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# David Yonggi Cho's Theology Of Blessing: Basis, Legitimacy, and Limitations

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**KEYWORDS:** *Pentecostalism, prosperity gospel/theology of blessing, Korea, Spirit of God, context*

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism was often called by some a 'tongue-speaking movement'. Hot debates on the nature and validity of the modern phenomenon of tongue-speaking produced some extreme condemnations, such as tongues being identified as the 'last

vomit of Satan'.<sup>2</sup> Then came the popularization of Pentecostal messages in the second half of the last century, thanks to the genius entrepreneurial spirit of televangelists of North America. However, this is no longer just a North American scene, as TV channels on a Sunday morning in Lusaka, Zambia are full of Christian messages, including Pentecostal ones for sure. The revolutionary internet availability will also accelerate the process of the religious popularization of Pentecostal messages. In most Pentecostal-charismatic media programs, the most popular topic is healing and material blessing, thus, the birth of the 'prosperity gospel'.

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<sup>1</sup> The current version is a substantial revision and expansion of Wonsuk Ma, 'David Yonggi Cho's Theology of Blessing: A new theological base and direction', in *Dr. Yonggi Cho's Ministry and Theology: A Commemorative Collection for the 50th Anniversary of Dr. Yonggi Cho's Ministry*, 2 vols., ed. Young San Theological Institute (Gunpo, Korea: Hansei University Logos, 2008), I:179-200

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<sup>2</sup> G. Campbell Morgan's infamous statement, quoted in many publications, e.g., Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 146.

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Who coined this exact expression is not clear, and the motivation may not have been affirmative but rather more critical in nature. Many agree, however, that the birth of the prosperity gospel is often attributed to Kenneth Hagin who rose as an important televangelist in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes known as the 'health and wealth gospel', this North American twist of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity has spread far and wide throughout the world. Perhaps because of a lack of proper terminology, any stream of Christianity which has a strong emphasis on God's immediate intervention in human life with his provision and care is often thrown into this category, especially those found in many developing countries, as well as the nine-million strong El Shaddai Catholic Charismatic group in the Philippines, Universal Church of the Reign of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus) in many urban centres of Brazil, countless African forms of indigenous Pentecostal groups, and so on.

The aim of this study is not to trace its historical development, but to argue that 'across-the-border suspicion' against many look-alike 'prosperity' phenomena, particularly in non-western settings, may require a close examination of their motivation, context, orientation, and theological grounding. Although requiring caution, the preaching of God's blessing, nonetheless, is a part of the Christian faith. The

study also suggests the parameters within which the legitimacy of such preaching is established. This will also challenge theological minds to exercise more nuance in applying a western paradigm to externally similar phenomena found in non-western settings. To approach the matter with a neutral mind, I am using the term 'theology of blessing' instead of the 'prosperity gospel'.

To illustrate the argument, I have chosen David Yonggi Cho as an example. Cho is the founder and senior pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC), the single largest congregation, until his retirement from the church leadership in 2008. Cho has often been generally known for advocating the prosperity gospel. My choice of Cho was also motivated by the availability of literature, often made popular by him, and an increasing number of academic reflections on him. He will be briefly introduced before the contextual and biblical discussions.

Two lenses will be used to establish its legitimacy with limitation: context and theology. The former will use the socio-cultural context in which Cho has developed his theology through his pastoral years. More specifically the cultural context will focus on widespread Korean religiosity and expectations, and the social context on that of poverty. The theological reflection is specifically to situate Cho's theology of blessing within the Pentecostal set of beliefs, with its theological basis and goals.

For the theological reflection, there are various perspectives that would produce fruitful research on this particular theology. For the present study, however, two biblical pneumatic tradi-

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3 See for example Kenneth E. Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness, and Spiritual Death* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library Publications, 1973).

tions, represented by two exemplary passages, are used to illustrate the point. Thus, this study has two aims: first, to establish a legitimate locus for his theology of blessing as a Pentecostal theology, and second, to provide a Pentecostal theological goal for the theology of blessing. That is, the study attempts to suggest a new biblical basis or 'beginning', and the goal or 'end' of this unique theology. It will be proper, therefore, to approach this section with a critical and analytical mind.

The writer bases his study of Cho's theology of blessing on his selected publications in English. Considering his countless sermons and lectures delivered in the past fifty years of his ministry, and the long list of printed material in Korean, the English publications account for only a fraction of his vast resources. It is also possible that this collection of selected material in English may not fairly represent the vast array of his thoughts. The recent publication of a massive series of studies to commemorate his fifty-year ministry has been a welcome addition to the growing scholarly studies on Cho.<sup>4</sup> This choice was made intentionally as the reflection is primarily intended for international readership; my own experiences and observations of the church and Cho are used only as a secondary resource. A reasonable degree of contact with various leadership of the YFGC over an extended period has also been useful.

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<sup>4</sup> At least 29 studies are included in the two English volumes of *Dr. Yonggi Cho's Ministry and Theology: A Commemorative Collection for the 50th Anniversary of Dr. Yonggi Cho's Ministry*.

## II David Yonggi Cho and His Theology of Blessing

### 1 A Brief History

Since the 1960s, the Korean church has been hailed as a sterling success of modern missionary work. Statistics attest to this claim easily. It is now claimed that a quarter of Southern Koreans are Christians, and the Korean church is the second largest missionary-sending entity, only after the United States. It is indisputably affirmed that the phenomenal growth of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, founded by David Yonggi Cho, is not only an epitome of, but the leading powerhouse for, Korean church growth.

A quick glance at the half-century history of the YFGC confirms the notion. The church began with a handful of members in 1958, in the outskirts of Seoul among the poor and underprivileged social classes in post-Korean War rubbles. When the church moved to downtown Seoul in 1962, it grew to 10,000. In 1972 when the church finally moved to Yoido Island (a Korean-War era military airfield) in the Han River of Seoul, not many believed that anyone would inhabit the island. But now Yoido is the mass media and financial centre of the nation, appropriately called the Wall Street of Korea. In the Yoido era, the church continually grew, and with 700,000 members in 1992, and currently 750,000, it is claimed to be the largest single congregation in the world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a useful history of the church, see 'The Tent Church: 1958-1961, the Early Years—

Many would agree that the church owes Cho for much of its phenomenal growth. His role has been studied in various aspects, including his leadership style, administrative skills, vision, prayer, cell-system, excellent communication skills and the like. However, many believe that his theology, or more specifically the 'theology of blessing', has been the bedrock of his message and ministry, fuelling the growth of the church and the far-reaching impact of the ministry beyond the immediate confines of the YFGC.

## 2 Theology of Blessing

It is in order to briefly summarize Cho's theology of blessing. First of all, he developed the 'three-fold salvation' based on 3 John 2: 'Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul' (NRSV). This modified early Christian greeting from a Roman practice provides a scriptural basis for Cho's comprehensive view of salvation.<sup>6</sup> Salvation, according to him, encompasses spiritual, circumstantial, and physical dimensions of Christian life. His theology of blessing is based on this comprehensive salvation of God

in our life.

It becomes instantly clear, therefore, that his theology of blessing is soteriologically motivated (that is, salvation) via Christological process (that is, through the atoning work of Christ). Consequently, there has been little pneumatological exploration. Thus, in a theologically strict sense, theology of blessing cannot be categorized fully as a Pentecostal theological theme. It is also true that this holistic view, against the more spiritually oriented view of salvation among traditional Christianity, has on the one hand almost revolutionized Korean Christian beliefs, while on the other hand, it has posed the challenge of properly balancing the three components. The theological framework of Cho's theology of blessing has been developed in the 'five-fold gospel'.<sup>7</sup>

### a) Pentecostal 'Five' (or 'Four')

Pentecostals are familiar with the traditional four- or five-fold Gospels, perhaps based on A. B. Simpson's original 'Four-fold Gospel': Jesus as Saviour, Healer, Baptizer, and Coming King.<sup>8</sup> Early Pentecostals, while using the same terminology as the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Simpson, reinterpreted the 'Baptizer' as Spirit-baptism, while adding the 'Sanctifier',

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the Tent Church' (<http://english.fgtv.com/yoido/History.htm>, 2007), 'The Church at Seo-DaeMun: 1962-1972—the Church at Seo-DaeMun' (<http://english.fgtv.com/yoido/History2.htm>, 2007) and 'The Church at Yoido: The Growing Church' (<http://english.fgtv.com/yoido/History.htm3>, 2007), accessed on Jan 21, 2008.

6 Because of its customary use among early Christians, some NT theologians have questioned the validity of using such passages in developing a theological system.

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7 One of a few books in English on the topic is *Salvation, Health and Prosperity: Our Three-fold Blessings in Christ* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987).

8 A. B. Simpson, *The Fourfold Gospel: Albert B. Simpson's Concept of the Complete Provision of Christ for Every Need of the Believer—Spirit, Soul and Body*, (updated version) (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1984).

making it five-fold. Non-Wesleyan Pentecostals after the 1910s maintained the four-fold structure with the reinterpreted notion of the 'Baptizer'.

This short background is important for two reasons. First, since the 'Five-fold' language is almost a technical theological language for Pentecostals, Cho's five-fold theology can easily be misinterpreted as the Holiness Pentecostal system, if one fails to check the content of the 'five'.

Additionally, a comparison between Cho's five and the Pentecostal four or five (see the chart below)<sup>9</sup> would immediately reveal several important features of his theological framework.

1) Like traditional Pentecostals, his theology is unmistakably Christo-centric. This is noteworthy as sometimes he has been criticized by non-Pentecostal Christianity in Korea as being Spirit-centric, minimizing the work of Christ for salvation.

2) His five-fold theology aligns closely with the 'Pentecostal Four' that is the theology of the Assemblies of God, with which he and his church have been affiliated. The 'Blesser' component has been added to the 'Pentecostal Four.'

3) The addition of the fifth has been contextually motivated as Cho applied the traditional Pentecostal theology to the unique socio-cultural context of Korea.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, his theology of blessing can be properly explained by, and appreciated from, this understanding. This has critical importance as popular writers readily label him as 'shamanistic.'<sup>11</sup>

Pentecostal Five	Pentecostal Four	Cho's Five
Jesus as Saviour		
Healer		
Sanctifier		Blesser
(Spirit) Baptizer		
Coming King		

#### b) Theology of Blessing and the 'Prosperity Gospel'

Cho's emphasis on blessing has often been interpreted within the developmental framework of Pentecostalism. Unlike classical Pentecostals, Charismatics, primarily coming from the mid-

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Theology' (69-93) and Allan Anderson, 'The Contextual Pentecostal Theology of David Yonggi Cho' (133-59), in *David Yonggi Cho: A Close Look at His Theology and Ministry*, eds. Wonsuk Ma, et al. (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004) and Wonsuk Ma, 'Asian (Classical) Pentecostalism: Theology in Context', in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2005), 59-91.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), and his dialogue with Korean theologians in the 5th International Theological Seminar.

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<sup>9</sup> The titles such as 'Pentecostal (Five)' and 'Cho's Five' is not to indicate that Cho's is not Pentecostal, but it is only for comparative convenience.

<sup>10</sup> This point has been adequately argued by several theologians recently. Hwa Yung, 'Missiological Challenge of David Yonggi Cho's

dle class, mainline Christianity in North America and later Europe in the 1960s, had successfully 'married' the Pentecostal message with the message of prosperity. It is not difficult to understand, for example, how the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship became a vanguard of the new Pentecostal generation, called the Charismatic movement.<sup>12</sup> Coupled with the healing message, this variety created a powerful popular religion primarily through televangelists such as Oral Roberts. Their strong emphasis on healing and material prosperity led to the birth of the 'health and wealth' theology, 'prosperity gospel', faith movement and 'kingdom now' theology.

It is important to recognize that this 'Pentecostal version 2.0' is clearly a child of Pentecostal theology. In spite of their new emphasis on healing and blessing, the classical Pentecostals had championed the instantaneous aspect of God's intervention whether that is Spirit-baptism or healing. Also, expecting God's miracles to meet various human needs is attested to, for example, in the testimonies of early Pentecostal missionaries. What is being criticized about this theology is its theological intent—whether 'health and wealth' is self-serving or kingdom-serving.

Understandably, Cho's theology of blessing has been severely criticized from within and without. It may be

worthwhile to note that some criticism from within appears to have come partially from an apprehension that such emphasis on everyday matters may pull Christianity as a 'high religion' down toward more popular but 'lower' religious domains often marked by Shamanistic characteristics. For this reason, especially in light of popular writings of the west,<sup>13</sup> some recent publications are significant. They have aptly argued the legitimacy and validity of Cho's theology as a creative contextual application of Pentecostal tradition.<sup>14</sup> However, at this point, what is at the core is the theological intent of such theology: whether it is 'self-serving' or 'kingdom-serving' as observed above for the Charismatic movement.

### III Context: Interpretive Tool for Theology of Blessing

The first point of legitimacy for the theology of blessing is found in its situatedness, that is its socio-cultural context in which Christianity exists, operates, and attempts to engage with. In Cox's words, a new religion needs to meet two basic conditions in order for it to be successful in the Korean environment: first, to continue 'at least some elements of the traditional cultures and religion'; and second, to 'help people cope with both the rampant urbanization and the wrenching demands of new economic and political

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<sup>12</sup> For example, J. R. Zeigler, 'Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International', *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 653-54.

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<sup>13</sup> For a recent one, see David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (London: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> See Note 10 above.

realities'.<sup>15</sup> In Cho's case, it is the economic challenge which his parishioners face each day, and their religious orientation which influences their expectation in a new-found Christianity.

### 1 Social Context: Struggle for Survival

The most revealing windows to the world in which Cho began his pastoral ministry are his own accounts. First, he describes his pioneering church as follows: The year 1958, when the church was first opened, was five years after the devastating Korean War concluded with a truce agreement.

Although a tent church was erected, nowhere did we see a sign of hope for success: the people of Daejo-dong [the area where Cho began his church] whose brightest hope was to pass a day with a proper meal; the church right by a public cemetery on the top of a hill;<sup>16</sup> the church whose roof was a torn U.S. army tent....<sup>17</sup>

The following account is more revealing of the dire social circumstance, and Cho's message of hope to counter the wide-spread poverty, both material and mental.

One day, a crippled shoeshine boy

came to our tent church. He was told that he could be healed in this church.... It is already October, and cold wind painfully blew, rain drops were as cold as ice, and the straw mats on the church floor were already frozen. Yes, many filled this tent church in worship. Among them, I saw the boy. In spite of shivering cold, I preached a message of hope with all my heart from the pulpit. 'God is good, and he is our father. Even though our life struggles today, if we welcome Jesus into our lives, and stand firm in faith, he will bless and transform our soul, body and our life. Have hope in Jesus. Hope that the sick will be healed, and the poor have plenty.' After the service, the boy requested a prayer for healing. 'Pastor, I want to walk. Please help me.'... I began to pray... But there was no change. I prayed again.... I held his hands, and shouted, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, straighten your legs!' 'In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up, rise up!' Soon the whole church erupted in a roar. The boy began to rise and walk! The whole church was praising the Lord with joy and excitement.<sup>18</sup>

It is in such a desperate social situation that the message of hope and blessing finds its rightful place. In today's world where one billion people live in absolute poverty, that is, with less than \$1 per day, the God, who created each life and gave his own Son so

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15 Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 220.

16 Koreans build cemeteries as far from residential areas as possible, as cemeteries represent a world of the dead. This note is mine.

17 David Yonggi Cho, *Forty-five Years of Ministry of Hope: Small Group Miracle* [in Korean] (Seoul: Institute for Church Growth, 2004), 19.

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18 Cho, *Forty-five Years of Ministry of Hope*, 37-38.



that we may have blessed eternal life, is expected to be mindful of the daily struggle of the masses. Most of such under-developed and developing areas are in the non-western world, where worldviews tend to be holistic. The demarcation between the material and spiritual realms in such places is not as clear as in the western world.

Christianity cannot simply be restricted to religious matters such as sin, forgiveness, eternal life, etc, while physical and material concerns are assigned to different mission programs such as development, education, hospitals, etc. Only after a life can survive physically, will the soul have a chance to learn of spiritual matters. In such a social setting, the primacy of physical and material dimensions of life, therefore, is more pronounced than the spiritual aspects of Christian mission. However, it is critical to remember that the context does not provide a complete or permanent basis for legitimacy.

## 2 Religiosity

Related to Cho's engagement within the Korean social context is the interaction between his theology and Korean traditional religiosity. At the core of Korean religiosity is Shamanism, a Northeast Asian version of animism with the significant role of ancestor spirits. It is interesting to note that Cho has been constantly accused of incorporating shamanistic elements into Christianity. For non-Korean scholars, the alleged incorporation of Shamanistic or indigenous spirituality or symbolism has been viewed as a creative contextualization of Christianity in the Korean cultural-religious con-

text.<sup>19</sup> However, the crux of criticism from within has been on the emphasis of blessing.

Christian orientation with the element of blessing highlighted had been not known in Korean until the explosive spread of Pentecostal worship and messages in the 1970s and afterwards. Korean Christianity, through its hard times under the Japanese colonial period and the following Korean War, had developed an extremely other-worldly outlook. Even in the 1970s, the Book of Revelation was a popular book for annual revival weeks of local congregations. In this environment, Cho's message of God's goodness for the here and now in concrete terms raised a host of criticisms. His theology was often branded as *Gibok Shinang* [faith that seeks or prays for blessing].<sup>20</sup> For this reason, his theology was accused of being Shamanistic.

Cho's approach has been particularly relevant to two particular aspects of indigenous religiosity—the general perception of spiritual beings and their perceived ability to harm or bless. First, Cho has consistently emphasized

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<sup>19</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 219-220; Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 100, n. 2. Hollenweger's appreciation for active 'syncretism' is found in Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Syncretism and Capitalism', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:1 (1999), 47-61.

<sup>20</sup> For a useful study on *Gibok Shinang*, see Sebastian C.H. Kim, 'The Problem of Poverty in Post-War Korean Christianity: *Gibok Sinang* or *Minjung* Theology?' *Transformation* 24:1 (Jan 2007), 43-50.

the goodness of God.<sup>21</sup> This was significant in the context where the spiritual beings are not always benevolent—in fact, many rituals are performed either to appease offended spirits or to neutralize curses.

Second, Cho paid attention to the most relevant role of traditional religions: meeting the daily needs of worshippers. Most folk religious beliefs, especially in the non-western world, take the pursuit of blessing seriously. Blessing, being defined as provision, protection and guidance, is the primary reason for religious devotion, whether it is to gods, spirits or deceased ancestor spirits. As Christianity takes root in such a religious soil, people bring with them their former religious framework and expectations and apply them to Christianity as their new faith.<sup>22</sup> Without this ‘functional substitution’, the new religion will remain irrelevant to everyday living. This often causes them to resort to old religious beliefs to find answers to daily needs, while

Christianity meets other religious needs such as forgiveness and salvation. This constitutes what is called ‘split-level Christianity’. A Korean attempt to bring this existential and cultural need to Christianity has been Cho’s theology of blessing.

## IV Two Biblical Pneumatic Traditions: Interpretive Tool for Theology of Blessing II

The Old Testament provides rich pneumatic traditions. However, as part of the general ignorance of the Old Testament among Evangelicals, many critical elements of the Spirit in the OT have been partially or completely undiscovered by Pentecostals today.<sup>23</sup> This seeming Pentecostal ignorance prevailing among western Christians has been ‘propagated’ throughout the whole world along with their missionary endeavours.

As discussed in various places,<sup>24</sup> these traditions can be categorized into two: charismatic and non-charismatic. The former includes the leadership and prophetic spirit traditions, while the latter may include creation tradition, the Spirit as God’s agent or instrument, the Spirit as an extension of God’s being, and the Wisdom tradition. On the other hand, in the New Testa-

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**21** Four important studies are included in *Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Ministry and Theology: A Commemorative Collection for the 50th Anniversary of Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Ministry*, vol. 1: Rodrigo D. Tano, ‘Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Theology of a GOOD GOD’ (17-30); Donald W. Dayton, ‘The “Good God” and the “Theology of Blessing” in the Thought of David Yonggi Cho’ (31-56); Young Hoon Lee, ‘Influence of Dr. Cho’s “God is so good-faith” in the Korean Churches’ (57-79); Yeol Soo Eim, ‘The Influence of Dr. Cho’s Goodness of God Theology upon His Ministry’ (81-103).

**22** For example, see Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 99-114 for Asian religious world-views.

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**23** This does not imply any lack of studies in the area. For example, a Pentecostal scholar published a well studied work, Wilf Hilderbrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995).

**24** For a brief discussion, see Wonsuk Ma, *Until the Spirit Comes: The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah*, JSOTS (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 29-32.

ment, various writers further develop only a selected Old Testament tradition or two.

The current discussion has chosen two traditions: leadership and creation-Spirit traditions, the most important traditions for the charismatic and non-charismatic Spirit traditions respectively. Also one is chosen from the Old Testament, and the other from the New. The OT passage will, in addition to establishing its theological legitimacy, demonstrate how the theology of blessing can be developed as a significant theme for Pentecostal theology especially in Asia. The NT passage will help us to view God's blessing as the empowerment of the Spirit for witnessing, thus setting a new theological purpose, so that we can prevent a destructive slip into the trap of popular and self-serving prosperity gospel.

### 1 Creation-Spirit Tradition

The creation-Spirit tradition has been particularly ignored by Pentecostals for a variety of reasons. This tradition begins with the involvement of the Spirit in creation itself (e.g., Gen. 1:2), and more specifically in the life-giving and sustaining role of the Spirit (e.g., Job 33:4, cf. Gen. 2). However, due to the fall of humanity, to begin with, and the continuing failure of Israel as God's people, the total destruction and judgment was pronounced by many prophets (e.g., Hosea). However, God's last word for his people is never judgment, but restoration. In these eschatological promises, the creation-Spirit tradition takes a radical change and expansion. Ezekiel 37 records a vision of dry bones. The S/spirit brings life to

them and the dry bones (i.e., exiled Israel) are to turn into a great army of God. In this old life-giving role of the Spirit, the scope is suddenly expanded to include personal and community restoration. In addition, the restoration encompasses the physical and material as well as the emotional, national and spiritual aspects. The present passage is an excellent example of the wide range of the eschatological promise of restoration for God's people.

#### *Isaiah 32:15-18*

<sup>15</sup>Until the spirit from above is  
poured upon us  
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

<sup>16</sup>Then justice will dwell in the wilderness  
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.

<sup>17</sup>And the effect of righteousness will be peace,  
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever

<sup>18</sup>My people will abide in a peaceful pasture  
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting place.

The passage of blessing through the coming of the Spirit begins and ends with the notion of 'water',<sup>25</sup> clearly signifying the life-giving and restoring function of the Spirit. It is the coming of the Spirit that ushers in the time of restoration after the long time of judgment.

<sup>25</sup> Thus, the same concept envelops the passage, providing an unmistakable emphasis. This is called *inclusio*.

ment (34:9-14). Unlike the previous incidents where only a handful of chosen leaders in Israel's history enjoyed the experience, this time the Spirit will be given to everyone in the community in great abundance as if heaven's flood gate has been opened. This divine force is to regenerate the dead and dry national life (e.g., Ezek. 37) and individual lives in the community. Since the Spirit is the only life-giver, the same Spirit will bestow new life to lifeless individuals, communities and nations.

The immediate consequence will be the renewal of nature in fertility. Fruitfulness should not be quickly spiritualized, but applied first to the real agricultural dimension. The age of salvation is a time of fruitfulness in the material and physical sense. This physical or material fruitfulness is immediately accompanied by, or alternatively results in, a moral transformation: justice and righteousness (v. 16, cf. Ps. 72; Isa. 11.1-9).<sup>26</sup> This is further developed into security, rest and shalom (vs. 17-18). One might say that the consequence of the Spirit's coming is material, physical, emotional, ethical, social, national and even spiritual transformation and restoration. This is only one of a few passages in the Old Testament where the coming of the Spirit has an explicit implication for

physical and material prosperity and blessing, among others.<sup>27</sup>

### a) Reflection

It is true that the role of the Spirit in this passage is found in the context of restoration or soteriological promise. Cho has rightly argued that our salvation includes the removal of curses of sin.<sup>28</sup> Once the curse is removed, according to Cho, 'blessings will come to every area of our lives. The cursed land will turn into good land flowing with milk and honey and God's blessings. Every area of our lives will be redeemed to live in newness of life.'<sup>29</sup> He also makes clear that the Holy Spirit plays a critical role in this process.<sup>30</sup> And yet, a direct role of the Holy Spirit in making our lives whole is to be developed, as restoration and blessing has not been explored as a pneumatological theme in Cho's theology of blessings.

This passage, as an example of the Spirit tradition in creation, suggests a vast array of pneumatological significance. The first is the critical role of the members of the community. The Spirit is not poured upon nature, but upon 'us', the members of the desperate community who long for the new era. Only when the Spirit is poured upon them, the awaited new era breaks in. The sec-

<sup>26</sup> The construct singular form of מַעֲשֵׂה has the customary meaning of 'work' but here more precisely 'effect of working'. (I. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962). 391), 'according to ancient Hebrew thought, moral perfection is always accompanied by שְׁלֵיִם in the material as well as the spiritual sense'.

<sup>27</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary*, trans. John Sturdy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 334.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., David Yonggi Cho, *Salvation, Health and Prosperity: Our Threefold Blessings in Christ* (Altamonte Springs, FL Creation House, 1987), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Cho, *Salvation, Health and Prosperity*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Cho, *Salvation, Health and Prosperity*, 54.

ond is the holistic scope of the Spirit's impact. It encompasses material, physical, emotional, moral, social and spiritual wholeness. This also ranges from personal to communal.

### b) In Relation to Theology of Blessing

Now, what can we glean from this Spirit tradition and the passage as to the further development of Cho's theology of blessing? First of all, this passage provides an important and solid pneumatological ground for material prosperity and physical wholeness. It is the Spirit that brings agricultural bounty through the transformation of the land. In the light of the heavy soteriological basis for Cho's theology of blessing, the creation-Spirit tradition provides a valid and fruitful new theological ground for a balanced theological foundation. In this way, his theology of blessing becomes a legitimate part of Pentecostal theology with a solid pneumatic biblical basis. Likewise, the healing tradition in Pentecostal theology, traditionally rooted in the Christological framework, can be expanded to the pneumatological sphere, by applying the restorative dimension of the creation Spirit tradition.

Second, the moral and ethical dimension of the work of the Spirit cannot be missed in this passage. Montague observed that this consequence is the first clear and positive association of the Spirit of God with the new ethical life that is part of the coming salvation.<sup>31</sup> And the Spirit of God inau-

gurates this new era of restoration.

One weakness of Cho's theology of blessing, often treated as a variation of the prosperity gospel, is the seeming ambiguity of its theological goal or intent. That is, a clear theological direction has not been emphasized to respond to the question, 'What is blessing for?' 'Is the Christian concept of blessing any different from, let's say, the Shamanistic or secular idea?' There is no doubt that biblical guidelines have been expressed through various avenues. However, still lacking is a definite theological guidance for the stewardship of God's blessing, which the next Spirit tradition attempts to address.

One implication of this weakness is the area of moral consciousness of justice and righteousness. Often this area has been marked for liberal Christian activists because Korean Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity was practically indifferent to the political oppression of the military government in the 1970s and 80s, often to support its commitment to national security against the alleged communist threat and in its drive for economic development. Ironically, this was the period when Korean Christianity achieved the most impressive church growth.

The realization of God's rule in justice and righteousness comes through the presence of God's Spirit among his people.<sup>32</sup> That justice and righteousness follow physical and material well-being may suggest that God brings

<sup>31</sup> George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 40.

<sup>32</sup> Isa. 11:1ff. also shows that the presence of God's Spirit upon his chosen leader results in the realization of justice and righteousness in society. It is also noted that this promise is for the future.

material affluence so that his people would uphold justice and righteousness, especially for the sake of the powerless. It is often the 'powerful' who violate justice and righteousness. The passage, thus, calls for a strong ethical orientation and responsibility in regard to the theology of blessing.

Third, the social dimension, related to the above, cannot be ignored. First of all, the coming of the Spirit is 'upon us', thus, unmistakably pointing to its social and communal context. Justice, righteousness, peace, security, and trust as the result of the Spirit's presence are also communal in context. This strongly opposes the highly individualized notion of the modern theology of blessing. One's personal affluence does not mean much, unless it is understood in the context of a community. For this reason, it is encouraging to see an increasing discussion on the Pentecostal notion of social service.<sup>33</sup>

For several decades, YFGC has shown its leadership in Christian service to society. Several among them stand out: the establishment of the Elim Welfare Town, a social institution for caring and training, the courageous publication of a daily newspaper, *Kookmin Daily*, a program to help children with heart disease to receive badly

needed heart surgery, and recently a humanitarian and relief NGO called 'Good People'. These epitomize their continuing efforts to 'serve' and 'lead' the society. However, given the potential of Korean Christianity and the YFGC in particular, there seem to be many more areas where the church should serve and lead.

Here is an example. Several years ago during a national election, an alliance of civic groups decided to investigate each candidate for their ethical record to determine their eligibility for the national assembly. They posted publicly a list of the ineligible and urged the voters to exclude them from their consideration. As a result, many on the list were not elected. However, soon after the election, the leader of the civic alliance was charged for his moral failure. This made us wonder why the powerful Korean Christianity had never done something similar in the past. What is more troubling is that this did not challenge Christians to assume their social role to uphold moral standards.

Fourth, the Spirit's potential for peace and unity adds an important element to the theology of blessing. The ultimate goal of the Spirit's coming in this tradition is for God's people to dwell in security and enjoy God's restoration, thus, completing the idea of shalom. This is particularly relevant to Korea's immediate concern for national reunification. The last half century has witnessed continuous political and military conflicts between the two Koreas. Christians have found themselves right in the middle of this conflict in two important areas.

First, they are primarily victims of the conflict, and well remember how

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33 For instance, the entire issue of academic journal *Transformation* 16:2 (1999) was dedicated to the theme, 'A Pentecostal approach to evangelization and social concern' with 'Brussels' Statement on Evangelization and Social Concern' (41-43). Also see the recently published study of what is called 'Progressive Pentecostal churches' throughout the world, Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

communist soldiers conspicuously burned and destroyed churches, and captured, tortured, killed, or took Christians to the north. This reminds us of similar experiences during the Japanese regime and also of the widespread persecution of Christians world-wide today. Second, Christians were in the forefront in upholding national security. Bible school students of the Yongmoon Prayer Mountain attempted more than once to march to the north across the heavily fortified demilitarized zone for national reunification. The Yongmoon Prayer Mountain also started a 24-hour prayer altar for national security, and many prayer mountains and churches followed this and began similar programs. While the nation is preparing for the eventual reunification, Pentecostal churches including the YFGC, should provide a holistic pneumatological paradigm for national unity and the post-reunification period.

Equally relevant is the Spirit's role in Christian unity. An institutional attempt for church unity through the World Council of Churches (WCC) has shown the importance of church unity in Christian witness. It has, however, also shown how challenging, if not impossible altogether, the task would be, without letting God's Spirit take full control and God's people faithfully obeying the Spirit's call. Although again failed by human ignorance, the Pentecostal movement, through the Azusa Street mission, demonstrated this ecumenical potential to the world.<sup>34</sup> Equally powerful were some

ecumenical Charismatic celebrations including mainline Protestants and Catholics together. Although less rooted in material blessing, the Spirit's potential for peace and unity urges Christians, particularly Pentecostals whose 'upward mobility' has given them a better forum to influence the society, to exercise their unique contributions. For this reason, even in a society where Christianity is an insignificant minority, Christians should uphold the public nature of religions including Christianity.

Fifth, although rather implicit, the holistic scope of the Spirit's work calls his people to faithful stewardship of God's creation.<sup>35</sup> The passage suggests that the whole chain of transformation and restoration begins with nature: the transformation of the land. The paradise motive further enhances this point: the picture of an ideal community of peace is not a concrete jungle where high technology and human-made skyscrapers overwhelm, but a setting where God's creation serves God and his people while nature is not exploited but properly cared for. If Pentecostals are people of God's Spirit, then God's creation shaped and vitalized by the Spirit should be champions of this stewardship. This pneumatic theology of creation deserves careful attention from Pentecostal academia and believers.

What has been laid out here is not an exhaustive list of potential areas

34 For example, Cecil M. Jr. Robeck, 'Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith: Implications for Ecumenism', *Pneuma: The Journal of the*

*Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (Spring, 1987), 61-84.

35 Wonsuk Ma, 'The Spirit of God in Creation: Lessons for Christian Mission', *Transformation* 24:3 & 4 (July & Oct. 2007), 222-30.

where a theology of blessing can expand its scope of formulation. These areas can strengthen some weak areas of the theology of blessing as it now stands. Also, this discussion clearly challenges this theology to explore several fruitful areas and expand the limits of the theology of blessing for its maturity.

## 2 Leadership-Spirit Tradition

This charismatic tradition is based on several popular OT figures including four judges, Saul, and David. In the record of their experiences with God's Spirit, several patterns emerge, with one important feature being the empowering effect. Gideon was equipped with military wisdom, strategy and executive ability (Judg. 6), while Samson experienced superhuman physical prowess every time the Spirit came mightily upon him (Judg. 14; 15). Saul was enraged at the barbaric demand of the Ammonites when the Spirit came upon him powerfully (1 Sam. 11); as a result, he mobilized a successful inter-tribal contingent army and destroyed the enemy's threat, liberating God's people. In David's case, no explicit purpose is given except the permanency of the Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13), although the ensuing achievements are implicitly attributed to the presence of the Spirit in him.

Another group of passages also refers to the Spirit, but this time for eschatological figures. For example, God introduces his chosen Servant in Isaiah 42. The Spirit of God is upon him and this presence of the Spirit is directly related to his mission: proclaiming justice to the nations, thus indicating the empowering aspect of

the leadership Spirit tradition. What is significant in this passage is the nature of empowerment. It is no longer physical and military, but internal and perhaps ethical in nature. The Servant is to persevere in the face of difficulties and adversaries and to persist to fulfil his mission.

A similar passage is found in Isaiah 11. This ideal Davidic king is to be equipped with the Spirit of the Lord. But the effect is more ethical or even spiritual than political or military, as the 'fear of the Lord' becomes the summary expression of the king's attribute. His rule is to establish justice and righteousness by protecting the rights of the powerless, while judging the oppression of the powerful. The Spirit's empowerment is to bring harmony to the human and animal worlds (Isa. 11:6-9).

Several characteristics found in this Spirit tradition are worth mentioning in relation to the present discussion. First, earlier traditions make it clear that only a few selected individuals experienced the Spirit of God. Only in the last days or eschatological consummation, will the Spirit be poured upon everyone (Joel 2:28; Num. 11). Second, the coming of the Spirit also appeared to be temporary in nature. As seen in Samson's case, for example, every time superhuman prowess was needed, the Spirit of God came upon him (Judg. 14; 15). The third is the unique feature of 'charismatic empowerment'. It implies the entrusted nature of the Spirit's empowerment, and a specific God-given task for the leader (commission).

*Acts 1:8*

But you will receive power when



the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and, to the ends of the earth.

This traditional Pentecostal motto passage has been perhaps the most recited verse in the whole Bible. In this passage, which is often considered to be the master plan for the entire Book of Acts, the immediate connection between the Holy Spirit and empowerment is evident. For our discussion, the whole of Lukan literature and its pneumatology will be within the scope of our investigation. It is well known that Lukan pneumatology has focused on, and further developed, the leadership and prophetic Spirit traditions of the Old Testament, both charismatic Spirit traditions. These are two important features of Lukan theology for Pentecostal missiology.

### a) Reflection

Two features characterize the process of God's plan unfolded in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.<sup>36</sup> The first is the charismatic orientation of Lukan theology. Luke carefully refers to the two charismatic spirit traditions: the leadership and prophetic spirit traditions. They are borrowed mostly from the Book of Isaiah.<sup>37</sup> To Luke, this

charismatic S/spirit is the source of miraculous manifestations of God's power through healing and miracles,<sup>38</sup> and also the source of persevering persistence to fulfil the calling. Luke understands that the charismatic empowerment of the Spirit is to enable the disciples to go out in power and perseverance. It was written that Paul and Peter, the key figures in the Book of Acts, ministered through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The second features is the mission focus of Lukan pneumatology. The two books of Luke were written not just to preserve the record of Jesus' life and ministry, but ultimately to convince 'most excellent Theophilus' (Luke 1:3, cf. Acts 1:1) of the Christian faith. Thus, the books were written with a missionary purpose.<sup>39</sup> One important observation is the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. Luke concludes his Gospel with a shorter form of the Great Commission, '...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witness of these things' (Luke 24:47-48). Then he records Christ's command for the disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they 'have been clothed with power from on high' (24:49). Here is a clear connection between the Great Commission and the role of the Holy Spirit.

36 Wonsuk Ma, 'Full Circle Mission: A Possibility of Pentecostal Missiology', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:1 (2005), 5-27.

37 Wonsuk Ma, 'The Empowerment of the Spirit of God in Luke-Acts: An Old Testament Perspective', in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 28-40.

38 For a fine study on the name of the 'power', see Manuel A. Bagalawis, 'Power' in Acts 1:8: Effective Witnessing through Signs and Wonders', *Journal of Asian Mission* 3:1 (2001), 1-13.

39 E.g., John Michael Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), esp. 18-25.

Then the Book of Acts repeats the concluding statement of the Gospel of Luke: '...he [Jesus] ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father' (Acts 1:4). But here, Luke makes an interesting reinterpretation of the popular remark of John the Baptist: 'He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (and fire)' (Mark 1:8; Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). In other Gospels, the Holy Spirit (and fire) functions to cleanse people of sins. However, Luke, by placing the same statement right after Acts 1:4, shows how Jesus' baptism in the Holy Spirit acquires an 'empowering' and missional function.

In Acts, this empowering presence of the Spirit is transferred to the disciples. The disciples through the empowerment of the Spirit became not only witnesses but also disciple-makers. Thus, one can call Luke's theology 'missiological pneumatology' or 'pneumatic missiology.' Without the 'witnessing' the presence of the Spirit has almost no meaning in Luke. One can say that the Holy Spirit is indeed the missionary Spirit. Also this empowering work of the Holy Spirit includes the ability to perform miracles as part of witnessing.

### b) In Relation to Cho's Theology of Blessing

The immediate connection between the coming of the Spirit and 'power' has been clearly demonstrated in the Korean Pentecostal lifestyle. In fact, one of the most sought-after components for ministry has been 'power' among ministers. Many revival meetings or prayer mountains feature this,

even among non-Pentecostal Christians.

Without doubt, Cho's theology expressed through his ministries and preaching has a strong emphasis on this Pentecostal motto: 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.' As a good Pentecostal, he has defined this experience as baptism in the Holy Spirit. Directly and indirectly, he indicates that this spiritual experience is a watershed for a host of new revolutionary experiences. Coupled with Cho's theology of blessing, the 'empowerment' has been rightly interpreted as multi-dimensional. This is a new contextual development of the traditional Pentecostal theology which had seen the 'empowerment' strictly in the spiritual dimension. This is easily understood in the context of the strongly eschatological urgency among the early Pentecostals.

Cho's comprehensive understanding of 'empowerment' naturally adds physical and 'other life matters' to the traditional spiritual endowment. This creative contextualization was a sensitive attempt to make the Pentecostal message (historically and theologically formulated) relevant to the unique Korean socio-religious context. This holistic interpretation also comes from a Korean, or more specifically Asian, worldview where the spiritual and physical interact in a holistic interpretation and application of the gospel. It was not until the appearance of Cho's ministry that the other-worldly Christian worldview persisted, which grew firm during the harsh Japanese period (1910-1947) and the Korean War (1950-52). Even the popular indigenous Pentecostal traditions of Woon-mong Nah after the liberation

continued this martyr-like Christian worldview.<sup>40</sup>

This comprehensive application of the Spirit's empowering ministry has virtually revolutionized Korean Christianity, in a way similar to the nation rising from its dire poverty in the 1970s and 80s. This message was also responsible for providing the dynamism which brought unprecedented growth to the Korean church in the same period.<sup>41</sup> Cho and his Yoido Full Gospel Church provided a new paradigm for the Korean church across the denominational boundaries.

However, this empowerment is only the first half of the picture. The real and ultimate theological goal lies in the witnessing in Jerusalem, the whole of Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. The theological goal was also shown in the historic development of the Pentecostal movement. From the very beginning, the Pentecostal movement was a mission movement. Within the first years of the Pentecostal outpouring in the Azusa Street Mission, several hundred Pentecostal missionaries preached the gospel throughout the world. A typical example is found among what Vinson Synan calls 'one-

way ticket missionaries'.<sup>42</sup>

The formation of the Assemblies of God, the first Pentecostal 'denomination' after the Pentecostal breakout, was explicitly for fellowship among Pentecostal believers and for mission. Charles Parham, the 'father' of the Pentecostal movement argued from the very beginning that the gift of tongues was specifically intended for missionary tasks, bypassing tedious language learning processes through the supernatural 'empowerment' of the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> Although Parham's initial belief was quickly proven untrue, this connection between the Pentecostal movement and mission, nonetheless continued as the bedrock of Pentecostal ethos.

The empowerment was rightly interpreted to be holistic, encompassing physical and material in addition to spiritual, and this is where theology of blessing and the spiritual empowerment are missiologically linked. This passage shows not only how the theological goal of empowerment has impacted Korean Christianity in the past, but also what a powerful potential it still has to explore. Once this theological goal is articulated as part of 'Full Gospel' theology, there is no doubt that the YFGC, its powerful daughter churches, its media arm and

40 For a detailed study on Nah, see Changsoo Kang, 'An Analytical Study on the Life of Woon-Mong Na, Indigenous Korean Pentecostal' (Th.M. thesis, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, 2003).

41 Wonsuk Ma, 'The Effect of Rev. Cho's Sermon Style for Church Growth and the Development of Theology', in *Charis and Charisma: David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church*, eds. Myung Sung-hoon and Hong Young-gi (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2003), 159-71.

42 Vinson Synan, *The Spirit Said 'Grow': The Astounding Worldwide Expansion of Pentecostal And Charismatic Churches* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1992), 39-48.

43 James R. Goff, Jr. 'Initial Tongues in the Theology of Charles Fox Parham,' in *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, ed. Gary B. McGee (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 57-71.

theological network will lead the worldwide Pentecostal family, particularly in the non-western world, with a distinct theological paradigm.

In the past, unfortunately, some programs and concepts uniquely developed by the YFGC have been further developed by someone else. For instance, the cell system has been theoretically further developed and popularized by Singaporean churches, church growth is now popularized by others through the 'natural church development' theory, and the traditionally 'Pentecostal' praise and worship movement in Korea has become a trademark of another church, just to mention a few.

## V Conclusion

This study argues that the theology of blessing developed by David Yonggi Cho since the 1960s finds its legitimacy both in the socio-cultural context of Korea and in the pneumatic tradition of the Bible. Legitimacy, however, comes with clear limitations. Poverty in post-war Korea no longer exists today. In fact, in a generation, affluence has become the major threat to Christian spirituality. The religious orientation provides both legitimacy and limitations. Christianity is called to be relevant but also to transform the culture and religious orientations. Even the biblical evidence offers a strong basis for the theology of blessing, and yet it also shows it to go beyond expecting a good life. Christians are called to serve others and the kingdom of God.

### 1 Fundamental Issues

In spite of the hard-argued legitimacy

of the theology of blessing, a critical question remains, as the theology of blessing is by nature self-centred: What is the fundamental purpose and requirement of a Christian life? The broad teaching of the scriptures presents a radical lifestyle totally different from self-centred gratification; it is the other—or kingdom-centred life that is called for. Legitimacy for the theology of blessing ends with the prayer for daily bread for our own selves; it is 'may your kingdom come' that will determine the lifestyle of Jesus' followers as stipulated in the Beatitudes (Mat. 5).

Simplistic minds with deep orientation to blessing can develop a tendency to judge life according to the level of wealth and health. Suffering in God's economy is a part of reality, and this is not always due to sin (e.g., Job). Also it is important to be reminded that God has placed a moral requirement on his people. He is not to be treated as a magical formula for one's gain. This calls for a serious theological reflection on blessing, and its measurement as Christians.

Therefore, Christians will need to test the motive for asking for blessings. Then the limitation: Is what I ask for to meet my needs for sustenance or what I wish to have? Then means are tested: a combination of God's gracious intervention and hard work will be acceptable, but not the accumulation of wealth by oppressing others, directly or indirectly. This is a justice issue. Then ultimately what is the gift of blessing for? This is then a stewardship issue. How we view life's affairs under God's rulership is ultimately an exercise of authentic discipleship: lifestyle that emulates that of our Lord.

Then, the Christian life is far beyond our own comfort in this world; it is to be a life lived for others and for God's kingdom.

## 2 For Korean Christians and Beyond

After a period of unprecedented growth, the Korean church has lost momentum since the early 1990s, and the YFGC is not an exception. The Korean church as a whole has found mission as its solution, and this was a right choice. The growth dynamism has been successfully redirected to mission, and it has now a contingent of more than 20,000 cross-cultural missionaries. This missional development also provides an exceptionally conducive opportunity to make a timely adjustment in the theology of blessing, which was at the heart of the church growth dynamic.

There are two specific tasks ahead of the Korean church and the YFGC, especially in the post-Cho era. First, a close review of the popular understanding of mission among Korean Christians is necessary. The narrow definition of mission as preaching the gospel and planting local churches is over-simplistic and this no longer serves the missionary work of the Korean church. The Lausanne Covenant, which has become a solid guideline for evangelical mission, presents an excellent example for mission definition.

If the present narrow definition is applied, then there are too many Korean missionaries in places where there are more Christians than in Korea by ratio. For example, how can

one explain Korean missionaries in Zambia where Christianity is now the official religion of the country? Yet, Korean missionaries in Zambia, like many from other countries, have engaged in authentic and impressive missionary work by working with nationals to reach urban Muslims, caring for street children who lost their parents from AIDS, and others. A holistic mission understanding is urgent for the Korean church.

The second is the broader understanding of empowered mission. The notion of empowerment among Pentecostals has also been narrowly perceived, and this has not allowed Pentecostal missionaries to expand their mission thinking beyond proclamation and church planting under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The broader understanding of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit would allow Pentecostals to take and appropriate various elements as missional gift, be it spiritual, economical, circumstantial, and the like. There is potential that this can further enable them to take adverse circumstances (such as Paul's imprisonment or Stephen's martyrdom) as God's empowering act, thus challenging the self-centred interpretation of blessing.

This is where a historic responsibility and opportunity lies for the YFGC as the largest single congregation in the world. If the era of mega-churches is coming to an end and the new era of mission is here, then YFGC can again lead the mission engagements of the Korean church and beyond. The guiding principle is the holistic view of mission and empowerment. This is my modest theological prayer.