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THE CONTEXTUAL PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY OF
DAVID YONGGI CHO¹

Allan Anderson

Introduction

The work of Dr. David (Paul) Yonggi Cho and the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) is known all over the world. Why this single congregation has been more effective in reaching Korean people than most others (if not all others) have been is due to several factors, of which the work of the Holy Spirit in this church is surely the most significant. In this article, I analyze how the context of Korea has affected the appeal of the message of Yonggi Cho, depending mostly on the eighteen books written by Cho (in English) in my possession, two visits to Korea, and working with Korean graduate students over eight years. Although Cho's books are devotional and inspirational rather than theological, I concentrate on those writings that deal with Cho's own context of Korea and attempt to draw out how his implicit theology may be regarded as "contextual." He writes mainly about his understanding of the Bible and his own experiences as a pastor, but sometimes refers to the context in which these experiences and understanding were developed. His books abound with biblical illustrations and teaching, but he develops his theology in a particular context. It is important that Pentecostals in different parts of the world realize the important role of the "freedom in the Spirit" to formulate, often unconsciously, a theology that has meaning for people in different life situations, and Cho's theology is a leading example of this. This contextual pneumatology is one of the most important features of Pentecostalism and is often overlooked.

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Youngsan International Theological Symposium, Hansei University, Goonpo, Korea in September 2002 and published as "The Contribution of David Yonggi Cho to a Contextual Theology in Korea," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12:1 (October 2003), pp. 87-107.

In my research and work among Pentecostals in southern Africa I have found that theology is more than written, academic theology; it is also to be found in the preaching, rituals and practices of churches that have contextualized Christianity in such a way as to make it really meaningful to ordinary people. This “enacted theology” or “theology in practice” is found in Pentecostalism all over the world,² and Cho’s theology will be evaluated from this perspective. One of the main reasons for the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism has been its remarkable ability to adapt itself to different cultural and social contexts and give authentically contextualized expressions to Christianity. Pentecostalism is inherently adaptable to contextualization: the vibrancy, enthusiasm, spontaneity and spirituality for which Pentecostals are so well known and their willingness to address problems of sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, evil spirits and sorcery has directly contributed to this growth. We see these features in the ministry of David Yonggi Cho.

1. The Importance of Contextualization

Missiologists have promoted “indigenization” for a long time, and Pentecostal scholars like Melvin Hodges have written profoundly about an “indigenous church.”³ These terms have become somewhat anachronistic because they assume that the gospel message and Christian theology is the same in all cultures and contexts, and they tend to relate this “constant” Christian message to so-called “traditional” cultures. The idea of a self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating church has been an important feature of many Pentecostal missions. “Contextualization,” on the other hand, assumes that every theology is shaped by its particular context, and must be so to be relevant and meaningful. It relates the Christian message to all social contexts and cultures, especially including those undergoing rapid change. The ideas of “contextual theologies” were first formulated in the World Council of

² Allan Anderson, *Zion and Pentecost: The Spirituality and Experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic Churches in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2000), p. 2; Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the Twentieth Century* (Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2001), p. 217.

³ Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953)

Churches in 1972.⁴ In the West, particularly in North America where the evangelical/ ecumenical divide was most acute, these ideas were more difficult for evangelicals to accept, although many of them had used different words to describe the same ideas, some speaking of a “deeper indigenization” or words to that effect. The rise of particular contextual theologies like “liberation theology” in Latin America, “Black theology” among African Americans and South Africans, and “Minjung theology” in Korea increased evangelical concerns that this new trend in theology would lead to “syncretism” and a placing of the social context above God’s revelation in the Bible. But gradually, evangelical scholars like Charles Kraft and David Hesselgrave began to give prominence to the importance of culture.⁵ Kraft spoke of “the constant message in alternative forms,” and of “dynamic-equivalence theologizing,” and that “all theologizing is culture-bound interpretation and communication of God’s revelation.”⁶

All theologies are contextual theologies, but we should not confuse the essential and universal aspects of the Christian message from the local, contextual ones.⁷ Lesslie Newbigin writes that “every communication of the gospel is already culturally conditioned,” but reminds us that the gospel “is not an empty form into which everyone is free to pour his or her own content,” but that the content of the gospel is “Jesus Christ in the fullness of his ministry, death, and resurrection.”⁸ Evangelicals now more readily accept the importance of contextualization. Gilliland defines the goal of “contextualization” as “to enable, insofar as it is humanly possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation.”⁹ He says that the Christian message must be

⁴ “Mission as Contextualization,” in *Readings in World Mission*, ed. Norman Thomas (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 169-184 (175).

⁵ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979); David Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

⁶ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, pp. 257, 291.

⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), p. 423.

⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 142, 152-53.

⁹ Dean Gilliland, “Contextualization,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, eds. A. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), p. 225.

proclaimed in the framework of the worldview of the particular people to whom it is addressed, it must emphasize those parts of the message that answer their particular questions and needs, and it must be expressed through the medium of their own cultural gifts. In assessing Cho's theology, these considerations are very important, as we cannot try to understand his ministry from a western perspective. Culture and worldview, of necessity, include religious beliefs; and in a discussion of a "contextual" theology we cannot avoid questions of religious pluralism, especially in a country like Korea. Cho's theology must be assessed from the perspective of the post Korean War context in which it was shaped.

Christianity in general and Pentecostalism in particular had taken on a distinctive form in Korea, quite different from that found in the West. Observers who have tried to emphasize the "North American" nature of Pentecostalism throughout the world or the "Americanization" of Christianity in Korea and elsewhere often miss this important fact. Creative innovations and the selective transformation of foreign symbols are constantly occurring and naturally, a synthesizing process takes place as a new form of Christianity like Pentecostalism interacts with older Korean religions like shamanism and Buddhism. For example, the prayer mountain movement in Korea is well known, and YFGC has its own prayer mountain near the border of North Korea. There are now hundreds of Christian prayer mountains all over South Korea. Mountains and hills as places of spiritual retreat and pilgrimage have been a characteristic of Korean religions for centuries. Beliefs in the mountain as the place to which God descends,¹⁰ are not only part of Korean tradition but are also ideas fully at home in the Old Testament. Buddhist temples are usually built on mountainsides and Korean cemeteries are found on hills outside residential areas. Traditionally, the many mountains of Korea were believed to be places where good spirits lived, and both shamans and ordinary pilgrims would receive power from the particular spirit on each mountain. At the risk of oversimplification, the prayer mountain movement may be said to be a culturally relevant form of Christian practice that reflects the ancient spirituality of Korean people. Similarly, Korean people suffering from their accumulated grief or han seek healing and "blessings" from traditional shamans to alleviate their deep pain, such as in the years following the Korean War or more recently, during the IMF crisis. The fact that a prominent part of Cho's message is to

¹⁰ Sunghoon Myung, "Spiritual Dimension of Church Growth as Applied in Yoido Full Gospel Church" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), p. 156.

proclaim that God brings “blessings” and healings is a contextual message for Korean people that is readily accepted. These are two examples of how Korean Christianity is contextualized by taking the good practices of ancient religions and transforming them with new Christian meanings.

2. Cho’s Detractors

Yonggi Cho has been seriously criticized by various writers, especially those for whom the idea of contextualization is rejected or unknown. Some of the earliest criticisms were indirect and from within the US Assemblies of God, where Gordon Fee criticized the “alien gospel” of the “cult of prosperity” in the official magazine *The Pentecostal Evangel*. In 1980, the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God officially condemned the “positive confession” teaching increasing in the USA at this time through the work of Kenneth Hagin and others.¹¹ None of these documents mentioned Cho, but its criticisms were directed at the “wealth and health” movement in the USA. On the contrary, in the years 1967-2000, *The Pentecostal Evangel* published at least twenty-eight articles by or about Yonggi Cho.¹² Later, Assemblies of God college professor Terris Neuman published an article condemning the “Word-Faith” movement and directly linking Cho to it.¹³ Criticisms also came from US evangelicals in 1985, when Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon published *The Seduction of Christianity*, where Cho is accused of such fantastic charges as being part of “sorcery” and “occultism,”¹⁴ of supporting “Eastern mysticism,”¹⁵ of reviving the

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, “The ‘Gospel’ of Prosperity: An Alien Gospel,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (June 24 1979), pp. 4-8; General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, “The Believer and Positive Confession,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (November 16, 1980), pp. 8-11, 18-20.

¹² Information gleaned from the website of the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center (<http://agheritage.org/research/periodicalsearch.cfm>), checked: July 3, 2002.

¹³ H. Terris Neuman, “Cultic Origins of Word-Faith Theology within the Charismatic Movement,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:1 (Spring 1990), pp. 32-55.

¹⁴ Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985), pp. 20, 33, 102, 143-145.

ancient art of shamanism,¹⁶ and of promoting the teaching of “mind-science cults,”¹⁷ all this based on a western misinterpretation of “visualization.”¹⁸ Hunt and McMahon suggest that Cho’s teachings came from the prosperity gospel in the USA, and back through Robert Schuller and Kenneth Hagin to the “positive thinking” of Norman Vincent Peale, Jungian psychology, Christian Science, Mormonism, and Scientology—all these declared to be evidence of a “New Age” conspiracy.¹⁹ Other evangelical scholars like Da Silva and Daniel McConnell (who called this a “different gospel”) repeated Hunt and Mahon’s criticisms in different forms.²⁰ These allegations could be simply discounted if many evangelicals (including Presbyterians in Korea) had not taken it so seriously. Some of the presuppositions behind this “New Age” conspiracy theory and especially those of McConnell have been more recently exposed and refuted.²¹ However, in keeping with most evangelicals, Cho expressly rejects Jungian psychology that leads to belief in the inherent goodness of humanity and the “humanistic theology” of Schleiermacher and other modern theologians,²² ideas prevalent in the “positive thinking” school.

A second form of critique came from more “liberal” theologians and included such famous names as Walter Hollenweger and Harvey Cox. The first critical study of Cho was conducted by Minjung theologian Kwang-sun (David) Suh and published by the Christian Academy of

¹⁵ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, p. 111.

¹⁶ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, p. 123.

¹⁷ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, p. 139.

¹⁸ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, p. 113.

¹⁹ Hunt & McMahon, *Seduction of Christianity*, pp. 24-25.

²⁰ Antonio Barbosa da Silva, “The ‘Theology of Success’ Movement: A Comment,” *Themelios* 11:3 (April 1986), pp. 91-92 (91); Daniel R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

²¹ Dale H. Simmons, *E.W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1997); Geir Lie, “E.W. Kenyon: Cult Founder or Evangelical Minister?,” *EPTA Bulletin* 16 (1996), pp. 71-86; Geir Lie, “The Theology of E.W. Kenyon: Plain Heresy or within the Boundaries of Pentecostal-Charismatic ‘Orthodoxy’?,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 85-114.

²² *The Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2 (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1983), pp. 52-53, 79.

Korea in 1981.²³ These scholars did not as much accuse Cho of false or “heretical” teaching as to suggest a positive link between Cho’s theology and Korean shamanism. In this respect, these scholars might regard Cho as “contextual.” An entire chapter of Hollenweger’s 1997 book *Pentecostalism* is entitled “Korea: the oral shamanistic culture in Pentecostal transformation.”²⁴ Hollenweger acknowledges that the chapter is “heavily based” on the writings of his former PhD student at the University of Birmingham and Korean Presbyterian missionary in Kenya, Boo-woong Yoo.²⁵ Yoo’s doctoral thesis was published in 1988 as *Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology*, and is not about Pentecostalism in its present form, but is a reflection on earlier revival movements, the “Korean Pentecost” of 1907 and the mystical “pentecostal movement” of the 1930s. The only mention of YFGC and Cho is indirect in a quotation from Suh’s critique.²⁶ It is incredible that this academic work on “Korean Pentecostalism” only once briefly mentions the YFGC, the most visible and influential representative of Pentecostalism in Korea, and it mainly devotes itself to a discussion of the relationship between the Korean revival movement in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches and Minjung theology. At the end of his work, Yoo also makes a short reference to the need for “a pentecostal exploration of Shamanism.”²⁷ At the same time that Yoo was doing his research in Birmingham, Jae-bum Lee did a very different Ph.D. study at Fuller Theological Seminary in the USA. The first academic work by a Korean Pentecostal in the English language, Lee’s thesis has set the pattern for many that followed, particularly his including the early twentieth century revival movement as “Pentecostal” and using revival leaders Sun-ju Kil, Ik-doo Kim and Yong-do Yi as paradigmatic of Korean Pentecostalism.²⁸ He draws attention to the fact that Korean

²³ Myung Soo Park, “David Yonggi Cho and International Pentecostal Movements,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12:1 (October 2003), pp. 107-128 (109).

²⁴ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 99-105.

²⁵ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 99 n.1.

²⁶ Boo-woong Yoo, *Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1988), p. 206.

²⁷ Yoo, *Korean Pentecostalism*, p. 223.

²⁸ Jae-bum Lee, “Pentecostal Type Distinctives and Korean Protestant Church Growth” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, 1986), pp. 180-86.

revivalism has always been accompanied by what he calls “Pentecostal type experiences” including Spirit baptism, healing, miracles and exorcism.²⁹

Several western writers suggest that Korean Pentecostals in general and YFGC in particular have succeeded because they have combined Christianity with shamanism. Yoo’s doctoral supervisor Walter Hollenweger was probably the first to do so. A footnote declares that the “famous Korean Pentecostal pastor Paul Yonggi Cho... could be considered a Pentecostal Shaman par excellence.”³⁰ He suggests that Korean Pentecostalism should be interpreted “with the categories of a Shamanistic culture” rather than from historical and theological categories imposed from outside.³¹ Harvey Cox also takes up this theme in his *Fire from Heaven* in a chapter on Korean Pentecostalism (with particular reference to YFGC) entitled “Shamans and Entrepreneurs: Primal Spirituality on the Asian Rim.”³² He too acknowledges the thesis of Boo-woong Yoo in his bibliographical notes at the end.³³ In what is now a well known passage, Cox says that in his opinion the YFGC “involves a massive importation of shamanistic practice into a Christian ritual.”³⁴ All of this is to support his overarching theory of Pentecostalism as “primal spirituality” that permeates his book. Cox assumes that religions succeed when they possess “two capabilities”: first, to include and absorb the “old” religions (in this case, shamanism), and second, to prepare people for living in a rapidly changing world. He declares, “Both of these key ingredients are present in Korean Pentecostalism.”³⁵

Cho does not dispute Cox’s second point, as he writes of the rapid changes in the world that are “not necessarily obstacles but opportunities.” He says, “The church cannot be a victim of change; she must be a guiding light in the midst of change.”³⁶ He sees his “cell group

²⁹ Lee, “Pentecostal Type Distinctives,” p. 169.

³⁰ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 100 n. 2.

³¹ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 104.

³² Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 213-41.

³³ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 328.

³⁴ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 226.

³⁵ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 219.

³⁶ *More than Numbers* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), p. 134.

system” with its use of women leaders as one way of accomplishing this relevance in the midst of rapid social change.³⁷ But Cox’s most controversial passage is probably the following: “One of the key reasons for Korean Pentecostalism’s extraordinary growth is its unerring ability to absorb huge chunks of indigenous Korean shamanism and demon possession into its worship,” of which the YFGC “is an especially vivid case in point.”³⁸ This idea of a link between Korean Pentecostalism and shamanism has been assumed and perpetuated in western literature to such an extent that it is now almost taken for granted.³⁹ But the so-called “link” with shamanism should be assessed in a quite different way. As Myung Soo Park has pointed out, it is more appropriate to see Cho’s reaction to shamanism and his teachings on healing and “threefold blessings” within the context of his contact with international Pentecostalism.⁴⁰ In other words, Korean Pentecostalism should be assessed not only from within the internal cultural and religious context of Korea, but also from the external influence of globalization.

3. Cho’s Contextual Theology

Cho’s theology may be presented as contextual from several perspectives. In his recent doctoral thesis in Birmingham, Chong-hee Jeong points out that Harvey Cox has overlooked two important elements in the appeal of Pentecostalism in Korea: “its emphasis on empowered contextual transformation through the Holy Spirit and the role of divine healing.”⁴¹ He writes of Korean Pentecostalism as having a “dynamic contextual theology” and of Cho’s “contextual ministry.”⁴² Similarly, Hyeon-sung Bae has written of Cho’s “Full Gospel theology” as an

³⁷ David Yonggi Cho with Harold Hostetler, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1997), p. 54.

³⁸ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 222.

³⁹ David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 161; Mark R. Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), p. 175.

⁴⁰ Park, “David Yonggi Cho,” p. 110.

⁴¹ Chong-hee Jeong, “The Formation and Development of Korean Pentecostalism from the Viewpoint of a Dynamic Contextual Theology” (Th.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2001), p. 201.

⁴² Jeong, “Formation and Development,” pp. 196, 215.

“indigenized form of Pentecostal theology in Korea.”⁴³ We must consider to what extent Cho’s Pentecostal message is a contextual theology that has adapted to and transformed its cultural and religious environment. Clearly, Cho himself has wanted to be seen as such, although he does not use the word “contextual”:

Being a Korean and having been saved out of the Buddhist religion, I have been able to appreciate the distinctive position of Christians who come from the Third World... We evangelical Korean Christians have developed our own traditions. This is very important because it makes it possible for us to be Christian without being less Korean. In the past, missionaries not only brought their religion but also their culture to the countries they evangelized. So it became apparent that the new converts lost much of their natural heritage. I believe that this produced an unnecessary hindrance to the acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Cho does not advocate uncritical use of Korean cultural principles. This is especially apparent in his “revolutionary” use of women leaders. In spite of Korean culture being “male-oriented,” Cho took these steps because “God showed me.”⁴⁵ The success of Cho’s Pentecostalism should not be attributed to a conscious syncretism, but should be seen as a response to the influence of the worldview of shamanism that permeates and underlies Korean society. Korean Pentecostalism and older Korean religions both acknowledge the world of spirits and respond to this, as Korean Pentecostal scholars have pointed out. Jae-bum Lee speaks of the “spiritual preparedness of the Korean people due to their animistic beliefs,” which he identifies particularly as an awareness of supernatural power, sins and evil spirits, and the need for blessings and healing. What he calls the “Pentecostal distinctives” found in many churches in Korea, met the needs of shamanistic people.⁴⁶ Sung-hoon Myung speaks of shamanism as “one of the folk religious groups most responsive to the Gospel in Korea.” He says that shamanists are “aware of supernatural power...[and they] use magic and worship in order to reach out to their gods...[they] are aware

⁴³ Hyeon-sung Bae, “Full Gospel Theology and a Korean Pentecostal Identity,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmong Tang (Oxford: Regnum, 2003 forthcoming).

⁴⁴ *More than Numbers*, p. 9.

⁴⁵ *More than Numbers*, p. 43; cf. Cho, *Successful Home Cell*, pp. 23-29.

⁴⁶ Lee, “Pentecostal Type Distinctives,” p. 298.

of their sins, and they have a fear of spirits.” And significantly for this discussion, they also “want blessings and healings from their gods.”⁴⁷ Shamanism provides a *praeparatio evangelica*, a fertile ground into which the Pentecostal “full gospel” is more easily planted. If Pentecostal pastors sometimes appear to be functioning as “shamans,” it is simply because they are responding to the needs arising from a shamanistic world. Korean Pentecostal leaders, however, emphatically deny any mixture of shamanism and like Pentecostals all over the world, see shamanism as something evil to be rejected.⁴⁸ Similarly, the dominant conservative Protestant Christianity with its strict moral law finds fertile ground in peoples whose cultures are heavily influenced by Confucianism—as is clearly the case with Korean and Chinese societies.⁴⁹ Cho refers to the Confucian background of Korea often in a favorable light, and usually points out that Confucianism is not a religion but an ethical system observed by Koreans.⁵⁰

The writings of Cho demonstrate firstly that his “contextual theology” is born in the particular situation of Korean suffering; and secondly, they illustrate how Cho has advocated a “Pentecostal theology” that is standard classical Pentecostal theology throughout the world, influenced by Pentecostal healing evangelists like Oral Roberts and by his years of working with North American Pentecostals.⁵¹ Cho is uncompromising and polemical with regard to the religious background of Korea: his former experience as a “devout Buddhist” could not help him solve his problems, he considered it foreign to the compassion of Christ, and he had known only what he calls “well-organized and sterile Buddhist philosophies and rituals,” which were “theoretically very profound,”⁵² but which he referred to as “heathenism”⁵³ and “doctrines of

⁴⁷ Myung, “Spiritual Dimension,” p. 235.

⁴⁸ Cf. Allan Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia: Indigenous Oriental Christianity?” *Pneuma: The Journal for the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 115-132.

⁴⁹ David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 140-141.

⁵⁰ *More than Numbers*, pp. 101, 144.

⁵¹ Park, “David Yonggi Cho,” pp. 108-120.

⁵² *The Fourth Dimension* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1979), pp. 10-11; Cho, *Successful Home Cell*, p. 149.

⁵³ *Fourth Dimension*, p. 173.

devils.”⁵⁴ Zen Buddhism in particular is singled out for his critical treatment, and Cho compares and contrasts it with Holy Spirit “Fourth-Dimensional Christianity.”⁵⁵ But at the same time, Cho’s concept of the “fourth dimension” is linked to his knowledge of Eastern religions with their own miraculous powers, as in Buddhism, yoga and Japanese religions like Soka Gakkai. He refers to the “evil spirit world” in this “fourth dimension” that is “under the power and authority of almighty God.”⁵⁶ Although these ideas have brought him severe criticism from evangelical polemicists, Cho is careful to maintain the distinction between the Asian religious world and the Christian revelation. But clearly his experience of this Asian religious spirituality and its element of the miraculous has brought him to the understanding of the “fourth dimension,” where visions and dreams are the language and “incubation” or “pregnancy” is the process through which believers receive their requests from God. This “incubation” in the “fourth dimension,” he declares, is also the way that miracles happen in other religions.⁵⁷ This particular teaching can only be understood by reference to the Asian pluralistic religious background in which Korean Pentecostals are immersed.

Korean Pentecostal scholars are beginning to appreciate the importance of the ancient religious system to Pentecostalism, but they are also aware of its dangers. Lee Young Hoon, one of Cho’s most senior ministers, points out that shamanism has influenced Korean Christianity in four ways. Firstly, it “made it easy for Koreans to accept the Christian God and the spiritual world.” Secondly, shamanism’s “emphasis on the present and on material blessings” made these a “major concern” of Korean Christianity and resulted in indifference to social concerns and a “self-centered Christianity.” Thirdly, shamanism “drove Korean Christians to focus on blessings”; and fourthly, it influenced an exclusive and conservative Christianity.⁵⁸ Korean Buddhism also influenced Christianity to yearn for present, material blessings and to focus on the

⁵⁴ *Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2, p. 76.

⁵⁵ *Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2, pp. 83-85.

⁵⁶ *Fourth Dimension*, pp. 46, 71; *Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2, p. 36.

⁵⁷ *Fourth Dimension*, pp. 47-49.

⁵⁸ Young Hoon Lee, “The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Doctrinal Development” (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1996), pp. 19-21.

other world.⁵⁹ Lee says that “Cho’s Holy Spirit movement has made the most of the shamanistic background,” but that Cho “tries not to be syncretized with shamanism” by his “sticking to the principles of the Bible.”⁶⁰ He says that the challenge for the church was that the “shamanistic tendency” of Koreans made them vulnerable to “seeking healing rather indiscreetly” and that they might “focus only on material blessing in the present life.”⁶¹ Jeong says that shamanism not only gave Koreans a concept of a High God but through its rituals it offered “help and salvation from worldly suffering and pain of *han*” (a unique Korean expression roughly translated as bitter grief and despair); and it ensured health, fertility and success. He says that Korean Pentecostalism has a “similar ritual function within the same culture of *han*.”⁶² Korea has a “shamanistic environment” that is a “seedbed” for Cho’s “contextual ministry.” In this unique context, the gospel is interpreted as the healing of *han* through “this-worldly blessing, material wealth, good health, and other personal and familial well-being which Koreans desperately need.”⁶³ Jeong suggests that the healing of *han* is achieved through the rituals of Cho’s preaching, prayer, worship with dancing and gospel songs, speaking in tongues, and the ministry to women in home cell groups.⁶⁴ Another Pentecostal scholar, Dongsoo Kim, has also written of Korean Pentecostalism as the healing of *han*. He adds the important observation of Cho’s calling to the ministry in the midst of personal suffering and a terminal illness from which he was miraculously healed, a similar calling to that of shamans qualifying them to be “priests of *han*.”⁶⁵ Many African Pentecostal church leaders have been called in similar circumstances, and this too is the way that traditional healers are called. This is another instance of the contextualization of shamanistic culture in Cho’s ministry.

Mark Mullins refers to the “shamanistic orientation” that has “undeniably permeated Korean Christianity.” He says that the “threefold blessing” theology of Cho Yonggi, the exorcism practices of Kim Ki

⁵⁹ Lee, “Holy Spirit Movement,” pp. 25-26.

⁶⁰ Lee, “Holy Spirit Movement,” p. 205.

⁶¹ Lee, “Holy Spirit Movement,” 212-213.

⁶² Jeong, “Formation and Development,” pp. 17, 26-27, 30.

⁶³ Jeong, “Formation and Development,” p. 235.

⁶⁴ Jeong, “Formation and Development,” pp. 246-56.

⁶⁵ Dongsoo Kim, “The Healing of Han in Korean Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15 (October 1999), pp. 123-139 (135).

Dong (a Korean Baptist pastor), and the prayer mountain movement are all examples of this.⁶⁶ However, I have tried to demonstrate that it is more appropriate to consider Cho's Pentecostalism as a contextual form of Korean Christianity interacting with shamanism. Korean Pentecostals justify their practices of healing and doctrine of blessings by referring to the Bible as their prime source. This tends to confirm Harvey Cox's contention that "primal spirituality now surfacing in Korea... also underlies the original biblical faith as well,"⁶⁷ the main reason for the growth of Pentecostalism in Korea and in other countries of the world. But Cox may not have reflected on the enormous difference between interacting with shamanism (as Korean Pentecostals do) and becoming shamanistic. This is an untenable position for Pentecostals; Cho himself clearly rejects traditional shamanism and says that shamans "serve demons."⁶⁸

Cho's context clearly played an important role in the shaping of his theology. Several Korean scholars have written of the context of the 1950s when Cho was converted from Buddhism to Christianity and the Full Gospel Central Church was founded in the slums of Seoul.⁶⁹ This was a time, says Young-hoon Lee, when "most people despaired in emptiness and frustration," and when "Cho's message of salvation in body and spirit gave enormous comfort and hope to the people who were poor and suffering."⁷⁰ This message of hope in a good God solved the *han* of people.⁷¹ Cho refers to these years in most of his books; they are a very significant part of his message and the foundation of the theology he developed for a despairing people. He refers to the sufferings created by the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, and his own personal poverty and gradual healing from tuberculosis.⁷² This was a time when many were "struggling for existence," when he identified himself with

⁶⁶ Mullins, *Made in Japan*, pp. 175-177.

⁶⁷ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 226.

⁶⁸ David (Paul) Yonggi Cho, *How can I be Healed?* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1999), pp. 98-100.

⁶⁹ Myung, "Spiritual Dimension," pp. 111, 235-36.

⁷⁰ Lee, "Holy Spirit Movement," p. 179.

⁷¹ Lee, "Holy Spirit Movement," p. 204; Myung, "Spiritual Dimension," p. 111.

⁷² *Fourth Dimension*, p. 110; *Solving Life's Problems* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1980), pp. 48, 73, 125, 135; *Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2, pp. xi-xviii, 20; *Successful Home Cell*, p. 3; *More than Numbers*, pp. 24, 97, 118; *Praying with Jesus* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), p. 91.

the hundreds of refugees on the streets and became himself “one of the hopeless.”⁷³ He mentions the aftermath of the Korean War when people lost families and businesses, had mental breakdowns, and became “completely possessed by the devil.”⁷⁴ His ministry began in a poverty-stricken area of suburban Seoul, where he himself was poor and where people were not interested in a message about heaven and hell in their daily struggle for survival. As Myung puts it, in this situation “the gospel had to be reinterpreted and renewed theologically” to meet the needs of people, so a “contextualization of the gospel was needed.”⁷⁵ Cho’s teaching on healing was closely related to the poverty and sickness rampant in Korea at that time.⁷⁶ His teaching on blessings and prosperity was his “theological counteraction” to the *han* created by the ravages of the Korean War.⁷⁷ For Cho, the message of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit was a present contextual message that gave hope to a suffering and destitute community. Most of his members in these early years were extremely poor.⁷⁸ His views on poverty are clear, again determined by his context:

Poverty is a curse from Satan. God desires that all His people prosper and be healthy as their soul prospers (3 John 1:2). Yet much of the world has not really seen poverty as I have seen it. Especially in the Third World, people live their lives in despair, struggling to survive for one more day. I am from the Third World. I know first-hand what it is not to have anything to eat.⁷⁹

Elsewhere he writes that it is because of his “oppressed background,” he has been able “to understand the plight of many

⁷³ *Fourth Dimension*, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁴ *Fourth Dimension*, p. 14.

⁷⁵ Myung, “Spiritual Dimension,” p. 236.

⁷⁶ Jeong, “Formation and Development,” p. 216.

⁷⁷ Jeong, “Formation and Development,” p. 225.

⁷⁸ *Fourth Dimension*, p. 172; *Solving Life’s Problems*, p. 132; *Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2, pp. xviii, 27; *More than Numbers*, p. 23; *Salvation, Health and Prosperity: Our Threefold Blessings in Christ* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), p. 11; *The Holy Spirit, My Senior Partner: Understanding the Holy Spirit and His Gifts* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1989), p. 8; Jeong, “Formation and Development,” pp. 226-27.

⁷⁹ *Fourth Dimension*, vol. 2, pp. 137-38.

oppressed people who have no hope for a future.”⁸⁰ It is important to understand that Cho’s views on poverty and prosperity come out of his own Korean context of poverty, Japanese occupation, and the Korean War; and should not be interpreted within the context of western wealth and materialism as might be done with the “prosperity” theology of Kenneth Copeland, for example.

4. Cho’s Pentecostal Theology

That Cho is a “classical Pentecostal” thoroughly influenced by US Pentecostalism is a feature of his theology that cannot be denied. He is, after all, a minister in the Korean Assemblies of God and Chairman of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship since 1992—thus he is arguably the most influential minister in this denomination globally. He was trained in the denomination’s Bible school in Seoul, where he received his own experience of “baptism of the Spirit.” Even though he may be regarded in many ways as a theological innovator within classical Pentecostalism (one of the reasons why his books have been so popular in the West), yet his theology is unmistakably Pentecostal. This is especially true of his theology of the Spirit, expressed in his 1989 publication, *The Holy Spirit, My Senior Partner*. The influence of his Assemblies of God background is evident in that Cho stresses the importance of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” and the “initial evidence” of speaking in tongues.⁸¹ Cho sees this as an experience subsequent to and distinct from regeneration or conversion,⁸² and distinguishes between speaking in tongues as a “sign” and as a “gift.”⁸³ Like all Pentecostals, speaking or praying in tongues is very important to him.⁸⁴ Cho sometimes uses the phrase “baptized in the Spirit” in his writings, but distinguishes between being “filled with” and having “fellowship with” the Spirit, between speaking in tongues and being

⁸⁰ *More than Numbers*, p. 24.

⁸¹ *Holy Spirit*, pp. 8-9; *Successful Home Cell*, pp. 131, 149. However, Myung, “Spiritual Dimension,” pp. 64-65 suggests that Cho does not insist on “initial evidence.”

⁸² *Holy Spirit*, pp. 100-102.

⁸³ *Holy Spirit*, pp. 167-68.

⁸⁴ *How to Pray: Patterns of Prayer* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1997), pp. 76-83.

filled with the Spirit,⁸⁵ and the latter results in people having an “overflowing blessing” to share with others.⁸⁶ The fellowship with the Holy Spirit for every believer is an important emphasis,⁸⁷ and perhaps one of the many theological innovations that might place Cho in a pneumatological centre. The Holy Spirit is the “Senior Partner” in his ministry, and Cho says that intimacy or communion with the Holy Spirit is “the greatest experience of my life.”⁸⁸

Cho’s understanding of evangelism and mission also is typically Pentecostal: motivated by and completely dependent upon the enabling of the Spirit.⁸⁹ He says that his preaching is based on the goodness of God, the redemption of Christ and biblical “principles of success,” so that meeting the personal needs of people is his priority above “theology, history and politics.”⁹⁰ His teaching on sickness and emphasis on healing is also typically Pentecostal: physical healing is seen as part of Christ’s redemption; sickness is “from the devil” and a “curse”; and God wants all people healed.⁹¹ Like most Pentecostal preachers, Cho makes extensive use of personal experience or “testimony” to illustrate his theology. This is particularly noticeable on the subject of healing, when Cho often refers to his own sicknesses and how he was healed,⁹² and gives testimonies of people healed during his ministry to them. Cho makes much of the experience of being “born again” and all his books have a strong soteriological and Christocentric tone. His holistic view of salvation is in common with Pentecostals all over the world, and one of the reasons why the Pentecostal message has spread rapidly among people in great need. He even espouses premillennial eschatology like most classical Pentecostals do, complete with end-time apocalyptic predictions about the union of Europe, the revival of Israel, and anti-

⁸⁵ *Holy Spirit*, p. 111.

⁸⁶ *Salvation*, p. 49; *Successful Home Cell*, pp. 119-120.

⁸⁷ *Salvation*, p. 32; *Great Businessmen* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1995), pp. 69-75.

⁸⁸ *Holy Spirit*, p. 13; *Successful Home Cell*, p. 131.

⁸⁹ *Holy Spirit*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ *Successful Home Cell*, pp. 153-56.

⁹¹ *Suffering... Why Me?* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1986), pp. 6, 13, 17, 33-41, 57-62; *Salvation*, pp. 115-56; *How Can I be Healed?* pp. 15-20.

⁹² *Suffering*, pp. 89-93; *Successful Home Cell*, pp. 41-44.

communist rhetoric.⁹³ In all these emphases, Cho is a true Pentecostal, clearly influenced by the ideology of the US Assemblies of God.

Hwa Yung, a Chinese Malaysian evangelical, suggests that Cho's theology goes beyond evangelical theology with three distinctives of its own: his ideas of the "threefold blessings" of salvation, the "fourth dimension" of the spiritual realm and "faith incubation."⁹⁴ As we have seen, the most contentious criticisms are those that see Cho as a preacher of a North American "prosperity gospel" and on the other hand, those that consider him a "Pentecostal shaman." But his teaching on "prosperity" is based on his emphases, which Cho unashamedly proclaims in true Pentecostal fashion. Following the early Pentecostals who preached a fourfold "full gospel" of Jesus the Savior, Healer, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit, and the Coming King, Cho adds his "threefold blessings." His most often quoted text is 3 John 2 (also a favorite with North American "prosperity preachers"): "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers."⁹⁵ His teaching on this subject is laid out in several of his books, but most comprehensively in *Salvation, Health & Prosperity: Our Threefold Blessings in Christ*, where he explains that this "aspect of the gospel" was emphasized during a particular time when Korea was "striving to join the ranks of the advanced countries of the world," so that "Korean Christians should have an attitude which is more productive, creative, positive and active."⁹⁶ But he was given the message of threefold blessings in the midst of poverty and destitution after the Korean War, and this was to become the foundation of all his preaching and ministry thereafter.⁹⁷ The only way to receive the threefold blessings is to believe that God is a "good God" and that salvation includes forgiveness of sins, health and prosperity.⁹⁸ His doctrine of "blessings" is

⁹³ *Praying with Jesus*, pp. 115-26; *Daniel: Insight on the Life and Dreams of the Prophet from Babylon* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1990); *Revelation: Visions of Our Ultimate Victory in Christ* (Seoul: Seoul Logos, 1991).

⁹⁴ Yung Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1997), pp. 206-207.

⁹⁵ *Solving Life's Problems*, p. 47. Myung Soo Park, "David Yonggi Cho," p. 108 suggests that this teaching emanates directly from North Americans, especially healing evangelist Oral Roberts.

⁹⁶ *Salvation*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ *Salvation*, pp. 11-12.

⁹⁸ *Salvation*, pp. 16-18.

not however a selfish, individualistic “bless me” teaching, but one intended to bring “overflowing blessings” to those people who are in contact with each believer.⁹⁹

The threefold blessings doctrine is the most emphasized of all Cho’s teachings. The official brochure of the Yoido Full Gospel Church states that the “five-fold message of the Gospel” includes: (1) renewal, or “salvation,” expressed in classical Pentecostal terms; (2) the fullness of the Spirit, the doctrine for which Pentecostals are well known; (3) healing, another emphasis of early Pentecostals and one of the main emphases throughout Cho’s ministry; (4) blessing, Cho’s addition to the “fourfold” gospel, which is declared to be “an abundant life of blessing which would be enough to share with others”; and (5) the Second Coming of Christ. The “three-fold blessings of salvation” are further explained to include “soul prosperity,” “prosperity in all things” and “a healthy life,” based on the 3 John 2 text.¹⁰⁰ This is clearly a promise of health and prosperity in the present life for Christian believers, but Cho says clearly that happiness does not come from outward wealth (“mere material gain”), but from “solutions to our deep, inner problems,”¹⁰¹ and he condemns those who think that happiness comes from power and wealth.¹⁰² The fourfold/ fivefold message of the “full gospel” of the Pentecostals is strongly Christocentric and soteriological; and so is Cho’s theology. The focus of page after page of his writings is Jesus Christ and his redemptive work as Savior from sin, sickness, demon possession, poverty, and trouble of every kind. He contrasts his message with that of other denominations:

I believe it is necessary to preach the full gospel, the total work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. The message from our church is about the saving Jesus, the sanctifying Christ, the baptizing Savior, the “blessing” Son of God, the healing Jesus and our soon coming King!¹⁰³

It is important to realize that Cho did not develop his teaching on success and prosperity from the context of the affluent West and the

⁹⁹ *Salvation*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁰ Yoido Full Gospel Church, *Yoido Full Gospel Church* (Seoul: Yoido Full Gospel Church, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁰¹ *Solving Life’s Problems*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰² *Praying with Jesus*, p. 26.

¹⁰³ *Fourth Dimension*, p. 91.

North American “health and wealth” preachers. As far as I have been able to ascertain, Cho does not even refer to Kenneth Hagin and other “Word of Faith” teachers in his writings, if we exclude Oral Roberts from this group. In spite of some scholars’ suggestion of a connection between Cho and the “Word of Faith” school of Hagin,¹⁰⁴ I did not find reference to this in any of his writings. However, he does not hide his admiration for and the influence of Roberts (in common with many Pentecostal preachers) and he mentions Robert Schuller, a “possibility thinking” preacher with whom Cho has shared platforms, in a favorable light.¹⁰⁵ More controversially, but probably innocently from his perspective, Cho once referred to mind-power writer Napoleon Hill and “positive thinking” advocate Norman Vincent Peale.¹⁰⁶ However this must not detract from the fact that it was in the context of the slums of Seoul among people recovering from the horrors of the Japanese occupation and the Korean War when Cho began to preach that poverty was a curse, and that God was interested in setting people free from this by giving them “the full blessing of prosperity.”¹⁰⁷ At the same time, he questioned the motives of those, including preachers, who desired prosperity but did not put God first.¹⁰⁸ For Cho, “prosperity” as an end in itself is evil, for God blesses his people only so that they may meet the needs of the poor and the needy.¹⁰⁹ Because his “contextual theology” is also dynamic, keeping up with the modernization of Korea that occurred from the 1980s onwards, Cho adapted to the changing context and also attracted the emerging middle class with his message of overcoming success in all circumstances, including business ventures.¹¹⁰ Yet Cho condemns modern western culture with its rapid pace, pleasure-loving activities, and entertainment-centered churches. These things, he declares, hinder people and churches from having “the full blessings of the Lord,” as they need time for prayer (“waiting upon the Lord”), worship and the preaching of God’s Word, the emphases of Cho’s services.¹¹¹ He says

¹⁰⁴ Park, “David Yonggi Cho,” p. 118.

¹⁰⁵ *Salvation*, pp. 91, 104-105; Park, “David Yonggi Cho,” p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ *Successful Home Cell*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁷ *Solving Life’s Problems*, 27, 31; Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, p. 209; Myung, “Spiritual Dimension,” pp. 249, 250-51.

¹⁰⁸ *Solving Life’s Problems*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁹ *Fourth Dimension*, vol.2, pp. 153-54.

¹¹⁰ Park, “David Yonggi Cho,” p. 120.

¹¹¹ *Fourth Dimension*, pp. 33-34, 105-106.

that many “traditional churches” in the West have “forgotten the vitality of Christianity and have become dead and sterile,” and that this is the reason that many western young people turn to Eastern mysticism.¹¹² Early Pentecostals too were a world-denying movement who saw the churches of the day as dry, formal and lifeless, who needed to be restored so that they could experience the power of God. There are passages in Cho’s writings that theologically are hard to swallow, such as his teaching that in the kingdom of God there is no poverty.¹¹³ Cho has also been criticized as being unconcerned with social change and structures of oppression, but the YFGC has extensive social care programs.¹¹⁴ Although the Korean liberation theology known as Minjung theology has espoused the concerns of the poor and oppressed, it is to Pentecostal churches like YFGC that the poor and oppressed have flocked for relief.

Christianity, particularly in its Pentecostal emphasis of the transforming power of the Spirit, purports to offer more than traditional religions like Korean shamanism did. Likewise in Africa, thousands of independent Pentecostal churches have changed the face of Christianity because they have proclaimed a holistic gospel that includes deliverance from all types of oppression like sickness, sorcery, evil spirits and poverty. This central message has often met the felt needs of Africans more fundamentally than that of churches founded by European missionaries, who left a message that is sometimes over-spiritualized and intellectualized.¹¹⁵ So, if Cho’s theology has been born in the context of a deeply suffering nation reeling from the aftermath of Japanese occupation and a devastating civil war, then this message is good news for the poor and oppressed, and provides incentives for people struggling to make a living. Unlike some American “prosperity preachers,” Cho does not deny the role of suffering in the purposes of God.¹¹⁶ The “thorn in the flesh,” he says, enables believers to live with “persistent perplexity” and thereby know the grace of God.¹¹⁷ This is somewhat ambiguous, as Cho distinguishes between suffering and sickness and

¹¹² *Fourth Dimension*, pp. 2, 76-77.

¹¹³ *Praying with Jesus*, pp. 50-51. A more nuanced teaching on this is given in Cho, *Salvation*, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ Lee, “Holy Spirit Movement,” p. 214.

¹¹⁵ Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1991), p. 30.

¹¹⁶ *Fourth Dimension*, pp. 108-112.

¹¹⁷ *Solving Life’s Problems*, p. 97.

does not think that sickness is the will of God,¹¹⁸ but there is no “cheap grace” in his theology. His own experiences of sickness came often and lasted long, but through these he learned to “trust even more,” and he was “able to live above despair and continue to walk with God until [his] healing came.”¹¹⁹ He was himself seriously ill for ten years while he preached healing in Christ, and Cho believes that this experience enabled him to be “completely broken” and “helpless” before God.¹²⁰ He views on suffering are clear:

Concerning suffering and endurance of many kinds of trials, we must discipline ourselves to maintain tenacious trust and confidence in the love of God when our lives are shaken by the winds and storms of suffering. Then we will overcome and receive victory.... Though everything may look dismal and suffering become worse, God will ultimately cause all these things to work together for good because His Word says so. We must have absolute trust in Almighty God even in times of suffering, because there is no power greater than the power of Almighty God.¹²¹

It is not clear whether by “suffering” in these and other similar passages include physical sickness, but Cho’s ideas here are a world away from the crass statements of the purveyors of a gospel of health and wealth.

5. Conclusion

Those who censure Korean Pentecostals like Cho for their alleged “shamanism” often fail to see that the parallels with ancient religions in these practices are also continuous with the biblical record. Furthermore, these Pentecostals define their practices by reference to the Bible rather than to shamanism, but see their activities as creative adaptations to the local context. At the same time, Asian Pentecostals might also need a greater appreciation for the rich diversity of their cultural and religious past. Demonizing this past does not explain the present attraction of Pentecostalism for East Asian peoples deeply influenced by their ancient

¹¹⁸ *Successful Home Cell*, p. 152; *Suffering*, p. 104.

¹¹⁹ *Suffering*, p. 96.

¹²⁰ *Successful Home Cell*, p. 43.

¹²¹ *Suffering*, pp. 101, 102.

religions and cultures, even though such a demonization might help in the religious competition that is a feature of these pluralist societies. But one conclusion that is incontrovertible is that Korean Pentecostals have found both culturally and Biblically acceptable alternatives to and adaptations from the practices of their ancient religions and are seeking to provide answers to the needs inherent in their own context.

I live in the western world and my understanding of religious phenomena outside my context will always be partial. There are unanswered questions about Cho's theology that are better debated by Koreans themselves. But Pentecostal theology in countries like Korea should not be a reflection of a theology born in the totally different context of the USA, even though cultural radiation from this country has invaded South Korea for over a generation. A theology "made in the USA," whether Pentecostal or otherwise, is a form of cultural colonialism. I believe that Asian Pentecostals must develop a theology that speaks with a different perspective of the voice of the poor, a theology of hope for a suffering people, a genuinely contextual theology. The good news, Cho declares, is that God meets all the needs of believers, including their spiritual salvation, physical healing, and other blessings for material needs. As Hwa Yung has pointed out, Cho is "an excellent example of how the gospel must be appropriately contextualized to address the felt needs of a people."¹²² East Asia, like Africa and Latin America, also has the phenomenon of mass urbanization, and the Pentecostal churches have provided places of spiritual security and personal communities for people unsettled by rapid social change. As Korean church becomes more relevant to their cultural and social context, they become more able to serve the wider society. This is evident in the contextual ministry and Pentecostal theology of David Yonggi Cho.

¹²² Hwa, *Mangoes or Bananas*, p. 209.