

## CHAPTER 5

### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY OF RECEPTION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to describe the empirical research project I carried out as a part of the present study. A preaching workshop was conducted with eight student-participants with the purpose of gaining some preliminary insight into how theological students would respond to text-guided preaching. The research question had to do with the relevance of text-guided preaching (discussed in Chapter 4) to the Korean tradition of preaching (discussed in Chapter 2).

The overall method of the empirical research project was a case study in a **qualitative** research project. In the last phase of the preaching workshop, each participant completed an evaluation form consisting of four formal questions. They were mainly related to identification of the most significant and most difficult elements of text-guided preaching. The answers that the participants provided constitute the results of the case study. The results are presented in this chapter using the question-and-answer format.

These results are the results of an **illustration in practice** of how the theory for preaching in the specific Korean context, where I discovered the problem being researched in this study, is being received in practice by a sample of

people. Because of practical reasons the researcher has chosen to use the specific group of people.

This chapter begins with Don Browning's and Johannes van der Ven's theories of practical theology. Both of the practical theologians are critical of the traditional view of practical theology as an extension of the enterprise of the historical-systematic theology. Browning asserts that the entire enterprise is in an essential way "practical." J. A. van der Ven conceives practical theology as an empirical-theological research.

The empirical research project presented in this chapter has to be taken as a step in the theological-inductive phase within J. A. van der Ven's empirical-theological cycle. It was hoped that the results of the case study conducted would somehow contribute to general, theological-inductive perceptions regarding the relevance to the Korean preaching context of the homiletical theory that the text should shape the sermon.

## **5.2 New Understandings of Practical Theology**

Historically speaking, the study of theology has been divided into three disciplines: historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology. Within this framework, the main task of practical theology is understood as applying the results of historical and systematic theology to everyday religious issues and situations. The task of preaching, for instance, is understood as explicating theological concepts with the aim of applying them to everyday concerns.

There are, however, certain major problems with this theory-to-practice, or applicational, model of practical theology. One problem has to do with the fact that it relies on the deductive form of reasoning. According to Johannes van der Ven, the traditional approach to practical theology “might be adequate in the case of homogeneous, precisely defined and relatively simple social, pastoral and church situations. In reality, though, the social, pastoral and church situations of today are heterogeneous, diverse, pluriform, perplexing and sometimes even chaotic” (1993, 91).

Another problem with the theory-to-practice approach is that it assumes a modernist understanding of theory and practice. In the modern period, theology has been viewed as a theoretical discipline. Theology becomes “practical” only when conceptual, theological knowledge is “applied” to concrete situations of life.

However, as Don Browning asserts, theology is practical fundamentally. “We come to the theological task with questions shaped by the secular and religious practices in which we are implicated—sometimes uncomfortably” (1996, 6). The clear distinction between theory and practice assumed by modern theologians does not exist in reality.

New directions in practical theology have been proposed since the 1980s. Practical theological discussions have raised foundational and methodological questions, and to some degree they have been influenced by the social sciences. Here we want to focus on Browning’s conception of practical-theological reasoning and J. A. van der Ven’s conception of empirical-theological research.

### 5.2.1 Practical-Theological Reasoning

According to Browning's proposal, the study of theology is fundamentally a practical discipline employing practical reasoning and dealing with social practices. In other words, theology is "practical through and through and at its very heart" (1996, 7). Theological reflection has to begin with the actual practices of a particular Christian community, because what lies at the center of the Christian life is praxis. For this reason, theological reflection takes the form of practical reasoning.

According to Browning, theology begins with genuine questions concerning those meaningful, social practices that are shared, practiced and maintained by a religious community. This first movement within practical theological reasoning is called "descriptive theology" (1996, 47). The descriptive task is spurred by an acute awareness that a particular practice is problematic. It is guided by fundamental questions such as: What are we actually doing? What is the significance of this practice? What should we really be doing?

The descriptive task leads to a second movement, "normative theology," which deals with the issue of normativity. Normative theology involves interpretation of the authoritative texts of the Christian tradition that inscribe normative Christian practices (Browning 1996, 49). This normative task asks such practical questions as: What are the normative practices that should guide us? What do the authoritative texts that shape our Christian identity really say about our practices? What are the normative practices embedded within the authoritative texts really about? What is the vision they embody?

The normative task points toward the final movement within practical theological reasoning, which Browning calls “strategic practical theology.” This is where a local community of believers in fact returns to their present situations (1996, 55-56). They engage in the strategic task of reforming or transforming their problematic practices. In doing so, they are driven by critical questions such as: What are the specific factors directly contributing to this particular situation? What course of action does this situation require?

The strategic task brings the fruits of the descriptive and normative efforts back into contact with the particular situation that first prompted the practical theological process. The practical theological process that began with a crisis in praxis is now completed with more critical praxis.

### **5.2.2 Empirical-Theological Research**

For J. A. van der Ven, praxis is central to practical theology; and the study of praxis requires an empirical approach. Generally speaking, an empirical approach to praxis involves not only the task of describing and explaining praxis as it is, but also the task of investigating and changing praxis so as to expand its boundaries (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 77). J. A. van der Ven’s empirical approach to practical theology consists of five phases: the development of the theological problem and goal, theological induction, theological deduction, empirical-theological testing, and theological evaluation (1993, 119-156; 1999, 332-335).

#### *1. Identifying a theological problem and determining a theological goal.*

Empirical-theological investigation begins with debating some aspects of the

hermeneutic-communicative praxis of a Christian community. It aims at “improving hermeneutic-communicative praxis, or at freeing it from constraints and expanding its boundaries” (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 120). In initiating a research, the researcher first identifies some limitations or inconsistencies with regard to some traditional religious practice and then determines a theological goal.

Preaching, pastoral counseling, and other forms of pastoral ministry are integral to the hermeneutic-communicative praxis and can be objects of empirical-theological research. The goal of a research on pastoral ministry may be formulated in terms of improving communicative methods, or of “determining the conditions under which particular methods may be helpful in unblocking religious intrapsychic communication of an individual with himself and with God” (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 120).

*2. Theological induction.* Once some particular theological problem is identified it has to be examined in the light of some concrete observation and of recent theological literature. Theological induction involves, first of all, collecting some concrete information on the theological problem and, secondly, reviewing concrete observations within a theoretical framework, which the researcher develops on the basis of contemporary theological literature. Theological induction is an “interaction of perception and reflection,” that is, “a kind of dialectical interplay” between concrete, more or less general, perceptions and general theoretical formulations (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 123).

Theological induction involves, thirdly, turning the theological problem into a specific empirical-theological question that can be researched and, fourthly, developing a research design that can adequately accommodate the specific empirical-theological question. An empirical study is necessarily limited in what it can explore or explain. It is impractical to explore every aspect of a theological problem. The researcher has to delineate an empirically and practically relevant aspect and turn it into a real research question.

The researcher then uses the question to shape specific methods, units, and other features that make up the research design. Empirical-theological research commonly uses the survey method to achieve “a descriptive and explanatory inventory by systematically questioning people about one or more issues” (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 123). It also employs the quasi-experimental design “to describe and explain the effect of interventions in a given situation.”

3. *Theological deduction.* The deductive reasoning guides and encompasses the formation of theories, the development of hypotheses, and the composition of questionnaires. Empirical-theological research requires a theory that may be validated empirically. In general theories have to demonstrate that they are logically consistent, independent, sufficient, and necessary. In empirical-theological research, the criterion of empirical sufficiency is crucial. Theological theories must have concepts that specify the concrete conditions under which they may hold. As J. A. van der Ven asserts, “theories without sufficient contextual specifications are not theories but speculations” (1993, 130).

A theory must contain concepts and an expression of how they are related to each other. One concept functions as the independent variable, while another functions as the dependent variable. The causal relationship between concepts may be mediated by a third concept functioning as the intervening variable. There may be other concepts and variables depending on the complexity of the theory. Theories specify the research units such as individuals, groups, and institutions.

The researcher must derive from a theory hypotheses that can be tested. The intent of theory formation is “to test against reality causal relationships which are presumed to exist on the basis of the basis of theological theory” (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 134). The concepts or variables of a theory have to be translated into concrete terms that express observable and measurable reality. On the basis of the hypotheses the researcher develops a survey questionnaire that can be administered to a sample group.

4. *Empirical-theological testing.* In the testing phase, the researcher first identifies the specific population to study, determining a sample group that is representative of the population. Then the researcher administers the questionnaire to the sample group, collecting the data to be analyzed. The researcher has to determine how the data analysis is to be carried out. It is critical to choose appropriate statistical tools to determine the relationship between variables.

Statistical presentations themselves, however, do not explain the causal direction of the relationship between variables. The research must attempt to

give a causal explanation either to support or to undermine theological hypotheses. As J. A. van der Ven explains, the explanation of the dependent variables in terms of the independent variables must be “exploratory.” “The goal of this endeavor,” he states, “is to formulate some well founded theological hypotheses supported by exploratory-causal research” (1993, 151).

5. *Theological evaluation.* Empirical-theological research requires theological evaluation of the results of the testing. The causal explanation has to be interpreted, that is, be placed in the immediate context of the theological question and also in the overall context of the research, the theological problem. The researcher tries to determine whether the causal explanation based on the results of the testing really answers the empirical-theological question articulated in the inductive process.

Theological evaluation may be extended beyond the empirical-theological study itself. “The results of the empirical-theological study do not represent a definitive endpoint.” They must be incorporated into the ongoing hermeneutic-theological debate. Empirical-theological investigation protects theology from dogmatism and fundamentalism. Theological evaluation of empirical findings is needed to protect theology from empiricism. Theology is a dialectical process: that is, “the results of the empirical study influence the hermeneutic-theological reflection, without which one would be dealing with an empirical dictate. At the same time, however, further hermeneutic-theological reflection stimulates a renewed confrontation with the empirical reality” (J. A. van der Ven 1993, 153).

### 5.3 Research Question and Method

The empirical component of my study has to do with the relevance and practicality of text-guided preaching. Is this kind of preaching relevant to Korean preachers and Korean congregations? It is crucial to have some notion of how text-guided preaching would impact the practice of preaching in the Korean church. Is it practical? That is, can it be successfully taught and practiced? As one who studies and teaches preaching theory and practice, it is vitally important for me to have some understanding of the practical aspect of preaching theories.

To enable an understanding of the impact of text-guided preaching, it was decided to conduct a preaching workshop for a small group of seminary students. I personally chose eight students who completed at least two courses in homiletics and demonstrated some competence in preaching. The one-day workshop consisted of four parts. Firstly, text-guided preaching was presented. Secondly, a demonstration of how the theory could be applied to a biblical text was given. Thirdly, each of the participants worked on a sermon draft. Fourthly, each participant completed the evaluation form.

The goal of the research project was to analyze students' understanding of and response to text-guided preaching. The evaluation form developed for this research project consisted of the following four questions.

1. What was for you the *most significant insight* of the preaching theory presented?
2. What was for you the *most difficult part* of the preaching theory presented?

3. As you draft a sermon, guided by the theory, what was the *most difficult part*?
4. What do you think is the *most crucial concern* among Korean or Korean American Christians today?

The first and second questions deal with the perception of the preaching theory. My concern was how my students would perceive the theory, which would be new to them. Which part of the theory would strike them as the “most significant”? Which part would be perceived as the “most difficult” in terms of understanding? It was expected that the first two questions would identify strengths and weaknesses of text-guided preaching.

The third question was intended to evaluate the students’ ability to apply the theory. The expectation was that this question would identify the students’ own weaknesses or struggles in sermon preparation. The fourth and last question was included for two reasons. The first reason was to explore the students’ general perception of life situations of Korean Christians. The second reason was to see whether or to what extent the students would interact with concrete everyday situations in preparing draft sermons.

The overall method of this particular research project was the qualitative approach of a case study. As one of the common methods of empirical research, the case study investigates a complex social phenomenon within some real-life situation (Yin 2003, 1). As Robert K. Yin explains,

the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study

method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events—such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (2003, 2)

Yin maintains that the decision to do a case study has to be based primarily on the form of research question (2003, 5-7). The case study method is preferred when the research focuses on a “how” or “why” question. Yin asserts that the case study has a distinct advantage when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (2003, 9). “What” questions that are exploratory may lead to the use of case studies.

The four questions that have been formulated specifically for the evaluative part of the preaching workshop may be seen as exploratory “what” questions. The first three have to do with identifying those parts of text-guided preaching that are “most significant” (question 1) and those parts that are “most difficult” (questions 2 and 3) from the standpoint of the student-participants. The fourth question has to do with identifying major concerns of Korean Christians. The overall question that guided the whole research project was a “how” question. How well would the participants understand and incorporate the new, creative form of preaching?

Within J. A. van der Ven’s empirical-theological cycle, a case study may be undertaken in the theological-inductive phase to explore a traditional practice in its real-life context. As we noted earlier, theological induction invariably begins with some general, experiential perception regarding a socially embodied

Christian practice. In the case of text-guided preaching, however, there exists currently no noteworthy perception regarding its theory or practice in the Korean church. Because of this, the exploratory case study method was chosen.

The case study project was intended to gain preliminary understanding into how text-guided preaching would impact Korean preachers and congregations. The relevance of this methodological approach was established on the basis of the fact that the relationship between the new kind of preaching and the Korean church was not yet clear. It was expected that the case study would generate significant insights that could be used to facilitate general theoretical discussions within the theological-inductive phase of theological-empirical research. Such discussions are essential for theory building regarding the relevance of the theory and practice of text-guided preaching in the Korean church context.

#### **5.4 Procedure**

The one-day preaching workshop was conducted on March 5, 2007 with eight participants, who were personally selected from among the students in the master's programs at World Mission University in Los Angeles, California. I conducted the workshop, which was organized into four sessions. The following agenda was developed for the preaching workshop.

- I. Session 1: Introduction and Presentation
  - A. Objectives of the preaching workshop
  - B. The preacher as interpreter-communicator
  - C. Interpreting the life-situations of a congregation

- D. Studying the literary-rhetorical features of the biblical text
- E. Determining the function and form of the sermon
- F. Developing a sermon
- II. Session 2: Application
  - A. Discussion of practical concerns of Korean Christians
  - B. Literary-rhetorical analysis of Psalm 1
  - C. Sermon form contrasting two different lifestyles
  - D. Movements from text to life situation (a sample sermon)
- III. Session 3: Sermon Preparation
- IV. Session 4: Evaluation

1. *Presentation of text-guided preaching.* In the first session, after an introduction, a presentation of text-guided preaching, based on chapter 4 of the present study, was given. To offer a brief summary, preaching is a hermeneutical-communicative practice. The preacher is, first of all, an interpreter of the Bible and of her congregation. Contemporary preaching theories stress the importance of interpreting the experiential world of the listener. The preacher moves from the contextual sphere into the textual sphere. In dealing with biblical texts, the preacher has to understand various rhetorical functions they are intended to perform and literary devices that contribute to those functions.

The preacher is also a communicator. She communicates the message of the Bible in the contemporary socio-cultural context. She communicates, through a sermon and in contemporary language, a particular claim a particular

biblical text makes on its readers. The preacher has to develop for the sermon a movement that adequately expresses the literary-rhetorical dynamics of the biblical text. The sermon development should also reflect an accurate account of practical congregational situations.

2. *Application of text-guided preaching.* In the second session of the workshop, the group began with a discussion of major current issues affecting Korean Christians. The purpose of the discussion was to exercise the hermeneutical practice of interpreting the contemporary context. Then the student-participants performed a literary-rhetorical analysis of Psalm 1. I chose the text for the group for reasons of familiarity and relative clarity. The students attempted as a group, first, interpretation of the metaphors of a tree and chaff and, then, description of possible contrasting lifestyles that would correspond to the reality that the metaphors were intended to project.

The group worked together on a possible sermon form that would adequately express the message of Psalm 1. The participants adopted the following outline, to be used in the third session as each would engage in the drafting of a sermon.

- I. Introduction
- II. "Chaff": Image of "Restlessness"
- III. A Contemporary Form of "Restless" Living
- IV. "A Tree": Image of "Security"
- V. A Contemporary Form of "Secure" Living
- VI. Conclusion

To help the participants understand transitions from text to context in sermon development, I examined with them Cas Vos' sermon on the pilgrimage psalms. A portion of the sermon is analyzed in chapter 4 of the present study. The student-participants found it helpful as it displays a series of movement between text and context.

3. *Practice of sermon preparation.* In the third session, each student who participated in the workshop was asked to draft a sermon on Psalm 1, using the outline developed earlier. The group had two hours for the task. I understood that it usually required much more time to prepare a draft, but a completed draft was not what I expected from the students. My expectation was certain evidence that they attempted to work with the particular sermon form they developed for Psalm 1. I also wanted to see how they would bridge the biblical text and today's situations. Particularly I was interested in seeing how well my students would relate the images of a tree and chaff to contemporary situation.

4. *Evaluation of theory and practice.* In the last session, each participant was asked to complete the evaluation form. They were asked to answer in some detail three questions relating to their assessment of the theory and practice of text-guided preaching, as well as a single question relating to their perceptions of the experiential world of Korean Christians.

## **5.5 Results**

Yin states that the question-and-answer format suits either a single-case or a multiple-case report (2003, 147). Yin explains that "the composition for each

case follows a series of questions and answers, based on the questions and answers in the case study database” and further that “the content of the database is shortened and edited for readability with the final product still assuming the format, analogously, of a comprehensive examination.”

Yin asserts that in reporting multiple-case studies the question-and answer format has some practical advantages. “Because each reader may be interested in different questions, the entire format facilitates the development of a cross-case analysis tailored to the specific interests of its readers” (2003, 148).

In presenting the results of the case study I conducted, the question-and-answer format is favorable, because a substantial portion of the case study results is already in the form of answers to a set of formal questions. The narrative below is guided by these four questions based on the formal evaluation questions.

First, what is the most significant part of the theory of text-guided preaching?

Second, what is the most difficult part of the theory?

Third, what is the most difficult part in practicing text-guided preaching?

Fourth, what are the most crucial concerns of Korean congregations?

### **5.5.1 Most Significant Theoretical Element**

1. Four participants identified the task of *interpreting the experiential world* of the listeners as the most significant insight of text-guided preaching.

Duck Ho Kim stated that the idea that preaching should begin with an understanding of listeners was most helpful. He commented: “sermons often fail to connect with listeners because they do not address their concerns. It is instructive for me that as a preacher that I have to undertake a systematic interpretative study of my listeners.”

Kwang Tak Oh commented that many preachers simply made general assumptions about their congregations and did not make efforts to interpret the diversity of their everyday experiences.

Ji Hee Lee wrote: “preachers have to develop meaningful relationships with church members in order to have a realistic view of their major concerns and struggles.” Lee commented: “Because preachers lack a realistic view of church members, their sermons tend to be too theological and too moralistic.”

Jin Soo Jeon thought that interpreting contemporary situations was one of the most important tasks of preaching. He wrote: “It is true that the power of the gospel is universal; but it is also true that the gospel can effect transformation when it is related to specific situations.”

2. Three participants identified the task of *regenerating the rhetorical impact* of the text as the most significant element.

For Ki Young Lee what was most helpful was the idea that a sermon must embody a clear rhetorical function. This is what he wrote: “I fully agree with the idea that the preacher must have a clear purpose in delivering a sermon, must have a clear understanding of what he wants to achieve by means of the sermon.”

Eun Seok Kwon commented: “It is often the case that preachers try to interpret the text in terms of what they want to say. In theory, the biblical text should shape the sermon. In practice, preachers tend to shape what the text says in terms of what they want to say.”

Jae Young Chang also recognized as central to preaching the need to be faithful to what the biblical text is saying and doing. He made this comment: “it is crucial to faithfully communicate what the text says and do so that the word of God can speak to us today. We want to hear what God wants to say to us through the Bible.”

3. One participant identified *literary-rhetorical interpretation* as the most significant element. In Kyu Ho Kim’s view, paying a close attention to the literary dimension of the biblical text is critical “because the meaning of the text depends on the linguistic, literary and rhetorical tools it uses. In order to understand the intention of the author we have to know how he uses the language.”

### **5.5.2 Most Difficult Theoretical Element**

1. Three participants identified the task of *interpreting the congregation* as the most challenging part of the theory of text-guided preaching.

Jin Soo Jeon considered interpreting contemporary situations to be not only the most crucial and also the most difficult task in text-guided preaching. He made this comment: “Korean preachers believe that since the power of the gospel is universal, all they have to do is to preach the gospel as purely and sincerely as possible. They believe that they should preach the gospel without

compromising its message to suit different groups and different situations.” He then wrote: since Korean preaching’s main focus is to proclaim the biblical truth, it is a great challenge for him as well as for many others to develop sensitivity to the real-life situation of listeners.

Ki Young Lee stated that the greatest challenge for him was learning to understand people. He wrote: “it is not easy to approach people, to really get to know them to understand how they think and live.” According to Lee, preaching must make a difference in the lives of the listeners and “that is why every sermon should have a clear goal and that requires learning and practicing ways of understanding people and their everyday concerns and thoughts.”

Jae Young Chang recognized understanding the everyday context of his congregation as the greatest difficulty in preaching. He stated: “Because we live in an individualistic society, it is not easy to relate to church members. They do not open up easily, even after few visits.”

2. Three participants thought that allowing the biblical text to shape the *form of the sermon* was the most difficult part.

Kyu Ho Kim took the idea of literary-rhetorical analysis seriously, but also expressed a serious concern about possible difficulties in developing sermons that adequately express the rhetorical and literary effects of biblical texts.

Duck Ho Kim expected major difficulties in understanding and practicing a variety of sermon forms. He explained: “We are used to one or two types of sermon forms. But in order to communicate biblical texts adequately, we have to use a variety of sermon forms. The idea that the text must shape the form of a

sermon is important. However, this requires that we learn and practice new forms of sermon.”

Eun Seok Kwon recognized the importance for the preacher-communicator of having a clear purpose in preaching. He said that having a clear goal would bring about a clear outcome. To capture Kwon’s greatest concern, different sermon forms are required for different sermon goals and that would require tremendous efforts on the part of the preacher.

3. Two participants identified *literary-rhetorical interpretation* as the most difficult task for them.

Kwang Tak Oh expressed that it was difficult for him to deal with literary features of biblical texts because he lacked training in literature. He noted: “theological schools do not offer courses designed to develop practical skills in rhetorical and literary analysis. Biblical interpretation pay little attention to literary conventions.”

Ji Hee Lee also expressed that her greatest challenge was dealing with the diversity of biblical genres. She said: “I need to work on how to approach different texts, how to understand the meaning of a text against its literary background.”

### **5.5.3 Most Difficult Practical Element**

As a part of the preaching workshop, each participant drafted a short sermon on Psalm 1. The sermon form was determined by the group. After

completing their assignment, which was designed to assess how well they would perform in practicing text-guided preaching, they gave the following responses.

1. Four expressed that explaining the dominant imagery of Psalm 1 in *concrete terms* was the most difficult part in practicing text-guided preaching.

Kyu Ho Kim stated that he found it difficult to relate the poetic text to real-life experience. Specifically, he had difficulty in thinking of modern, contrasting forms of life that would express the contrasting images of a tree and chaff.

Similarly, the greatest challenge for Ji Hee Lee was explaining the text in terms of modern examples. Lee understood the importance of the context listeners, but found it difficult to explain the poetry of Psalm 1 with examples from everyday experience.

Eun Seok Kwon wrote: “It was not easy for me to describe contrasting lifestyles that would represent the contrasting metaphors. It was really challenging for me to communicate the message of the poetic text using concrete everyday terms.”

Jae Young Chang also expressed his own limitations in handling biblical poetry and in relating biblical imagery to real-life experience.

2. Two participants identified their unfamiliarity with the *sermon form* as their main problem.

Ki Young Lee wrote: “I am used to logical thinking that moves from one idea to another, from one point to another. I am not yet oriented to a way of thinking that moves from one metaphor to its contemporary expression and repeats the

movement. I must say I am not familiar with this pattern of sermon development.”

Jin Soo Jeon thought it important to study new theories and new styles of preaching. He said the area of difficulty for him was following the given sermon form. He explained that it stemmed from his unfamiliarity with the particular form.

3. Two participants’ problem had to do with the *poetic language* of Psalm 1.

Duck Ho Kim remarked: “In general biblical poems are not easy to approach. In order to read them, we need some understanding of how Old Testament poetry works.” He then wrote: “The particular metaphors of Psalm 1, the contrasting images of a tree and chaff, were common metaphors for the original readers. But they are not part of our everyday language. In general the poetic language of the Psalms requires detailed background information.”

Kwang Tak Oh expressed a more or less similar view. He wrote: “It not easy for me to fully grasp how figurative language works. I lack the sensitivity and skills required to fully grasp and communicate the power of figurative language to elicit strong emotional responses.”

#### **5.5.4 Most Crucial Congregational Concern**

1. Three participants identified the *conflict between Christian and worldly values* as the greatest concern for Korean churches and believers.

Kyu Ho Kim remarked that many Korean churches and Christians seemed to simply go along with secular emphases. He wrote: “It is a crucial Christian value to follow the will of God. But it is often the case that believers pursue and

promote their own interests, extolling the value of individual choice. Instead of following the Bible, modern believers seem to follow the gospel of individualism and pluralism.”

Jae Young Chang expressed a similar view. He said: “It is a great challenge for us to maintain a Christian lifestyle in this secular culture. I work with college students and young adults and I observe that their thoughts and behaviors mirror the secular culture.”

Jin Soo Jeon remarked: “Many believers are confused about the essence of the gospel. I think it is because the Korean church has failed to distinguish between Christian and worldly values. Preachers have been preaching the value of individual happiness and the value of prosperity without questioning whether or not these and other values are compatible with the gospel of the church.”

2. Two participants thought that *family issues* were the main concern of Korean believers.

Ji Hee Lee underscored the reality of divorce within the Korean-American Christian community. She wrote: “Many Korean marriages end in separation and divorce. I think pastors have to deal with the effects of divorce and, more basically, with marriage issues. Breakdown of traditional family roles poses a great challenge to the Korean church.”

Duck Ho Kim talked about intergenerational issues in the Korean church. He stated: “In a typical Korean congregation we see three generations: grandparents, parents, and children. Although we are well aware of

intergenerational issues, the church seldom addresses them. Preaching should be used to facilitate affirmation and acceptance of individuals across the generations. Understanding and discovery of one another will strengthen family ties and the church community and promote spiritual continuity and maturity.”

3. Three participants mentioned specific *financial, emotional, and spiritual issues* of individual Christians.

Kwang Tak Oh pointed out the importance of work and money for many Christians. He elaborated: “Christians need to develop the right attitude toward money. Many believers have to deal with financial issues, and consequently financial security is an important issue for them. But sometimes they spend too much time working and making money so that wealth becomes the central focus of their lives. I think they need to learn to trust God for their financial concerns and to balance between spiritual growth and financial security.”

In Ki Young Lee’s view, emotional health of individual Korean Christians should be the number one priority of the church today. This is what Lee wrote: “Many Korean Christians suffer pain, depression and other emotional difficulties from time to time. They need pastoral support and help in these areas. I think Korean church leaders need to develop strategies for dealing with emotional issues of church members.”

Eun Seok Kwon saw active church involvement as the most critical issue. He stated that lay members should be encouraged and equipped to play active roles in church leadership and ministry. He wrote: “Christians have God-given

duty to commit to and build up the local church. But the reality is that only a minority is actively involved in church activities.”

## 5.6 Discussion

1. *Regenerating the impact of the text.* We begin our discussion of the results of the case study with the fact that the central idea that a sermon should regenerate a portion of the text’s impact appealed to some of the participants. At least three of the eight participants saw as pivotal the idea that the biblical text should shape the sermon. The significance of this finding may be discussed in the contexts of the Korean and American traditions of preaching.

The Korean tradition of preaching has been indifferent to the diversity of rhetorical functions of the biblical texts. As we saw earlier (Chapter 2), most Korean preachers approach the Bible with the intention of isolating a biblical truth or idea to be delivered to their congregation. They often lack time, and in some cases patience, to carefully study the text so as to experience what it says and does. So it is encouraging to find that some student-participants understood the centrality in preaching of experiencing and regenerating a portion of the multi-layered impact of the text.

The Korean tradition of preaching has to seek transformation by entering into the exciting debates about sermon’s purpose, content and form that have been carried on by contemporary American homileticians. Korean debates about the nature of biblical preaching may benefit from paying a close attention

to Thomas Long's idea that preachers should try to accomplish with their sermons what God want to accomplish through the biblical texts.

2. *Shaping the form of a sermon.* For three participants (Kyu Ho Kim, Duck Ho Kim, and Eun Seok Kwon), the most difficult element of the theory of text-guided preaching was the idea that the text should shape the form of a sermon. What is relevant here is the fact two other participants (Ki Young Lee and Jin Soo Jeon) expressed that their greatest struggle in actually drafting a sermon as part of the workshop had to do with the particular sermon form the group had developed and used.

To understand these participants' struggle with sermonic forms, we have to point out the fact that one sermonic form predominates the practice of preaching in the Korean church. Most Korean preachers favor topical preaching and the three-point deductive sermon. Korean preaching has to be improved by experimenting with different preaching styles and different sermonic forms.

It is hoped that the fact that altogether five participants in the case study found the form of a sermon the most challenging aspect of preaching may possibly lead to a general theological perception that could facilitate serious discussions among Korean homileticians about possible changes in the Korean practice of preaching, although I am convinced that more case studies are needed to generate meaningful theological perceptions.

3. *Interpreting the listeners.* Evidently, the clearest finding of my case study has to do with the fact that four (Duck Ho Kim, Kwang Tak Oh, Ji Hee Lee, and Jin Soo Jeon) of the eight participants have recognized the interpretation of

one's listeners as the most significant insight of text-guided preaching. Also, we want to note that three participants (Jin Soo Jeon, Ki Young Lee, and Jae Young Chang) have identified the task of interpreting the listeners as the most difficult theoretical element. Altogether seven out of eight participants found that particular interpretative task to be either the most significant or the most difficult element.

This observation is of great importance in the context of the Korean homiletical tradition. Also, it implies that the new developments in American homiletics are relevant to the development of Korean preaching.

Korean preaching is largely concerned with issues relating to textual interpretation and sermon composition. The task of sermon preparation moves from locating a biblical truth to articulating it with the help of few specific ideas or points. What is missing in the process is an intentional study of the listeners and their contexts.

That a majority of the participants in my case study recognized the importance of interpreting the listeners' concrete situations is quite encouraging, precisely because such recognition is necessary for transforming the traditional homiletical practice in the Korean church. As some Korean homileticians have voiced recently, Korean preaching needs major improvements, most particularly in the relationship between the preacher and the congregation. Having a clear understanding of one's congregation is as important as having a clear understanding of one's text.

The recognition of the importance of interpreting the listeners clearly indicates that contemporary American homiletical discussions are directly relevant to the transformation of Korean preaching. One of the contributions of the new American homiletical movement has to do with the presence of the listener. Many homileticians have followed Fred Craddock's lead in embracing a listener-oriented preaching. In this respect at least American homileticians can contribute to the improvement of Korean preaching.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

We can find in the above discussion some clear implications for the practice of text-guided preaching in the Korean context. In this concluding section, we want to raise some fundamental questions, questions that have to do with theological training at World Mission University, as well as those directly related to text-guided preaching.

The most fundamental question is this: How can we change or improve our theological training at World Mission University, so as to orient our students to the hermeneutic importance of the context of Christian faith? This question is directly related to my assumption that perhaps most of the theological students at our school may be experiencing some real difficulties with the crucial task of interpreting the everyday situation, where socially embodied Christian practices take place.

Traditionally speaking, theological education consists of learning the biblical and theological content and developing the communicative skills needed in

applying the content to the everyday situation. What has been missing is a systematic, empirical study of the cultural context.

In order to help our students to become competent interpreters of the cultural forces that shape the larger community that surrounds and influences a particular congregation or a particular Christian community—for instance, the Korean immigrant church in the United States—we have to develop and require courses that closely examine the complexity of the cultural phenomena.

To be more specific, such courses would help students develop a sufficient knowledge of such important things as: central issues in critical hermeneutics; narratives and idioms that inform social practices and institutions; critical cultural issues and competing positions they engender; changes, trends, contingent events shaping the larger society; and social, political and cultural forces affecting people's lives.

Learning the cultural context of Christian life has to include abilities to raise critical questions about socially embodied practices, both secular and Christian. In other words, we have to help our theological students develop practical reasoning, so they would be able to deal with such fundamental questions as: Why are we doing this? Why is this practice important? Why is it problematic? What are we to do?

Another fundamental question we want to raise has to do with biblical studies. Traditionally speaking, biblical studies have concentrated on the content of the Bible. Conservative biblical scholars have emphasized the importance of the theological meaning or message of the text, while critical

biblical scholars have focused their investigations on the relationship between the text and the historical fact—for instance, the connection between the Gospels and the historical Jesus.

I am genuinely convinced that biblical studies at World Mission University have to be redirected to emphasize the performative dimension of the biblical text. So the pertinent question is: How can we reorganize the biblical studies component of our theological curriculum, so as to increase our students' competencies in employing literary and rhetorical methods?

What would be required is an extensive reevaluation and reformulation of the goals and objectives for the group of courses dealing with biblical books and biblical interpretation. Currently our main objectives for the courses focus on reading and interpreting the content of the biblical texts in the light of historical and literary information. So we have to discuss, first of all, why the current perspective is problematic.

It is practically impossible for one or two homiletics courses to deal with the task of interpreting and understanding the cultural context of preaching. So there must be separate courses designed specifically for the task. By the same token, the methods and procedures of interpreting the biblical texts in terms of their communicative functions have to be dealt with in courses in biblical studies.

Should biblical exegesis aim at preaching? In other words, should biblical exegesis take into account homiletical considerations? According to the dominant view, exegesis must operate independently of all practical considerations.

However, from the perspective of new theoretical hermeneutics, such as Gadamer's and Ricoeur's, biblical interpretation cannot operate independently. As Cas Vos' *Theopoetry of the Psalms* amply demonstrates, it is not only possible but also pertinent to read and interpret the biblical texts from a homiletical perspective.

We turn now to the questions directly related to the theory and practice of text-guided preaching. As we indicated in the discussion section above, Korean preaching's single-minded focus on isolating and delivering timeless, biblical truths and its dependence on a single style—namely, topical-deductive preaching—have to be challenged and reformed.

So the first question is: What can be done to redirect the focus from the truth to the impact or claim? What can be done to improve the theory of text-guided preaching, so that it could be more potent in persuading my students to redirect their homiletical interest from the timeless truth to the rhetorical impact of a biblical text?

What is needed is a shift from epistemology to hermeneutics. I will have to deal with crucial philosophical issues relating to interpretation and language in more practical terms. In particular, the idea of a text disclosing a world and the idea of a text performing multiple speech-acts have to be presented to my students in terms that are less technical and easier to understand. Furthermore, I will have to explain these and other notions in connection with biblical texts.

In teaching text-guided preaching, a presentation of practical exegetical procedures for preaching will be quite helpful. Thomas Long's *The Witness of*

*Preaching* offers a brief exegetical method for preaching, which, he explains, “is designed to be thorough enough to provide a solid engagement with the text but brief enough to become a regular part of a minister’s weekly schedule” (1989b 60-61). Long’s method could serve as a model.

Another question that has to be addressed has to do with the form of a sermon. What can be done to encourage my students and others who have depended on the deductive sermon to explore other, more creative, sermon forms? More precisely: What would be possible procedures that would be helpful in teaching the homiletical process of allowing the text to shape the form of a sermon?

There are many possibilities for the text-to-sermon movement. I need to develop a number of effective patterns of sermon form and incorporate them into text-guided preaching. What is also required is a set of homiletical procedures, which would methodically guide students and preachers from claims of texts to creative sermon forms.

In order to make text-guided preaching relevant to the Korean church, it is necessary to present or outline the theory with a view to a specific social context, such as the particular ethnic experience of the Korean immigrants in the United States. I find a model for such a project in H. J. C. Pieterse’s *Preaching in a Context of Poverty*, which demonstrates how preaching and church praxis can contribute to the liberation of the poor from poverty.