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What is the World Mission Society Church of God?

By Freddy Davis

Most people are familiar with many of the various religions, cults, and philosophies that exist in the world, but there are scores of others that come and go on a regular basis. New ones are popping up all over the world all the time.

Not too long ago, I had a chance conversation with someone sitting near me at a Christian concert. While we were waiting for the concert to begin, we started chatting and getting to know one another a little. In the conversation, he mentioned a cult group that one of his relatives had gotten caught up in called the *World Mission Society Church of God* (WMSCOG). I was not familiar with that group, so later I set out to find out something about it.

One of the great values of understanding worldview concepts is that it makes it easy to gain an understanding of the beliefs of virtually any faith group. This gives us the knowledge we need to not only understand them, but also to more effectively share Christ. Here, I will use the MarketFaith Ministries' approach to understanding other belief systems to not only share with you about this particular belief system, but to also demonstrate how to go about doing it yourself for other belief systems you might run into.

To do this, we will use the typical process we have created. It will include sharing its:

- Background and History
- Authority Source
- Worldview Category
- Worldview Beliefs
- Other Distinctive Beliefs and Practices
- Basic Information on How to Effectively Share a Witness for Christ

Background and History

The WMSCOG is a new religious movement that was founded by South Korean Ahn Sahng-hong. The main

church is located in Sunnam City near Seoul, South Korea. They currently claim to have anywhere from 3 million to 3.9 million members, worshipping in 7,500 to 7,800 churches in 175 countries worldwide (depending on which of their websites you look at). However, others estimate that their actual numbers are closer to 200,000 to 300,000. There is no official documentation to confirm the actual number. This church is considered the largest among the Christian new religious movements in Korea.

Ahn Sahng-hong was born in 1918 to Buddhist parents in Myeongdeok-ri, Korea. This was the period when Korea was under Japanese occupation. Later, he and his mother lived in Japan for nine years, but returned to Korea and settled in the town of Busan in 1946.

Ahn Sahng-hong later became a Seventh-day Adventist, being baptized into the church in 1954. He married Hwang Won-sun in 1958 and remained married to her until his death in 1985. They had three children: Ahn Kwang-sup (b. 1954); Ahn Myeong-seon (b. 1957); and Ahn Chang-jun (b. 1959). His wife died in 2008 and the couple are now buried together in Seokgye Cemetery in Yangsan-si, Korea.

At some point, Ahn Sahng-hong came to believe that the Seventh Day Adventist church, and Christianity in general, had become corrupted. He then felt led by God to reconstitute it based on the same truths of the early church. In particular he came to believe that there was a need to celebrate the Passover, and that the use of the cross as a Christian symbol and the celebration of Christmas were both practices of pagan origin. In March 1962, these disputes led Ahn to be excommunicated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with a handful of his followers.

So, in 1964, he founded a new church movement in Busan, South Korea, calling it the *Church of God*. There

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were 13 branches when he died in 1985.

Following Ahn Sahng-hong's death, Kim Joo-cheol was named successor. Under his leadership, eleven of the thirteen churches formed a council and formally affirmed the two major doctrines that currently characterize the church: 1) that Ahn Sahng-hong was the second coming of Christ, and 2) Zahng Gil-jah was God the Mother. At that time, the headquarters of the church was also moved to Seoul. Additionally, they changed the church's name to *Witnesses of Ahn Sahng-hong Church of God*.

Later, in 1997, a non-profit organization was established called the *World Mission Society Church of God* for the purpose of registering and managing the organization's assets. Generally today it goes by that name.

Zahng Gil-jah, for her part, was a long time member of the WMSCOG. She was baptized into Ahn Sahng-hong's church in 1969. At that time she was married to Jae Hoon Kim and the couple had two children. Seemingly, her involvement in Ahn Sahng-hong's church caused problems in her marriage that ultimately led to divorce. After that, she never remarried and, as of this writing, continues on as God the Mother and an active part of the church. Currently Kim Joo-cheol is the administrative leader of the church with Zahng Gil-jah the doctrinal authority.

At the council when Ahn Sahng-hong was declared to be the second coming of Christ, Zahng Gil-jah was named his spiritual bride and given the title God the Mother (this in spite of the fact that Ahn Sahng-hong remained married to his own wife until he died, and was never in a personal relationship with Zahng Gil-jah).

After Ahn Sahng-hong's death, there were two of the thirteen churches that disagreed with the majority decision concerning Ahn Sahng-hong and Zahng Gil-jah. These split off to follow Ahn's widow and three children to

form their own group, called *Jesus Christ's New Covenant Passover: Church of God* (NCPCCOG).

Authority Source

The WMSCOG purports to be a Christian church, and claims that the Bible is its authority source. However, that is only true to a point. Much like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science, while they claim the Bible, their interpretation of the Bible has other sources. Jehovah's Witnesses interpret the Bible based on the dictates passed down from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. In the case of Christian Science, the Bible must be interpreted based on the teachings of its founder, Mary Baker Eddy. In each case, the interpretations are a far cry from what the Bible actually teaches.

The teachings of the WMSCOG are based primarily on the writings of Ahn Sahng-hong. He wrote numerous books detailing his beliefs. Among the most prominent are:

- **The Mystery of God and the Spring of the Water of Life** - This book delves into Ahn Sahng-hong's interpretations of biblical prophecies, including his views on the end times and the significance of specific dates.
- **The Bridegroom Was a Long Time in Coming, and They All Became Drowsy and Fell Asleep** - This work further explores Ahn Sahng-hong's interpretations of biblical prophecies, including his views on the end times and the concept of the "Bridegroom."
- **The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ** - This book discusses the relationship between the Old Testament Law and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament.
- **Visitors from the Angelic World** - This work explores themes related to angels and the spiritual realm.
- **The Last Plagues and the Seal of God** - This book focuses on Ahn Sahng-hong's interpretations of biblical prophecies regarding the "last plagues" and the "seal of God."

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Additionally, following Ahn Sahng-hong's death in 1985, the majority faction of the church adopted two new doctrines asserting that Ahn Sahng-hong was the Second Coming of Christ, and Zahng Gil-jah was God the Mother.

Worldview Category

Based on the fact that the WMSCOG holds as a core belief that the God of the Bible exists, it is a theistic belief system. However, since it interprets the Bible based on non-biblical authority sources, it falls into the worldview category of Non-biblical Theism and is a Christian cult.

Worldview Beliefs

To get at the worldview beliefs of any given belief system, we must answer three worldview questions:

- Who is God?
- What is man?
- What is salvation and how does a person achieve it?

So, how does the WMSCOG answer these three questions?

Who Is God?

The WMSCOG claims to believe in a dualistic view of God comprised of both a male and female image. Their belief asserts that God is comprised of God the Father and God the Mother. They arrive at this belief by interpreting biblical passages like Genesis 1:26-27 and Revelation 22:17 to mean that there also exists a female image of God. They refer to this female image as "God the Mother," and have somehow identified her as Zahng Gil-jah. She is an elderly woman from South Korea who is, as of this writing, still living.

At the same time, they also believe in the Trinity, but based on their own unique interpretation. The way they arrive at their belief is by interpreting the Hebrew word "Elohim" (the plural form of the word God) to mean that God is expressed in more than one person.

Taking it a step deeper, the WMSCOG has a unitarian view of God rather than the one God in three persons understanding of the Christian faith. While they affirm the existence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, they believe that the three are one and the same God, and consider that He merely plays three different roles with three different names and appearances.

To describe their concept, they use the illustration of water. They reason that while the appearance of H₂O, and even its name, changes in its different states, it remains the same chemical compound. In the same way, God the Father (Jehovah), God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit are, in essence, one and the same God, and are not a Trinity in the sense understood in trinitarian theology.

What Is Man?

The WMSCOG believes, based on their interpretation of the Bible, that humans are created in the image of God. However, their understanding of that image consists of both God the Father and God the Mother. This is also the source of the two genders in humanity.

In particular, they begin with the teaching found in Genesis 1:26-27 of humans being created in God's image. At this point it may seem to correspond to a traditional biblical understanding. However, they specify their belief further by interpreting certain New Testament passages in non-traditional ways that include both male and female elements. They support this with New Testament passages taken out of context.

For instance, Galatians 4:26 reads: *But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.* This verse is actually an illustration about Abraham's two sons, Ishmael (born of a slave woman) and Isaac (born of a free woman). In context, it illustrates the difference between being under the law and being under grace. The WMSCOG takes this, however, to be a reference to God the Mother.

Additionally, Revelation 21:2, 9 and 22:17 speak of “*the Spirit and the Bride.*” Christian theology understands the “Bride” to be the church. The WMSCOG interprets it to mean that one aspect of God is the “Bride,” and this bride is God the Mother. This is also the origin of the doctrine that Zahng Gil-jah is the spiritual bride of Ahn Sahng-hong.

What Is Salvation?

The WMSCOG believes salvation is achieved through faith in Ahn Sahng-hong, whom they believe to be the Second Coming of Christ (thus is God). They interpret biblical prophecies about the Second Coming as having been fulfilled by Ahn Sahng-hong, who restored the truth of God’s laws including Passover, the Sabbath, and the Ten Commandments. They also believe that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one and the same, with Ahn Sahng-hong embodying all three. Therefore, they conduct prayers in his name instead of Jesus Christ.

Beyond that, they believe in God the Mother, the necessity of keeping the New Covenant Passover, and certain other laws they believe were restored by Ahn Sahng-hong. Further, they believe that people’s souls pre-existed in heaven before being sent to earth in order to seek forgiveness for sins committed while in heaven. The background for these beliefs include:

- Ahn Sahng-hong’s reason for Christ’s second coming was to restore the New Covenant truths that were lost or altered after the early church period. Recognizing and receiving Ahn Sahng-hong as the Savior of this age is a necessary part of salvation, and they pray in his name.
- Just as physical life comes from a physical mother, spiritual life and eternal life are received through God the Mother.
- Human souls pre-existed as angels in heaven who had committed sins there. Their sinning led to their expulsion to Earth. Life on earth, then, is an opportunity to seek forgiveness and return to heaven.
- Certain actions and obedience to the requirements of the church are necessary elements of salvation. People must be obedient to the New Covenant laws, which includes observance of the Sabbath and certain designated feasts.

Other Distinctive Beliefs and Practices

In addition to the beliefs concerning Ahn Sahng-hong as the second coming of Christ and Zahng Gil-jah being God the Mother, there are several other distinctive beliefs of the WMSCOG .

Observance of Sacred Assemblies

The WMSCOG has a particular emphasis on observing specific Old Testament feasts. They believe that God established seven annual Feasts as a means of giving His people the forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit. Each feast is believed to contain a particular special blessing, and by observing them, people are able to remain connected to God and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Although there are seven Feasts of God that are scheduled throughout the year, they are divided into three different seasons. As such, the Feasts are often described by the church as the seven feasts in three times. These feasts give us insight to the work Christ would carry out on the earth from His first coming until the end of times.

- Feast of Unleavened Bread includes *New Covenant Passover* and *Unleavened Bread*.
- Feasts of Weeks includes *Resurrection Day* and *Pentecost*.
- Feast of Tabernacles includes *Feast of Trumpets*, *Day of Atonement*, and *Feast of Tabernacles*.

Eschatological Focus

While in the past they predicted particular end time dates, they now claim they don’t do that and never have. Still, the WMSCOG believes the end times are imminent.

Claims of New Revelation

The WMSCOG asserts that Ahn Sahng-hong delivered a new, divinely inspired message that goes beyond what is taught in the Bible.

Scriptural Context and Translation Issues

The WMSCOG often uses proof texts quoted out of context to make the Bible appear to support their doctrines when it actually does not.

Baptism is Required for Salvation

The WMSCOG believes that baptism is necessary for salvation and that God promised us numerous blessings in baptism. These include:

- entering the Kingdom of Heaven (John 3:5),
- receiving the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and
- becoming a child of God (Galatians 3:26).

They believe that the baptism through which we can receive all of God's promises must be performed according to the criteria Jesus left for us 2,000 years ago – in the three names of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Doomsday Prophecy

The WMSCOG predicted that the world would end in 1988 – 40 years after the independence of Israel in 1948. They cite Matthew 24:32–34 to support that prediction. When that didn't happen, they made a new prediction that it would end in 1999. When that didn't happen, they made another new prediction that it would end in 2012. Their current position is that those predictions were never made and that the church does not associate the end with a specific date.

Saturday Worship

The WMSCOG asserts that God commanded us to keep the Sabbath Day. While they recognize it as a day of rest, it is first and foremost a day to commemorate God who created the heavens and earth. As such, they consider it an essential part of the Christian faith to observe it, and believe God promises to bless all those who keep it.

According to the WMSCOG interpretation of the Bible, the day to worship God is Saturday. Based on their timeline, Christians observed the Sabbath Day from the time of Christ until A.D. 321 when Roman Emperor Constantine outlawed worship on Saturday and forced people to worship on Sunday.

The Origin of Our Soul

The WMSCOG believes that a fundamental component of faith is belief in the soul. They teach that understanding its origin and where it came from gives us insight into where we are going and why we must believe in Christ.

They reason that God created man using the dust of the ground, which represents the body, and the breath of life, which represents the soul. So, God gave us our soul. The WMSCOG believes our soul previously existed in Heaven before our spirit came to Earth and took on the human body, and will return to heaven following death.

Women Wear Veils During Worship

The WMSCOG teaches that women must wear a veil during worship in order for their worship to be acceptable to God. This practice is based on the teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:1.

How to Effectively Share a Witness for Christ

As a theistic belief system, people who are a part of the WMSCOG do not need to cross a worldview barrier to understand Christian concepts. They already believe in the existence of a transcendent creator God. So when sharing about faith in Christ, WMSCOG believers will already understand theistic worldview concepts. Thus, it should be possible to move right on to an explanation of the gospel itself.

One of the things that is true of all non-Christian theistic belief systems is that there will be problems related to either the reliability of its authority source(s), its history, or the logical structure of its theology. In the case of the WMSCOG, there are particular problems with its authority sources.

While the WMSCOG claims to get its beliefs from the Bible, that is not entirely true.

1. The WMSCOG filters its interpretation of the Bible through third party sources. Rather than interpret the Bible using regular hermeneutical (interpretive) principles, it bases its interpretations partially on the writings of Ahn Sahng-hong, and other parts on decisions that were made by the church leaders following Ahn Sahng-hong's death.
2. Various of Ahn Sahng-hong's teachings are also based on the theology of Seventh Day Adventism.
3. Beyond that, many of its doctrines promote a legalistic approach to salvation that are contrary to the biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
4. Another problem with WMSCOG is that the decisions about Ahn Sahng-hong being the second coming of Christ, and the implementation of the idea of God the Mother, were made up out of whole cloth by leaders who came after Ahn Sahng-hong.

Thus, an important part of sharing the gospel with members of the WMSCOG will involve comparing the teachings of the Bible to the doctrines of the church using the Bible.

Conclusion

The WMSCOG is a false religion, and its falsity can be demonstrated by comparing the teachings of the church with the teachings of the Bible. It promotes not only numerous strange teachings, but more importantly, salvation by works.

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