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Cho Yonggi's Charismatic Leadership and Church Growth

David S. Lim

1.0 Introduction

As the founding and senior pastor of the largest megachurch in the world so far, it is quite obvious that Rev. Dr. Cho Yonggi (hereafter, Cho) has been an effective leader of *church growth* (CG) in Korea and the world. How was he able to lead the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) to achieve such phenomenal growth? I am greatly honored to have been invited to present this paper that will focus on his *personal charisma* as one of the key factors that brought about such a development in church history.

This paper seeks to answer the question: in Cho's model of CG, has his "charismatic leadership" (CL) been a significant factor? I will show that it indeed was, and describe the nature of his CL, especially in relation to how it contributed to CG. My data are collected from published literature, esp. Cho's, and includes some interviews with YFGC leaders as reported in Hong, 2000a.¹ The essay ends with an evaluative reflection on his CL style and CG model.

1.1 Definition of Church Growth

"Church Growth" (CG) may be defined as "a consciously planned effort to effect increase in membership in a local church." This was popularized by the Fuller School of World Mission (cf. McGavran, 1980; Wagner, 1984), but found one of its best models in the YFGC. But unknown to many, Cho had already established Church Growth International (CGI) as a training and publishing institute in his church campus as early as 1976 to promote and share his CG experience with the global church.

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The emphasis of CG is “conversion growth,” not “biological growth” nor “transfer growth,” as the main means of increasing membership through an ongoing program of evangelism and discipleship in a church (cf. Wagner, 1984). Based on a 1998 survey, the membership increase through “transfer growth” at YFGC was only 52%, lower than that of the average church in Korea (60.7%).²

I consider 1964 as the starting point of Cho’s *mega-church* type of church growth based on a clear *cell system*. He can therefore be considered the first church leader to conceive of and implement such a structure, which has gained global impact, providing the inspiration and a good model for subsequent ones (cf. Comiskey, 1999). Cho started his church with five members in a small tent in 1958, which grew to 800 in 1962; 2,000 in 1964; 18,000 in 1973; 200,000 in 1981; 503,000 in 1986; 593,000 in 1990; 671,000 in 1993; 709,070 in 1997; and 720,000 in 1998-99 (Hong, 2000: 105).³ In the latest statistics that I have (1998-99), YFGC had 667 assistant pastors (ordained and non-ordained), 1,159 elders, 80,759 deacons, 831 overseas missionaries, 16,993 home cell groups in 25 large districts and 13 local sanctuaries, and 230,000 regular adult church attendees (Hong, 2000a: 70).

1.2 Definition of Charismatic Leadership

CL may be defined as the position and process of “giftedness” whereby someone in authority is perceived to have “charisma” (extraordinary influence) over his/her followers (cf. Hong, 2000a: 66). Having such an “aura of authority and power” is both an objectively observed possession of the leader (cf. Weber, 1968: 241-250, 1112-1117) as well as a subjectively perceived attribution of the members (cf. Bryman, 1992: 22-69). The discussions as to which comes first, or which predominates may be just good for intellectual exercise.

In religious circles, CL involves “spiritual authority” through one’s “proximity to the sacred” (God and his Word).⁴ Whereas the biblical usage of “charisma” (gift of grace) focuses on its supernatural *source*,⁵ the common (present) usage emphasizes its human awe-inspiring *effect* on (or *ascription* by) the followers.⁶

From my studies, “charisma” in CL seems to be a combination of four (4) major traits, which may be further subdivided into more specific sub-traits. This “giftedness” is a “gift-mix” of supernatural *proficiency*, congenial *personality*, consistent *spirituality* and competent *ingenuity*.⁷ One or two without the others would fail to produce CL. Some pastors may be more gifted in one trait over others, but one who has all to the maximum de-

gree would be an outstanding "charismatic leader," as Cho has proven to be. We shall now proceed to depict the exemplary CL of Cho.

2.0 Marks of Cho's Charismatic Leadership

Though Cho does not directly refer to himself as one possessing "charisma," yet this essay will show that his CL was a very important factor in his ministry that resulted in phenomenal CG. It is clear that his church members perceive him to be "spiritual" and "charismatic," that he speaks God's words as God's chosen servant. In fact, according to Hong's 1998 survey, YFGC members rate Cho as more charismatic than how other Korean church members (even of other mega-churches) perceive their senior pastors!⁸

2.1 Supernatural proficiency

There are at least six ways by which Cho's charisma shines through his supernatural giftedness:

2.1.1 *God's call.* Foremost is his experience of special supernatural endowment. His strong sense of divine calling and mission in life is built on his supernatural experiences,⁹ particularly his miraculous healing from a terminal disease and his dramatic conversion.¹⁰ He must have used these events to not just remind himself constantly, but also to repeat them to his constituents and the public.

2.1.2 *God's ministry.* In many of his messages, he claims (and has been seen to have) direct contact with God and given his abilities by God. He proclaims that he ministers with the help of God, and calls the Holy Spirit as his Senior Partner (Cho, 1989). He always attributes the secret of his fabulous CG to God's sovereign grace and will (Hong, 2000a: 77).

2.1.3 *Divine miracles.* A very significant aspect of Cho's Pentecostal ministry is "signs and wonders," particularly healing and "speaking in tongues" (glossolalia) through the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (Cho, 1989 and 1999; Kennedy, 1990; Hong, 2000a: 69). For non-Pentecostals, one can still have CL if one discovers and uses his/her special gifts faithfully.¹¹

Yet as a Pentecostal evangelical, Cho excelled in his "power-gifts." Worship services include prayers for healing. A certain Elder Kim testifies that he saw "signs and miracles" in Cho's early ministry (Hong, 2000a: 71). Well-publicized is the instantaneous healing (in spite of his reluctance to act on the Spirit's prompting) of an elder's son who was crippled by an incurable paralysis (Cho, 1983: 143f; 1984: 87-89). In these and other miraculous answers to prayers, he is careful to always bear witness

to the saving power of the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

With regards to CG, he also emphasizes the divine dimension: the need for prayer and fasting in bringing revival (Cho, 1984: 96-99, 108).

2.1.4 *Visualized faith.* To provide CL, one has to have giant faith -- as stated so well by William Carey: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God." Cho put such faith in concrete form by formulating the concept of "*visualization*," to enter the "Fourth Dimension" (Cho, 1979: 30-36; 1984: 18-24, 105-107).¹² To "visualize" is to envision an *objective* (called "dream or vision") as clear-cut as possible (Cho, 1979: 30f). Two personal examples have been repeated often: foremost is his own first experience of praying specifically for a *table* made of Philippine mahogany, a Mitsubishi *chair* with wheels and an American-made *bicycle* very early in his ministry for which he was ridiculed until the answers actually came (ibid.: 19-25; 1983: 19-25; 1997: 162-165). The other is that of a spinster who got married within a year to a man whose ten characteristics were elicited from Cho's ten questions on who she considers to be her "ideal husband" (Cho, 1979: 26-29; 1983: 29-31).

And in terms of CG, Cho believed in such "visualized" supernatural guidance. When he began to pioneer a church in 1958, he gained a "burning desire" to build the largest church in Korea (Cho, 1979: 31). In 1960, he started to ask God for 1,000 more members each year; in 1969 for 1,000 more members each month; and in 1979 up to 20,000 more per year (ibid.: 31). In 1969, he had the assurance or "substance" even before plans were made that he will be able to build a 10,000-seat church sanctuary at \$5million (ibid.: 34, 191-94).¹³ He recalls that in spite of his hesitation to believe in 1974 that he can build a center for CG International (CGI), his request for a "fleece" of \$1million was collected in the exact full amount in just one Sunday (Cho, 1997: 98f).

Then in 1984, he also envisioned to build an additional 15-story building for \$10million, expand the Prayer Mountain for \$3million, and enlarge the existing sanctuary by building a larger church complex around it for another \$10million (Cho, 1997: 171f). In 1988, he visualized the establishment of the nationally circulated *Kuk-Min Daily* newspaper with a Christian Section, which has become the third largest circulation daily in Korea (Hong, 2000a: 82). He also got the assurance in early 1991 that his church will reach 700,000 members soon (Cho, 1979: 36). In all these, what was visualized looked almost impossible to be achieved; yet they all came to pass!

2.1.5 *Persistent Boldness.* Once Cho has visualized a dream or

vision, he then proceeds to act on it, preach it and teach it with courage and determination. To prove that he believes it, he shares it with every opportunity: "I speak about it to everyone at all possible times. By speaking thus, I am releasing power, as it says in the Bible" (followed by quoting Mark 11:23, NIV). "If that speaking is joined to the voices of the congregation, that power becomes multiplied" (Cho, 1997: 170f). On personal level, such boldness is expressed by planting "seed-faith" through giving an amount that shows one's belief that it will be done (cf. *ibid.*: 1979: 157-169). He teaches that by faith when people give through tithing, they will receive blessings from God and become prosperous (1980: 27-41).

For CG, Cho teaches that the vision must be carried everywhere, in Cho's terms, "pregnant within the pastor" as a "24-hour-day business" (Cho, 1997: 173f). He testifies, "The growth of our church does not depend on my physical presence. It depends on the capacity of my dreaming and my faith – wherever I am" (*ibid.*: 174). Such persistent boldness to do "immediate and urgent action" is well recognized in CL studies (Weber, 1968: 242; Czovek, 2002: 173-175; cf. Engstrom, 1976: 118). CL consists not of a spur-of-the moment occurrence, but of a patient persuasive process that challenges others to labor for the realization of the desired goals.

Yet what makes this CL mark more prominent in Cho's case is the *innovative* and *controversial* nature of his vision and message. People normally do not welcome new ideas and projects and tend to oppose them. So pioneering CL entails more courage to stand and fight for what one believes is "from God" or "right." Such leaders need to have the courage to bet on their ideas, take calculated risks and act accordingly. And through their example, they inspire others to follow their vision and strive for excellence and greatness. So Cho had to often overcome the fear of rejection and present his new ideas and goals, even if not many even among his close associates immediately accepted them.¹⁴ Later his steps of "bold faith" were vindicated and they followed his directions in the end.

2.1.6 *Articulate oratory*. And just like others gifted with CL (cf. Shamir et al, 1994: 25; Smith, 2000), Cho's other God-given gift is his speaking ability or rhetorical skill. In order to project authority and influence others to follow the vision of CL, the ideas and messages have to be *verbally* and *publicly* articulated with understanding and clarity.¹⁵ Effective communication skills attract people to pursue the leader's personal and organizational goals.

According to a survey (Myung, 1990), over 90% of YFGC

came to church mainly to hear Cho's preaching. Cho is a gifted storyteller who can tell narratives in a very dramatic and captivatingly detailed manner so that hearers feel as if they are at the scene. A certain Deaconess Yi says that Cho's sermons made her feel as if they are "God's living words;" and a certain Deaconess Chang testifies that his sermons are specifically for her (Hong, 2000a: 72).

Cho is also known to be fluent in many languages (English, Japanese, German and French), adding to the church's view that he is an extraordinarily gifted pastor (Hong, 2000a: 74).

Another researcher characterizes Cho's messages as "simple, with much use of examples, no theoretical framework, delivered with speedy pronunciation and a high level of self-confidence" (Kim Chang-kyu in Hong, 2000a: 73). Hong observes: his preaching "involves strong and exact pronunciation, tone, various accents and clear and simple sentences... He also makes the best of gestures and facial expressions to effectively communicate his sermons" (ibid.).

Hence these six gifts project Cho to be a "charismatic leader" with supernatural endowment.

2.2 Congenial personality

Secondly, almost instinctive and intuitive to CL is their magnetic *personality* that gains people's loyalty. They project dynamism, charm and enthusiasm so that they exercise the power of inspiration and command over members, bordering on cultic control (Engstrom, 1976: 40f).

2.2.1 *Positive self-image*. CL's alluring attraction is known to be based on their positive self-concept (Engstrom, 1976: 83-94). Cho recognizes this himself, so he clearly teaches this to others: would-be leaders must have a change of heart or attitude: "to grow out you must grow in" (Cho, 1984: 16f). They must change their self-image, getting rid of the burdens of poor appearance, poor education, poor self-discipline, poor family status, poor abilities, and poor health; instead they can turn these into steps to well being and success through "positive thinking" (Cho, 1980: 43-56; 1984: 24-30).¹⁶

2.2.2 *Intensive self-confidence*. The personality of CL exudes immense self-confidence, displaying high levels of expectation, dominance and strong conviction (cf. House, 1977). It is not enough to believe that one has been called by God to be a pastor and is carrying out God's mission for him. S/he also has to have the ability to project confidence by saying it is so and by living accordingly. Cho confidently shares that one of God's gifts for him is boldness (Cho, 1979: 42).

Corollary to this is Cho's passion and enthusiasm for his ministry (Hong, 2000a: 71). CL requires one to be passionate about what s/he is doing. Such leaders do not speak in monotone about their dream and mission in life. They breathe it, study it, talk about it, and teach it (Covey, 1990). Cho invested time in praying and thinking about his goals and took confident action to be sure that others will share his passions also.

2.3 Consistent spirituality

Then comes the third set in the religious CL "gift-mix" that has to do with a person's spiritual discipline. It is the outward measure of one's determination to have integrity of character and fitness for the long haul. Like most Korean pastors and yet exceeding them, Cho has lived a life of strict self-discipline and hard work. Cho himself clearly understands that the pastor's *personal*, especially his/her *spiritual disposition* is a key factor that affects the life and growth of his/her church. So he emphasizes this right in the first chapters of his books (cf. Cho, 1983: 1-34; 1984: 15-30; 1997: 1-12).

2.3.1 *Personal discipline*. One's faith and confidence has much to do with his/her integrity and self-mastery. Integrity is the ability to keep the promises that one makes to oneself; CL values one's self-respect more than the recognition of anyone else. Related to this is one's self-mastery, to control one's own desires and impulses. Thus, one must be able to continually check if his/her actions are aligned with his/her principles and values.

Cho believes in the importance of intimate communion with the Holy Spirit, since the latter is his "senior partner" in ministry; so he teaches this to all his leaders (Cho, 1997: 119-134; cf. 1984: 117). He claims that he has the habit of rising very early each day and spending at least one hour with God before doing anything else (ibid.: 130-134). He has taken periodic prolonged retreats, sometimes to the Prayer Mountain. He also prays and dreams (with 60% of his prayer times) in tongues (ibid.: 131). This kind of self-discipline extended also his family time, diet, exercise regimen, etc., and even to the way he learned foreign languages (ibid.: 131f).

With such a lived example, he has been able to encourage and teach his members to have similar spiritual experiences. When his members experience such themselves, it adds to their perception of his charisma and intensifies their loyalty to his ministry, thereby contributing to CG (Hong, 2000a: 71, 84f; cf. Hong, 2000).

2.3.2 *Humble honesty*. CL entails humility and honesty before one's constituents. A basic CL's spirituality is to keep promises,

fulfill expectations and make factual statements (cf. Engstrom, 1976: 39, 44f). Since no one is perfect, one must be ready to accept his/her limitations. But even with the above kind of spiritual discipline, it is still not easy to admit one's weaknesses and sins to others. Yet Cho has been able to overcome his pride, which may be rooted in his 10-year "wilderness experience" of being very sick (1964-73) by which he learned what it means to be truly broken: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20) (cf. Cho, 1997: 44f).

So Cho claims, "If I make a mistake, I confess that mistake before the congregation. I never cover up an error I might have made." At first, "I died inside." "But after many years of telling my people the truth, their love for me is stronger than ever. They no longer think I'm perfect, but they think of me as honest" (Cho, 1984: 36f). At one time he apologized to an elder who felt hurt for not being asked about his appointment to head the Missions Board for Europe (ibid.: 95). He is also quick to forgive (ibid.: 117-119). No wonder his charisma increases even when he commits mistakes!

2.3.3 *Loving service.* Another mark of CL's spirituality is their great dedication to serve people. They work hard to serve those whom they lead so that they can develop their talents, grow as persons and work in service themselves. In short, CL is also "servant leadership" (cf. Covey, 1990; Price, 1989; Richards & Hoeldtke, 1988; Thomas, 2002; Wright, 2000).

Cho believes that *love* is the highest motivational force in life, which can free people from stress and anxiety, and thus can keep them physically well (Cho, 1983: 147-181; cf. 1997: 140f). This he shows in his preaching: the goal in his sermons is "to introduce Jesus and help people succeed in life" (ibid.: 147-160). His intention is not to be eloquent, but to turn his pulpit into a counseling room, to meet the needs of his audience and to uplift and encourage them (ibid.: 156-160; cf. Camic, 1980). He has also used proper rituals in the dynamic worship services to provide psychological upliftment for the member's spiritual needs (Hong, 2000a: 84; cf. Carlton-Ford, 1992).

Cho also trains his associates and trainees in "authority with love," to not "exercise too much control over their members" (Cho, 1997: 93f). The leader's authority is not based on the power of his/her position or on human maneuvering. In YFGC's case, they follow Cho, "because they know I genuinely love them. If I make a mistake, I publicly confess it to them and ask them to pray for me. When a pastor can be open to his congregation like that, they will respect him and obey him. In Christianity all authority must be based on love, just as God's authority over us

is based on love" (ibid.: 94f). Hence he also teaches, "I never encourage our members to become dependent on the cell leaders, because that would be as bad as Communism or the Moonies. Anything that destroys personal independence and the individual's personality and responsibility is from the devil. God never created us to be puppets" (ibid.: 94).

His servanthood extends to his unselfishness to share the principles and practices that he found to be helpful for CG, without trying to control or strongly influence the decisions of the pastors and churches he ministers to. This is what effective CL is all about.

Further, CL supports and even establishes social services, and encourages those they lead to give back to society. After all, YFGC began as a ministry among the urban poor in 1958 (Cho, 1979: 171), and by 1986, "the educational level, occupation and living conditions of the members... show that it is the church of the middle lower classes" (Choi, 1986: 122); some "redemptive lifts" at least among its members have occurred! Meanwhile various social ministries have also been set up over the years in YFGC under Cho's CL (see 3.4 below).

2.3.4 Simple lifestyle. Effective CL entails living a simple lifestyle that reflects one's commitment to the cause that one is living for. Unlike many televangelists and pastors, Cho testifies that he lives a "simple yet comfortable lifestyle" (Cho, 1984: 37, 119). Although he receives much donations for personal use in the various conferences and crusades where he had been invited to speak, he has refused to "live like a king." He says, "My heart's desire is to give" to those in need, and the remainder to the church's international outreach ministry funds. He is very conscious that he should set an example to his church about giving, as well as that he should avoid being accused of ill motives in ministry (ibid.).

These four marks of spirituality lived consistently have contributed immensely to Cho's CL.

2.4 Competent ingenuity

Finally in the CL "gift-mix" are the skills involving organizational management: how to use available resources to the maximum effect for one's desired end, and in Cho's case, to affect CG.

2.4.1 Constant goal-setting. It is not enough to have faith and visions, but these must be translated into goals, strategies, programs and projects. It is through goal setting that CL motivates others to achieve the vision (cf. Shamir et al, 1993: 583). As goals are reached, and feelings of success prevail, one's charisma increases: "success is more important in the initial attribution of

charisma" (Puffer, 1990) and "nothing succeeds like success."

Cho emphasizes the importance of goal setting in CG (Cho, 1984: 109-111, 161f). Here one needs to find a balance of being both realistic and ambitious at the same time. Realism makes one aware of the natural rate of growth, thus not pushing growth beyond the limits of growth: natural growth comes by increments, so one can't force growth against its inherent nature. Yet to inspire, CL must set goals, which are somehow beyond people's grasp, and in spiritual CL, beyond human capacities, where God's power can be demonstrated.

On setting goals, Cho means the development of five-year plans, with budgets to achieve specific goals (1984: 36, 113-115). Then these goals and plans are consistently communicated to the people, thus giving the whole church a clear sense of direction. From among the crowd, leaders have to be recruited; hence Cho also has an eye to detect informal leaders "who naturally attract others to themselves. Sometimes people who have a knack for communicating with other people make excellent leaders" (ibid.: 50). Then he sees to it that each leader is trained (ibid.: 112f) and has a clear goal and plan; they get this at least through the annual cell leaders' convention (ibid.). He also knows how to motivate these lay leaders through recognition, praise and caring (1997: 135-141).

Hence CL requires one to be a constant strategist.¹⁷ Very early in Cho's ministry, in 1964, while almost dying from an unknown disease, he discovered the Exodus 18 formula of structuring his church in a cell system, whereby he can train and use lay leaders (as non-paid assistants!) to lead multitudes (Cho, 1984: 31-35). And to keep his church financially sustainable, he organized over 2,000 businessmen into a mission fellowship (Hong, 2000a: 81).

2.4.2 *Participatory management.* CL has the confidence to delegate, to share power as much as possible. Though effective leaders may be known for being decisive, superior problem-solvers and good at inspiring people to follow their lead, they know that they must share power with their subordinates, allowing them to make their own decisions themselves by helping them to develop judgment skills rather than by making them wait for the leader's decisions. The more power s/he gives to others, the more s/he will be seen as a visionary leader who is able to focus on strategic issues.

Cho delegates most decisions to his immediate staff, which consists of the assistant pastors and elders. He remains aloof from the routines of the various internal organizations of YFGC. One of his secretaries told Hong: "Cho hardly lectures people.

He delegates most of administrative affairs to his staffs" (2000a: 82). Cho allows his "fellow-workers to make mistakes and learn from them as God does with me" (Cho, 1984: 29).

Avoiding interference in mundane details actually adds to his charisma: "the separation of administrative concerns from the personal attention of the charismatic helps to preserve his or her aura of extraordinariness" (Trice & Beyer, 1986: 144). The social distance that evolved because of the increased size of YFGC may have helped to promote his charisma among his members: "Social distance may not have been deliberately created to generate charismatic images, but the product, a sense of distance and awe, may be a result of the creation of a social charismatic image" (Hong, 2000a: 75).

In fact, he relates to only a relatively small number of leaders who "have others under them who shepherd the cell leaders, and it is the cell leaders who perform the bulk of the ministry of our church" (Cho, 1997: 65). What he has done was just to turn his church into a training center, investing in his people, the ultimate resource! Without direct knowledge of each leader, he just has to see to it that they are trained in the skills necessary to be effective cell leaders, thereby contributing to the goal of CG!

2.4.3 *Media usage.* Moreover, Cho has been able to magnify his charisma by projecting his success through various forms of mass media. Perceived success validates and increases the leader's charisma (Weber, 1968: 241-244; Friedland, 1964; Trice & Beyer, 1986),¹⁸ esp. through the use of media (Wuthnow, 1994). It may not be clear whether success affects the leader's charisma or if one's charisma enhances the success. Yet in Cho's case, it is clear that each reinforced the other (Hong, 2000a: 74f).

His members get to know his biography, esp. his spiritual experiences and exploits, as well as updates of his various ministries, esp. international ones (Cho, 1984: 124-131) in newsletters and periodicals (Hong, 2000a: 75f). They know how many books he has published and translated into various languages. He has a Committee of the World Broadcasting Mission that sends his sermons by radio and television to many countries, such as U.S.A., Argentina, Indonesia, Kenya and the Philippines (ibid.: 76). All these have gained public and even international exposure through various mass media: publications (ibid.: 75f), television (in spite of its high costs, Cho, 1984: 62-67) and radio (ibid.: 67-69).

Therefore, with almost all of these four traits with fifteen sub-traits evidenced "to the max" in his life and ministry, Cho has been an excellent model of CL. Anyone who aspires to CL should try to emulate him in all these qualities.

3.0 Reflections on Cho's Charismatic Leadership and Church Growth

This study proceeds to consider the implications of Cho's CL style and CG model for us to follow in the 21st century. What is God's will for CL and CG in his visible church on earth in this new generation? Adding on a few more details to the above discussion, may I highlight at least five major reflections.

3.1. Excellent Spirituality.

Foremost is the *spiritual* quality of CL that Cho displayed in the CG of YFGC. Though only God can read hearts and motives, we can judge Cho's integrity from the fruit of his life (lifestyle!). Based on the pattern of his life in more than forty years of ministry, he has remained humble in spirit, as evidenced by the simplicity of his lifestyle. Pride has not gone into his head. In spite of the success and popularity gained from his CL and CG, he has remained not just humble and simple, but also teachable and servant-like, open and willing to share his experiences and insights with other colleagues.

It seems clear that Cho has used his charisma with a very *spiritual* motive: "in the Spirit" for the glory of God and not "in the flesh" for self-glory. He also used his CL in a most *spiritual* manner: in servanthood for the good of his co-pastors and church members, and not in domination and exploitation for the good of himself and his family.

We can even surmise that in the future, he will remain "broken before the Lord." In the continuous exercise of CL, there will be limits to CG as has been shown by the cessation of rapid increase in membership, perhaps except for biological and transfer growth, and even the possible decline in membership since 1996.¹⁹ He will have to face the growth of nominalism in his church (as is all ready happening in many Korean churches, cf. Hong, 1999) and eventual decline in the spiritual quality of his members.²⁰ He will have to wrestle with the issues that will arise from the limits to the effectivity of his version of "positive thinking" and "prosperity gospel," as expressed in his *Fourth Dimension* teachings of "The Fivefold Gospel" and "Triple Salvation (Blessings)" (Cho, 1979 and 1983). His parishioners' ill health and eventual death will have to be explained by not only spiritual causes (their lack of faith, and sin), but also natural ones (gradual decay of aging, viral attacks, etc.), which may conflict with his present beliefs so far (cf. Cho, 1980 and 1999). There may also be a possible decline in "signs and wonders" like in other Pentecostal-charismatic churches. These apparent "set-backs" will serve as checks to possible temptations for him to

become proud.

Nonetheless, Cho's spiritual leadership enhanced the productivity of his church, since CL elicits greater dedication to the organization and its goals from the constituents (cf. House, 1977; and House et al, 1988: 116). The high quality of his CL has undoubtedly been a major factor in YFGC's growth. Those who aspire to follow in his footsteps must work hard to have those traits in the "gift-mix" that demand spiritual discipline and skills training, and such efforts will be amply rewarded!

3.2. Empowering Structure.

Yet beyond Cho's personal quality is his *institutionalization* (or *routinization*) of an organizational structure that may preserve if not outgrow the CG that he has achieved so far.²¹ He seems to have solved the problem of possible disintegration that can arise from the inevitable need for succession (cf. Bryman, 1992:71; Conger, 1999: 168-171). In 1964, he found the best possible solution in the lay empowerment model through participatory management by institutionalizing the *cell system*.²² He views that home cell groups (HCG) is "the basic part of our church. It is not another church program – it *is* the program of our church" (1984: 42).

Through the cell system, he is able to develop a steady stream of leaders for CG and for expansion. For CG, research shows that large churches can maintain high levels of commitment and conformity if they are divided into small homogenous units (Finke, 1994: 8), and Cho affirms that for CG, "the real secret is home cell groups" (1997: vi). And for mission extension, "The expansion of any movement is in direct proportion to its success in mobilizing its total membership in continuous propagation of its beliefs" (Strachan, 1968: 108).

Yet perhaps above all, the cell system of home cell groups (HCG) provides a structure in which the issue of succession becomes insignificant. Cho asserts: "...this system of home cell groups does not depend on one person. In our church, it does not depend on me. It depends on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, because He is the one who energizes the leaders... Those members don't depend on me; they depend on one another and on the Holy Spirit" (1997: 86). He also says, "Churches should not have to depend on a single strong pastor" (ibid.: 52), and "My church is not the church of Paul Yonggi Cho, although I'm the founding pastor. My church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ and cannot be centered on my personality. With the cell system, the actual ministry is done on the cell level. Although the people hold me in high esteem and are loyal, they can go on without

me" (1984: 41). He has even empowered each HCG to be self-supporting: each cell has its own collection recorded and dispensed by its treasurer (1984: 49).

So it was not just the high quality of Cho's personal leadership, but also his wisdom to institutionalize the cell system in YFGC that he was able to provide for the phenomenal actualization of his CG goals and also for the continued growth of his church even after he is gone. CL can be institutionalized, so that succession does not become a major issue.

3.3. *Constant Renewal.*

Cho's CL has not been static, but dynamic; thus his CG was constantly being renewed through new initiatives that built on previous achievements. Research show that big organizations find it very difficult to respond to prophetic voices, esp. those that will differ from the leader (cf. Hong, 2000a: 87f). Catering to mass audiences, mega-churches will also tend to lose their prophetic voices, because their huge assets have to be protected through "compromise" with government and business interests, including those of their own influential upper class members who benefit from the status quo. Their pastors will tend to mainly focus on comforting the afflicted, and hardly on afflicting the comfortable (cf. Chung, 2001)! Moreover, in a big bureaucracy, decision-making will be based more on rational thinking and efficiency (which is not always negative) but less on affective action and spiritual guidance (cf. Poloma, 1989: 112, 127-138). Yet Cho's CL overcame these dangers, and in fact, YFGC has grown into quite an open and creative church!

Even from the start of Cho's ministry among the urban poor of Seoul, his openness to the Spirit gave him the sensitivity to give contextualized teachings to his people. His messages of "positive faith" helped his ailing and destitute members gain a good sense of identity and hope of life; they can be delivered from spiritual emptiness and material poverty (Hong, 2003: 294, 298). He testifies that his "blessings theology" was developed in the context of suffering and devastation of the Korean War (ibid.: 295). Thereby the poor are able to gain self-confidence and are equipped to labor for the Kingdom of God amidst the needs and hardships of life. They are trained to be leaders, in spite of their low socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

In 1964, he was willing to break Korean church and social tradition: he not only instituted the cell system, but also appointed women to be the cell leaders. He was the first pastor in Korea to actively train and empower women to lead in the church's HCG (Hong, 2000a: 73); in fact, almost all of his first

HCG leaders were women (Cho, 1997: 21-29). Today, women members still outnumber men by about three to two (Hong, 2000a: 70), perhaps because of the tendency of women to be more attracted to CL (Willner, 1984). But Cho has a correct and better explanation: women are better evangelists than men, and his CG is mainly due to women-to-women evangelism (1997: 60f).

Then in 1982, Cho had YFGC start the "Love in Practice" or "Sharing Movement," to provide basic necessities to indigents in the neighborhood, and later to orphanages, homes for the aged and leprosaria. In 1984, the church began to offer free heart surgeries, which later extended to Uzbekistan, Nepal, Cambodia and Ukraine. In 1988, there were three new initiatives: blood donation drive, "Love-Bread Movement" to provide aid to poor neighbors, and Elim Welfare Town (with free technical school for poor youth and free nursing home for the aged) in Gunpo City (Hong, 2003: 304f).

There were other initiatives in socio-cultural fronts in the '80s. A school was started that developed into Hansei University, and Bethesda University grew out of the Full Gospel School of Theology (Hong, 2003: 303). Cho launched "Invitation to Happiness," the first Christian television ministry in Korea, and the *Kookmin Daily News*, the first Christian daily newspaper in Korea (ibid.: 305). In 1995, YFGC set up its Environmental Preservation Division, and in 1996, YFGC began the first satellite mission on Korea's communication satellite *Moogoonghwa* (Rose of Sharon). Later, the church also launched Internet Broadcasting Department for cyber-evangelism and now Video on Demand (VOD) (ibid.: 303). Lately, in 1999, they established "Good People," the first church-based non-government organization (NGO) in Korea, mainly to support wholistic "mission to unreached Third World countries...with the love and righteousness of God" (ibid.: 308).

So, Cho's CL has seen to it that YFGC is constantly renewed. CL and CG are not static, but dynamic. Given Cho's openness to creative initiatives, there are grounds for optimism that he will continue to use his CL to keep YFGC on the path of constant church renewal in the years to come. Aspiring leaders need to do likewise.

3.4. Social Impact.

A significant distinctive in Cho's CL has been the "beyond CG" impact that he has made in Korean society. Through the effective CL of Cho, YFGC has been able to not just increase in quantity of church membership, but also in quality of social

transformation. The main highlight may be in May 3, 1996, when Cho was awarded the *Moogoonghwa* medallion, the highest medal given to Korean citizens, primarily for his contributions to the free heart operation movement (Hong, 2003: 305).

When the concept of CG and phenomenon of mega-churches (not so different from centralized structures of denominations) became popular in the late '70s, many evangelical church leaders, esp. from the Two-Thirds world have been very critical of it. Most critical are those who see CG as the product of a Westernized non-wholistic approach to mission that is not concerned for the *discipling* (read: *transformation*) of societies, viewing evangelism and church development as the main (if not the only) goal of the Great Commission.

More recent Pentecostal theologians have raised this concern, too (e.g., Dempster, 1999; Petersen, 1999). Of note is: "Pentecostals must take seriously the critique that, in spite of their significant contributions in areas of social concern within their communities, there has been little conscious effort to provide a horizontal linkage from their experiments in ways of coping with life in their own context to a larger forum where they would have more direct access to the means of cultural production. If Pentecostals are content to form only their own 'substitute societies', they may forfeit the opportunity to participate in radical change or structural transformation" (ibid.: 110f).

Yet it looks like that Cho has successfully led YFGC to move in a more wholistic and transformational role in society. In many modern cities like Seoul, the main wholistic issue is the growing gap between the rich and the poor. It seems that from YFGC's "sharing movement" and its various social ministries from the early '80s onwards, Cho's CL has led to a CG that has been able to equip the rich to serve the poor and to empower the poor to serve others. Through media, esp. the *Kookmin Daily News*, the nation (not just the church) has been mobilized to help thousands of boy or girl-led households, donate blood, and volunteer in medical service corps; in 1992, 1,300 civic groups joined in a national "Kind Neighbor, Bright Society" movement to develop kindness as a way of life (Hong, 2003: 305f), and in 2001, a "donation culture" was promoted through feature stories in the newspaper (ibid.: 307).

Through the two universities, YFGC can develop young people in various professions to provide Christian leadership in society. In 1998, a model "ecological garden" was set up on the banks of Han River in Yoido, which formed "ecological schools" to teach on environmental issues. Since 1999, the church-based NGO "Good People" has sent food, fertilizers and medicine to

North Korea; rebuilt schools in India; funded AIDS prevention program in Kenya, sent emergency relief to Kosovo, Turkey, Afghanistan, etc.; aided flood victims in Korea; and many other social work with national and global reach (Hong, 2003: 308-310).

Cho has shown that effective CL involves bold and wholistic moves, which can outgrow CG goals and can impact society. All that is needed is for CL to expand its horizons, equip its members to develop their gifts and empower them to make their dreams come true. Bold faith combined with good managerial skills (esp. in delegation) will richly reward the leader.

3.5. *Multiplication Potential.*

Given the above distinctives of Cho's CL style, we can look forward to greater impact of his ministry. He has shown that there is almost nothing impossible that a spiritual and effective CL can do for CG, church renewal, social transformation and even global impact. As Cho has emphasized, the most critical gift for leadership is "dreams and visions" that are set into goals, which are constantly upgraded as they are achieved! May I show an example of what a possible "vision" that church leaders can consider in our time.

Recent mission practitioners are offering the further "higher goal beyond CG" of *church multiplication* through "church planting movements" (CPM; e.g., Garrison, 1999; Lim, 2003) or "house church networks" (HCN; e.g., Banks, 1989; Simson, 2001; cf. Ringma, 1994; Padilla, 1999; Montgomery, 2001). They view the centralized mega-churches (and their latest forms, like "cell churches" and "Groups of 12 (G-12)" (cf. Neighbor, 1990; Comiskey, 1999) to be unable to use the full potential of the *whole* church to evangelize and transform the *whole* world, particularly the 10/40 Window.

Theologically, CG perpetuates the "Babylonian captivity" of the church in Christendom structures inherited from centuries of theological emphasis on the "priesthood of a few (read: the clergy)" rather than the Reformation breakthrough into a servant-church structure based on the biblical teaching of the "priesthood of all believers." CG thinking continues to require hierarchical power centers (best exemplified in the papal system of the Roman Catholic Church) that are opposite to the egalitarian partnership structures of house-churches (or "Basic Christian Communities," BCC) and facilitative functions of servant-leadership in the New Testament (cf. Kung, 1965; Dunn, 1985; Lim, 1987 & 2003; Simson, 2001).²³ Unless these mega-forms of CG truly *decentralize* to let each cell function fully as autonomous

(self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating) churches, with their own leaders, budgets and programs,²⁴ God's church will continue to deprive almost 90% (the unequipped laity) of the church from exercising their priesthood, prophethood and rulership in Christ.

Strategically, the centralized and hierarchical structure of mega-church type of CG has been disadvantageous to the full growth of the church and its mission. Cho's empowerment model seems to be not empowering enough! In his ideals, each HCG "has limited size, usually not more than 15 families," which is good, but he continues, "It has a definite goal set by my associate ministers and myself. It has a definite plan, given to each cell in written form. It has definite leadership, trained in our school" (1984: 42; cf. 1997: 113f), which reveals a dependency that hinders their self-developing potential for Kingdom expansion and church multiplication. There is a big difference between training leaders and training followers (Hiebert, 1989; cf. Getz, 1984).

The main limitation of mega-church type of CG is its hindrance to effective world missions, on at least two counts: (a) it models mere *addition* growth for mega-cities, instead of more church *multiplication* for national saturation evangelization; and (b) it absorbs a disproportionate amount of resources (time, money and energy) for church development, and discourages increased spending for wholistic cross-cultural missions; if they do try, their short-term and resident missionaries have been ineffective to plant contextualized and transformational churches. The mega-church model of CG has grown mainly in secularized and urbanized societies, which allow religious freedom. But it seems to have been ineffective in planting indigenous churches and CPMs neither in the 10/40 Window nor even in the saturation evangelization of their own nations.

Actually Cho has begun to do a type of "church multiplication" in more recent years. Though he pioneered only three churches in his first 26 years (1984: 10), by 1989 he had already 75 churches and mission work in different parts of the world, like Japan,²⁵ Australia, U.S.A., Latin America and Europe (1997: 47, 79), and a recent report say that he has about 250 churches in Korea and about 650 churches in the world, including some in "closed countries." If any HCG leader wants to become a licensed minister, Cho pays for her/his Bible School tuition, on condition that s/he serves at least three years in YFGC. If later they want to start their own church, Cho helps them financially for the first six months (ibid.: 79f). He does not provide them anything to give to nationals by teaching them to "depend on

God as their total resource;" the nationals are not to depend on foreign funding,²⁶ so Cho's missionaries are told not to give the impression that they are bringing riches to them (ibid.: 175f). And he believes that this kind of church planting can be done anywhere (ibid.: 174-176)! Hopefully this can be implemented more frequently and more vigorously.

Moreover, Cho also shares the CPM/HCN view that the church meets any time and anywhere: it "meets everyday in factories, schools, offices, homes, restaurants and club buildings..." If the Communists take over and kill the pastors, they cannot destroy the 18,000 cells (1984: 41). He sees that such a system is not just persecution-proof, but also poverty/depression-proof (1997: 84-86)! Yet in his ministry, in spite of his apparent desire to emphasize the decentralized form of the church, with no need for the presence and ministry of pastors, the focus still flows back to his mega-structure and his personal CL! Such is the main danger of CL and huge structures: they tend to create high dependency of staff and members on the leaders and especially the top leader (cf. Conger, 1989; Yukl, 1999)!

Yet given his ecclesiology and openness to the Spirit, Cho may be able to lead his church (and the church worldwide) to a multiplication mode! And the global impact will be very great. The evangelistic and transformational impact of one church of 200,000 members (in CG programs) will almost surely be less than that of 500 churches of 400 each (in traditional *church-planting* programs), and much less than that of 10,000 churches of 20 each (in *church multiplication* movements)! Cho saw this in China (1997: 84), and his CL can help make it replicated all over the world!

4.0 Conclusion

As shown in this study, Cho has served his generation excellently well with this God-endowed CL gifts. His "gift-mix" of the four traits with fifteen sub-traits were of superior quality, making him a charismatic leader *par excellence*. Yet he remained humble and simple, a model of mature spirituality and servant-leadership. He has faithfully used his effective CL not just for the growth of YFGC, but also for the development of many churches worldwide. And the resultant CG of his CL has been of constant internal renewal that has social transformative impact in Korea and the world!

This study has also shown that most importantly, Cho has used his CL to move his mega-church to empower almost 10% of his laity to be HCG leaders and church leaders through the cell system. Perhaps he can use his CL to lead YFGC to its logical or

theological end (empowerment of 100% for NT priesthood) and to its practical or strategic end (mobilization of 100% for CPM missions). May his next goal be "church multiplication," not just "cell multiplication." May he train, commission and send most (if not all) of his leaders to plant many more multiplying churches,²⁷ in Korea and in the non-Christian world!

Or perhaps it is the best that Cho could do in the hierarchical cultural milieu of Korea (his cultural heritage) and the centralized hierarchical system of Christian denominations (his ecclesiastical heritage) in his generation. The challenge for the next generation of those who aspire to church leadership and CG in the post-modern era should be: are we going to continue to develop more hierarchical and centralized mega-churches or make a "paradigm shift" to more egalitarian and decentralized servant-churches (or HCN) for CPMs in the new millennium? May God use Cho's exemplary CL to inspire us to obey the Great Commission, to bear explosive witness among the nations, so that "the end will come" (cf. Mt. 24:14)! Maranatha!

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NOTES

1. Hong Younggi, Ph.D., is a scholarly participant-observer, being an ordained minister of YFGC who grew up in this church.
2. Hong, 2000a: 86, n. 81. The rates of "conversion growth" and "biological growth" are not given.
3. YFGC also branched off two mega-churches: Eunhye wa Chilli Church in 1981, and Full Gospel Incheon Church in 1983.
4. Holmberg, 1978 shows the New Testament considers the sacred as Christ and the Holy Spirit.
5. Hence, Roman Catholics use "charism," Protestants use "unction," while Pentecostal-charismatics use "anointing." For careful studies on the biblical use of "charisma(ta)," see Von Campenhausen, 1969; Dunn, 1975: 205-297; Holmberg, 1978; Koenig, 1978; Banks, 1980: 93-112; Fung, 1984; Dunn, 1985; Lim, 1987: 137-161.
6. It would be interesting to study the similarities and differences

between the "charismatic effects" of religious figures and the sensational or fanatical "idolization" of teenage pop personalities (like singers, actors, and sports and media stars) and politicians.

7. I am ranking them from the "most inborn" to the "most learnable" traits.

8. Hong, 2000a: 72 notes that he compared the charismatic perception, religiosity and CG, with a sample size of 110 from YFGC, 640 from other mega-churches, 265 from large churches and 245 from small and medium-sized churches.

9. On the significance of spiritual experiences in the emergence of CL among religious leaders, cf. Weber, 1968: 1112, 1117; Trice & Beyer, 1986: 41; Rambo, 1992: 100; and Storr, 1996. In the OT cases of Saul and David, cf. Czovek, 2002:179f; 196f.

10. On Cho's dramatic healing and conversion story, see Cho, 1979: 9-12, 1983: xii-xvii; and YFGC, 1989: 289f.

11. Examples are the "gifts" of biblical scholarship (A. Deissman, F. F. Bruce), theological writing (M. Luther, John Calvin), evangelistic preaching (D. L. Moody, Billy Graham), expository preaching (John Stott, J. I. Packer), hymn composition (Charles Wesley, Fanny Crosby), charity work (Florence Nightingale, Mother Teresa), mission mobilization (John Mott, George Verwer), etc.

12. He contrasts this from that of Buddhism and criticizes the influence of Zen Buddhism in the West (Cho, 1983: 75-84).

13. At that time, the Board of elders and 600 deacons objected because the church had only \$2,000 in hand; but with his faith and his church's commitment, they moved to the new sanctuary in Yoido in 1973 (*ibid.*: 191-194).

14. One of his boldest decisions was to resign and move to Yoido in 1969 (Cho, 1983: xviii).

15. Historian on American presidents, Doris Kearns Goodwin notes communication as the most powerful tool of political leadership: "Without the ability to communicate, leaders can possess all the other attributes and still fail to have an impact."

16. He acknowledges that it is similar to Robert Schuller's teaching (Cho, 1997: 159f).

17. Using David's case, Czovek notes, "Charismatic deliverers, if they are to prevail are to be strategists – taking advantage of every opportunity" (2002: 186).

18. Willner, 1984: 13f avers that though mass media may promote charisma more broadly than in the past, they cannot generate charisma.

19. Cho claims 700,000 members by 1996 (1979, 3rd ed.: preface).

20. Weber notes, "If proof and success eludes the leader for long, if he appears deserted by his god or his magical or heroic powers, above all, if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" (1968: 242).

21. Charismatic leaders and their followers will desire to transform their movements into more permanent institutions. Routinization refers to the process by which the dynamism of CL is translated into the stability of traditional or bureaucratic organization. This is necessary if the charisma of the leader is to be preserved, be expanded and stand a better chance of survival. See Weber, 1968: 241-250, 1112-1117 on how the process of structural development takes place.

22. For a full narrative of this important discovery, read Cho, 1997: 13-29.

23. Thus there was no need for celebrative worship and governing centers among the people of God in each village or city, except three times a year in the temple in the OT. Yet there were no local shrines nor temples in OT times, just as there were no local church structures in NT times. In every city, the "local church" consisted of a fellowship of interdependent leaders (usually called "elders") of house-churches, with no central governing body. Our Lord Jesus, Peter, Paul and Apollos were charismatic leaders, but each of them did not build a centralized nor hierarchical structure.

24. On servant-leadership and servant-structures, cf. Greenleaf, 1977; Schein, 1992; Elliston, 1993; and Lim, 1987.

25. Cho chose an ordinary lady minister to plant the YFGC in Japan with a goal of 1,000 members in five years, and she did it! (1997: 76).

26. Cho himself never asked for financial help from foreign missionaries or churches, even when he was ministering among the poor (1979: 179).

27. Most CPMs nowadays believe that it takes a maximum of three years to disciple a believer to become a disciple-maker (servant-leader of a house-church). The discipler just has to be a few steps ahead of his disciple(s), thus 2 Tim. 2:2 (cf. Jn. 14:12-14; Ac. 20:17-35) can be done in just a few months if not a few weeks!