

KOREAN PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITY
AS MANIFESTED IN THE TESTIMONIES OF BELIEVERS OF THE
YOIDO FULL GOSPEL CHURCH

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One of the most widely used words during the last decade of the twentieth century was spirituality. This is evidence of human effort to find an escape route from the limitations and constraints of material civilization.

This study will analyze the spirituality of the Korean Pentecostal movement. Until now, much research on the Korean Pentecostal movement has been published. However, many have limited their research to David Yonggi Cho's life and sermons. Of course, no one can deny his importance. Aside from Cho, it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain the Korean Pentecostal movement. Nevertheless, there is something more that we need to explore to understand the Korean Pentecostal movement: the spiritual experiences of ordinary Pentecostal believers.

Until this point, Pentecostalism in Korea has been researched by studying different leaders in the movement. We now need to learn the effect these pastors and their messages have had on their congregations and on individual believers.

I think Cho understands market characteristics (i.e., suppliers/pastors and consumers/church-members) better than most religious leaders in Korea. He says that a church growth leader should be able to identify the needs of other people and meet them accordingly.¹ What is important to Cho is not the systematic practice of a religious creed or doctrine but the effort to help poor, sick, struggling believers regain hope and courage. To meet this need, he speaks of divine healing, positive thinking and the power of faith in the Living God.

¹ Institute for Church Growth, *Charis and Charisma*, eds. Sung-hoon Myuung and Young-gi Hong (in Korean; Seoul: Institute for Church Growth, 2003), p. 66.

If so, how have Cho's messages been received by ordinary believers? Has his message given people hope and courage as he intended? In order to answer these questions, we have to examine the testimonies of ordinary believers, who listened to and have been led by Cho.

1. A New Dimension in the Study of the Pentecostal Movement: Testimonial Study

Testimonies hold special importance in the Pentecostal movement.² In the early days of the Pentecostal movement, a testimony was treated as an important highlight in a service. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, the Pentecostal movement emphasizes religious experience. Neither conservatism, which stresses the absolute sovereignty of the word of God, nor progressivism, which understands a religion as ethics, treats a testimony equitably. Both conservatism and progressivism devalue testimony as a private religious experience. However, the Pentecostal movement regards true religion by one's experience and magnifies it by testimony.

Secondly, a testimony is narrative. Pentecostalism is a mass movement. Typically, a mass movement expresses itself through narrative rather than logic. A narrative can represent a vivid illustration of human life that logic can not portray. A testimony is a religious narrative about one's self. Through narrative, the Pentecostal movement developed. However, the theology of the Pentecostal movement is less developed.

Testimony has not been fully developed as an important resource for Christian religious study. That is because of the misconception that a testimony is a private matter rather than a formal resource for theology. This is the objection raised by both conservatism and progressivism. However, Evangelical theology recognizes this issue and understands the testimony from a new perspective. In Evangelicalism, a testimony does not replace the revelation in the Bible but confirms it. In other words, a spiritual experience should not transcend the authority of the Bible, but it reflects the content of the Bible in contemporary life in its meaning. On

² Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostalism and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 3.

this point, John Wesley understood such religious experience as an important source in Christian theology.³

Recently, theologians have begun to study this topic; among them, Nathan Hatch. Hatch of Notre Dame University opened a new chapter in the study of the history of nineteenth century churches by analyzing the religious experiences of ordinary believers.⁴ Since then, many scholars of church history have accepted the religious testimonies and biographies of the public as important sources in their studies. This has opened a new horizon in the study of church history. This research method has contributed greatly in understanding the early history of American Methodist churches.⁵ Recently it also influenced the study of the Pentecostal movement. Grant Wacker examined numerous religious experiences of Pentecostal believers and made a great contribution in understanding the early Pentecostal movement.⁶

When we study the faith of Pentecost, it is important to study its leaders. According to the assertion of Max Weber, a famous German sociologist, all great religions were created and propagated by charismatic leaders whose movements were systematized and indoctrinated. Weber asserted that a religious movement could not continue without going through this process. However, the mentality and spirit of such charismatic leaders is better seen through the religious experiences of their congregational members than through systems, creeds, or doctrines. Thus, whether a religion can grow or not depends on whether its religious experience is dynamic and working. The validity of this approach is based on William James' *Variety of Religious Experience*. He claims that the true nature of all religions can be found in its religious experience. Any creed, doctrine, or system is secondary.⁷

In this regard, it is meaningful to study David Yonggi Cho, the founder of the world's largest church. We can find many testimonies

³ Rex D. Matthews, "'Religion and Reason Joined': A Study in the Theology of John Wesley" (Th.D. diss, Harvard Divinity School, 1986).

⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁵ Nathan O Hatch and John H. Wigger, eds., *Methodism and Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001).

⁶ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostalism and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁷ William James, *Variety of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

through publications of the Pentecostal movement. An exemplar Pentecostal magazine in Korea is *Shinanggye* [World of Faith]. It is a monthly magazine spreading the Pentecostal faith through literary mission. Cho established a society of literary evangelism in December 1966 and published the first issue of *Shinanggye* in February 1967. Through this magazine, the Full Gospel has spread throughout Korean churches. *Shinanggye* currently has the highest circulation of all Christian magazines and stories of overcoming poverty and miraculous healings have been widely disseminated throughout Korea through it.⁸

The author examines Pentecostal spirituality and the leadership of David Yonggi Cho based on the testimonies published in *Shinanggye* in the later half of the 1970s. The testimonies published in *Shinanggye* use the real names and detailed addresses of the confessors. Although the majority of the testimonies were from members of the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC), some were from members of other churches. Included is a variety of socially well recognized people as well as ordinary people.

2. The Starting Point of Pentecostal Spirituality:

The Last Hope for Solving Problems of Life

What kinds of people join YFGC? How does Cho lead non-believers to Christian faith? This is an important starting point in understanding Cho's ministry.

The central motive for registering in the church, as shown through the testimonies of *Shinanggye*, is to seek faith to overcome obstacles in life. This is very different from a traditional view that faith is part of social life and a means to maintain social status. In Europe and the United States, as Christianity came into the social mainstream, one motive for faith was to join conventional society. According to Herberg, an American religious sociologist, going to a church in America meant that one was joining mainstream society.⁹ However, believers of YFGC join with the strong purpose of overcoming life's problems. To Cho, Christian faith is not a means of fellowship but is primarily God's answer to life's problems.

⁸ *Forty Year History of Yoido Full Gospel Church* (in Korean, Seoul: Shinanggye, 1998), p. 124.

⁹ William Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960).

This motive is also distinguished from those who think of the life of a faith as a means of social reform. Korean Christianity was the forerunner of introducing Korea to western culture. In the early twentieth century, when Korea was undergoing a cultural and political upheaval, an escape was sought from oppression through the church. During the Japanese colonization, the church was also on the front lines of the independence movement and a place to teach Korean to many illiterate people. After the liberation in 1945, the church was also a place to distribute relief supplies after the wars. While many may have attended churches in the past for various reasons as noted above, Cho has always emphasized the powerful God.

One testimony recounts the story of a brother of Seon-Won Song who suffered from an unidentified mental illness. He took medicines and sought help from a shamanist woman without relief. Doctors told him he needed brain surgery. The cost was too high, and the success of the operation was not guaranteed. At this time, a district pastor of YFGC spread the message of the power of the gospel. Their mother came to the church as the last resort. "Now let's leave our last hope in the hands of God." A work of God began to manifest in this family. And the brother was healed.¹⁰ We find many testimonies in the *Shinanggye* of those who came to YFGC as a last recourse "to leave our last hope to God."

A traditional church does not offer clear solutions to people who are at the end of their rope. They may view circumstances as fate. In other words, they offer consolation through giving up. However, this kind of answer is very passive. People want more positive and active answers. Thus, those who attended traditional churches left their long-time place of faith and came to YFGC or other Pentecostal (in Korea popularly called "Full Gospel") churches.

Myung-ja Lee was born into a non-Christian home but attended Sunday school from a young age. However, she gave up living with faith as she grew up and began to suffer from all kinds of diseases in the lung, stomach, heart, brain, etc., too numerous to mention. She spent ten years of her life suffering from these diseases. Then, Lee started to listen to the sermons of Cho through a broadcast and came to YFGC. Not by someone's invitation, she came alone after listening to the program. As soon as she attended the worship service, she gained peace and bowed to

¹⁰ Seon-won Song, "On This Glorious, Joyful Day," *Shinanggye* (October, 1975), pp. 86-87. All the testimonies published in this monthly magazine are in Korean. Instead of the conventional transliteration of the Korean titles, their English equivalents are given throughout this study.

the cross. Then she had a firm conviction that her diseases would be healed if Cho placed his hands on her suffering body. Soon after, Cho did this and she was set free from disease.¹¹ We can see how Lee, who had a traditional faith, believed that she had found an answer to her problem through Cho's sermon. I believe this has been the main reason many believers leave their churches and come to a Full Gospel church.

Another reason some begin to attend a Full Gospel church is boredom with routine church services. Young-ui Kim became a Christian as a child and is a medical doctor licensed in the United States. To Kim, the lively faith of Cho and Pentecostal believers was a challenge; their lives were full of vitality, but his life was not. "I am a Christian also, yet why can't I live fully as they do?" This thought caused him to come to YFGC where he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This experience fundamentally changed his life of faith.¹² Many people, who have not found dynamic faith in a traditional church, have transferred to a Full Gospel church.

In fact, the Full Gospel is a challenge to nominal Christianity. Faith is just a formality and a system to many nominal Christians. However, this kind of faith is not dynamic. Suddenly, they begin to be skeptical about their religion and desire to clarify what they believe. The Full Gospel challenges them to greater dimensions of faith and introduces them to a faith in God that is practical, relevant, and life transforming even for ordinary people with ordinary problems.

3. Pentecostal Spiritual Training: "Cry out"

To Pentecostal believers, a spiritual life is not an end in itself. Cho teaches the necessity of spiritual warfare in order to solve human problems. The believers of a Full Gospel church continue to make a diligent, spiritual effort in order to solve their problems. Cho also teaches that the problems of life are not limited to things that can be seen. At the bottom of all problems, there lies a spiritual problem. One may need spiritual warfare in order to solve such problems.

This often requires all-night prayer, fasting, and hands-on prayer. Si-sook Chung of Chicago Full Gospel Church testifies to the following. "I have desperately relied on God's answer, praying all night, receiving

¹¹ Myung-Ja Lee, "The Lord Who Recreated My Life," *Shinanggye* (January, 1976), pp. 84-87.

¹² Young-ui Kim, "The Living God," *Shinanggye* (January, 1976), pp. 24-25.

hands-on prayer. After a week, while praying, the Holy Spirit was moved, granting me a fire baptism and the gift of speaking in tongues. Halleluiah!”¹³ This process forms the spirit of Pentecostal faith.

One of the prominent characteristics of Full Gospel prayer is known as “crying out prayer.” It begins by calling the Lord three times, “Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord.” The biblical basis for this practice is found in Jeremiah 33:3: “Call to me and I will answer you” (NIV). Believing this verse, Full Gospel believers cry out to the Lord in unison. This prayer is not simply to talk to the Lord but desperately to hang on to God. As Jacob wrestled with the angel of God, this prayer wrestles with God. In fact, the churches in Korea have practiced “crying out” prayer since the 1907 great revival.¹⁴ However, it is presently known as the Full Gospel style.

Laying on of hands by ministers takes a special position in Full Gospel faith. Experiences in the Holy Spirit often happen through this practice.

The husband of Ji-sook Chung of Chicago attended church regularly, but his faith was not firmly rooted. Jashil Choi, the mother in law of David Yonggi Cho, was leading a revival meeting in Chicago, and Chung asked Choi to lay hands on her husband in prayer. He received the fullness of the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues.¹⁵

These phenomena are often manifested in YFGC. David Yonggi Cho is regarded as an extraordinary minister with unusual gifts of the Holy Spirit, and receiving a hands-on prayer by him is considered a special privilege. A majority of Full Gospel believers share this belief.

Myung-ja Lee was growing in Christian faith, but she gave up. She became very ill and began to seek faith again in a Full Gospel church. One month after she attended YFGC, she desired to receive special hands-on prayer by Cho. She thought, “I wish to have spiritual counseling and hands-on prayer from Cho,” and with this clear goal, firm faith that a special prayer by Cho would solve her problem began to bud

¹³ Ji-sook Chung, “Come, Come, Come to Me,” *Shinanggye* (December, 1975), p. 90.

¹⁴ Myung Soo Park, “Syungkyul Undonggwa Chogi Hankuk Kyohoeui Daebuheung” [Holiness Movement and the Great Revival of Early Korean Churches], *Christianity and History in Korea* 14 (2001), pp. 47-77 (57).

¹⁵ Ji-sook Chung, “Come, Come, Come to Me, 2,” *Shinanggye* (January, 1976), p. 83.

in her heart.¹⁶ She later received hands-on prayer and a demon which caused sickness in her for ten years, was driven out.

The Full Gospel faith stresses the importance of all night prayer, as do all other Korean churches. It is not known exactly when the all night prayer started in Korean churches. However, there were often all night prayer meetings during revival movements in the early part of the twentieth century. A majority of revival meetings were held in the evenings, and after the worship service, cry-out prayer continued. When the believers were moved and filled with the Holy Spirit, these meetings continued into an all night prayer. However, the Korean churches held all night prayer regularly on Friday nights after the liberation from Japan.

Another special kind of prayer found in Full Gospel churches is fasting. Fasting prayer was especially emphasized by Jashil Choi and widely put into practice. Choi established a fasting prayer mountain in Osanni, where she trained believers for the Christian life and their illnesses were healed through fasting prayer. Pentecostals go to the Osanni Prayer Mountain when they are faced with difficult problems. There, they fast, cry out in prayer, and receive hands-on prayer from pastors. Then, they experience the wonderful grace of God. Choi believed and preached that over-eating causes most sickness. Thus, the practice of fasting can deal with the cause of the sickness. Speaking in tongues is also experienced in many cases along with divine healing.¹⁷

Central in the spiritual life of Full Gospel believers is prayer. This characteristic is distinguished clearly when compared with the practices of the Catholic Church or other traditional Protestant churches. The center of their spirituality is the sacrament and the word of God respectively. If the sacraments and the word of God are regarded as indirect approaches in one's relationship with God, prayer is a more direct approach. Prayer is conversation with God. Full Gospel believers talk to and receive God's answers through prayer.

In addition, prayer is a kind of spiritual warfare. Believers fight the schemes of Satan through prayer and fasting. When In-seong Kim received the Christian faith, his father was hitting his daughter severely. People said it was because the god of Jesus came into this family. The ancestral gods of this family were infuriated and afflicted many hardships. Kim confronted the demons of drunkenness and debauchery with prayer in tongues, fasting prayer, and all night prayer to drive them

¹⁶ Lee, "The Lord Who Recreated My Life," p. 86.

¹⁷ Jashil Choi, *Kumshik Gidoui Neungnyuk* [The Power of a Fasting Prayer] (Seoul: Seoul Books, 1977).

out. However, the situation did not improve. On the contrary, the hardships of the family worsened. Kim thought, "This is the last stand of the demons." To Pentecostal believers, prayer is neither a kind of meditation nor cultivation of the character. It is a desperate warfare with demons. If one does not understand this perspective, he/she can not fully understand the spirituality of the believers of the Full Gospel church.¹⁸

The reason that Christians can win in spiritual warfare is because the God of Christianity created the heavens and the earth while the other gods are demigods. Bok-hee Lim, who believed in shamanism and strongly denied the Christian faith, finally gave up the life of the shaman because Christians gathered around her neighborhood to pray. She said later, "Because it was a confrontation between a demigod and the almighty God, the demigod could do nothing but to be defeated in a groggy state without even having a real fight." Soon, Lim collected all the clothes and equipment that she used for her practice and burned them all. This amounted to five rear carloads. Then, she destroyed the little temple for her god of shamanism in her backyard.¹⁹

The most important thing to remember in spiritual warfare is not only faith in the almighty God as the master of the heavens and the earth. The most important thing in spiritual warfare is the power found in the name of Jesus Christ. The Bible says God gave all sovereign authority to Jesus, which He promised to give to His disciples. When David Yonggi Cho prays for divine healing, he teaches one to say, "You, filthy Satan, I command you in the *name of Jesus of Nazareth*, be driven out from the saint."

The power of the name of Jesus is the strongest weapon in spiritual warfare. Nak-hyung Kim, who is a dentist and elder of YFGC, says that he can see when the power of bad spirits is harassing a patient during an operation. Then, he commands, "Filthy demons, come out in the name of the Lord, Jesus."²⁰ In many cases, the patient regains faith, and the operation is finished successfully.

Pentecostals understand the life of faith as a sort of spiritual warfare. The Traditional belief of Koreans is that the ancestral gods of many generations would be infuriated if they converted and began worshipping the One God. Thus, having Christian faith has been risky. Pentecostals

¹⁸ In-seong Kim, "It Be as You Believe," *Shinanggye* (March, 1976), pp. 88-89.

¹⁹ Bok-hee Lim, "Burning the Last Cloth of Shamanism," *Shinanggye* (February, 1978), p. 100.

²⁰ Nak-hyung Kim, "Faithfulness with All the Heart, Life, and Will," *Shinanggye* (July, 1976), p. 62.

are trained to prepare for this process of converting a non-believer. They are told to tell the new converts, "There will be an attack from Satan. Do not be afraid of the attack, but stand strong and confront it. Never give up or be defeated."

Pentecostalism transforms believers into spiritual warriors. To them prayer is the most powerful weapon. The power of bad spirits is defeated through the power of the Holy Spirit. Cho leads believers of YFGC through rigorous prayer training.

4. The Turning Point in the Spiritual Life of the Full Gospel: The Baptism by the Holy Spirit

The essence of Pentecostal spirituality is found through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal movement does not regard Christian faith as a simple transcendental faith rather as something that they can touch, feel, and experience. Experiential faith is emphasized. Cho teaches his members that there is a second grace of God called the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and he requests that they pray for it. In other words, a clear objective for Pentecostal believers that cannot be found in other believers is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This is the very point that distinguishes a Full Gospel church from a traditional church. Being part of a Full Gospel church is not an end in itself, but only a beginning. Cho continuously preaches about the Holy Spirit, and each parish pastor leads in this direction. Additionally, they teach, that being armed spiritually through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they will overcome hardships. All these elements make Pentecostal believers aggressive and strong.

This spiritual experience may come as an inexplicable warm feeling. Eui-ja Eom, the director of a marriage counseling center in Seoul, describes the feeling-- "a light that has not been seen in this world shines and gives the feeling of being uplifted in the air." In many cases, the baptism by the Holy Spirit is manifested by a concrete and specific spiritual experience. Jin-Hwa Kim says that "a hot fire of the Holy Spirit touched me" while in desperate prayer. This has been reported as a common experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.²¹ Thus, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is often described as a "fire" baptism.

²¹ Jin-hwa Kim, "God Who Cured My Sterility," *Shinanggye* (December, 1975), p. 83.

Often, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is manifested as light. A famous Korean musician, Myung-so Jeong was attending a revival meeting in the United States. The preacher prophesied that a person in this congregation would receive a great grace of God. After the meeting was over, she tried to fall asleep. Around 2 a.m., “a white light and a red light began to shine on me strongly. The brightness was something that I could not handle,” and she arose quickly.²² Joy is also a frequent manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s presence. Jeong continues, “An indescribable joy sprang up. It was a kind of drunken feeling.” She expressed her great joy by singing hymns. After experiencing the grace of the Holy Spirit, hymns continuously came. Alone, she started singing, “Jesus is All the World to Me” over and over. “In many cases, after receiving the grace of God, a favorite hymn is found, and the hymn is sung repeatedly.”²³

In the Pentecostal movement, the baptism by the Holy Spirit is accompanied by speaking in tongues. If the warm, hearty, indescribable joy is the inner evidence, speaking in tongues is a more objective evidence. Jeong, after experiencing the grace of the Holy Spirit, testifies that “a strange voice comes out of my mouth.” While awakened from sleep, “strange words come out of my mouth, and I am talking with God through such words.”²⁴

Byung-hyuk Chun was on his way home from an all night prayer meeting on the twentieth day of attending the church. Then, he experienced “a feeling of my heart swollen with joy and floating in the air. Out of so much joy and thanks, I prayed to God. Then, I started speaking in tongues and cried uncontrollably.”²⁵ Speaking in tongues is a specific evidence of believers who have received the baptism by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals believe that speaking in tongues is not only clear evidence of the living God but also specific evidence that God loves them. A notorious punk, Young-seok Jeon, managed to commit all the sins in the world. Nevertheless, he was led by his Christian wife to YFGC and attended all church meetings with zeal. “The Lord gave me

²² Myung-so Jeong, “God, You Are the Living God,” *Shinanggye* (August, 1976), p. 32.

²³ Jeong, “God, You Are the Living God,” p. 32.

²⁴ Jeong, “God, You Are the Living God,” p. 32.

²⁵ Byung-hyuk Chun, “Powerful God,” *Shinanggye* (February, 1976), p. 93.

the baptism by the Holy Spirit as the sign of His love for me.”²⁶ Jeon was shunned by the society. However, with the baptism by the Holy Spirit, he began to have a firm conviction that he was a child of the absolute sovereign God. This conviction served as the turning point in his life.

Speaking in tongues, however, has also been the subject of mockery. Rev. Jashil Choi was criticized by fellow students even in the Pentecostal Bible college to stop speaking in tongues. Out of disappointment, she stopped praying in tongues for a while. However, her heart was saddened. She thought that being ashamed of a spiritual gift was to be ashamed of God. From that point on, she began to pray in tongues again courageously and loudly. Then, her heart was refreshed and the sadness in her heart disappeared.²⁷

5. The Life of Being Filled with the Holy Spirit: New Heart, New Action and Powerful Work

The Full Gospel Church teaches believers to continue being filled with the Holy Spirit *after* receiving Spirit baptism. Hearts are changed, behaviors are changed, and convictions are strengthened when people have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

First, fullness is manifested by an absolute repentance for sins. This is a typical characteristic of the modern revival movement. Many people repent wholeheartedly despite the fact that sermons of the Full Gospel church often do not emphasize the law of God. In many cases, they do not receive the Holy Spirit after repenting, but the work of repentance is revealed when they receive the Holy Spirit.

Chang-yeon Won was advised to go to a theological seminary by David Yonggi Cho and was agonizing over this issue. He prayed earnestly. Within 30 seconds after the prayer, he felt his heart and body suddenly warm, and joy and hope filled him. He started to weep, and felt as if his world turned upside down. At this point, all his sins were vividly revealed to him. He even saw himself stealing peaches in the backyard gardens of his neighbor. He then started to repent of his sins one by one. Before this, he had been cursing life in general, but now that he was

²⁶ Young-seok Jeon, “The Joy of Working for Others,” *Shinanggye* (December, 1976), p. 91.

²⁷ Jashil Choi, *Nanun Hallelujah Azummayutda* [I Was Mrs. Halleluiaah] (Seoul: Seoul Book Center, 1978), pp. 139-40.

filled with the Holy Spirit,²⁸ he was filled with thanksgiving. Won repented of all of his sins only after receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit.

This forceful work of the Holy Spirit was revealed to Il Kim. He started to attend a Full Gospel church at the advice of his friends while suffering from a dreadful disease. Kim did not know anything about Christianity nor the concept of sins that he had committed. He received the grace of God the first time he went to the church. “The day of receiving the grace, the day that the Lord showed his love for me was my attendance at Full Gospel Central Church. After hearing the pastor’s sermon and the communion service, a strange thing happened to me. Tears were pouring, and the place of pain was wrapped in strange warmth. I felt that Jesus was pardoning my sins. Since this day, I could taste the peace and joy of my mind that I have never felt before.”²⁹

Young-seok Jeon was a former gangster. However, since he received grace, his heart was changed as well as his behavior. “My life was transforming day by day. Liquors, tobaccos, bad temper, doubts, negative thinking, etc. began to leave its place in my life....The former gangster, Jeon was crucified on the Cross as well, and the changed Jeon resurrected and emerged out of the tomb that confined the gangster.... People, who used to know me, began to pay attention to me.... Then, I definitely testified, “there was no one in this world to save and change me, but Jesus changed me completely.”³⁰

One of the most specific changes in the lives of Korean Christians is that they quit smoking and drinking. The Full Gospel church continues this tradition with other Korean churches. The father of In-seong Kim exhibited a very bad temper when drunk. He would beat and harass his family members, who were converted Christians. He targeted Kim, who was diligent and faith-filled. Kim embarked on all night prayer, fasting prayer, and prayer in tongues eagerly. Then, one day, her father lost his job and was led to church by his daughter. However, he could not give up his drinking habit. While he was praying and fasting at the Osanni prayer

²⁸ Chang-yeon Won, “The Grace of Making One, Who Was Bound to Die, Live Again,” *Shinanggye* (October, 1976), p. 82.

²⁹ Il Kim, “Amazing Love,” *Shinanggye* (October, 1976), p. 86.

³⁰ Young-seok Jeon, “The Joy of Working for Others,” *Shinanggye* (December, 1976), pp. 91-92.

hall, he quit drinking and smoking in five days. Having a bad temper while intoxicated, he now began to live a new life.³¹

Many believers testify that unreasonable fears began to disappear after receiving grace. Traditionally, Korean women have obeyed their husband and mother-in-law. Nevertheless, many wives, who have experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit, are persecuted at home. The mother-in-law oppresses the daughter-in-law saying that a hardship is happening in their home because of her faith. The husband threatens to divorce his wife, who does not listen to him anymore. Nevertheless, believers who have experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit do not yield to these persecutions.

The testimony of Hee-jeong Kim is a case in point. She testifies, “a power or a force to pull and push sprang up in me.”³² With this power, faith is declared and persecution is overcome. One of the characteristics of Pentecostalism is power manifested through faith. This is not only power for the mission of spreading the gospel but also power to overcome the obstacles in life.

6. Problem Solving: Divine Healing, Blessing and New Christian Life

As people's problems are overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit, they begin to ponder the meaning of life. The fivefold gospel and threefold blessing messages of David Yonggi Cho, suggest specific answers to these intrinsic life issues.

Hardly anyone questions that one characteristic of the Full Gospel church is divine healing. It is the most important aspect of the ministry of David Yonggi Cho and has contributed to the phenomenal growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church. Most of the testimonies printed in *Shinanggye* are of healing experiences. To the believers of the Full Gospel church, sickness is not just a physical concern. They believe that the body belongs to a deeper dimension. Thus, they believe healing of sickness is possible with help from the supernatural world.

³¹ In-seong Kim, “Let It Be as You Believe,” *Shinanggye* (March, 1976), pp. 88-89.

³² Hee-jeong Kim, “A Faith Budding by a Recorded Tape,” *Shinanggye* (March, 1977), pp. 84-85.

Many believers of Full Gospel churches consider that sickness is a punishment from God for disobedience. They presume that God punishes them with sickness if they are not living the life of faith. In many cases, after coming to church for a while, some begin to wander about again, and soon after they neglect keeping the Lord's day holy and giving the tithe. Thus, some believe that it was part of the healing process to help them realize their mistake and to return to God.

Jae-yeol Kim was a fervent believer in a Full Gospel church. However, her husband did not have faith and suffered from sickness. Moreover, he could not stand his wife's life of faith. She started fasting prayer to avoid persecution. Several days later, during the early morning prayer, all her sins from a child were shown to her like a movie clip. She realized that she was the root of the problems. She desperately repented. After fasting prayer, she returned home to find that her husband was healed.³³ This illustrates that the repentance of the wife was very much related to the healing of the husband.

Pentecostal believers claim that they experience divine healing during Cho's healing prayer. David Yonggi Cho names several specific diseases during the healing prayer after his sermon, and then proclaims divine healing in the name of Jesus. Many are healed at this time.

Myung-hwan Kim's right eye was so weak that he could not see clearly. During an evening worship service of Yoido Full Gospel Church, David Yonggi Cho proclaimed, "the person with a weakening right eye, stand up at this time. You are healed tonight." Immediately, he stood up and thanked the Lord. He was healed. Several months later, he decided to have an eye examination to see if this improved vision was for real or just a temporary illusion. His eyesight had been restored and he could see even very small letters clearly.³⁴

Healing is related to fasting prayer in many cases. Many come to the fasting prayer hall to seek healing as a last resort. Kwan-ock Kim had suffered from bronchial asthma for a long time. He went up to the Osanni fasting prayer hall at the suggestion of friends. After a week, he felt a twitching in his stomach and ran to the rest room. As soon as he sat on the stool, a fistful lump of feces was excreted, and he spotted a lump of

³³ Jae-yeol Kim, "Answer to a Prayer," *Shinanggye* (October, 1976), p. 88.

³⁴ Young-hwan Kim, "The Best Ophthalmologist," *Shinanggye* (April, 1976), p. 95.

worms (probably parasites) in the bloody stool. After this incident, he was cured of the asthma and other miscellaneous diseases.³⁵

When we analyze divine healing, most people relate it to the experience of the Holy Spirit. The work of divine healing is revealed when a person experiences the fiery Holy Spirit, atones for his/her sins, and has a firm conviction of becoming a child of God. Some people are critical saying, that healings of the Full Gospel church only cure disease and do not produce changes in lifestyle. Nevertheless, when we read the testimonies we see that these are only superficial criticisms.

Nak-Hyung Kim, a dentist and elder of a Full Gospel church, testified of his experience. He had to take a leave of absence his junior year in dental school due to tuberculosis. At this time, he was invited to a tent church meeting of Seodae-moon Full Gospel Church where he witnessed a miracle healing. He prayed that the same miracle would happen to him. "Without a single doubt, I implored God to heal me just like the person in front me. Then, the heaven opened and came into my body to operate on me. In a split second, my tuberculosis was completely cured. --- the fire of the Holy Spirit came into me like a flood." Along with this healing experience, he continued to experience the grace of God, forgiveness, peace, joy, etc.³⁶ In the testimony of Kim, we can see that the grace of divine healing does not end with the healing.

David Yonggi Cho always stresses the blessings of the soul, material prosperity, and health. Material blessing is central in his ministry. Traditional churches shun way from this blessing; however, Cho takes it very positively. He believes that a good God will give good things to His children.

Cho teaches that giving the tithe is like sowing a seed of blessing. It is so called the law of sowing. Just as a seed needs to be sown to reap fruit, the tithe has to be offered to receive material blessing. Korean Christians believe that the blessing is received through tithing. Ahn, Jeong-Soon heard Cho's teaching that the tithe is the stock seed for blessing, and she determined to offer the tithe faithfully. Consequently, she and her family received abundant material blessing.³⁷

³⁵ Kwan-ock Kim, "Healing by a Fasting Prayer," *Shinanggye* (November, 1975), pp. 87-89.

³⁶ Nak-hyung Kim, "Loyalty with All the Heart, Life and Will," *Shinanggye* (July, 1976), pp. 60-61.

³⁷ Jeong-soon Ahn, "Condition for a Marriage that Required a Conversion" *Shinanggye* (January, 1977), p. 106.

Pentecostals believe that tithing keeps the home in blessing. Seong-hye Park was well off financially, however she did not offer a wholesome tithe. She grudgingly thought the tithe was a waste. Whenever she withheld her tithe, her family suffered from disease, accidents, and miscellaneous incidents. She decided to offer the tithe. After that, she and her family were protected from hardships and their blessings increased day by day. Thus, she believes the tithe is the forbidden fruit of modern society. As Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and were expelled from the Garden of Eden, someone, who does *not* offer a wholesome tithe, drifts away from the blessed garden.³⁸

Diligence is as important as tithing and keeping Sundays holy. Harvey Cox published an analysis of David Yonggi Cho's sermon emphasizing diligence. In his opinion, this teaching has contributed greatly in helping Korean Christians attain a middle class lifestyle.³⁹ If Korean Minjoong theology stressed liberation from poverty through changes in social structure, the Pentecostal movement encouraged the poor to strive for the middle class by living diligently. On this point, it can be said that the Pentecostal movement contributed to the modernization of Korean society.

Sook Hwang's business hit bottom and was on the verge of bankruptcy. Then, she listened to David Yonggi Cho. Cho always preached, "if you want blessing, sow the seeds of faith." She then decided to give generously as he taught. He also speaks of the principle of sowing and growing. That is, one has to work hard. Hwang then made every effort in her business and in her life of faith and she endeavored to teach others. Hwang succeeded once more in her business. She has traveled around the world and come to the conclusion that Korea is the best country to live in for her.⁴⁰

Numerous testimonies printed in *Shinanggye* tell of those who have fallen into despair and regained the courage to start over. Instead of poverty they gain material blessings and often move into the middle class. In this regard, the evaluation of Harvey Cox seems to be justified and appropriate.

³⁸ Seong-hye Park, "Tithe is the Second Forbidden Fruit," *Shinanggye* (June, 1978), p. 91.

³⁹ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twentieth-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), pp. 234-37.

⁴⁰ Sook Hwang, "Sow the Seeds of Faith," *Shinanggye* (December, 1976), pp. 88-89.

As much as material blessing is important, the blessing of the home is also important. If the home is not peaceful, one cannot speak of blessing. Kim, So-Ja was severely beaten by her husband because of her Christian faith. She planned to pray at the Osanni fasting prayer hall for ten days. On the seventh day, her husband appeared in a dream. But, the news she heard from home was that her husband was becoming even more violent. Then, on the ninth day of her fast, her husband came to the prayer hall with their daughter and promised her that they would live the Christian faith together. He became a faithful saint of the church.⁴¹

Traditionally, Korean churches have told wives to obey their husbands and convert their husbands with faith and patience. However, in the majority of cases, this advice ends in failure. However, Full Gospel faith understands this kind of confrontation is spiritual warfare. They advise one to confront the issue courageously with faith. Here, the confrontation is not physical but spiritual through prayer. It seeks deliverance from darkness through a change of heart.

7. Analysis: The Characteristics of Korean Pentecostal Spirituality

We have examined the spirituality of believers in Full Gospel churches through their testimonies as recorded in *Shinanggye*. They reveal the typical spiritual life of Pentecostal believers. Most begin their spiritual journey in a desperate environment. This can be sickness, business failure, or discord in the family. They strive to solve their life problems with their whole hearts. Typically, they seek the Lord through many forms of prayer including, all night prayer, fasting, prayer in tongues, and cry-out prayer.

During this process the baptism in the Holy Spirit, (the distinguishing substance of the Pentecostal movement), often was poured out upon them. A fiery hot feeling and speaking in tongues accompanied this. Many also experienced divine healing at the same time as receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Through this, many began to have a firm conviction that God now recognized them. This religious experience continued also in their daily lives. That is, many quit drinking and smoking, began to keep Sundays holy, offered the tithe, and worked diligently. Through these processes and experiences, as well as the teachings on blessing of Cho, believers in Full Gospel churches grow in faith. They are convinced that they are children of God, and become

⁴¹ So-ja Kim, "Upon the Answering of God," *Shinanggye* (March, 1976), pp. 86-87.

deeply involved in the faith community through Full Gospel/Pentecostal churches.

Next, is an evaluation of several characteristics of Pentecostal spirituality visible in the ministry of David Yonggi Cho and the Full Gospel churches in Korea.

Firstly, is the aspect of primitive religion. Many religious scholars have understood the appearance of the Pentecostal movement as a resurrection of primitive religion. Harvey Cox, a religious scholar of Harvard Divinity School, has said that speaking in tongues is a primitive language and that a miracle represents primitive piety. In fact, primitive religion has been regarded as superstitious in existing society. However, it is captivating the minds of the common people. Primitive religion deals with the problems of sickness and disaster more specifically than modern religion. David Yonggi Cho deals with the basic needs and problems of people which existing traditional religions have neglected.

of the monastery in the Middle Ages. This eventually led to the institutionalization of the Catholic Church.

In contrast, he goes on to say that the Pentecostal movement returned the church to the masses and that this is an appropriate expression of spirituality in contemporary times. Muehlen adds that one way the Catholic Church can meet modern needs is to follow the example of the Pentecostal movement.⁴⁴ David Yonggi Cho is an excellent religious leader for the masses in modern society.

Thirdly, the spirituality found in the Full Gospel church is private in that it focuses on problem solving. As we can see in the testimonies, most believers of a Full Gospel church come to the church with private, individual problems. Their faith is matured during the process of overcoming numerous problems such as sickness, poverty, disaster, family issues, etc. David Yonggi Cho takes these concerns seriously and deals with them directly. Recently, Full Gospel churches have begun to speak out to/for society, but they have traditionally held a strong orientation toward the individual.

Religious sociologists identified one element of modern religion as privatization. Religion no longer serves to function in public matters and is now limited to private matters. This is distinctly seen in the United States, where church and state are clearly divided. So, religion is evaluated not in the context of finding meaning in a public forum but in the context of how it satisfies the needs of religious consumers, the members of the church.⁴⁵ From this perspective, the fact that Full Gospel churches have focused on the problems of individuals, is an indication of good understanding of their role in modern society.

Fourthly, Pentecostal believers find meaning and a sense of belonging through the experience of the Holy Spirit. Many people, regarded as “losers” in life, receive the firm conviction that they are children of God after receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Believers of Full Gospel churches care for their members through organizational zones. Spiritual assistance is provided through prayer and sharing rather than by financial aid alone. Through this process, a strong fellowship among the believers emerges. This sense of belonging serves as an oasis for lonely people during urbanization.

⁴⁴ H. Muehlen, *Reform of Christian Faith: Charisma, Gift, Reform*, trans. Jungwon Kim in Korean (Seoul: St. Paul Publishing, 1980).

⁴⁵ Peter Berger, *Religion and Society*, trans. Yang-gu Lee in Korean (Seoul: Jongno Books, 1981).

Wade Clark Roof, a religious sociologist of the University of California, Santa Barbara, asserts that the most important duty of a religion in modern society is to provide personal meaning for one's existence and a sense of social belonging.⁴⁶ Robert Wuthnow, a religious sociologist at Princeton University, agrees with Roof, likening its purpose to that of a support group. In modern society, where everything is specialized and done by a division of labor, people feel like lost children without a sense of belonging. Religion supports them and instills a sense of belonging.⁴⁷ Full Gospel churches are serving this purpose in their congregations.

Fifthly, David Yonggi Cho relies on the supernatural and emphasizes the transcendental works of God. Many people have lost all their resources and worldly hope before they come to a church as their last resort. They earnestly desire a miracle of God. In this regard, a miracle is the essence of Pentecostal spirituality. It is evidence that testifies of the living of God. Doubts vanish.

John Locke, a British experiential philosopher of the eighteenth century, said, that in order for Christianity to remain vital in a modern society, a miracle needs to be manifested to prove that their religion (God) is alive. According to Locke, during the era of close relationships between church and state, the nation supported the religion for its survival. However, when support from national governments has officially ceased, support from believers is essential. Therefore, a miracle is imperative to prove that their religion is alive. In fact, the most revived churches of modern society are those where the supernatural miracles of God have been manifested. The transcendental spirituality of David Yonggi Cho is needed today.

Finally, in understanding Pentecostal spirituality, some misconceptions of the Pentecostal movement need to be addressed. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a holistic experience that changes the mind, heart, and life of a believer. Most of the accounts that have been investigated testify to a change in lifestyle, which accompanied the charismatic experience.

However, this point has been neglected in the past. In my opinion, Pentecostal activists may have over emphasized the aspect of charismatic manifestations. Manifestations are outward, physical, objective phenomenon of the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We also

⁴⁶ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, p. 77

⁴⁷ Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (Princeton, NJ: Free Press, 1994).

see inner evidence of peace and joy overflowing in the lives of the testifiers. Pentecostal theology should stress this point more intently in the future.

Historically, the Pentecostal movement originated from (came out of) the Holiness movement of the 19th century. They both believed the work of the Holy Spirit results in a change in the heart. Thus, if the Pentecostal movement is to remain faithful to its historical conception, it must emphasize the inner manifestations of a change of heart as well as the objective charismatic manifestations of speaking in tongues and healing.