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

Hong Young-gi

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

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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.

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

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.

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.

However, we can say in reality that the development of not only Korean Pentecostalism but also the charismatic mega-churches in Korea began with the emergence of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, which was founded by Cho Yong-gi with five members in a small tent in 1958. We can never ignore the great role of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in the impact on the charismatic mega-churches. The growth of the Yoido Full Gospel Church has been remarkable. As seen in Table 4, the membership in 1962 was 800 but increased to 18,000 in 1973, and to 200,000 in 1981. The church in 1998 claimed a membership of approximately 720,000. The attending adult members in 1998 were an estimated 230,000, as was suggested earlier.

Among the ten charismatic mega-churches today, the Eunhye wa Chilli Church and Full Gospel Incheon Church stemmed from the Yoido Full Gospel Church. The senior pastors of the two churches were trained in the Yoido Full Gospel Church. The two churches used to be dependent sanctuaries of the Yoido Church. They became independent churches (Eunhye wa Chilli Church in 1981 and Full Gospel Incheon Church in 1983) and developed to mega-churches later. Yi Ho-moon, the senior pastor of Soong-uui Methodist Church, admitted the influence of the Yoido Full Gospel Church and Cho Yong-gi on his ministry (Yi Ho-moon 1992, 339-40). Although we cannot argue the direct impact of the Yoido Full Gospel Church on the growth of other charismatic mega-churches such as Myungsung and Ju-an Church, it is very likely that those charismatic mega-churches which emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s were influenced by the visible success and ministry style of the church.

Table 4 Registered Membership of the Yoido Full Gospel Church

Year	1958	1964	1968	1973	1979
Membership	23	2,000	8,000	18,000	100,000
Year	1981	1986	1990	1993	1997
Membership	200,000	503,000	593,000	671,000	709,070

Secondly, the historical background for the emergence of these charismatic mega-churches was the rapid growth of the Protestant church during the period of 1970-1990. The period during which most charismatic Korean mega-churches grew greatly corresponds to the period of rapid growth of Korean Protestantism. So Kwang-son (1982) argued that the growth of large churches was the reduced scale of the rapid growth of Korean Protestant churches. Except for the Yoido Full Gospel Church, all the charismatic mega-churches have appeared since

the 1970s. From the 1970s to the early of 1980s, Korean Protestantism had explosive growth, and the present charismatic mega-churches grew greatly almost in proportion to the growth of the Korean church. However, historical context is not isolated from social context, which also seems to have influenced charismatic mega-churches.

2.2 Social Background

Since the early 1960s Korean society underwent a massive transformation from a traditionally agricultural economy to an industrial economy. During this rapid industrialization many people came to the cities. The urban population grew from 28 percent in 1960 to 41.1% in 1970, 57.3% in 1980 and 65.4% in 1985 (cf. Ministry of Statistics, *Korean Statistical Almanac*: 1969, 1977, 1987). But it needs to be noted that urbanization did not proceed at an even pace. Urban growth has been concentrated in a few primary cities such as Seoul, Pusan, Inchon. If we understand the striking growth of the Seoul metropolitan region, that would help us understand why most large churches and all the mega-churches are centered in and around Seoul. The Korean Protestant church has an urban character, and especially do the charismatic mega-churches.

As a result of rapid industrialization and urbanization, a comparative sense of deprivation and loss of identity prevailed among the people. Because people were in a state of confusion and unrest due to rapid modernization, they came to the churches that could meet their religious and social needs. The difficulty of finding a place to belong and loss of identity can make humans more connected to God, placing more demands on the role of religion. But this explanation falls a little short. Many people migrating from rural areas to cities usually had animistic religious patterns and affectionate human relations, but experienced the new cold social structures and milieu with culture shock. Those people who attended the church in rural areas were also particularly vulnerable, because churches in the city do not have the same community visibility and social strength as the churches from whence they come. The charismatic mega-churches could give many low class or unstable people not only the sense of belonging and unity but also the meaning and value of equality with their message, rituals (e.g., dynamic service), and fellowship activities (e.g., caring in home-cell fellowship groups). In short, they gave an alternative belief system to those people. Sociological factors are not sufficient to explain the emergence of charismatic mega-churches, but need not be neglected.

2.3 Religious Background

What kind of religious backgrounds have given the basic soil for the development of charismatic mega-churches? Before we see the role of Korean traditional religions, we can briefly discuss the characteristics of Korean Protestantism pertaining to the growth of charismatic mega-churches. Conservative theology was the key element here because theological orientation affects church growth and direction of ministry. Korean conservative theology was largely endowed by the first missionaries who preached the Protestant gospel to Korea, which has meant the priority of evangelism over social participation and emphasis on church-centered faith, Bible study and prayer (cf., Hong Sung-wook 1997, 206-16). Another element was “individual churchism,” which historically stemmed from the mission policy of the first missionaries who adopted the principles of Nevius in the advocacy of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation. Nevius principles appealed to the Korean churches in a fragile political condition that had to survive without economic support. Individual churchism has affected the large size of the local congregations, while it has brought about negative results, such as splits among the churches.

The impact which Korean traditional religions had on charismatic mega-churches is not unrelated to their growth: Buddhism, Confucianism and Shamanism. Buddhism had an indirect influence on Korean Christianity with the idea of heaven and hell for people to receive the Christian gospel. According to Korean Buddhism, those who did good deeds on earth will go to one of twenty-eight different heavens, but if bad, they will fall into one of eighteen great hells. Confucianism also had some elements sympathetic to Christian concepts. *Oryun* (the five relationships), which was believed to be the basic order of heaven, are that people should obey a king, all children should obey their parents, a wife should obey her husband, all young should obey their elders, and friends must keep faithfulness with each other. For this reason, it was easier for early missionaries and pastors to teach the word of God to Korean people. Also Confucianism emphasized the patriarchal system, and the emphasis on the patriarchal authority of Confucianism made it easier for Korean people to accept and follow pastoral authority in the Korean church, especially in the charismatic Korean mega-churches.

However, above all, Shamanism would be the most powerful traditional religion that affected the charismatic Korean mega-churches. It is the most ancient and the most widespread form of religious belief and practice in Korea. Hyun Young-hak says even to the extent that

shamanistic consciousness is the very basis of “Korean consciousness” (1985, 357). Korean charismatic mega-churches have common grounds with Korean Shamanism, which is not, and should not be, necessarily negative. For the sake of brevity, only parallel points can be suggested:

- (1) Target: Korean shamanism has functioned as the religion of *Minjung* (common people) throughout the oppressive history of Korea. Korean charismatic mega-churches also appealed to many ordinary people.
- (2) Experience: Shamanism was more related to daily or supernatural experience than to philosophical system of thoughts. The ritual of Korean shamanism (i.e., *kut*) is full of chanting and drumming, adding vitality to emotions (Hwang 1994, 64). The emphasis on charismatic experiences in individual devotion or in-group setting in charismatic Korean mega-churches is not unrelated to the tradition of Korean shamanism.
- (3) Female leadership: One dominant character of Korean shamanism is the important role of female shamans. It has been suggested that charismatic leaders attract many women (Willner 1984) and in the charismatic Korean mega-churches female leadership is advocated and activated by the senior pastor. The acknowledgment of female leadership seems to have met the psychological and social needs of Korean women including Korean female Christians in the inferior position of the society, which led to commitment of women in the charismatic Korean mega-churches.
- (4) Healing: Korean shamans used to carry out psychological or physical healing *kut* for their clients. Healing of *Han* (which means the oppressive feelings accumulated over time) was a crucial aspect of *kut*. In the charismatic Korean mega-churches, whole healing (spiritual, mental, and physical) is emphasized. Korean Protestantism and charismatic mega-churches have been influenced by the Korean soil of the traditional religion in positive and negative ways. The authentic Christian Gospel should be contextualized into the Korean culture more and transform the culture with its standard and power.

2.4 Cultural Background

Does culture matter in the spread of a religious movement? Christians comprise less than 1 per cent of the population in Japan. Why? The analysis of Dale (1998, 275-88) shows that the slow growth of the Japanese church is basically due to cultural factors (e.g., ambiguous concept of God due to eight million gods in Shinto, the *tennousei* [emperor system]). Then what kind of cultural factors have been conducive to the

emergence and development of the charismatic mega-churches in Korea? In general, Koreans are said to be religious people but there is more than that. Korea is one of the few ethnically homogeneous countries in the world, a nation of one race, one culture, and one language. This homogeneous national character coincides with, the principle of homogeneity, one of the main theories of church growth (McGavran 1980; Wagner 1984).

We can also discuss modern Korean cultural factor in regard to the emergence of the mega-churches. The preference of Koreans for the large seems to be culturally relevant to Korean church growth. For Koreans, big seems beautiful. Koreans like to name *dae-* (which means big or large) in front of whatever they make and name. Every bridge in Han River of Seoul is called *daegyo* (“big bridge,” e.g., Mapo-daegyo). Korean church distinguishes the Sunday morning service from other services, calling it *dae-yebae* (“big service” or “great service”). This preference for the large in the Korean Churches seems to have been influenced by (1) negative Confucian spirit, such as show-off legalism; (2) modern rapid economic growth and materialism (e.g., Many people today still evaluate success by the size of the apartment or car people have.); and (3) American culture and church growth theology of American churches, especially, of Fuller theological seminary. The Korean preference for the big makes people prefer the big churches. Some Christians are even proud of just the fact they are members of a big church, which has to be criticized. This kind of mentality affected the mind of many Korean pastors who ministered hard with the idea that big growth may mean a successful ministry. Kim Byong-so points out that Korean pastors thought the growth of the church as the gift of the Holy Spirit (Kim 1995, 80). However, since the advent of economic crises in the late 1997 (which is popularly called the “IMF crisis”), this kind of mentality seems to have been challenged with the negative view of Korean business conglomerate.

3. Characteristics of the Korean Charismatic Mega-churches

The aim of the previous part has been to acquaint the readers with the genesis and backgrounds of Korean charismatic mega-churches. Our next concern is what distinguishes them from other churches, that is, their characteristics. For this matter, we have to consider two criteria altogether: church type and church size. To put this into a question, what are the characteristics of charismatic Korean mega-churches

distinguishable from other mega-churches as well as other smaller sizes of churches? We will be here concerned with socio-economic status of the congregation, church growth pattern, members' religiosity, and members (charismatic) perceptions of their senior pastor. This will be analyzed by my social survey conducted in 1998.⁹ For the sake of brevity, only key relevant results are presented here.

3.1 Social Status of the Members

The overall picture of socio-economic status from the survey shows that charismatic mega-churches have lower socio-economic status than other types of Korean mega-churches and large churches, but higher than the small/middle-sized churches (Table 5).

Table 5 Means for Membership, Education years and Income

Church Type and Size	Distinction	Adult Attendance	Education Years	Monthly Income*
Traditional Type	Mean	14048.78	13.80	2491129
	N	205	178	124
	Std. Dev.	1399.43	2.64	1173121
Middle-class Type	Mean	20899.65	14.84	3231545
	N	289	266	190
	Std. Dev.	5400.00	2.27	1624024
Charismatic Type	Mean	137519.53	13.43	2366256
	N	256	243	195
	Std. Dev.	102605.28	2.55	1091692
Large Church	Mean	2258.87	14.33	2587017
	N	265	251	181
	Std.Dev.	1789.24	2.78	1624024
Small/Middle-sized Church	Mean	262.24	13.30	2083488
	N	245	223	129
	Std.Dev.	162.39	2.52	1111051

* Unit by won, Korean currency, approximately US\$1 = 1,200 won.

How can we interpret these data? Charismatic mega-churches started to gather strength precisely among the most disadvantaged or dissatisfied sectors, such as the urban poor, women, and the independent middle

⁹ The sample size for the comparative analysis among the three types of mega-church was 750 in total: 205 in the traditional type, 256 in the charismatic type, and 289 in the middle-class type. The sample size for the comparative analysis among the three sizes (charismatic mega-churches, large churches, small/middle-sized churches) was 766 in total: 256 in charismatic mega-churches, 265 for large churches and 245 for small/middle-sized churches.

groups, providing them with a sense of life and hope. In the case of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, it is well-known that the poor and the sick were the main congregation from the first. In the case of the Kumnan Methodist Church is in Mangil-dong, a town with many working class people where there were many tombs. Many poor people used to move to that town. It has been said that many people of the Kumnan Church say that “I had come to the tomb town of Mang-u-ri and have been blessed owing to Kumnan Church, without perishing.” Today many charismatic mega-churches consist of a varied class of congregation now, which signifies the lift of their social class. However, it is also true that many of charismatic mega-churches are still attracting many low class people.

3.2 Church Growth: Recruiting Process

How are the Korean churches growing? Concerning the recruiting process of newcomers, I asked church members what was their previous religious background before joining the present church. It was shown that charismatic type of mega-churches have a higher rate of conversion growth than that of other types of mega-churches and smaller Korean churches (Table 6).

Table 6 Religious Background in Three Types of Mega-churches (%)

Religious Background	Traditional Type	Middle-class Type	Charismatic Type	Large Church	Small and Middle
No religion	21.4	16.0	23.1	16.5	20.8
A member of another Protestant denomination	13.4	23.0	29.8	21.1	12.5
A member of another Church (same denom.)	39.0	43.6	22.4	49.0	46.3
Buddhism	6.4	9.2	14.1	6.5	6.7
Confucianism	3.7	2.8	2.4	1.5	2.5
Catholicism	2.7	2.5	2.4	1.9	1.7
Shamanism	1.1	0.4	2.0		1.3
Folk Religion	0.5	1.1			0.4
Others	11.8	1.4	3.9	3.4	7.9
Total	n =187 (100 %)	n= 282 (100 %)	n=255 (100 %)	n=261 (100%)	n=240 (100%)

value = 73.44, df = 16, $p < .0001$

The proportion of conversion growth (religious background including no religion, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, and folk religion) was 42.5% for the charismatic mega-churches, while it is respectively 34.1% for the traditional type, 29.5% for the middle-class

type, 26.4% for the large churches, and 33.4% for the small/middle-sized churches. The charismatic type seems to be the most successful in the incorporation of previously unchurched persons among the churches as well as in quantitative church growth. Regarding the decisive factor in church growth, it was significantly shown that members in the charismatic mega-churches attributed church growth first to their senior pastor's sermons and second to his leadership.

3.3 Congregational Perceptions of Their Pastor

How do Korean church members perceive their senior pastor? Twenty-three questions were used for the congregational charismatic perceptions of their pastor and their perceptions of the characteristics of their pastor.¹⁰ The one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and Scheffe tests were used to identify the statistical significance in the differences of

¹⁰ Only some items are presented here as sample for the sake of brevity. Extraordinary pastor (e.g., "He is an extraordinary pastor whom God has specially chosen."), trust (e.g., "I have complete faith in him."), confidence (e.g., "He is a pastor of self-confidence."), passion (e.g., "He is very energetic and passionate in his ministry."), sermons (e.g., "I am always attracted to his sermons."). Those twenty-three items were measured by Likert scaling (strongly disagree to strongly agree). By charismatic perceptions, I mean, in the sociological sense, that church members perceive their pastor as extraordinary and as worthy for them to dedicate themselves to the pastor with a strong following. In the church context, the charisma leader is perceived as the messenger who is speaking God's message to the people.

¹¹ The items of the attitudes to the church were measured on a five-point scale (strongly disagree = 1 and strongly agree = 5). They are about church growth (e.g., "I believe that my church should grow more."); pride in their church (e.g., "I am proud of my church."); a sense of oneness (e.g., "I feel a sense of oneness like a family in this church."). With regard to religious life and characteristics of the respondents, five items were given: the experience of evangelism (e.g., "I have a experience of preaching the Gospel to others.") and religious experience (e.g., "I have a religious experience such as speaking with tongues, healing, and personal experience of the Holy Spirit."); the frequency of church attendance; the frequency of prayer; and the frequency of reading the Bible. The view of church, religious experience, the experience of evangelism were measured on a five-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The frequency of church attendance was measured on a week-basis (one time a week, two times a week, three times a week, four times a week, five times a week, and more than six times a week). The frequency of prayer and Bible reading was measured as follows: (1) seldom, (2) occasionally, (3) once a week, (4) two or three times a week, and (5) every day.

congregational perceptions. It was shown that the pastors of the Korean mega-churches were more likely to be perceived as charismatic than those of the smaller size of churches ($p < .0001$). Within the Korean mega-churches, the degree of charismatic perceptions was the strongest on the charismatic mega-churches.

Which were the distinctive characteristics of the senior pastors of charismatic mega-churches in the perceptions of members? Using the stepwise multiple discriminant function analyses, passion and collective mission were shown to be the most significantly differentiated characteristics of the charismatic type, compared with other mega-churches and smaller size of churches. That is to say, the pastors of charismatic Korean mega-churches are seen to have the charisma of passion for mission. What do these results mean in the understanding of charismatic mega-churches? That may mean that the leaders of charismatic mega-churches are strong leaders who are able to demand commitments from their members. Without commitment from members, the churches would have not grown to what they are today. Because the members see mission and passion for that mission in their pastor, they may be motivated by the church mission to church ministries.

3.4 Religious Life of the Congregation

Eight variables were used to evaluate the congregational view of their church and religious life.¹¹ Tukey tests were performed to determine which churches show difference in which variables. The thrust of the data is that charismatic mega-churches are commonly and significantly distinguishable from other churches (other mega-churches and smaller size of churches) in the dimensions of church growth, pride in the church, frequency of evangelism, and religious experience. That is, charismatic mega-churches are very positive about quantitative church growth and are more likely to be proud of their church than other churches. Pride in the church was strongly correlated with senior pastor's sermon (0.54), with pride in the pastor (0.53), and with the pastor's vision (0.48).

It was, furthermore, significant that charismatic mega-churches are more likely to be active more in evangelism and to have various religious experiences (e.g., healing, speaking in tongues) than other churches. Thus, charismatic Korean mega-churches have come to be identified with an emphasis on subjective or community religious experience; positive view for church growth; and pride in the church. But among these charismatic mega-churches stand out in the dimension of religious experience. The clearly distinguishable character of religious experience

may be connected to the vitality and commitment in evangelism of charismatic mega-churches. It is a belief in the personal God who touches the lives of individuals and whose power permeates the mundane that has influenced the way in which charismatic mega-churches attracted many people.

3.5 Discussions with Respect to the Survey

Why are Korean charismatic mega-churches successful in church growth as well as in conversion growth? Some factors appear to be connected to this phenomenon. First, the success seems to have been due to active commitment of members (e.g., active evangelism), together with their identification with their churches (positive view of church growth and pride in the church). It is significant to note the relationship between religious experience and evangelism. Religious experience in the charismatic mega-churches may be related to the frequency of evangelism that can contribute to church growth. In a path analysis of Poloma and Pendleton (1989), using a sample of 1,275 members of Assemblies of God, it was shown that charismatic experiences led to evangelism. In my study, the correlation coefficient between religious experience and the frequency of evangelism was 0.51, and the correlation coefficient between charismatic perceptions and the frequency of evangelism was 0.24 (both are significant at the .01 level). This signifies that religious experience in the charismatic Korean mega-churches may be correlated to higher mean in the frequency of evangelism which may lead to church growth (cf. Poloma 1989).

The charismatic type of mega-churches has proliferated and gained significance within the last two decades in Korea. On the basis of findings here, it may be interpreted that meaningful spiritual experience in the charismatic Korean mega-churches motivated the members to preach the gospel, thereby leading to church growth. As William James (1902) argued that religious organization has its roots in religious experience, the vitality of charismatic mega-churches seems to be accounted for by lively spiritual experience.

I wish to suggest that pastors hold an important key to encouraging these religious experiences within their congregation. The level of religious experiences on the part of senior pastors in the Korean charismatic mega-churches helps to account for the milieu in their churches. Most of the senior pastors had experiences of crisis, alleged divine healing and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which cannot be detailed here (for example, among the ten senior pastors leading

charismatic Korean mega-churches today, eight of them had bad tuberculosis, one had cancer, but all experienced healing. Eight of them had dramatic conversion experience). However, it should be also noted that religious experiences that are not rooted in sound theology might connote a danger to result in mysticism and heretical charisma of the leader. A balance between experience and theology should be maintained.

Second, there may be some relationship between quantitative church growth and congregational charismatic perceptions. The common character of Korean charismatic mega-churches is that they have a strong, charismatic leader who provided the lower-class people with a sense of meaning and power. Thus, charismatic pastoral leadership plays a key role in the understanding of Korean charismatic mega-churches. The successful quantitative church growth in the charismatic mega-churches may be, in large part, derived from the sustaining perceived effects of the pastoral charisma. In the Christian context, the validation of charismatic pastoral authority comes from the congregational perceptions that their pastor has proximity to the sacred, speaks the divine words, and is a channel of God's work. But from a theological point of view, the congregation do not have power to bestow charisma on their pastor: They can only render or refuse recognition whenever charismatic claims are made by their leaders. Because church members are convinced that God called, worked through, and speaking through their pastor, they may perceive their pastor as a charismatic and able leader and follow him with commitment.¹²

Shamir and others (1993, 583) argued that an important aspect of charismatic motivational influence is the creation of a high level of commitment on the part of the leader and the followers to a common vision, mission, or transcendent goal. Hence it could be argued that congregational charismatic perceptions are not unrelated to church growth: But one also needs to admit the possibility that charismatic perceptions may be the product of success in church growth. The study of Puffer (1990) suggested that success might be more important in the initial attribution of charisma. Charismatic leadership should not be

¹² However, it is theologically sobering to consider that charismatic leaders are also tempted to control over people and to find their identity in the affirmation and adulation of followers because of sin-tainted human nature, although they try to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit and on the authority of Jesus Christ. The authority of leaders in the church should continue to be examined by the upright biblical reflection and the authority structure of the church. Otherwise, charismatic authority may have a deleterious effect on the church.

confused with success, but it is also possible that success in church growth can be a helpful route to being seen as exceptional or as charismatic in the church. It is likely that charismatic perceptions and church growth are related.

Third, it should be noted that based upon my interviews and observations, the leaders and members of charismatic mega-churches attribute their success in growth to divine leading and the power of the Holy Spirit. Many informants in charismatic mega-churches reported alleged supernatural manifestations and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their churches. The emphasis on charismatic pastoral leadership does not necessarily negate the work of the Holy Spirit here, since many members believe that the manifestation of Spirit is at work through their pastor. The senior pastors are playing a role of spiritual identity-provider and the Spirit is believed by the congregation to work powerfully in and through the lives of believers in the charismatic mega-churches. This suggests that behind congregational religious experiences and charismatic perceptions of their leader in the charismatic Korean mega-churches is an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis should be balanced between the sovereignty of God and human faithfulness within sound theology, which is one main task of the Korean Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.

The corollary of these discussions thus far is that congregational charismatic perceptions of their pastor, members' individual and corporate meaningful spiritual experiences, and their emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit are closely intertwined as internal, dynamic ingredients of the Korean charismatic mega-churches, which may explain to large measure their vitality and phenomenal success of growth.¹³

4. Conclusion

Korean charismatic mega-churches emerged during times of rapid social change that gave many ordinary people who were marginal a sense of uneasiness and instability. Those churches were able to give them hope and vitality of life through their messages and rituals that enabled their

¹³ The membership growth of the charismatic Korean churches may be one indication of their commitment to preaching the gospel. But it is suggested that their focus should be shifted from merely counting attendance to counting discipleship within the church for the long-enduring and transforming impact of the Christian gospel on Korean society.

congregation to experience the living God and his power. Strong social support of a cohesive group, mental and spiritual happiness from highly emotional services, a clear sense of meaning of life through powerful messages, benefits from belonging, including material help, and above all, strong leadership, must have added the vitality of charismatic mega-churches.

I would contend that charismatic religious experiences are linked to the institutional success in the Korean charismatic mega-churches and at the heart of those experiences are the charismatic experiences of the leader which have given the solid basis of their charisma and motivation for congregational commitment. The normative experiences of the paranormal in the seemingly profane world have given dynamic power to Korean charismatic mega-churches.

However, it appears that Korean charismatic mega-churches are facing tensions today produced by the inevitable development of a bureaucratic organization with the domestication of charismatic fervor in the early periods, with their upward lift of social status, with demands of huge and various ministries, and with the problem of leadership succession. They are also facing the problem of true discipleship in the issue of church growth (cf. Hong Young-gi 1999). Would they continue to keep their vitality and to grow in a balance between their religious experiences and institutionalization in the future? Would they continue to grow maintaining the quality of the church? These seem to be crucial questions for the charismatic Korean mega-churches to ask and solve.

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