

THE BACKGROUNDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHARISMATIC MEGA-CHURCHES IN KOREA¹

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1. Introduction

Korean Protestantism can be characterized as the rapid church growth and the emergence of the mega-churches, which attracts the focus of scholarly investigation. The number of Protestant churches increased from 3,279 in 1920 to 5,011 in 1960 and to 33,897 in 1996. The Protestant population in Korean society has grown significantly since the 1960s. As can be seen in Table 1, the number of Protestant population had an enormous increase from 623,072 in 1960 to 8,760,000 in 1995.² In 1995, with Korean Protestants (19.7%) and Catholics (6.6%) combined, Christians have leveled out at about 26% of the whole

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 9th European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association (EPCRA) Conference in joint with the Mission Academy of Hamburg University, July 13-17, 1999 in Hamburg. The paper will be published in the early 2000 in the series of *Perspektiven der Weltmission* by the Missions academy at the University of Hamburg, Germany. I gratefully acknowledge the help of Drs. Jean-Daniel Plüss, Chris Sugden, Ben Knighton, Allan Anderson and Donald Dayton. I am also grateful to the editors of this journal, who gave me good help and comments, and to Rev. Joseph Suico who encouraged me to have this article published. Of course I alone am responsible for the remaining inadequacies of this article.

² In Table 1, figures until 1945 refer to whole of Korea, and after 1945, only to South Korea. The figures up to 1960 come from the denominational reports of the Ministry of Culture and Information and *Christianity Almanac* published yearly by Kidokgyomun-sa. The denominational reports are likely to be overstated. The figures for 1985 and 1995 are from the national census of the government by the Ministry of Statistics, which seem to be quite exact.



population.³ Christianity, in spite of its short history in Korea, has become the major religion, together with Buddhism, in Korean society today.

Table 1 Growth of the Protestant Population

Year	1900	1920	1940	1960	1985	1995
Protestants	21,136	323,574	507,922	623,072	6,489,282	8,760,000

But the phenomenon that attracts the scholarly attention, along with the growth of the Korean Protestant population, is the fact that there are many large and mega-churches in Korea. In 1999, it was estimated that there were nearly 400 large churches and 15 mega-churches.⁴ The exceptional characteristic of Korean mega-churches, namely, that it is not easy to build such a huge church organization which thousands of people voluntarily attend, has been the object of academic interest, regardless of value judgment. Table 2 shows the profile of 15 Korean Protestant mega-churches in 1999.

³ The whole population in 1995 was about 44,553,000. In 1995, Catholics were 2,950,000. The population of Buddhism in 1995 was 10,321,000, which was 23.1% of the population. In passing, those who professed to have no religion were 57.5 per cent of the whole population in 1985, and 49.3 per cent in 1995. This rate of "no religion" is quite higher than that of other countries.

⁴ It is not easy to have a unified criterion for the size of church. Some church growth scholars, such as John Vaughan (1984), like to use "composite membership" as a criterion of church size, which is an average of total membership, worship attendance, and Sunday school attendance. But in this paper, I will use "adult attendance membership." There are some reasons for this. First, most Korean churches, when asked about membership, do not talk about "children membership," if not asked specifically. Second, the gap between registered members and attendance members varies a lot from church to church so that the use of registered members will not be objective. Because of the big gap, I attended the worship services of all the mega-churches, and estimated seating capacity and attendance members. Third, it is difficult to get access to the data of registered members of some mega-churches that do not count and show their membership. The churches having more than 10,000 adult members in worship attendance of Sunday services will be classified as mega-churches and more than 1,000 adult members, as large churches.

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TO THE DIRECTOR
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

FROM
DR. ROBERT M. HAYES

RE
YOUR LETTER OF MAY 12, 1964

Enclosed for you are two copies of a letterhead memorandum
dated May 12, 1964, and two copies of a letter dated May 13, 1964,
both of which were prepared by me in response to your letter of
May 12, 1964. The letterhead memorandum is a copy of the
original which was prepared for the Director of the University
of Chicago and the Director of the National Aeronautics and
Space Administration. The letter is a copy of the original
which was prepared for the Director of the University of
Chicago. Both the letterhead memorandum and the letter are
copies of the original which were prepared for the Director
of the University of Chicago and the Director of the National
Aeronautics and Space Administration. The letterhead
memorandum is a copy of the original which was prepared
for the Director of the University of Chicago and the
Director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
The letter is a copy of the original which was prepared
for the Director of the University of Chicago.

Table 2 The Profile of 15 Korean Mega-Churches*

Church	Est. Year	Current Pastor (installation year)	Denomination	City	Adult Attend
Youngnak	1945	Yim Chul-shin (1997)	Presbyterian, Tong-Hap	Seoul	15,000
Myungsung	1980	Kim Sam-hwan	Presbyterian, Tong-Hap	Seoul	23,000
Ju-an	1955	Na Kyum-il (1978)	Presbyterian, Tong-Hap	Inchon	20,000
Somang	1977	Kwak Sun-hee	Presbyterian, Tong-Hap	Seoul	22,000
Chunghyun	1953	Kim Sung-kwan (1997)	Presbyterian, Hap-Tong	Seoul	13,000
Sarang-eui	1978	Ok Han-heum	Presbyterian, Hap-Dong	Seoul	12,000
Onnuri	1985	Ha Yong-jo	Presbyterian, Tong-Hap	Seoul	14,000
Kwanglim	1953	Kim Sun-do (1971)	Methodist	Seoul	25,000
Soong-eui	1917	Yi Ho-moon (1973)	Methodist	Inchon	13,000
Kumnan	1957	Kim Hong-do (1971)	Methodist	Seoul	25,000
Yoido Full Gospel	1958	Cho Yong-gi	Assemblies of God	Seoul	230,000
Full Gospel Inchon	1983	Choi Sung-kyu	Assemblies of God	Inchon	12,000
Eunhye wa Chilli	1981	Cho Yong-mok	Assemblies Of God	Anyang	50,000
Manmin Choong-ang ⁵	1982	Yi Jae-rok	Unification Holiness	Seoul	12,000
Sungnak ⁶	1969	Kim Ki-dong	Southern Baptist	Seoul	23,000

* The churches in shade are charismatic type.⁷

By the criterion of adult attendance members, there are eight mega-churches having over twenty thousands. Of the fifteen mega-churches, eleven mega-churches are in the city of Seoul, capital of Korea, three in Inchon, and one in Anyang. Inchon is a metropolitan port city near Seoul,

⁵ In 1999, the Korean Federation of Churches and Korean National Council of Churches defined the senior pastor of the Manmin. Choong-ang Church as heretical, since the pastor, Yi Jae-rok, uttered in his sermons what is defined as heretical statements in the Christian church (e.g., "My spirit can visit your home, heal sickness, and consult your problems during your sleep" (May 5, 1998); "I have accomplished the words of the Bible, except for walking on water" (June 21, 1998); "Many members see me together with the Lord in the sun and moon" (June 26, 1998)). After the pastor's heretical statements, many assistant pastors and some members left the church. In the case of the Onnuri Church, I gained an information of adult attendance membership through my friends in the church. The adult attendance membership in this table does not count the members of the independent churches that stemmed from the present mega-churches. For example, Yoido Full Gospel Church and Kwanglim Church planted several churches that became later independent.

⁶ Sungnak Church has been defined as heretical by some Korean mainline denominations since the 1980s, because of the emphasis of the pastor, Kim Ki-dong, on the demonology who maintained that the souls of non-Christians might become demons.

⁷ Among the charismatic mega-churches, Ju-an, Soong-eui, Kumnan Churches began to grow towards the mega-churches since the year of the installation of the senior pastor written in Table 2, although they were founded earlier.

and Anyang is a small city nearer Seoul than Incheon which has developed since the 1980s. So all the mega-churches are centered in Seoul metropolitan areas. As far as registered membership is concerned, the largest Protestant denominations in the Korean churches are Presbyterian, Methodist, and Assemblies of God in that order. All the mega-churches have built their own church buildings and sanctuaries, instead of renting other big buildings. Most mega-churches have many other sanctuaries where people can attend services by TV, and have five to seven services on Sunday.

I want to classify the three types of Korean mega-churches with the criteria of religious characteristics as well as historical and social background. The first type is termed the traditional type which includes the Younknak Church which appeared in 1945 after the independence from the Japanese rule (1910-45) and the Chunghyun Church which appeared in 1953 after the Korean War (1950-53). The uneasy and turmoil social context following the Korean War had an impact on the development of the two mega-churches. The Younknak Church was the first mega-church in the history of the Korean church. Both of them are Presbyterian churches which have emphasized orthodox doctrines, pietism, and conservative faith (e.g., In the Chunghyun Church, Rev. Kim Chang-in, the founding minister, never allowed the church bookstore to sell anything such as sermon, tapes, Christian books on Sunday, which is unlike other types of mega-churches).

The second type is the middle-class type of mega-churches which began to appear in the late 1970s. With the development of Kangnam area in Seoul, capital of Korea, many middle-class people began to gather there and attend the present mega-churches (Somang, Kwanglim and Sarang-eui Churches). So a sense of class homogeneity contributed to the emergence of the middle-class mega-churches. These mega-churches have a tendency to have both intellectual and spiritual sermons and emphasis on the word of God and Bible study, because most of the congregation are highly educated (e.g., average education years are 14.8, as shown in Table 5).

The third type is charismatic, which emphasizes religious experience, prayer, and evangelism.⁸ For example, Myungsung Church is famous for

⁸ Charismatic mega-churches here include both Pentecostal and Charismatic mega-churches. There are two approaches to differentiating between "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic." One is theological, which includes doctrinal lines, such as Spirit baptism. The other is ecclesiastical, which concerns denominational affiliation. However, obviously neither differentiation is entirely

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the physician's role in the health care system. It emphasizes the need for a strong medical profession and the importance of maintaining high standards of care. The author argues that the physician's primary duty is to the patient, and that this duty should be the guiding principle in all medical decisions.

The second part of the paper addresses the issue of medical malpractice. It discusses the challenges faced by physicians in a litigious environment and the need for a fair and just legal system. The author suggests that the current system of medical malpractice litigation is flawed and that reforms are needed to protect both patients and physicians.

The third part of the paper focuses on the importance of medical education and training. It discusses the need for a rigorous and comprehensive medical curriculum and the importance of clinical experience. The author argues that the medical profession must ensure that its members are well-trained and competent in order to provide the best possible care to their patients.

The fourth part of the paper discusses the issue of medical ethics. It explores the complex moral dilemmas that physicians often face and the need for a strong ethical foundation. The author suggests that the medical profession should develop a code of ethics that is based on the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for autonomy.

The fifth and final part of the paper discusses the future of the medical profession. It explores the challenges that will be faced by physicians in the coming years and the need for innovation and change. The author suggests that the medical profession must embrace new technologies and approaches to care in order to meet the needs of a changing society.

its dawn prayer movement, and Ju-an Church is renowned for its *Chongdongwon-jundo* (special Sunday for mass evangelism). The service in the Korean charismatic mega-churches is more lively and dynamic than that in other types of mega-churches, and what is called, "the manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit," such as healing or speaking in tongues, often take place. The alleged healing miracles are published in the church periodicals and newsletters so testimonies of supernatural or spiritual events play an important role in many charismatic mega-churches. Members impute the senior pastor with charismatic authority, because many members believe that the senior pastor has shaped the spiritual culture of the church, which allows such a manifestation. In sum, the Korean charismatic mega-churches are open to the work and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and exhibit more authoritarian and charismatic style of leadership than other churches.

If there is one characteristic for each type, it would be pietism for the traditional type, religious passion for the charismatic type, and emphasis on the word of God for the middle-class type of mega-churches. The distinctive characteristics are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 The Distinctive Emphasis in Religious Character of Mega-Churches

Distinction	Traditional Type	Charismatic type	Middle-Class Type
The Different Emphasis in Religious Characteristics	Orthodox Doctrines, Pietism, conservative Faith	Religious experiences, Open to the work and gifts of Holy Spirit	Intellectual Sermon, Emphasis on the Word of God, Bible Study

In the understanding of the emergence of Korean mega-churches and the rapid growth of Korean Protestant churches, one can never ignore the important role that Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have played. Pentecostal-Charismatic successes in evangelism may well constitute the

adequate. Although the theological colors of Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal charismatic Korean mega-churches, such as interpretation of Spirit baptism, differ from each other, they show similar religious characteristics, such as the openness about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, emphasis on prayer, on exuberant worship, on evangelism, and on religious experience. What characterizes them is experiential spirituality. In this sense, they can be termed altogether as "charismatic mega-churches." It seems that the case of the Onnuri Church is the one that transferred from the middle-class type to the charismatic type of mega-churches. The congregation was and is still middle-class based, but the church is very open to the work of the Holy Spirit and emphasizes dynamic services nowadays.

The following is a list of the names of the members of the Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago, as of the date of the meeting of the Board on the 15th day of June, 1900.

Name	Residence	Term Expires
John D. Rockefeller	New York	1901
James H. Wood	Chicago	1902
William W. Phelps	Chicago	1903
John C. Bennett	Chicago	1904
John H. Johnson	Chicago	1905
John H. Johnson	Chicago	1906
John H. Johnson	Chicago	1907
John H. Johnson	Chicago	1908
John H. Johnson	Chicago	1909
John H. Johnson	Chicago	1910

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most dramatic increase of believers in the history of the Christian church (Burgess, McGee and Alexander 1988, 4). This is not an exception in the growth of Korean Protestantism. Charismatic mega-churches comprise ten, among the fifteen Korean mega-churches, which occupies nearly 70%. It is shown that the Yoido Full Gospel Church and the Eunhye wa Chilli Church (or Church of Grace and Truth) which belong to the Pentecostal denomination are the two largest churches in the world as well as in the Korean mega-churches. Many of the growing Protestant churches in Korea exhibit charismatic religious characters, in the sense of religious experiences, dynamic service, and evangelism. Then the crucial questions in this paper are 1) What are the backgrounds of the emergence of charismatic mega-churches? 2) What kind of characteristics do they have? So the purpose of this paper is to explore the backgrounds and characteristics of charismatic Korean mega-churches rather than of the whole charismatic Korean churches or of the whole Korean mega-churches.

2. The Backgrounds of Charismatic Mega-churches

To understand the backgrounds of charismatic Korean mega-churches requires the understanding of historical, social, and religious dimensions behind them. I will discuss each in order. .

2.1 Historical Background

As seen in Table 2, except for the Yoido Full Gospel Church founded in 1958, four charismatic mega-churches emerged in the 1970s and other four in the early 1980s. The emergence of charismatic Korean mega-churches is a recent occurrence. Some scholars (e.g., Yoo Boo-wong 1988) have paid attention to the Pyugyang revival in 1907 and the mystical Christian movement, initiated by such pastors as Yi Yong-do and Choi Tae-yong in the 1930s, in the attempt to clarify the history of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement of Korean churches. However, such streams seem to have served as the historical root of, rather than as the history itself of, the Korean Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. The first Pentecostal church was founded in 1933 by the American Pentecostal missionary, Mary Rumsey, and Huh Hong. Korean Assemblies of God was founded in 1953 by the American Assemblies of God.

