

New Wineskins Need New Wine: Contextual Changes and New Hope for Korean Pentecostalism¹

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Introduction

For many years following the Korean War (June 25, 1950–July 27, 1953), the Korean people suffered from its after-effects. They had experienced the tragedy of fratricidal war, with a vast majority having lost family members and fighting for survival. Many also experienced extreme poverty, illnesses, and despair. Meanwhile, most conservative Korean Christians adopted a passive attitude and stance toward political issues.

Korean Pentecostalism was able to offer hope to the people, not through a vision of social reformation but via the Threefold Blessing motivated by Yonggi Cho.² Jürgen Moltmann defined the Threefold Blessing as a theology of hope in the Korean context,³ the triple blessing conveying the kerygma of spiritual, physical, and material hope. Although the threefold blessing was contradictory to the society, economy, and politics of the time, it nonetheless successfully contextualized into Korean Christians as a Pentecostal hope.

When contextualized into the post-Korean War context, the Threefold Blessing presented to Korean Christians a hope that they could overcome their suffering through faith in Christ. In other words, it was not just a case of seeking after blessings, but rather it represented ‘good news’ to Koreans who were suffering under extreme hardship. As a result, it brought about remarkable church growth. The message of the Threefold Blessing was popularized to Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel Church (hereafter YFGC), which grew to become the largest church in the world

¹This article is based on his book, *A Theology of Hope: Contextual Perspectives on Korean Pentecostalism*. (Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2019 and is available at www.aptspress.org.

²The doctrine of the Threefold Blessing is based on the biblical text 3 John 2—salvation, divine healing, and prosperity.

³Jürgen Moltmann, “The Blessing of Hope: The Theology of Hope and the Full Gospel of Life,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13.2 (2005), 148-49.

in the mid-1990s. Some scholars think that the rapid growth of Korean Pentecostalism is due to its parallels with Korean Shamanism.⁴ However, the YFGC's success can be attributed (at least in part) to how its message responded to the needs of Korea's people in the post-war context.

In today's Korean socio-economic context, however, pursuing blessings has more and more become a form of Christian materialism. With regard to this tendency, Wonsuk Ma points out that Pentecostals need to consider whether their pursuit of blessings is self-serving or kingdom-serving.⁵ As a matter of fact, the Threefold Blessing can no longer function as a hope to Koreans unless it is re-contextualized into the contemporary context.

In this paper, the ecclesiological and soteriological changes in the Korean context will be discussed, as well as the implications of this for the re-contextualization of the Threefold Blessing.

Contextual Change

Three dynamics need to be considered to re-contextualize the Threefold Blessing for contemporary Korean Pentecostals. They are as follows:

First, Korea continues to undergo remarkable socio-economic changes. For instance, in May 2012, South Korea joined Germany, France, Japan, the United States, Italy, and the United Kingdom as the seventh member of the "20-50 Club." To be a member, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of a nation with a population of 50 million or more must exceed \$20,000.⁶ Today's Korean people (including Pentecostals) do not suffer from absolute poverty any longer, although some may experience relative poverty.

Second, the concerns and demands of contemporary Korean Pentecostals have changed and become more sophisticated. With the rapid westernization of its complex societal structure, the values of Korea are changing. In a highly competitive society focused on material

⁴Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2005), 105; Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1995), 220-222.; Boo-Woong Yoo, *Korean Pentecostalism: Its History and Theology* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988), 223.

⁵Wonsuk Ma, "Dr. Yonggi Cho's Theology of Blessing: New Theological Basis and Directions," in 2003 Young San International Theological Symposium (Seoul, Korea: Hansei University, 2003), 191.

⁶Park Sung Seek, "Korea in the 20-50 Club: Where Should It Go from Here?" *The Korea Herald*, June 11, 2012, available from <http://view.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20120611000997> (accessed June 25, 2012).

success, Koreans are losing their sense of communal responsibility and caring for others. Social problems like the increasing gap between rich and poor and family breakdowns have deepened.

Third, Korean Pentecostals are facing new issues caused by their contextual changes. Increasingly, it is important for them to share their financial blessings with others rather than focusing on themselves. Remembering how they were marginalized financially after the Korean War when the theology of the Threefold Blessing was first introduced, they need to show more concern toward neglected social groups, sharing their blessings with the poor, the needy, and the politically disadvantaged.

Many Korean Pentecostals sense the importance of extending the scope of the triple blessing to the whole of society; and they also recognize the disappointment of many non-believers in Christianity due to the exposed lifestyles of certain Christian leaders in both the church and the nation. Case in point—in 2008, Myoung Bak Lee, a Christian, was elected the nation's president with overwhelming support from the Christian community, which demonstrated the increasing influence of Christianity.⁷ His cabinet included many members of SoMang GyoHoi [Hope Church], where he attended. In fact, in 2009, Christians made up 57 percent of his government's ministers, 50 percent of the Chong Wha Dae's [Blue House's] senior secretaries, and 39 percent of his secretaries.⁸ Sadly, a number of them had serious ethical problems and became involved in a series of corruption scandals. They were arrested and forced to step down, including Lee's older brother (an elder in the church), who was suspected of having taken a bribe.⁹

The "prosperity gospel" without ethics can result in Christian materialism, which encourages Pentecostals to justify any means for the accumulation of wealth. Korean Pentecostals generally have not considered Christian ethics in handling wealth to be significant. Pentecostal preachers around the world (including Cho) preach that prosperity is the will of God without clarifying how Christians should deal ethically with financial matters. This can bring about a dualistic fallacy—i.e., Prosperity is good and God's will for his people, while poverty is bad and not God's will. Due to their belief that prosperity comes entirely from God, many Pentecostals have felt it is the wealthy,

⁷Ibid., 120.

⁸Ho Woo Yoon, "Lee Myoung Bak Jeongkwon Seo Joongyong Doin Gidokgyo Shinja Deul [Christians appointed in President Lee's government]," *Joo Gan Kyoung Hyang* [Weekly Kyoung Hyang], April 7, 2009, available from *Joo Gan Kyoung Hyang* [database online]; http://newsmaker.khan.co.kr/khnm.html?mode=view&dept=113&art_id=19621&fid=&sort=sym (accessed July 15, 2012).

⁹"South Korean President's Brother Lee Sang-deuk Arrested," BBC NEWS, July 11, 2012, available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18792840> (accessed July 12, 2012).

rather than the poor, who are blessed by God. In contrast, Methodists have held that the sources of Christian wealth are diligence and frugality,¹⁰ John Wesley saying that “Religion [Christianity] must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches.”¹¹

Recontextualization of the Threefold Blessing

Spiritual Prosperity

When Christianity arrived in Korea, the most urgent theme of missions was to save souls. Spiritual salvation gave the hope of the Kingdom of God to Koreans who used to practice shamanism or indigenous high religions. Theologically, however, it is questionable whether redemption only refers to spiritual salvation in the Bible. Yonggi Cho insists that redemption needs to include social redemption that eradicates social depravity and environmental redemption for the sake of the whole groaning creation (Rom. 8:22), since the redemption of Christ is holistic.¹²

If Christ’s redemption is restricted to spiritual salvation for individuals, the Kingdom of God cannot be experienced in the here and now. It can be only an eschatological hope to Korean Pentecostals. For Moltmann, the Kingdom God is present through living in the hope for the Kingdom.¹³ In that sense, his eschatological hope is both future and present. For Korean Pentecostals, however, the Kingdom is not merely the subject of their eschatological hope. They believe that, alongside spiritual salvation, they are saved from the curse and from the evil causes of poverty and disease through Christ’s redemption.

The phrase in 3 John 2—“as your soul prospers”—is the biblical basis for the spiritual prosperity portion of the Threefold Blessing. Traditionally, the spiritual blessing is simplified as spiritual salvation. However, this raises two questions. First, does the phrase only refer to spiritual salvation? And second, is the salvation in the Threefold Blessing restricted to just the spiritual dimension?

One of the major concerns of classical Pentecostals was how to

¹⁰Sang Yun Lee, *A Theology of Hope: Contextual Perspectives in Korean Pentecostalism* (Baguio City: APTS Press, 2008), 267-271.

¹¹Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Co., 2002), 175.

¹²Jun Hee Cha, “The Anthropology of Rev. Yonggi Cho’s Threefold Blessing Theology: In the Light of the Old Testament,” in *Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Ministry and Theology I*, ed. Young San Theological Institute (2008), 155.

¹³Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press, 1997), 29.

define sanctification and the baptism in the Spirit. They agreed that sanctification and salvation should not be separated but rather combined together as one experience. To them, salvation was not the ultimate goal but simply marked the beginning of their faith. In fact, the spiritual blessing did not merely refer to salvation, but also to empowerment by the Spirit for service as well as for daily life. While liberation theology understands salvation as having social implications, conservative evangelical Christians have traditionally understood it as referring to soul-salvation. Some Pentecostals, on the other hand, have extended the understanding of God's work of the atonement to include health and prosperity in this life.¹⁴ The Threefold Blessing reflects this perspective.

Cho's holistic soteriology is based on the triple fall of Adam, which corresponds with the triple corruption of humankind—the spirit, the body, and the environment.¹⁵ Thus, one would expect Cho's theology of the redemptive work of Christ to have addressed these three categories, including environmental redemption. However, until 2005, his soteriology was restricted to the spiritual and individual aspects.¹⁶ To him, Christ's salvation saves the soul and changes the way human beings live from being a curse to being a blessing.¹⁷ In other words, before 2005, it seems that Cho did not think that Christ's redemption could be applied to society and the ecosystem, even though his understanding of salvation had been extended to include existential matters for believers.

As a spiritual hope, the Threefold Blessing has to have both eschatological and practical implications for the present Christian life. It seems that Korean Pentecostals mostly understand the spiritual blessing as referring to the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the reception of spiritual gifts. However, this raises the question of whether the phrase “as your soul prospers” refers only to the experience of Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts without concern for the ethical dimension or fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). In fact, Korean Pentecostals place more emphasis on the spiritual gifts than on producing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian maturity.

The spiritual gifts and fruits cannot be simply equated. According to Menzies and Menzies, Paul's fruit of the Spirit or his ethical language

¹⁴Donald W Dayton, “The Good God and the Theology of Blessing in the Thought of David Yonggi Cho,” Young San Theological Institute(ed), *Dr. Yonggi Cho's Ministry & Theology I* (Gunpo, Korea: Hansei University Logos, 2008), 54.

¹⁵Young Hoon Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Theological Development* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2009), 129.

¹⁶Moon Chul Shin, “Young San eui Saeng Tae Shin Hak [Yonggi Cho's Eco-Theology],” in Gook Jae Shin Hak Yeon Goo Won [International Theological Institute], *Young San eui Mokhoiwoya Shin Hak I* [Yonggi Cho's Ministry and Theology], 398.

¹⁷Yonggi Cho, *Salvation, Health, and Prosperity* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987), 16.

cannot be linked to Luke's Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit in a causal relationship.¹⁸ Compared with Luke, Paul included a larger spectrum of activities within the ministry of the Spirit. To him, the Spirit is more than simply the source of inspired speech and charismatic wisdom; He brings ethical transformation and life-changing power into every believer.¹⁹ For Luke, the spiritual gifts relate to the missiological dimension of the Spirit's work; but for Paul, they are concerned with the ethical dimension and the regeneration of the believer.²⁰

Regarding the relationship between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, Parks says that they are "the two wings of a bird. The wings must work in harmony if the bird is to fly."²¹ Dunn says that, through the washing of regeneration and renewal effected by the Spirit, Christians are saved and can be transformed into the very image of the Lord.²² As a branch can bear fruit when it remains on the vine (Jn. 15:5), spiritual fruit will be produced when people are led by the Spirit.

The spiritual life of Korean Pentecostals is based on being filled with the Spirit repeatedly, which involves not only having a spiritual experience, but also continuing to live in the Spirit. The work of the Spirit in Christians cannot only be assessed in terms of the reception of spiritual gifts. Similarly, living in the Spirit does not merely mean practicing spiritual gifts on a daily basis but involves individual transformation into the image of Christ.

How then can this change in lifestyle through the Spirit be realized? The concept of the spiritual blessing part in the Threefold Blessing has to be re-interpreted and re-contextualized from an ethical perspective to include a focus on the fruit of the Spirit alongside the baptism in the Spirit. The cultivation of the Spirit's fruit should follow His baptism. Thus, it is necessary to reconsider the meaning of spiritual prosperity as to whether it only involves Spirit baptism or includes ongoing life in the Spirit leading to Christian maturity.

¹⁸William W. and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundation of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 205.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 205-206.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 206.

²¹H. Parks, "Charisma: What's in a Word?" *Renewal* 52 (August/September 1974): 21; Paul Elbert, "Calvin and the Spiritual Gifts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 1979): 237-238.

²²James D. G. Dunn, "Spirit and Kingdom," *The Expository Times*, January 1970, 37.

Healing

Can the theology of healing in the Threefold Blessing sufficiently respond to people's suffering in today's world? Cho's understanding of healing does not only mean physical curing, but is also related to good news for suffering people.²³ Healing has been accomplished through the event of the crucifixion of Christ,²⁴ thus healing needs the broader sense of integrating social and ecological aspects. It is clear in the New Testament account that not all the sick were healed. The Apostle Paul prayed three times for the removal of his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7), which many scholars think may have been a physical weakness. Instead of receiving divine healing, the Lord told him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9, NKJV).

This raises pastoral questions about how to help Pentecostals who are not healed after extended periods of prayer. How can the Threefold Blessing give hope to those who are disabled, suffer from an incurable disease, or have never received material blessings despite praying for the Threefold Blessing? Korean Pentecostalism has failed to provide satisfactory theological responses to those who do not receive healing or blessings. James emphasizes that prayer for healing is the responsibility not only of the sick person, but also of the elders of the church (Jam. 5:14-15). The sick person needs the help of the church as the body of Christ. The church's role in healing is based on sacrificial love on behalf of others.

Pentecostal ministers and leaders tend to be silent about those in the church who have not received divine healing. However, these people need even more pastoral care as well as prayer instead of being criticized that sin or unbelief may be hindering their healing. The disabled suffer not only from their physical or mental handicap, but also from social prejudice and discrimination, which may bring on more hardship than their disability. The ultimate goal for the disabled may not be physical healing but rather healing of a social system that stigmatizes them. Amos Yong says that it's a problem to pray for one with Down's syndrome to be healed of this chromosomal aberration when people fail to recognize the human person in the image of God beyond his physical difficulties.²⁵

²³Allan Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Malden, MS: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 601-603.

²⁴Yonggi Cho, *Fivefold Gospel and Threefold Blessing* (Seoul, Korea: Seoul Logos, 1998), 128-129.

²⁵Amos Yong, "Disability and Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecost and the Renewal of the

Healing in the Threefold Blessing has been considered only in its personal and physical dimensions. Its scope needs to be enlarged to include society, the family, and the church. The suffering of the disabled cannot be alleviated without addressing the issue of social prejudice.²⁶ Unfortunately, disability and incurable sicknesses are still mainly perceived in biological, medical, and individualized terms rather than in the social dimension.²⁷

Richard Shaull points out that Pentecostal theology has not made many efforts to develop “a theology of social responsibility clearly integrating the personal and the social, a number of things are happening in their communities in which this integration is a reality.”²⁸ The social dimension of healing in the Threefold Blessing has also not been considered. Moltmann says, “The modern concept of person is the social concept: ‘person’ no longer means the all-sufficing, self-sufficient, universal and reflective figure.”²⁹ Thus, ‘person’ cannot be understood outside of relationships with others, and healing should not be limited to personal matters.

In the synoptic gospels, people encountered Christ as the healing power of the divine Spirit. He met people not as sinners but as those who were sick, suffering, and in need of help.³⁰ As a result, healing occurred in the interaction between Jesus and expectation—i.e., between a person’s faith and Jesus’ will.³¹ To Moltmann, healing is the sign of the new creation and the rebirth of life;³² and furthermore, healing consists of the restoration of disrupted community and the sharing and communication of life.³³ To European theologians like Barth, Moltmann, and Tillich, the Kingdom of God is an agent to heal social evils as well as disease in the present.³⁴

As physical and mental illnesses are often related to social and environmental circumstances, healing has to be understood from a broader perspective. Doctors believe that many diseases are caused by stress in contemporary society and that those who are cured from a disease may relapse if their stress remains. Healing not only concerns

Church,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19 (2010): 77.

²⁶Lee, 261-266.

²⁷Yong, 81.

²⁸Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 214.

²⁹Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press, 1999), 251.

³⁰Ibid., 189.

³¹Ibid., 190.

³²Ibid., 189.

³³Ibid., 191.

³⁴Dayton, “The Good God and the Theology of Blessing,” 55.

physical and mental illness, but also the individual circumstances with which people struggle, the society in which they are involved, and the natural ecosystem.³⁵ Healing is incomplete unless it addresses all three of these areas.

Healing for a Broken Society

In 2002, Korea ranked second behind the USA in divorce rate,³⁶ many victims suffering from family breakdown rather than poverty or disease. Inner emotional healing may be the preferred approach for the problems between spouses and between parents and their children. The Threefold Blessing has focused more on physical than on inner healing, so the healing portion of the Threefold Blessing remains narrow in scope.

Anderson claims that healing is more than curing and that it must be holistic for today's suffering world.³⁷ Yong also distinguishes between the terms 'healing' and 'curing,' preferring to use curing for physical healing since healing's broader and more holistic meaning includes the social and psychological dimensions.³⁸ Curing is not the term normally used when broken relationships in the family and society have been resolved. Yong also insists that healing for the disabled goes beyond improving their physical conditions to bringing about conceptual change in society on their behalf.³⁹ The healing of social prejudices and discrimination, which they face daily, is important to them; and these can be resolved when ordinary people show concern towards them.

For Moltmann, healing and salvation are related.⁴⁰ Similarly, Cho makes no distinction between the two. The crucifixion of Christ was intended to bring about the holistic recovery of the entire universe, addressing not only physical illness but also the whole of humanity, the ecosystem, and the universe itself. Healing in the Threefold Blessing likewise needs to be extended. Urbanization, industrialization, and modernization bring environmental problems, family breakdown, human rights abuses, gender discrimination, and an increasing gap between rich and poor.

³⁵Kim, "Paul Tillich and Dr. Yonggi Cho," 360.

³⁶Caroline Gluck, "Koreans Learn to Live with Divorce," BBC NEWS, May 8, 2003, available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/3011119.stm> (accessed June 25, 2012). See also "The Statistics Korea," http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor_nw/2/2/1/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=246945 (accessed June 25, 2012). According to Statistics Korea, in February 2011, there were 23,600 marriages and 8,300 divorces.

³⁷Allan Anderson, "Pentecostals, Healing and Ecumenism," *International Review of Mission* 93 (July/October 2004), 494-495.

³⁸Lee, 261-266.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 189.

Pentecostals have to consider if the focus on individual healing can give hope to Korean society. Pannenberg says, “Christians do not hope just for themselves, which would mean only too often the hope of one would be at the cost of the hopes of others. In Christ they share in a universal hope for humanity.”⁴¹ Indeed, it is questionable whether healing in the Threefold Blessing can continue to give hope to society and church if it remains limited to the physical and personal dimensions.

Healing for Han

The issue of *Han*⁴² also needs to be addressed. As already discussed, Koreans are people of *Han*,⁴³ the national sentiment with implications for every aspect of Korean life. *Han* is normally accumulated through external factors and will not be resolved unless these external elements are removed. Korean shamanic rituals were focused on releasing people’s *Han*,⁴⁴ which is one of the primary reasons why shamanism has survived.⁴⁵

Koreans experienced the *Han* of poverty and sickness, which left them frustrated because they could not handle it themselves. Dong Soo Kim insists that if Pentecostalism had been unable to release *Han*, it could not have grown so rapidly and quickly.⁴⁶ The Threefold Blessing, with its message of divine blessings, effectively responded to the *Han* of Koreans, making it very appealing because it focused on individual *Han* in the life of ordinary people rather than the collective *Han* of society. To address this collective *Han* aspect, the meaning of healing in the Threefold Blessing has to be expanded to give Koreans hope regarding change in their current circumstances through re-interpreting healing for contemporary society. Previously focused on individual and physical *Han* due to poverty and illness, the Threefold Blessing now needs to

⁴¹Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapid, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 177.

⁴²*Han* is a typical Korean emotion accumulating by grief or resentment for a long time. It has no English equivalent but could be translated as deep sorrow, regret, unresolved resentment against injustice, and a sense of helplessness.

⁴³Dong Suh Nam, “Towards a Theology of Han,” in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, ed. Commission on Theological Concerns, the Christian Conference of Asia (London, UK: Zed Press, 1981), 50.

⁴⁴David Kwang Sun Suh, “Liberating Spirituality in the Korean Minjung Tradition: Shamanism and Minjung Liberation,” Virginia Fabella, Peter K. H. Lee, and David Kwang Sun Suh (eds.), *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 33.

⁴⁵Pan Ho Kim, “The Healing of *Han* in Korean Pentecostalism,” Young San Theological Institute(ed), *Dr. Yonggi Cho’s Ministry & Theology I* (Gunpo, Korea: Hansei University Logos, 2008), 127.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 124.

consider healing the collective *Han* caused by such social factors as injustice, inequality between rich and poor, gender and racial discrimination, inequality of opportunity, and capital exploitation.

The healing of relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed and the wrongdoer and the wronged cannot be achieved without reconciliation through forgiveness. Division of the Korean peninsula is a major cause behind the *Han* of the Korean people. Both sides of Korean border have been antagonistic towards each other. Thus, unification cannot happen without each side extending the hand of forgiveness. Without healing wounded hearts, this political and diplomatic matter cannot be solved.

A new understanding of healing must be accompanied by a new theological perspective. Forgiveness between social and political groups and between individuals has to precede the healing of *Han*. The biblical precedence in Matthew 5:23-24 and 6:12 teaches that the inner healing of those who are wronged cannot take place unless they offer forgiveness to the wrongdoer.

In summary, previously, healing focused on physical curing. Now it must include inner healing for individuals, healing of communal discord, recovering of the ecosystem, and even reconciliation between North and South Koreans.

Recontextualization of Prosperity

Theological controversies arose in past decades about the Threefold Blessing, its emphasis on prosperity, and its relationship to Shamanism. These controversies continue today because Korean Pentecostals have not applied Christian values to their emphasis on prosperity nor have they reflected upon the purpose of prosperity in the contemporary Korean context. Pentecostals believe that blessings come from God; and in a biblical and theological perspective, there is nothing wrong with that. However, by persistently asking God to provide financial prosperity when they already have enough, their concept of God becomes similar to the god of shamanism.

The prosperity of Christians needs to be understood in terms of the community and responsibility to society. As Moltmann points out, the concept of “person” needs to be seen in social terms.⁴⁷ The new Threefold Blessing has to deal with those same social and political matters. Theologically and biblically, blessing does not mean to have more than others. If the Threefold Blessing does not embrace the fulfillment of basic human needs for neighbors, sharing blessings with

⁴⁷Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 251.

the poor, and altruistic love for others, it can no longer give hope to Koreans.

Originally, the theology of the Threefold Blessing developed within a context of poverty. As already mentioned, Cho regards poverty as a curse from Satan,⁴⁸ he himself being a victim of poverty and remembering what it meant to have nothing to eat.⁴⁹ Most early members of the YFGC were extremely poor, so his message of prosperity through Christ gave them hope.⁵⁰ Today, however, few members of YFGC feel they suffer from poverty; they have received financial blessings and their hope for prosperity has been realized.

Pentecostals need to think about what prosperity means to them, taking into account their obligation to their neighbors. Vinson Synan notes that in every generation there will be the poor and the sick, just as Jesus said—“*You will always have the poor among you*” (John. 12:8), and they will need the gospel of the Threefold Blessing.⁵¹ While Moltmann is not opposed to the prosperity of Christians, he’s strongly critical of rich Christians who further impoverish the poor or cheat others for personal benefit.⁵² In the New Testament, the tax-collectors were Jews who knew about the God of Israel. As they oppressed powerless compatriots and as they abused their power in order to accumulate wealth, their god became Mammon and an unjust deity.

To early Korean Pentecostals, prosperity in the Threefold Blessing was not the selfish pursuit of wealth but rather a source of hope in desperate situations. Unfortunately, that hope has tended to turn into a self-centered desire for more prosperity without a willingness to help others. Nowadays, Koreans suffer not from financial poverty but from symptoms of spiritual poverty such as spiritual malaise, emptiness of life, and lack of love. Pentecostal hope must emphasize loving concern for others. Pentecostals need to discover a new hope based on sharing blessings with others in the wider society. Also, Lee notes that Pentecostal churches have focused on the spiritual manifestations of the Spirit described in the book of Acts, but they should not overlook their responsibility for charitable deeds toward their neighbors, as these were also part of the early church’s ministry.⁵³

Korean Pentecostals need to think theologically about what the

⁴⁸Yonggi Cho, *The Fourth Dimension II* (Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing Inc., 1983), 137.

⁴⁹Cho, *The Fourth Dimension II*, 137-38.

⁵⁰Yonggi Cho, *The Holy Spirit, My Senior Partner* (Milton Keynes, UK: Word Ltd., 1989), 8; Cho, *Salvation, Health and Prosperity*, 11.

⁵¹Lee, 267-271.

⁵²Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London, UK: SCM Press, 1999), 99-100.

⁵³Sang Yun Lee, 253-259.

Kingdom of God in the here and now means in the contemporary Korean context and how they can participate in that Kingdom. Pursuing a more prosperous lifestyle on earth when they already have enough is not the way to be a part of the Kingdom. Instead, they can participate by sharing their blessings and caring for the needy with the love of Christ. They need to focus on giving instead of receiving and to recognize that blessings are for the welfare of the community. The understanding of prosperity has to be changed to include a communal dimension where Pentecostals share community burdens and make sacrifices on behalf of others. As Althouse says, “A revision of Pentecostal theology can revitalize the social-political dimensions of the Pentecostal message as a prophetic call to church and society.”⁵⁴

New Wine for New Wineskins

Love without sacrifice is deficient. The love of God for humanity was made manifest in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; thus sacrifice is an essential element of Christian love. The new theological basis for prosperity in the Threefold Blessing must likewise focus on love for neighbors and the wider society. Again, Althouse insists, “The dialectic of cross and resurrection is the moment of the inbreaking of eschatological future into the present.”⁵⁵

How then should the theological terms ‘hope’ and ‘love’ be understood in relation to each other? According to Pannenberg:

Hope and love belong together. Only those who hope with and for others, can also love them, not in the sense of egotistical desire to possess the one who is loved (*amor concupiscentiae*), but in the sense of a benevolent love that helps the other on the way to fulfilment of his or her specific human destiny (*amor amicitiae*).⁵⁶

To achieve communal prosperity, hope’s focus needs to shift from being self-centered to being community-oriented. Young Hoon Lee suggested that the Threefold Blessing needs a blessing that favors a distribution of wealth to marginalized people and a balanced development that involves all of Korea’s social classes.⁵⁷ As long as the hope of prosperity remains self-centered, it lacks a strong Christian

⁵⁴Ibid., 179.

⁵⁵Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann* (London, UK: T&T Clark International, 2003), 178.

⁵⁶Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3, 182.

⁵⁷Lee, 253-259.

ethical base. The hope of prosperity for and with others will produce joy and fulfillment as Pentecostals pursue this hope in community. Moltmann says that hope must be forward looking, forward moving, and transforming the present.⁵⁸ His theology of hope helps to remedy the theological disadvantages of the Threefold Blessing.

Cho says that, in order to live a life of true joy and happiness, we must love and sacrifice for our neighbors. If we would yield and share a little more love for the happiness of our neighbors, the exploits of the love and sacrifice will come back to us as joy and happiness.⁵⁹ The emphasis of Cho's message has changed from a focus on personal blessing (especially prosperity and healing) to the pursuit of joy and fulfillment in Christ through sacrificial love for others. Commenting on this change in Cho's social theology, Anderson argues, "The social theology of Cho is based on this concept of the love of God that fills the life of the Christian through the Holy Spirit and enables the Christian to share this love with others, thereby meeting Jesus in daily life through serving poor and disadvantaged people in the immediate society as well as in other countries."⁶⁰

In the post-Korean War context, without resolving the problem of eating and drinking, it was not easy to experience the Kingdom of God as "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit" in the here and now. However, in the contemporary context, the Kingdom is not a matter of eating or drinking for one's own benefit, but God's righteousness for an unjust society and peace and joy with others in the Spirit through acts of love.

In contrast to post-war Pentecostals, today's Korean Pentecostals can act generously by sharing their financial blessings and resources with the marginalized and disadvantaged. To do so, they have to transfer the personal blessings based on 'I-oriented' into a bigger spectrum, such as social and communal blessings. For such a transition, the theological understandings of blessing have to be changed as well. This new blessing must be neither to hold nor to have more but instead to share with others. In order to make that happen, the orientation of the Threefold Blessing must change from 'I-oriented' to 'We-oriented.'

⁵⁸Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: on the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 16.

⁵⁹Yonggi Cho, *Albeit We Shall Love* (Seoul, Korea: Seoul Logos, 2008), 267-291.

⁶⁰Allan Anderson, "A Time to Share Love: Global Pentecostalism and the Social Ministry of David Yonggi Cho," *JPT*, Vol 21 (2012), 167.

Conclusion

In the Threefold Blessing, Jesus is the Savior, the Healer, and the Dispenser of blessings. In the past, the message of the Threefold Blessing was very influential among Korean Pentecostals as a source of contextual hope. However, for contemporary Korea, it needs to be re-interpreted and re-contextualized from an emphasis on personal blessings to a focus on the community. The theology of the Threefold Blessing needs its scope enlarged to allow for practical expressions of altruism on behalf of neighbors, society, the ecosystem, and the universe for all through sharing in the love of Christ.

This transition requires a new systematic theological foundation based on love and sacrifice. Without a doubt, unless hope renews itself in these new contexts, it will lose its function. Korean Pentecostals need to re-contextualize and re-interpret the Threefold Blessing theologically for today. If not, it cannot continue as a source of hope.

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