

Ung Joe Lee, "The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context." PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006. 275 pages.

Summary

Dr. Ung Joe Lee's dissertation, *The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context*, is an attempt to find the reason why the traditional Korean preaching does not appeal to the people of today and to seek a new homiletic method for the new generation. "Why does traditional Korean preaching not draw the hearts of people?" "What is a proper preaching form or homiletic method for the new Korean generation?" These questions are the starting point of his work. His answer for the first question is postmodernism, and the second is the Listener-Oriented Preaching.

In the first chapter, Dr. Lee argues that through preaching, not only preacher but also listeners should be able to encounter Jesus and be led to transformation in individual dimension and social dimension. This is Christo-praxis preaching that we have to seek.

In the second chapter, Dr. Lee focuses on Korean traditional religions, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism, which are backbones of the Korean Church as well as the Korean culture.

In the third chapter, Dr. Lee studies socio-political events that gave huge influence to the Korean congregation. Because of the invasion of Japan, Korean War, and the present division of the nation, Koreans have been called the nation of *han*, which means an inactive resentment. However, Korean society is experiencing huge changes with the rapid economic growth, Westernization, globalization, and urbanization. Especially, Korean society is being influenced by postmodernism of this era. Nowadays, traditional authority and objective truth is being questioned by the resurgence of individualism and subjectivism.

In the fourth chapter, Dr. Lee turns his eyes to the development of Western homiletic theory as a pair of traditional Korean preaching which he will explore in the following chapters. In the West, the Christian sermon has its root in ancient Greek rhetoric of persuasion. On the contrary, the Old Testament emphasizes the power of the spoken word, because what is addressed is the word of *God*. The New Testament rhetoric is appealing not only to the character of speaker, such as Jesus and Paul, but also to the message that is preached: the gospel. Furthermore, in the New Testament, listener becomes an important issue of rhetoric, as Paul admits that he has changed his message for different listeners.¹ Apostolic fathers like St. Augustine often used ancient rhetoric to explain Christian faith, and Reformers also tried to blend classical Greek rhetoric with the proclamation of the gospel. However, in the era of enlightenment and liberal theology in Europe, preaching had been reduced to a pure human performance, and as its protest Karl Barth argued that what is important in preaching is neither preacher nor audience, but the Word of God. For him rhetorical issues or skills were not merely secondary but should be eliminated to reveal the genuine power of the gospel. Even though his theology caused deep conflict with Emil Brunner who emphasized the act of human in preaching, his influence was enormous in theology and, especially, in Homiletics, until New Homiletic came into scene in 1970ties. In this circumstance, New Homiletic seeking to create an experience of the gospel rather than to convey information came into scene by Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, David Buttrick, and others.

¹ Ung Joe Lee, "The New Homiletic: The Strategies for the Listener-Oriented Communication of the Gospel in the Postmodern Korean Context" (PhD diss. Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), 85.

In the fifth chapter, Dr. Lee overviews Korean preaching styles and content by studying nation's Christian experience. Korean preaching became authoritative and deductive in its style and moralistic in its contents. Furthermore, Korean preaching came to have charismatic style stimulating emotions of listeners by using an informal narrative style of delivery; for example, the Great Revival Movement of 1907. During the Japanese imperialism of early 1900, the suffering of the present and the transcendence of the suffering through meditation on the suffering of Jesus became a central theme of Korean preaching. In 1950ties through 1970ties following the Korean War, the message of hope with material blessing was dominant in Korean churches, as Korean economy made remarkable growth. Especially in this era, urban conservative churches, whose preachers used deductive biblical/doctrinal preaching and emphasized the manifestation of the Spirit in preaching, grew rapidly.

In the sixth chapter, the author studies through the listener-oriented preaching theories of Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry and David Buttrick. As Historical-Critical method failed to consider the context of the listener and bring reactions of the listener, Listener-Oriented Preaching (LOP) was developed by the influence of the New Hermeneutic and the New Literary Criticism: preaching does not simply deliver information but creates reality, and the important element for preaching is the reader of biblical stories as well as the author and the text. In 1960ties and 1970ties the paradigm of preaching shifted from a preacher-based communication to a listener-based one.² Thus, in this chapter, Dr. Lee overviews Fred B. Craddock's inductive preaching, Eugene Lowry's homiletic method of narrative preaching, and David Buttrick's motion-picture strategy. And, in the seventh chapter, he investigates these three homiletic theories.

In the eighth chapter, Dr. Lee finally reaches the point of applying the strategies of the Listener-Oriented Preaching to the postmodern Korean congregation. He argues that the preached message should be theocentric – what God has done for us – before what we must do in response. The language of preaching should be imaginative, because “in the postmodern world, the image is the primary unit of value,”³ and Jesus also used imaginative language which listeners could relate to their own experience. However, preachers should use effective images that hold the attention of listeners and plan biblical ideas, because postmodern generation has already been bombarded with images from mess media. The essential keys of preaching should be creativity and variety, because postmodern generation is accustomed to the quick scene change of movie or television which takes only 3.7 seconds. Authentic personal illustration can be used to build genuine communication with listeners. Mono-mythic cycle can be used to reflect human mind through the story and to attract minds of people. Media and current issues can be used to overcome the bias and alienation in segments of the media-saturated congregation. Slogans of commercials or major sports events or major news events, which are properly evaluated, can support the message of the gospel. Participatory questions can also be used to create closeness and identification as well as spontaneity from the congregation.

In the light of his study, Dr. Lee concludes that the method of storytelling in preaching will work for the postmodern Korean generation, because what mess media encourages through its multi-sensory presentation is the very thing that the stories do: experiential encounter with information. Preachers can put good stories, which contain emotional appeal, in certain parts of sermon to support elements of a sermon or they can create a sermon as a story as a whole. By

² Ibid., 148.

³ Ibid., 220.

using the story, preachers can preach to the postmodern generation not the story itself but what is inside of the story, the gospel.

Reflection

Dr. Lee's dissertation has two strengths that we need to remember. First, Dr. Lee brings up the practical issues of the Korean Church and tries to solve them by understanding the society in which the congregation is living. The starting point of his work is not mere assumptions about the Korean Church or Korean church history but a clear diagnosis of the present situation of the Korean Church: Korean Church reached stagnation in its growth and the reason for the stagnation is mainly because of the ineffectiveness of traditional Korean preaching style in the postmodern context. Second, Dr. Lee puts the congregation in the center of theological discussion in the Korean Church. Listeners are changing. Therefore, preachers need to change how they deliver the gospel, which is the unchanging essence of the Christian message. Although Dr. Lee's dissertation has strengths that we see above, however, there are still some weaknesses that need to be reconsidered. First, he lacks the investigation on Korean elements in his work. In other words, he does not explain how preachers prepare themselves for the Koreanness of their congregation. He only gives tips for the postmodernness of their congregation. Second, Dr. Lee's story is limited to stories that draw the consciousness of postmodern generation. He never talks about the stories that draw the consciousness of *Korean* congregation of our time. That is, he failed to see that the story should be their stories, Korean's stories, in order for them to be rooted in the hearts of the Korean congregation.

There are two things we can learn from Dr. Lee's work for our context, Korean/Korean-American church context. First, what is at stake in preaching is how to preach rather than what to preach. Especially, in Korean-American churches, the culture between 1st generation Korean congregation and 1.5 point generation or 2nd generation is different. What is at stake is not just what is preached but how is preached. The message should be delivered appropriately in the culture where it is preached.

Second, the point of preaching is the encounter with God. What Listener-Oriented Preaching ultimately tries to do is not just to get the message heard but to get the listeners meet God, who is presented in the message. Postmodern generation wants the encounter with God. They do not lack spirituality.⁴ Rather, they are starving for spiritual food. What they want to have is the encounter with the ultimate and that is what God has been longing for. In this sense, postmodernism is not only a crisis but also an opportunity for the preaching of the gospel. We need to invite them to the meeting with God and allow their heart to be touched by God in preaching. That is the task of the preaching and that is the call of preacher.

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⁴ Ibid., 71-72: "the Korean postmodern generation is searching for answers to spiritual issues and concerns, as are most young people around the world."