

# Pentecostalism in Korea

## Shamanism and the Reshaping of Korean Christianity

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South Korea (henceforth Korea) is one of the most vibrant Protestant communities in the world today. Protestantism, which was introduced to Korea in 1884, is the second largest religion in Korea, with almost nine million followers or about twenty percent of the country's 49 million people (see Table 1). Its growth was particularly pronounced from the early 1960s to the end of the 1980s, the period of the country's remarkable modernization. Since the early 1960s, when South Korea's Protestants scarcely topped the one million mark, the number of Protestant Christians has increased faster than in any other country, almost doubling every decade.

What is remarkable about this Christian success is that it was achieved in just over a century or so and that it transpired in a land which used to

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Table 1. Religious Population in South Korea  
(in thousands; percentage of total population)

	1985	1995	2005
Buddhist	8,059 (19.9)	10,321 (23.2)	10,726 (22.8)
Protestant	6,489 (16.1)	8,760 (19.7)	8,616 (18.3)
Catholic	1,865 (4.6)	2,951 (6.6)	5,146 (10.9)
Confucian	483 (1.2)	211 (0.5)	105 (0.2)
Won Buddhist	92 (0.2)	87 (0.2)	130 (0.3)
Other Religions	212 (0.6)	268 (0.6)	247 (0.5)
No Religious Affiliation	23,216 (57.4)	21,953 (49.3)	21,865 (46.9)

Source: National Statistical Office (1987, 1997, 2006)

be—and to some extent, still is—dominated by both indigenous and world religions. Another extraordinary fact is that Korea is the only country in all of Asia, except for the Philippines, that has embraced Christianity en masse: while Christians are to be found in every Asian country, it is South Korea that has witnessed the most spectacular and sociologically significant Protestant expansion. Also, the Christian success in Korea contrasts sharply with the failure of Christianity to make any impact in Japan—a neighbouring country with strikingly similar social organizational arrangements and shared cultural traditions and practices—where a mere 600,000 or about 0.5 percent of the Japanese population (130 million) have converted. Christianity did not fare any better in China even when it had religious freedom before the communist takeover in 1949.

The vitality of Protestantism in Korea is attested to by the fact that greater Seoul is home to twenty-three of the fifty largest churches in the world (FRESTON 2001, 62), including the world's largest congregation, the Yoido Full Gospel Church, which reportedly has one million members as of 2011, and the world's largest Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian congregations. The nation now sends more missionaries abroad than most other countries. The number of Korean overseas missionaries at the end of 2008 was 19,413 in 168 countries, which was second only to the United States, which had 46,000 missionaries worldwide (KOREA WORLD MISSIONS ASSOCIATION 2009).

There are more than 170 denominations and 60,000 churches in Korea. The largest denominations in terms of membership are Presbyterian (33 percent), Methodist (22 percent), Holiness (16 percent), Baptist (11 percent), and Full Gospel (8 percent). Approximately 10 percent of the total number of Protestant churches are comprised of independent churches. What is interesting about Korean Protestantism is that while a large majority of Korean Protestants belong to seemingly mainstream, non-Pentecostal denominations, their religious inclinations have leaned toward evangelical, Pentecostal Christianity. In fact, many churches in Korea are oriented toward the Pentecostal style of faith, emphasizing faith healing, receiving of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues (“ecstatic utterance”), and emotional expressions during worship services, which all have parallels in shamanism. The question is, what factors account for the Pentecostalization of Protestantism in Korea? What makes Pentecostalism a trans-denominational and trans-ecclesial religion in Korea? This article argues that the Pentecostal form of Christianity has become popular among a large majority of Christians in Korea because it finds many points of contact with Korean shamanism, a time-honored religion that has shaped the religious imagination and inclination of Koreans. By extension, I also argue that this affinity has been a key reason for the success of Protestant Christianity in Korea. I first provide a brief description of Pentecostalism, followed by a survey of the central beliefs and practices of Korean shamanism, detailing how they comprise the core of Koreans’ religious worldview and how new religions have incorporated shamanistic elements to broaden their appeal. I then examine key Pentecostal beliefs and practices, such as faith healing, praying for miracles, speaking in tongues, and the highly emotional style of worship, to demonstrate how they are congruent with those of Korean shamanism. I close with observations that this congruence between the indigenous religion and Pentecostalism is partly responsible for the rapid growth of Protestantism in Korea.

### *Pentecostalism: A Belief in Supernatural Gifts*

Pentecostalism is the belief that the miraculous gifts (*charismata* in Greek) that God bestowed on the Apostles and others in the earliest churches, have not stopped and are still being exercised by contemporary Christians. Pentecostalism is often referred to as the “charismatic move-

ment” because of its emphasis on the supposed continuation today of these miraculous *charismata* or gifts. To be more specific, there are two types of gifts mentioned in the New Testament: “ordinary gifts,” such as faith, hope, and charity, which are bestowed on the faithful in all ages; and “extraordinary gifts,” in contrast, which are given only on extraordinary occasions and are supernatural gifts that enable their possessors to perform or experience supernatural deeds such as healing, casting out demons, performing miracles, speaking in tongues, and seeing direct revelations from God (see COX 1995; STALSETT 2006; ANDERSON 2004; BLUMHOFER 1993; SYNAN 1997). Pentecostals are called what they are because they believe that the miracles of Pentecost can be repeated today.

Of particular importance in Pentecostalism is the doctrine of “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” evidence of which is speaking in tongues or experiencing or exercising other extraordinary gifts. In the belief that God can and does work miracles today, the Pentecostals seek to experience God’s power known as Holy Spirit baptism, which can endow them with special gifts to speak in tongues, prophesy, heal the sick, and perform miracles. The centrality of speaking in tongues is such that there are those who insist on the necessity and precondition of speaking in tongues as verification of salvation. Another noteworthy aspect of Pentecostalism is its method of worship, which involves, among other things, loud and emotionally manipulative music and singing, all of which are designed to agitate the participants into a state of emotional frenzy. Also, Pentecostal churches often set aside a time for “ministry,” during which they practice the “laying on of hands,” a type of prayer for miraculous intervention. In short, Pentecostalism, with its promises of health, prosperity, miracles, and a direct, spiritual experience with God, has been an important factor in evangelistic activities and has contributed to church growth throughout the world. Harvey Cox (1995, 83) sees Pentecostalism as representing the “recovery of primal speech (ecstatic utterance), primal piety (mystical experience, trance, and healing), and primal hope (the unshakable expectation of a better future).” And shamanism entails beliefs and practices which are extraordinarily similar to those of Pentecostalism, as MILLER and YAMAMORI (2007) observe from their study of global Pentecostalism:

Another explanation for Pentecostal growth is that for people from traditional cultures where shamanism is frequently practiced, it resonates cultur-

ally, because Pentecostals also believe in the spirit world. Indeed, one can find many functional parallels between Pentecostalism and animism; for example, in both kinds of practice demons are cast out, people are healed, and individuals are spirit possessed. Hence, the Pentecostal worldview is not all that different from what animistic believers have known, except that there is no longer a need to appease a whole pantheon of spirits through magical means. Indeed, the major difference between Pentecostals and people in animistic cultures is that the former affirm that there is only one spirit, the Holy Spirit.

(MILLER and YAMAMORI 2007, 24–25)

*Korean Shamanism:  
The Religious Basis of Korean Ways of Thinking*

Korean shamanism, which is called *mu*, *musok*, or *mugyo* (“religion of the Mu”) in Korean, encompasses a wide range of indigenous or “folk” religious beliefs and practices (KIM, T. 1981; JO 1983; HOGARTH 1999; KIM, C. 2003). Similar to other shamanistic beliefs of Asia, Korean shamanism is basically the spirit worship of nature, comprising animatism, animism, and ancestor worship. Central to shamanism is the belief that every animate being and inanimate object, as well as ancestors, has a spirit, and that these spirits wield power on the shifting fortunes of each individual. As a polytheistic religion, shamanism worships a great number of spirits: there are some 270 different kinds of deity in Korean shamanism, which can be roughly categorized into four groups: heavenly spirits or gods, earthly gods, human gods, and evil spirits (KIM, T. 1981, 285). Some shamans even maintain that there are over 18,000 spirits associated with Korean shamanism, which is the reason why shamans in Korea are sometimes called *manshin*—“a person serving ten thousand spirits.” The non-exclusivistic nature of what can be worshipped as spirits in Korean shamanism has allowed the religion to incorporate many new spirits over time, including gods or spirits of other religions, as well as prominent figures from the history or legends of Korea (MOON 1982, 28).<sup>1</sup>

1. Some shamans even worship the spirit of the American general Douglas McArthur, considered a military hero in South Korea for freeing the south from North Korean control during the early stage of the Korean War (1950–1953).

In contrast to world religions in which the role of the clergy is one of several defining features, the role of shamans is the core and essence of Korean shamanism, and Korean shamanism can be said to be a religion based on the role and spiritual experiences of shamans. Korean shamans play four distinctive roles or functions: 1. the priestly function—playing an intermediary role between human beings and spirits; 2. the prophetic function—conveying the will of the divine spirit to the followers, or predicting, with the help of the spirit, a change in the fortune or misfortune of a person; 3. the clinical function—diagnosing illnesses and treating patients by exorcising evil spirits from the patients’ bodies; and 4. the recreational function—singing and dancing, to entertain spectators.<sup>2</sup>

All of these shamans’ functions are most evident in the shamanic ritual, *goot*. Broadly categorized by their functions, that is, prayer rites, healing rites and invocation rites, shamanic rituals consist of four general stages: 1. an appeal to the spirit; 2. singing and dancing for the spirit; 3. listening to the spirit’s will; and 4. a send-off of the spirit (CHOI 1994, 56–61). Through the mechanical repetition of such shamanistic acts as singing, dancing, chanting, convulsion, and so forth, shamans fulfill their roles as a healer, fortuneteller, protector, and officiator of various ceremonies. While shamans conduct appropriate rites for all occasions, various shamanistic rituals can be categorized broadly into three forms: 1. *gibokje*, by which one wishes to usher in fortunes by eliminating evil spirits causing ill fortunes; 2. *byeong-goot*, to exorcise evil spirits and cure sickness; and 3. *songryeongje*, to comfort and cleanse the souls of the dead in order to initiate their journey to the other world so that they do not cause any problem in this world (RYU, 1973, 16). While there are some local differences in actual performance of the ritual, *goot* is thus conducted invariably for good fortune. The most striking characteristic of this folk religion is its preoccupation with, and emphasis

2. There are three kinds of shamans in Korea, and they are classified according to the process through which they become shamans: 1. hereditary shamans or *seseupmudang* who inherit their profession from parent; 2. spirit-possessed shamans or *gangshinmu* (also known as *naerinmudang*) who experience “spirit sickness” or “spirit possession” (*shin-byeong* or *shindeullim*); and 3. trained shamans who learn the profession from a shaman to earn a livelihood (MOON 1982, 22). The number of shamans is believed to be around 150,000, more than the combined total of Christian clergy and Buddhist monks. Korean shamans consist mostly of women and the vast majority of their customers are also women.

on, the fulfillment of material wishes, hence its popularly known epithet, *giboksinang* (literally “faith of material blessings”). In fact, the fundamental purpose of shamanism is to fulfill practical needs: people solicit the services of a shaman in the hope of realizing their wishes, such as longevity, health, success, and wealth.

### *Shamanism and the Pentecostalization of Korean Protestantism*

From time immemorial, shamanism has traditionally exerted the most profound influence upon the attitudes and behaviors as well as cultural practices of Koreans. Indeed, the time-honored beliefs and rituals of shamanism have formed the basis of the religious and cultural life of the Korean people. No imported religion survived, not to mention flourished, unless it incorporated shamanistic elements or unless there was an appreciable degree of affinity between the new religion and Korean shamanism. Many Korean scholars argue that, on the surface, many religions exist in Korea, but only one religion exists at the core, and that is shamanism.

Shamanism is the primitive ethos of the Korean people. It is the basic instinct of the masses.... All Korean religious ideas and ceremonies are influenced by it, and at some point coalesce with it. All successful religious movements in Korean history have drawn upon strong shamanistic underpinnings. And such is certainly true of the New Religions [Christianity]. (PALMER 1967, 5)

Like other religions before it, Korean Christianity has incorporated or emphasized many aspects of the shamanistic tradition, especially the beliefs and practices pertaining to the realization of this-worldly wishes. Many scholars have commented on the affinity between Korean Christianity and shamanism as a reason for the success of Christianity in Korea. RYU Dongshik (1975), for example, argues that Korean Christians understand the Christian message from a mental landscape that is informed by shamanistic imprints and that the stories and messages in the Bible find their parallels in the vocabulary of the shamanic tradition. The shamanism-Protestantism nexus is particularly striking in Pentecostalism. Many of the key beliefs and practices among Korean Protestants are Pentecostal, that is, regardless of denominational ties, they largely believe in faith-healing, pray for the sick,

encourage the congregation to speak in tongues, and pray for supernatural miracles. There is thus an unmistakable Pentecostal bent in Korean Protestantism, demonstrating that Pentecostalism has become a trans-denominational and trans-ecclesial phenomenon in Korea. As Chaisik CHUNG observes:

There is a Pentecostal ferment and elements in all of Korea's churches. Furthermore, the outlines of shamanistic trances can be easily detected beneath the surface of Christian Pentecostalism, which emphasizes speaking in tongues and the experience of the Holy Spirit. (CHUNG 1982, 622)

Youngsook Kim HARVEY adds:

To individuals with little control over their lives, shamanism offered avenues for direct negotiations with the supernatural. This mode of religious behavior proved an advantage to the missionaries. Stylistically, it predisposed the Koreans to Pentecostal, fundamentalist Protestant Christianity, and the Christian concept of the Holy Ghost was compatible with the shamanistic concept of spirit possession. (HARVEY 1987, 152)

### *Faith Healing in Pentecostalism and Healing in Korean Shamanism*

The most obvious convergence between shamanism and Korean Protestantism in general and Korean Pentecostalism in particular has to do with the belief and practice of healing in both religions. In parallel with the popular conceptualization of the role of shamans in Korea, pastors are expected to have the capacity to communicate with the spiritual world and to possess a mysterious power to exorcise evil spirits causing illnesses. Like shamans, these pastors use hypnotism, resort to speaking in tongues (similar to ecstatic chants in shamanism), and exorcise the evil supposedly residing in the afflicted person. All of these, of course, parallel the characteristics of Korean shamanistic rites in healing and exorcising. That is why it is claimed that pastors who perform faith healing are “shamans in Christian disguise,” and “[like] shamans, they promise personal blessings through emotional and spiritual experiences in the church” (LEE, J. 1997, 102). By performing the healing rites during worship services and revival meetings, Korean pastors have essentially turned the two occasions into shamanis-

tic rituals that typically feature disease-curing exorcism (see KIM, G. 1981). The most striking example in this regard is the world's largest church, Yoido Full Gospel Church, a Pentecostal church with one million members. The church began to grow noticeably since its charismatic pastor David Yonggi Cho began to perform faith healings on people with "incurable diseases." In fact, faith healing is identified as the most important reason for the remarkable growth of the church in its first ten years (1958–1968), which grew from its modest beginning as a tent church to a 15,000-member church (BYUN 1972, 128–31).<sup>3</sup> Boo-woong YOO writes:

His [Cho's] role in Sunday morning worship looks exactly like that of a shaman or *mudang*. The only difference is that a shaman performs his wonders in the name of spirits while Rev. Cho exorcises evil spirits and heals the sick in the name of Jesus. (YOO 1986, 74)

Cox refers to Yonggi Cho as a vivid example of Christian shamanism:

Korean Pentecostalism's unerring ability to absorb huge chunks of indigenous Korean shamanism and demon possession into its worship... is so extensive that some wonder out loud what has absorbed what.... To a visitor schooled in shamanism, the worship at the Yoido Full Gospel Church bears a striking resemblance to what is ordinarily known as "shamanism."

(COX 1995, 222–24)

The healing ministry, manifesting striking similarities with the healing rites of shamanism, has thus become the "main event" of Sunday worship services at many Korean churches.<sup>4</sup>

It is also worth noting that the rite of healing is not limited to the weekly worship services, for many churches in Korea operate their own prayer centers, known as *gidowon*, where faith healing ceremonies are sustained with regularity. For example, the main objective and focus of the Fasting

3. A survey of the church's congregation by Cheongmi Yi (1973) showed that 56 percent of the respondents identified the "wish for healing" as the reason for first coming to the church.

4. There are other types of healing that cater to wishes other than good health, as evil spirits are believed to be causing other kinds of misfortune. For example, a healing ceremony can be held for those who are unemployed, as unemployment is perceived to be caused by a demon; and for those who had only daughters and wish to have a son, a ceremony is held to chase away evil spirits causing women to have only daughters.

Prayer Center of Yoido Full Gospel Church is centered around faith healing and the advertisements at the center often mention testimonials of miraculous healing. In addition, there are large numbers of independent prayer centers which provide healing services for the sick, including the mentally ill. At *buheunghoe* or revival meetings, moreover, many revivalists perform the same rites, healing the sick and exorcising satanic spirits. Such emphasis on healing led to the wide popularity of revivalists who specialize in healing and of churches that are ministered by pastors who supposedly have healing powers.

The act of faith-healing and anecdotes of faith-healing, retold in testimonials during worship services, prayer meetings, and revivals, became an important “drawing card” for Korean clergy who have advanced them as evidence of one of many this-worldly rewards of converting to Christianity. For people who cannot afford expensive medical treatment for their illness, the prospect of a “free” and supposedly convenient cure certainly proved to be an attractive feature of the church. In this way, a line between Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal denominations has been blurred by Christians’ overwhelming interest in, and desire for, miracles and healing. While a large majority of Korean Protestants belong to seemingly mainstream, non-Pentecostal denominations, their religious inclinations have leaned toward charismatic, Pentecostal Christianity. As COX (1995, 221) has noted, “the traditional western denominational labels mean very little” in discussing Korean Protestantism. COX (1995, 225) adds: “Korean Pentecostalism has become a powerful vehicle with which... people who might be embarrassed to engage in the ‘old-fashioned’ or possibly ‘superstitious’ practice of shamanic exorcism can now do it within the generous ambience of a certifiably up-to-date religion, one that came from the most up-to-date of all countries, the USA.”

One of the most important ways in which Korean Protestants’ faith in divine healing is reinforced is through sermons. In their sermons, many pastors stress and exhort the miraculous healings of Jesus Christ as probably the most important message of Christianity, as it serves as evidence that it is a religion that not only shows the omnipotence of God but also has potential practical benefits to believers. As a demonstration of God’s love and power, the miraculous healing in the Bible is advanced by a vast majority of Korean clergy to the level of magical potency. By making repeated ref-

erences to the biblical accounts of Jesus Christ's healing deeds—for example, the curing of leprosy (Matt. 8: 2–3; Luke 17: 12–14), the blind and mute (Matt. 12: 22), the deaf (Mark 7: 32–35), the lame and the crippled (Matt. 15: 30; Luke 13: 13; John 5: 9), and “every disease and sickness” (Matt. 4: 23, 9: 35), Korean pastors authenticate the healing potential of God and of Christian belief. The biblical narratives of Jesus chasing away demonic spirits, including those that cause seizures (Matt. 17: 15–18), shrieking and foaming at the mouth (Luke 9: 37–42; Matt. 8: 28–32), and madness (Luke 8: 27–36), are put to effective use in capturing the religious worldview of potential converts.

Such emphasis on the primacy of faith-healing by Korean clergy is demonstrated in a survey of over 1,300 sermons at ten leading Protestant churches in Korea between 1978 and 1985, the period of rapid church growth in the country (CHRISTIAN ACADEMY 1986, 25–44). The study finds that the topic of faith healing, along with other miraculous deeds of Jesus, comprised the most prominent place in their sermons, while ethical or pedagogical themes remained relatively inconspicuous. And studies have found that churches led by pastors who perform faith healing grew relatively fast. For example, Jae Bum LEE (1986) argues that the early success of Seoul Sungrak Church, which had a congregation of 180,000 members as of 2010, is owed to the performance of exorcism and faith-healing by the principal pastor Gidong Kim. He reportedly performed exorcism extensively and is believed to have revived six people from death since 1961, and exorcised demonic spirits from 400,000 churchgoers, out of which fifty-nine had their crippled legs cured.

The salience of the theme of faith healing in the sermons is paralleled by Korean Protestants' widespread belief in the biblical accounts of miracles, many of which have to do with healing. For example, the 2004 GALLUP KOREA polls (2004, 95) shows that 83.6 percent of the Protestant respondents expressed their belief in miracles. Similar tendencies were evident in the 1984, 1989, and 1997 surveys (GALLUP KOREA 1984, 1990, 1998). It is also worth noting that a considerable number of Christians have actually experienced faith-healing. For example, the 2004 GALLUP KOREA (2004, 74) survey found that 31.3 percent of the Protestant respondents personally experienced faith-healing, while 41.8 percent of the respondents in the 1997 survey reportedly experienced the same.

*Miraculous Gifts: Emphasis on Material Blessings*

Along with divine healing, praying for miracles is a key component of Pentecostalism. In the Korean context, praying for miracles has been reshaped according to the shamanistic inclinations of the Korean people, that is, to maximize the appeal of Christianity to potential converts, Korean pastors have emphasized that accepting Jesus Christ as the savior will bring about the fulfillment of material wishes. Indeed, Korean pastors typically associate the purpose of prayers with the experience of miracles, stressing that prayers are an important means of earning the favor of God in having one's wishes fulfilled (LEE, H. 1991, 111–12).<sup>5</sup> In this way, the belief that Christianity is a religion that could yield prosperity in this world and spiritual salvation in the other world became extremely popular among Korean Protestants, regardless of their denominational ties. Many Koreans, who have long embraced shamanism in hopes of resolving this-worldly frustration through the prayers, rites, and magic, seem to have adopted the Christian faith for the very same reason, effectively replacing the traditional form of magical religion with a new one.

A compelling example of such emphasis on God's material blessings in the present life is found in the central message of David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church.<sup>6</sup> The church's slogan that has attracted large audiences—and inspired other churches to emulate—is the threefold blessings of Christ, that is, health, prosperity, and salvation, insinuated in the second verse of the third epistle of John: “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.” Cho interprets the above verse as follows: “good health” is self-evident; “all may go well with you” refers to success and prosperity in worldly matters; and “well with your soul” means salvation. Preaching the “theology of prosperity” or “prosperity Gospel,” Cho and his imitators have thus advanced the idea that the acceptance of the Holy Spirit can mean that one

5. This-worldly tendencies are so pervasive that even the names of some Korean churches carry terms traditionally associated with material wishes, such as plenty (“The Church of Plenty”), blessing (“The Church of the Blessed”), happiness, and hope.

6. The size of the congregation can be puzzling unless the structure of the church is understood. The church comprises many “satellite churches” located throughout Seoul and the surrounding region.

is, besides being blessed with salvation in the next life, graced with health and materialistic successes in this world.<sup>7</sup> One popular term among pastors in this regard has been a “blessing” (*chookbok* or *chookwon*), hence the popular saying, *Yesu mitgo bokbateuseyo* (“Believe in Jesus Christ and receive material blessings”). Cho’s theology has prompted many responses, the most typical of which is expressed by Charles ELLIOTT:

As we talked, I began to realize that comfort—that refusal to be embarrassed by material success—is the essence of this religion. And Cho himself is quite clear about that. “We meet needs that people have,” he said. “We give them what they want, what they are looking for...” What they are looking for is shaped and influenced by their experience and by their expectations. The former is their daily life. The latter is their consciousness and unconscious memory of the ancient role of the shaman. Life is harsh, alien and threatening, full of *han*. The shaman offered catharsis, *jung*, play and blessings. Cho and his many imitators offer an emotional release, sympathy—and blessings. (ELLIOTT 1989, 32)

In addition to the threefold blessings, many Korean pastors also stress eight other blessings of Christ from the Book of Matthew (5: 3–10), especially those passages with materialistic implications (PARK 1982, 38–39), such as, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (literally interpreted as gaining land ownership); and “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” They further argue that one’s success in this life is a sign of God’s blessing, while illness, poverty, business failure, or any other misfortune is simply due to sin and spiritual impurity, and that the only way to defeat them is to believe in God who, in turn, will usher in good health and prosperity.

Such emphasis on God’s grace in granting people’s materialistic wishes is especially conspicuous in sermons. JUNG Jaeyoung gives an example of a sermon which is typical of many churches in Korea:

Our Father is rich. He makes everything possible. He gives us rice cake if we ask for it. He gives us fish if that is what we ask for. I hope you can be truly thankful for your faith in Our Father who can give us everything. (JUNG 1994, 74)

7. Cho is not without his critics. Many prominent Christian leaders inside and outside Korea have expressed their concern over Cho’s teachings, claiming that they are cultish and promote a mixture of Christianity, Korean shamanism, and Cho’s own ideas.

Also, in his analysis of collected sermons by thirty leading pastors in South Korea, KIM Daegon (1983) found that the theme of material blessings upon accepting God as the savior was the predominant focus of their sermons, and that the instances of miracles in the Bible were given particular attention. Some of the most popular biblical passages in this regard include the following:

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. (3 John 1: 2)

Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great. (Job 8: 7)

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Matt. 7: 7)

Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!” And God granted what he asked. (1 Chronicles 4: 10)

Many Korean Christians can recite any one of these passages instantly without hesitation. Also, not only are these passages popular in sermons but also as passages to be framed for hanging in Christians’ homes, shops, and restaurants. Typically written in calligraphy, frames with copies of biblical passages are found in many Christian homes and Christian-owned businesses. Of course, the practice of hanging East Asian calligraphy has long been popular in Korea as in China and Japan to honor words of wisdom, and Christians have used this means of displaying important messages to honor the Word of God.

The fact that praying for miracles is intimately linked to God’s granting of material wishes is attested to by Christians’ intimate understanding and acceptance of the miracles in the Bible and of the omnipotence of God. As shown above, surveys of Korean Christians repeatedly show their strong faith in miracles and the potential re-enactment in the present. For example, in a survey of 1,231 Protestants from churches across South Korea, Joonggi KIM et al. (1982, 75) found that 84.5 percent of the respondents believed in the biblical accounts of miracles, while an overwhelming 99.4 percent perceived them positively. Most Korean Protestants thus wholeheartedly embrace the image of God as the savior who performs miracles and grants material wishes. And biblical accounts of miracles—and the assumed possi-

bility of their reenactment in contemporary circumstances—have attracted millions of converts who have wholeheartedly embraced Christianity’s promise of a better life in this life and the next.

Such emphasis on material rewards by Korean clergy is paralleled by the equally enthusiastic this-worldly inclinations of Korean Protestants. According to the 2004 GALLUP KOREA polls (2004, 35), 56.7 percent of the Christian respondents agreed that heaven or paradise is not to be found in the other world but in this world. They also regard this-worldly values as being more significant than those of religious or doctrinal ones: 32.2 percent of the respondents identified health and 19.5 percent selected money and wealth as the most important matters in life, while only 8.5 percent, 5.8 percent, 4.5 percent, 3.6 percent, and 2.5 percent of the respondents recognized trust, love, faith, sincerity, and honesty as the highest values, respectively (GALLUP KOREA 2004, 235–39). In a survey of the adherents of Yoido Full Gospel Church, taken at the height of church growth in 1981, the primacy of this-worldly orientation among the congregation was also evident. When asked to identify motivations for believing in Christianity, 30.6 percent of the respondents identified healing while 37.6 percent recognized material blessings as primary reasons for conversion (KIM, D. 1981, 94). This was significantly higher than the respondents’ religious motives, such as salvation (16.9 percent) and eternal life (7 percent). In the same survey, a majority of members expressed that their conversion to Protestantism actually resulted in a more enriching and prosperous life, and 41.2 percent of the respondents said that their attendance at church resulted in a better standard of living. Jung Young LEE (1997, 80) thus observes:

[Koreans] understand the blessings of this world in terms of personal and material rewards rather than social justice and ethical living; and they perceive heavenly blessings as spiritual manifestations of worldly blessings. This kind of interpretation comes from the Korean culture, especially from shamanic thinking. (LEE 1997, 80)

The Korean Christians’ overriding concern with the fulfillment of material wishes and answered prayers is manifested in a wide array of books that are basically collections of testimonials narrating answered prayers. Two of the best known books are collections of testimonials which were culled from the letters sent to a radio program on the Christian Broadcasting System (CBS) called *Saeropgehasoseo* (Please make it new) in the 1980s (see KO 1982;

1988). The books contain testimonials which typically narrate incidents of answered prayers and faith-healing. There is also a monthly magazine that, at least in the beginning, specialized almost entirely in publishing Christian testimonials. First published in 1967, *Shinanggye* (World of faith), a leading Pentecostal monthly magazine that was renamed *Plusinsaeng* (Plus Life) in 2008, has published many testimonials of miraculous healing and of overcoming hardship, including poverty (PARK, M. 2004).

### *Speaking in Tongues and a Pentecostal Style of Worship*

Speaking in tongues, which is one of the most important aspects of Pentecostalism, finds its parallel in shamanistic ecstatic chants, which are supposedly an expression of the voices and words of a spirit. As insinuated above, the only way for shamans to communicate with spirits is through spirit possession or *shindeullim*, the state in which shamans feel themselves to be possessed by spirits. It is in this state of ecstatic trance when shamans blurt out messages from spirits, which are akin to speaking in tongues, often unintelligible and vocalized in tones totally different from those of the shamans. Although spirit possession is typically limited to shamans, the experience itself has been held in awe by the public, as they view it as a special gift of a select few who, through the “power” of spirits, can prophesy, perform exorcism, and heal the sick.

A 2006 survey of Christians showed that 49 percent of the respondents experienced speaking in tongues (*Kukminilbo* 2007). The popularity of speaking in tongues among Korean Christians is partly due to the fact that Koreans value experiences that manifest shamanistic imprints. For example, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, called *seongnyeongcheheom*, which is very much like the shamanistic spirit possession or trance, is held in high esteem by Korean Christians in the belief that it is a means through which speaking in tongues, seeing visions, and healing can be achieved. Surveys typically reveal that a high proportion of Korean Christians have personally experienced the Holy Spirit. For example, a 2001 survey of Korean Christians showed that 77 percent of the respondents expressed that they experienced the Holy Spirit (*Kukminilbo* 2001). Similarly, a 1982 survey HYUNDAESAHOEYONGUSO (1982, 78) revealed that 75.5 percent of the respondents expressed that they have experienced the Holy Spirit. As insin-

uated above, what these high figures signify is the propensity of Korean Christians to believe that the experience of the Holy Spirit enables one to experience speaking in tongues which, in turn, allows him or her to receive God's blessings. Indeed, Korean Christians tend to associate these experiences as a precondition of, and evidence of, the imminence of God's material blessings. Experiencing the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues are like badges of candidacy for God's material blessings. They further believe that the understanding of, or interpreting tongues—as shamans attempt to comprehend the messages or demands of the spirits—is in accordance with the teachings of the Scriptures and is confirmed in their own experience. Speaking in tongues has become very popular among Korean Christians precisely because it is perceived as a mystic, sacred language, and as a secret communication channel with God through which they express their sorrows and vent their anguish in a language nobody else can understand. Through speaking in tongues, as testimonies reveal, Korean Christians experience catharsis and gain a sense of comfort and peace of mind. They also become more confident and assured of their faith and become more enthusiastic and active about their faith (Yi, G. 1970, 65–70).

Another point of affinity between shamanism and Pentecostalism is found in the latter's style of worship. As mentioned earlier, the basic expression of shamanistic ritual is *goot*, in which shamans use instruments called *mugu*, comprising, among others, a drum, a mirror, bells, fans, swords, and gongs, to create a very emotional and frenzied mood. *Goot* invariably consists of loud singing and dancing for the spirit; shamans always invoke, entertain, and send off the spirits with frantic dance and music, although the ritual starts in quite a solemn atmosphere. There is also a procedure called *moo-gam*, in which the patron of the ritual wears the shaman's costume and dances. All of this attests to what the West African writer Malidoma Patrice Some said, that the main feature of shamanic rituals is "playing with spirits."

The worship service at many Korean churches, irrespective of denominational ties and including the rapidly rising independent churches, is much like *goot*, entailing loud music and singing. In particular, the role of music in this context is noteworthy, as it is used as a common method to thrust listeners into a kind of hypnosis or an altered state of consciousness in both shamanism and Pentecostalism (HOGARTH 1999, 23). During the worship service, moreover, participants lift their hands, clap them in joy, go to the

altar to pray, hug one another and even cry. They also lay hands on one another for anointing, power, or healing. In such ecstatic communication with God, the worshippers feel stimulated, uplifted, and exhilarated, as if at a shamanistic seance. The engendered recreational effect also resembles that of Korean shamanism. These meetings are recreational in the sense that they seem to provide variations upon and liberation from the strictly regulated daily patterns. The participants often confess their experience of feeling uplifted or spiritually stimulated and of becoming “possessed” by an exhilaration inspired by the emotionally rousing worship service, and such vivacity is comparable to ecstasy induced by a shaman (LEE, H. 1991, 98–104). In parallel with the rituals of shamanism, therefore, both weekly worship services and revival meetings often entail a form of “spiritual orgy,” in which all the participants devote themselves to a cathartic recreation. In this way, all pent-up frustrations get an explosive release on the site of such a communal ritual, liberating the participants physically, psychologically, and emotionally.

### *Conclusion*

The congruence between shamanistic beliefs and practices on the one hand and those of Pentecostalism has been one of the key reasons for the popularity of Protestantism in general and Pentecostalism in particular. Such affinity has allowed many mainstream, non-Pentecostal churches to absorb the Pentecostal style of faith, emphasizing faith-healing, receiving of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and praying for miracles, all of which have parallels in shamanism. This personal, experience-oriented movement, based on the experience of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the individuals, has struck the right chord in the religious imagination of the masses. Many Koreans, brought up in a culture that exulted the exorcising and healing powers of shamans, found the supernatural elements of the Scripture—that is, casting out demonic spirits and healing—neither difficult nor surprising. Many Koreans were attracted to Protestantism precisely because the new religion was presented as a continuation or an extension of their traditional belief system, offering similar this-worldly satisfaction, or at least, the promise. For them, Christianity was not much more than their traditional religious system cloaked in the guise of modern, Western religion. That is

because much of what Christianity offered paralleled the beliefs and rites of shamanism in intention and meaning.

This study is thus congruent with Grayson's theory of emplantation, for the remarkable growth of Christianity in Korea rested heavily on minimizing the contradiction between the new doctrine and Korean values and on reducing the potential conflict between the new faith and Korean traditional religions (GRAYSON 1985). This study is also consistent with the existing cross-cultural studies on Christian conversion: that Christianity has shown great success in propagating itself by incorporating different cultural traits in local settings (see SAUNDERS 1988; BADONE 1990; HEFNER 1993). Certainly the shamanization of Christianity has proved eminently successful in Korea, and this seems to offer an answer to the question of why some societies eagerly embrace the new faith while others are so resistant. This questions the validity of what is known as an "intellectualist" approach to religious conversion (HORTON 1971; SKORUPSKI 1976, 183–204), which explicates conversion as a change in religious belief, where one is preferred out of a rival set of belief on the grounds of explanatory force. Also challenged is the view that conversion entails changes in the beliefs, values, identities, and the universe of discourse of individuals (SNOW and MACHALEK 1984). The Korean example illustrates that conversion has taken place without a major transformation in belief or values. The only major change involved in conversion seems to have been a shift in identity. In accepting the imported faith, Korean Protestants did not have to give up much of their traditional religious beliefs and habits, for the core Korean religious values have been co-opted into new ones. Indeed, conversion to Protestant Christianity in Korea did not require a surrender of old beliefs. By reworking Protestant beliefs and practices within an indigenous framework, Korean Protestants succeeded in retaining the core of their traditional religio-cultural beliefs and practices in the new faith. The Korean example thus contradicts the argument that world religions spread at the expense of traditional cultures and societies. What we witness in Korea, instead, is the expansion of Christianity at peace with old beliefs. Like the other world religion that took root in Korea—Buddhism—Christianity compromised with and absorbed elements of traditional Korean religious culture in order to be accepted by the Korean populace.

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