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A holistic homiletical approach to preaching based on ancient and modern texts

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This article proposes a homiletical model as an alternative to traditional homiletical approaches in response to the recent membership decline in evangelical churches in Korea. While socio-economic and sociocultural aspects may contribute to the membership decline, the article considers evangelical preaching and its alternative. Evangelical churches have been struggling with the decline of church membership since the early 2010s. While the Korean sociocultural value has changed, evangelical preaching has remained unchanged in its content and homiletical approach. The premises of this article considers how and what the preacher should preach in Korea by analysing and revisiting both classical persuasive rhetoric and the current homiletical approaches as a literature study. The literature study shows how both the elements of classical rhetoric and different homiletical approaches are evident in Paul's speech at Areopagus in Acts 17. As a sample, the article shows how one can implement the new alternative homiletical approach to Judges 6 in the current social context in Korea. In the act of preaching, the message moves the listeners towards fulfilling God's missional calling by engaging in the new norm of social distancing in these times of pandemic crisis.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The proposed holistic homiletical approach results from an interdisciplinary discussion synthesising non-religious classical rhetoric and modern religious homiletical approaches. Furthermore, the holistic approach treats different elements within classical rhetoric and homiletical approaches based on intradisciplinary discussion. The Korean preachers should consider the new proposed holistic model in response to church membership decline in Korea.

Keywords: Korean evangelical preaching; classical persuasive rhetoric; homiletical approaches; speech act; holistic homiletical approach.

Introduction

Preaching involves interpreting ancient and modern texts (Thompson 2008:799). In this article, 'ancient' means the biblical text, while 'modern' refers to the living humans in their social context. Therefore, the preacher must prepare not only to interpret the scripture but also to interpret what the listeners experience from their socio-contextual setting.

The underlying assumption of evangelical preaching in Korea is that preaching must come from a biblical text. However, evangelical preaching in Korea comes short both in doing biblical and sociocultural hermeneutics. As a result, preaching either merely explains the text or engages the listeners apart from the biblical text.

This article aims to construct a holistic homiletical approach from the results of both *intradisciplinary* and *interdisciplinary* disciplines. As an interdisciplinary task, the article integrates two different categories of speeches: Aristotle's classical rhetoric and modern Christian preaching that briefly 'analyses, synthesises and harmonizes links between' approaches 'into a coordinated and coherent whole' (Choi & Pak 2006:n.p.). Moreover, the article takes 'multiple' approaches 'from the same' Christian preaching (Helper 2022:n.p.) as an intradisciplinary task as a part of the process for the emerging holistic model.

The objectives of the article are as follows:
- a literature study of persuasive rhetoric and homiletical approaches
- investigating Paul's speech act in his sociocultural context
- proposing a holistic homiletical approach for evangelical preaching in Korea.

Preaching and the classical persuasive rhetoric

Preaching addresses 'fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for … the world' (Dykstra & Bass 2002:18). Furthermore, preaching is a persuasive speech act to place the listeners in a position where they can respond 'wholeheartedly to the truth' (Montoya 2000:132).

Christian preaching, in its uniqueness, has a long history in connection with the ancient rhetoric (Shaddix 2003:133f.). Speech acts in rhetoric are utterances used to perform a particular desired purpose (Green 2021:n.p.). Therefore, speech act or persuasive rhetoric was distinctive in 'a way of the dispute giving rational arguments (*rationes, logoi*) and asking for meaning … in philosophical or scientific reasoning' in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds (Dingemans 1996:38–39).

Aristotle's classical rhetoric has three means of persuasion: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. *Ethos* relates to the speaker's credibility for the listeners' trust. *Pathos* concerns the listeners' inner conviction that comes from the rhetoric. *Logos* is the logical argument in rhetoric that makes sense to the listeners' mindset (Rapp 2010:n.p.). Moreover, if the speech is to be timely in the listeners' particular social context, *kairos* should be taken into consideration (Ramage, Bean & Johnson 2012:67). The first three (and the fourth as a background) are identifiable in Paul's preaching to the Thessalonians (1 Th 1:5), where Paul mentions the gospel form as *logos*, the listeners' deep conviction came in their hearing of the gospel as *pathos* and the way Paul lived that was consistent with the message as *ethos* (Chapell 1994:26).

In this section, out of the four elements within the classical rhetoric, two, *ethos* and *pathos*, will be considered for an intradisciplinary discussion. Persuasiveness in sermon preparation, preachers must consider the above elements and the listeners' experience in their social context as they interpret the biblical text transferring the ancient text to modern listeners.

The preacher's credibility for the listeners' trust as *ethos*

The element of the speaker's *ethos* may not be apparent to the listeners because *ethos* relates mainly to the speaker's character that is 'projected in the speech' that makes the speaker 'trustworthy' (Kennedy 1999:82). However, the listeners' trust could also come when the preacher studies the scripture and interprets the real-life interaction in the listeners' social context (Nel 2014:3).

While it may take time to build trust from the listeners, the listeners will eventually take notice of the preacher's character as they witness the preacher outside of the preaching context. No matter how eloquently a gifted preacher delivers the sermon week by week and the message comes across powerfully, a severe character flaw will weaken all previous messages preached (Sloan 2019:n.p.). There are preachers whose preaching is relevant and engaging. However, such a natural ability that captures the listeners might simply be entertaining (Vines & Dooley 2018:25) because the preacher's utmost priority is being faithful to Jesus Christ, who has called the preacher into preaching ministry (Willimon 2015:153).

Furthermore, suppose one must choose between being faithful to oneself and true to the biblical text. In that case, the text must have priority over oneself (Vines & Dooley 2018:138) because there is a possibility of weakness in a 'personality-driven preaching … when the emotive design of the Bible deviates from the current mood of the preacher' (Vines & Dooley 2018:26).

Preaching as witnessing for the preacher's and the listeners' *pathos*

One of the best ways to describe a preacher is to depict him or her as a witness who has witnessed 'something, and … to tell the truth about it' in the courtroom (Long 2005:35/168), where the person's opinion matters a little. To stand as a witness from the preacher's experience means to confess in public with the 'validity rests with the integrity of the confession itself' (Lose 2013:21). Therefore, the preacher should focus on becoming a witness behind the pulpit rather than explaining the text to convince the listeners (Willimon 2015:121).

Furthermore, the task in preaching is witnessing 'to the truth' what the preacher perceives and not attempting to prove the truth apologetically (Lose 2013:21). For instance, often, the preacher tends 'to prove redemption and the transforming power of the gospel' instead of the preacher should 'encourage' the listeners 'to seek and to follow' (Nel 2014:7). To serve as a witness, the preacher must experience the text before the actual preaching event takes place so that what the preacher experienced from the text could influence one's preaching (Arthurs 2017:116).

Therefore, when one hears God's word from experiencing the text in sermon preparation from the preacher, *pathos* becomes evident in preaching (Willimon 2015:145). Moreover, the listeners' *pathos* emerges as 'the preacher embodies the spirit of the text while seeking to help [the] listeners do the same' in preaching (Vines & Dooley 2018:27). *Pathos* must begin within the preacher before the listeners can experience the message.

Preaching and the current homiletical approaches

Homiletics is 'the practice and study of the art of preaching' (Nordquist 2019:n.p.), which 'requires meticulous study and careful construction' of the message (Anderson 2006:86). Furthermore, in homiletics, the content of the message and scripture must be connected closely 'with the central concern

of biblical hermeneutics' (Greidanus 2001:5). Therefore, hermeneutics is not an end in itself but serves as a basis for homiletics in preaching (eds. Gibson & Kim 2018:93).

While the task of homiletics is discerning 'the confessional intention of the text' (Bond 2003:28), the preacher needs to determine 'the best way to communicate the idea of the text' to the listeners (Edwards 2005:23). Its primary focus is to communicate most effectively by developing 'a strategy for transferring' the result of exegeting the ancient text to contemporary listeners (Edwards 2005:23).

Currently, there are several homiletical approaches. The underlying assumption for evangelical preaching in Korea is that the preacher's sermon has its basis in the Christian Bible. Therefore, one can categorise different types of homiletical designs based on their relationship with scripture. As it was for the classical rhetoric, this article will consider several types of homiletical approaches and bring them into one as an *interdisciplinary* discipline.

Preaching as topical that has a clear theme

Typically, topical preaching expounds on a single topic (Wiechmann 2017:n.p.) by explaining and proving the topic by citing different biblical verses as a reference (Prutow 2010:147) while the different verses 'share a common subject' (Warren 2005:419). For such reason, topical preaching is often referred to as 'concordance preaching' (Motyer 2013:109). Gibbs (2010:235) describes topical preaching as 'a river, and all the Scriptures that throw light upon the topic to the tributary streams that flow into that river'.

There are pieces of evidence of topical sermons in the New Testament (Orrick, Fullerton & Payne 2017:68). Furthermore, if a topic is a primary idea of the biblical text, the topical preaching exposes the text, which can be biblical (Orrick et al. 2017:71).

However, there could be a possible downside of topical preaching. Topical preaching can place more weight on the topic itself and less on considering 'the declarative force of Scripture, and the textual shape of the Bible' (Mohler 2008:66). What happens often is that a preacher may 'quote a particular verse' without 'its larger context' in mind and 'try to support it with other isolated texts to make [the point]' (Olford & Olford 1998:112).

Whether preaching is textual or topical, Morris (2012:138) contends that the preaching topic as a 'single dominant thought should … [derive] from the text' in biblical preaching. However, Hughes (2001:110) contends that topical preaching is often the result of 'a homiletics of consensus … [people's] conscious agenda instead of God's'.

Topical preaching could effortlessly 'descend into surface-level-only engagement with the text and agenda-driven … characterized by abusive proof-texting' (Merideth 2013:2). However, a sermon based on one biblical passage may not be sufficient when there is a need for 'a comprehensive response' (Orrick et al. 2017:72–73).

Narrative preaching for the listeners' participation as *pathos*

To preach biblically means that the preacher acknowledges and is faithful to the biblical genres where the sermon structure follows a genre. While there are different genres in the Bible, the narrative is one of the dominant genres (Edwards 2005:15). When a preacher chooses a text, the genre 'significantly influences meaning' in the preaching process (Edwards 2005:19).

The strength of narrative preaching is in the sermon's meaning, which is not 'waiting to be discovered but evolves, actualized' by the listeners as they participate in interpreting the meaning in the narrative (Rashkow 2006:447). Furthermore, while the listeners participate in the preacher's sermon preparation, they also engage in the preaching process. Narrative preaching invites the listeners to make God's story their home (Thompson 2003:113) as the preacher vividly 'presents, describes and explains' the story that 'the listeners can imagine … and seeing themselves as characters in God's ongoing drama' (Lose 2013:24).

Narrative preaching assists the listeners to allow the text, God's story, to transform their thoughts and 'behaviors … appropriate to [their] social worlds' (Green 2003:68/262). In narrative preaching, the listeners learn first-hand by entering 'the experience of others' by feeling the characters in the story and 'feel what they feel' (Galli & Larson 1994:82). As a result, a narrative sermon concerns 'the Bible and the listeners in their present situation' (Miller 2006:54).

As opposed to 'mere precepts-driven homiletics', narrative preaching is a 'preferred style of exposition' where the preacher, like an artist, makes the Bible 'come alive with metaphor and image' that is 'more memorable' (Miller 2006:19). The narrative preaching approach draws 'out explicitly the idea and ethical implication of' the textual stories that lead the listeners to ethical response (Long 2009:15, 18). Narrative preaching may be 'a viable alternative … in the light of the other … religious and secular' stories in the current postmodern era (Lose 2013:23).

Missional preaching for the listeners' identity and calling

The concept of missional is 'a way of thinking that challenges the church to re-form and reforge' the understanding of church's identity 'theologically, spiritually, and socially' for living and proclaiming the gospel in the sociocultural context (Mancini 2008:33). Therefore, missional preaching is to read and interpret the text with 'the missional hermeneutical lens', raising the question of how the text prepares the missional congregation and its relevance in the current cultural context (Nel 2021:170). As a result of the

preaching from the 'missional interpretation', the listeners participate in God's mission (Johnson 2015:140).

Like topical and narrative, missional preaching has its foundation in the Scripture. However, there is a difference in its emphasis and direction. While biblical doctrine or theme becomes the primary focus in topical preaching, and narrative preaching primarily focuses on the listeners' experience and participation in God's narrative from the text, missional preaching takes a step further with the congregation by 'a process of reformation whereby the local church rediscovers and seriously seeks to live by its God-given identity' (Nel 2014:2). Therefore, missional preaching aims to nurture and empower the congregation to fulfil their missional calling (Goheen 2011:204).

Because the congregation 'exists for the sake of God's mission' (Wright 2017:80), to measure the efficacy of a missional church is to measure 'its effectiveness in the world' (McNeal 2011:22). Missional preaching does not restrict itself within the periphery of the church but goes beyond it because Christian preaching is 'public heralding rather than insider conversation', and its intent is missional (Willimon 2015:147).

Before God uses the church to be his instrument to 'reconcile the world to himself' (2 Cor 5:19), the church must be shaped first by the word 'ministry', and missional preaching 'shapes' the church by becoming a 'justice-and-reconciliation' church (Tizon 2012:1226). In that sense, the theological understanding of God's people's calling is missionary and evangelistic (Nel 2021:171), in which the missional preaching directs and moves the church 'outward' (Goheen 2011:206).

Biblical preaching for exposing the text for the listeners

One could consider preaching to be biblical and expository if the sermon has its basis in the Bible (Robinson 2001:21). However, more often than not, there could be a misconception between the Bible exposition and biblical preaching. A biblical sermon is not a running commentary, where preaching merely instructs that sound like lecturing in a classroom (Murray 2010:n.p.). Biblical preaching is when 'the preacher allows a text from the Bible to serve as the leading force in shaping the content and purpose of the sermon' (Long 2005:38/168).

A sermon should come from theological and rhetorical interpretative work by the preacher (Buttrick 2000:129) to provide faith in the listeners through the preaching of the Word (Horton 2008:47). However, because of a significant cultural chasm between the text and the audience, one of the most challenging tasks in sermon preparation is bringing the biblical text to the modern listeners without undermining the textual 'form and function' (Gregory 2017:19). A preacher not only needs to exegete the text but interpret the listeners' experience in their social context to bring 'biblical texts and

the complex realities of today's world into conversation with one another' (Louw 2016:2) for the preaching to have a contemporary significance.

Apart from the length of the primary text or emphasis, expository is equivalent to textual or biblical preaching. The concept 'expository' assumes preaching as exposing a biblical text (Dever & Gilbert 2012:36), while 'biblical' highlights speaking from a biblical text. A biblical sermon is 'text-driven' when the preacher 're-presents the substance, structure, and the spirit of the text' (Gallaty & Smith 2018:42) to the listeners. In summary, the task of biblical preaching is to interpret the text for the modern listeners in their social context to make 'the greatest possible impact' (eds. Willhite & Gibson 1998:26).

Identifying the persuasive rhetorical elements and homiletical approaches in Paul's speech at Areopagus (Ac 17:22–34)

Like other speeches in the book of Acts, the speech in Acts 17:22–31 is Luke's summary of Paul's speech (Wright 2008:86). Paul's speech in Areopagus serves as an example for preachers to engage the listeners in their socio-religious culture and world views. The elements of classical rhetoric and the four modern homiletical approaches are identifiable in Paul's speech narrative. It also sets an excellent example of *how* and *what* to say in preaching to those who do not share the Christian belief and religious culture.

The evidence of persuasive rhetorical elements in Paul's speech at Areopagus (Ac 17:22–34)

Paul's audiences had two distinctive world views (v. 18). Their beliefs in deities affected how they lived and their aim in life. Rather than appealing to the Mosaic laws, Paul used their current religious beliefs and philosophical thoughts. In that regard, Paul took a dialogical (διαλέγομαι, 'to discourse' in v. 17) approach to speaking into the Athenians' world view.

Unlike the Jewish religious belief, logically, the topic of resurrection was 'least intelligible' (Keener 2020:448). However, the resurrection sparked their interest in Paul as an orator (v. 18). Perhaps the reason was that Paul's rhetorical style might have been comparable to the 1st century Dio Chrysostom (Johnson 2002:9).

Paul opened his speech with their 'open agnosticism' (Wright 2008:87). Although Paul was a foreigner, he received the listeners' attention because he began with the Athenians' religious practice, an altar dedicated to the god of the unknown (v. 23). One can say that there was an initial *ethos* from the listeners to Paul, the foreign orator. To gain the preacher's ethos from the listeners, the preacher must be aware of the listeners' world view before the preacher can challenge the existing culture or faith (Green 2002:132).

Logical reasoning was imperative for Epicureans and Stoics in rhetoric. Logical reasoning was evident throughout Paul's speech (vv. 24–25; 26–27; 28–29), which makes the speech *logos*. Also, Paul's use of the conjunction οὖν ('therefore') in verse 29 shows that Paul was very conscientious of *logos* in his speech. As a trained orator (Polhill 2001:377), Paul builds up a case to give a reason why all humanity must give an account to the creator.

Having *logos* in preaching is indispensable because every preaching must have a logical flow and be coherent in the preacher's and the listeners' minds. Preaching must have *logos* for the listeners in their minds to have *pathos* emergence in their hearts.

For Paul, Christ's resurrection was a historical fact. The Jewish belief in resurrection was still in a distant future. However, Paul brings the past historical event and eschatological event to the present, τὰ νῦν ('things now') in verse 30 because 'a new era has begun for all mankind through Christ' (Lenski 1961:736). According to Paul, God gave a furnishing assurance that Jesus would judge all people by raising him from the dead (Bruce 1988:341). Paul's speech was very much *kairos* because the listeners could not remain ignorant or dismiss what they have heard.

The evidence of modern homiletical approaches in Paul's speech at Areopagus (Ac 17:22–34)

Although the listeners of Paul's message reacted differently after hearing the subject of the resurrection (Ac 17:32–34), on the surface level, the subject did not emerge at the beginning or the middle of his message. However, the subject of resurrection was the direction in which Paul was heading and it evolved (Rashkow 2006:447) in the background as the listeners participated in the narrative of Paul's logical argument, making Paul's speech topical and narrative.

Paul's speech act was not *missional* in that listeners were the insiders, Christians, to be responsive to the social issues with God's calling. Nevertheless, the message was *missional* because Paul spoke on humanity's identity in the light of divinity in verse 28. Once the listeners rediscovered their identity in the light of God's purpose for humanity (v. 27), they were called to respond (v. 31). As a result, Luke records that the listeners reacted differently rather than rejecting Paul's speech (Munck 1981:174), nor were they indifferent.

Every section of Paul's speech echoes his theology based on the Jewish-scriptural text (Horton 1981:230) without directly referencing the text. For instance, Paul referred to God's totality in creation (Louw & Nida 1988:24). God's lordship in verse 24 might have 1 Kings 8:27 or Isaiah 57:15 as a background. Paul's indirect reference to his theology of God's sovereignty and imminence in verse 26 is based on Ecclesiastes 3 while connecting with the words of their well-known poet. Therefore, Paul's speech had a scriptural base, and he brought it over to the Athenians' religious-cultural context, making the speech *expositional or textual*.

A holistic homiletical approach as an interdisciplinary discipline

The holistic homiletical approach takes the elements from the classical persuasive rhetoric and the four homiletical approaches synthesising them into one homiletical approach as an *interdisciplinary* discipline. The holistic approach aims for the listeners to participate in God's mission in their social context by participating in the narrative of the preaching event, discovering their identity in Christ and responding appropriately to their social needs.

Primarily, there are three cycles that the preacher goes through in sermon preparation. The first cycle concerns determining the sermon topic and its contemporary significance to the listeners in their social context for relevance, and ensuring that the sermon to be kairos. The primary topic must come from the text and speak into issues that the listeners face daily because the preacher often stands 'at a crossroad' interpreting both the ancient text, scripture, and challenges in life (Brown 2016:137). If, for some reason, the preacher cannot connect the topic discovered to the contemporary significance, then choose a different text or change the sermon topic.

The second cycle concerns logos, that is, logical coherency in the sermon for the listeners' comprehension, and clarity in the message. Furthermore, *logos* will enhance the natural flow of the message for the listeners can follow and participate in the preaching narrative of *pathos* in the listeners' hearts. In this second cycle, the preacher determines the preaching narrative route and the destination. Moreover, the preacher constantly reflects on and evaluates each phase of the message to know whether each phase will naturally lead to the next phase.

The third cycle involves constructing a sermon outline replicating the holistic homiletical approach. Three elements must be evident in the sermon outline:

1. Logical coherency because preaching is an argumentative task.
2. Scripture does not necessarily have to be in the foreground and remain in the background in preaching as in Paul's speech act.
3. Movement and a clear direction take the listeners from where they are to where they need to go.

Replicating the holistic approach to Judges 6:36–40

What does God say to the listeners in their social context in Korea from Judges 6:36–40? Is there any common struggle and experience between the character and the event in the narrative with the listeners? In preaching narrative, the listeners may become aware of their desensitised hearts because of experiencing the prolonged pandemic that needs to be addressed. The shared cultural context with the ancient world of Gideon (v. 17) is the listeners' uncertainty of any hope of

remedy from the adverse condition of the pandemic. Therefore, from the first part of the message, the preacher invites the listeners to see how Gideon's cultural and social condition is relevant and similar to the current social condition in Korea.

The listeners have become inward-focused on experiencing the social distancing as 'new normality'. As a result, people, in general, have removed themselves from social responsibility. Preaching is a provisional act that gives the listeners to rediscover their true identity in Christ and call to participate in what God is doing in this world. What makes preaching prophetic or *kairos* is when the listeners hear God's word 'for such a time as this' (Es 4:14) from preaching.

Just as Gideon helplessly accommodated the ruthless Midianites' oppression (v. 11), the listeners vulnerably adapt to the present condition of 'with' coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Korea. While pointing to the clarity of God-given mission, the preacher shares the uncertainty in the source of the missional calling.

Like the character in the narrative, the listeners have unnoticeably become numb to people's needs from the 'social distancing'. From the narrative, the preacher helps the listeners to participate in the narrative to identify themselves with Gideon in a similar situation and social condition. The listeners are moved from the condition of indifference, timidity and uncertainty to participate in God's missional work in preaching narrative.

The crux of the message is how God deals with the listeners' uncertainty about whether they are fit for the service by helping to overcome their fear and doubts in their hearts. Gideon involuntarily came to know that God was gradually and patiently dealing with Gideon's weaknesses. It is not the preacher's task to encourage or convince the listeners to have faith in God. Instead, like Gideon, preaching should provide a context where the listeners experience God's patience in dealing with their weakness. As a result, the preacher can expect the listeners' *pathos* to emerge in their hearts.

Gideon experienced certainty of God's *missional* calling from God's acceptance of the offering in verse 21. Moreover, Gideon needed more assurance from God by asking for a sign.

At this point, the listeners might feel a typical chasm from the ancient narrative because miracles do not regularly follow one's prayer. Therefore, instead of asking for a sign, the listeners should focus on the gospel as God's most significant sign. The preacher should point to Christ's death and resurrection as a sign of God's forgiveness and acceptance so that the listeners experience healing from preaching to participate in God's *missional* work in their social context. Inevitably, the preachers and the listeners anticipate the emerging *ethos* in preaching when the preacher assumes the role of 'priest' (Heb 5:2), who shares the common fretfulness and *missional* calling to their society.

Conclusion

The article treated different elements from within the same category, non-religious or religious rhetoric, holistically as a result of intradisciplinary implications. Furthermore, by bringing the non-religious classical rhetoric and Christian religious homiletical approaches together, this article considered a *holistic* approach resulting from interdisciplinary implications. The article proposes the holistic homiletical approach as an alternative to traditional evangelical homiletics in Korea.

In response to the recent membership decline of evangelical churches in Korea, preaching according to the holistic homiletical approach could engage the listeners effectively. The holistic homiletical approach has demonstrated how preaching can provide a context where the listeners' hearts receive restoration to rediscover their identity and calling. In the act of preaching, the message moves the listeners in the direction of fulfilling God's missional calling in these times of pandemic crisis.

Acknowledgements

Disclaimer

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