8. *Sunbogeum* theology

8.1. INTRODUCTION

In the first decade of the 20th century, pentecostalism blossomed among the urban poor of Los Angeles, circumstances which contributed to its characteristics. It was also called ‘The Third Force in Christianity’ or ‘The Third Ecclesiology’in the Western world in the 1950s, while a leader of the Korean Assemblies of God, Jeong-Geun Pak, called it ‘The Third Revolution’ in the 1970s.1

In relation to the watchword ‘third,’ it is noteworthy that pentecostalism is a universal and continuous movement which broke out in the 20th century after the world had experienced various kinds of theological and socio-cultural predominance. Here we may assume it would display certain characteristics that were acquired from previous influences. It not only shares common insights to a reasonable degree with the theology of the Reformation, Ana-baptism, Holiness movement, Fundamentalism, and Evangelicalism,2 but it also broadens and deepens their horizons. It ‘went beyond’ the Wesleyan-Holiness theology of baptism in the Holy Spirit with its emphasis upon the contemporary experiences of the gifts of the Spirit. It was ‘rejected’ by Fundamentalism and others who believed in the ancient cessation of the *charis mata*. Considered radicals among other radicals, pentecostals formed their own theology: they took the whole New Testament tradition as their paradigmatic sources.

*Sunbogeum* theology, as a part of classical pentecostalism, was developed in Korea as discussed in the previous two chapters. One of the leading conservative Presbyterian theologians, Aron Pak, regarded Yonggi Cho’s Triple Salvation Theology – the characteristics of *Sunbogeum* (Pure Gospel) theology – as the conservative frontier theology of Korean theology, i.e. a revelation-theology of Korean type.3 It manifests its distinctiveness as radical Korean theology, on the one hand, while keeping its place in traditional Christianity, on the other. This homogeneity

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1 Jeung-Geun Pak, *Pentecostal Theology*, Seoul, 1978, pp.20-28. Pak claimed that pentecostalism is the latter rain movement, the third movement, and the save-the-nation movement. When he called it the third revolution, he viewed the development of human history in three revolutionary phases which were compared to the functions of human trichotomy: the first socio-economic and industrial revolution which was for the flesh; the second mental revolution which was accomplished through Luther’s Reformation and was for the realm of soul; the third spiritual revolution which was to fundamentally re-create the human by the superhuman power of the Holy Spirit and was for the realm of spirit. From this, we see a hint that *Sunbogeum* has the view that the Trinitarian God (Father, Son, and Spirit) works fully when trichotomy (spirit, soul, and body) functions fully. Not only God’s Spirit was emphasized but also his concern with human spirit.

2 William W. Menzies, “Synoptic Theology: An Essay on Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” in *Paraclete* 13/1 (Winter 1979). 14. Menzies wrote that there is no pentecostal theology because pentecostal theology is “simply a full gospel” Biblical theology that restores the experience of Pentecost to its rightful place in Christian theology.” Therefore, he says that there is no difference between evangelical, fundamentalist, and pentecostal hermeneutics.

and heterogeneity of Sunbogeumism in universal pentecostalism is the focus of our research. Not only has it become manifest as pentecostal revivalism in world Christianity, but it also has retained certain theological ingredients. The synthesis of its backgrounds in theology (classical pentecostalism), religious heritage (Korean shamanism as context), human factor (personality of Yonggi Cho), and socio-political developments (North-South separation after the Second World War, as well as the war-stricken poverty after the Korean War and the economic revival since the 1960s) produced the characteristics of Korean pentecostalism. Even though two different dispositions have formed within Korean Sunbogeum theology (progressive Sunbogeum pentecostalism and traditional-classical Sunbogeum pentecostalism), we will focus on progressive Sunbogeum theology, which was developed primarily by Yonggi Cho. This radical Sunbogeum pentecostalism not only constitutes the main stream of Korean Pentecostalism, but it also manifests the feature of Korean pentecostalism (7.3.2.1, 7.3.2.4).

This chapter addresses the nature of Sunbogeum pentecostalism: its characteristics (8.2), its main theologian, Yonggi Cho (8.3), and his methodology (8.4). The main reference books for this chapter are The Fourth Dimension I (1979) and II (1983); Fivefold Gospel and Triple Blessing (1983) by Yonggi Cho; and Faith and Theology of Yoido Sunbogeum Church I and II (1993) by the International Theological Institute of Yoido Church. The following publications will be used as the main antithetical sources to Sunbogeum theology: “A Report of the Result of Study over Yonggi Cho’s Pseudo-Christianity” (1994) which was accepted by the 79th General Assembly of the Tonghap Presbyterian Church; A Study on the Pentecostal Movement in Korea (1982) by Korea Christian Academy; and Verführerische Lehren der Endzeit (1991) by Albert Betschel.

8.2. SUNBOGEUM THEOLOGY

This section describes the characteristics of Sunbogeumism in connection to its theological foundation and Korean context. To this end, its foundation (8.2.1) will be discussed as it relates to the Full Gospel (8.2.2), shamanism, and Minjung theology (8.2.3). Before we begin this discussion, two technical terms must be clarified. First, a distinction exists between the terms Sunbogeumism (Korean pentecostalism or Sunbogeum pentecostalism) and Sunbogeum theology (Korean pentecostal theology). These two terms may be interchangeably used, but the former implies the history, doctrine and characteristics of Korean Pure Gospel (Sunbogeum), while the latter signifies theological formulations and discussions of Sunbogeumism. Secondly, Yonggi Cho’s key theological formulation, i.e. his Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation, are generally identified with the components of Sunbogeum theology; however, this formulation can neither be identified with Sunbogeum theology itself nor with the wholeness of Cho’s message in his major work, The Truth of Sunbogeumism I, II (1979).
8.2.1. The Biblical Foundations of Sunbogeum Theology

Sunbogeum theology is not the result of translated American or other Western pentecostal literature, even though the former opened dialogue and greatly helped it participate in the family of world pentecostalism. Sunbogeum theology has mainly developed through the writings of Yonggi Cho, who believed the Bible should be the living Word of God. He intensively studied the Bible and read many books (cf. 6.3.2.1). Indeed his self-study through extensive reading influenced much of his theological thinking. Cho’s theology and his early ministry were rooted primarily in one Bible verse, 3 John 2 – a particular favorite of Oral Roberts. His views of divine healing seems to have been influenced and strengthened by the ministries of Oral Roberts and T.L. Osborn. Some of the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich were also among his favorites. Cho studied both conservatives and liberals. Nevertheless, he believes that he founded his own theological principles, especially the theory of the Fivefold Gospel and the Triple Blessing, from the Scriptures. He described it in this way: “Sunbogeunism is the Full Gospel which fully applies God’s Word from Genesis to John’s Revelation and the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ to our faith and life through the Holy Spirit.” He summed it up by saying that Sunbogeunism is nothing but pure Biblical faith.

His view on this matter does not differ from other pentecostals. David A. Womack, who wrote in collaboration with the Committee on Advance, which was organized to analyse the American Assemblies of God in 1967, affirmed that “the pentecostal revival did not come about only through a series of historical events, but through the development of a particular view of the Bible.” Jeong-Geun Pak defined Sunbogeunism as one that “believes the 66 books of the Bible as the eternal and infallible Word of God and tries to live up to that Word.”

8.2.2. Sunbogeum Theology as Korean Full Gospel Theology

The essence of classical pentecostalism has been called the Full Gospel. Korean pentecostals regard Sunbogeum theology as a part of the Full Gospel theology. In a wider sense, the former is included in the latter, sharing common pentecostal distinguishing characteristics. In a narrower sense, however, Sunbogeum theology has its own features in addition to the Western Full Gospel movement and, therefore, can be called ‘a Korean Full Gospel Theology.’ Four aspects make Korean Sunbogeunism different from the Full Gospel or classical pentecostalism.

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4 Nam-Gyu Choe, telephone interview to Hamburg (14.6.2000); Sam-Hwan Kim, telephone interview to ITI, Seoul (20.6.2002). As the director of the International Theological Institute of the Yoido Sunbogeum Church, he said “Pastor Cho was not influenced by Watchman Nee.”
6 ibid. Cho says Sunbogeunism leads believers to become ‘Christ-like Christians’ through the faith of the cross, the faith of filling with the Spirit, the faith of bringing the Gospel to the end of the world, the faith in a good God, the faith in Jesus who bore diseases, the faith in the coming Jesus, and the faith of giving. These are the seven foundations of Sunbogeunism (12-29).
7 David A. Womack, The Wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement, Springfield, MO, 1968. p.16; The Wesleyan teaching of second blessing in salvation as the theological roots of pentecostalism (5.2) can be understood from various standpoints.
First, it shows its openness in theological thinking. As classical pentecostalism is an ‘on the way theology,’ so Sunbogeumism discloses its openness more radically than the former. Thus, it functions like a forerunner of modern Korean theology as Aron Pak stated. Korean pentecostals, who devote their lives to much prayer, are more likely to walk with the Holy Spirit and be influenced in theological reasoning with openness and flexibility. Yung Han Kim, who is a representative of those Korean theologians who promote a theology that analyses contemporary socio-cultural situations and seeks guidance for it, criticizes the close-mindedness of Korean fundamentalistic theology as well as the groundlessness of liberalism, while promoting a theology of checks and balance via the principles of Reformation theology (ecclesia reformata semper reformanda). Sunbogeum theology is also a candidate for such a demand. Byeong-So Min, a Methodist pastor and writer, believes that the theology of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Blessing discloses the character of a ‘telescopic theology,’ which integrates three streams of Korean theology (conservatism, progressivism, and liberalism) which have ‘microscopic’ attitudes in theology. Sunghoon Myoung, one of the representatives of Sunbogeum theology, asserts that the Sunbogeum church is becoming a partner of The Third Wave (Peter Wagner) rather than classical pentecostalism or neo-pentecostalism (charismatists). The flexibility of Korean pentecostalism can be seen in the joining of the Korean Assemblies of God to the Korea National Council of Churches (KNCC) in 1996. Second, Sunbogeumism has formulated its definite faith formula – Fivefold Gospel and Triple Blessing. For Yonggi Cho, who took care of a great congregation composed of humble and poor masses, teaching pentecostal tenets like baptism in the Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues or dealing with other pentecostal theological issues were not as important as helping his congregation practise their pentecostal faith through this simple faith formula (8.3.1; 8.3.2), thus demonstrating that Korean pentecostalism approaches the redemption of Christ as whole-compassing.

Third, it added ‘prosperity’ to the fourfold teaching of the Full Gospel. Pentecostalism as Full Gospel modified its four fundamental teachings (salvation, baptism with the Holy Spirit, healing, and the second coming of Christ) from the

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9 William Kay, “Assemblies of God: Distinctive Continuity and Distinctive Change,” in Pentecostal Perspectives, edited by Keith Warrington, Carlisle, Cumbria (U.K.), 1998, pp.40-63. Five theological matters which have been discussed in the British Assemblies of God are pointed out: evidential tongues; premillennialism; the possibility of demon-possession by a Spirit-filled Christian; the position of house group leaders; and the interpretation of healing. See, especially, chapters 12 and 16 in relation to Korean context.

10 Aron Pak, ibid.


14 ITI, ed., Faith and Theology of Yoido Sunbogeum Church I, Seoul, 1993, pp. 105-125. Cho’s Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation is a synthetic theology. It is an Evangelical Charismatic Theology which contains the essence of the Augustinian idea of predestination and free will and Puritanical Evangelicalism.
fourfold pattern of the Holiness branch (Christ the Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King as described by A. B. Simpson). Here, the shift from Sanctifier to baptism in the Spirit (together with the glossolalia issue) resulted in a shift away from the Holiness movement, resulting in Pentecostalism – a radicalizing process in the spiritual realm. Likewise, Sunbogeumism has developed into another radical pentecostalism by adding prosperity to the existing Full Gospel. This aspect refers to its whole-salvific feature, which has been developed in the Korean context (6.3; 6.4; 6.5).

Fourth, Sunbogeumism stresses the need to practise healing in ministry. This difference from classical pentecostalism is more practical than theoretical. As Jesus healed various kinds of diseases and cast out demons in His ministry on earth, so the Sunbogeum Church, regarding itself as the body of the living Christ, emphasizes healing as an important factor in fulfilling its mission. This tendency shares common ground with the Latter Rain Movement as well as the Third Wave, which also tried to restore the gifts of the Spirit without restriction. At the same time, this healing emphasis can be attributed to related to Yonggi Cho’s own physical weakness and contemporary Korean circumstances (6.2.8; 6.3; 6.4.6.2).

Korean pentecostalism expanded through the introduction of the Full Gospel, i.e. an understanding of the Gospel which has been accommodated for Korean needs. The four items of the Korean Full Gospel theology mentioned above disclose the characteristics of radical wholeness-salvation and the openness of Sunbogeum Pentecostalism, a feature related to the Korean socio-cultural context.

8.2.3. Sunbogeum Theology in the Context of Shamanism and Minjung Theology

Korean ethno-religious diversity (as described in chapter 3) is important for understanding the birth and growth of Sunbogeumism. In this subsection, two problems related to this diversity will be discussed: the link between Sunbogeumism and shamanism, on the one hand, and between Sunbogeumism and Minjung theology, on the other.

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15 William Faupel, “From the Ends of the Earth to the End of the Earth: The Scope of the New Order of the Latter Rain.” An article presented on 12. 7. 1995 at EPCRA/ SPS Conference at AOG Theological Seminary, Mattessey Hall, England; R. M. Riss, “Latter Rain Movement,” in Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements (DPCM), edited by Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, and Patrick H. Alexander, Grand Rapids, 1988/ 9ed., 1996, pp.532-534; C. P. Wagner, “Third Wave,” in op. cit., pp.843-844; Gordon Anderson, “Current Issues in Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology.” Unpublished pamphlet. There is some similarity and some difference between Sunbogeumism and Latter Rain Movement. The similarity is: both promote the gifts of the Spirit; both influenced other churches’ growth; and both had a tendency of moving towards becoming an independent church. The difference is: Latter Rain has the doctrine that man receives the Spirit after Pentecost through laying on of hands while Korean pentecostalism rather teaches praying and waiting upon the filling of the Spirit; Latter Rain emphasized prophecy while Korean pentecostalism does not, on account of false prophetic utterance; Latter Rain did not develop its theology and organization and remained as a movement; and Latter Rain did not promote material blessing as means for God’s business. Sunbogeumism is a Spiritual movement as well as a theological system that tries to establish the Trinitarian God’s church that will provide for both the successive Spiritual movement and its systematization. This point is one of the important tasks for Sunbogeum theology.
The relationship between Korean pentecostalism and shamanism is a problematic one. The main point of discussion is whether these two parties can be harmonized or whether one party indigenizes the other. The former is discussed by critical scholars in relation to religious syncretism between Sunbogeum pentecostalism and Korean shamanism, while the latter is discussed in evangelical circles (including Korean pentecostalism) in terms of religious indigenization.

Walter J. Hollenweger takes the lead in proposing that Korean pentecostalism has been syncretized with shamanism. Harvey Cox also contends that the growth of Yoido Sunbogeum Church can be attributed to the inclusion and combination of shaman elements with Christianity. According to the opinion of Mark M. Mullins, associate professor of sociology of religion at Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo, “Yonggi Cho’s theology might be best viewed as a synthesis of Korean shamanism, Robert Schuller’s positive thinking, and the pragmatism of the Church Growth school of missiology” of Fuller Seminary. He writes that Cho’s theology in relation to shamanism is found in his emphasis on earthly blessing and various kinds of prayer. Both Gwang-Seon Suh, former professor of Ihwa Women’s University in Seoul, who researched Korean pentecostalism from the viewpoint of theology, and Gwang-Il Kim, medical professor at Hanyang University in Seoul, who researched healing ministry in Korea from the viewpoint of psychiatry, pointed out the shamanistic elements of Korean pentecostalism. Daniel J. Adams, associate professor of systematic theology at Hanil Theological Seminary in Jeonju, Korea, understood Sunbogeum Church and Cho as a phenomenon of Korea’s new religious movements whose characteristics are syncretism, nationalism, and utopianism (3.4). He even compared Cho’s protracted disease (6.3.2) with shaman-disease (3.2.2). Other scholars who have similar views of syncretism’s relationship with Sunbogeumism include Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon, Albert Betschel, Sang-Chan

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16 In section 3.2, we discussed Korean traditional religion. Hananim (one god in heaven) concept and shamanism have been in some way syncretized even though Koreans still have the living word (language) Hananim and its unique concept. The Biblical God and Korean original Hananim may be compared from the view of conceptional analogy but both are different in essence.


Han, and Boo-Woong Yoo. Proponents of this viewpoint claim that shamanism has been the central force shaping the growth of Korean pentecostalism.

According to Hollenweger, such syncretism can be understood as a “theologically responsible syncretism” whereby Christianity recognizes the given situation and transforms it into a Christian truth. During the Second International Conference of Korean, Brazilian, and German Theologians at Hanshin University in Seoul (1998), several views on syncretism were introduced. Kyoung Jae Kim, who thinks that ultimate truth can be found in God’s redemptive economy of world religions, proposed a “hermeneutical horizontal fusion or mutual complementary weaving/grafting between the Gospel and culture.” Erhard Kamphausen, who accepts the critical view of Western scholars that the Scriptures and Western church contain the characters of religious syncretism, recommended “symbiotic syncretism” denouncing synthesizing syncretism. Seong Young Kang proposed a “healthy syncretism” — syncretism which takes place when the Gospel and culture encounter a strained play. In line with such syncretist views, Theo Sundermeier proposed an ecumenical missiology through a new hermeneutics on intercultural relations. He bases this view on the premise that there is no absolute interpretation of the Biblical text because the meaning of the Bible is polysemous according to the receivers. Rejecting traditional methods of indigenization and contextualization in missions, he introduced a missiological hermeneutics which promotes a mutual encounter and dialogue between the Christian message and other cultures on equal footing. Contrary to this viewpoint, Korean evangelicals believe in the absoluteness of the Biblical Gospel, which can and must transform the traditional socio-religious culture. Yung Han Kim, for example, argues in favour of transformative cultural theology. If these two views (theologically responsible syncretism and transformative indigenization) explain the same thing in different ways, then no


24 Hollenweger, ibid., pp.155-164. He contends that we can find there are many examples of theologically responsible syncretism in the Bible (155).

25 The former tries to syncretize from the attitude of mutual understanding and adaptability/changeability whereas the latter holds the attitude of keeping his own concrete-established view in syncretizing.

26 “The Second International Conference of Korean, Brazilian, and German Theologians: A Review of the Conference Proceedings.” A reporting brochure of the conference held at the Hanshin University in Seoul on the theme of Christian Communities and Cultures (29.6-1.7.1998).


28 See the last point of 4.3.2.3.
controversy exists between the views of syncretism and indigenization or transformation. In essence, the question is how we theologically define ‘syncretism.’ In terms of the cultural adaptability of Pentecostalism, which was pointed out by Vinson Synan, Sunbogeum theology discusses shamanism in relation to the point of contact (cf. 3.2.2) and in the realm of indigenization. Korean pentecostal theologian Jae Bum Lee dealt with the relationship between Sunbogeum pentecostalism and indigenization. He claimed that Yoido Sunbogeum Church is representative of the indigenization efforts in the Korean religions of shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The central message of this church is to glorify God, to save souls, and to meet the living God. With this in mind, we can better understand the relationship of pentecostalism to shamanism in terms of their points of contact and indigenization, rather than syncretism, he argues.\(^\text{30}\) At the same time, Sunbogeumism recognizes Biblical witness that Jesus himself not only cast out demons and healed every kind of disease but also instructed His disciples to do the same thing (Matt. 10:5-8; Mark 16:15-20; Acts 5:12-16; 8:4-7; 14:3; 19:8-20). Actually, a large number of shamans and their clients became Christians through the ministry of the Sunbogeum church. It is believed that the shamans are demon-possessed and, therefore, need to be healed through the power of God, namely the Holy Spirit (Matt.12: 22-32). Casting out demons is regarded as a part of ‘power evangelism’ or ‘power encounter’ in missiology.\(^\text{31}\) One of the leaders of the Korean Assemblies of God, Jeong-Geun Pak, describes the difference between the Holy Spirit movement and shamanism through mutual comparison: first, the former is based on the creator God of monotheism, while the latter on dualistic pantheism; second, a man will experience heavenly joy and peace when filled with the Holy Spirit, while spirit-possessed shamans suffer from mental and physical pains; third, the former leads men to worship God, while the latter is a kind of idolatry that wants to use spirits; fourth, anyone can be filled with the Holy Spirit while only shamans can come into contact with spirits; fifth, the former has only one mediator, Christ, while the latter makes multiple shamans mediators; and sixth, through faith anyone can be filled with the Holy Spirit while shamans need special rituals and tools to have contact with spirits.\(^\text{32}\)

Since Korean shamanism functions as a folk religious phenomenon according to oral tradition without any sacred scriptures and formal theology (see 3.2.2), theological discussions between shamanism and Sunbogeum theology will be restricted in the following chapters to only those references which have been discussed by Korean Sunbogeum theologians. The Korean Assemblies of God does agree with selective portions of the theology of Walter J. Hollenweger. While his distinguished services to the research of world pentecostal movements are recognized, his critical intercultural theology is not easily accepted. His view of syncretism between Korean pentecostalism and shamanism is not accepted among the Korean Assemblies of God.\(^\text{33}\)
Second, the relationship between Minjung theology and Sunbogeum theology needs to be discussed as well. In the 1970s, both emerged as two distinctives within Korean Christianity. They held certain theological concerns in common: they started in the grassroots and both emphasize ‘the Spirit.’ Minjung theology, which originated from the liberal Kijang Presbyterianism, grew upon two fundamental assumptions. One is that it finds an analogy between oppressed Korean Minjung (ochlos: the subject of history) and the life of Jesus as it was understood by the Leben-Jesu-Forschung of the German liberal theology of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is Byung-Mu Ahn’s interpretation of Jesus and ochlos described by the “Minjung theologian” Mark’s Gospel. The other is that wherever Minjung is, so is ‘the Spirit.’ This idea finds its theoretical basis in the divine immanence as well as in the concept of a third stage in history, i.e., the “Age of the Holy Spirit” by Joachim von Fiore (ca.1130-1202). These two assumptions emphasize either the ‘historical Jesus’ or the ‘immanent Christ,’ i.e. the Spirit. It needs, however, to be noted that fundamentalistic Sunbogeumism takes the kerygma ‘Jesus is the Christ’ (Acts 5:32) as the centre of the Gospel: it does not separate the Holy Spirit from the risen Christ because it believes that only those who are justified by the redemptive grace of Jesus can be filled with the Holy Spirit from Heaven. The following seems to be the crucial difference between both movements: Minjung theology takes Minjung as the ‘revelational subject’ whereas Sunbogeumism takes Minjung as the ‘evangelization object’ of the Gospel.

Further, some Korean theologians discuss Minjung theology under the category of pentecostal Minjung. Sunbogeum pentecostals are the representatives for this Minjung theology. Boo-Woong Yoo, who belongs to the Kijang Presbyterian denomination, wrote: “We can conclude that the common voice of the two Minjung writings while both Sunghooon Myoung (Spiritual Dimension of Church Growth, 1990) and Young Hoon Lee (The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea, 1996) referred to his books; the KAOG has fundamentalistic view on the Bible and follows consequently exclusivist idea. Hollenweger’s critical view on the Bible and liberal understanding on intercultural relation will not be accepted by the KAOG.


Byung-Mu Ahn, “Jesus and Ochlos: centering around Mark’s Gospel,” in Minjung and Korean Theology, Seoul, 1982, pp.86-103; idem, “The Subject of History View from Mark’s Gospel,” op. cit., pp.151-184. Byung Mu Ahn had the view that the life of Jesus was not his personal biography but Minjung’s (social) biography. He cut off Paul’s Christology from Mark’s Galilean Jesus according to Bible criticism (redaction theory).

Nam-Dong Suh, “Jesus, Church History, and Korean Church,” in Christianity in Korean History, Seoul, pp.55-69; idem, “Minjung’s Theology: Confluence of Two Stories,” in op. cit., pp.124-163; Joachim divided church history into three ages: Father’s Age; Son’s Age; and Holy Spirit’s Age which would start from A.D. 1260 (after 42 generations). It was a dynamic, spiritual, and liberal interpretation of the Bible.

Sunhee Lee, Die Minjung-Theologie Ahn Byungmu’s von ihren Voraussetzungen her dargestellt, Frankfurt a. M., 1992, pp.63, 69, 240. Lee concluded that Ahn failed and brought his theology dangerously near to a Korean theology of folk ideologization because he could not find it on the right theological basis. Ahn did not acknowledge original sin, only structural sin; the suppressed Ochlos suffered by the oppressors and such a social structure were assumed to be sin.

in Korea – pentecostal and socio-political – is ‘sound of Han (resentment) and story of Han.’ At this point the pentecostal Minjung meets the socio-political Minjung. It is a matter of emphasis, not of substance.” According to him, there is no substantial difference between Korean Sunbogeum pentecostalism and Han-releasing Minjung rituals. Because of such a viewpoint, he views Yonggi Cho’s role in worship meetings exactly like that of a shaman. Further, he claims that the task of the pentecostal movement in Korea is to exploit hidden strength, which can be done through in the release of Han, so that the story of Han may be established. Keeping with this view, another Minjung theologian, Hong Jung Lee, criticized Korean pentecostalism as syncretism between fundamental/anti-intellectual theology and capitalized-imperialistic North American culture. According to him, the Korean church, in general, is a shamanized church. Sunbogeumism, as well as Korean mainline evangelicals, take the view that there is a substantial difference between ochlos-Minjung and Korean pentecostals. Korean evangelical scholars like Yung Han Kim, Myung Hyuk Kim, and Bong Ho Son hesitate to take Minjung theology as a genuine Christian theology representing the special revelation of God. They criticize it as a socio-philosophically-oriented interpretation of the Korean social context in view of a modern liberal interpretation of the Bible, which overshadows the redemptive work of Christ.

There is a phenomenal similarity between the two movements, both of which were grass-roots movements. Minjung theology contributed to the Korean church by calling attention to society, especially the oppressed people, while Sunbogeum pentecostals contributed to the saving souls as well as to changing the lives of oppressed people. Korean pentecostalism holds the opinion that Minjung will be saved through the redemption of Christ and the essence of Han (resentment) will be removed. It does not regard Minjung as a revelational/theological element.

40 ibid., p.223.


42 Yoo, Korean Pentecostalism ..., pp.224-225.

43 Hong Jung Lee, "Minjung and Pentecostal Movement in Korea" in Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition, edited by Allan M. Anderson and Walter J. Hollenweger, Sheffield, 1999, pp.138-160. Lee’s theological standpoint as Minjung theology (Minjung as the subjects of the pentecostal movement/141, 149) sees the Gospel of the early American missionaries and Korean pentecostalism as exclusivism against pluralism/inclusivism. His critical point is that the Korean church is generally shamanized (157). Nevertheless, he argues for a new Korean pentecost which would fuse with elements of Korean shamanism and its traditional religions. Hyeon Sung Bae’s criticism of Lee’s opinion represents the view of Korean pentecostalism which says that his judgement was limited by a subjective and partial interpretation (loc. cit. pp.161-163); Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., book review of Boo-Woong Yoo’s dissertation, in Pneuma, vol.12/1 (Spring 1990): 60-62. Wi Jo Kang, book review of Boo-Woong Yoo’s dissertation, in Missiology, vol.21/1 (1993): 93. Yoo’s book frustrated both reviewers (especially Robeck) in relation to the history and theology of Korean pentecostalism not only because he worked on it from his own point of view as a Minjung theologian but also because he was not well informed on the subject.


whatsoever. In Christ, there will be no more Minjung grass-roots who suffer, desperately wanting to be liberated from their various kinds of oppressions. Further, the question must be asked why Minjung theology has established a forum of theological discussions/concerns while so many of the underprivileged (people of Minjung) have been drawn into Sunbogeumism and eventually created a sweeping movement in Korean Christianity. The difference between them is as follows: first, Minjung theology, which sympathizes with traditional religion, especially with shamanism (cultural reactionism to the modernity), has adversely affected the modernization process of Korean socio-politics, whereas Sunbogeumism developed while riding the waves of the modern economic/industrial revolution in Korean society (cf. 7.1); second, Minjung theology identifies the suffering lives of Minjung (the subject of history) with that of Jesus who, as God’s revelation did not receive relief from His suffering, while Sunbogeumism regards human wholistically (Minjung included) as sinners and leads them to Jesus, who saves them from sin as well as their suffering through His Atonement and the Holy Spirit (8.3.4.2); third, Minjung theology was formulated by theologians who never shared the social status of the Minjung, but were non-Minjung elites, whereas Sunbogeumism emerged among the social status of grass-roots and spread out among them to raise an exodus of many of suffering grass-roots (Minjung); and fourth, the Minjung theology has remained a theological study for socio-political development (missio Dei) without forming a considerable movement, whereas the latter has developed into an effective stimulus which called forth pentecostal crusades and church growth in Korea.

Korean pentecostalism, which has been planted and grown in shamanistic/Han- ridden Minjung in Korea, not only displays great expansion, but it also calls forth suspicion of syncretism with Korean shamanistic religiosity. Critical scholars as well as Minjung theologians, view the relationship as syncretism, while Korean pentecostals interpret it as contact/indigenization. If any theologically responsible syncretism exists – Christianity recognizing a given situation and transforming it into a Christian truth (Hollenweger) – the different views can only be various expressions of the same view. The relationship may be compared to an another analogy. As Sunbogeumism understands the incarnation of Christ as the model of indigenization (14.2.1), if the Gospel is planted in a certain culture and transforms it and indigenized Christianity be produced, we can call this kind of indigenization as “symbiotic syncretism” according to the model of incarnation. As a result, we may call the relationship between Sunbogeumism and Korean shamanism as “symbiotic

46 In a sense, Minjung theologians are afraid of the expansion of pentecostalism because pentecostalism would be another powerful ecclesiastical organization able to destroy Minjung, the so-called bearer of truth; Kyoung Jae Kim, Christianity and the Encounter of Asian Religions. Dissertation. Zoetermeer, 1995, pp.120-144. Kim showed how Christianity meets the Korean cultural-religious heritage. He suggested four models that illustrate it: the sowing model; the yeast model; the converging model; and the grafting model. Sunbogeumism belongs to the sowing model which does not syncretize the Gospel with any kind of previous religio-cultural elements while Minjung theology belongs to the converging model which regards “the salvation experiences recorded in the Scriptures as equal to the salvation experiences of Minjung in their daily life” (132).


48 According to the different views in theology, it is unreasonable to judge the works of the other party from one’s own standpoint.
“Syncretism.” This is still an open question (17.3). At present, the relationship between *Sunbogeumism* and *Minjung* theology can be explained as similar phenomena with different theological viewpoints in modern Korean Christianity.

8.3. YONGGI CHO AS MAIN SUNBOGEUM THEOLOGIAN


In addition to these books, he published many other works. As a preacher and pastor of devoted prayer, his writings are more inspirational than theological. Jeong-Geun Pak [*Defending of Pentecostal Truth* (1970) and *Pentecostal Theology* (1978)], Jeong-Ryeol Pak [*A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (1985) and *Pentecostal Theology* (1996)], and Sunghoon Myoung [*Spiritual Dimension of Church Growth* (1993)] also contributed to the establishment of *Sunbogeum* theology, but, its fundamental framework has been primarily shaped by Cho.

Cho summarized the Gospel in the form of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Blessing (or Triple Salvation), which is built upon Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus’ cross is the major premise for both of them. The Fivefold Gospel is the doctrinal basis for the ‘Korean Pure Gospel,’ while Triple Blessing is its practical application. This formulation of Cho’s characterizes Korean pentecostal theology, i.e. *Sunbogeum* theology. Jong-Ho Byeon suggested that Yonggi Cho’s Korean *Sunbogeumism* could also be called “Yonggi-ism.” The controversy surrounding the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation will be discussed at the latter part of this section.

8.3.1. Fivefold Gospel

Originally, the content of Cho’s Triple Salvation (3 John 2) was preached early in his ministry. Then, the expression, Triple Salvation, was used as a slogan for Cho’s uneducated and poor congregation. In this way, the holistic salvation of spirit, body, and life situations through the cross of Christ, constitutes the foundation of

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49 See 6.4.7.


51 idem, *Triple Salvation*, p.266. For Cho, Christ’s substitutional death, namely the cross event, is the hermeneutical key for his theology.

Sunbogeumism; however, it was only a ministerial idea without any doctrinal structure. It was even accused of being parallel with the shamanistic invoking of worldly blessing. Later, in the early part of the 1980s, this content was formed into a systematic structure called the Fivefold Gospel. By Sunbogeumism, this Fivefold Gospel is understood as the central idea in the Scriptures. The ground for this doctrine was found in the Bible as the total depravity of Adam and complete redemption by Christ. This was a triple depravity as well as a triple salvation – spiritual, physical, and circumstantial. Cho has a trichotomic conception of man when he discusses triple salvation. Five aspects of this Gospel are worth noting.

The Gospel of the born-again comes first. Through the Atonement of Jesus, a sinner can be saved and the order of spirit, soul, and body can be established. Then Jesus abides in him and he will be blessed by God in his whole life. The Fivefold Gospel makes this point the most important and basic element of Christian faith.

Fullness with the Holy Spirit is the second point. This implies three experiences in the Spirit: regeneration, baptism in the Spirit, and sanctification. Baptism with the Spirit is for those who are born again and is given so that they may serve effectively. Sanctification is the grace of the Spirit for Spirit-baptized believers, which allows them to bear spiritual fruit. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is when a believer maintains both external gifts of the Spirit and the internal fruit of the Spirit. A Spirit-filled life is identical to a Christ-filled or Christ-like life.

The Gospel of blessing comes next. According to this Gospel, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament instructs God’s children to be in need or to be millionaires. The Bible, however, teaches God’s children to have what they need (Deut. 28:1-14; Ps. 23:1) and God’s intention is to supply them according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). The material problems of this world (debt, poverty, mammonism, etc.) were caused by man’s disobedience against God’s sovereignty (sin). Through Jesus’ Atonement and His grace, believers will be saved from such a curse (2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 3:4). Because, believers as well as God’s church and mission on earth, cannot be separated from the material environment, God will bless them with spiritual and material means so that they have what they need and are able to give. These are the general principles of God’s blessing in relation to the material.

Divine healing is the fourth point. Disease, which is the beginning of death, is caused by Satan, guilt, and the curse of God. Christ redeemed all three grounds for disease so that believers can be healed. This teaching came to Cho from the Full Gospel tradition of the Holiness movement and the Scriptures. His own physical weakness inspired him to develop this doctrine, too (6.3.2.1).

Finally, there is the Gospel of the second coming and the new heaven, which gives believers great hope and the desire to live a holy life and evangelize. It places

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55 Cho, ibid., pp.91-140. The features of a Spirit-filled person are: overflowing joy (1 Thess. 1:6-7); boldness in faith (Heb. 11:1-2); being filled with God’s love (Rom. 5:5); overflowing liveness (John 6:63); power of divine healing (Mark 16:17); overflowing peace and gratitude (Eph. 5:20; Phil.4:7); constant prayer in tongues (Acts 2:4); life that is filled with miracles (Matt. 28:18); being filled with Spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22-25); and active evangelization (Acts 1:8).
56 ibid., pp.142-167.
the focus on the pretribulational view within eschatology. This doctrine was added to the previous four points so that its structure as pure Gospel may be complete.

This Fivefold Gospel is systematically arranged according to the salvation of spirit, soul, body, circumstances, and the future (the third and the fourth point can be interchanged). But, the fullness with the Holy Spirit and the second coming (second and fifth point) are not included in the Triple Salvation. This ‘pure Gospel’ (Sunbogeum) is preached as the Full Gospel ‘message’ and Full Gospel ‘faith,’ which start from the redemptive grace of the cross of Jesus Christ. This Fivefold Gospel is the essential feature of Sunbogeum theology.

8.3.2. Triple Salvation

When Cho published his book, *Triple Salvation*, in 1977, he stated in the preface: “Triple Salvation is the idea of my faith and the philosophical foundation of Gospel witness.” It came to him not from theological study but from the Bible (3 John 2), “after having constant prayer in agony and tears.” But it does not mean that he was entirely alienated from the thoughts of others when formulating his idea of Triple Salvation. Vinson Synan writes that this blessing idea “reflected the influence of the American ‘faith’ teachers such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland, who themselves were influenced by Oral Roberts.” At the theological seminary, Cho had learned about the God of past and future, but now he began to realize the ‘present’ God who lives, loves, and takes care of us. Then, 3 John 2 became a principle through which he interpreted the entire Scriptures. Two assumptions of this principle were the good God and the holistic salvation of Jesus Christ through His Cross. The following three elements of the Triple Salvation are the practical application of the Fivefold Gospel.

The first principle of Triple Salvation refers to “as your soul prospers” (3 John 2d), and lays the foundation of God’s salvation. The Triune God created man in His image: this is the base of the trichotomy of the spirit, soul, and body. These were distinguishable but not separable. After the Fall, man’s spirit was occupied by the evil spirit, namely Satan. Thus, man became Satan’s servant. Man’s existence is influenced by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.

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57 Filling in the Spirit as in the second point, can be also understood as surrendering to the Spirit with one’s full soul (mind or person).
60 *ibid.*, p.18. He began his ministry among the war-devastated and despairing Koreans.
62 Cho was not trained of a ‘well organized theological institute.’ Two-year course at KAOG seminary was not of a higher standard than a simple Bible school. This means he was not absorbed by a certain established theological structure. Therefore, his approach to the Bible as well as to God might have inclined not to a propositional way but to an ontological one. By such a circumstance (which may serve as a context for the occurrence of revolutionary or revelational ideas), it seemed that he was able to reach the reality closer; Cho, ibid., p.266. Cho says that Triple Salvation’s great premise is the cross of Jesus Christ. His theological development is based on it according to his interpretation of it. It is noteworthy that some accused Cho of ‘theology without the cross.’ We discuss this at chapter 11.
(1 John 2:17). In this way, the soul-centred life witnesses sinful human existence. Jesus Christ gives His salvific grace primarily for the salvation of man’s spirit. Otherwise, man cannot be related to God. When a sinner repents and accepts Jesus as his Saviour, the Holy Spirit blows in man’s spirit and gives eternal life. Then, the Spirit resides in his spirit. This is salvation.

This soul needs to be disciplined as it resists the Spirit’s guidance. At the same time, the soul needs to be nourished and trained through the Word of God. When the soul has been broken and trained by the Word of God, then man (his soul) is ready to live according to God’s Word without resistance. Then the flesh must be addressed. This cannot be broken or disciplined because it is not bestowed with any consciousness. Because flesh reacts by impulse, it must be crucified at the cross. The way to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires is to be baptized in the water with Christ, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to fast and pray.

A soul that prospers is then presented – a man filled with the Holy Spirit. Having his spirit saved and regenerated, his soul broken and tamed, and his flesh brought to its knees through the soul, the Holy Spirit can then flow through his spirit, soul, and body. This is the state of being filled with the Holy Spirit and is the soul’s prosperity.63

The second element of Triple Salvation is that “in all respects you may prosper” (3 John 2b). This means that a believer shall be prosperous in whatever he is engaged. Therefore, it is also called the successful life, a natural result of a man whose soul prospers and receives. Covetousness belongs to the satanic realm, while prosperity to that of God. While Korean Christians have generally accepted that poverty and suffering are a Christian virtue and that the material world belongs to the satanic realm, Cho regarded such viewpoints as distorted, not Biblical.

In association with material blessings, Cho teaches that tithing is an obligation of God’s children because it demonstrates their acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty in the material world. We should not tithe for the purpose of receiving God’s blessing. Rather, by obeying God through tithing, one can be freed from being the slave of material things and can employ material as a steward of God, according to His will. Besides tithing, he vividly teaches three principles of offering (time, material, life etc.) to God, which one can freely do according to his faith for God’s work including the principle of planting and harvest, the principle of investment, and the principle of the “rumbling of a mountain.”64

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63 Cho, *Triple Salvation*, 35-103. Cho does not see man as three separate parts but as a whole person (as if ‘one but Tri-une God’) when he explains the inner realm of man in relation to salvation. When Sunbogeumism puts ‘soul prospers’ first instead of ‘spirit prospers,’ it implies that it takes soul (psyche) as the whole person (Acts 2:41, 43); Cf. Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man I, II, III*, 1968, trans. into Korean, Seoul, I (1972/14 ed., 1985), II (1972/12 ed., 1985), III (1974/10 ed., 1986). Cho has similar thoughts in many ways to Nee’s, especially in his trichotomic understanding of man. Nee, however, did not emphasize the material blessing and healing even though he had the view of holistic redemption in Christ; see footnote 4 of this chapter.

64 Cho, ibid., pp.164-172. These are not doctrines but a means of practical application for believers. Such illustrations were an effective tool for ordinary people to apply in their faith lives. All three principles were taken from the Bible. The first principle was illustrated by the biological and natural law of planting and harvest (2 Cor.9:6), the second by the examples of investing and God’s rewards (Phil. 4:15-19; Luke 9:10-17), and the third by the physical law of echo as an illustration for giving and reward (Luke 6:38).
In addition, he teaches believers to keep their minds from the following faults, which destroy themselves and hinder God’s blessing: hatred, anger, greed, perfectionism, guilty conscience, fear, and frustration. He also adds two important measures that will lead believers to successful lives—how to discern the will of God and how to live with clear-cut objectives in pursuit of His will. In short, being a prosperous Christian according to God’s will is the point Cho emphasizes with this blessing.

The third and final element of the Triple Salvation advocates being “in good health” (3 John 2c). He makes the spiritual problem clear in connection with disease which is caused by sin, Satan, and the curse of God. His application of Christ’s redemption to this problem is quite logical and mathematical even though this does not mean that every disease will (or should) be healed mechanically through our faith. His understanding of God’s salvation is ‘black and white’—either one belongs to the satanic realm or to God. His point for this salvation is that believers are qualified to receive divine healing from God’s holistic redemptive prescription. The Holy Spirit performs God’s grace of Triple Salvation on earth.

Cho explains how believers can receive healing. They should desire to be healthy, repent from all sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, forgive each other, pray in faith, and they should receive God and live holy. He also emphasizes that after healing, one must live in Christ because evil spirits (the devil) may come in again with disease (Luke 11:24-26; John 5:14).

Through God’s Triple Salvation, people can live as free human beings. The saved person is free from evil desire, habit of sin, anxiety, fear, and fear of death. Because Triple Salvation is performed by the Holy Spirit, Christians must be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit so that they remain free. Therefore, Sunbogeunism is different from Yong-Do Yi’s mystical pentecost movement, which emerged in the 1930s under Japanese colonial government.

65 Cho, ibid., pp.206-236. How to discern the will of God: first, a firm decision to obey the will of God without reservation (Rom. 8:14); second, constant prayer waiting for God-given desire (Phil. 2:13); third, judging the desire to see if it accords with the Scriptures (Matt. 4:1-11); fourth, pray if any circumstantial evidence is given (1 King 18:44; Judges 6:36-40); and fifth, pray if peace is settled in one’s heart (Ps. 107:30). If we know the will of God for us we need to pursue it by making His will our object: first, set a clear-cut goal (Mark 11:24); second, have a burning desire (Rev. 3:15); third, always remember the law of “flocking together with birds of a feather” (2 Chron. 11:10ff; 1 King. 12:8-15) and the law of looking (Gen. 13:14-15); fourth, do not lose peace in one’s heart (James 4:8); and fifth, acknowledge success with one’s mouth (Prov. 6:2; Mark 11:23).

66 ibid., pp.243-283. This does not mean that no disease is caused by careless sanitary (or health) management or no medical treatment is needed.

67 ibid., pp.309-312. Cho believes that evil spirits bring evil thoughts and deeds. Especially, in his early ministry, such a tendency was distinct. It is an expression of his black and white logic.

68 See 4.3.2.1 and 4.4. We can compare them as follows: first, their Christology is strikingly different. Yong-Do Yi aimed to lose the world and have Jesus. His Christ-passion mysticism sought union with Jesus in love and death for its own sake. There is neither a clear concept of Christ’s redemption nor new hope in resurrection. He only pushed forwards the cross and sought to sacrifice himself together with Jesus. His imitatio Christi became ‘crucified with Jesus together.’ Sunbogeunism, however, is based on the redemptive grace of Christ; second, consequently, Yi’s attitude was extremely dualistic. He saw the material world or flesh as obstacles to spiritual faith. He dreamed and wished to live free from his family so that he could just love Jesus and serve others. Sunbogeunism on the contrary makes a synthesis of the material and spiritual world because the latter will be the means for serving God. Yi looked at the suffering side of the cross while Sunbogeunism looks at both sides, the suffering and the glory; third, Yi did not consider reason as well as theology as important. He
believer’s suffering and his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:1-10; 1 Pet. 5:1-11). God’s thorns can be our mental and physical weaknesses, poverty, insults, persecution, and other difficulties.69

This Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation brought controversy, however. Because Cho belongs to the circle of fundamentalists, most criticism refers to both his contribution and problems. Having studied his ideas for a decade, the Tonghap Presbyterian Denomination presented a study (1994) which refers to Cho’s tendency of matching the needs and desires of the Korean folk population. It pointed out the positive side of his views: arousing an interest in pneumatology, bringing attention to the supernatural realm of Christian faith, positively affecting believers’ faith, influencing church growth, and inspiring hope for the Gospel through connecting salvific grace with the realms of health and economics. The study, however, also raised critical questions of his view of the Bible. Cho deviated from the main theme of the Scriptures and used a literal interpretation of the Scriptures which centres on rebirth, infilling with the Spirit, blessing, divine healing, and the Second Coming.70 This conclusion (1994) manifested a summary and a correction of the 1983 view of the Tonghap denomination, which criticized the Triple Gospel without mentioning any positive contribution. The 1983 view said that the Gospel of the Triple Blessing must recognize that the source of blessing is God, not man; it has the tendency of teaching spiritual salvation as the means for the blessing of earthly life; and its theory, which links God’s salvation with the idea of world-centredness, success-centredness and material-centredness, has the danger of falling into a shamanistic blessing-seeking faith.71

Aron Pak, the conservative Presbyterian theologian, commented that the idea of holistic salvation is Scriptural and that its ultimate objective in God’s sovereign glorification is Calvinistic; however, its theological development and conclusion are somewhat mysterious and incomprehensible to the ordinary theological mind.72 Tae-Bok Kim believes that the idea of Triple Salvation contributed for Korean churches reading the Bible with a positive attitude, while unconsciously influencing them to make God as their means for worldly blessing, making success-oriented

72 Aron Pak, ibid.
secularism a Christian value system. Bong-Ho Son and other critical Korean scholars point out the danger of Triple Salvation teaching: it may attract shamanistically-oriented Korean people to the Christian church for the sole purpose of receiving blessings. Kyong Jae Kim summarized the theology of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation as follows: its contributions are, first, its invaluable role as a holistic-salvific message and hope for suffering Koreans during the social shift of industrialization/urbanization from the 1960s to the 1990s, and, second, its great contribution to the growth of Korean churches. Kim then summarized its critical problems as being its belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and its literal interpretation, and, second, its understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit as limiting in ecclesiology, neglecting His work in society and history. The final criticism is that it despises traditional religions as idolatries, ignoring religious syncretism. In addition, Gwang-Seon Suh believes that the Triple Salvation tends towards asocial individualism, with a lack of consciousness for social problems and historical responsibility. Cho’s ‘prosperity theology’ has been criticized as a capitalistic religion by critical and liberal circles in general, while evangelical theologians, who hold a holistic view of the Atonement of Christ like classical pentecostalism, ask if his teaching matches the Biblical teaching on prosperity. Young Hoon Lee, the director of the International Theological Institute of Yoido Sunbogeum Church, introduced the ‘Biblical teaching on prosperity theology.’ For him the Biblical teaching on prosperity harmonizes with ‘prosperity theology.’ He emphasized, however, that “prosperity and success should never be put ahead of God.”

The International Theological Institute (ITI, a representative of Sunbogeunism), advocates Cho’s Sunbogeunism. Its publication, Faith and Theology of Yoido Sunbogeum Church I, II (1993), tried to defend Cho against the critique of the Tonghap denomination. They argue the following: first, this Gospel shares its basic theological thought with that of world pentecostalism, especially with that of

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73 Tae-Bok Kim, “What is the Principle of Triple Salvation?” in Pulpit Ministry (November 1981), Seoul, quoted from Jun-Be Ahn, Pastor Cho Yonggi ..., pp.227-233; Albert Betschel, ibid., pp.64-69. Betschel also criticized Cho’s way of thinking as inverting the cause (God) and consequence (vision or church growth).


77 “Is Prosperity Theology Scriptural in the Midst of Suffering?” WEF-Theological News, vol. 25/1(Jan-Mar. 95): 1-2. This is the report of and excerpts from the consultation on prosperity theology and theology of suffering held by the world evangelical fellowship at the Torch Centre Seoul (28.9-1.10.1994).

78 These two books originally aimed at explaining and vindicating Cho against the views of Tonghap Presbyterian church. These books, therefore, describe the history and theology of pentecostalism in general. They deal with the history and doctrine of the American Assemblies of God, the history and theology of Sunbogeunism (Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation), and the theological debates between Tonghap denomination and Yoido Church.
the Assemblies of God; second, it introduces the ‘good God’ and the holistic salvation in Christ’s redemption and criticizes the traditional concepts of Korean churches as non-Biblical dualism, which emphasizes spiritual salvation separate from the material realm; and third, basing itself on the Scriptures, it tries to plant the Gospel in Korean Minjung, who exist under a shamanist mentality, and transform them by the indigenization of the Gospel.79

In relation to Cho’s view on Triple Salvation, two problems need to be discussed. The first is the weakness of his use of 3 John 2. He took verse 2 out of context, a basic error in interpreting the Scriptures. The richness of the Bible cannot be reduced to one key verse. Another problem is his view of the cross, which is the premise of Triple Salvation. He emphasized the substitutional side of the cross but overlooked its reconciliation side. These two weaknesses will be discussed later.

8.3.3. Methodology of Fourth Dimension

Even though we cannot entirely separate the content from the method of a theology, it is important to realize that Cho’s method is remarkable. According to him, theology must clarify the relationship between revelation and experience because the ultimate object of God’s revelation is focused upon humans, not upon the Bible. This is the ultimate task of theology as well, a hermeneutical principle in theology.80

Because he emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His holistic salvation, he uses all possible means, especially scientific knowledge, to illuminate the Gospel. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to employ modern technical means of communication like radio, TV, newspapers, computers, and other telecommunication as means of evangelizing the Gospel. In this sense, his theology may be called an open or frontier theology in pentecostalism 81 and his methodology can be called ‘supernatural science.’ The basic assumption for such a methodology is founded upon the idea that the spiritual realm controls the material realm. He found it in the Bible. This methodology is called the fourth dimension.

In this subsection, we will deal with the contents of the fourth dimension (8.3.3.1), the scientific approach (8.3.3.2), and the synthetic feature (8.3.3.3). Since the relationship between spiritual and material world constitutes the main contents of the fourth dimension, the scientific approach and synthetic feature are also included in this methodology. The fourth dimension also needs to be understood in relation to the radical pneumatological theology of Sunbogeunism.

8.3.3.1. The Contents of Fourth Dimension

This method was introduced in Cho’s book The Fourth Dimension I (1979) and its revised volume II (1983).82 When he published the first book, he put the following

79 TTI, Faith and Theology ... I., pp.300-304.
81 idem, The History ..., pp.7-12 in Part I. Pentecostalism is characterized in many ways: truth on fire; full Gospel; hot Gospel; theology of immediacy; theology on the move; and theology of power. Sunbogeunism may be one of the best examples of such characteristics.
82 In the second publication, the catchwords “more secrets for a successful faith life” were added on the front cover page. At the same time, R. Whitney Manzano became the co-writer of this volume. It seems that Manzano helped him to deal with scientific and philosophical material; Cho, The Fourth
subtitle on the front cover, “The key to putting your faith to work for a successful life.” In other words, this methodology was to explain how we put our God-given faith to practical use in such a way that God can work with us through His Spirit. In connection with this, he claims that the spirit controls the material world. This idea is regarded as an analogy of incarnation. As a ‘Spirit-filled pentecostal,’ Cho believed that it became the key for interpreting the spiritual lives of Christians. The *Fourth Dimension* was formulated to introduce this idea and its practical application.

The term ‘fourth dimension’ does not have any meaning in itself except that it represents the idea that the higher dimension, the spirit, controls the lower dimension, the material. Cho presented his idea using a geometric illustration: a line between two points is one dimension; a plane, which is created by adding line upon line, is two dimensional; and a cubic, which is formed by piling up the plane, is the third dimension. The whole material world belongs to the third dimension; however, the spiritual belongs to the realm of the fourth dimension. Logically, then, the higher dimension includes and controls the lower dimensions. He found this principle in the creation description of the Bible, where it is stated that the Holy Spirit (the fourth dimension) brought order out of chaos (the third dimension as described in Gen. 1:2-4). A new, beautiful order was created by the fourth dimension. This principle, that the fourth spiritual dimension incubates the third, chaotic material dimension and creates a new being, can be applied to the regeneration provided for Christians by the Second Adam through His Spirit.

The function of the spiritual realm is understood by him as a general phenomenon in the world. Therefore, in the fourth dimension, either good or evil is created, he argues. He warns Christianity of the dangers and deceptions of other fourth-dimensional phenomena in the contemporary religious world: the development of the subconscious by the Unitarian Church in America; healing through Yoga meditation; the miracles of Japanese Sokagakkai; the self-hypnosis of Zen Buddhism; and transcendental meditation. Christianity should know Biblical truth and apply it to the fourth dimension, he asserts. Because humans are composed of both the spiritual and physical realms and live in the world of three spiritual forces (the Spirit of God, the spirit of man, and the spirit of Satan), he urges believers to walk closely with the Holy Spirit so that God’s sovereignty can be established by conquering satanic influence. To do this, man’s spirit must be regenerated by Christ’s redemption and the Holy Spirit. The regenerated man is then equipped with the ability to spiritually communicate with the Holy Spirit through dreams and visions. This communication is nothing else than a constant prayer before God in anticipation of an answer. Then miracles and God’s answers can follow in the spiritual and physical realms of believers. This manifests the principle of the fourth dimension, which makes the relationship between the spirit and the material the central element. It is interesting to note that Cho found this fourth dimension when

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83 Yonggi Cho, *The Fourth Dimension I*, pp.6,9,21, 23, 26, 30, 35, 36, 49 et al.
85 Ibid. (both).
he seriously thought through the problem that false religions or evil spirits can also do some kind of miracles. As a pentecostal, he was confused in this matter.86

This fourth dimension is his methodology. It has unfamiliar ideas and suspicious elements as compared to most theological methodology. Therefore, some foreign critics view his principles in The Fourth Dimension as being unbiblical.87 Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon criticized Cho’s idea that the spirit controls the material is the same concept of a Hindu (Yoga) god who is “the All and made everything out of Himself.”88 Albert Betschel also criticized Cho’s way of understanding the fourth dimension in the Bible (Gen.1: 2-3) as being Christian New Age version. He contends that Cho makes the Holy Spirit the same cosmic power found within the New Age Movement, through which man can accomplish great things. He further raised questions if Cho wants to make the work of God tangible for the human spirit and explicable as a means for the process of wonders. Betschel regards this as an erroneous attempt to seek a rational explanation for a spiritual process.89 But Betschel’s criticism, furnishing some theological insights into Cho’s methodology, seems to be rooted in a misunderstanding of Cho’s writing. Cho writes that “the whole chaos world was incubated by the Holy Spirit, then the word of creation was given and a new world came into being.”90 whereas Betschel understood it as “the Holy Spirit evolved from Tohuwabohu.” As a result, Betschel identifies Cho’s understanding of the Holy Spirit as identical with cosmic power of the New Age movement.91

8.3.3.2. Scientific Approach

Cho writes: “Since the physical world is a shadow of the spiritual world, what we know scientifically of the material helps us in understanding the spiritual. Jesus revealed spiritual truth by using material examples.”92 And he goes on as follows:

It is my intention to try to understand with you, my reader, the newest neuroscientific developments as they relate to our sensory perceptions and consciousness, then relate what we are now learning to the Truth about us derived from God’s final word, the Scriptures... I keep abreast of what is happening in the world of science. The reason for this is that I believe that we who proclaim the Word of God have an opportunity and responsibility to unveil reality to the world in a way that the world can understand.93

He not only employed modern technology for his church’s administration and evangelization, but he also adopted scientific knowledge in fields such as psychology, human anatomy, physics, and linguistics, in order to interpret and apply the principles of the fourth dimension more practically as found in the Scriptures.94

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87 Korean version of The Fourth Dimension was first published in 1996 in Korea.
89 Albert Betschel, ibid., pp.53-59.
90 Cho, ibid., p.17
91 Betschel, pp.55-57.
92 Cho, p. 97.
93 ibid., p.104.
According to him, the presence of God and the relationship between Him and believers are so real and visible that “we shall know how great the power of our prayer is if we calculate prayer in the realm of numerical value...Our prayer can be verified mathematically, physically, and scientifically.” He used Einstein’s theory of the energymass equation ($E = mc^2$) as an illustration.\(^95\) This idea, as well as the notion that the work of a living God can be scientifically (practically and systematically) explained, may find a common conceptional ground with the methodological foundation of Christian phenomenology.\(^96\) A similar approach with scientific methods is taken by Walter J. Hollenweger, who introduced modern scientific achievements such as knowledge about the relationship between the spiritual realm and the material to argue for justifying ecumenical religious dialogue criticizing European/ traditional theology, which has been influenced by the logic of Aristotelian/natural scientific absolutism.\(^97\)

Cho reads widely in scientific publications and uses this knowledge for illustrating the effects of the spiritual realm on the material realm. This is the reason why his method can be called ‘supernatural science.’\(^98\) This idea is also implied in the methodology of C. Peter Wagner of Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Missions and Institute of Church Growth. He approaches church growth as a science.\(^99\) Despite its contributions to church growth, this approach was criticized by Bong-Ho Son as a theological pseudo-science for lacking a “critical attitude toward the materialism of modern culture.”\(^100\) Hunt and McMahon further criticized

natural science and use its methodology for theological study. Economics is also an important subject for theological education, he asserts. Theology not only should deal with spiritual principles but also disclose the mental as well as the material worlds as they are, says Torrey.

\(^{95}\) Cho, “Visible Faith,” in *Love and Blessing*, vol. 3 of *Fragmentary Thought in Ministry*, Seoul, 1978/5 ed., 1983, pp.35-41. Cho adopted the formula to explain how a definite prayer can be answered. He insists that the energy of our prayer is needed if man wants to have ‘the mass of answer through prayer.’ When man looks at something intensively, energy will be generated (in him) and when this energy becomes strong, mass will be generated, he says. Even though such a comparison (between God’s order of prayer/answer and physical/human phenomenon) may be naive in the view of academics, his scientific attitude to Christian faith is well manifested. For example, when Isaac was born to his aged parents, their physical situations were actually changed to a state in which his mother could conceive and bear a baby, Cho believes. His intention is obvious, in that using such scientific achievements he wants to help scientifically-trained modern man realize the presence of the living God who loves and actually works for him.


\(^{99}\) C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church*, Glendale, CA, 1976/5 ed., 1978, pp.38-40; idem, *Church Growth & The Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate*, 1981/ reprinted, 1987, Kent, pp. 69-86. Here, Wagner explains the methodology in two ways: as a ‘consecrated pragmatism’ and as a science. Pragmatism is understood by him as the option or means which most effectively accomplishes the goal. “A means that fails to accomplish the goal is not, by anyone’s measurement, a justifiable means,” he argues (75). Science is understood by him as “the attempt to explain certain phenomena in a reasonable and systematic way” (76). Yonggi Cho’s scientific methodology and Wagner’s idea have much similarity.

\(^{100}\) Bong-Ho Son, ibid., p.259.
it as psychologized shamanism, the reappearance of primitive paganism (shamanism) under the guise of modern psychology.  

8.3.3.3. Synthetic Feature

As spirit has both features of penetrating the boundaries and preserving particularity, pneumatology-emphasizing pentecostalism shows its dynamism in synthetic features. Through materialization (experience) of the norm (Word of God, or Idea), pentecostalism can synthesize such areas as rationalism with empiricism, romantic-idealism with materialism, and deductive-oriented conservatism with inductive-oriented liberalism. Even Schleiermacher’s theology, which is rooted in the Moravian missionary movement and which paved the way for a new methodology in modern Protestantism, contributed to pentecostalism’s making experience the authoritative determinant of theological truths.

Cho’s approach to this matter surpasses classical pentecostalism. The best example is his idea of the joint blessing of the soul and material. Because of his basic understanding of holistic salvation through God’s ‘fourth dimensional’ Spirit, his methodology shows strong synthetic features. He emphasizes the Calvinistic sovereignty of God, although his evangelistic efforts are Arminian in approach. While his theology is grounded on traditional and reformist theologies, his ecumenism and evangelism style place him across traditional boundaries, leaving him open to other theological circles. The International Theological Institute of Yoido Sunbogeum Church advocated the Fivefold Gospel as a synthetic theology, which integrates the essence of Calvinistic sovereignty of God with that of Arminian

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101 David Hunt and T.A. McMahon, ibid., pp.174-175. C. Peter Wagner, John Wimber, Sanford, and Kelsey were also included in this category of interpreting the Bible in a wrong way through a grid of mysticism, they argue.

102 Colin E. Gunton, The One, the Three and the Many: Cambridge, Great Britain, 1993, pp.181-184.


104 L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology: Grand Rapids, MI, 1939, 1941/ rep., 1984, pp.19-20. “The religious consciousness of man was substituted for the Word of God as the source of theology ... his starting point is anthropological rather than theological,” argued Berkhof; James H. Railey, Jr and Benny C. Aker, “Theological Foundations,” in Systematic Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective (STAPP), edited by Stanley M. Horton, Springfield, MO, 1994, p.44; Friedlich W. Kantzenbach, Programmen der Theologie: Denker, Schulen, Wirkungen von Schleiermacher bis Moltmann, München, 1978, pp.18-19, 22,34. Schleiermacher’s dialogue between Christianity and natural science as well as his experience-oriented understanding of religion opened up a theo retical explanation for revival theology, which might have indirectly related to the emergence of pentecostalism. At the same time he is regarded as the pioneer of liberal theology. Since Sunbogeumism as well as pentecostalism were essentially related to religious experience, which is viewed as an anthropological approach in theology and, therefore, is regarded as liberalism, we may also categorize Sunbogeumism as ‘liberalism’ in the sense that it also stresses the human effort in faith (the danger of self-righteousness).
revival theology and pneumatological dynamism. In 1972, Jong-Ho Byeon called Cho a “harmonizer of dualistic sphere” having noticed that he was both spiritual and physical, ideal and practical, Korean and global, pentecostal and cultured, conservative and progressive, living in heaven and striving on earth, and preaching the near parousia and promoting national prosperity of all ages. Byeong-So Min views Cho’s theology as a synthetic theology, which can integrate the elements of Korean conservative, liberal, and progressive theologies.

This synthesizing characteristic was criticized because of its tendency to fall into syncretism (cf. 8.2.3). Conservative evangelical theologians such as Ui-Hwan Kim and modern theologians such as Paul Tillich warned against such dangers. In its early years, Sunbogeumism was not entirely free from this weakness.

8.3.4. Application of Cho’s Methodology

Cho emphasized that the method of theology must be applied through faith. Therefore, people who want to practise fourth-dimensional faith must constantly pray and wait before God so that the interrelationship between God and human beings can be maintained. Applying his method requires three practices – Visualization, the renewal of the mind, and the spoken word. These three aspects are interrelated. This sub-section discusses these requisites one by one.

8.3.4.1. Visualization

Dreams and visions, imagination, incubation, and visualization are different aspects of the same theme. Consulting the theories of philosophical linguistics developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein and John William Miller, Cho explains the importance of visualization as a communication apparatus: man has words in his mind in the form of a picture or a visualization before he communicates them to others through spoken words. Therefore, the visualization or picture is the original communication means rather than the word, which is merely a function conveying the inner picture. When the exalted Christ sends His Holy Spirit to us, there is fellowship with Him and we shall prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams (Acts 2:14-18). Here the method of the fourth dimension, the Spirit controlling the material realm, is applied. Five factors contribute to using visualization as a means of practising one’s faith.

First, one must discern God’s will for oneself. To do this, one must give up one’s own plans and desires asking God to show His will. A vision must be given

105 ITI, *Faith and Theology I*, pp.119-122; Cho does not hesitate to meet with Jürgen Moltmann and Harvey Cox. He was invited to attend the WCC world conference as a special guest (8th general conference/ 3-15. 12. 1998/ Zimbabwe) even though he was not able to attend.


107 Byeong-So Min, ibid., pp.87-91.

108 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1, Chicago, 1951, pp. 122-126. Because of this characteristic, Sunbogeumism may not be free from such dangers. Kim warned against fusing pietism with rationalism, while Tillich pointed out the danger of shifting inner-revelation or spiritualism into rationalism.


111 Idem, *Triple Salvation*, 1979, pp.206-221. See the second point of 8.3.2.
by God and visualization should be practised according to God’s will for us. Cho warns of false goal-setting and visions saying, “In Sokagakkai they draw a picture of prosperity, repeating phrases over and over, trying to develop the human spiritual fourth dimension; and these people are creating something” and then encourages believers saying, “Let the Holy Spirit come and quicken the Scriptures you read and implant visions in the young and dreams in the old.”

Second, the motivation of visualization must be a love for God and love for God’s people. This agape love will be given to believers through His Spirit. The separative tendency of either loving God by conservatism or loving people by liberalism must be overcome through the greatest commandment of the Lord to love God with all one’s resources and love neighbours as oneself.

Third, the basic reason for envisioning an objective is to vitalize our faith in God. Because faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1a), Cho says, one must have definite objectives in mind before substance can be full and effective. Man’s living faith works through his defining a goal, having a burning desire for it, praying constantly, and confessing it as if it were already answered. The practical expression of this claims that if there is nothing hoped for there may be no actual faith in God.

Fourth, to dream and visualize is to establish a definite prayer goal before God. Because man is too prone to follow worldly pursuits rather than concentrating on God, he must have a clear vision or burning desire in order to keep praying and waiting on God. Sometimes man cannot thank and glorify God for an answer to prayer if he did not pray for a specific vision because it is difficult for him to recognize an answer as being from God or happening by chance, Cho says.

Fifth, dreams and visions are the spiritual languages of the ‘fourth dimension.’ The Holy Spirit communicates with believers through them; therefore, believers are to use them to communicate with the Holy Spirit. Cho interprets the following Biblical stories as positive and negative examples of ‘looking at and imagining’ in fourth dimensional communication between God and men: Adam and Eve with the forbidden tree; Lot’s wife who looked back; Abraham’s looking at the Canaan land and the stars; Jacob’s story of his spotted and speckled cattle; and the gazing upon the Son of God on the cross, who shed His blood for our sins. As a spiritual means, visions and dreams can be used only by the regenerated spirit (heart, subconscious and unconscious mind) even though soul or the conscious mind decides the action of a man.

Visualization can be practised by those who are filled in the Holy Spirit and devote their lives to prayer because visions and dreams are only given by God through His Spirit. The decision to follow God is also required. Visions wake our faith and provide us with the expectation for answered prayer. As God through His Spirit gave dreams and visions to the prophets in the Old Testament time, Spirit-

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113 idem, vol. II, pp.147-181.
114 ibid., vol.1, pp.9-35.
115 ibid., 17-23.
116 ibid., pp.44-50.
117 ibid., pp.41-50. vol. II, pp.43-58. According to Cho, man’s spirit can be viewed as part of his soul. Heart, inner man, subconscious, and unconscious mind seem to be treated as the same as spirit.
filled saints of today are also called to have communication with God through Holy Spirit. Visualization is the practical means for accomplishing this.

Cho’s theory of visualization is criticized primarily in two aspects. First, Hunt and McMahon criticize that it is an old, occult practice of shamanism because visualization is the most effective form of shamanism in its physical and spiritual healing practices.118 Second, Betschel argues that this imagination or visualization inverts the cause (God) and consequence. This is not faith in God but faith for the sake of faith, he argues.119 According to Cho, however, the healing experiences of other religious practices like Buddhist monks, Yoga, and Japanese Sokagakki, as well as transcendental meditation, must be rejected on the ground that they are satanic deceptions.120

8.3.4.2. Renewal of Mind

This teaching is related to the mental attitude of believers who are qualified to have communication with God. As human beings are created after the image of God and bestowed with the capacity for thinking, regenerated man must tune his thoughts with that of God so that he may communicate with Him through His Word and Spirit. This mindset requires three steps: first, changing the thinking attitude from a negative one to a positive one; second, training oneself constantly in terms of miracles; and third, orienting one’s mind to God, who never lacks or fails.121

A more detailed picture, however, is needed. When a sinner is converted, his spirit is regenerated and he has a relationship with God; however, as a born-again Christian – like a baby – one must be renewed in his mind (nous or reason) so that he may walk according to the will of God in this world (Rom. 12:2). Through reading and hearing the Word of God (God’s thoughts) and obeying Him, man’s thoughts and life can be renewed. The fourth dimension can then be practiced by those who have renewed their thinking attitudes because these people are prepared to walk with God in faith. Cho attempted to make believers aware of their rights and entitlements which have been bestowed on them by God in Jesus Christ. The prescription for this was to learn to think according to the Word of God and to speak and dream according to the will of God. The objective of renewal of the mind consists in the expectation that Spiritual experiences should not remain personal ecstasies but be developed into a powerful reform movement so that souls are saved and blessed and social evils cured. Its logical basis consists in the fact that a human, as a free-willed being, should conform his mind and thoughts to those of God, as revealed in the Bible, if he wants to work with God. Its actual application consists in the practices of positive thinking, imagination or dreaming and visualization, speaking out, and prayer. Its socio-cultural meaning consists in the recognition that static, tradition-oriented, negative, Han (resentment)-possessed Korean spirit needed to be changed through the Gospel.

Korean Minjung were prepossessed with negative thoughts, which were not freed from shaman rituals. They did not have any tool to break their fatalistic negativism. After the Korean war, Koreans suffered from their war-stricken

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118Hunt and McMahon, ibid., pp.113-114, 134, 140.
119Betschel, ibid., p.53-59.
120Cho, vol. 1, pp.36-37, 64-66.
situation, shackled by fatal fear, poverty, and failure (cf. 6.2.8; 6.4.2), and his positive Gospel appealed to them. The socio-political situation harmonized with his message through the industrialization campaign of President Park: “We can also live better.” The poor and alienated flocked from all quarters. Many were saved. Their Han (resentment) disappeared through the baptism in the Spirit. Actually, the Korean spirit has been, to no small degree, awakened and changed to a dynamic, future-oriented, positive, and creative spirit by his ministry. Yoido Sunbogum Church grew into a mega congregation because he constantly used this mind renewal principle; a way of realizing his ministerial philosophy of the “Triple Blessing.” Although psychotherapy asserts that speaking in other tongues has the effect of relieving depression or Han, Koreans needed to change their way of thinking if they were to build a strong church and be leaders in society. In this way, Cho contributed much to the change of the traditional negative self-image of Korean people to a positive Christian self-image through this new mind-setting (cf. 8.2.3). His teaching of mind renewal was, therefore, a method through which the Word of God is fulfilled in and through the believers, something which he calls it “the laws of faith.” If a man is filled with the Spirit, he shall see visions and dream dreams (Acts 2:14-18). These God-given visions will be fulfilled when he is ready to continuously embrace them through his renewed mind and faith. This positive-thinking mind, with the expectancy of God’s miracles, can provide man the ability to live in the fourth-dimensional life.

Wan-Sang Han, who studied Yoido Sunbogum Church from a sociological perspective, not only acknowledged the favourable effects on the Korean Christians, but also pointed out four problems. First, its positive/subjective mind-set has the danger of falling into a pitfall of social nominalism, taking the individual as reality while viewing society as an unreality. Thus it can fall into ethical problems by not paying attention to the structural sin of society. Second, its positive thinking functions indirectly as a defending element of the contemporary, politico-economical system while neglecting the prophetic/critical role of the church in society. Third, its positive thinking has a somewhat anti-intellectual tendency against liberalism and modernism, which can be used by God for His purpose through humanization (not humanism). Fourth, positive thinking tends towards a nationalistic faith and sees Korea as God’s elect for world evangelization. This idea

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123 Gwang-Seon Suh, ibid., pp.75-81.

124 Sunghoon Myoung, *Spiritual Dimension of Church Growth*, Seoul, 1993/5ed., 1995, pp.255-259. The improvement of living conditions of the congregation of Yoido Church was partially caused by the economic development of Korea, but Cho’s teaching of mind renovation had a great effect. Because pentecostalism generally takes root among poor people, the development of living standards of Yoido congregation already becomes an issue if it loses its pentecostal identity. Cho, therefore, preaches more about loving and giving than before.


126 His analysis from the sociological perspective can be a criticism of Cho’s methodology. But the sociological perspective on Korean pentecostalism is only introduced here without comments. See Chapter 15.
indirectly protects the advocacy of political elites who promote Korean national identity and revival.127

8.3.4.3. Spoken Word

The third requisite of applied theology is to teach about the creative power in the spoken word. This idea is based on two principles – God works through His Word and man’s speech (spoken word) has control over his whole body (creative power).128 This explains the relationship between the Word of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the believer’s confession. Here, speaking out or the outward expression of God’s Word as well as the positive word, is emphasized. When Spirit-filled believers speak the Word of God in faith, the creative power of the fourth dimension takes place through the Holy Spirit. There are three aspects related to this.

First, man must acquire the Scriptures, speaking the constructive and productive words in his personal life. Then they will have control of his whole body, and he eventually will be prepared to meet various situations. If man continues to speak in a negative way, however, he will reap the results according to his negative words. Cho does not consider this method different from the “subconscious development” proposed by psychologists except for his application of the Biblical Word in faith. Man needs to speak words of faith because confession through his conscious mind will convey a strong suggestion of faith to the subconscious, he says. Then he will be successful in his life.129

Second, one must proclaim the Word when the anointing of the Holy Spirit is present. This is a means of uttering prophetic words. Through our proclamation, God accomplishes His will. The Holy Spirit does not have the proper material with which to create until we give the word.130 For the release of Christ’s presence, we need to proclaim the whole Gospel because Christ is bound to what we speak forth, he argues. If a Presbyterian minister preaches about the salvation experience, “he is just releasing and creating the presence of the Jesus who can give this born again experience to people.”131 In the same way, a Holiness preacher may create only the presence of the sanctifying Christ. Sunbogeumism preaches the saving Jesus, the sanctifying Christ, the baptizing Christ in the Spirit, the healing Jesus, and the blessing Son of God, all of these aspects are manifested in his church, he says.

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129 Idem, Wisdom to Success, Seoul, 1976, pp.88-92. According to Cho, subconscious is not different from spirit or the inner man from where faith springs; idem, “Self-development,” in Collection of Fragmentary Thought 2: To Be a Leader, Seoul, 1976/8ed., 1983, pp.24-30. According to Cho, believers need to improve their character through changing their self-consciousness because many believers are not free from feeling of inferiority, fear, frustration, and uneasiness etc. These can be driven back through changing their subconscious. The tools for this are drawing mental images (visualization) and autosuggestion (mouth confession). These conscious-works will be infiltrated into the subconscious and self-consciousness will be changed, Cho says.
130 Cho found this principle at the creational description in Genesis (Gen. 1) where God spoke and followed creation through the Spirit (verse 2). In the New Testament such phenomena appear (Matt. 8:13; 16, 26; Mark 11:23; Acts 3:6-7; 13:11;14:9-10).
Third, in the fourth dimension, one can receive the Word of God given to a specific person in a specific situation. This implies we can personally receive the spoken Word of God through the Scriptures and have a living faith in God. Even though this spoken word is the same Word of God written in the Scriptures from Genesis to John’s Revelation, its purpose and usage is different. Jeong-Geun Pak and some non-Korean authors have the same view in this matter. By reading the Scriptures, man receives knowledge and understanding about God and His promises. But man does not receive living faith or miracle-performing faith by only reading it; he can have such faith when the Holy Spirit quickens the Word of God to him. To receive this living faith, he suggests five steps: accept and obey God’s will; ask the Lord to reveal His will in our hearts; compare the desire born in us with Biblical teaching; ask God to show a tangible sign in our circumstances; and pray and wait until peace comes into our hearts. In addition to this, he gives practical advice for receiving this living Word of God in faith: plant the seed of faith and wait before God. This seed is not limited to a material offering, but it can be anything that we can offer.

In summary, words have power. They are creative in both negative and positive ways. God not only created the world by His Word but also keeps it through the same Word. Therefore, believers need to speak and proclaim the Word of God for their creative and productive lives. The Holy Spirit, who inspired prophets for the uttering of God-given prophecy in the Old Testament, also quickens the written Word so that we can receive the living Word of God. When we speak the Word in His anointing, God performs miracles and wonders according to the proclaimed Word of God. Then the spiritual dimension creates a new order from the material realm.

These ideas of mind renewal and the spoken word can also be viewed in a different way. H. Terris Neuman, an assistant professor at a college of the American Assemblies of God, asserted that the teaching of positive confession originated in the mind-healing cults of the nineteenth century, which are part of the metaphysical movement of the century that made the inner-self reality and sought to be united with God (principle or law) for the purpose of gaining health, wealth, and prosperity. Albert Betscher also criticized it: this teaching tries to find a schema

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132ibid., pp. 87-113. In Cho’s first book of the *The Fourth Dimension*, he called the received specific word *rhema* while calling the general word of God *logos*. After theological debate with Tonghap denomination (7.2.3.4) he gave up using the expression *rhema*. However, his idea of waiting on the Lord until we receive faith (word) from God has not changed. Because *rhema* is the *logos* which is quickened by the Holy Spirit, Cho emphasizes *logos* as the fundamental word of God; Jeong-Geun Pak, *Pentecostal Theology*, Seoul, 1978, p.42. Pak advocates *rhema* which is the word that God gives to a person; Jenny Everts, “Living to Give: What’s Right with the Prosperity Gospel.” A paper presented at the conference of the Society for the Pentecostal Studies and the European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Association, on 13. 6. 1995 at AOG Theological College, Mattersey Hall, England. Everts said that practical application of the *rhema* idea is Biblically not wrong. Today, even though Cho himself does not make a difference between the two aspects of the word of God, it may be well applied to Christian lives. Peter Wagner acknowledges the *rhema* idea.


134H. Terris Neuman, “Cultic Origins of Word-Faith Theology within the Charismatic Movement,” in *Pneuma*, vol.12/1 (spring 1990): 32-55. This word-faith gospel has been accepted by those within in the pentecostal and charismatic movements as well as some evangelical circles. Norman Vincent Pearl, Kenneth E. Hagin, Robert H. Schuller, and Yonggi Cho were believed to be included in this line.
or a principle under which God would be bound; and desires to place humans on the same level with God.\textsuperscript{135} The American Assemblies of God stands against the teaching of positive confession of American prosperity Gospel saying that it has the tendency to lose the balance in the teaching of the whole Bible and also makes God act according to man’s faith.\textsuperscript{136}

8.4. CONCLUSION

Sunbogeuism broke out and spread in the Korean context as a radical pentecostalism before it gave way to theological reflection, showing both its dynamism and its weakness. Korean Pentecostalism, with its holistic soteriology and teachings of prosperity Gospel, has been shaped in the Korean context – the soil of shamanistic tradition, war-stricken poverty, and the shift to modernization/industrialization in society. The hardships of its founder, Yonggi Cho, also contributed to its theology. Consequently, its key theological formulations, the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation, disclose the characteristics of situational/contextual theology – Korean pentecostal Yonggi-ism. This doctrine is based on the total depravity of Adam and total redemption in Christ, which is regarded as pure Biblical faith. It has found a great home in the Han (resentment)-possessed Korean Minjung. The problem of a theologically responsible syncretism with Korean traditional religion (shamanism) and Korean Sunbogeuism remains unsolved. Korean evangelicals and pentecostals understand this relationship as a point of contact or indigenization in the Korean context, but Minjung theology holds a different view. The relationship between Korean pentecostalism and Minjung theology needs to be discussed in the framework of common phenomena at the grass-roots level without finding theological similarities between them.

The contributions of Sunbogeu theology to Korean churches, as well as to world Christianity to some extent, are the following: revitalizing pneumatology; inspiring church growth; calling people to a living faith; awakening the supernatural realm of Christian faith; creating interest in holistic salvation; giving hope and salvation for the suffering Korean Minjung during their shift to modernization; and helping believers read the Bible with a positive attitude. Nevertheless, it has also aroused criticism, which can be summarized in the following: first, Cho’s formulation of the Gospel has the tendency of being man-oriented, making God useful for man; second, it is a literal interpretation of the Bible; third, it emphasizes worldly blessing, which results in success-oriented secularism; fourth, it is characterized as a theology in Korean context that suffers from syncretism with shamanism; fifth, its tendency for asocial individualism neglects the responsibility of society; sixth, it is exclusive against traditional religions; seventh, it has a tendency to combine with modern capitalistic ideology; eighth, the unhealthy teaching of prosperity lacks harmony with the teachings of the Bible; and ninth, it is somewhat mysterious.

\textsuperscript{135}Betschel, ibid., pp.59-64.

The main criticism of Sunbogeum theology is that it manifests anthropocentric tendencies in theological issues. Third John 2, which provides the fundamental Biblical basis for the theology of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation, can better be interpreted when it is put in the context of verse 3 and 4 – *walking in the truth*. Having separated verse 2 from this context, it reveals its weakness by appealing to human needs rather than hearing God Himself (the truth). With this orientation to humanity, the theology of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation exposes an inevitable tendency towards anthropocentricism in its entire theology. All other criticisms, such as the deviation from main Biblical themes, making God a means for worldly blessing, and catering to the needs and desires of Korean folk, point ultimately to the same problem. At the same time, the anthropocentric tendency in Sunbogeum theology is a remarkable critique on contemporary theocentric concepts in Korean theology, which are not only incapable of meeting the needs of contemporary Koreans but is also caught up in schisms. Although Sunbogeum theology has an anthropocentric orientation, it has not fallen into anthropocentricism (humanism) per se, thanks to its grounding in the Scriptures and its openness to theological education and reflection.

Korean pentecostalism recognizes the weakness of the theology of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation and strives to improve it. In the early part of the 1980s, the following great fundamentals of Sunbogeum faith were introduced: the cross of Calvary (basis); Pentecost’s upper room (filling with the Holy Spirit); evangelism to the ends of the earth (evangelizing); the Good God (blessing); Jesus the Healer (healing); the Second Coming of Jesus (hope in *parousia*); and distribution (love and serve). These fundamentals indicate that the emphasis of Sunbogeumism began shifting from gaining to sharing as a reaction to outside criticism.

Yonggi Cho’s view of the fourth dimension appears to be a revolutionary idea in theological methodology. This method was introduced with the intention of preparing Christians for greater reliance upon God and walking day and night with Him in His wisdom and power. Its essence (the spiritual realm controls the material realm) and its application (visualization, renewal of mind, and the spoken word) need to be considered in connection with a pneumatological understanding of theology. Therefore, this method has the advantage of combining spiritual truth with the material world: Spirit-filled Christians are motivated through this method to live for God and pray with definite goals. However, because the goal of this method is to qualify believers for the blessings of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation, this methodology is as problematic as its theology. The main criticisms of the fourth dimension include the concept of Eastern mysticism/shamanism, reappearance of primitive paganism under the guise of modern psychology, Christian New Age philosophy, erroneous attempt to seek rational explanation for a spiritual process, pseudo-science lacking in critical attitude toward modern materialism, and danger of falling into rationalism. Criticisms about its application include the occult practice of shamanism, making God exist for humans’ sake (or inverse the cause and consequence), a lack of politico-social criticism, a loss of balance in Biblical

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137 Cho, *Fivefold Gospel* ..., pp.12-27. These fundamentals were introduced in the early part of the 1980s with Fivefold Gospel. This is more comprehensive than Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation.

138 ITI, *Theology of Yoido Sunbogeum Church II*, Seoul, 1993, p.113. See also 7.3.2.1 and 7.3.2.4.
teaching, and the mind-healing cults of the nineteenth century. Although this methodology retains the strength of materialization of the norm, it has the danger of falling into a syncretistic tool for people’s sake.

It seems that in the era of postmodernism, this theology of the Fivefold Gospel and Triple Salvation can contribute to exhorting pentecostals to daily demonstrate their Christian witnesses and rediscover “the deep dimension of reality which is that of holiness and religiosity.”\(^\text{139}\) It also requires Korean pentecostals to reflect on whether God’s sovereignty and man’s free will can be harmonized without losing their identities.