

CHAPTER VI

TOWARD A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter will conclude this dissertation by drawing connections among what we have discovered from different sources – psychoanalytic, anthropological, cultural, and theological – in order to formulate an effective theological model of spiritual and psychological development for contemporary Korean Christians that can deal with three major challenges – narcissism, the identity formation, and the embodiment and practices. These three interconnected challenges have crucial themes that need to be transformed through a theological model of spiritual and psychological development: 1) narcissism and Korean culture-bound emotion, *jeong-han* (intrapsychic); 2) absence of adequate sources, methods, and models of spiritual and psychological development (interpersonal); 3) family or primary caregiving matrix: problems of emotional support and response (the formation of the self); 4) faith community: hierarchical, oppressive, and unhealthy interpersonal dynamics and boundaries (religious identity formation); 5) community: loss of communal value and intergenerational identity formation process (cultural identity formation); and 6) society: fragmentation of norms as shaping or directing forces (religious practices).

In order to effectively deal with these crucial issues, there are key principles that are learned from FDT, self psychology, practice theory, Korean cultural value of *jeong*, and Wesleyan theology. Each theory made notable contributions and also showed limitations. Overall, Wesleyan theology provides the most comprehensive theory that covers all three major

challenges of Korean spiritual and psychological development. Key principles from these sources are: 1) a paradigm shift of models of God and divine-human, human-human relationship to a more horizontal, egalitarian, intimate, and interdependent dynamics; 2) a concrete process of intrapsychic and interpersonal divine-human and human-human dynamics; 3) the genuine meanings of grace and *jeong* as both enduring power or energy and free gift for interpersonal dynamics and growth; 4) comprehensive methods and sources in ritual and daily practices that includes grace and *jeong* for the formation of cognition, emotion, and practices; and 5) a dynamic and harmonious model of group and community.

As an ideal matrix for spiritual and psychological development that includes these key principles, I propose a long-term small group dynamic model that is the combination of spiritual discipline and group psychotherapy. It is small enough to provide an intimate dynamics like those of family or friends, while large enough to have diverse interpersonal interactions in a group, which is a social microcosm. The foundational principles of this egalitarian, dynamic model are mutual unconditional acceptance, trust, and respect, as well as sharing and practicing grace and *jeong*, which are ultimate glue and energy in order to fill the hunger and deficiency of human beings and to facilitate interpersonal interactions. In the following section, I will explore foundation and mechanism of contemporary encounter groups and of group psychotherapy, the similarities and differences between them, and the usefulness and limitations of these secular small groups. Then, I will provide examples and benefits of the enhanced group dynamic model as the combination of spiritual discipline and group psychotherapy in which grace and *jeong* are the main sources.

Contemporary Encounter Groups and Group Psychotherapy

As selling spirituality has been a booming business in contemporary society, the method of group meetings and dynamics has been flourishing in different names with similar focuses and goals such as encounter groups, self-help groups, and group psychotherapy. The method of small group dynamics has been a popular tool both in church and secular settings. However, it is important to figure out the theoretical and practical foundation and central mechanisms of these small group dynamics in order to adopt some important aspects of the method for a model of Korean spiritual and psychological development.

In his extensive research on group psychotherapy, Irvin D. Yalom, a well-known psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who retired from Stanford University, points out the significant overlap between group psychotherapy and other small groups often called encounter groups in terms of basic mechanism, process, and goal. In the early 1990s, about forty percent of adults in the United States were involved in weekly small group meetings for a minimum of three years in at least one of three million small groups across the nation.¹ Those small group meetings include Bible study groups, adult Sunday school programs, book clubs, hobbies, and self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Recovery, Inc., Compassionate Friends, Survivors of Incest, to name just a few.

Those diverse small group meetings can be grouped under a rough, generic name, “encounter group,” which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s.² The mechanism of the encounter group is based on Carl Rogers’s psychology of the 1960s. Encounter groups encompass diverse variations of groups with similar processes and dynamics such as human relations group, T-groups (training in human relations), personal growth groups, human potential groups, and so on.

¹ Irvin D. Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 4th Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 482.

² *Ibid.*, 486.

The size of the groups is often eight to twenty, which is an ideal size for intimate interpersonal interactions.

The encounter group values self-disclosure, expression of emotions, trust, confrontation, and here-and-now experience. It strives for “some change – in behavior, in attitudes, in values, in lifestyle, in self-actualization; or one’s relationship to others, to the environment, to one’s own body.”³ The participants are not regarded as patients because they are not necessarily in therapy but are involved in the small group meeting for growth.

The common ground of these encounter groups is their helpful therapeutic factors through “interpersonal interactions of the group.”⁴ Church programs and secular self-help groups are almost identical in this aspect regardless of purposes, goals, and names. Participants in both secular self-help groups and church small groups enter into these meetings with almost the same degree of personal problems, crisis, anxiety, guilt, depression, and existential questions about their lives.

A major difference is the “spiritual domain” as Yalom calls it. About sixty-eight percent of church program participants had an intention of joining the small group because of their desire for deeper spiritual awareness and discipline, whereas fifteen percent of self-help group participants did so.⁵ Sixty percent of church group members answered that they are in the process of spiritual formation, while thirty-seven percent in self-help groups said that they are in the process of a spiritual journey. Although these proportions are different between the secular and church groups, both groups have both spiritual and psychological aspects in the group dynamics.

³ Ibid., 486.

⁴ Ibid., 482.

⁵ Ibid., 482.

Small groups were not a modern invention by secular psychotherapists. Throughout the history of Christianity, as well as those of other religions, small groups and religious communities have been a major matrix and means for spiritual discipline. Small groups also have the ideals and values of Christianity – mutual love, support, care, and *koinonia* – as its core dynamics and process. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, small group meetings in both church and secular settings made “much explicit use of encounter technology . . . a familiar behavioral technology,” which emphasized “personal exploration, identification and expression of feelings, and genuine member intimacy.”⁶

The encounter group provides a powerful technique of “experiential learning” in human relationships. Participants in the group can learn human relationships by observing and studying the mutual interactions among members in the group, which is similar to the mechanism of “here-and-now” experience in contemporary group psychotherapy. There must be a strong sense of trust among participants within the group in order for it to help provide a safe refuge and motivation of each participant for change. The encounter group has developed useful techniques for feedback for closely examining inner and interpersonal struggles and pathogenic beliefs, as well as encouraging observant participation and providing cognitive aids for recognizing and learning.

The encounter group identifies itself as “group therapy for normals” or a “social oasis” working with “normal healthy members of society . . . who had achieved considerable success.”⁷ It emphasizes human potential, personal growth, and human development by stressing the authentic encounter with others including the group leader in the group. In evaluating the effectiveness of the group, Yalom points out that it is certainly capable of influencing significant

⁶ Ibid., 483.

⁷ Ibid., 491.

changes, “but for both better and worse.”⁸ Changes remain in many participants over a certain period of time when the leader provides effective group experience for participants.

The encounter group movement has influenced the techniques and process of contemporary group psychotherapy in several ways. The most important characteristic is the dual mechanism of cognitive learning and emotional change that the participants experience in group dynamics. In addition, some techniques of the encounter groups such as the experience of here-and-now, feedback, observant participation, and the role of the leader or therapist have been adopted by group therapy.

The encounter group and group psychotherapy share similar goals and concerns. Both groups have a positive expectation about human potential and the growth of the individual through interpersonal dynamics in the group. They both aim to provide notable changes in an individual participant’s self-control, self-awareness of one’s behavior, acceptance of others, confidence, increased interdependence, social interpersonal skills, and so on. Similar to the encounter group that identifies itself as “group therapy for normals,” group psychotherapy also began treating more and more individuals with minor problems and life issues. This broadening of potential participants has caused an overlap of those who seek to provide group experience. Licensed clinicians have become more and more at the ethical issues and risks of group treatments provided by uneducated and unskilled group leaders.

There are also differences between the encounter group and group psychotherapy in their settings. The encounter group tends to be larger about ten to sixteen or eight to twenty members. Participants often stay with each other for a week or two, and participate in several sessions per day. The setting is often much more informal and relaxed than that of group psychotherapy, and

⁸ Ibid., 495.

the span of the meeting is much shorter. The participants often experience pleasure in the group dynamics with an informal setting, and the leader is also a member of the group. The participants are often relatively healthy individuals who want to grow further by gaining more confidence or seeking a release from stress, anxiety, or a depressive mood.

The most notable differences are the composition, goal, and process of the group. As Yalom points out, the patients of group psychotherapy have “different goals, more deeply disrupted intrapersonal and interpersonal relations” and “a different (closed, survival-based) orientation to learning.”⁹ The degree of suffering and the atmosphere of the group are much more serious in group therapy than those of the encounter group. Thus, the procedure of the group, especially working-through process, in every stage of therapy is different.

Group psychotherapy in different traditions is firmly based on the almost identical mechanism of change. In his many years of experience as a psychotherapist and researcher, Yalom claims that the goal and fruit of the group psychotherapy is not “cure,” which is an “illusion,” but instead “change” or “growth.”¹⁰ The original type of group therapy was a heterogeneously composed group, chosen by the therapist, aimed at intensive group dynamics and working-through experience. It had the ambitious dual goals of both “symptomatic relief” and “characterological change.”¹¹ It provided a comfortable, safe matrix for patients’ free interactions with others through which they could recognize and identify their own problems and change their problematic interpersonal patterns. Moreover, the group therapy can be a useful tool for deeper, fundamental changes in a person’s character.

⁹ Ibid., 510.

¹⁰ Yalom, preface to *Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, xii.

¹¹ Ibid., xii.

According to Yalom, the most important foundation for group psychotherapy is to provide and maintain hope for the patients who struggle with despair and meaninglessness. Group psychotherapists often instill trust, belief, and confidence in the treatment process of the group, which can facilitate motivation for the patients to attend and to experience change. The group therapy works as the place for mutual encouragement, learning, and change because the simple observation of the significant improvement of others itself is an effective and therapeutic experience.

A therapy group works best when trust, acceptance, empathy, comfort, and warmth exist between the therapist and patients as well as among group members. It is essential for the participants to feel the sense of belonging, being unconditionally accepted (grace and *jeong*), and being highly valued by others. Group cohesiveness is the necessary condition of the group therapy. “We-ness” (i.e. *jeong*) among group members promotes stronger mutual care and support and deeper group dynamics.

The basic process of group therapy is giving accounts of their situations and struggles. Group members share their moments of success and their struggles. While listening to others’ accounts, they recognize the fact that they are not alone in struggling with their own pathogenic beliefs, thoughts, problems, and impulses. In listening to others’ accounts, patients get information and explicit instruction from the therapist and other patients. In this aspect, group psychotherapy employs the approach and mechanism of cognitive therapy. In the dynamic interactions, patients often receive direct advice from others. The content of direct advice may not be beneficial, but patients experience a sense of mutual caring and interest felt in the process of interpersonal interactions.

In interpersonal dynamics, patients can experience the heightened sense of self-esteem and self-value in realizing that they have something to give for others such as direct advice and confirmation of the universality of others' problems. In other words, patients are growing and changing by giving. Many patients often have the misconception that they are not valuable to others. Patients who struggle with low self-esteem and a lack of confidence can recognize and feel that they actually have value. Thus, patients are helpful to each other by offering insight, suggestions, assurance, and support. As intimacy and trust are being built into the group dynamics, patients often provide accurate and frank, both positive and negative, interpersonal feedbacks to each other about the tendency, attitudes, and habits of others. Because the therapy group itself is a social microcosm, differences in age and life experiences can play an important part in providing accurate feedback to each other. Older members with better social skills and more life experience and empathy for others often play crucial roles. Patients recognize the therapist as a paid professional, but fellow patients are like friends or family members in the real world.

Group psychotherapists interpret mental disorders as disturbed or distorted interpersonal relationships in group, family, or community. Thus, the goal of group therapy is to change or correct the disturbances or distortions in the interpersonal relationships. Group therapy is highly beneficial for those who have experienced disturbances in being raised in chaotic, dysfunctional families. In attending group dynamics, participants correct these wounds inflicted from their primary families in early childhood. Yalom named this process "the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group."¹²

¹² Ibid., 13.

Group therapy provides the unique experience and dynamics of a genuine family by furnishing intimate relationships, strong emotions, siblings, parental figures, sibling rivalry, and competition. In this quasi family, participants make dynamic interactions with others in the ways reminiscent of the patterns of behavior in their early childhood. In group dynamics, patients also imitate or identify the exemplary behaviors of other patients and therapist such as supporting others or self-disclosing to others. Imitating and identifying have therapeutic impacts.

Group therapy provides the corrective experience for both pathogenic beliefs and disturbed emotions. In other words, the therapy is most effective when it facilitates both cognitive and affective components in the therapeutic process. The corrective experience also happens in individual therapy, but the group setting provides an ideal environment to facilitate the corrective experience. When the participants experience the group as a supportive and safe place to exchange frank feedback with each other, it becomes a great place for experiencing the process of the corrective experience. Not only can patients express their own emotions, but a supportive group will allow for the full and honest expression of strong emotions. The patient then evaluates the incidence through the consensual feedback from others, and can recognize the inappropriateness of certain behaviors and feelings. As a result, the patient can build the confidence to interact with others more honestly and spontaneously and with much better interpersonal patterns and skills.

In group therapy, participants can experience catharsis through sudden, momentary relief from their psychological suffering. Strong emotional experiences in group therapy seem to be very effective and therapeutic. However, an emotional or uplifting experience does not necessarily bring any change or growth whatever the intensity of the experience itself. Open expression of the participants' emotions is a vital factor of the process of group therapy, but this

factor should be complemented by a cognitive aspect so that participants can explicitly recognize and identify their issues.

The most important role of the group therapist is simply being present with the patients. Patients often cannot remember the interpretations of the therapist, but they do remember the fact that the empathic therapist was with them during the tough moments of their lives. The therapy group, as Yalom describes, demonstrates well “the double meaning of the word apartness: we are separate, lonely, *apart from* but also *a part of*.”¹³ It is like being a lonely ship in a dark night. It was “nonetheless enormously comforting to see the lights of other ships sailing the same water though “no physical mooring could be made.”¹⁴

Yalom claims that the therapy group is a great place for the participants to explore existential struggles such as isolation, the purpose of life, meaninglessness, freedom, and death. In other words, group psychotherapy is an ideal place for exploring deeper spiritual issues. In participating in the therapy group, the patients experience intimacy, support, guidance, and care from others, while they also face the inevitable aloneness and distance between oneself and others. Even though each participant can get closer to others, one must face life and death alone.

Contemporary encounter group and group therapy models share common, notable strengths in developing a Korean theological model of spiritual and psychological development: 1) egalitarian, intimate human-human dynamic process; 2) the recognition of innate human potential and the themes of change or growth; 3) cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of change through interpersonal dynamics; 4) unique experiences of a genuine family and community as social microcosm; and 5) providing hope rather than despair and

¹³ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴ Ibid., 96.

meaninglessness and dealing with spiritual and existential issues through acceptance, empathy, trust, and the sense of belonging among group members.

In spite of these strengths, there are several areas and themes that these two group dynamic models should be complemented by Wesleyan theological and Korean cultural themes and methods: 1) divine grace and *jeong* as facilitating and sustaining energy; 2) egalitarian, interdependent human-human and divine-human dynamics; 3) a concrete, long-term developmental model of growth; 4) a strong connection between inner change and daily practices, and between personal change and social transformation; and 5) concrete religious and cultural beliefs, ideals, and values as the motivating and directing force for personal growth and social transformation.

Example I: Group Psychotherapy as Spiritual Discipline

John McDargh, through his five years of experience as a group therapist and facilitator, points out that long-term group psychotherapy can also be a spiritual discipline where divine grace and mutual acceptance and love work strongly. In his article, McDargh portrays a poignant process of a session in the long-term group psychotherapy that he had led for five years.¹⁵ It was secular group psychotherapy, but McDargh found out the intersection of psychological healing, spiritual support, and the exploration of personal experience.

McDargh's clients are perfect examples of *jeong-han*, narcissism, and depression who had struggled with the powerful emotion of shame. They have issues of the fragmentation of the self, problems of identity formation, and struggles in interpersonal interactions that are the major challenges in the Korean culture. These major issues are partly due to their experiences of

¹⁵ John McDargh, "Group Psychotherapy as Spiritual Discipline: From Oz to the Kingdom of God," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 22, no. 4 (1994): 290-299.

growing up in dysfunctional, chaotic family. His clients share the similarities with Kohut's encounter of new type of clients with narcissistic traits who were mostly successful professionals with neurotic suffering such as emptiness, shame, loneliness, mixed feelings of self-esteem and inferiority simultaneously, and lack of joy. In early childhood, they adopted a pattern of behavior in order to take care of their parents' feelings and please them. In a Korean term, they had *noon-chi*, which is being sensitive to and figuring out others' emotions and perceptions rather than focusing on one's own emotions and needs.

The group members are "middle class, and (most) middle-aged white men with the education and talent."¹⁶ They are successful professionals with good education, gifts, and talents who work as business executives, government bureaucrats, city planners, and university administrators. However, they experienced a chaotic childhood by growing up in abusive and dysfunctional families, especially in alcoholic families. The clients experience the feeling of emotional emptiness and narcissistic depletion. They easily feel a deep impairment and emptiness and are unable to have and recognize real and authentic emotions.

McDargh points out that it is necessary to get to know that "one had feelings," which is "no small step."¹⁷ He describes his discovery of the inner condition of his clients as follows:

Indeed, as I have begun to understand more about the condition of growing up on a "dysfunctional" or abusive family, I could see more clearly that for all of them in the group to some degree, and for some men to a very great degree, there was a profound impairment in the ability to be aware of their own flow of affect. The necessary adaptations they made to childhood patterns of physical or emotional abuse, unpredictable parenting, and violent or emotionally chaotic households involved learning to pay attention to the moods of others but to be oblivious to their own.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., 294.

¹⁷ Ibid., 292.

¹⁸ Ibid., 292.

The group members often felt a deep sense of responsibility for their parents and siblings and provided life-long “habits of generous, selfless caretaking extended down to the present.”¹⁹ As a result, they found it difficult and often impossible to identify their own emotions – “what *they* desired, what *they* felt, what *they* wanted for themselves.”²⁰ Thus, it was one of the main goals of the group therapy sessions to name and verbally express the flow of emotions at the present moment and place.

Along with recognizing real emotions, another important task for the therapy session is to grasp the strong sense and conviction of one’s own identity – religious, cultural, and sexual orientations and identities. In group therapy sessions, McDargh identifies his own role not as a therapist but as a “servant of its process.”²¹ The dynamics of group members also provided egalitarian, mutual learning experience for both therapist and group members. McDargh himself explores his own identity as a gay, Roman Catholic, middle-class white man, with great talent and education. For all of the participants, it was a moment of asking the question “who am I on this journey?”²² It is like taking a path home by realizing the deepest emotions and desires in one’s hearts and minds.

McDargh, as the therapist of the group, focused on psychodynamics of the group members and the mutual interactions among them. He knew the issues of their feelings of emotional emptiness and narcissistic depletion. In group psychotherapy, McDargh tried to help them 1) to recognize the dynamic and flow of the real and authentic emotions within themselves so that they could identify and express those emotions; 2) to figure out unconscious relational conflicts and interpersonal dynamics; 3) to seize their own desire and longing for themselves

¹⁹ Ibid., 292.

²⁰ Ibid., 292.

²¹ Ibid., 291.

²² Ibid., 296.

rather than taking care of the emotions of significant others around them; and 4) to grasp the strong sense and conviction of one's own religious, cultural, and sexual identities through which therapist and patients all experienced mutual learning and growth.

McDargh employs group format because he wanted to figure out not only one's own emotions but also clues for unconscious relational conflicts and interpersonal dynamics among participants. In each group session the participants, including the therapist, experience the profound sense and deep interactions of unconditional acceptance, love, *jeong*, and grace. The participants show care and courage for others, though they neither offer any word of affirmation and encouragement such as hope nor provide specific solutions. They neither condemn nor judge others. What the participants do for a particular participant is simply recognize and share "what they have seen" in the person's life and "how he has endured and prevailed" in the long journey. It is the recognition of one's faithfulness and survival.

Moreover, McDargh evaluates that the participants experience "both a psychological achievement and a gift of grace."²³ The group sessions have been a place where participants experience a deeper sense of God's grace as McDargh describes: "grace is everywhere . . . how homely and hospitable God turns out to be."²⁴ In that sense, the group psychotherapy also becomes spiritual experience and discipline. In the group dynamics, participants experience mutual interdependence among human actors and in between God and human actors: "I am a part of you and you are a part of me because we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God."²⁵ It is also a great time for the participants to accept their own identity as who they are rather than being obsessed and struggled with the standard of perfection of a good person in the society and

²³ Ibid., 297.

²⁴ Ibid., 295.

²⁵ Ibid., 297.

culture. The goal is to embrace one's own life as it is, thus recognizing that there is no need to despair.

In the psychotherapeutic process in a secular setting, McDargh noticed both psychological achievement and spiritual growth not only for the patients but also for himself, though his original goal of the meeting was psychological change of participants. He had led a group psychotherapy session in a secular setting with seven men for the past five years. The group provided a sense of safety, belonging, and family, and behaved as a kind of a quasi family. Most of all, it was a place where all participants could experience the gift of God's grace and unconditional acceptance, trust, care, and *jeong*.

McDargh's group psychotherapy session is a good example of common strengths of contemporary encounter group and group psychotherapy models. Moreover, his group session is a stronger model than other secular group models because the group dynamic effectively channels the work of divine grace in human-human and divine-human dynamics. However, this model of psychological and spiritual development also does not provide a concrete developmental process of religious and cultural identity formation, and a strong connection between personal change and social transformation. These are the areas that contemporary Methodist model effectively works.

Example II: Spiritual Discipline as Group Psychotherapy

Small group model was a distinct method of early Methodist movement in the eighteenth century in England. Wesley divided a Methodist society, which is a local church in the contemporary sense, into small groups called classes and bands. These two types of small groups

are similar to encounter group or group psychotherapy in the contemporary sense and were an effective model for spiritual and psychological development of early Methodists.

In the Methodist tradition, there exists a contemporary descendant of class meetings and bands; the “covenant discipleship group.” It is a weekly meeting which consists of up to seven persons recently rejuvenated. They meet together for an hour each week in order to mutually hold themselves spiritually accountable to one another. They engage in these weekly meetings and share with each other by means of the covenant that they have written.

The pioneer of the covenant discipleship group is David Lowes Watson who wrote a doctoral dissertation on it at Duke University and developed and organized the first group in 1975 at Holly Springs United Methodist Church in Holly Springs, North Carolina.²⁶ Interestingly, it was around the same time when James W. Fowler was developing his FDT as a response to the struggles of people and society at that time. Watson himself evaluates covenant discipleship group as “appropriating methods of our forebears, not merely copying them.”²⁷ Steven W. Manskar, who was a student of Watson and Director of Accountable Discipleship at the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church in Nashville, TN, evaluates the covenant discipleship group as follows:

Covenant Discipleship, today’s entry point for Accountable Discipleship, is an adaptation of the early Methodist class meetings. It is not an attempt to re-create an eighteenth-century model and apply it to the twenty-first century. In Covenant Discipleship we have lifted out the pieces of the class meeting that are most needed for Christians of today: mutual accountability and support. While elements of the class meeting, such as prayer and Bible reading, are recommended components, they are not the main thing. The purpose of Covenant Discipleship is accountability, which is where people listen, ask questions, and support and help one another as they are formed as disciples of Jesus

²⁶ Gayle Turner Watson, *Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 6.

²⁷ Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God’s Household* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 7.

Christ. Accountability is distinctive to Covenant Discipleship because disciples need the encouragement and support it affords.²⁸

Thus, the major component of the covenant discipleship (CD) group is talking about accountability – about “how one has lived his or her life” in light of the group covenant created by the members of the group.²⁹ It does not aim at judgment or work-righteousness. It is simply telling other group members “how your week has gone,” “what have you done,” and “what you have not done” and allows everyone to check in with the group.³⁰ The dynamics of the group looks like that of a support group or group psychotherapy, however, the talking and dynamics of group members is based on the specific covenant of the group.

The covenant of the CD group is written by group members themselves. It is the household rules of the faith community, which is based on God’s grace. In the Methodist tradition, the household rules are called General Rules. These General Rules are supposed to function as a rule for living for the members of the group. It is also general in order to “accommodate the varied experiences, interpretations, and perspectives disciples bring with them.”³¹ The rule does not have a narrow ideological and theological perspective, nor is it intended either as a form of law or as a means for works righteousness.

For Wesley, a faith community is the primary matrix and field where participants experience God’s grace and mutual support and encouragement. A faith community is not only the gathering of same-minded people but also a new family, a household of God in which people live their lives according to the household rules of God. People experience grace at the moment of baptism, which is the beginning moment of becoming a new member of God’s household. For

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

²⁹ Ibid., 16.

³⁰ Ibid., 17.

³¹ Ibid., 26.

Wesley, grace is a free gift for all participants, and the forgiveness and acceptance are unlimited and unconditional. Grace is the beginning and end of salvation: it is an unmerited, free, unearned gift of God.

The General Rules have a well-balanced, holistic approach for the formation of the firm religious and cultural identity of the group members, and for the transformation of their cognitions, emotions, and practices through both rituals and daily practices. In the General Rules, there exists a balance between the works of piety and the works of mercy and a balance between public/social and private/personal practices. The works of piety have both public (worship) and private (devotion) aspects, while the works of mercy also have both social (justice) and private (compassion) aspects.

The works of piety are participating in spiritual practices such as public worship, the sacraments, communal and individual prayers, reading and studying the Bible, and fasting or some other form of abstinence. The works of mercy are physically practicing the General Rules in their everyday lives. The works of piety are crucial in developing the intimate personal dynamics with God, while the works of mercy are crucial in making the intimate personal dynamics with other human actors.

The CD group writes its own covenant or general rules, which typically has eight to ten clauses in four main aspects: acts of worship, devotion, justice, and compassion. The clauses are simple sentences such as “I will seek out people in need and do all I can to help them” (acts of compassion), “We will not be silent when confronted with social injustice” (acts of justice), “We will practice daily devotions, including reading Scripture and praying for group members” (acts of devotion), and “We will pray for those who visit our worship service, that they will be touched by grace” (acts of worship). The group selects clauses that every member agrees with

and is willing to accept as a guideline for the group meetings. It is also possible for everyone to add particular personal clauses if she or he wants to do.

The format, dynamics, and process of CD group meeting are similar to those of group psychotherapy. It is a weekly meeting, and the group meets for an hour. A group has up to seven persons. It usually begins with a short prayer for opening one's mind and heart and experiencing grace. Each meeting begins on time and completes on time, whether every group member arrives at the meeting on time or not. If some members want to continue sharing and talking, they can have informal time after they end the formal session. The rule looks somewhat strict and dry, but the primary goal of the meeting is not fellowship but mutual accountability. The group meeting is structured but intimate at the same time. The group members also should keep strict confidentiality.

It is an egalitarian and intimate model. Each session has a leader or a facilitator and each member takes turns and has a leadership role for the session. Having a leader is important for the group dynamics of the session, though the leader does not play an authoritative role. The leader begins the session by reading and responding to each clause of the covenant, and asks each participant to do similarly. As the participants read each clause, they are cognitively reminded of the covenant that they have made together. Each member tells the others how their week has gone, what they have done, or not done in light of the covenant that they have made together. The members also hear each others' struggles, difficulties, and moments of joy from the past week. The purpose is not to make judgments or assign punishments but rather it is a means of sharing a journey together. Participants often experience sympathetic listening, understanding, firmness, assurance, and even advice and correction.

The leader should keep track of time, flow, speed, and balanced involvement of each member. All clauses in the covenant are expected to be shared at each session though as the intimate relationships develop and the conversations get deeper, time may become a problem. The leader should control the conversation and group dynamics so that introvert participants get a chance to talk while overly extrovert participants are limited.

The leader has a responsibility to provide feedback to each participant's sharing such as offering affirmation, guidance, encouragement, or correction. Each member should acquire the necessary skills to effectively lead the session, since everyone takes turns at the leadership role. The relationship among all members is therefore horizontal however members must be aware of the dangers of a leader who is not prepared or skilled enough to effectively lead the group.

The original design of CD group is formal and mechanical, and participants are expected to share what they have done or not done rather than what they have felt.³² The group members should share their recognitions of their daily practices, rather than their emotions and inner struggles. However, as time goes on, and the group's conversations get deeper, group members often become much more open with their emotions. Moreover, personal problems can emerge in group dynamics. As Gayle Turner Watson points out, "In the hands of a skilled professional, this vulnerability can be used to great therapeutic effect, and often is."³³ As a result, the participants can experience a deeper sense of friendship and communion. Although it is not the original intention of the group meeting, spiritual and psychological bonds among group members is an unexpected bonus.

The group meeting is closed with prayer or a simple ritual. The leader can offer a blessing, or the group members can speak a sentence related to personal or communal concerns.

³² Watson, *Guide*, 46.

³³ *Ibid.*, 46.

Some groups close the meeting by having a moment of meditation and reflection. Some groups have a brief ritual such as Holy Communion. There are also housekeeping items such as announcing the next meeting's leader, informing others of a planned absence, and raising specific clauses on which to focus for the next meeting.

The CD group aims at growth and change in cognition, emotion, and daily practices and becomes a place where participants can cognitively and affectively experience *jeong* in interpersonal interactions with other participants and God. As the intimacy among participants is strengthened in the dynamic process, they experience foundational trust and friendship. The mutual interactions in the group are self-*selfobject* relationships develop through which participants experience others as *selfobjects* from which *jeong* is slowly transmuted into the self.

Jeong fills the deficiency in the self, and the self becomes healthier and stronger. *Jeong* continuously provide the source of energy for further growth and change. Even after the self becomes strong, it still exists in the self-*selfobject* relationship throughout the lifetime of the community. The selves in the CD group become *selfobjects* for others, and there exist reciprocity and grace among human actors. In CD groups, sharing *jeong* is also sharing grace among group members. Grace is a free, unearned gift that provides unconditional, unlimited acceptance and support and is a major source of power for continuous motivation for growth and change.

The CD group itself is an effective model and method for spiritual growth, but it needs to be complemented by the mechanism and process of group psychotherapy since psychological struggles are often interconnected with spiritual or existential issues and also revealed in dynamic interactions in CD group. CD groups are not effective enough in the areas of expression of emotions and the here-and-now experience. There are some exchanges of emotions and experience of relief and catharsis, but a CD group does not provide the best opportunities nor

enough time and space for participants to recognize their genuine emotions and verbally express them as they arise in the group dynamics.

Example III: Personal Participations in Small Groups

I have been a member/facilitator of two CD groups in Nashville, TN for an academic year and Minneapolis, MN for three years. The first group lasted a year, and there were five members: three European-American students and two Korean students. All five members were United Methodist clergy candidates who were also studying in the Ph.D. program in Religion or Education at Vanderbilt University. Since we all lived on the boundary between the academy and the church as well as between theory and praxis, we had really good group dynamics, as well as encouragement and support from each other. It was this common religious identity as United Methodist clergy candidates in the academy that made the group possible, despite the notable differences in racial and cultural backgrounds.

The second group lasted for three years and each member was a member/facilitator for each session. It was a group of six probationary elders (pastors) who were in the working toward full membership and full ordination in the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. I was the only Asian man, while others were European-American women. We were all in a first full-time appointment as either a lead pastor or an associate pastor to churches in the Twin Cities and throughout the State of Minnesota. The second group was effective and powerful as a safe, reliable, and warm holding environment where I could freely share my deeper psychological and spiritual struggles without the fear of being judged or harshly evaluated. We had a strong bond of friendship, *jeong*, sense of belonging, and the strong work of divine grace because of our daily struggles in spiritual leadership positions in tough local congregations.

In both groups we used the mechanism and process of typical CD groups: mutual accountability in light of the group covenant. We wrote a covenant together, and read it and provided simple accounts of our own lives since the previous meeting at the check-in moment in the beginning of each session. There was a difference in the duration of those two groups. The first group was a homogeneous group in terms of gender, career, and religious identity, while the second group was homogeneous in terms of a shared situation (i.e. on probation), career, and religious identity however there were notable differences in backgrounds and life experiences among group members.

The most notable difference in my experiences in the two different groups was the emotional aspect of the group process. The first group was stricter and more mechanical in following the rule of the CD group. It lasted exactly one hour after which we had to return to the class. In attending each session I could easily recognize what I thought but it was extremely difficult to figure out what I felt. We began with a short centering meditation and ended with warm exchanges of hugs and handshakes.

The second group was a perfect balance of group spiritual discipline and group therapy, though there was no licensed therapist. If it was led by a skilled professional, it could have had a greater therapeutic effect. Each session lasted over two hours, began with a short prayer and ended with meditation and prayer. In the second group, the expression of emotions and here-and-now experience were more common. Nobody in the group discouraged or controlled the expression of emotions rather it was always welcomed, accepted, and encouraged and we could provide direct correction or advice for each other. In attending the second group, I could recognize, feel, and name my genuine emotions that I had suppressed in my interpersonal relationships in my ministry setting. The members of the second group all had a good knowledge

in the areas of spiritual discipline, theology, and psychology, and all of them openly shared their emotions and even tears. The group members provided trust, acceptance, grace, and love for each other.

Group members participate in a moment of focusing meditation and prayer, which takes about five minutes. This exercise comes from my own personal experience in attending two classes, *The Psychology of Religious Development* and *Spirituality and Psychotherapy*, taught by John McDargh during the academic year of 1999-2000. McDargh used the focusing technique developed by the practice and research of existential psychologist Eugene Gendlin and his fellows at the University of Chicago. Gendlin believes that an innate and learned human ability to monitor one's felt sense and to clearly express it in verbal speech was the most important precursor for upcoming constructive changes. In paying attention to one's own breathing, an individual can notice thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations without judging them. By remembering or taking note of those emotions, sensations, and thoughts, one can account for them during the group process.

As a graduate student at Boston University at the time, I knew that I was obsessed with academic studies and easily recognized those thoughts, but I had trouble in being clearly aware of what I desired for myself and what I felt in my heart. In attending the "breath mindfulness exercise"³⁴ as McDargh names it, I could identify my felt sense in my daily life, which became a genuine source for realizing my inner struggles and changing my patterns of thinking, feeling, and interacting with others.

In the group, similarities in religious and cultural identities and life experiences and sharing one's deeper thoughts, emotions, and struggles develop stronger friendships, as well as

³⁴ McDargh, "Group Psychotherapy," 291.

jeong, love, and grace among group members. After the focusing meditation is over, group members take turns for check-in. They remind each other of the group's covenant and share their reflections on their lives in light of that covenant. Throughout that process, deeper feelings, concerns, and issues are also revealed. In the beginning of the check-in time, group members talk about their joys and concerns of the past week, their accomplishments, their appreciation for other group members, and situations in the work place and in their family. It is a more formal, mechanic, business-like report of one's experiences of the past week.

However, as the group members enter into a deeper conversation, they begin talking about their inner struggles, distortions in interpersonal relationships, disturbances in their emotions, and even thoughts and feelings of oneself toward other group members. If the group leader/facilitator and other members provide empathetic listening, understanding, space is opened up for further communal exploration, reenactment, interpretation, and mutual feedback, advice, and guidance. This is the time for exploration, analysis, and interpretation of theological themes and psychological issues by communal wisdom of group members.

The mutual dynamic interactions of providing interpretation, feedback, encouragement, support, and even correction, provide hope and meaning of life for each other, rather than despair and meaninglessness. The cohesiveness of the group offers a sense of we-ness, *jeong*, friendship, and family that promotes stronger support and care for each other. Recognizing the universality of one's own struggle as it appears in other members' lives often gives encouragement and support. Moreover, participants experience self-value and self-esteem in giving support, care, and advice to others. They realize that they have something valuable to give to others as a free gift. Most of all, group members overcome fear and loneliness by experiencing the simple, affirmative presence of the group leader/facilitator and other members.

As the group session is coming to an end, the leader signals for the check-out, and the group members share concluding remarks or reflections not only about themselves but also for others. At this moment, group members provide wise and thoughtful comments on their observances and experiences of others' courage, strength, and triumphs. Before the group breaks up, group members share housekeeping issues, exchange hugs and handshakes. They leave the space feeling a heightened sense of courage, joy, and meaning for their lives for the week ahead.

A Model of Spiritual and Psychological Development

In the previous section, I have explored foundations, mechanisms, dynamics, and methods of encounter groups, group psychotherapy, and Methodist CD groups, and strengths, limitations, and differences of these similar-looking models. Out of these resources, I propose a long-term small group setting, which is the combination of spiritual discipline and group psychotherapy models, as a model of spiritual and psychological development for contemporary Korean Christians and Protestant churches. The combination is necessary and powerful because encounter groups and group psychotherapy share effective dual mechanism of cognitive learning and emotional change, while the Methodist CD model is a powerful tool for religious and cultural identity formation and the embodiment of religious beliefs and practices.

As previously stated, this model is small enough to provide an environment of a quasi-family to deal with the fragmentation of the self and large enough to examine unconscious relational conflicts and the problems of power dynamics and relational boundaries among participants for more effective identity formation and changes in religious practices. This model is a comprehensive tool in dealing with all three challenges, narcissism and the formation of the self, religious and cultural identity formation, and embodiment of religious beliefs and practices.

This is an ideal setting for not only exploring personal, intrapsychic emotions and struggles but also relational issues and conflicts. Interpersonal dynamics can be found by a therapist in individual counseling setting, but directly experiencing and being observed within the group are more powerful for the participants to realize their own struggles. It is also an effective channel to share and practice grace and *jeong*, which are ultimate energies not only for intrapsychic and interpersonal growth and change but also for the interplay of personal change and social transformation.

The model encourages each person's ongoing participation in a small group for mutual strengthening and growing – even those who are relatively healthy spiritually and psychologically. This model simply asks people to continue being faithfully on the journey with critical questions about one's own identity and struggles in the process of journey through the facilitating energy of grace and *jeong* in divine-human and human-human interactions within the community. It neither provides hierarchical stages and developmental frame according to physical age and maturity nor aims at individual achievement toward the best or highest stage. It encourages neither to worry about one's current level of spiritual achievement nor to seek for the next level.

There are crucial components and principles that must be included in this model of spiritual and psychological development: 1) egalitarian, intimate, genuine family dynamic model with trust, unconditional acceptance, empathy, and mutual communication; 2) psychological exploration on intrapsychic emotional struggles such as narcissism, emptiness, and depression, and interpersonal conflicts and problems; 3) spiritual and existential exploration on the purpose and meaning of life, hope and despair, isolation, and life and death; 4) the purpose and goal of small group model for both personal growth and social transformation; 5) firm religious and

cultural identity formation process; 6) the interconnection between religious beliefs and practices; and 7) the powerful work of grace and *jeong* as the energy for healing and growth.

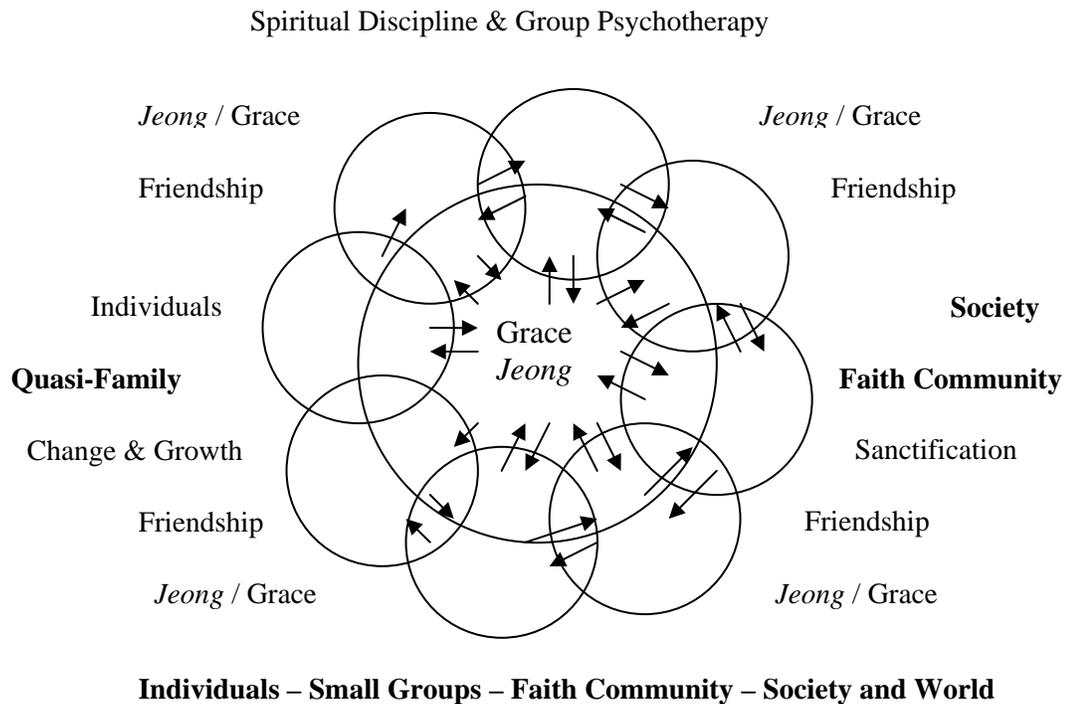


Figure 8. Long-Term Small Group Model
Strengthening Self, Identity Formation, & Religious Practices

The small group model for Korean spiritual and psychological development that I propose has several unique characteristics. First, the group will have up to seven or eight people and will be an egalitarian and heterogeneous group in terms of gender, age, life experiences, etc., but the group members will have similar spiritual and psychological struggles, themes, and situations. The participants will experience others like friends or family members. However, it is often helpful to have either all laities or all clergy groups. As previously mentioned, there are

serious problems in power dynamics and relational boundaries within faith communities in Korea, either in laity-laity or laity-clergy relationships.

Second, the group will have a spiritually and psychologically informed and trained leader in order to provide reflections and corrective advice, but the leader is not in higher position but also a member of the group. The group leader has an ability to deal with the psychological and spiritual issues arising from deeply disrupted intrapersonal and interpersonal relations, though the leader does not play an authoritative role. In the Korean cultural setting, it is still difficult to have well-trained people in helping spiritual and psychological development. Thus, having a group meeting is much more effective in providing professional help than having an individual counseling.

Third, the group meeting will last up to two hours for both sharing one's life during the past week in light of the covenant or group rules that the group members made and a deeper group dynamics where emotional disturbances, relational conflicts can emerge. One hour session of the Methodist CD group is not enough for both components. The covenant or group rules will help form group identity and the transformation of cognitions, emotions, and bodily practices of group members in their daily lives. In leading the group dynamic process, the leader should check the time, flow, and balanced participation of all group members.

Fourth, the group meeting will have spiritual and existential components in the beginning and/or in the end by providing the moment for meditation, prayer, brief reading and reflection of spiritual books or Bible, but the meeting will not be a typical style of small group Bible study or prayer meeting. This moment is crucial in bringing attention to one's thoughts, emotions, and struggles by providing a channel for the work of divine grace and human *jeong* in the group process. For these prayer or meditation time, group members or the leader will choose the

method of prayer and meditation from a tradition or heritage that they want to employ. Some groups may use the methods of contemplative prayer or focus meditation, reading a small part of prayer books or other secular books on growth, or a short passage in the Bible for personal reflections on one's life.

Fifth, this small group setting will work as a quasi-family. Thus, the development of a new group needs a careful process of 1) getting to know each other, 2) sharing common goals, visions, and situations, 3) building trust, friendship, *jeong*, and love, and 4) building a strong sense of a genuine family. This group setting needs to provide a sense and dynamic of a family where each member can support other family members in strengthening the self, forming a particular religious and cultural identity, and challenge each other to make changes in their daily practices.

Sixth, the group as a family will write covenant or household rules based on *jeong* and grace for organizing group members' daily lives. In the process of actually writing of the rules, new group members will develop a strong bond and mutual acceptance among them. Driskill points out that "the rediscovery of the spiritual significance of a Rule of Life provides another avenue for spiritual growth" and "although the notion of a rule to guide spiritual growth and development sounds rigid and severe in the contemporary context, it is helpful to think of rules as guidelines for ordering daily life."³⁵ The term, "rule of life," was used by monastic communities in the Early Church and included personal and communal prayer along with daily work and study.³⁶ The rule of life in contemporary secular context is ordering people's lives in the midst of a chaotic daily schedule, and connecting people's faith and their daily lives. Some groups can use denominational sources such as the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal

³⁵ Driskill, *Protestant Spiritual Exercises*, 88-89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

Church or *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* written by Bishop Rueben P. Job of the United Methodist Church.

Bishop Job, in his small, pocket sized book, claims that following and practicing three simple rules – *Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God* – will change the world and is a good way “to cut through the complexities and turbulence of everyday life” and “to overcome the divisiveness that separates, disparages, disrespects, diminishes, and leaves us wounded and incomplete.”³⁷ Bishop Job also points out that these three simple rules have a deeper root in the teachings of the Hebrew Bible, the daily lives of Early Christians, and early Methodist movement in the 18th century England. The Methodist movement within the Church of England rose from the social context much like our own, and John Wesley’s use of these rules of life changed the lives of people and the society. The three simple rules are “contemporary and exceptionally well suited to our time, our culture, and our needs today.”³⁸

The first simple rule, *Do No Harm*, is to change people’s spoken words and actions that wound and injure others. People often hurt others by simply uttering wrong words or making wrong responses to others. Thus, it is a rule to reconsider the consequences before saying and acting, being careful and considerate, making efforts to bring harmony, wholeness, and healing to others in the community and wider society. Thus, simply being careful and considerate changes people and society.

The second simple rule, *Do Good*, is directed to everyone, even to people who are considered unworthy to receive any good. It is not only sharing grace and *jeong* but also gifting for others’ survival and well-being. It is practicing “healthy self-denial” rather than “unhealthy self-worship as promoted by our culture,” which encourages “greed and selfishness” and

³⁷ Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

discourages “compassion, sharing, fairness, and commitment to the common good.”³⁹ In other words, the second simple rule includes both self-care and doing something good for others, rather than devaluing or denying self for the sake of others.

The third simple rule, *Stay in Love with God*, is the foundation and the source of power for first two rules and people’s daily lives as Bishop Job claims:

Staying in love with God is the foundation to all of life . . . We practice the rules, but God sends the power that enables us to keep them. We practice the rules; but God does the transforming, the renewing, and the building of the house – the house of our lives, the house of our church, and the house of our world.⁴⁰

The third rule is empowered by divine grace and practiced through consistent spiritual practices and disciplines within the faith community such as private and public daily prayer, rituals such as worship and the Communion, reading books and reflection on daily lives, and small group meetings that Wesley called the means of grace.

Seventh, the meeting will have a unique process. It begins on time with a brief moment of meditation or prayer, and/or reading or reflection, whether all group members have arrived or not. Then, each member will have a check-in time by talking about his or her life during the past week – daily practices, thoughts, feelings, struggles, and challenges – in light of the group covenant or rules. The check-in time is for mutual accountability, and members can provide their thoughts, reflections, feedback, and advices for others. It is a moment when participants’ deeper emotions, concerns, and issues are also revealed. Both during and after the check-in time, the group will continue to have conversations and dynamics among group members so that they can become more open with their struggles and emotions, and the patterns of interpersonal conflicts can emerge. The intense interpersonal dynamics are possible by trust, friendship, *jeong*, and

³⁹ Ibid., 45-46.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 48.

grace, and the members should be trained and reminded of keeping strict confidentiality. This is an important moment of the group process because it facilitates the expression of emotions, here-and-now experience, and working-through process. Then, the group members have check-out time. They can provide thoughts, comments, and encouragements for others. The group meeting is closed with prayer or a simple ritual, and the members go back to their daily lives with enhanced emotion, cognition, and energy for changing their daily practices.

Conclusion: The Significance of the Faith Community

In the previous section, I proposed a long-term small group setting, which is the well-balanced combination of group spiritual discipline and group psychotherapy. Most of all, the small group setting is a powerful channel for delivering grace and *jeong*, which are ultimate glue or energy for the ongoing journey of spiritual and psychological development. The small group model covers comprehensively all three areas of spiritual and psychological development: cognition, emotion, and practices. The group dynamic effectively facilitates the process of strengthening the self, forming the identity, changing daily practices, and eventually transforming the larger faith community, society, and the world. In other words, the small group model for spiritual and psychological development becomes the foundation and grassroots for changing the society from the bottom.

The small group model works most effectively when the small groups exist within larger faith community or when they are small churches within the church, the *ecclesia*, which is the gathering of the called-out ones. The small group is the foundation and grassroots for transforming the society and world through the change of daily practices of group members, and the faith community becomes a bridge between small group and society. The community of faith

provides rich rituals and symbols, and a comprehensive way of supporting its members' spiritual practices, spiritual discipline, spiritual guidance, spiritual discernment, and, as a result, ongoing spiritual development, which makes notable growth and change in personality, attitudes, perspectives, goal and meaning of life, interpersonal relationships, and awareness and active participation in social problems.

The ultimate goals of spiritual and psychological development are not only personal growth and spiritual and psychological well-being but also changes of daily practices for transforming the problems and issues in faith community and society. The larger community, whether it is a faith community or secular society, is a new family, a household of God, which works based on the economy of God powered by grace and *jeong*. The economy of God is the right arrangement in the household for everyone's spiritual, psychological, and economical survival and well-being. A faith community is an instrument to serve the people and community for their living and flourishing through its particular economy of God. In the wider sense, the economy of God acknowledges God's inclusive and intimate relationships with human beings in creation. As Meeks points out, the economy of God in Wesley's theology is prominent and "the heart of Christian discipleship and the substance of the way of salvation."⁴¹

Wesley's understanding of spiritual development, sanctification, was living a life that continuously returns God's gift of grace and life to God and others in faith community and wider society, which leads freedom and life for all. Wesley's position was strongly against the excessive accumulation and misuse of wealth because wealth discourages love of God and neighbor, and becomes a major roadblock on the way toward spiritual development by discouraging love of God and neighbor. Sharing wealth by gifting for the poor, especially poor

⁴¹ Meeks, "Sanctification," 85-86.

families with young children is also a way of spiritual formation and development. Thus, there is no sharp boundary between spiritual and psychological growth and social ethics, and Wesleyan spirituality has implicit ethic of generativity. The ultimate goal of Korean spiritual and psychological development is the interplay of personal change and communal, institutional, and social transformations.

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