

**Young-Hoon Lee.** *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Doctrinal Development.* S.I.: Regnum Studies in Mission, 2009. 208 pp. \$23.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-870345-67-5.



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**Commissioned by** Gene Mills (Florida State University)

Young-hoon Lee's *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea* is a significant contribution to the limited number of English-language studies on Korean Pentecostalism. This book is published as a revision of his 1996 Temple University dissertation, with changes made to help update statistics and to bring the narrative up to the present. Lee has been involved with the ministries of Yoido Full Gospel Church (hereinafter YFGC) in various capacities and currently serves as its senior pastor.

The book begins with an introduction that outlines the scope, procedures, limitations, research sources, bibliography, and definitions. Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the three main Korean religious traditions: Shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, all three predating the arrival of Christianity in Korea. After the first two chapters, the bulk of the book (six chapters) is a discussion of six chronological periods of Korean religious history, from 1900 to the present. Five periods of twenty-years each cover the entire twentieth century, with the sixth period discussing the time from 2000 to the present. The

first period covers the years 1900 to 1920, highlighting the 1907 Revival in Korea and the eschatological preaching of Sun-joo Gil. The second period is from 1920 to 1940 and focuses on the ministries of the Presbyterian healing evangelist Ik-doo Kim and the Methodist mystic Yong-do Lee. The third period (1940-60) takes a turn away from biography to discuss the beginnings of three religious movements: Olive Tree Church, Unification Church, and Korean Pentecostalism. Lee lists the first two as “new religious sects” and treats them separately from the Korean Pentecostal movement. Minjung theology and nationwide evangelistic crusades are the primary movements of the fourth period (1960-80). The fifth, and final, period of the twentieth century (1980-2000) looks at both the Ecumenical movement and the Church Growth movement. Chapter 9 offers a conclusion. The end matter includes a helpful bibliography, name index, and subject index.

At first glance, the book is a survey of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Korean church history through the lens of what Lee calls “the Holy

Spirit movement.” That in itself is a worthy project: providing a new category for helping us to understand the Korean expressions of Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality.

In order to make it clear from the start, Lee states that his use of “the Holy Spirit movement” incorporates classical Pentecostals, charismatics, and the Third Wave. But when one considers the vast diversity of what is included under this heading, it seems daunting that so many distinct traditions and confessions can remain together in one book. For example, both the Ecumenical movement (National Council of Churches in Korea) and the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (Unification Church) are included in the narrative as part of the Korean “Holy Spirit movement.” At the same time, classical Pentecostal missions and churches in Korea (other than the Assemblies of God and YFGC) are never mentioned by name.

In the end, the focus turns in the latter part of the book (pages 91-144) toward Yonggi Cho and YFGC. In some ways, Lee views Cho and YFGC as the *telos* of the entire historical and theological development within “the Holy Spirit movement” in Korea.

When Lee begins to focus exclusively on Cho and YFGC he highlights its many notable achievements in world mission and social reform but fails to mention any of the struggles along the way, making the rise to the top as the world’s largest church appear as a smooth ascent. He does, however, mention the schisms that created four denominations from one, but quickly notes a later joining together that he terms “an unprecedented church unity” (p. 127).

One major historiographical issue is related to the book’s treatment of North American missionaries in Korea. The missionaries are caricatured as passing on to Koreans “only the conservative, fundamentalist, and Americanized Christian traditions.” Thus, according to Lee, the Korean Christians should blame the North Americans

for their own “passivity in pursuit of theological studies, literal biblicism, uniformity of faith, exclusivism, extreme pietism, and an eschatological faith with an emphasis on the life of the world to come” (p. 24). It is a surprising inventory of baggage when one considers that the first North American missionaries to Korea were sent by mainline Protestant denominations in the late nineteenth century (the current Presbyterian Church, USA and the United Methodist Church).

Throughout the book, there is some confusion from words that are translated incorrectly back into English. For example, “amillennialism” becomes “non-millennium” (p. 37), the Four Spiritual Laws become the “Four Spiritual Principles” (p. 85), and the British and Foreign Bible Society becomes the “England Bible Society” (p. 87).

Although the decision to use a hybrid Romanization system was defended in an editorial note, it makes for difficult reading and lowers the academic quality of the book, especially when there are three complete systems that have proven adequate for other scholars and publishers. Further, the decision to only provide the English translation of Korean titles of books means that further research is hindered for anyone who reads Korean and wants to follow up on the references.

Even with the noted deficiencies, this book is recommended reading for all scholars of global renewal studies as well as Korean church history. It is hoped that a fuller treatment of Korean Pentecostalism will be pursued in the future, one that includes the diversity of all who actually call themselves Pentecostal, rather than those who are imagined by others to be Pentecostal.

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