

# Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

**David Yonggi Cho:  
His Life, Theology and Ministry**

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Charis and Charisma: David Yonggi Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church*, Regnum Studies in Mission Series. Edited by Sung-hoon Myung and Young-gi Hong. Oxford: Regnum Books, 2003. Paper, 217 pp., ISBN: 1-870345-45-2, US\$15.00.

As the subtitle indicates, this book is about David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church, the largest single congregation in the world. Myung, a Fuller Ph.D. in Church Growth, founded the Institute for Church Growth in 1993 and served as President until 2003. Hong, another Ph.D. from the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, is the current president of the Institute.

The book is divided into three parts. The first consists of four interviews that either Myung or Hong undertook. The first is with Cho himself under the chapter heading of "Church Ministry: Taking Steps with the Holy Spirit." Cho characterizes in this interview his ministry as that of the Holy Spirit. So is his leadership as "leadership by the Holy Spirit" (pp. 6-8). The second is with Oak Han-hum, perhaps one of the best representatives of Korean Evangelical ministers. The interviewee, a renowned Presbyterian minister of another successful mega church, is known for his methodical discipleship program. It is of interest to observe the contrast of the traditional Korean Christian preaching and that of Cho. It will be well for Cho's members to heed Oak's admonition to live an obedient life with blessings (p. 19). The third is with Peter Wagner, a noted church growth theorist, under the heading of "Leadership and Communication." While he emphasizes Cho's communication skills in his leadership, Wagner uses his new apostolic template to define Cho's leadership. In this sense, the title does not faithfully reflect the content. (It is possible that the title was later worked out by the editors.) The last is with Cecil M. Robeck, a Pentecostal ecumenist of our days, under the title of "The Influence on the Churches in the World." (Again, another confusing title: the influence of what?) He highlights the empowering aspect of Cho's ministry and Cho's influence in the decision of the Korean Assemblies of God to join the Korean National Council of Churches (p. 31). It is obvious that these interviewees were carefully chosen to represent various aspects of church ministry.

The second section is a long interview with Cho himself. Here he shares his principles of church growth. This 85-page long section is an excellent summary of Cho's theology of church growth. His major headings are: a) Church Growth and Leadership, 2) Church Growth and the Holy Spirit, 3) Church Growth and Prayer, 4) Church Growth and

Sermon, 5) Church Growth and Cell Groups, 6) Church Growth and the Mass Media, and 7) Church Growth and the Kingdom of God. The preface of the section specifies that these are the seven principles of church growth of Cho in his 45-year ministry. As one scholar pointed out recently, Cho is not only a church growth practitioner par excellence, but also a theorist and a powerful advocate. This section brilliantly proves this claim.

The third section is an academic reflection of Cho's church growth movement by five scholars. Sung-hoon Myung, under the heading of "The Influence of Rev. Cho's Leadership on the Churches of Korea," characterizes Cho's leadership in seven ways (pp. 124-31). Then he argues that Cho's influence in Korean church is particularly notable in the following areas: 1) church growth, 2) the Holy Spirit movement, 3) preaching ministry, 4) world mission, and 5) ecumenism and Christian culture (pp. 131-40). The next is Joel Comiskey's "Rev. Cho's Cell Groups and Dynamics of Church Growth" in which Cho's influence of Cho's pioneering work and development of the cell system is studied. Comiskey's extensive missionary experience in Latin America makes him as an authority in the subject matter. He currently involves in church planting ministry while teaching at Columbia International University. The third is Wonsuk Ma's "The Effect of Rev. Cho's Sermon Style for Church Growth on the Development of Theology," which examines the contents and delivery system of Cho's sermon. Then he concludes the influence of Cho's sermon to church growth and theological formulation of the Korean church. Ma is a Korean Pentecostal missionary currently teaching in a seminary. The fourth is Myung-soo Park's "A Study of Rev. Cho and the Growth of Yoido Full Gospel Church," (and a typo in the Table of Contents for this entry.) A Holiness historian, Park is well poised to offer several important insights. Although his discussion on Cho's theology and leadership is useful, the strength of Park's study is found in his study of Cho's church growth (of Yoido Full Gospel Church) in the social context of the urbanization and industrialization of Korea during the same period that Cho's ministry developed (pp. 187-94). The last is Young-gi Hong's "The Influence of Rev. Cho's Church Growth on Korean Society." Strong in his sociological insight, Hong argues that Cho's influence in the Korean society has been recognized in or through the following ways: 1) change in the minds for positive life and hope, 2) positive role of the church in social integration, 3) redemption and life, 4) cultural reform, 5) social change, 6) social service activities, 7) the publication of his daily news paper, 7) Christian NGO

activities (pp. 202-214). The book contains no index or bibliography, which is an obvious deficiency for any academic publication such as this.

The publication of this book marks an important beginning in several areas. First of all, Cho's influence of, and contribution in, the church growth movement is not questioned. For instance, by now all the highly publicized church growth theorists have abandoned the pursuit and simply found a new job. Peter Wagner is a case in point. Others have adopted a revised version of the movement. "Natural church development" is a good example. Primarily due to the failure of some church growth theorists' decision to get off the train in the middle of the road, the brilliant concept that Donald McGavran pioneered has not seen its full fruition. It is Cho who still faithfully holds the fort, and he should be recognized for his role in this area by church growth advocates. (I still found "a few good men [and perhaps women]" in a recent international conference of church growth and leadership in Seoul, Korea.) The Institute for Church Growth has persistently expanded the definition of church growth in a commendable way. The volume represents this important but lone voice of the church growth movement. The second is the launch of an international contribution of the Institute. For x years, the Institute has published perhaps the only existing and highly influential monthly journal in church growth. In fact, the Institute has developed several important programs not only to promote the church growth (e.g., "Breaking through the 300-Barrier") and the "re-growth" of plateaued churches, but also critical data gathering and researches, but all in Korean. For many years, I personally wanted the Institute, Cho and his Yoido Full Gospel Church would drastically expand its ministry scope, although Cho's international ministries with mass crusade and popular church growth seminars cross all the continents). If Myung has established the ground work for the Institute, it is Hong who has taken this critical ministry beyond the Korean peninsular. Thus, we may expect more work in English either by or on Cho in coming years. Third, finally a reputable international publisher has emerged to give a voice to Asian (or non-western for that matter) reflective thinkers. For this, the editors of the Regnum Books International are to be commended. It is crucial for the Christian world to heed to the voices of the "majority world" where Christianity is exploding. Only with courageous and willing publishers like Regnum, the thinkers will have a voice. I hope that more Christian publishers would follow Regnum's suit. Even from business viewpoint, who would do a business with a shrinking enterprise?

As an Asian, Myung and Hong deserve warm congratulations on this important milestone. The book also has three different entries in the

menu: from “sharing” to academic studies. The editors attempted to prepare something for everyone. This not an easy job, but they did it.

Now, a book review has a nasty habit of diligently looking for something to blame the editors or authors for. The noble attempt of the editors to offer something for everyone also comes with a price. At the end, no one group would be totally satisfied with this mix. For instance, church growth academician would die for more critical and analytical reflections with solid scholarship. Pastors struggling with their own church’s future would cry for more words from Cho, including not only bright side of his church growth, but even dark sides, if there is any. Unless the editors offer this book as the first and last contribution to the desperate readers, perhaps it may be a wiser choice to chose one entry and do it well and deep. Also notable are several unclear expressions (as some of which were noted above) most likely coming from the translation from Korean (as the book was originally published in Korean) into English. The book has several small but obvious marks of a rushed production such as typos (again one of which was noted above), the mediocre binding, and others such as the lack of any index. I hope these small details would not cause otherwise would-be readers to simply bypass the book. All these, however, is only a small complain for the exceptionally savory content that this book offers. Watch with me for more titles of this sort in the near future.

Julie C. Ma