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Charismatic Leadership in Korean Mega-Churches

PhD, Young-Gi Hong

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Dynamism and Dilemma: The Nature of Charismatic Pastoral Leadership in the Korean Mega-Churches

PhD Thesis, Young-Gi Hong, 2000

Abstract

This study analyses the nature of charismatic leadership exercised by the senior pastors of thirteen Korean mega-churches, each of which has more than 10,000 adults attending Sunday services. The empirical research employed a combination of quantitative methods using ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), correlation, factor, and regression analyses, and qualitative methods, namely, participatory observation and interviews.

The social survey conducted with a sample of 1,260 church members to compare the churches of three sizes, which are mega-churches, large churches, and small/middle-sized churches, show that the members' charismatic perceptions of their senior pastor in the mega-churches were distinguishable from those in the smaller churches. This charismatic perception has a positive impact on the members' religiosity, which was found to be a significant reason for numerical growth in the mega-churches.

Comparisons of the three types of Korean mega-churches, the traditional, middle-class, and charismatic, indicate that charismatic characteristics are viewed differently in each type of mega-churches, suggesting that charismatic leadership involves a reciprocal relationship between the senior pastor and the members.

The qualitative research focused on the development of charismatic pastoral leadership and its institutional character in the Korean mega-churches. Charismatic pastoral leadership has multiple components which include the influence of the macro- and micro-contexts, the life experiences of the senior pastors and their charismatic qualities, the fostering of charismatic images, both spiritual and social, and the commitment of the members. The development of charismatic pastoral leadership was also fostered by effective routinisation processes, such as the development of organisations incorporating the senior pastor's sense of mission.

This study argues that the nature of charismatic pastoral leadership in the Korean mega-churches is best viewed as a multi-dimensional process that takes place over time in the dynamic interaction between the senior pastor, the church members, and given contexts. The charisma of the senior pastor has an immense impact on the institutional success of a Korean mega-church.

However, this charismatic leadership also gives rise to certain potential dilemmas, both institutional and theological. The institutional dilemmas were found to be the problem of succession, the difficulty of leadership development, the ministry of the ongoing motivation of the religious or institutional commitment of the younger generation, and the tension between charisma and bureaucracy. The theological dilemmas of charismatic pastoral leadership include how to continue to integrate charisma and Christian character, and the problems of the relationships between charisma and the role of community, charisma and context, and charisma and Biblical church growth. It is suggested that Korean mega-churches need to understand better the institutional and social character, as well as their own theology of Christian

charismatic leadership, in order that they may not succumb to any negative consequences arising out of charismatic leadership.