

Kevin Ranaghan: 15 years of Catholic renewal
Judson Cornwall: wholly holy

Christmas

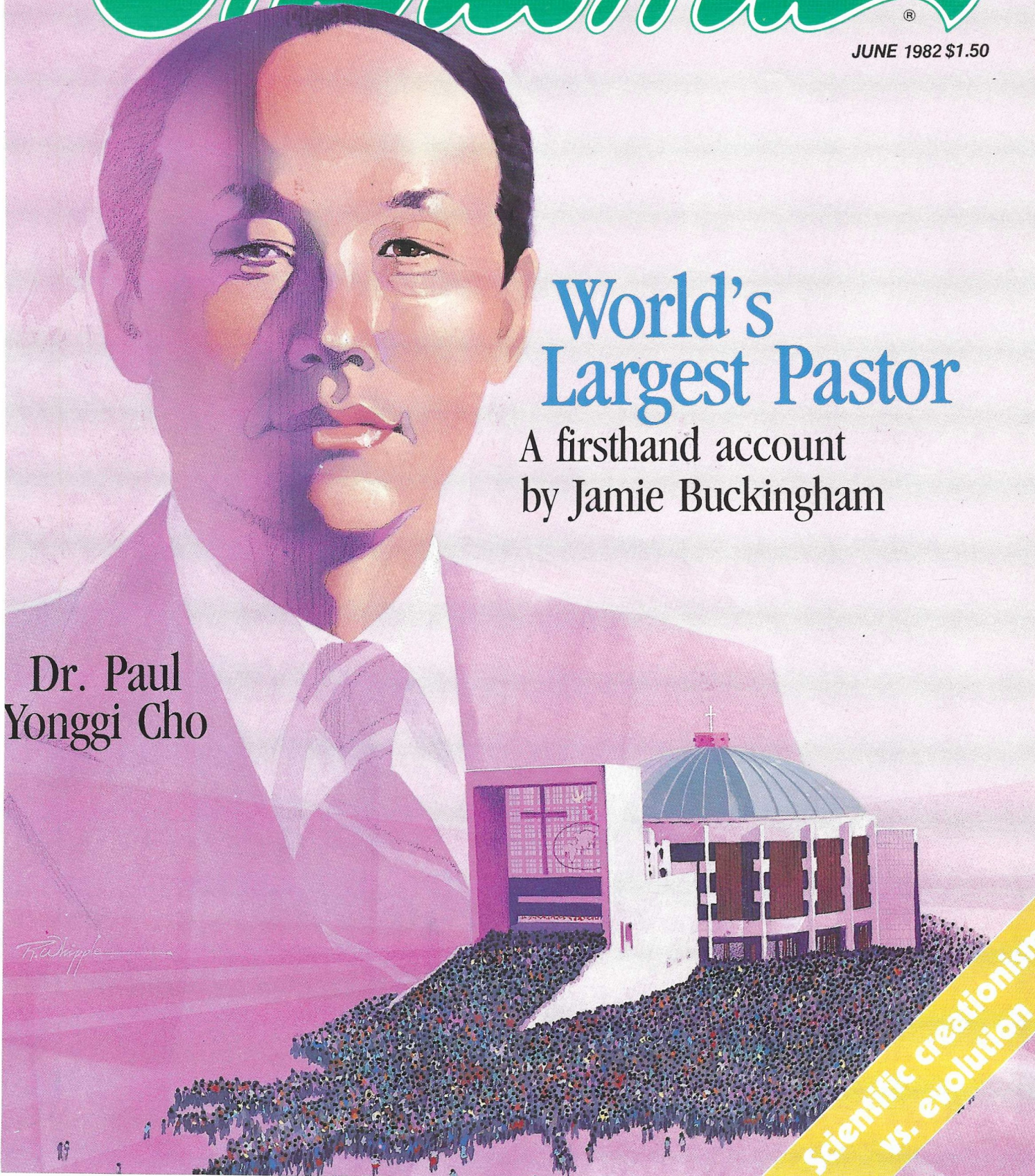
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World's Largest Pastor

A firsthand account
by Jamie Buckingham

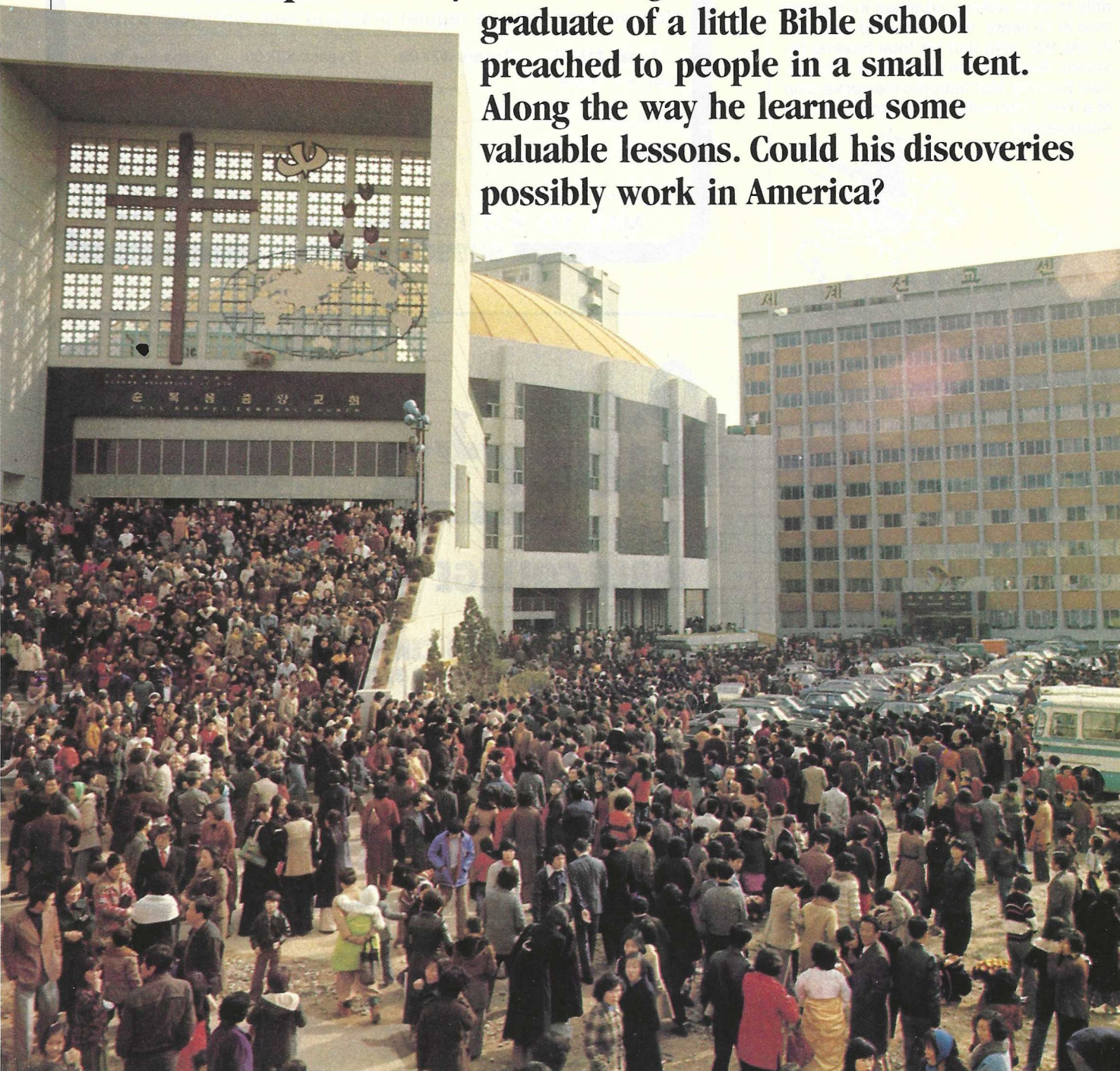
Dr. Paul
Yonggi Cho



Scientific creationism
vs. evolution

The World's Largest Pastorate

Here is the story of Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho who now leads a congregation of 200,000. He began as a peasant boy with some goals. Later, this sickly graduate of a little Bible school preached to people in a small tent. Along the way he learned some valuable lessons. Could his discoveries possibly work in America?



BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

There is an ancient Korean proverb: "Do not look up at the tree which you can never climb."

Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, however, dared look up at a tree which no other Christian leader in the world believed possible to climb—a church of 200,000 members.

At age 46 he, along with his staff of 210 pastors and more than 16,000 home group leaders, has climbed that tree.

And they are still climbing.

Projections are the church will double again in size in the next two years.

Two years ago the Seoul Full Gospel Central Church, a single congregation in the heart of the Korean capital, attained a membership of 100,000 to become unchallenged as the largest church in the history of the world.

The church has since doubled in size, despite Pastor Cho's recent emphasis on giving members to other churches. (To one church he assigned 5,000 members. To another, 3,000 members.)

The story of the Korean church is one of the most exciting of all history, and many noted Christian leaders are saying that Dr. Cho's influence in evangelical Christianity will surpass that of Billy Graham within the next few years.

In 1958 Paul Yonggi Cho, a sickly graduate of a small Korean Assemblies of God Bible school, put up a small tent on the outskirts of Seoul. There were no seats, only straw mats strewn on the bare ground.

The Korean War was over, and the nation was deep in poverty. Eighty percent of the city of Seoul had been destroyed. Assisted by his future mother-in-law, Jashil Choi (pronounced Chay) and later by missionary John Hurston, Pastor Cho—still ravaged by the effects of TB—ministered faith, hope, and healing to his growing congregation of poverty-stricken people.

<The Full Gospel Central Church of Seoul, South Korea, has doubled in size in the last two years. Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho continues to lead its outreach as Christendom's largest body of believers.

On Sunday morning Cho would go up the hill and cry out over the thatched rooftops, "It's time for church. Come to church."

The people responded. In three years—fortified by Bible teaching, prayer, and an emphasis on a miracle-working God—the church moved to a 1,500-seat building in the Sodaemun area of Seoul. Although the church was first known as a "revival center," emphasis soon shifted to building a strong, stable body of believers.

During those early years—and continuing to the present—five significant foundations of ministry were established. Although Cho was not dreaming of anything comparable to what developed, he is quick to point out that without these early foundations future growth would have resulted in chaos rather than a healthy, dynamic body.

Prayer and Fasting

The primary foundation is the emphasis on prayer and fasting. Shortly after the church began, Sister Choi (now 67 years old) established Fasting Prayer Mountain at Osanri, 45 minutes north of Seoul. Purchased in 1968 for a church cemetery, it quickly became a place of life rather than death.

Armed with a tenacious belief in the power of prayer and fasting, Sister Choi, listed as Cho's associate pastor, began making nightly trips to Osanri to pray for the needs of the church and its membership. Since then the entire church has caught the vision. A 10,000-seat auditorium is being completed at Fasting Prayer Mountain to provide for the almost one million people who register there yearly. Many of these people spend from one to 40 days and nights in prayer and fasting. Others use their vacations to come to the place of prayer—bringing their entire families for two weeks of fasting. The church runs buses regularly from downtown Seoul to Osanri to carry the thousands who pray.

Fasting Prayer Mountain contains 115 underground prayer grottos—tiny caves in the side of the mountain to hold one or two people who want to be secluded

for intense prayer. There are 130 full- and part-time workers at the mountain who work in one of four auditoriums and in the huge hotel-type dormitory and recreation ground.

When I was there recently, I walked across the mountain and could hear, coming from the ventilation pipes protruding through the soil from the grottos, the sounds of people praying or singing. The effect was awesome.

Thousands of people are healed annually at Fasting Prayer Mountain. But the burden for prayer has gone far beyond local and personal needs; the people now intercede for the entire world.

Besides the intercession at Fasting Prayer Mountain, all-night prayer services are held on Wednesday and Friday nights at the huge Central Church on Yoido Island in Seoul. Average attendance is 15,500.

The Korean church has long recognized the power of prayer in the foundation of any strong church.

Small Groups

The second foundational principle is the concept of dividing the body into small groups. In 1964, Cho, suffering from a nervous breakdown, was inspired by Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18—when Moses was experiencing similar problems. Realizing he could not adequately shepherd his rapidly growing flock, and believing strongly in what some Americans call "lay leadership," Cho divided the city into districts and assigned his workers as pastors over small flocks.

By early 1982 this had grown to 12 districts, each with its own office and staff at the Central Church. The offices resemble war rooms, with maps, charts, and records of all the sections in each district. Each district is broken into 10 to 17 geographical sections—with a full-time minister over each section. These districts and sectional heads compose more than three-fourths of the 210 staff pastors—two-thirds of whom are women.

There are now more than 16,000 home groups, and 60 percent of these are led

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Largest Pastorate

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by highly qualified women.

In order to qualify for leadership, a cell home group leader must show clear evidence of a consistent Christian life. He or she must have been a member of the church for at least two years, be baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, be a tither, and have at least two families in

in the soot on his grandmother's kitchen wall.

- "I will receive a doctorate degree by the time I am 30."

- "I will travel around the world as a young man."

- "I will receive the Nobel Prize someday."

High ideals for a little peasant boy who had almost been stomped to death by the Japanese soldiers and whose

sidered almost inferior—is a female Korean.

Biblical Theology

Equally important in the foundation of the church is Cho's emphasis on Bible teaching. He is not only an outstanding theologian who understands the Scriptures; he is also a communicator of extraordinary ability. His preaching is Bible-centered.

Cho's preaching is enhanced by his understanding of Western humor as well as the more subtle Oriental way. He laughs easily, is dramatic in his preaching, but deeply serious when it comes to spiritual truth. He believes the theology of the Bible is worthless unless it is translated into present action—complete with miracles and healings.

Cho's theology is reflected in his congregation, many of whom have memorized much of the Scripture. Every leader in his church—indeed, most of his church members—not only speak in tongues but have been used in healing miracles.

The humor of this is not lost to Cho who tries to look deadpan when telling that many of the world's foremost evangelical leaders who are impressed by size are forced to accept the "tongues package" as part of the success secret.

Cho says the ministry of the church is three-fold:

- "Foremost, I would want anyone who comes in contact with our church to develop total confidence in the Lord's three-fold blessing reflected in 3 John 2. It is God's desire that we prosper spiritually, physically, and financially.

- "Secondly, I would hope that each one would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. In the Christian life it is vital that we continually be Spirit-led.

- "And last, we Christians are responsible to carry the message of the gospel to others."

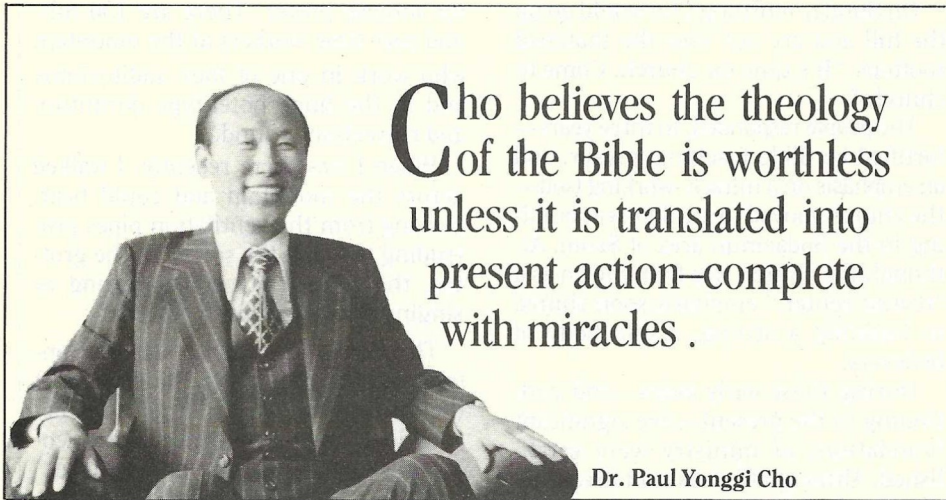
Evangelism

Without the fifth foundation stone of evangelism in the framework of Cho's church, the other four would have limited purpose.

During the first six months of 1981, over 52,000 people committed their lives to Jesus Christ during the Sunday worship services. Of that number seven out of ten were accompanied to church by their neighborhood cell group leader.

Cho does not "stack the deck" when it comes to numbers. These new Christians who want to join the church must go through a strict examination before they are accepted.

The new Christian first makes written application — filling out a form with



the neighborhood who want to form a cell group.

Cell groups with more than 12 members are usually divided in half, and the assistant cell leader becomes the head of the new group.

Home cell leaders are basically "carrier teachers." They attend one of three identical Wednesday training sessions and carry the Bible lesson they learn to the members of their group. Leaders are further trained in semiannual three-day conferences, in monthly sectional meetings, and in informal meetings with their section heads.

After each meeting the cell leader must submit a written report with the offering taken.

Vision for the Future

The third foundational principle for growth established by Pastor Cho in his early ministry was the necessity of vision on the part of leadership.

As a young student he was influenced by the writings of the German philosopher Hermann Hesse. In *Demian*, Hesse had written: "You can achieve anything if you desire it passionately enough." Cho caught this vision—that if a person concentrates all his willpower on a certain end, he will receive it.

Hesse had also written that every healthy person must have a goal in life and that life must have content. At an early age Cho had written his own goals

future wife had sneaked through the DMZ from North Korea to escape communism.

Cho's concept of vision has been passed on to his followers. Many of them are now achieving the impossible by "seeing and believing"—which Cho candidly admits is what faith really is.

A friend of Cho's tells the story of the young pastor at the Full Gospel Central Church who had a vision for a large Korean church in New York City. He took a map of New York City and for weeks—sometimes hours at a time—sat staring at the map. All this time he fasted and prayed.

The man's wife, wondering if her husband was mentally ill, contacted Cho. Cho went to see the young pastor. The man pointed at the map, to an intersection of two streets in downtown New York.

"After weeks of praying I can now see the church," he said. He then described to Cho what faith said would happen on that corner.

Cho laughed with joy and joined the man in prayer.

Today a thriving Korean church is on that spot—the result of a literal vision.

Similar stories abound at the Central Church. For instance, the largest protestant church in Japan is the result of a similar vision. The pastor—in a land where women have long been con-

details of familial and personal information — complete with photographs. That form is kept for three months, during which the applicant is visited in his home at least three times by a member of the pastoral staff, must participate in the Sunday services and cell meetings, and must show evidence of a consistent Christian walk. At the end of that period the applicant is endorsed and his membership recorded.

However, membership is for one year only. Each January all members are reevaluated. Inactive members are removed from the files.

Despite these rigid requirements, the church continues to reach both peasants and national leaders. Many high-ranking military officers and government leaders have renounced their old Oriental religions and are active members of the church.

Evangelism, for Cho, only begins in Korea. His vision, his burden, is for the world. Himself a convert because of missionaries to Korea, Cho is now sending missionaries throughout the world.

The Full Gospel Central Church sent out its first foreign missionaries in 1972. Work is now established in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. Ethnic Bible schools are now being established in each area. At last count there were more than 100 full-time, seminary-trained missionaries sponsored by the church. The goal for 1984 is 400—meaning they will be sending out more missionaries than most major denominations.

To facilitate the foreign mission outreach, a ten-story World Mission Center was dedicated in 1977. Much of the prayer at Fasting Prayer Mountain is directed toward the United States and other missionary fields.

During the last several years Cho has traveled extensively throughout the world, conducting evangelistic crusades and healing meetings and sponsoring seminars for Church Growth International. CGI teaches the principles of church growth using the Seoul church as the prime example. Cho asked Dr. John Hurston,* former Assemblies of God missionary who has worked closely with him behind the scenes since the church began, to be the executive director. CGI has held more than 115 seminars, directly influencing more than 50,000 pastors and lay leaders in 40 nations.

Additional mission and evangelistic outreach is conducted through a mas-

sive book and tape ministry, plus a new TV outreach into the United States headed by former PTL Network executive, Bob Manzano.

Because of Cho's evangelistic emphasis, the church has experienced miraculous growth while at the same time overcoming pressing problems.

In 1972 the church, growing at astronomical speed, built a 10,000-seat auditorium with accompanying buildings on Yodio Island in the Han River near the government headquarters. A financial crisis was averted at this time when the church members began to sacrifice to overcome the debt.

In *Dream Your Way to Success* (Bridge Publishers, Plainfield, NJ) Nell Kennedy relates some of the episodes that delivered the church from its financial crisis. Cho and his wife Grace had literally given all they had to help with the finances, but money was still needed to complete the building.

"One Sunday a woman in her eighties

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came making her way steadily to the altar and handed the pastor an old rice bowl, a well-used pair of chopsticks, and a spoon. 'I want to do something too,' she said, 'but I have no money except a little pension to keep me going. This is all I have—this old rice bowl, a pair of chopsticks, and a spoon. I want to give it all to the Lord's work to help somebody somewhere to know the truth about life. I've decided I can eat out of cardboard with my fingers.'

"Oh, Grandmother, I can't accept this from you. (Grandmother is the customary and polite way of addressing aging women even when they are not related by family ties.) It's too much. I know you and I know it's all you have! You need these things to eat your everyday meals.

In some places people own a Sunday set of dishes as well as an everyday set, but I know this is your only rice bowl. I just can't take it.'

"She began to cry. 'You have to take it, pastor. If Jesus were here, He would take it. I know I can't help much, but it's all I have and I want to give something.'

"Just then a businessman sprang to his feet. 'Pastor! I want to buy those three things!' Tears welled up in his eyes and his voice broke. He paid almost \$30,000 for the rice bowl, chopsticks, and spoon.

"People began selling their houses and moving into small apartments. The pastor's parents moved from Pusan to the church apartments at Yoido, along with over 60 other families in the church. Many young couples decided to give a year's salary and live by faith.

"Life savings toward a child's education were brought in as parents committed the matter to God and taught their children also to look to God for their futures....Children of all ages learned the stark reality of seed-planting. This did not involve piling seeds of money up and watching them accumulate in a savings account book, but it involved planting them in the ground for God.

"Together they were able to pay off the loans and finish building the church and apartments. The first man who was invited to preach in the new sanctuary was Billy Graham, in 1972."*

Almost 100 new churches have been started even while the big Full Gospel Central Church was growing. The membership statistics of these churches, which almost equals the membership of the Central Church, is not listed in the statistic sheet. However, despite this constant "giving away" of members the statistics of the Central Church are staggering.

● **ATTENDANCE:** There are seven Sunday services with an average attendance of 18,000 at each service, including those in chapels served by closed-circuit TV. Services are at 7, 9, and 11 a.m. and at 1, 3, 5, and 7 p.m. Each service lasts 90 minutes, which allows a mere 30 minutes for the church to empty and refill. Cho usually preaches at five of the services. There are seven choirs of more than 100 voices each—with a full orchestra at each service. (It's like having seven Billy Graham crusades—each Sunday of the year.)

● **MEMBERSHIP:** 200,769 as of March 1982. (Growth rate is approximately one new member every seven minutes.)

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* Used by permission. Bridge Publishing, Plainfield, New Jersey. from *Dream Your Way to Success*.

*Dr. Hurston has now accepted the position of president of the Melodyland School of Theology in Anaheim, California.

Largest Pastorate

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- STAFF PASTORS: 210
- HOME GROUPS: 16,000
- DEACONS: 3,068 (including 110 senior deacons)
- DEACONESSES: 9,438
- ELDERS: 58

Elders must first have served as senior deacons, be at least 45 years old, have an unquestioned Christian walk, tithe, have been a cell group leader, and be proven in some specialized ministry. While Cho makes great use of women leaders, especially pastors, eldership is reserved for men. The elders form the board of the church and approve all final decisions.

The church continues to grow. A new addition to the auditorium will increase seating to 25,000, meaning the total seating capacity including the TV chapels will be at 40,000. Yet despite the phenomenal growth, Cho himself remains something of an enigma. He is constantly under attack by both those in the world and opportunistic friends in the ministry.

His personal life has consisted of crisis after crisis. As a child he was almost killed by the Japanese occupation troops. He nearly died on several occasions of lung and blood disease. He has been constantly attacked by depression and fatigue.

During a quiet, intimate dinner at the home of mutual friends in Korea recently, he and his wife Grace opened their hearts to me.

We were discussing his latest crisis. A member of his congregation, under great pressure from his aged parents, had gone to a grave to participate in the pagan custom of ancestor worship. The man confessed to Cho and offered to withdraw from the church. Cho, who constantly and boldly preaches against the idol worship of Oriental religions, told the man he needed the church now more than ever.

"If a man gets drunk, you do not tell him to stay away from church until he sobers up," he said gently. "So I told the man to keep coming, that the Holy Spirit would give him the power to renounce his journey back into false religion."

The Korean Assemblies of God, however, took a dim view of Cho's stance. For a number of years the Full Gospel Central Church had put huge amounts of money into the denomination. They gave their building in Sodaemun to the denomination. But Cho has been aware of the "politics" behind the scenes and the petty jealousies gendered by the fact

his church is now twice the size of the rest of the denomination. In what Cho feels was the result of the long-standing jealousy on the part of some of the leaders, the matter came to a head when the denomination threatened to discipline him.

Cho told his elders he would resign if they felt he had done wrong. In the resulting show of unity the church withdrew from the denomination and is now proceeding as an independent body—wooed by everyone from a Methodist denomination to representatives from the Southern Baptist Convention to join them.

Cho, however, is aware others need him far more than he needs them. For the present he feels he can be far more effective ministering from a non-denominational base. In fact, he has found many new doors swinging open in

"I still do not understand. Christ teaches us to be honest and truthful. I thought American Christians believed that as much as the Koreans."

America and the rest of the world since he left the denomination.

Cho loves and respects Americans. At every service there is a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving for the U.S. military troops who are helping the South Korean army guard its borders against the ever-present threat of militant communism.

At the same time, he has been deeply disappointed by American opportunists who have taken advantage of his gentle acceptance. For example, a pentecostal minister from the West Coast sold him \$40,000 worth of TV equipment which turned out to be used, corroded junk. When Cho questioned him about the worthless goods the minister had unloaded on him, he was told, "Here in America we preach *caveat emptor*—'Let the buyer beware.' You should have looked at the merchandise before you bought it."

When I asked Cho how he felt about

the matter, he responded with upraised palms, "The money is God's, not mine. Now the man must answer to God."

Cho says his deepest disappointment, however, came when his American book publisher defaulted on promised payments for royalties. Cho's books, "best-sellers" in America, had generated a lot of money for the publisher. But the royalties were not put in an escrow account and were used to pay other bills the publisher had incurred. Thus when it came time to pay the Korean pastor the more than \$20,000 due on book sales, there was no money.

Cho contacted the publisher and was told money was on the way. Within a few days Cho received a check for \$7,000. It bounced when he tried to cash it.

Cho shakes his head and says, "I still do not understand. Christ teaches us to be honest and truthful. I thought American Christians believed that just as much as the Koreans."

I was deeply touched by Cho's genuine forgiveness. I was also deeply shamed to belong to a race of "round-eyes" who had taken advantage of such a gentle man.

It is impossible, and a bit presumptuous, to try to evaluate either cause or effect when it comes to something like the Seoul Full Gospel Central Church.

Why Korea? Why Yonggi Cho? There are too many suppositions. Too many "perhaps" answers. All I can do is report the phenomenon—and that not too accurately.

But some basic editorial conclusions can—and should—be drawn.

In order to evaluate the Korean phenomenon we are also forced to evaluate ourselves. For one cannot ask the question "Why?" in regards to Korea without asking "Why not?" when it comes to the United States.

Cho's (and John Hurston's) experience with Church Growth International has revealed that most American pastors are genuinely interested in church growth. They want to pastor a large church. The reasons behind this are varied—all the way from the boost to the uncrucified ego to the fulfillment of the command of Christ to win the lost. But so far few American churches (in fact, none that I know of) have incorporated all the spiritual principles necessary to bring the spiritual results.

Fighting my own cynicism of the "American way," and still scarred by years of being part of a denomination which equated numerical growth with success (and the lack of it with failure), I have tried to fairly and objectively evaluate what I have learned in Korea.



PHOTO BY KAREN HURSTON

Much of the life of Seoul's Full Gospel Central Church manifests itself through the "cell" groups. When the group becomes too large, it is split, and the assistant cell group leader takes the new group.

I do not believe numerical growth should ever be a goal. The old "Let's-have-1,000-in-Sunday-school" gimmick is unworthy of the Man who went to the cross for our sins. Numerical growth, however, *will be the inevitable result* of a leader and a church who believe God for the impossible. The world is starving for someone to exhibit the attributes of God. When these are revealed in the life of a shepherd—and in the corporate body of the church—the world will beat down the doors to get in. That I believe.

I also believe that Yonggi Cho has incorporated in his own life and the life of his church at least four spiritual principles which are bound to produce growth—quantitative as well as qualitative. These are (1) prayer, (2) utilization of women, (3) brokenness, and (4) unlimited faith.

Prayer

Prayer and fasting stand at the heart of all being accomplished in Korea. While Cho utilizes many important methods, including the use of small groups for the purpose of evangelism and pastoral care, fasting and prayer remain the power behind it all. Cho and his companions in Church Growth International have conducted many church growth seminars in America. Inevitably the American

pastors then rush home to put the "Jethro Principle" into practice. But small groups without the foundational emphasis in righteous living and fasting and prayer produce nothing but stacks of triplicate files and increased individualism.

In fact, I wonder whether the use of small groups will do much more than provide wholesome fellowship and increased administration until a church has disciplined itself in prayer and fasting.

Utilization of Women

Despite Cho's world-wide popularity, those closest to him—in fact, Cho himself—all point out that his mother-in-law, Sister Choi, is a key to the church's dynamism.

In Korea the women always walk behind their husbands. But if you buy one of those little carved statues of the Korean family at a gift shop, you'll discover the wife is always carved taller than her husband. (A fact many American GI's who have married humble little Korean girls often learn the hard way.) While there is submission, there is also great strength.

The women leaders in the Korean church no way resemble the strong, sometimes overpowering, women charismatic teachers of America. While two-thirds of Cho's leaders are women, these

pastors and leaders remain submissive to the male eldership of the church. They have learned you do not have to be rebellious to be strong.

That is the reason many say Sister Choi is the real power behind the leadership. She never pushes. She prefers to withdraw to her prayer grotto, talk with God, and let Him push the men around.

While I was visiting the church, I saw her only twice. Both times she was shuffling quietly from one room to another on slippered feet. Since she speaks no English, she only smiled, then bowed her head and shuffled on. But there surrounded this bent little woman the aura of God.

Brokenness

Between 1910 and 1945 Korea suffered untold brokenness under the cruel Japanese occupation forces. The entire nation became a seed which fell into the ground and died. Resurrected at the end of World War II, it began to bud. But additional pruning—back to the roots—came in the Korean War when what was left of the nation was destroyed, including the entire city of Seoul.

Now Korea, the Land of the Morning Calm, is blossoming. Seoul, with a population of almost nine million, is one of the largest cities in the world—rising

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like a splendid phoenix from the ashes of war and oppression. The Full Gospel Central Church is only one of the phenomena of modern Korea. But it is certainly the most important.

Yet the nation is still a nation under siege. When Pastor Cho leads his people in prayer at the Sunday services, he cries out to God with great earnestness to hold back the communist army—700,000 heavily armed troops—which is poised at the DMZ just 27 miles north of the city. The city is a fortress, surrounded by active mine fields, anti-tank

barricades, artillery and rocket bunkers—all pointing north. The threat of annihilation is ever-present.

America, on the other hand, is a nation which has never heard the rumble of artillery, felt the devastation of bombs, or seen the flashing bayonet of the invader. We are a people of fast foods, instant success, and unlimited wealth. We are not a people of patience, humility, and brokenness. The one word which characterizes Americans is *pride*. It even characterizes the church. We are proud of our attendance, our offerings, our high steeples.

How different, then, to be in the largest church ever raised in this history of Christendom and find all the leaders, in-

stead of pounding their chests, walking with bowed heads and moist eyes.

Instead of "See what we have done," they say softly, "This is the work of the Lord."

Thus, I wonder, if it is possible in the United States—this land of fierce independence which was birthed and never weaned from the spirit of rebellion—to experience here what is happening in Korea. For there is something in those wonderful people from the Land of the Morning Calm which provides a ready seed-bed for the gospel.

Can, I wonder, in our rocky soil of rebellion, in our briar-infested materialism, such a church ever grow?

The question raises another question.

Gathered in His Name

By Jamie Buckingham

What could I offer a people who were already soaring with the eagles?



Jamie Buckingham and Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho face the congregation of the Seoul Full Gospel Central Church. Seven times every Sunday the 10,000 seat auditorium is filled while an additional 8,000 watch each service on television.

I really didn't want to speak at the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul. Last year, on a similar visit to Korea as a guest of the U.S. Army, Pastor Cho asked me to sit on the platform and share a brief testimony. At that time I realized Koreans could communicate much better to Koreans than a fumbling American could.

But when I returned again this year—once again to minister to the 8th Army troops at Yongsan—both my host, Chaplain Curry Vaughan, and Pastor Cho insisted I preach at the 1 p.m. service.

I am not uncomfortable before large crowds, nor do I mind speaking through an interpreter. But I agonized over this experience. I felt totally unqualified. After all, what can you say to someone who

really *is* doing it better than anyone else in the world?

I remembered the Army chaplain last year—a full colonel—who referred to the Full Gospel Church as "Oh, *those* people." And I had just talked to a Baptist missionary who told me he had been in Korea three years and never attended a service at the Full Gospel Church, even though it was located less than a mile from his small congregation. "And," he added, "I probably never will, either."

Yet here I was on the platform—my earphone attached for the simultaneous translation—waiting my turn to encourage a churchful of Koreans, already soaring with the eagles, to stop using Americans as examples, because, sadly, too many are merely turkeys.

The service was already in progress as Pastor Cho, Chaplain Vaughan, and I emerged on the high stage overlooking the packed auditorium. We had just ascended three flights of stairs backstage from Pastor Cho's office and suddenly there we were, in front of 10,000 people and looking at another 8,000 seen in the bank of TV monitors that lined the stage.

An assistant pastor called the church to prayer. Back home we bow our heads. A few may pray in the Spirit, but always quietly. Sometimes there is an "Amen" at the close of the service.

Here I felt like a wood chip caught in a rushing river. Every voice was raised in loud supplication. It was like the "sound of many waters."

More than the sound, however, was

Does spiritual growth always have to be preceded by persecution?

I think not. For God's word about humbling ourselves, praying, seeking His face, and turning from our wicked ways still finishes with the promise of success. Persecution is necessary only if we do not first obey.

Unlimiting Faith

God is still searching for men—for churches—who will trust Him with everything. He is looking for men who will go out and cry above the rooftops, "It's time for church! Come to church!" He's looking for a people who will not limit Him in any way, who will believe it

is His will that the glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. He is looking for a church who will cooperate with the Holy Spirit in every facet—who have a vision big enough to believe an entire city can be won to Jesus and come under the authority of the Father.

Can it happen in America? Of course it can happen here. It can happen any place a man determines nothing is impossible with God and makes himself available to the Holy Spirit.

Some say the Korean church is a cultural, not a spiritual phenomenon. If that's so, how do we explain what has happened in the American culture of a

similar nature? The Billy Graham phenomenon? The Oral Roberts University and City of Faith phenomenon? The Christian Broadcasting Network phenomenon? Although the thrust in each case is different, there remains the striking similarity of men—Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson—who, like Yongji Cho, believed with God for the impossible and stood fast in difficult times as it came to pass.

When we believe—any of us—as they believe, then it shall happen here as it has happened there. ➤

Charisma's Editor-at-Large, Jamie Buckingham is a widely-traveled and well-received author and speaker. He has recently returned from Korea where he met with Dr. Cho.

the intensity of the faces. Agonizing before God, waving their arms in gestures as though assailing the gates of hell, the vast auditorium was a sea of sound and motion.

Suddenly I, too, was caught in the rushing river of prayer. Shouting praises, beseeching God with an intensity I'd seldom known in public prayer, I was no longer on the bank—I was in mid-stream.

Then a bell—the type used by a hotel bell captain—was rung by the leader. It was a signal to move on to other things. The sound and motion subsided. Once again the river was calm.

The people were standing now, speaking in mighty unison. Again they were accenting their phrases with strong gestures as one would when emphasizing a point in a sermon.

"It's the Apostle's Creed." Curry almost had to shout to be heard even though he was standing beside me. "Join in," he invited.

I did. In English. Punching my phrases with my arms as I chanted. "The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven. . . ." Never has the old creed been said with such vigor.

Then the choir again. The soloist had the vocal range and quality of Beverly Sills.

"She's one of Korea's greatest singers," Paster Cho whispered. "Yet she's in the choir every Sunday."

I turned to Curry. "What's that other sound? Do they have an artificial waterfall below the platform?"

"It's the people whispering prayers as the choir sings," he said. "Look at their lips."

Everything is accompanied by prayer.

Before the service, in Pastor Cho's study, we had been told of a bomb threat

on the services that Sunday. Special police had been posted throughout the congregation. I could spot them. They were the ones not praying—looking out over the congregation like the President's Secret Service agents at a convention.

Cho chuckled. "Those men have already had to sit through three services.

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There are 40 of them here. Maybe some will accept Christ."

He pointed to a handsome man on the end of the first row, his weapon bulging under his three-piece suit. "That one's a Buddhist."

The beautiful young woman next to him was sharing her Bible. He had no choice but to follow the Scripture reading—and join in the hymns.

It was my turn. I spoke in English as the TV cameras recorded my message and other cameras carried it to the chapels. Cho interpreted, hopefully improving on my message as he spoke.

We sang again. "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise. . . ." I put aside my English and

sang in tongues. Why not?

The usherettes, dressed beautifully in pink traditional Korean dresses, trotted forward to receive the offering.

"Korean Christians tithe," Cho pointed out as the choir sang again. I didn't answer.

A few announcements then suddenly we were singing "The Lord's Prayer." It was accompanied by harps, violins, and rolling timpani. My voice, caught in the mighty rush of other voices mingled with the trumpets and cornets, confessed, "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. . . ."

The service was over. The simultaneous translation was saying: "The church is jammed. Be careful. If you drop something on the floor, you may not get it back. Be careful as you leave. . . ."

I was rushed down the back steps away from the crowd and into the pastor's office again. A man handed me an envelope with an audio cassette, video cassette, black and white 5x7 photos of me preaching, copies of Cho's books, and a generous honorarium. "That's chewing gum money," Cho laughed easily, referring to our American habits.

Our wives appeared. We sipped half a cup of tea, and it was time to go. Another service was about to begin.

Outside, caught in the almost 40,000 people coming and going, I realized something. These people didn't come to hear me. They had no idea who I was. Nor did they come to hear Yonggi Cho. They didn't care who was preaching. They came to worship.

Cho had prayed before the service that I might not just preach but that I might also learn something to take back home to America.

I did.

Oh, how I did. ➤