

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF DAVID YONGGI CHO AND THE  
YOIDO FULL GOSPEL CHURCH

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As the Korean church grew explosively in the 1970s, one congregation attracted the attention of the churches of the world. Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) pastored by Rev. David Yonggi Cho had the largest congregation in the world with a membership of 700,000 by the end of 1994. Cho founded YFGC in 1958 and has pastored the church since. Many view YFGC as the base of the Pentecostal movement in Korea. This paper will discuss the history, development, characteristics, and influence of this church in relation to the ministry of Cho.

1. The Life and Ministry of Yonggi Cho<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to understand YFGC and its ministry without considering the man behind it—David Yonggi Cho. Cho was born on February 14, 1936 in a small town in Wooljoo County, Kyung-nam Province in the southern part of Korea, while the country was under Japanese occupation. From the time that Japan invaded Manchuria and started a war with China (1931), the Japanese exploited most crops and requisitioned Koreans to harvest them. It was in this devastating situation that Cho spent his childhood. The country was liberated in 1945 but divided into south and north by American and Soviet forces: the north became a communist country and the south a democratic one. But South Korea was still going through major chaos both politically and socially.

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<sup>1</sup> His story was published by an American reporter, Nell L. Kennedy, *Dream Your Way to Success: The Story of Dr. Yonggi Cho and Korea* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1980). See also Woonhak Nyo, *Chooyo Tutdaero Iroosuh* [Thy Will Be Done: World Mission and Yonggi Cho] (Seoul: Kyujang, 1982).

Cho's father, Doo-Chun Cho, ran for election to Congress on May 30, 1950 but failed. The Cho family was suffering financially. Less than a month later the Korean War broke out. Young Cho witnessed the destruction and suffering caused by the war. In spring of 1953, when Cho was a sophomore in high school, he was injured in the chest while exercising. He gradually became weakened. Since it was still during the war and his family was poor, he could not get proper medical treatment. Later he was diagnosed as having a terminal case of tuberculosis. Without proper treatment, he became severely weakened and close to death. On what was thought to be his deathbed he was visited by a Christian girl who was a friend of his sister. His Buddhist parents had forbidden her to visit their home, but she persisted and gave Cho a Bible, preaching the gospel to him. Soon Cho became a Christian and his health began to improve dramatically.

He happened to meet Kenneth Tice, an Assemblies of God missionary, and began to interpret his sermons for him and another missionary, Lou Richards. Richards taught the Bible to Cho. While Cho was reading about divine healing in the Bible, he was touched by it and repented for not having fully believed it. He prayed and fasted for three days. On the third day he had a vision of Jesus in which he was called to dedicate his life to preaching the gospel.<sup>2</sup> After this experience, in 1956, he moved from Busan to Seoul and enrolled in the Full Gospel Bible College, which belonged to the Assemblies of God denomination. Although he was not in very good health, he managed to continue his studies. As his Christian faith grew deeper, his health also gradually improved. During these years of study, Cho met Jashil Choi, his classmate and a former registered nurse, who took care of him. She later became his associate pastor and mother-in-law.

Cho started a tent church in 1958. Its 38-year history, although it assumed different names as the church moved from one location to the other, may be divided into three periods. The first is the pioneering period (1958–1961)<sup>3</sup> in which YFGC was the instrument of the Pentecostal faith's taking root in Korea by its strong Full Gospel message and divine healing. The second is the developing period (1961–1973) when the church took the leadership in the Pentecostal movement of Korea and spread the Pentecostal faith in the Korean church. The third is

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<sup>2</sup> Kennedy, *Dream Your Way*, pp. 118–21.

<sup>3</sup> International Theological Institute, *Yoido Kyohoeui Shinanggwa Shinhak* [The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology], vol. II (Seoul: Seoul Books, 1993), p. 96. (Hereafter, ITI stands for International Theological Institute.)

the current period of expansion (1973–). The church has taken the lead in the Holy Spirit movement of the entire Korean church, has become mature enough to show its concern for Korean society, and has greatly expanded the Holy Spirit movement.

## 2. History of the Yoido Full Gospel Church

### 2.1 The Pioneering Period (1958–1961)

Cho, a new seminary graduate, put up a tent in a slum area of Daejo-dong, Seodaemun-ku, Seoul on May 18, 1958 with Mrs. Jashil Choi and her three children. The tent church that had started with only five grew rapidly as Cho's powerful message and healing ministry, with his ardent prayer and street evangelism, made a great combination. Many who had various diseases came and were healed. The news of the work of the Holy Spirit at this tent church spread among the people and, by 1961, the church had a membership of 600.

The primary characteristic of this pioneering period was its ministry among city slum-dwellers. This was a post-war time of devastation and most people despaired in emptiness and frustration.<sup>4</sup> To these city slum-dwellers in Daejo-dong, Cho preached the good news of hope. He proclaimed that they could gain not only spiritual blessing but also material and situational blessings from God if they came to Jesus Christ and lived by the word of God. Cho's message of salvation in body and spirit gave enormous comfort and hope to people who were poor and suffering.

The second important characteristic of YFGC was the experience of Spirit baptism and divine healing. Cho preached Pentecostal faith, which emphasized Spirit baptism and the subsequent signs such as speaking in tongues, based on the prophecy of Joel that God would pour out His Spirit in the last days. The most outstanding manifestation of God's power in Cho's tent church was divine healing. Many were healed from various diseases. Cho's sermons penetrated the lives of city slum-dwellers. Divine healing and Spirit baptism were the driving forces behind the growth of the church. The explosive growth of YFGC was not only because of divine healing however, but also because members who

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<sup>4</sup> Kyung-bae Min, *Hankook Kidokkyohoesa* [Church History of Korea], rev. ed. (Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1982), p. 470.

were changed by God's power, went out, and preached the word of God to others.<sup>5</sup>

The third was powerful prayer. The early apostolic church was born by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, as they devoted themselves to prayer in the upper room.<sup>6</sup> Cho stressed prayer and devoted himself to it. He prayed at dawn, fasted and prayed, and prayed through the night.<sup>7</sup> Prayer became one of the most important elements of his ministry.

## 2.2 The Developing Period (1961–1973)

Cho interpreted the sermons of Rev. Sam Todd, an American evangelist, during revival meetings held for one month in September, 1961, at Seodaemun rotary. A great number of people came to these meetings and experienced God's grace. Many received Jesus and many were healed. After the meeting, Cho decided to establish a second church and held an opening worship service on October 15, 1961. "Full Gospel Revival Center" was the name of his second church. He started construction, and finished it on February 18, 1962. Cho was ordained as a minister on April 26, 1962. On May 13 of the same year, he changed the name of the church to "Full Gospel Central Church." The membership reached 3,000 in 1964.

Cho overworked to the point of fainting and suffered quite some time from bad health. One Sunday, while he was administering baptism to hundreds of people,<sup>8</sup> Cho collapsed and spent a week in a hospital. A week later, he return to the pulpit to preach but collapsed again. He was hospitalized. While reading the Bible in the hospital, he received revelation from Exodus 18 and used it to organize a number of cell-unit system,<sup>9</sup> which has become a trademark of YFGC.

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<sup>5</sup> Yonggi Cho, *More than Numbers* (Waco: Word, 1984), p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:14; 2:1–4, 42–47

<sup>7</sup> Dawn prayer was initiated at Changdaehyun Church in Pyongyang, during the 1907 revival meeting and expanded by Sun-joo Gil. Fasting prayer and all night prayer were expanded by Yonggi Cho and Jashil Choi.

<sup>8</sup> The Assemblies of God churches approve nothing but baptism by immersion, following the traditions of the apostolic church in the New Testament and also the traditions of Anabaptists.

<sup>9</sup> ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, pp. 185–86.

Cho appointed women as cell-unit leaders, a revolutionary attempt in the tradition of the Korean church or any Korean society with a strong Confucian background. Until then, the position of women in Korean society was not well recognized, if at all. The cell-group system brought liberation to the status of women in Korea. These women leaders devoted themselves to the growth of the cell groups by effective home visitations and street preaching. Cell units conceived as sub-churches grew rapidly having worship services, prayer and fellowship. The growth of cell units thus made a significant contribution to the growth of the church. Meanwhile, various departments of the church were organized, including men's and women's mission and service groups. The church started publishing a Christian monthly magazine *Shinanggye* [The World of Faith] in 1967 in order to expand the Holy Spirit movement based on the word of God.

The primary characteristic of this period was the work of the Holy Spirit experienced in the community. If the work of the Holy Spirit in the pioneering period had been individual experience, the work of the Holy Spirit in this period was the revival and renewal of the church as a community. The outpouring of the Spirit restored the Christian lives of a discouraged people of God. By this experience, the church could follow the model of the church presented in the book of Acts. When the church acknowledged and worked with the Holy Spirit it became Spirit-filled and this partnership brought with it the rapid growth of the church.<sup>10</sup>

The second characteristic of the period was the cell-group structure. Other churches had neglected cell-group structures but as employed in YFGC cells proved to be a great turning point. All members joined the cell system. Cho educated and trained the cell-group leaders so that they could take care of their groups. The structure of the cell-unit system contributed greatly to the effective training and pastoral care of the new members. With the help of this system, Cho can minister to the 700,000 members of his church. This subject will be discussed further.

### 2.3 The Expanding Period (1973 to the present)

Since the church could not accommodate the rapidly growing numbers, it decided to build a new church and started construction in Yoido, an island with nothing but sand. Despite economic depression,

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<sup>10</sup> Yonggi Cho, "Naega Chehumhan Siljiljuk Kyohoesungjang" [The Practical Church Growth That I Experience], *Church Growth 2* (Seoul, 1985), pp. 136-53 (147-49).

opposition and hardships, they finished construction and dedicated the new church on September 23, 1973. Church growth accelerated after moving to Yoido. Its membership reached 100,000 in 1979; 200,000 in November 1980; 500,000 in 1985; and 700,000 in 1992.<sup>11</sup> During this time, the church built a prayer mountain (1973), opened a publishing company (1976), and started a weekly newspaper, *Full Gospel News* (1978). To propagate Pentecostal faith and for the effective training and education of its members, YFGC established the Institute for Full Gospel Education, which became the International Theological Institute (ITI) in 1993.

YFGC also fully supports the Full Gospel Bible College to educate Christian leaders. The college later became Hansei University with full accreditation from the government.<sup>12</sup>

The primary characteristic of this period was the explosive growth of the church. Some try to explain such growth in relation to the sociological, economic and political backgrounds in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The following factors contributing to the growth are: the message and the leadership of Cho, divine healing, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the proper training of the church lay leaders by the Holy Spirit movement leadership.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the church began to take the primary role in the Holy Spirit movement of the Korean churches. In this period of expansion YFGC has dispersed the Holy Spirit movement all over the country and contributed greatly to the spiritual movement of the Korean church.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Church Growth International, *Church Growth Manual*, No. 7 (Seoul: Church Growth International, 1995), p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> Full Gospel Theological Seminary later became Hansei University, a Christian university fully accredited by the Korean government. Its undergraduate school consists of the Departments of Theological Studies, Journalism, Computer and Information Management, Business and Management, History, Industrial Design, and Music. Its graduate school confers Master and Ph.D. degrees in Theology and Music. Hansei University, *2003 Hansei University Catalog* (Gunpo: Hansei University, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Joon-shik Choi, "Hannkukeui Jongkyojuk Ippanguesuh Barabon Kidokkyo Tochakhwa Shinhak" [Intercultural Theology from Perspective of Korean Religions], *Shinhaksasang* [The Theological Thought] 82 (1993), pp. 96-128 (126-28).

<sup>14</sup> ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, pp. 125-26.

Third, the Pentecostal movement of YFGC has expanded into the world. Since the 1970s, YFGC has facilitated women workers and stirred a revival movement through the cell-unit system. They have brought the Pentecostal movement to thousands by concerted prayer, person to person evangelism, publications, broadcasting, and so on.<sup>16</sup> Pentecostal mission theology puts stress on eschatological expectation and the realization of the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup> YFGC makes every effort to further the Holy Spirit movement with its eschatological expectation, thereby to fulfill the vision of the Lord Jesus: to evangelize the world before the end comes by reviving the church.

Fourth, it emphasizes the renewal of the church and its participation in society. Realizing that the church must go before modern society to continue its growth, YFGC has concentrated on church renewal since 1993.<sup>18</sup> They practiced Christian love by broad charity work for the lower class and the underprivileged.<sup>19</sup> The current standing of YFGC is as follows.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.3.1 *Worship services*

There are seven worship services each Sunday, three each Wednesday, and two each Saturday. The seven Sunday services have different focuses: Cho preaches in two services; executive assistant pastors preach in three worship services; one is with an emphasis on praise and worship; and one is a healing service. There also are daily early-morning prayer meetings and all-night prayer meetings. Sunday schools and various mission groups have their own worship services on Sundays.

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<sup>16</sup> Young-hoon Lee, "Hankuk Kyohoewa Sungrungwoondong" [Korean Churches and the Holy Spirit Movement], *Shinanggye* (October 1995), pp. 134-39 (137).

<sup>17</sup> L. Grant McClung, Jr., "Truth on Fire: Pentecostals and Urgent Missiology," in *Azusa Street and Beyond*, ed. L. Grant McClung, Jr. (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge, 1986), pp. 47-54 (52).

<sup>18</sup> ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>19</sup> The charity work of YFGC includes: providing cardiac operations to children with heart disease; donating blood; "bread of love" (distributing food to the hungry); giving relief to foreign refugees; a sharing movement; the establishment of a training institute, and so on. For detail, see ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, vol. II, pp. 141-44.

<sup>20</sup> Statistics are as of December, 2003.

### 2.3.2 *Organization*

Centered on the leadership of Cho, its senior pastor, the church has ten departments and subordinate branch departments. There are 20 regional chapels, 20 large districts, 309 sub-districts, 4,374 sections, 11,214 cell units, and 700,000 members.

### 2.3.3 *Education*

The Department of Pastoral and Theological Studies of the International Theological Institute takes care of the continuing education and training of pastors and lay workers. A lay education institute ministers to the needs of lay people. Sunday schools and various mission groups have their own education programs.

### 2.3.4 *Evangelism and world mission*

Various mission groups and committees participate in evangelical programs. The Mission Department supports Cho's foreign campaigns, sends missionaries and establishes and supports foreign Bible schools. As of 2003, YFGC has sent 600 missionaries, established seven Bible seminaries<sup>21</sup> and one university, and expands its missionary work in the two-thirds world.

## 3. Unique Features of the Holy Spirit Movement of Cho and YFGC<sup>22</sup>

Cho claims that the Holy Spirit movement can bear fruit when it is accompanied by the fullness of the word, prayer and the Holy Spirit. If one is neglected or overly emphasized, the dynamic work of the Spirit

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will be impossible.<sup>23</sup> Since the Holy Spirit movement of YFGC has been established and developed through the ministry of Cho, a discussion of Cho's message, prayer, Spirit-baptism and speaking in other tongues, divine healing and cell unit system is in order.

### 3.1 Message

The distinguishing elements of the Holy Spirit movement of YFGC are: salvation of the spirit; faith centered on the word of God; experience of the Holy Spirit; and world evangelization.<sup>24</sup> They are made concrete by Cho's messages.

Jin-hwan Kim described Cho's message. "It is positive and hopeful with stress on Bible-centered genuine faith and on the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>25</sup> Karen Hurston has said, "Cho does not prepare his sermons exclusively by his own planning but by calling on the Holy Spirit."<sup>26</sup> E. J. Peters wrote: "A preacher who is called by God and possessed by the Spirit becomes a powerful tool of God."<sup>27</sup> Cho's Bible-based and positive sermons have contributed not only to the growth of YFGC but also to the expansion of the Holy Spirit movement.

The framework of Cho's sermons is the fivefold gospel and threefold blessing. The fivefold gospel consists of: the gospel of salvation; the gospel of the fullness of the Holy Spirit; the gospel of divine healing; the gospel of blessing; and the gospel of the second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> The threefold blessing is based on 3 John 2 and describes the blessing that Christians receive by the work of the cross of Jesus Christ. It consists

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<sup>23</sup> Yonggi Cho, *Sunggongjuk Kyohoesungjangeui Yulshue* [A key to Successful Church Growth] (Seoul: Seoul Books, 1976), pp. 40-44.

<sup>24</sup> Young-hoon Lee, "Hankukkyohoe Sungrungwoondongueui Naahgalgil" [Suggestions for the Holy Spirit Movement of Korean Churches], *Sungshinsaegye* [The World of the Spirit] 1 (1992), pp. 26-27 (27).

<sup>25</sup> Jin-hwan Kim, *Hankukkyohoe Buheungwoondongsa* [The History of the Revival Movement in the Korean Church] (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Karen Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1994), p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> Eugene James Peterson, *A Theology of Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 47.

<sup>28</sup> The structure of the fivefold gospel is similar to that of the fourfold gospel of the Holiness church. The Holiness church stresses regeneration, sanctification, divine healing and the second coming of Christ.

of spiritual blessing, physical blessing and the blessing of circumstances.<sup>29</sup> Cho emphasizes that only with the help of the Spirit can such a message effectively reach people<sup>30</sup> and change them to trust in Jesus completely.<sup>31</sup> Hence, Cho's Holy Spirit movement is based on the word of God and is a movement to proclaim Jesus. Since the Spirit testifies about Jesus (John 15:26), it is a "Jesus-witnessing movement," because Christians testify about Jesus when they are filled with the Spirit.

### 3.2 Prayer

Cho is a man of prayer, saying that he learned in the early days of his ministry, that he himself should pray before telling people to pray.<sup>32</sup> Cho has stressed that Christians must learn how to pray, discipline themselves to pray, and devote themselves to prayer, for prayer is a hard and long process.<sup>33</sup>

The 120 disciples of Jesus devoted themselves to prayer before the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). They then received the baptism of the Spirit and became bold witnesses to the gospel. Therefore, any prayer movement is directly connected to the Holy Spirit. Many churches and Christians of other countries have learned the prayer patterns of YFGC and effective methods for running and managing houses of prayer. When they apply them correctly, they experience the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit movement of YFGC has thus expanded swiftly.

### 3.3 Spirit-baptism and Tongue-speaking

According to traditional Pentecostal faith, baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience distinct from conversion.<sup>34</sup> The disciples of Jesus

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<sup>29</sup> See Yonggi Cho, *Ojoongbokeumg-wa Sambakjachookbok* [The Fivefold Gospel and Threefold Blessing] (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1983) and ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, pp. 13–141.

<sup>30</sup> Yonggi Cho, *Nanun Iruke Sulgyohanda* [I Preach This Way] (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1989), p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> Cho, *I Preach This Way*, p. 174.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Yonggi Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival* (Waco: Word, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>33</sup> ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>34</sup> Yonggi Cho, *Sungryungron* [Pneumatology] (Seoul: Youngsan, 1980), p. 141.

confessed “Jesus is Lord” by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3) and Jesus confirmed that they were all clean—that they were already saved except Judas Iscariot, since Jesus had called them (John 13:10). Nonetheless, Jesus said that they should be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). Since Cho emphasized this type of baptism as the second blessing after conversion, churches and denominations with different doctrines have long attacked him.<sup>35</sup> John Wesley’s second blessing, which is described as sanctification or as the wholeness of Christ, points to Spirit-baptism.<sup>36</sup> Charles G. Finney, Dwight L. Moody, Reuben A. Torrey, and J. W. Chapman have supported this truth.<sup>37</sup> The doctrine of Spirit-baptism is an integral part of the Holy Spirit movement.

There has been a long-running debate on the signs of Spirit-baptism. Cho says that it has various signs but tongue-speaking is the most common and unique external sign. He also proposes strong testifying to Jesus Christ as an evidence of Spirit-baptism.<sup>38</sup> Cho divides tongue-speaking into two categories: “sign” and “gift.”<sup>39</sup>

YFGC encourages people to receive Spirit-baptism, edify the church, and be witnesses to Christ, armed with the power of the Spirit.

### 3.4 Divine Healing

Healing is an integral part of the development of YFGC and the expansion of the Holy Spirit movement. Cho preached the power of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts, to the despairing. This brought miracles, signs, and healings of those with various diseases, all contributing to the rapid growth of Cho’s tent church. The sick came and Cho provided them the opportunity to listen to the gospel.

We may ascribe the continuous manifestation of divine healing in the tent church to Cho’s own experience of healing from the terminal stage of tuberculosis and his faith in the gospel of divine healing. Cho

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<sup>35</sup> See ITI, *Sungryungi Nuheiegye Imhasimyun* (When the Holy Spirit Comes upon You) (Seoul: ITI, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> John Thomas Nichol, *Pentecostalism* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1966), pp. 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 101.

<sup>38</sup> Cho, *The Five-fold Gospel and Three-fold Blessing*, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Yonggi Cho, *Soonbokeumeui Jinri* [The Full Gospel Truth], vol. 1 (Seoul: Seoul Books, 1979), pp. 246-47.

claims that divine healing is the will of God, the prime ministry of Jesus, and the task and command that he gave to us, for God himself has said: "I am the Lord, who heals you (Exodus 15:26)."<sup>40</sup> Jesus, moreover, devoted two-thirds of his ministry to healing.

Some advocates of divine healing misused the healing ministry but Cho presented salvation as whole and entire: salvation through the healing of the spirit, the body, and the person's circumstances. He retained a balanced theology in his healing teachings. Problems that arise among advocates of healing are due to a lack of correct understanding of the gospel.

### 3.5 The Cell System

One of the primary grounds of the explosive growth of the Pentecostal movement lies in the house church movement. This movement has its root in the Christian community of the early church. Meeting in houses was one of the foundations of the growth of the early church (Acts 2:42-47). Christians in the first century, through their small-group house meetings, had fellowship, Bible study and communion service. They may also have shared an *agape* meal, although the evidence on this is not clear.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, developed the house church movement.<sup>41</sup> Before John Wesley, the sacraments were at the center of the faith of the church but he wanted to practice the faith patterns of the early church of the New Testament. Wesley emphasized discipleship, small group meetings (classes), and circuit quarterly meetings. It is worth taking note of the circuit quarterly meetings. They were begun in 1748 to promote the unity and fellowship of Methodists. Wesley or another leading preacher was the chairman/leader of the meetings, which were attended by the class teachers and stewards of societies. Leaders discussed the financial support and spiritual activities of the preachers, while the stewards managed financial matters. Wesley

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<sup>40</sup> Yonggi Cho, *Shinyouron* [Divine Healing] (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 2001), pp. 22-23.

<sup>41</sup> For the research on the house church movement, see: Arthur L. Foster, ed., *The House Church Evolving* (Chicago: Exploration, 1976); Tony Highton and Gilbert Kirby, *The Challenge of the House Churches* (Oxford: Latimer, 1988); Joyce V. Thurman, *New Wineskins: A Study of House Church Movement* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1982); C. Kirk Hadaway, et al., *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987).

wrote “circuit plans” and posted them at the head office. According to the plans, the preachers would become circuit riders and go to the churches and class meetings in their assigned district for a certain period.

Wesley efficiently utilized the system of bands, classes and societies, and believed this type of system was taken from the early church. In their band and class meetings, they disciplined edified and helped one another. The class meeting was the first step to becoming a Methodist and served to form well-disciplined and sincere members, leaving out less committed ones.

Such small group meetings made a great contribution to the development of the Methodist Church. The circuit rider system was successfully practiced in the pioneering period of America. Asbury developed it and thus further added to the growth of the American Methodist Church.

Small group meetings also had a significant influence on the holiness revival. In the nineteenth century, they were established weekly and considered important for the promotion of holiness. Phoebe Palmer began regular meetings on Tuesdays. Hence it became “Tuesday meeting.”

Also influenced were the revival meetings of Charles G. Finney, D. L. Moody, as well as the twentieth century Pentecostal movement.

Cho reorganized the structure of the small community of the early church into a cell system and made it a “permanent revival center,”<sup>42</sup> so members may experience fellowship, renewal, revival of faith, and engage in evangelical work. In the early stages of the cell system, there were some difficulties because of the lack of places for gathering, the position of women in society (since the majority of the cell leaders were women), and the fact that lay leaders did not have confidence in the cell system. As the problems are being resolved, the cell system is considered an internationally registered mark of YFGC.

People learn the word of God, pray together, and practice a fruitful Christian life through cells. The nature of the cell unit system is described as following.<sup>43</sup>

Five to seven families in the same neighborhood form a cell group, where the strongest spiritual members are the leader and the assistant

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<sup>42</sup> Yonggi Cho, *Kyohoesungjang, Jinjungwonhasipnika* [A Secret of Church Growth] (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1995), pp. 221-42.

<sup>43</sup> Young-hoon Lee, “The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its History and Structure” (A report for 95 Alliance World Fellowship [AWF] and World Congress of the Sungkyul [Holiness] Church, Seoul, Sep. 25–Oct. 1, 1995), pp. 3-4, 12-17.

leader. Metropolitan Seoul is divided into 13 large districts, 20 regional chapels and 150 prayer houses. In each district or chapel, a pastor is assigned as the senior district pastor. Each large district is divided into several sub-districts with sub-district pastors. Currently there are 309 sub-districts. Each sub-district has several sections with sectional leaders. (There are 4,374 section leaders.) In addition, each section has several cell groups and leaders. (There are 11,214 cell groups.)

About five cell groups form a section, 10 to 15 sections form a sub-district and 12 to 23 sub-districts form a large district. Currently YFGC has 634 full-time pastors, who are in charge of districts and other parts of church education and administration.

With their cell group leaders, members pray together and receive spiritual experiences. When a cell group grows to ten families, it is divided into two units, five families for each. The assistant leader of the original cell unit becomes the leader of the new one, and each leader appoints their own assistant leader. This procedure is repeated as the size of the cell grows. The focal point of each cell is its members and his or her needs. In reality it includes not only those already registered in the church, but also those who stand on the fringe of decision.

YFGC consisted of 11,214 home cell units as of December 2003, each of which has its own leader and assistant leader. YFGC has 700,000 members. Home cell group meetings are held once a week at each member's home by turns. They study the Bible in seven steps by themes and each step is a year-long course.<sup>44</sup> This study as a whole is repeated every seven years. At cell meetings, they also pray together for new members, Spirit-baptism, for healing, concerning their personal problems, etc.

This system is the driving force of the unity and fellowship of the church and its growth, following the example of the early church.

#### 4. The Contribution of the Holy Spirit Movement of the Yoido Full Gospel Church

Leading Korean theologians and religionists published a research report on YFGC in 1982. In the foreword of the report, Won-yong Kang pointed out, "The Holy Spirit movement of YFGC attracts the interest of

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<sup>44</sup> David Yonggi Cho, *Home Cell Group Study Guide*, vols. 1-2 (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1990); Yonggi Cho, *Guyoksunggongbu* [Home Cell Group Study Guide], vols. 1-7 (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1980-1986).

the churches around the world, as well as the Korean churches, both positively and negatively.”<sup>45</sup>

I will discuss some negative and positive effects of the Holy Spirit movement of YFGC and Yonggi Cho and their influence on the Korean church.

#### 4.1 Promotion of the Recognition of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit

Although the Korean church recognized the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, it was almost ignorant of and uninterested in the ministry of and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Cho’s Holy Spirit movement taught Christians how to minister and work with the Holy Spirit. Consequently, many of the Korean churches recognize the Holy Spirit as a distinct person of the godhead and experience the Spirit’s dynamic work. Cho frequently says, “Holy Spirit, we acknowledge, welcome, and trust you.”<sup>46</sup>

#### 4.2 Increased Understanding of the Holy Spirit Movement

YFGC had to go through many difficulties due to the lack of understanding of the Korean church of the work of the Holy Spirit. One Presbyterian denomination, in its annual general assembly of 1983, said that Cho had heretical tendencies in his theology and ruled that its members should not have fellowship with Cho. Theological debates on this issue continued for about a decade, which caused increased, widespread knowledge of Pentecostal theology and the faith of YFGC. The publications of the International Theological Institute (ITI) and international seminars on the Holy Spirit, also organized by ITI, have changed the prejudices of the Korean church about the Holy Spirit movement of YFGC and Cho. This has provided the ground for other denominations to understand and accept Pentecostal theology.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Won-yong Kang, ed., *Hankuk Kyohoe Sungryungwoondongeu Hyunsanggwaja Gujo* [A Study on the Pentecostal Movement in Korea] (Seoul: Korea Christian Academy, 1981), pp. 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> See Benny Hinn, *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990) and *Welcome, Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995). Hinn adopts Cho’s conception of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>47</sup> See ITI, *The Yoido Full Gospel Church: Its Faith and Theology*, pp. 142–205.

### 4.3 Church Growth

Church growth means spiritual revival rather than just an increase in numbers,<sup>48</sup> and is crucial. It gives glory to Jesus Christ, the head of the church.<sup>49</sup> YFGC is a model church with a rapid growth rate. Cho has introduced the key factors of church growth in and out of Korea and has challenged churches by publishing books and lecturing at meetings and seminars.

### 4.4 Renewed Thoughts

Cho's sermons are positive and active. Robert Schuller has said that positive thought is just another expression of the faith that Jesus spoke of.<sup>50</sup> Cho presents a positive, active faith to his people and encourages them to practice it daily. This reformed thought has brought changes in many lives.<sup>51</sup> Christians with renewed minds have contributed to the development of society as the country was going through swift changes in its political and economic aspects.

### 4.5 Indigenization

Indigenization is a process whereby Christianity adapts itself to the culture of a people for greater acceptance. Each country or nation has its own cultural background and traditions.<sup>52</sup> Indigenization combines the harmonious growth of native culture, in the light of the gospel and

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<sup>48</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *How Churches Grow* (New York: Friendship Press, 1959), p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> R. B. Kuyper, *Jundoshinhak* [Evangelical Theology], trans. Su-joon Park (Seoul: Hope, 1980), p. 113.

<sup>50</sup> Robert H. Schuller, *Your Church Has a Fantastic Future* (Ventura: Regal, 1986), p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> Sung-hoon Myung, *Gyohoesungjan-ggwa Sulgyo* [Church Growth and Sermons] (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1992), pp. 70-71.

<sup>52</sup> "Tochakhwa" [Indigenization], in *Kidokgyo Baekwasajun* [One-Volume Christian Encyclopedia] ed. Young-je Han (Seoul, Christian Literature, 1992), p. 1446.



Christian principles, into a new Christian unity.<sup>53</sup> Cho, with his belief in a good and sovereign God, presented fresh hope to despairing people. He proclaimed God as the One who solves *han* in the present and declared a future life.<sup>54</sup> Balanced spiritual experiences, the prayer movement, cell structure, and lay activities have made it possible for the Holy Spirit movement of YFGC to take deep root into Korean culture.<sup>55</sup>

## 5. Summary

The Pentecostal movement as led by Cho, (often called the Full Gospel movement), may be positively evaluated in connection with the indigenization of the Holy Spirit movement in Korea. His message of hope has brought hope and joy to the poor and oppressed. Speaking in tongues has contributed greatly to release the *han* in them. By appointing women leaders in the cell-unit system, Cho has acknowledged their capability and thus raised the position of women in society. He has brought spiritual renewal while most churches have been institutionalized.

This Holy Spirit movement may be viewed as a synthesis of the various Holy Spirit movements of Korean church history. Cho's emphasis on prayer and the second coming of Jesus Christ follows the tradition of Sun-joo Gil's Holy Spirit movement; his emphasis on mystical experience through the cross is in line with Yong-do Lee's Holy Spirit movement; and emphasis on healing was also noted in Ick-doo Kim's Holy Spirit movement. Cho's Holy Spirit movement has made the most of the shamanistic background of Koreans to bring rapid church growth. He avoids syncretistic shamanism by adhering to the principles of the Bible.

The Yoido Full Gospel Church and Cho have grown steadily in their thirty-eight year history. During this time, YFGC has been well organized. Harvey Cox points out that order, authority, and responsibility should be emphasized to continue growth in an organization. However,

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<sup>53</sup> Pong-bae Park, "Hankukkyohoeui Tochakhwa" [The Indigenization of Christianity in Korea], *Shinhaksasang* [Christian Thoughts] (Jan. 1971), pp. 72-81 (81).

<sup>54</sup> ITI, *Osoonjulwoondong-eui Hankukgyohoeeye Michin Younghang* [The Influence of the Pentecostal Movement on the Korean Church] (Seoul: ITI, 1993), p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> ITI, *The Influence of the Pentecostal Movement*, p. 52.

this brings with it the danger of lessening spirituality, Cox warns.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore he suggests that the Korean church may lose its power of ethical critique against Korean society if it takes too much interest in organization.<sup>57</sup> This presents a critical task for Pentecostals: how to balance the work of the Holy Spirit and the operation of organizations.

It is possible to maintain balance only when quantitative growth is accompanied by qualitative judgment. This means that YFGC must broaden its interests to include wider social concern and social reformation. Previous Holy Spirit movements have been more concerned with personal salvation and church growth, and YFGC is to make a critical choice for its future.

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<sup>56</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994), pp. 236–37.

<sup>57</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 237.