

진실로 너희에게 이르노니 너희
중에 두 사람이 땅에서
합심하여 무엇이든지 구하면
하늘
저희를
두 세
곳에는 나도 그들 중에
있느니라.

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마태복음 Matthew 18: 19-20

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (NRSV)

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The Value and Potential for Conversational and Collaborative Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church

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*This essay was originally presented as Taekhan Yoon's Th.M Thesis
at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia in 2008.*

Introduction

During the past decades, the Korean Protestant Church experienced miraculous growth and became one of the fastest-growing churches in the world. The number of Korean churches increased about 700% from 1960 to 1990, increasing the number of members to approximately 8,760,000 in 1995, an increase of no less than 1,400% in the same period.¹ With this augmentation, 16,000 Korean Protestant missionaries enlarged their domain to 173 countries, the second largest number from one country. According to the 2005 census data in Korea, however, the population of Protestants dropped to 8.61 million, a continuation of the decrease in the last 10 years. This fact proves that something leads to a drastic change in the Korean Protestant Church, and the change arouses a lot of controversies over the major cause of this situation.²

The Crisis of Korean Preaching

What caused this? There are divergent factors that obstructed the miraculous growth of the Korean Protestant church. In this regard, authoritarian preaching can be regarded potentially as one of the most influential contributing factors to the decline of members of the Korean Protestant church because of the gravity of preaching in the Korean context. Preaching is virtually given a great deal of weight in the Korean Protestant church. Preaching not only has the central position in the Korean Protestant church's, ministry but it has functioned as the motivational power behind the growth of the Protestant church in modern Korea. The voice of preaching was enough to wake up the potential Christians in Korea. Thus, a great number of

Koreans started to gather at the church in order to listen to the Word of God, making Christianity one of the most outstanding religious groups in Korea. To preachers, preaching was a sacred anointing from God, and it was the truth of the Word that made divine power visible to congregations. Looking at Korean Christian history and the centrality of the influence of preaching, one is led to conclude that the decline of the Korean church is related to the crisis of authoritarian preaching in the Korean Protestant church. Unfortunately, Korean Protestant preaching is losing its power because of its authoritarian preaching style. Due to preachers' complacent credulity about the effectiveness of the authoritarian preaching style, Korean preachers simply failed to learn and understand what congregations in a competitive and changing contemporary society desire to hear from the pulpit.

An Analysis of Korean Preaching Context

1) Korean Preaching Context

One of the factors that influenced the current change of the contemporary situation in Korea was the collapse of traditional values. Confucianism has broadly influenced Korean culture, customs, behaviors, and ideologies. It conveyed certain fundamental notions of values to Koreans such as morality, justice, truth, and conduct in relationships.³ Under the influence of Confucianism, Korean society spontaneously accepted the hierarchical system and the authoritarian-centered ethic as the deeply-grounded foundation of Korean ethics. One of Confucianism's most important teachings was the principle that there is a proper order to all things in the universe, including human society. Confucianism taught that—within and through this social order—peace and harmony could be achieved if every person knew his or her proper place in society and upheld the responsibilities of that place. This Confucian tradition also influenced the Korean Protestant church. Confucian fundamental ideas about morality and the proper ordering of human relationships, which are closely associated with the authoritarian-centered and hierarchical system, are still commonly recognized and considered as proper conduct for the Korean Protestant church. In particular, Confucian teachings have become rigid, foundational principles of the Korean Protestant church ministries.⁴ For instance, Korean Protestant churches affirm the Confucian values of self-cultivation, education, hard work,

honesty, perseverance, and diligence.⁵ Korean Protestant churches highly value the morally conservative way of living and family-centered lives. Specifically in terms of piety, the Korean Protestant church values respect, obedience, and benevolence as unconditional and reciprocal responsibilities that are interdependent.⁶ As a result, the church remains in the hierarchical authority of the Confucian structure.

Under the influence of Confucianism, authoritarian preaching is the typical preaching style of many Korean preachers: a three-point deductive approach with rigid, simplistic, and humorless prescriptive and imperative language in the traditional hierarchical context.⁷ It influences all aspects of preaching, such as the identity of the preacher, the image of the preacher, the theology, the methodology, and the practice in many Korean Protestant churches.

2) Korean Preachers

In general, preachers who utilize authoritarian preaching find their identity from the hierarchical and patriarchal Korean church context. In this identity, authority is naturally given by virtue of being a father figure. It consequently makes the preacher unquestionably the head of the family or of the church. It allows authoritarian Korean preachers to regard themselves as “heralds” sent directly by God. This herald image forces the preachers and congregations to believe that preaching consists of faithfully speaking God’s words under God’s authority, much like an ambassador speaks authoritatively on behalf of his or her king. Such preaching requires the ears of the congregation who eagerly wait to hear and be transformed by the Lord. According to Thomas G. Long, the image of a herald originated from the image of the servant of the Word who only aspires to proclaim the news with two criteria: attending to the message of the Bible and proclaiming the Word plainly.⁸ In this metaphor, preachers have the responsibility to know God’s Word, to keep themselves a fit channel for its proclamation, and to declare God’s truth clearly and faithfully. Therefore, the main goal of the preacher is not to elevate his or her status, but to proclaim the message of God. In this regard, Long clearly indicates that “the task of the herald is not to be somebody, but to do something on another’s behalf and under another’s authority.”⁹ This herald image unexpectedly produces a negative result because authoritarian preachers speak without verified knowledge, injecting uncritical interpretations of the Word of the living God. It also permits the preachers the indulgence of not being criticized by the

congregation. The preachers' flawed nature or preaching content and styles are commonly regarded as unquestionable issues. Preachers often make the starting point of preaching not the Word of God but the preachers' opinions and ideologies. For them, the most important task of the preacher is to examine the grammatical and historical context of the Scripture and to deliver the result of the study to the congregation without adding or subtracting. However, Korean preachers degrade the meaning of preaching by placing too much importance upon the uncritical interpretation of Scripture. In this process, authoritarian Korean preachers use the Bible as the biblical reference and the proof text of their sermons. They undermine almost all serious theological thinking about every practical aspect of preparing sermons, and they fail to take adequate account of the context of preaching.¹⁰ Consequently, authoritarian Korean preachers use biblical texts as the starting point for what they want to say, making the Word of God merely a launching pad for the projection of their personal agendas.

3) Method of Delivery and Language

Under the hierarchical authority of the Confucian context, most Korean preachers manifested almost identically the Confucian method of communication – the hierarchical method – assuming that it was the widely utilized and universally accepted preaching method in Korea. Since the early period of Korean church history, this method has tolerated the authoritarian preacher's use of imperative, argumentative, aggressive, and preacher-oriented language that segregates the congregation from the pulpit. The Korean language also does not have a case system, adjective-noun agreement, nor verb-subject agreement. Such a sentence pattern (subject and verb agreement) is not generally used when a higher ranking person speaks to a lower ranking person in hierarchical Korean society. The problem is that authoritarian preachers frequently use such sentence patterns carelessly when they preach, not always considering their congregation and the impact of what they are saying.¹¹ Disregard of proper, respectful sentence patterns can lead to the misuse of biblical passages by replacing God with the preacher as the speaker of the Word. Many authoritarian preachers use the deductive method of preaching,¹² but the method obstructs dynamic communication between the preacher and the congregation in regards to the sharing of the Word of God. Deductive preaching tends to force the congregation to believe what the preacher concludes, denying any participation from the congregation. In

addition, authoritarian Korean preaching is a non-contextual pattern of preaching which creates a gap in the harmonious relationship between the preacher and the congregation. The preachers often neglect the context of the congregation and the congregation's role in the formation of the sermon. When preachers are asked about difficulties in their preaching, they blame congregants' ignorance of the preachers' supposedly in-depth thoughts. It consequently creates an almost insurmountable gap between the preacher and the congregation.

4) The Non-Contextual Pattern of Preaching

As time changes and clashes of cultures arise, contemporary Koreans no longer assume such hierarchical culture as the mandatory structure of communication. The contemporary congregation in Korea has intense aspirations of experiencing the presence of God in the time of preaching, and they desire ardently to listen to the Word of God through diverse ways of preaching. Fortunately, the Korean Protestant church has begun to seek new ways of preaching such as narrative, dialogue, inductive, and collegial preaching methods which can supersede authoritarian preaching. Preaching is not a way of showing authority, but a way of sharing. Korean preachers need to seriously reflect on their congregations and a new way of preaching as a major breakthrough, leading to the subsequent development of the Korean Protestant church. Congregations of Koreans hope that preachers will utilize conversational and collaborative preaching methods in order to bring the congregation closer to the Word of God.

The Need and Effective Value of Conversational and Collaborative Preaching in Korean Protestant Context

1) Post-Authoritarian Preaching

Conversational preaching attempts to replace preacher-oriented monologue with dialogic preaching. Conversational preaching does not allow the preacher to stand as the sole authoritative center of the sermon; instead, individuals in the congregation are in conversation in the formation of the sermon. It is a vision of preaching in which the people of God attend together and reflect on each other's experiences, actual practices, and hopes as participants in preaching. In conversational preaching, preaching is more than reading a manuscript and dealing

with one another's questions and issues. It is preaching in which the experiences of conversational partners are considered equivalent to those of the preacher whose responsibility it is to focus the homiletical conversation. This type of preaching does not fit the strict pattern of sermon formation. It is a totally new conception of preaching which begins with the preacher's typical study of the text, preparation of a sermon outline, and discussion with the congregation about the ways in which Sunday's text might be applied to the whole congregation, completing the sermon creation process.

On the other hand, collaborative preaching is a practical method that involves members of a congregation in sermon brainstorming, based on the idea of preaching as a collaborative event between the preacher and the congregation. Collaborative preaching can transform simple preaching into a "rhetoric of listening" through biblical interpretations and theological insights of the congregation. Emphasizing the collaboration of the congregation beyond the artificial level, collaborative preaching enables the Word of God to fully engage with the congregation's real life. Collaborative preaching also increases the authority of the Bible in the congregation because it discerns and speaks the truth of the Gospel by engaging in and influencing the ways that a congregation shapes itself into becoming a Christian community. This preaching offers an opportunity for the congregation to explore the principles of collaborative ministry, coming together and sharing their experience in the formation of the sermon. In this process, preachers invite congregations as co-operative partners at the table, creating a truly participatory dialogue.¹³

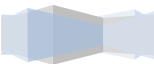
2) Preaching for Building Up the Church

These two unfamiliar preaching methods function as a new direction in homiletics for building up a church in which the people of God harmonize with equal status. The primary characteristics of conversational and collaborative preaching are different from traditional preaching (the Korean Protestant church's authoritarian preaching). In the traditional understanding of preaching, the congregation is regarded as receivers of the Word, separated from the pulpit, and even as inferior beings who should be guided or supported by the preacher. On the contrary, conversational and collaborative preaching methods invite the congregation to become primary partners in matters of faith formation and practice. These two homiletical

methods encourage both the preacher and the congregation to reconsider fixed ideas about preaching and the relationship between preacher and congregation. In these models, the experiences of conversational and collaborative partners are elevated to a level that is equal to the experiences of the preacher, whose responsibility it is to focus the homiletical conversation. In order for this to occur, an alternative understanding of the relationship between the preacher and the congregation as “equal partners on a journey to understand and live out their faith commitments” is required.¹⁴ Also, these conversational and collaborative preaching methods advocate that the sermon’s content should be proposed to the community of faith for their additions, corrections, or counterproposals. In these two preaching methods, the preacher searches for meaning that is found at the intersection of a text and life’s myriad experiences instead of simply finding an answer for the sake of answering a question. Therefore, these two preaching methods refuse to limit sermon contexts only within biblical texts or church-related theological issues. Conversational and collaborative preaching methods crave to share the gospel of God, which causes dramatic and dynamic encounters with God in the real life of the faith community. The methods also urge the use of confessional sermonic language. This confessional language represents convictions to which believers have come through their experiences and through the influence of those who have believed before them.

3) Contextual Patterns of Preaching

As we see above, both conversational and collaborative preaching methods not only invite the congregation to become the companion of the preacher on an equal footing (instead of being simple receivers and hearers), but they also indicate a growing concern among homiletical theorists about what and even how to preach in a postmodern world. At this point, the most important function of the two preaching methods is the awareness of the gap between the preacher and the congregation which the congregation faces in Korean preaching context. The gap limits the richness of preaching, disturbs the divine revelation, and inhibits the human experience of the power of God. All things considered, these two preaching methods awaken the need to close the gap between congregations and preachers. They also show the importance of inviting the congregation into the place where biblical-theological interpretations and their real lives are shared. Moreover, these methods offer an alternative that corrects the weak points of the



current authoritarian preaching. They enrich the interpretation of the Word of God through the multiple voices of the community, and the diverse and multiple conversations about a biblical text can be very useful in making the congregation understand the text. Therefore, conversational and collaborative preaching rests not on the personal authority of the preacher, but on the authority of the Word the preacher is preaching. Especially, these new models of preaching keep the congregation and the preacher from being confused by a narrow-minded, authoritarian declaration of a text in areas where textual interpretation is particularly obscure. In this respect, conversational and collaborative preaching methods are new ways of preaching that will act as counterproposals to authoritarian preaching. Conversational and collaborative preaching methods contain the ability to invite the people of God to the sermonic table with the experiences of other conversational partners. In these models, Korean preachers can preach by incorporating an exploration of the text, doctrine, or situation with the give-and-take among different voices that marks genuine conversation. By inviting everyone to participate in life-giving conversation and collaboration, these two preaching methods empower ongoing communication between God and God's people, engaging and influencing the ways that a congregation is talking itself into becoming a Christian community without a gap between preachers and congregations.¹⁵ Thus, the preacher and the congregation become colleagues who explore together the mystery of the Word for their own lives as well as the life of the congregation, the larger church, and the world.¹⁶ Therefore, preaching becomes a concrete action of revealing and sharing love with the community for the purpose of building up the church.

Appropriateness of Conversational and Collaborative Preaching in Korean Preaching Context

1) Matching the Essential Character of Korean Communication

Conversational and collaborative preaching methods essentially correspond to the attributes of “sharing” (conversation and collaboration) and “mutual care” (consideration) that are deeply immanent in Koreans. The essential attribute of Korean communication is based on the idea of “Na-num”(sharing) and “Bae-ryuh” (mutual care). This is evident through the Korean way of conversation. When Koreans have a conversation with others, most of them are expected

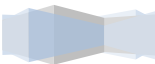
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to nurture “sincere” attitudes. They always pay close attention to the importance of delicacy and consideration for others during the conversation. Also, Korean communication is based upon silence or laconic speeches that are reflections of a speech style of mutual care: fewer words so that one does not hurt the other by talking about things that are taboo. However, Koreans are erroneously basing their silence on the Confucian teaching of “silence is golden.” The Confucian speech method warns that nonsensical, emotive talk which does not have any objective is unacceptable. Only certain points expressed in clear fashion are meaningful and worthy of being said. But Koreans do not or should not follow the Confucian pattern of communication. Koreans are the people of “Jeong:” warm, rich interpersonal, nurturing, and caring. Jeong is a difficult concept to define. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Korean-English dictionary defines it as “feeling, love, sentiment, passion, human nature, sympathy, heart.” Although it is complicated to introduce a clear definition of Jeong, it includes all of the above as well as more basic feelings such as attachment, bond, affection, or even binding together which is caused by “Na-num”(sharing) and “Bae-ryuh” (mutual care). It characterizes the Korean communication context as the linguistic culture of indirect, metaphorical, and inductive communication rather than direct, literal, and deductive communication. It also develops the intuitional, imaginative, and symbolic functions in Korean communication. It is the essential character of Korean communication which contains the concepts of equality and respect for individuals.

We also find the essential characteristics of Korean communication, “Na-num” (sharing) and “Bae-ryuh” (mutual care) through the Madangguk. It is a Korean traditional art performance in which players and the audience mingle, talk, sing, and dance together with “Na-num”(sharing) and “Bae-ryuh” (mutual care). In Madangguk, the audience is not only the object but also the subject of performance. It acknowledges the people who participate in the performance as the object of mutual conversation and the subjects of communication who produce the creative power of a dialogue play. No one is allowed to be an inactive recipient, but rather all are welcome participants.

2) Practical Possibility of Conversational and Collaborating Homiletic in the Korean Preaching Context



Furthermore, we can see an overlap between conversational and collaborative homiletics and the Korean ministerial meetings of *Shim-bang* and *Mok-jang*, in which there is already potential for growth, sharing, and mutual care. This overlap is best expressed in the Korean tradition of *Shim-bang*, in which a pastor, elders, and lay persons visit a member's home, worship together, and share a small meal. *Shim-bang* makes the claim that it is not the pastor alone who rules the church. Instead, pastors strengthen the communication between pulpit and pew. This conversational and collaborative homiletic also uses the *Mok-Jang* meeting approach in which small groups meet so that they might discuss their physical, mental, and spiritual lives with one another in relation to the Scripture, their curiosity about the Bible, and their sense of community. In addition, the meeting encourages the new members to attend church activities and worship regularly, to become part of a group or committee, and to become Christians who are dynamic and close to the Word. Korean pastors already recognize the importance of lay leadership as seen in *Shim-bang* and the need for communal conversation as seen in *Mok-Jang*. These two approaches in combination create a possibility that cries out for a collaborative and conversational homiletic.

Through exploring the above Korean ministerial methods, we can see two principal aspects of the contemporary Korean context that are related to the fundamental principles of conversational and collaborative preaching methods: (a) Korean ministers have already recognized that lay members' active participation and cooperation are necessary for a successful ministry; and (b) the contemporary Korean church context demands communal ministry in which lay members become co-leaders and partners rather than the conventional and authoritarian ministry centered on the ministers. These two facts demonstrate that the contemporary Korean church context possesses the basic potential and condition necessary for conversational and collaborative preaching. In this regard, if Korean preachers analyze the fundamental principles of *Shim-bang* and the *Mok-Jang* meeting and extend these two ministerial methods to the methodology of conversational and collaborative preaching, then these unfamiliar models of preaching will become appropriate for the Korean Protestant congregation.

The Korean Protestant church has been continuously losing members. One of the potential contributing factors to this decline is the authoritarian preaching of Korean preachers, which is increasingly an inappropriate style that goes against the changing Korean context. Authoritarian preaching has lost its relevance in modern Korea because of the corrosion of traditional Korean values, leaving Korean Protestants searching for a balance between new ideals and old traditions. It allows the preachers to use ideological and doctrinal approaches that make pastors look like religious police officers in contemporary Korea. Authoritarian-style preaching becomes disingenuous and destructive as pastors turn into “false-heralds.” Even worse, it leads to the misuse of God’s power in the pulpit. However, now we can overcome the above issue with new methods of preaching: conversational and collaborative. This new style is post-authoritarian which means it removes certain hierarchal and dogmatic homiletic approaches which have created a gap between the preacher and the congregation. Both models of preaching invite and encourage active participation in the homiletical process from both pew and pulpit, responding to the hunger of church members for a new approach that doesn’t leave them simply as inactive receivers of the Word. The conversational and collaborative models of preaching build the church up by bringing God, the Word, the pastor, and the congregation into an ongoing discussion that seeks the real meaning of the Word of God and worship in a style that cannot be found in the authoritarian approach. The characteristics of the conversational and collaborative preaching methods reflect the “sharing” and “mutual care” characteristics of the Korean context. Furthermore, we can see an overlap between conversational and collaborative homiletics and the Korean ministerial meeting of Shim-bang and Mok-jang, in which there is already potential for growth, sharing, and mutual care. Korean pastors already recognize the importance of lay leadership as seen in Shim-bang and the need for communal conversation as seen in Mok-Jang. These two approaches in combination create a possibility that cries out for a collaborative and conversational homiletic.

The seeds have been planted, and now there is a need to water the soil with the Spirit of God and the courage to use the new approach of the conversational and collaborative models of preaching for the Korean context. I hope that by using this method the church may anticipate new growth and learn from new narratives shared in the conversation between the preacher and the congregation. These new experimental homiletics may be a healing factor in the Korean

churches because they will bring new life and new members into the church, enabling all to feel that they are parts of the body of Christ. Moreover, members will be able to freely communicate and collaborate with the church and the pastor as the division between the preacher and the congregation is removed. Through these new models of preaching, the new and old members of the church will be able to share with one another without worrying about lectures or authoritarian stances of preaching. Instead, they will be able to collaborate with small groups, the entire congregation, and the pastor, all of whom freely and lovingly care for one another through the sharing of the Word.

Abstract

Title: The Value and Potential for Conversational and Collaborative Preaching in the Korean Protestant Church

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This thesis explores how the crisis in Korean homiletics relates to the loss of members of the Korean Protestant Church. The thesis argues that authoritarian preaching is not satisfactory because of its exclusive and hierarchical approach, creating a gap between the pulpit and the pew in which the congregation is not a part of the homiletic process. In this regard, the thesis endorses the new homiletic lenses of conversational and collaborative preaching methods as viable styles of preaching, patching the gap between the preacher and the congregation. These methods highlight the communicative and collaborative creation process of the sermon in which the preachers and the congregation prepare together. Moreover, the thesis argues that these new methods are plausible in the Korean context because their characteristics resemble the Korean culture and the essence of Korean communication practices.

¹ <http://www.nso.go.kr/eng2006/emain/index.html>.

² The Journal of Current Affairs, “Why is Korean Protestantism declining by itself?” (Seoul: Dokrip Press, 2006), 8-30.

³ Ibid., 28.

⁴ Un-young Kim, in his multiple books, asserts this position. Un-young Kim, A Study of Homiletical Paradigms (Seoul: PCTS Press 2004), 108. Unyong Kim, Rethinking Preaching (Seoul: Worship & Preaching Academy 2005), 102-108.

⁵ Chang-Bok Chung, Preaching for Preachers: The Study of Preaching with Particular Reference to the Korean Cultural Context (Seoul: Worship & Preaching Academy, 1999), 19.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Un-young Kim, A Study of Homiletical Paradigms (Seoul: PCTS Press 2004), 109.

⁸ Thomas G. Long, The Witness of Preaching (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press 1989), 24.

⁹ Ibid., 27

¹⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹¹ Chang-Bok Chung, Introduction of Korean Preaching (Seoul: Worship & Preaching Academy 2001), 53-57.

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¹³ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵ John S. McClure, The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet (Nashville: Abington Press, 1995), 50.

¹⁶ Lucy Atkinson Rose, Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 4.

