

## THE FUTURE GROWTH OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY AND YOIDO FULL GOSPEL CHURCH: ITS POTENTIAL ROLE IN THE NEW CONTEXT

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*Wonsuk Ma*

### *Abstract*

Christians have long recognized the amazing growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church. It has been a pioneer in the Church Growth Movement and has set an example in its dependence on prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit. The church faces challenges/opportunities in the future as it relates to the church growth in the Global South, the changing culture in South Korea, and the Pentecostal/charismatic movements around the world.

### INTRODUCTION

Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC), Seoul, Korea, has created a unique spiritual tradition which has shaped its mission engagements. At the center of this tradition is David Yonggi Cho, the founder and current Senior Pastor Emeritus. Many studies have explored the church's history and the formation of its theology, spirituality, and mission, and they inevitably centered on Cho as the source of the developments.<sup>1</sup> One cannot overstate

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1 Perhaps the most extensive study is Ig-Jin Kim, *History and Theology of Korean Pentecostalism: Sunbogeum (Pure Gospel) Pentecostalism: An Attempt to Research the History of the Largest Congregation in*

the significance of the church and its founder in influencing Korean Christianity, global Pentecostal-charismatic movements, and world Christianity. Again, many studies have explored the impact.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, I will take a close look at what is perhaps the most critical mission issue of world Christianity: its growth. What is YFGC's role when faced with the growth of global Christianity, especially at this point in history? There are four observations worthy of mention. The first observation concerns the continuing influence of the church throughout the world. In the circle of megachurches, Cho and the church are upheld as pioneers of the Church Growth Movement. The recently organized Asian Leaders Summit is a network of Asian megachurch senior pastors. The present senior pastor of YFGC, Younghoon Lee, leads the network. This robust network promotes unity among the member churches of various denominations and explores their role in their challenging social contexts.<sup>3</sup> The second observation is the accelerating southward shift of global Christianity and the increasing role of Pentecostal-charismatic movements. YFGC exists and plays a leading role within this context. The third observation concerns the exemplary leadership transition from Cho to Lee in 2008, specifically the latter's proven effectiveness as a global leader over the last decade. The fourth observation is how YFGC and the Korean church have responded to the challenge of maintaining growth within their changing social context. How they continue to negotiate this challenge will determine their future role for the global church.

I will begin by elaborating upon YFGC's experience in church growth and the efforts of the church and Cho to promote and propagate this endeavor. I will then explore the present state and future projection of global Christianity by tracing the shifts of global and regional forms of Christianity between the historic Edinburgh Missionary Conference in

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*Church History and the Theology of Its Pastor Yonggi Cho* (Boekencentrum, 2003).

2 Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Younghoon Lee, *The Holy Spirit Movement in Korea: Its Historical and Theological Development*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2009).

3 For example, the August 2016 Seoul annual summit program lists 19 regular and associate member churches and ministers representing megachurches in Hong Kong, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Japan, and Taiwan.

1910 and its centenary celebration in 2010. The last section will bring together these two components to chart the church's potential role, which I foresee as being a positive influencer or global leader in the continuing growth of global Christianity. However, this role is only possible if the church maintains its growth in its challenging social context. I will conclude by identifying several areas to which the church and its leadership should pay attention if the church is to fulfill its historic mandate.

## YFGC AND CHURCH GROWTH

Yoido Full Gospel church is undoubtedly the “mother church” of the Church Growth Movement in practice if the movement's academic advancement is attributed to Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner.

### YFGC's Experience of Growth

Yoido Full Gospel Church is best known for its large size, but equally significant is the process through which this growth was achieved. According to the church's history, in its second “downtown” era, the church membership grew from 500 (1962), 3000 (1964), 8000 (1968), to over 10,000 (1973).<sup>4</sup> During its third Yoido era from 1973, its growth was staggering: 100,000 in 1979, 200,000 in 1980, 500,000 in 1985, 700,000 in 1992, and 755,000 in 2007.<sup>5</sup> The story of this growth spread fast and wide, and many began to learn from the church's experience.

Cho enumerated seven key components of church growth: 1) the message of Christ, 2) prayer, 3) experience of the Holy Spirit, 4) the vitality of small group activities, and 5) mission to society and the world.<sup>6</sup> Myung and Hong, church insiders, added to the list Cho's leadership, his sermons, and the creative utilization of mass media.<sup>7</sup> Cho, however, stressed that

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4 “History of the Church: Sudaemoon Era,” accessed December 28, 2017, <http://yfgc.fgtv.com/y1/0401.asp>.

5 Church Growth International, *Church Growth Manual 7* (Seoul: Church Growth International, 1995), 145.

6 David Yonggi Cho, “Church Ministry Taking Steps with the Holy Spirit: Interview with the Rev. Cho,” in Sung-hoon Myung and Young-gi Hong, eds., *Charis and Charisma: David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2003), 4-5.

7 Part 2 of *Charis and Charisma* elaborates on Cho's seven “Principles for Church Growth.”

church growth is a gracious act of God: “One might be mistaken that I am saying this out of my humility but, in fact, building a mega-church strictly belongs to the Lord’s absolute sovereignty... the Lord has chosen me presently to serve as a chamberlain of a mega-church.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Growth vs. Multiplication**

At the same time, critics of the megachurch phenomenon have also raised their voice. They act as a positive force to balance the dominant effect of large churches and their leaders. Besides controversies surrounding moral failures and the extravagant lifestyle of some leaders, megachurches inevitably affect the life of smaller congregations in the area. A large fleet of shuttle buses transports worshippers from every corner of the city to YFGC. This fleet is a visible symbol of the suffocating power of the megachurch to other congregations in the city. The megachurch movement also masks the reality of Pentecostal and charismatic church experiences. The “bread and butter” of the movement’s strength is the large number of small congregations in storefronts, urban slums, or far-flung villages. A recent survey shows that an average Pentecostal or charismatic congregation in Burkina Faso has 155 people, compared to 785 for the Catholic Church. In Brazil, the contrast is even greater: a Pentecostal denomination has an average of 135 members in each congregation while the Catholic Church has 11,221. This observation implies that Pentecostals quickly create new congregations even in less promising locations. Pentecostals create an almost ubiquitous presence to engage with the daily life of local communities. Did YFGC do something to dissolve this seeming quandary? Two important programs may be noteworthy. First, in 2008 at the retirement of Cho’s pastoral leadership, the church decided to release 19 of its regional campuses in the metropolitan area to become independent local congregations. Although the church had sponsored the establishment of “daughter churches” in the past, many of which have become megachurches themselves, this release was considered to be a drastic and intentional act towards the “multiplication” model of church growth.<sup>9</sup> Also, the church website further lists 21 congregations as YFGC’s

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8 Cho, “Church Ministry Taking Steps,” 3.

9 Interestingly, a Filipino scholar argued for the multiplication as an alternative to the growth

“independent sister churches.” These churches are located throughout the country.<sup>10</sup>

### **Church Planting Initiatives**

Also, the church has systematically supported a church planting program. This program was administered directly by the church. Cho established the Home Mission Department in 1993 with the primary goal of supporting and facilitating new church planting initiatives in small and medium-sized provincial towns. The Department reports that it established the 496th church on October 9, 2017, in Namyangju City. The report also includes the names of ministers and addresses (with the contact information). According to the website, this is the seventh church established in 2017.<sup>11</sup> The Department of Church Planting is an integral part of the primary departments of the church, along with the World Missions Department. The significance of this ministry is also visible as the church planting ministry is listed together with world mission, the David Cho Evangelistic Mission, Church Growth International, and the short-term mission program.

The church runs a church planting school to train church planters. The program appears rigorous in its curriculum, the program length, and application qualifications. This 12-14 week program meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The strict admission qualifications include a minimum of three years of ministry experience plus an expressed desire of and commitment to church planting. The church also has a “Church Planting Day” where all the church planters come together to share their experiences. Unfortunately, however, this program is not widely available, and the applicants are restricted to those within YFGC or its affiliate churches.

In addition to the national church planting program, Full Gospel World Mission reports that there are 417 churches that were planted

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of single Congregations at a conference sponsored by YFGC. See S. David Lim, “A Missiological Evaluation of David Yonggi Cho’s Church Growth,” in Wonsuk Ma, William W. Menzies and Hyeon-sung Bae, eds., *David Yonggi Cho: A Close Look at His Theology and Ministry* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004), 181-207.

10 “Church Structure,” accessed December 29, 2017, <http://yfgc.fgtv.com/y1/07.asp>.

11 Church Planting Department, “Update on Church Planting,” accessed January 21, 2018, [http://cp.fgtv.com/a4/a4\\_02.asp](http://cp.fgtv.com/a4/a4_02.asp).

by its missionaries in 44 countries. The total membership is 61,757 as of January 2018.<sup>12</sup> To support and strengthen its international church planting ministry, the Full Gospel World Mission says that it operates six theological institutions in Bolivia, Indonesia, Kazakstan, Kenya, Taiwan, and Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> Considering that many missionaries also work in “sensitive” locations, this number may be higher.

### **Propagation of the Church Growth Movement**

Everywhere Cho conducted a mass evangelistic meeting, he always offered church growth training for local pastors.<sup>14</sup> The Australian Assemblies of God illustrate the best effect of this training. Its annual growth skyrocketed from two percent to thirty-three percent after Cho’s training.<sup>15</sup> Similar stories were heard in Africa, Latin America, and various parts of Asia. The church also produced published material to share its church growth principles. The most significant program which the church instituted to propagate church growth was Church Growth International in 1976.

The YFGC annual conferences and seminars have drawn megachurch pastors and those who desire to learn from successful practitioners. These mechanisms have widely disseminated the key “ingredients” of YFGC’s church growth.<sup>16</sup> Equally significant is the fact that the teaching of megachurch leaders throughout the world has confirmed that the church in any context can experience growth. However, varying social contexts

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12 World Mission Department, “Statistics,” accessed January 27, 2018, [http://mission.fgtv.com/mission2/m01/m01\\_04.htm](http://mission.fgtv.com/mission2/m01/m01_04.htm).

13 World Mission Department, “Theological Training, Overseas,” accessed January 27, 2018, [http://mission.fgtv.com/mission2/m06/m06\\_01.htm](http://mission.fgtv.com/mission2/m06/m06_01.htm).

14 His extensive international ministry was studied by Myung Soo Park, “Globalization of the Korean Pentecostal Movement: The International Ministry of Dr. Yonggi Cho,” in Wonsuk Ma et al. eds., *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 20 (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014), 228-41.

15 David Yonggi Cho, 45 Years of Ministry of Hope [in Korean] (Seoul, 2004), 126. Its updated version is available in English: David Yonggi Cho, Dr. *David Yonggi Cho: Ministering Hope for 50 Years* (Alachua, Florida, 2008).

16 Sung-hoon Myung and Young-gi Hong, eds., *Charis and Charisma: David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2003), 37-119. It lists leadership, the Holy Spirit, prayer, sermon, cell groups, mass media and mission as key church growth principles of YFGC.

do require a careful adjustment of church growth principles. The fruit of YFGC's concerted efforts is seen in the rise of the megachurch movement. YFGC's experience has inspired, challenged, and helped many church leaders around the world to grow their churches. This experience is one of Cho's most important legacies which continues under Lee's leadership. Currently, both Cho and Lee actively minister internationally, and they sometimes team up for ministry.

The numerical growth of the Korean church, especially in the 1970s-80s, was celebrated as the shining success of Christian mission. YFGC was the first church which intentionally set church growth as one of its key goals.<sup>17</sup> Its unprecedented growth has commanded a large following both nationally and internationally. It also built the administrative structure, mobilized lay leaders, established training programs, and developed strategies to propagate church growth theories and experiences. YFGC emerged, and for a long time now has been, the international icon of church growth.

## **THE GROWTH OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY: TODAY AND TOMORROW**

### **A Century of Christian Shifts**

With the preceding in mind, how is YFGC's unswerving conviction for church growth relevant to today's world church? The answer to this question has much to do with the present state of global Christianity. Table 1 shows that from the beginning, world Christianity has grown steadily despite two serious setbacks. In fact, world Christianity's current trajectory will soon include one-third of the world's population. This perspective comes to life when we take a closer look at the hundred-year period between the historic Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910) and its centenary celebration (2010). The celebrated *Atlas of Global Christianity* (2009) reveals that several radical changes took place.<sup>18</sup> Between the beginning and the end of

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17 I counted YFGC as a second-generation megachurch in Korea, which was intentional in its efforts to achieve numerical growth. See Wonsuk Ma, "Megachurches in Asia and Dissenting Movement: The Case of Yoido Full Gospel Church," in Jehu H. Hanciles, ed., *The Twentieth Century: Traditions in a Global Context*, The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, vol. IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2018).

18 Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh

the twentieth century, the total number of Christians increased by 355.9% (from 558.1 million to 1.987 billion). Most regions recorded growth except Europe. Africa’s growth was staggering. The number of Christians in Africa grew by 4000% (from 8.7 million to 359.6 million). The annual growth rate of the number of Christians in Africa is 2.88%, which is the highest among all major religions.<sup>19</sup>

(Table 1: Christian Population, unit: million)

YEAR	1900	1970	2000	2017	2025	2050
CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD	558.1	1230.7	1986.7	2479.6	2732.2	3443.7

However, the picture is less encouraging if we interpret this numerical “growth” within the context of the growth of the world population. Unless the rate of Christian increase is greater than that of the population growth, Christianity loses its race for “evangelizing the world in our generation.” Indeed, during the twentieth century, world Christianity receded from 34.5% of the world population in 1900 to 32.4% in 2000. However, by the turn of the new millennium, the picture began to improve in Christianity’s favor. The world population grew at the annual rate of 1.21%, while Christianity grew at 1.31%. That is, Christianity increased at 0.10% per year faster than the world’s population, reversing the disappointing Christian performance in the previous century. If Christianity continues to grow and follow this current trend, it will include one-third of the world’s population by 2020.<sup>20</sup> Notice in Table 2 that by 2050 about 35% of the world will identify as Christians.

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University Press, 2009). The present study, including the four tables, takes the updated statistics and projections found in Todd M. Johnson et al., “Christianity 2017: Five Hundred Years of Protestant Christianity,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 41:1 (October 2016): 41–52. Understandably, the accuracy of the numbers is hotly debated. However, by employing the same criteria, the numbers would be useful in establishing trajectories.

19 Johnson et al., “Christianity 2017,” 48.

20 For a more detailed discussion, see Wonsuk Ma, “A ‘Fuller’ Vision of God’s Mission and Theological Education in the New Context of Global Christianity,” in Charles van Engen (ed.), *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 84-106.

(Table 2: Christian Percentage of the World Population)

YEAR	1900	1970	2000	2017	2025	2050
PERCENTAGE	34.5	33.4	32.4	33	33.6	35.4

During the same period, Islam recorded an impressive annual growth of 1.93%, far outpacing Christianity. Christianity hopefully will outperform Islam, but Christianity can still grow well if it grows among Hindus, Buddhists, and the secular, even if Islam continues to rapidly grow. Many predict that shortly, Islam will become the number one world religion, a title held by Christianity for millennia. Islam appears to have a leading edge for expansion. Due to its social structure, the biological growth rate is extremely high, especially in comparison to the world population growth. Most of Islam's growth comes from biological growth. Biological growth and conversion growth will occur as Muslims continue to migrate to the traditional Christian strongholds, Europe and North America. The Muslim immigrant communities have increased significantly in major European and North American cities. In recent years, this northward migration has intensified, due to the influx of refugees from troubled areas such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Northern Africa. Even though Hinduism (1.34%) and Sikhism (1.62%) have outgrown Christianity, their regional concentration does not pose as much serious competition as Islam.

The data reveals that Christianity has the winning edge against world population growth, but it is losing the growth battle with Islam. In the past, traditional religions have served as a "buffer zone" between the two missionary religions. However, in the future, conflict and tension between the two religions will increase in frequency and intensity. Part of the "winning" strategy for Christianity will be to identify the fastest growing Christian blocks.

(Table 3: Major Religions in Mid-2017)

	CHRISTIANS	MUSLIMS	HINDUS	BUDDHISTS
ADHERENTS (MM)	2479.6	1784.4	1031.7	527.2
ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	1.31%	1.93%	1.34%	0.93%

### **Growth Hot Spots**

The present and future growth in global Christianity can be identified confessionally and regionally. The statistical analysis of Christian groups is extremely telling. A simple comparison among the annual growth rates reveals that Christianity's future growth (if current trends continue) will come from Pentecostal/charismatic churches (2.22% annual growth) and independent churches (2.21%), followed by evangelical churches (2.12%). The combination of these three mega blocks accounts for 1.449 billion or 58.4% of the total number of people in the world who identify as Christians. These statistics place YFGC at the heart of the growing movement of world Christianity.

In addition to the growing church blocks, analysis of the geographical growth spots is equally essential. Two conditions should be in place to facilitate substantial growth: sufficient room for growth and robust motivation for growth. A continental breakdown of Christians reveals that only two continents are meeting these conditions. Over one-half of Africa's population still needs to be evangelized; only 47.93% of Africans self-identify as Christians as of 2010. The annual growth rate of Christianity in Africa (2.88% in 2000) has been impressive. However, growth and expansion in Africa are expected to slow and become more challenging as Islam becomes the primary mission field. Asia has the most room for growth both regarding percentage (only 8.45% is Christian as of 2010) and in number to reach (4.166 billion total population). Its growth rate is impressive with a 2.24 percent annual growth rate in 2000. At the same time, Asian Christianity faces an array of formidable challenges. The presence of dominant historical religions is the most serious one, and the situation differs from one place to another. The number of Christian martyrs has been high on this vast continent. I anticipate that the future growth of

Christianity will be substantial despite challenges and oppositions. These two regions are a stark contrast to Latin America where most people already self-identify as Christians, which leaves little room for growth. Its Christian growth rate (1.21%) is equal to the population growth.

(Table 4: Major Christian Traditions in Mid-2017)

	ROMAN CATHOLICS	INDEPENDENTS	EVANGELICALS	PENTECOSTALS/CHARISMATICS
ADHERENTS (MM)	1231	437.4	341.9	669.2
ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	1.08%	2.21%	2.12%	2.22%

**“Slowth” Points**

In the twentieth century, non-evangelical churches in Europe, North America, and Oceania have declined noticeably, and this trend is expected to continue or even accelerate. The annual growth rates of Europe (0.09%) and North America (0.59%) are way below the world population growth rate (1.21%). Oceania fares a bit better, perhaps due to many small but Christian-majority islands (0.96%). The traditional heartlands of Christianity have steadily lost Christian strength in number, influence, and mission. Compared to the growing Christian populations in the Global South, the north-south (or “west-rest”) divide is pronounced, and the gap is expected to increase steadily.

The decline is not limited to the West. The Korean church, once acclaimed to be the shining story of missionary success, has become stagnant and has declined in recent decades. The loss is across the religious affiliations, including Buddhism and Catholicism. Secularism and affluence are blamed as principle external forces, and Christian groups have not adapted to the changing needs and expectations of society. In many urban centers of the Global South, churches work hard to remain relevant to new generations. Some succeed, but many fail. YFGC is no exception to this onslaught of secular forces. It is currently negotiating these high currents, and its experience will be helpful to other urban churches throughout the world.

Despite the gloomy overall picture of the western church, the “growth”

rule mentioned above seems to be relevant even in the West: Pentecostal, independent, and evangelical churches show a slower rate of decline, and at times they show growth. With theological conservatism and a zeal for evangelism, the missionary call is revived to reach out to their society and the world. Also significant is the infusion of Christian and missionary zeal brought by immigrant Christians. Their presence is typified by an unapologetic Christian commitment, offering a refreshing sign of Christian viability in a highly secular society. With 375 diaspora churches in North America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia, YFGC has a presence in many cities where Christianity is declining.<sup>21</sup> How these churches can encourage the host churches is still to be seen.

## **YFGC AND THE FUTURE GROWTH OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY**

By the sixtieth anniversary of its existence, YFGC finds itself in a radically different social context both nationally and globally. For the church to offer a credible and positive contribution to the world, it will have to earn its place anew. This process will involve the church's experience and capacity to overcome its immediate challenges. The church will need to translate its own experience into a generalizable knowledge so that a similar growth or renewal can be experienced in other social contexts throughout the world. The following topics are areas where YFGC can "earn" its right to be a global champion for the continual expansion of Christianity.

### **Growth, Multiplication, and Spreading**

YFGC has been a recognized model for church growth in the areas discussed above. Moreover, its commitment to the growth and expansion of Christianity, both local and global, is expected into the new century. Evangelism, church planting, and church growth remain the church's priorities. But the church will need to do a serious review of its past and current modus operandi to cast a new vision. This process has already begun, and the leadership is encouraged to continue this reinventing work. The following paragraphs identify three areas of reinvention.

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<sup>21</sup> World Mission Department, "Statistics."

The first area is the megachurch model of church growth. As discussed above, YFGC was the first intentional model of church growth in the form of a megachurch. In spite of its unique contribution to the overall growth of Christianity, its negative impact has been steadily voiced. The church's immense size also siphons the life energy of smaller congregations in their areas. This model is not a "growing together" model of church growth. This intentional model also raises a serious theological (or more specifically ecclesiological) question: What is the ultimate call of local churches? Many people would agree that numerical growth is only a means, not an end in itself. Megachurches will remain part of the Christian landscape, especially in the fast urbanizing places in the Global South. If a congregation numerically grows without intentional efforts to achieve mere numerical growth, that situation would be acceptable.

Second, related to the first point, multiplication should be the model for Christian growth. YFGC has adopted a clear paradigm in its celebrated cell group system. When a group grows beyond 15 families, it divides into two cells. (This multiplication by division, similar to the process in the human body, is the reason why small groups are called "cells"). Constant multiplication resulted in the mega-sized church. This "grassroots" principle should also be applied to growth in the number of churches. Multiplication should be a direction for future Christian growth ("Christian growth" instead of "local church growth"). YFGC has already taken steps towards this vision. One step is the unprecedented release of its satellite congregations to become independent local congregations. Although this instantaneously halved YFGC's membership, the action was widely acclaimed to be a positive move. With the existing dozen or so daughter churches (many of which are megachurches) throughout the country, they also produced daughter churches through their church planting programs. Another facet is the church planting campaign discussed above.

Third, as powerfully demonstrated in the cell system, the mobilization of the laity should not be seen just as a smart procurement of a dedicated mass of lay leaders for their free service. Instead, it should be seen as a significant expression of Pentecostal theology fostering every believer for ministry. This "everybody-is-an-evangelist" paradigm has been the backbone of the church's growth. Their stories (or "testimonies") have been the best

initial presentation of the gospel.<sup>22</sup> How this grassroots mobilization and empowerment can take a new relevant shape that is conducive to the changing social landscape will be an ongoing challenge. The church's adaptation to the changing social demography will again begin with "every believer's" missional presence in communities. The change will be in response to the fast aging of the population, disinterest of the younger generation in Christianity, and rising cross-cultural marriages and their children now appearing in the workforce. With the main congregation of YFGC still culturally and linguistically homogenous, the future possibility comes with challenges.

### **Fullness of the Spirit**

If numerical growth is the external appearance, the fullness of the Holy Spirit is the true inner identity of the church. Cho claimed that the Holy Spirit is his partner, and he attributed the unprecedented growth of his church solely to the work of the Lord.<sup>23</sup> Although the church has admirably entered a "public space" by serving the marginalized and raising a prophetic voice to socio-political issues,<sup>24</sup> its foundational nature is spiritual, its core is the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and its energy is the experience of the Spirit. Therefore, the church can best serve future global Christianity by maintaining or even strengthening this unique spirituality and practice. Here are three distinct and practical expressions of Cho's and YFGC's belief in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, which will influence the shape of future spirituality.

The first expression is prayer on individual and corporate levels. The strong emphasis on prayer by Cho and the church is common knowledge. Korean religiosity already had a strong tradition of prayer as a means of devotion and supplication, especially in deep-rooted shamanism and

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22 For example, see Myung Soo Park, "Korean Pentecostal Spirituality as Manifested in the Testimonies of Members of Yoido Full Gospel Church," in *David Yonggi Cho: A Close Look at His Theology and Ministry*, 43-67

23 Cho, "Church Ministry Taking Steps," 3. Also, notice the title of his book, *The Holy Spirit My Senior Partner: Understanding the Holy Spirit and His Gifts* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1989).

24 "Liberty Korean Party, You Should Have Repented...: An Interview with Rev. Younghoon Lee" [in Korean] *Monthly Shindonga*, Oct 2017, 294-305.

Buddhism. The pietistic variety of Christianity, which western missionaries introduced to Korea, further strengthened this emphasis. Then Cho's Pentecostalism added the supernatural dimension to this strong religious tradition of prayer. His very first "spiritual warfare" prayer in his tent church won him the fame of healing and exorcism through prayer.<sup>25</sup> It is no wonder that YFGC established several enduring prayer traditions now visible in Korea. The first is praying for God's supernatural intervention. This often results in claims of healing and miracles. It involves rebuking demons and evil spirits in the name of Jesus. This kind of prayer has become a regular feature of almost every worship service, including home group meetings. The second expression is the establishment of the Jashil Choi International Prayer and Fasting Mountain, which has attracted thousands of individuals and groups who are seeking an encounter with God. Its small prayer cells litter the hills of this hilly area. The third expression is the prayer programs which YFGC pioneered. They are Friday overnight prayer, 21-day Daniel Prayer, 40-day planned prayer, etc. The fourth expression is sermons preached throughout the church system. Almost every preaching message includes God's supernatural work on behalf of God's people in response to their prayer and faith. The fifth expression is a wide variety of opportunities to share one's experience in healing and miracles through prayer. The monthly magazine of the church, now called *The Plus Life*, regularly publishes such testimonies and is distributed on newsstands throughout the country. A countless number of prayer groups and cell meetings provide informal opportunities in smaller group settings. However, these once ground-breaking mediums of spiritual strength may now be waning, even though the number of prayer programs, meetings, and conferences continue to increase. The Prayer Mountain no longer has a long waiting list, and prayer gatherings are now a common place for the elderly. The overall church membership is aging. Most importantly, however, the level of enthusiasm has steadily eroded. For example, the "overnight" prayer meeting, which used to begin in the late evening (e.g., 9 p.m.) and end in the early morning (e.g., 4 a.m.) no longer operates within these hours. It is more accurate to refer to it as a "late night" prayer meeting because the program is over by about midnight, and most participants leave

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25 Cho, *45 Years of Ministry of Hope*, 28-31.

the sanctuary. Social change caused this. Because people have a higher standard of living, they are less desperate for God. This change of attitude is not limited to younger generations. However, YFGC has the potential to implement new groundbreaking prayer strategies for individual believers and churches. The challenge is difficult, but a breakthrough is essential for the sake of a viable future for the Korean church. Only then will it have the credibility to reach out to the world church.

The second area for YFGC to revision is healing. The church's number one theological emphasis is the message of God's healing power. Belief in this principle flows from Cho's own life-changing experience of healing from deadly tuberculosis. Through his understanding of Korean religiosity in which benevolent spirits offer to heal and his orientation in the Pentecostal belief of apostolic faith, he integrated this conviction in every sphere of church life. Cho can be credited to be the first Korean Christian leader who intentionally took healing as the major belief, and he allowed this doctrine to permeate into the daily life of believers and the church. Healing ministry is now commonplace at YFGC and its networks. Lay leaders, such as cell group leaders, regularly rebuke diseases and evil spirits for healing and exorcism. This ministry, therefore, has been thoroughly "democratized" by eliminating the boundary between clergy and laity. This significant part of YFGC tradition has been continued by the new leader. His recent book, a collection of sermons on healing, indicates that he upholds this emphasis. In the preface, he notes: "The modern society witnesses the increase in illness due to environmental degradation and mental illness due to the erosion of social system. And the developing medical science is not able to cope with this increase."<sup>26</sup> He already signals the expansion of healing to mental, relational, and environmental issues. The need for mental and relational "healing" will become greater as society grows more compartmentalized. The church, already in the 1980s, added the creation as part of its healing rhetoric. The national reunification was also added to the healing/reconciliation category. The church's work to establish a cardiac hospital in North Korea, although still not completed due to political reasons, is an excellent example. One big theological task is to understand the Holy Spirit's role in this expanded understanding of healing. Among the three areas of the Spirit-filled life of

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26 Younghoon Lee, *Lord's Healing Light* [in Korean] (Seoul: Institute of Church Growth, 2017), 5.

YFGC, this is perhaps the most promising one that will take the church into the next generation.

The third area is the controversial theology of blessings. The message of blessing and healing was the critical component of the message of hope which summarizes Cho's ministry. The holistic view of God's salvation is framed in the language of blessing as seen in the "Threefold Salvation and Fivefold Blessing."<sup>27</sup> Cho's radical message of the "good God" was a bombshell in the deep religious psyche where spirits and gods were more the object of dread than love. Christianity had inherited this fundamental religious attitude, augmented by the pietistic faith of early missionaries. Fellow Christians began to charge Cho with moving toward a syncretistic, shamanistic faith. One European scholar, in an approving gesture, called him a "Pentecostal Shaman par excellence."<sup>28</sup> One thing is clear, however: Cho's message of God's blessing struck a deep chord with the Korean contextual struggle, both individually and corporately. His message has been connected with the rising tide of the prosperity gospel, and not without valid reasons. Nonetheless, in spite of its problems, his contribution to the development of Christian mission cannot be downplayed. For the billions of people who struggle with poverty, Christianity has become "good news for the poor."<sup>29</sup> The biggest challenge of the message of the "good God" lies in several theological balances: 1) "goodness" for the individual vs. the corporate, 2) God's justice vs. goodness, and 3) blessings as a means instead of an end in itself. The most formidable challenge has come from the changing social condition that South Koreans, including Christians, are now looking for more meaning to life. YFGC, as looked upon by the world church, is expected to provide a solid theological understanding of wealth and health, their place in God's kingdom and work, and also the role of poverty and suffering. Positive signs are visible around a change in the messages the church preaches and its activities in serving its social context.

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27 David Yonggi Cho, *Salvation, Health and Prosperity: Our Threefold Blessings in Christ* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1987).

28 Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 100, n. 2.

29 For a theological and practical reflection, see Wonsuk Ma, "Blessing in Pentecostal Theology and Mission," in W Ma, V-M Kärkkäinen and J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu (eds.), *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2014), 272-91.

Some of the signs are incredibly encouraging, but one theological challenge remains: how would YFGC's care for the marginalized distinguish itself from the other initiatives, both secular and Christian, that work through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit?

### **Moral Authority as Witness**

As mentioned above, the Korean church has numerically declined from the 1990s. Observers point to the demographic change as the primary cause of the decline. Many rural communities throughout the country have closed their elementary schools as the population stopped growing. The shift in demographics immediately reduced the number of children and youth in churches and caused the churches to age. Although large churches such as YFGC may not have felt the impact as much as smaller congregations, it is just a matter of time. However, more serious is the flight of the younger generations from the church. The loss of moral credibility often turns off younger minds. The lack of relevance is another leading cause of flight. This weakness is particularly relevant to YFGC. The message of material blessing is not as widely appealing as it was a generation ago. People are now looking for meaning, and churches have found it a tough task to attract them back to Christian message.

A long campaign for church growth has begun to backfire. The aggressive church growth drive bred competition, secular values, and moral fallouts. Unfortunately, megachurches have become a symbol of decadent and commercialized religiosity. The hereditary succession of pastors and their sons in large churches did not help the situation. In this context, the Catholic Church excelled in directing attention to the marginalized. As a result, the shrinking religious market share tilted toward the Catholics until recently. The criticism lodged against Protestant churches, especially megachurches, has challenged church leaders to recover Christian vocation and moral authority. YFGC, once at the center of criticism, has put a strong emphasis on serving the weak in society. Also, the church went through an exemplary succession process from Cho to Lee. With its financial transparency and commitment to spend 1/3 of its gross income for the socially marginalized and Christian mission,<sup>30</sup> it has steadily raised

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30 For example, "At its 60th anniversary, Committed to Serve the Poor" [Korean], *Chosun Ilbo*

a prophetic voice to the political and social powers. The church has also advocated church cooperation and unity. Due to its massive influence, the church influences other churches in the country.

The 2015 national census revealed that Protestantism was the only religious classification not to decline. This made it the largest religious group in the country, surpassing Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> Protestantism grew from 18.2 percent to 19.2 percent of the national population. In contrast to general expectations, Catholics declined from 10.8 to 7.9 percent. The combined total of Christianity is 27.1 percent of the population.<sup>32</sup> This encouraging news, however, was received by Christians with much caution. The church needs to continue its efforts to restore the moral confidence of the general population. The Christian community widely shared this sentiment. The large churches are particularly positioned to exercise their ethical leadership as an important “witness” to the truthfulness of the Christian claim, which is an important testimony of the church’s effort to be a moral authority to society. YFGC is in the position to positively influence many churches still obsessed with mega-sizes to release its resources for the common good.

## CONCLUSION

Younghoon Lee of Yoido Full Gospel Church presented a second-day keynote address at the Edinburgh 2010 Conference on his church’s spirituality and diakonic engagement.<sup>33</sup> As the leader of the largest church in the world, his speech received a mixed reception. Delegates from the Global South were enthused, while a hush was heard in private conversations, which was displaced by comments such as “So what?” The latter was raised more from some delegates from the West. One African delegate sensed this subtle reaction and confided in me: “We certainly do not want a church with a profound theology but only a handful people.”

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Feb 3, 2018, accessed on February 17, 2018, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2018/02/02/2018020202549.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2018/02/02/2018020202549.html).

31 KOSIS, “Demography by Gender, Age and Religion, 2015” [in Korean], accessed on February 20, 2018, [http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT\\_1PM1502](http://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=DT_1PM1502).

32 KOSIS, “Demography.”

33 Younghoon Lee, “Christian Spirituality and the Diakonic Mission of the Yoido Full Gospel Church,” in Kirsteen Kim and Andrew Anderson, eds., *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Today and Tomorrow*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 3 (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011), 85-97.

Often struggling with religiously pluralistic circumstances, the South knows that Christianity can exist only with Christians.

During the production of the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, a volume on evangelism struggled to come forward. Only at the end, one of the series editors took the issue and produced a volume on evangelism and diakonia. Evangelism, church planting, and church growth are now primary mission agenda items amongst most churches in the Global South. To YFGC, a new opportunity has opened to serve the world church for continued growth and expansion. It will, however, no longer be “business as usual.” With its substantial convening power, and a well-trained history scholar leading the church, YFGC will be able to spark a new age of world church growth.

YFGC’s biggest asset is not its size, but its experience with local and global changes in its sixty-year existence. With its powerful influence, YFGC should call world Christianity to make saving souls (evangelization) the church’s mission priority. This evangelization priority applies to all the branches of the world church: Catholics, mainline Protestants, evangelicals, Pentecostals, and others. All have a distinct role to play to build, expand, and strengthen God’s kingdom. YFGC, being Asian and Pentecostal, as a single church, has the potential to considerably influence the growth of Christianity and help move the statistical increase over the one-third of the world population mark within our lifetime.

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## **About the Author**

Wonsuk Ma is Dean and Distinguished Professor of Global Christianity at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S.A. Dr. Ma may be reached at [wma@oru.edu](mailto:wma@oru.edu).