

World Mission Society Church of God

By Steve Matthews

Founder: Ahn Sahng-hong (1918-1985)

Current Leader: General Pastor Joo-cheol Kim

Founded: 1964, South Korea

Headquarters: *The Head Office* is in Bundang, South Korea. *The New Jerusalem Temple* is the central church of the WMSCOG where God the Mother dwells, and is also located in Bundang.

Membership: The main English website claims a membership of 2 million members.¹ Another WMSCOG website claims that they are “a Christian non-denominational church with more than 2,700 locations and 2.7 million registered members in 175 countries.”² As with a number of other groups, some of those who are familiar with the WMSCOG suspect that these numbers are inflated.

Other Names: The Church of God, the WMSCOG, the Elohist, the Mother God followers.

Authoritative Writings: The Bible is held to be the Word of God. The “Truth Books” are made up of six books written by Ahn Sahng-hong and one written by the General Pastor Joo-Cheol Kim and are published by their *Melchizedek Publishing Company*, as are other books by the General Pastor. The WMSCOG is very strict about their policy of refusing to allow those outside their church to own these books.

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen a sharp increase in the rise of controversial Asian sects and new religious movements that have rapidly grown largely without the notice of many in the Christian world. Many of these groups now boast millions of members and include Iglesia Ni Cristo,³ Soka Gakkai International, Happy Science, and the World Mission Society Church of God (WMSCOG). Quite similar to the Unification Church,⁴ of Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the WMSCOG also claims a South Korean returned Messiah, along with a female counterpart who functions in a role as a co-savior.

In a short amount of time the WMSCOG has become a very controversial group being called a cult by multiple groups ranging from *People Magazine*⁵ to the NBC's *Today Show*.⁶ Members of the WMSCOG are often extremely zealous and fiercely dedicated to their church and its teachings, spending huge amounts of their time attending their many weekly meetings and preaching, be it door to door, on college campuses, at malls, or other places. Their aggressive recruiting efforts, along with a very active Internet presence, has allowed the group to see continued worldwide growth. Devoted members are continuously creating websites and online videos as a way of reaching potential members.

The WMSCOG is extremely concerned with its public image to the outside world. In an effort to show a positive image members are encouraged to volunteer their time in civic duties such as blood drives, environmental cleanups, and disaster relief efforts. As a result of this charitable work the church has received various awards and commendations, and these awards received for this volunteerism are constantly touted by members and cited in their literature and on their websites.

HISTORY

Ahn Sahng-hong was born in a small village in South Korea in the winter of 1918 to Buddhist parents. It is reported that he grew up in a poor family and that he worked in a very difficult job breaking rocks. Shortly after the end of World War 2 he started attending a Seventh-day Adventist church and then was baptized into that church in 1948, but ended up being excommunicated in

1962 over growing doctrinal differences. Ahnsahnghong married Hwang Wonsun in 1958 and together they had three children. It was in 1964 that Ahnsahnghong established his own church which he would call *The Witnesses of Jesus Church of God*. As leader of this church Ahnsahnghong would write over two dozen books (the majority of which have not been published by the WMSCOG or even seen by most of its members) and see his church expand into several additional congregations. This new church would continue with the Saturday Sabbath teaching of the Seventh-day Adventists but would also add a number of its own teachings including the ideas that a reverence of the cross is idolatry, that Christmas is a holiday rooted in paganism, that women should wear veils over their heads while praying, and that Christians should keep the Passover and the other Old Testament feast days.

Shortly after Ahnsahnghong died following a stroke in 1985, his church split into two factions. This was a significant turning point in the movement's history. Within a month of Ahnsahnghong's passing, a small group of followers (which included Joo-cheol Kim and Zahng Gil-jah) arose and would begin to introduce radical new teachings that divided the church. This splinter group started to claim that Zahng Gil-jah was our Heavenly Mother and the female image of God, and even though Ahnsahnghong in his books and sermons never claimed to be God, they now claimed that he was Jesus Christ come again and God who had appeared in the flesh in the last days.

Ahnsahnghong's wife and children remained with the original church group, which became known as the *New Covenant Passover Church of God*⁷ (NCPCOG) and continues to pray in the name of Jesus. Ahnsahnghong's son Ahn Kwang-sup leads in the NCPCOG church today as an elder and speaks out against the WMSCOG, which he says has distorted his father's teachings.⁸ The NCPCOG also publishes many of Ahnsahnghong's books, which have never been available through the WMSCOG. The splinter group which broke off called themselves *The Witnesses of Ahn Sahng-hong Church of God* and now has become the WMSCOG.

Few groups in recent times have seen their history rewritten to the extent that one finds in the WMSCOG. From the recounting of their origins to changes in the wordings of their publications,⁹ to prophetic date settings followed by subsequent denials, the leadership of the WMSCOG is incomparable to other religious movements. As an example of this is that it has been a common practice of the church to have members return previous editions of newly revised books when they are released.

Apart from the doctrinal deviations embraced by the WMSCOG, there are numerous other serious other problems that come up when looking at their past. Multitudes of former members report that the WMSCOG repeatedly made false predictions about the end of the world, which was supposed to come in 1988, 1999, and more recently in 2012.¹⁰ Another devastating problem is that Ahnsahnghong himself started in his book *“Problem with the New Jerusalem, the Bride, and Women's Veils”* that the idea of a Heavenly Mother was delusional and a false teaching.¹¹

BELIEFS

The WMSCOG doctrine of God can best be described as a unique theology. The group asserts that the Hebrew word for God is “Elohim,” which is a plural noun and this shows us that there is more than one God. According to the WMSCOG, the two Gods revealed in the Bible are God the Father and God the Mother, and these two Gods have recently come to our world and were born in South Korea as Ahnsahnghong and as Zahng Gil-jah. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity has been redefined in a modalistic sense where there are not three separate, coexisting, divine Persons in the Godhead, but instead as one divine Person who reveals Himself at different times as the Father, or the Son, or as the Holy Spirit. Redemptive history is divided up into three ages – the age of the Father (the Old Testament), the age of the Son (the New Testament), and the age of the Holy Spirit (our modern time). The Savior has a different name in each age, and mankind can only be saved by calling on the correct name for that age. In Old Testament times one had to call on the name of Jehovah to be saved. In the New Testament age calling on the name of Jesus was the way of salvation, but today in the age of the Holy Spirit one can only be saved by calling on the name of Christ Ahnsahnghong. In this age, we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and Christ Ahnsahnghong.

Another central belief of the WMSCOG is that Ahnsahnghong is *Second Coming Christ* prophesied to come again, this time from South Korea. Followers maintain that He is the Christ because He preached and restored the New Covenant Passover, which is the sign of salvation and which will guarantee protection from the impending plagues that are coming upon the earth. He is also the fulfillment of numerous prophecies including the fulfillment of the reign of David, the

prophecy of the order of Melchizedek, the Last Adam, and the coming of the promised Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit.

Adherents hold God the Mother in a central tenet of their faith. This teaching presents Heavenly Mother as the New Jerusalem, the Last Eve, and the bride of Christ from whom flow the waters of eternal life. The church believes that the Apostle Paul writes of her in Galatians 4:26 where he speaks of our mother who is “the Jerusalem above.” Only our Heavenly Mother can give us spiritual and eternal life. In order to be saved one must believe in and trust in both Ahnsahnghong and in Heavenly Mother.

The New Covenant Passover is one of “*seven feasts in three times*,” the sign of the true church, and is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and to receive eternal life. The importance of the Passover to members of this group should never be underestimated. The list of requirements for eternal life is long for the WMSCOG member – believing in Ahnsahnghong and Mother as Gods, keeping the Passover and all the other feasts, and being baptized with the correct formula. Many members would also include keeping the Sabbath, paying your tithes and offerings, attending the numerous meetings and studies on the Sabbath and throughout the week, and being involved in preaching work.

The WMSCOG has a number of other unique and unorthodox teachings. The church teaches that all of mankind once existed as angels in the kingdom of heaven prior to coming to earth and were sent to earth because of sin. Another belief is that in this age South Korea is now a spiritually chosen land. They also teach that Jesus was resurrected with a physical body but after returning to heaven He returned to His spiritual, non-physical form. After Christ returns in judgment, the physical universe shall pass away and all things shall return to a spiritual state, just as things were in the kingdom of heaven before the creation of the physical universe. Those who will be saved will one day become “creators” with the power to create people and worlds.

The WMSCOG teaches that the “us” and the “we” of Gen. 1:26 and 27 are their gods Ahnsahnghong and New Jerusalem Heavenly Mother, instead of dialogue between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Members may be very surprised to learn that both of their supposed deities were once married and had children. Another challenge for the WMSCOG is that Ahnsahnghong was raised as a Buddhist (a religion that says there is no God), and then became a Seventh-day Adventist (another religion which they would say contains false teachings) at the age of 30. Christians may point out the fact that numerous important doctrines and practices of the WMSCOG seemed to have been borrowed directly from Seventh-day Adventism (Sabbath observance, Jesus is Michael the Archangel, foot-washing, etc.).

CLAIMS OF ABUSE

Although the WMSCOG has only operated in the United States for a short time, stories abound by former members and family members who all give similar reports about various types of control and abuse within the group. Members are expected to divide huge amounts of their time every week between attending meetings and preaching activities, and former members recount that much attention is paid to collecting money from members during Sabbath meetings and at the various feasts held throughout the year. Heartbroken families frequently share that after their children are baptized into the WMSCOG they break ties with and become distant from their loving families. Distrust, suspicion, fear, and paranoia seem to be instilled in many members of this church which can result in breakdowns of all relationships outside of “Zion” (e.g. God’s true church which keeps the feasts). Unlike most other churches, *only* those who have been baptized as members of this group are allowed to purchase church published books.¹²

Former members have reported that when beginning to study with the WMSCOG, the identity of our Heavenly Mother is initially deliberately withheld from them. It is only after several studies that the student is taught that the universe was created by a woman living in South Korea. As in other controversial groups, ex-members share similar experiences of being discouraged from talking to people who have left the church, from reading critical literature or looking at critical websites (this is sometimes called “forbidden fruit”), from visiting other (Babylonian) churches, or asking difficult questions to their leaders.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul gave many warnings about the coming of false Christs (2 Cor. 11:3-4; Matt. 24:4, 23-27). As noted earlier; the original church of Ahnsahnghong which became the

NCPCOG saw him as an important messenger who came to reinstitute the Passover, but they *never* recognized Ahnsahnghong as “Second Coming Christ” and a God to be worshipped and prayed to along with a Heavenly Mother. This teaching did not come about until after Ahnsahnghong’s passing by a small splinter group of his followers.

Members of the WMSCOG tend to be very zealous and have been told to think of mainstream Christianity as being completely corrupt, influenced by Satan, and polluted by pagan Babylonian beliefs. What they see to be very important beliefs, like the true Sabbath day and the importance and necessity of keeping the Passover and the feasts, have been removed from the gospel that Christ came to restore to the true church in the person of Ahnsahnghong. These beliefs ignore the Bible’s teaching that Jesus is the believers’ Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), Sabbath (Hebrews 3-4) and the only way to salvation (Acts 4:12). The same Jesus will return as the same person and in the same manner as His departure. At His ascension on the Mount of Olives, two men in clothed in white appeared saying, “this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:9-11).

When talking to members of the WMSCOG one quickly sees that the subjects of the Ahnsahnghong as Second Coming Christ, God the Mother, and the need to keep the Passover are their central and most important messages. The idea that two leaders of this church are gods who are to be worshipped and prayed to is completely contrary to the Bible’s teaching. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, it is clearly expressed that there is only one God (Deut. 32:39; Isa. 44:6, 8, 45:5-6, 21-22, 46:9; Rom. 3:30; Eph. 4:6) and that there is only one to whom believers should direct their prayers (1 Tim. 2:5). Witnessing to this particular group can prove challenging because of the limited resources that are available. However, there are sufficient materials to help the individual who desires to learn more about WMSCOG and share the gospel message with them.¹⁴

Notes

¹ “Introduction,” World Mission Society Church of God, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://english.watw.org/intro/introduction.asp>.

² “About Us,” WMSCOG US East Coast, accessed February 10, 2017, <https://www.wmschurhofgod.org/world-mission-society-church-of-god-about-us-religion/>.

³ A separate 4-page Profile has been published on Iglesia ni Cristo: Anne C. Harper, “Inglesia ni Cristo” *Profile Notebook*, Watchman Fellowship, Inc. (Arlington, Texas: 2002-2017). A complete Profile Notebook (over 500 pages) is available at www.watchman.org.

⁴ A separate 4-page Profile has been published on the Unification Church: Rick Branch, “Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity” *Profile Notebook*, Watchman Fellowship, Inc. (Arlington, Texas: 1993-2017). A complete Profile Notebook (over 500 pages) is available at www.watchman.org.

⁵ Chris Harris, “Former Members Allege New Jersey Church, South Korea-Based World Mission Society Church of God, is Actually a ‘Cult,’” *People*, December 10, 2015, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.people.com/article/former-members-call-south-korean-church-a-cult>.

⁶ Ronan Farrow, “When a little-known faith divides families,” *Today Show*, NBC News Digital, LLC. February 19, 2016, Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://www.today.com/video/when-a-little-known-faith-divides-families-626225731540>.

⁷ New Covenant Passover Church of God (official website) <http://www.ncpcog.co.kr/rb/>, English version: <http://www.ncpcog.net/eng/>.

⁸ “An Interview with The NCPCOG: Ahnsahnghong Believed The Idea Of A ‘Mother God’ To Be Delusional,” *Examining The World Mission Society Church of God*, August 13, 2011, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.examinethewmscog.com/archives/an-interview-with-the-ncpcog-ahnsahnghong-believed-the-idea-of-a-mother-god-to-be-delusional/>.

⁹ “Changes in the Green Book – Part 1 – Removal of ‘Second Coming’ References,” *Examining The World Mission Society Church of God*, May 26, 2012, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.examinethewmscog.com/archives/changes-in-the-green-book-part-1-removal-of-second-coming-references/> and “Changes in the Green Book – Part 2 – Removal of ‘Second Coming’ References,” *Examining The World Mission Society Church of God*,

May 30, 2012, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.examinethewmscog.com/archives/changes-in-the-green-book-part-2-removal-of-40-years-references/>.

¹⁰ “The WMSCOG’s Failed Doomsday Predictions of 1988, 1999, and 2012. What Will They Predict Next?,” *Examining The World Mission Society Church of God*, December 1, 2011, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://www.examinethewmscog.com/archives/the-wmscogs-failed-doomsday-predictions-1988-1999-2012-what-will-they-predict-next/>.

¹¹ In this book Ahnsahnghong harshly criticized a woman in his congregation who was claiming to be the New Jerusalem saying, “*This booklet was published to prevent troublemakers who misinterpret and behave fanatically, [and] explain the errors in the books that Um Sooin published ... women like Um Sooin have caused a great problem to arise with her corrupt ideas ... The Jerusalem in Heaven is Our Mother ... Um Sooin speaks as if she is out of her mind when she claims that the New Jerusalem is herself ... They use this passage to assert that Um Sooin is our mother who has come down from Heaven. ... How extremely scandalous is this? With this type of misguided delusion, she has become a false prophet and has attempted to gain power. Please think of what will become of her sin and the sin of those who follow after her ... The New Jerusalem which is written of in Revelation 21:1-4 ... is a spiritual building not a person. ... Nobody except someone who is not in their right state of mind can believe and follow after this. ... Because the interpretation of Um Sooin was made to match their claims, they have made these ridiculous interpretations.*” – See <http://ncpcog.co.kr/rb/home/b/0604/441>.

¹² For more documentation and examples for this section, see the collection of articles and media reports compiled here: “World Mission Society Church of God,” *ApologeticsIndex*, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/659-world-mission-society-church-of-god>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For an in-depth look at the beliefs of the WMSCOG visit www.examinethewmscog.com and <http://encountering-ahnsahnghong.blogspot.com/>. There are also two helpful books: *Our Mother Who Art Not IN Heaven* by Friberg J. Quinton and “Searching the Bible for Mother God” by Steve DiSebastian.



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