

Sang Yun Lee, *A Theology of Hope: Contextual Perspective in Korean Pentecostalism*. Baguio City: APTS Press, 2018. 305 p. ISBN: 978-9718-942-40-6.

Hope is something that is of immediate concern to everyone, everywhere, regardless of how rich, happy and satisfactory a life they may live. This is because it is never a generic one-virtue-fits-all but must be constantly reinterpreted and regenerated within its own new contexts. That is to say, when a context changes, it necessitates new hope according to new demands. With regard to the changing hope, this book embarks on a cardinal task of scrutinizing what has developed the theology of hope in the unique context of Korea and what kind of new theology of hope we need for today and tomorrow. This question has provided the stimuli for this historical and theological study of hope. That is why Lee seeks to explore, in Korean church history, the theological backbone of Korean Pentecostalism that has invigorated the spirit of hope especially for those who suffered from desperate circumstances after the Korean War. Paying particular attention to the so-called “Threefold Blessing” (salvation, financial prosperity, and healing) of David Yonggi Cho, he argues that the Threefold Blessing has functioned as a contextual hope to Koreans as it, in the preface, is viewed as “the most urgent and eager hope.” Although Lee appears to apply general academic disciplines of historical and theological approaches, his core argument takes shape in the first five parts by engaging the reader in various perspectives such as socio-politico-economic, cultural-religious, and eco-theological perspectives while, in the last part, he attempts to discuss how the Threefold Blessing needs to be renewed/recontextualized for the new context of the present and the future in which the concept of suffering has significantly changed with the burgeoning growth of socio-economic status in Korea.

Before undertaking the main task of this study, Lee, in Part 1 (pp. 1-12), provides a brief introduction of historical background and of previous researches on Korean Pentecostalism: he believes that Confucianism—in terms of neo-Confucian called *Silhak*—has played a pivotal role in introducing “Christianity to the country in the eighteenth century before the arrival of Western missionaries” (3). The Japanese colony by force (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953) are regarded as main causes of various sufferings such as political persecution, severe poverty and disease from which the Threefold Blessing has been emerging as a new hope for the brokenhearted. Lee’s literature review results in proposing a new approach that adopts interdisciplinary skills between historical and theological studies in relation to its cultural-religious, socio-economic-politico, soteriological,

pneumatological, eco-theological and socio-theological perspectives since most scholarly works on the Korean Pentecostalism with regard to the Threefold Blessing tend to be centralized on the church growth and “the influences of shamanistic belief on the prosperity theology” (11).

Part Two devotes its seven subordinate chapters (chapters 3-9, pp.13) to the discussion on how Korean Pentecostalism could be successfully contextualized under Japanese colonization beginning from the arrival of Christianity finishing with the establishment of Korean Pentecostalism. Buddhism and Confucianism are presented as “ruling dispensations for about a thousand years” (15). A special attention is given to the tension between the *Choseon* Dynasty and the Confucian scholars of *Silhak* since *Sihak* endeavored in civilization and evinced interests in western culture including science and Christianity. Lee appears to carefully demonstrate that Korean Christianity including Pentecostalism developed its own indigenous aspects since their history began before the arrival of western missionaries. After acknowledging the two Korean revivals— in Wonsan (1903) and Pyongyang (1907)— as the inauguration of the early indigenous Korean Pentecostal movements, Lee turns to the specific historical background of the post-Korean War where the Threefold Blessing needs to be “the primary focus of Cho’s message” and “the central theological tenet of Korean Pentecostalism” in the hopeless context (22). Protestant missions in Korea that began with the arrival of H.N. Allen in 1884 and the process of translating the Bible into Korean called *Hangeul* are also presented. The Korean evangelists Seon Ju Gil, Ig Doo Kim and Yong Do Yi are considered as the most prominent early Pentecostals who “contributed individually to the development of the Pentecostal movement under Japanese rule” (pp. 53-58). Some crucial key figures to understanding the establishment of the Korean Pentecostalism are introduced like the first Pentecostal missionary Mary C. Rumsey who arrived at Korea as an independent missionary in March, 1928, and some other missionaries— Gladys Parson (in 1930), E. H. Meredith and L. Vessey (in 1933) together with three indigenous Korean church leaders—Hong Huh, the first Korean superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Korea, Sung San Park, the pastor of the Seoul church in 1932, and Boo Keun Bae, one of the first ordained Pentecostal pastors on October 5, 1938.

Part Three (pp. 69-108) deftly and robustly examines some important aspects that are central to contextualization for the Korean Pentecostalism. *Hananim/Haneunim*, the Korean name of God for one supreme being, is first mentioned by Lee as he believes that the name was originated from “Shamanism’s name for the sky god” (71), and the concept of *Haneunim* in Korean shamanism has influenced the way Korean Christians understand God. The fact that “the ancient Koreans

believed that *Haneunim* controlled nature, including the blessings and calamities of human life”—but as a fearful Deity (72)—allows Lee to argue that this name became a theological foundation of “the God of Korean Pentecostal” (75) as it was reconceptualized as *Joeushin Hananim* (the good God) by Cho in the post-Korean War context. Lee also tries to understand the people of God in suffering with special reference to *Minjung* “(the mass of people)” and *Han* “(the perceived suffering of the people)” (79), and concludes that the message of the Threefold Blessings in 3 John 2 was “effectively contextualized into Korean society because it provided the only real hope” for the suffering people (83) and that “*Han* can be released through inner healing by the Spirit” (91). Lastly, the author does not nullify the idea that there is a strong connection between Shamanism and the Korean Pentecostalism while admitting its influence upon the Korean Pentecostals in two aspects: It helped Korean Pentecostals 1) “to understand the sovereignty of God as a supreme being and the spiritual world of his subordinate spirits, devil, and angels” and 2) to “indigenize the theology of the Threefold Blessing for Christians” in terms of material blessings “as the praxis of their religiosity formulated through generations” (99).

Part Four (pp. 109-154) attempts to make some theological sense out of the mass of evidence presented with regard to the theological and historical influences on the origin and development of the Threefold Blessing in chapters 14 to 16. Chapter 14 explains that the Threefold Blessings was formulated from Cho’s personal experiences of “extreme poverty and suffering from disease” (113). However, it is also delineated that there are some external sources that made impact on the process of Cho’s theological development such as Classical Pentecostals, Oral Roberts, the Word of Faith Movement of Kenneth Hagin and Kathryn Kuhlman. In chapter 1, Lee reflects on some biblical surveys of 3 John 2 that became “the foundation text for the Threefold Blessing theology” (123) while dealing with the theological concepts of “reconciliation” (128) and “holistic salvation” (131). Chapter 16 shows that God’s promise was considered as the basis for hope in hopeless situations. Chapter 17 then discusses the uniqueness of Cho’s theological perspective in comparison to Moltmann’s theology of hope: On some occasions Cho and Moltmann are believed to have much in common—they experienced personal hardships that influenced their theologies especially the desperate contexts after the Korean War and the World War 2 (142). On other occasions theological differences are also observed: “Moltmann’s hope is based on the resurrection of Christ and the promise of the Second Advent” (145) whereas the hope of the Threefold Blessing centers on the Christ’s suffering and salvation (146). Lee in chapter 18 continues to support the theology of hope in relation to the Kingdom of

God that was understood by Cho not only as an eschatological hope in the future but also as an immanent one in terms of “here and now” (149).

In Part Five (pp. 155-186), Lee addresses important matters of the Threefold Blessing regarding Spirit baptism/infilling, prosperity, healing, and Kerygma. According to Lee’s observation on Cho’s pneumatology, “the Holy Spirit is involved not only in the process of salvation” but also “in everyday life” (158). Therefore, it seems that the spiritual salvation subsumed under spiritual blessing in the Threefold Blessing needs to be repeatedly experienced by being filled with the Spirit in terms of having an intimate fellowship with the Spirit on a daily basis. Moreover, Lee views divine healing and financial prosperity as important as salvation in the Threefold Blessing, that none of those three is to be devalued or relegated especially in the unique context of Korea. It is also understood that Kerygma has to contain “good news” not only for the future but also for the present for the people suffering today (183).

Lee seeks to draw the reader’s attention to one of his main arguments in Part Six (pp. 187-220) that “Pentecostalism needs a new hope for new Korean contexts” (221) pointing out that as current Korean context has changed, the Threefold Blessing also needs to be recontextualized according to new demands: Pentecostals have 1) to share their material prosperity for the society as “communal prosperity” (221), 2) to emphasize ethical issues, and 3) to heal the sick individuals, the society, and the ecosystem. In this regard, Lee discusses new church roles “in social responsibility” for the marginalized (190), “in hope for the reunification of Korea” (192), and “in social transformation” (195). Moreover, it is also argued that Cho’s Threefold Blessing theology is to be renewed by broadening its scope from individual blessings to “the salvation of society as well as the ecosystem” (200).

Overall, this work deals with a Pentecostal theology of hope with special reference to Cho’s Threefold Blessing that has been overlooked by scholars and so is a valid contribution to this area of Pentecostal studies. As far as I know this is the first volume fully dedicated to exploring the Pentecostal theology of hope in Korea. This is the main contribution of this work as it attempts to show that hope is one of the most important aspects that underlie theological foundation of Korean Pentecostalism since most studies on Korean Pentecostalism tend to focus on anthropological and missiological elements such as shamanism and church growth.

Although the present work is fresh and intellectually captivating, it could be more effective if Lee chose to apply historical theology to trace the theological development of the Pentecostal theology of hope instead of that of the Threefold Blessing. This is because the Threefold Blessing as a theology of hope limits its scope and validity to the post-Korean war

era since it is a conventional term of Cho. Due to the fact that the concept of the Threefold Blessing specialized with a new addition of financial prosperity, which is not of early Pentecostals especially before the Korean War, it cannot be the theological framework for the Korean Pentecostalism as a whole. This is where confusion can arise as if Lee proposes the Threefold Blessing as a new theological distinctiveness of the Pentecostalism in Korea when he actually limits its scope only to the post Korean War period. Additionally, although his study has presented a solid argument for understanding Korean Pentecostal theology of hope, the work would have been strengthened by exploring some other contemporary Pentecostals figures together with Cho. Admitting Cho's great influence upon modern Korean Pentecostalism, I also need to ask a nagging question of "How much is Cho's perspective representative of the Korean Pentecostalism?" Sometimes I wonder if Cho's theology is of Korean Pentecostals or of the Yoido Full Gospel Church.

It is also academically fascinating to see a direct theological dialogue between two Christian giant men who can be reminiscent of hope—Cho and Moltmann—although it might be worth taking this study a little more thoroughly in depth. In considering my own response to this matter, I find within myself a deep love and admiration for the comparison by which Lee could bring his contribution for further development of Korean Pentecostal theology. I concur with Lee's recommendation for continued future growth of Korean Pentecostalism that one needs to give special attention to Moltmann's christology and pneumatology in broadening the scope of the Threefold Blessing from individuals to society and the ecosystem (221). Moreover, Lee rightly points out that Christian ethics is what Korean Pentecostals need to reconsider to prevent "Christian materialism" (204). However, I want to begin by saying that it does not seem to me that these recommendations for the future of Korean Pentecostalism can reasonably be accepted merely as a solution to the problems of Korean Pentecostalism today. This may have some truth to it, but it is also evident that many ethical problems, in a sense, have little to do with knowing what is right or wrong. Perhaps the theological issues of sanctification, self-deception, and suffering should be dealt with more seriously. It seems inevitable that many Korean Pentecostals, including Cho himself, lack in those areas since Cho's theological foundation, called the Fivefold Gospel, replaced the Sanctifier to the Blessor. It is a sensational issue that Cho was convicted of embezzling about twelve million dollars. I personally found it very frustrating that he—in his preaching without admitting his fault—considered the moment of shame and dishonor as the time for God to make Cho himself grow out of pain and suffering. Undergirding Lee's proposal for the future of Korean Pentecostalism, I also see the necessity

of reinterpreting/developing/emphasizing the theological tenet of sanctification from a Pentecostal perspective. I personally find Lee's opinion unquestionably sound and vitally important: "Moltmann's political theology is deeply engaged in the fulfillment of basic human needs and the protection of human dignity and rights. The new Threefold Blessing has to deal theologically with those same social and political matters" (216). My only concern is political matters since the political status of South Korea has evolved to a certain level of a mature democratic country where the issue of human dignity and rights can hardly be objectively measured. In this regard, *the Korean church* is discouraged to make any political speech, although *Christians* are strongly encouraged to participate in political matters in the sense that the variety of political opinions contribute to maintaining the right spirit of democracy, but not in the sense that we Christians need to make one voice toward any political stance or party.

In addition, the detailed and nuanced debate about if "the Korean revivals were Pentecostal movement" in recent years deserves more attention "because no one reported speaking in tongues at the beginning of the revivals" (33). In this regard, Lee seeks to draw out attention to the fact that there is a strong evidence of a tongue manifestation during the Pyongyang revival movement in 1907 (34). Moreover, I believe the considerations of the three indigenous leaders such as Seon Ju Gil, Ig Doo Kim and Yong Do Lee, add up to a fairly strong case for regarding them as early Korean Pentecostals. However, in spite of its well-structured and written study on the three Pentecostals, there are some points worth pondering: 1) It is argued that "During the Korean revival movement, Korean Pentecostal leaders such as Seon Ju Gil, Ig Doo Kim, and Yong Do Lee commonly performed healings and miracles" (33). I am not convinced, however, that one can say Gil ever performed healing whereas the other two are obviously well known as healing practitioners. In fact, it is hard to find any archaic data that shows Gil's involvement in healing, although he can be considered to be the first Pentecostal preacher. 2) It is Lee's assertion that for early Korean Pentecostals "God is not the Supreme One who not only reigns over the eternal life after death but the One who reigns over the earthly life and cares for us on the earth" (77-78). Some confusion is introduced, however, when this concept of the supreme God—who is immanent—is one of the theological backbones of Ig Doo Kim as Lee himself asserts that "he [Kim] convinced Koreans that God could intervene not only in the spiritual dimension but also in the material problems of everyday life" (56). Lastly, it may seem to be a hasty conclusion that "His [Ig Doo Kim] healing ministry caused a sensation: Koreans had never previously experienced divine healing" (55). I agree with Lee for Kim's sensational

healing ministry because Kim is considered as the most powerful and the first healing practitioner in the sense that he provided a prototype of healing crusade while the following statement is dubious due to some reports on healing occasions that took place before Kim's time.

There seem to be some minor points worth pondering: 1) One of the reasons why this work is meaningful is that Lee attempts to pay a great deal of attention to some factors that have not been studied much especially with regard to Korean Pentecostalism. While Lee's work contributes to enriching Pentecostal studies, it would be greatly appreciated if he could endeavor to narrow down the influence of Confucianism to the Korean Pentecostal circle rather than that of Korean Christianity in general. 2) I believe it is Synan's argument cited by Lee that Cho was influenced by Kathryn Kuhlman in terms of words of knowledge (122). Although intriguing, this idea seems difficult to be supported since Synan himself does not provide any concrete evidence except the similarity between Kuhlman and Cho regarding the way that they pray. 3) Moreover, chapter 2, which catches a glimpse of some previous researches on Korean Pentecostalism, retards the progress of deploying historical development from chapter 1 en route to Part 2, which provides historical survey on Korean Pentecostalism. It would be better if chapter 1 be relocated just before or under Part 2 without having any interruption of chapter 2.

All things considered, the achievement of Lee's work is tremendous in terms of helping the reader to understand how Korean Pentecostalism has been developed in the unique context of Korea from the arrival of Christianity and how today's Korean Pentecostals need to recontextualize the theology of hope as the socio-economic demands evolves. On one hand, Lee's handling of the Threefold Blessing of Cho is particularly clear and well-argued since the author is capable of examining Cho's theology from the insider perspective of the YFGC. On the other hand, being a pastoral staff of the church, Lee seems to have a limitation to be critical enough to evaluate Cho's theology and ministries from a distance. Despite the need of this critical evaluation on Lee's work, this volume provides a solid survey of a new Korean Pentecostal perspective through the lens of the theology of hope. I agree on the important point that Korean Pentecostals need to practice the Threefold Blessing in its new scope: salvation and healing should focus on individual, society, and even ecosystem while financial prosperity also needs to be a communal blessing to be shared with the poor and marginalized. Regardless of one's agreement or disagreement with the author, this is an accomplished and persuasive achievement for those who are interested in Pentecostal studies in Korea or in East Asia. This book

can also be a useful material for missiological studies with regard to contextualization.

Reviewed by Jun Kim