1. Introduction

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The story of church growth in Korea is no longer unknown to the Christian world. Recently, the situation in the Korean Protestant churches has been reported as follows: 170 denominations; 47,810 church congregations; 430 Christian organizations; 210 mission organizations; 184 Theological Colleges and Seminaries; and 521 prayer houses. The number of Korean overseas missionaries in 2003 amounted to 11,614 working in 170 countries sent by 140 missionary organizations. It means that the number of missionaries increased almost 125 times in 24 years. Numerically speaking, Korea takes second place in the sending of overseas missionaries after the U.S.A.

Compared to its short history of slightly over a century, the Protestant church in Korea has experienced a big revival. The reason for this can be mainly sought in theological, religio-cultural and socio-political spheres. These form the context in which the Korean church experienced its spiritual awakenings. Observing its history from this viewpoint, we can make out three stages (see figure 1), each with its own main ignition factor. These three stages are generally categorized by Korean theologians as 'pentecostal movements' (see 1.5). However, we can especially distinguish the revival after the Korean War (1950-1953), which corresponds to the period of Pure Gospel [Sunbogeum: in Korean: 순복음; in Chinese: 純福音] movement.

The first revival broke out in Wonsan city in 1903 and came to a head in Pyongyang city in 1907 (see the map of Korea). This movement has played a major role in shaping the characteristics of the Korean churches. It started with Bible study and prayer meetings under the leadership of evangelical missionaries from North America. The spiritual form of the faith at this phase is compared to the authoritative and powerful God the Father of the Trinitarian God. Through this movement, Korean believers experienced an exodus out of the traditional religions.

A second wave of pentecostal revival arose about two decades after the first one, set in motion by the Methodist minister Yong-Do Yi (1901-1933), who committed himself to the flame of God’s love. He was an indigenous pentecostal martyr. Even though his contribution to Christianity has remained an unsolved theological problem up to now, his influence on the Korean church cannot be passed over. His spirituality featured a mystical pentecostalism of the suffering Son of God, on which the oppressed Koreans under the Japanese Imperialism could model their faith.

These two events, together with many other revival meetings, have not only solidified the foundation of Korean churches in general but have also bequeathed to them their spiritual character. But they have developed neither their own theologies nor influential organizations. The first two stages were indigenous ‘pentecostal’ movements. If we interpret pentecostalism in a narrower sense, they were spiritual movements which fall within a category of evangelicalism. They had neither recognized manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit nor the definite and settled doctrines of so-called classical pentecostalism. The Pyongyang revival has no report about speaking in tongues or prophecies. In the period of minister Yong-Do Yi, the phenomena of praying in strange tongues and prophecies were reported by some observers, but such spiritual gifts were not officially recognized by Korean churches at that time. Such hitherto unknown experiences disappeared as minister Yong-Do Yi passed away.

A third pentecostal revival developed in Korea, this time not as a revival meeting as in the previous two examples, but as a new doctrine introduced by foreign classic pentecostalism. The importance of this movement is that it expands and influences Korean Christians continuously by way of filling them with the Holy Spirit. Having been introduced in 1928, this third movement grew slowly for two and a half decades, without a solid organization under the oppression of Japanese occupation. The early movement was dominated by faith in God the Father who has control over the universe. The second revival (1930s) was characterized by faith in the suffering Son and the third movement after the Korean War adhered to faith in the Holy Spirit; we can hardly see any modern Asian countries which had an expansion of Christianity as a national “movement” as in Korea. Especially, when we consider that of the neighbouring countries like China and Japan, we find remarkable differences.

Deok-Hwan Kim, *The Foundation History of Korean Church Denominations*, Incheon, 1986. 3 vols. 2: 91-106. 3: 203-212. Yong-Do Yi’s followers who were rejected by Presbyterian and Methodist denominations formed their own, pure Korean denomination, *Yesu Gyohoe* (Jesus Church). In 1984, this denomination had 22 congregations, 34 pastors and 2,474 members.

John Stetz who was the first AAOG missionary to Korea wrote to the author (1.4.1996) saying, “... the history of the Pentecostal movement in Korea ... I believe that it started in the Presbyterian church in Pyongyang, North Korea back in 1909. But the Presbyterian missionaries did not believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues ... so they tried to squelch it thinking that it was extremism and not the work of the Holy Spirit. But in 1909 and 1910 there was a mighty move of the Holy Spirit which spread all over Korea and into China. One Presbyterian missionary in Korea told me about a group of Koreans who had a Pentecostal experience in the south east section of Korea and that even in 1954 when he spoke to me they were still speaking in other tongues. This was in the vicinity of Pohang and further up the coast.” This is the only report that the writer has heard about the spiritual gift which was mentioned in connection with the Pyongyang movement. Missionary Stetz does not seem to be so well informed of the Pyongyang revival as to prove it, but it is interesting to note. Those who were speaking in tongues might be the inheritors of the second pentecostal movement.

Imperialism, the established churches and the Korean War (1950-1953). Thereafter, the American Assemblies of God acted as an agent to help organize a denomination in 1953. When this Korean Assembly of God opened the Bible School in Seoul on 10th May 1953, they picked Full Gospel Theological Seminary [Sunbogeum Shinbogakyo; 순복음 신학교; 純福音 神學校] as the designation of the school. “Let us preach only the Full Gospel” was the slogan to take the designation Sunbogeum. That was the official/formal birth of Sunbogeum pentecostalism in Korea.10

Thus Sunbogeum became familiar to Koreans as the name of a new spiritual movement instead of the official designation, the Korean Assemblies of God. It was settling down as an indigenization (see 1.5) of classical pentecostalism in Korean soil. This time, the pattern of the spiritual movement was characterized as faith in the Holy Spirit after the ravages of the Korean War and the following process of economic growth since the 1960s.

This third stage of Sunbogeumism has not only solidified its pentecostal teaching but has also resulted in its becoming the fastest growing church in Korea. It has been planting churches in the whole of South Korea and among Korean emigrants in the world. The statistics of the Korean Assembly of God in January 1995 shows: 30 districts in the whole of South Korea; 1,045 congregations; 2,585 pastors, among whom 1,360 are trainee-pastors; 1,175,621 members, among whom 183,465 children are included; 166 intercultural missionaries have been sent out.11

Among the several pentecostal groups, only Sunbogeum church, which is an heir to the earliest classical pentecostalism in Korea, has influenced the growth of the Korean churches and made a marked impact on world evangelization. It was ignited by foreign missionaries but it was developed by Korean pentecostals on Korean soil. However, it has not severed itself from the established churches and from the universal pentecostal movement. The tension between indigenousness and universality in Sunbogeum pentecostalism calls our attention to a theological problem. It is common knowledge that Korean Christianity has deep roots in the shamanistic spirituality of Koreans which is syncretized with Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (see 1.5). But Sunbogeum seems to be especially suited to this spiritual soil of Koreans. Because of the phenomenological resemblance between the pentecostal worship meetings and the shaman rituals and because of the similarity between the prosperity gospel of Sunbogeumism and the blessing-oriented shamanism, the Sunbogeum movement has been suspected by some theologians of

10 Yo-Yeol Choe, interview, January 20, 1995 in Bucheon, Korea. Pastor Choe is the first graduate of Sunbogeum Theological Seminary (1955). He added that the name Sunbogeum began to win a reputation from the time when Yonggi Cho founded Sunbogeum Jungang Gyohoe (Pure Gospel Central Church) at West Gate, Seoul, in early 1960s. See 6.2.
11 There are about 550 pastors of KAOG who are ministering in churches in North America and in Europe (The Directory of KAOG 1995/6 and Kookmin-Ilbo Daily News (28. 3. 1996)); The number of missionaries is from 1997.
12 Gyomunsa, Korean Church Growth in 100 Years, Seoul, 1993. p. 200. There are six other pentecostal denominations besides the KAOG. The sum total of all other groups reaches slightly over 100,000 members with 1,140 congregations. The figure is not definitive.
being blended with shamanism. For all that Sunbogeum pentecostalism has secured its place as an influential church among the Protestant churches in Korea, its theological assessment is still left unfinished. Moreover, considering its vision for world mission and its practical impact on world evangelization, we are called upon to reflect how indigenized Korean pentecostalism can be related to universal Christianity in an intercultural context.

With regard to these considerations, I think that it is important to study Sunbogeum pentecostalism to locate its identity under the aspects of indigenousness and universality. The indigenous aspect implies its contextuality and the universal aspect has to do with its theology.

The object of this study, therefore, is to investigate the context and texture of Sunbogeum pentecostalism so that we may evaluate its cultural indigenousness and theological interrelatedness. It may shed more light on the world mission and Christian theology.

1.2. METHODOLOGY

Concerning the methodology for this study, I use historical, phenomenological (comparative), and systematic-theological methods. These three methods support one another: the first and the second methods are descriptive and analytical, the third one is normative. Each method will be used in accordance with the character of the chapters. First, the historical method will be applied to Parts I and II which deal with the socio-political, religious and Christian history of Korea and the sketch of the Sunbogeum movement. Second, the phenomenological method will be used to Parts II and III: the Sunbogeum movement, as a distinguishing phenomena, will be

13 Harvey Cox, Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century, Reading, MA, 1994. pp.213-241. Cox writes about Korean pentecostalism, specially about Yoido Sunbogeum Church, as a kind of test case using a principle which he had established through worldwide exploration of pentecostal types of Christianity. This principle is that a growing church today possesses two capabilities: first, it must be able to include and transform certain elements of existing religions which still influence the cultural subconscious; second, it must also equip people to live in changing societies where responsibility, inventiveness and skills are indispensable. The first capability in Korea, according to him, is that Korean pentecostalism “absorbs huge chunks of indigenous Korean shamanism.” Korean pentecostalism is combined with shamanism, he thinks. He argues this from information given about worship meetings at Yoido Sunbogeum Church. The second capability in Korea is explained by the organizational genius of pentecostals, he says. The national organization and training of Korean mass evangelization campaigns prepared Korean pentecostal Christians to be mission-oriented believers so that it caused them and Korean economics to bring about prosperity according to Peter Drucker’s theory of “nonprofit enterprise brings profit in the modern knowledge society.” He refers to the ideas of Boo-Woong Yoo (Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology) and Hyun Kyung Chung (“shamanistic dance event” in Canberra for the 7th W. C. C. general assembly in 1991) who stand on the side of liberation and Minjung theology. It is hard for us Korean evangelicals to come to a full appreciation of his thought except its ethical warning for Korean pentecostalism because he is not well enough informed about Korean churches. His liberation theology, on its part, may render serves to Christian churches by his attempt to bridge the concern for liberation common to both liberation theology and pentecostalism. We shall discuss this problem in Part III.

14 However, we start to introduce Korean people, religions and churches in chapters 2-4 as general information.
compared with other phenomena in Korean church history and theology. Third, I will apply the systematic-theological method to Part III. Sunbogeum theology will be researched systematic-theologically.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study has four parts. Each part will be further divided into several chapters. Part I will cover the study of the context of Sunbogeum pentecostalism. We shall consider three aspects: namely, modern Korean socio-politics, Korean religions and Korean church history. These aspects are expanded in three chapters so that we may throw light upon the marked characteristics of Korean culture which have prepared the way for the Sunbogeum movement.

Part II deals with the history of Sunbogeum pentecostalism. Three chapters are allocated to this. I describe its birth and its initial history in chapter 5. This section covers the period from 1928 to 1952. We shall see how classical pentecostalism was planted and began to push out new shoots in Korea during this time. Chapter 6 covers the history of classical pentecostalism in Korea as an organization, the Sunbogeum church. The focus of the description for the rapid growth of Sunbogeum church in this period will be on the support of the American Assemblies of God and the person of Pastor Yonggi Cho. In chapter 7, I will deal mainly with the role of Sunbogeum pentecostalism inside and outside Korea. The reality of Yoido Sunbogeum Church will be researched with interest because it is a living testimony of Sunbogeum pentecostalism.

Part III covers the theology of Sunbogeum pentecostalism. I will research its doctrines. In a sense this will be a discussion about Sunbogeum systematic theology. Its views on the Bible, the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, missiology, ecclesiology, ethics and eschatology will be discussed respectively in each chapter. In the section on the Trinity, angelology, demonology and anthropology will also be treated. Chapter 8 will be the core of this part in which I will deal with the nature of Sunbogeum faith. It is generally represented by the doctrinal formulation of Pastor Yonggi Cho: the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation. The philosophy and methodology of Sunbogeumism will be especially highlighted because these are the most distinguishing features of Sunbogeum pentecostalism.

Part IV corresponds to the conclusion of this study, which will contain an evaluation and future prospects.

1.4. SOURCES

The main sources for each chapter will be introduced in its introductory section. Here, I only present the general principle which will define the sources for the whole study. Sources for this study are divided into primary sources, secondary sources and general literature.
1.4.1. Primary Sources

Primary sources are those which originate from Sunbogeum pentecostals. I get them by the following means:

The first way is to consult books, such as collections of preachings, essays, dissertations and Biblical teachings. *Church History of Korea Assemblies of God* (1993) edited by the International Theological Institute which is established at Yoido Sunbogeum Church and *Fivefold Gospel and Triple Blessing* (1983) by Yonggi Cho are the main primary sources for the history and theology of Sunbogeum pentecostalism. The second way is to consult the assembly documents and periodicals of the denomination. The *Minutes* of the general assembly, magazines of both the denomination and the seminary students, and the denomination newspaper are counted in this category. The third way to primary sources is via personal contacts, interviews, personal observations and the writer’s own experiences. The fourth way is to get information through fragmentary sources like weekly church news, articles outside Sunbogeum publications, letters, brochures and leaflets.

1.4.2. Secondary Sources


1.4.3. General Literature

and II (1997) by Jan A.B. Jongeneel are most frequently used. Several publications of Jürgen Moltmann are referred to as for criticisms for Sunbogeum theology.15

1.5. TERMINOLOGY

Some technical terms which will be used in this study need to be clarified in advance.

Korea. When I refer to contemporary Korean Christianity, I generally signify South Korea. However, when I deal with the ethno-cultural background of Koreans, Korea signifies the whole of Korea. Sometimes, the title Morning Fresh (Choseon) will be used to name Korea, it being the oldest designation for Korean national identity. North Koreans still use Choseon to designate Korea. Korea and Choseon can be used interchangeably.

Han. In this project I shall use the word to denote two different concepts. We can distinguish between them either by placing the Chinese character in parenthesis next to the word, or from the context of the passage. Firstly, Han (한: 韓) corresponds to Korea in its ethnic, cultural and racial connotation. The original linguistic meaning of Han is one, wholeness and greatness. Its personification is Hananim or Haneunim (one god in heaven). The other Han (한; 憎) expresses the unsolved resentment which Koreans have accumulated in their hearts. This symbolic word for Koreans, especially for Korean women, is understood to be related to shamanism. Minjung theology takes this Han to be an important issue (8.2.3).

Pentecostalism. This theological system was started by Charles Fox Parham at the turn of last century (1.1.1901) at Topeka, Kansas. Generally, this is called classical pentecostalism. Its theological foundations are established on the twofold doctrines: first, the second experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit after salvation; second, the speaking in tongues as the initial sign for Spirit baptism. Its worldwide movement followed when William J. Seymour opened the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles in 1906. Neo-pentecostalism since the 1960s, the Third Wave since the 1980s, and spiritual awakenings like the Pyongyang revival (1907) are included in a broader sense of pentecostalism. Sunbogeum pentecostalism is a movement and a theological system which has been developed in the Korean Assemblies of God since 1953. It belongs within classical pentecostalism. In its literal sense, it means ‘pure Gospel’ pentecostalism.

Indigenization and syncretism. As Korean pentecostalism and the writer belong to the circle of exclusivism, this project uses the terminology indigenization with the classical sense of ‘Christianizing the people within the framework of non-Christian life by the Gospel so that transformation of the essence of traditional religio-cultural structure follows as a concomitant phenomenon.’ It is a spiritual transformation of the people and culture. Terminologies among accommodation, inculturation, syncretism, contextualization and indigenization, this project prefers to adopt the term indigenization. However, the problem of ‘theologically responsible syncretism’ (Walter J. Hollenweger/ 8.2.3) will be left open.

15 Jürgen Moltmann, Der Gekreuzigte Gott (1972), In der Geschichte des dreieinigen Gottes (1991) and Der Geist des Lebens (1991) are most frequently referred to.