

## AN EAST-ASIAN REINTERPRETATION OF WESLEYAN ECCLESIOLOGY

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### *I. Introduction*

The East-Asian churches, specially Korea, Japan, and Taiwan(China), have not been growing much during the last two decades in comparison with other part of the world in the global Church of the Nazarene. One of the reasons for this seems to be ecclesiological disparity between governing system of East-Asian churches and the Biblical as well as postmodern evangelical ecclesiology. This paper considers that the East-Asian churches are in critical need of transforming the existing structure of denominational government for effective evangelism and church growth in this rapidly shifting epoch from modern to postmodern era. An ecclesiological model for reshaping is going to be extracted from reinterpretations of the Biblical and Wesleyan ecclesiology in relation to critical assessments of the postmodern evangelical churches.

As a practical example of the challenge, the five districts of Korean church were merged into one national district with several affirmative purposes in 2002. But the outcome of the merge was rather a pyramid type of centralized hierarchical system. The result has appeared actually in an opposite direction from the Biblical and postmodern evangelical understanding of the Church, which pertain to a form of self-effacing hierarchical service or servant leadership model. Japan and Taiwan seem to have similar challenges, which occasioned less effective development of the Church.

The method to approach to the issue is to do a brief overview of the history of Korea Nazarene church, and a critical analysis of ecclesiological structure of it will be attempted to search for effective *missio dei* primarily in Korea, and possibly Japan and Taiwan as well. The argument of this essay will be attempted in referring to the statement of ecclesiology and the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, and also Biblical and Wesleyan interpretation of the Church will be referentially considered. The thesis of this essay is to submit a model of organic and trans-hierarchical or post-hierarchical governing form of national districts in the East-Asian countries.

*II. East-Asian Challenges and Alternatives: A Case of National District in South Korea*

For the sake of searching God's effective mission as primary, those challenges of Korean church will be briefly identified; and that will entail a legitimate basis of doing critique of ecclesiological advancement of East-Asian church. According to the statement of ecclesiology of the Church of the Nazarene, "*God's mission in the world is primary, and we derive our mission from God, who formed a universe of vast proportions and, within nature and history, created a people to bear the divine image so that divine love might flourish.*"

Since the Korea Church of the Nazarene was established in 1948, the Church has grown up to five districts in accordance with various flourishing Christian movements. Yester-decade the five districts of the Church were merged into one national district, and the merge could be considered as a historical event in the mist of divisions and conflicts in many other denominations in Korea. The merge into one national district seems to be also an extraordinary occasion of cultural adaptation from a perspective of the global Church of the Nazarene.

Currently, the number of the merged Church is 291, and considering the length of history, the number of the Church is relatively moderate achievement in comparison with other denominations as well as other part of the world in the Church of the Nazarene. At this point a critical analysis on the last 10 years (2002-2012) of denominational endeavors of the national district in Korea Church of the Nazarene Church is in a needy situation.

The several affirmative purposes and rationales for unification were 1) a unified process of ordination, 2) an extended deployment of ministers, 3) to make a balanced portion of geographically representative delegations to governing body of the Church, 4) a unified Christian education based on the identity of the Church, and 5) to have one communicative channel for international relations, etc. The positive results from the merge are improvement of identity of the denomination, administrative recuperation for ordination process, feasible church planting, and unified relations with international church as well as with Korea Nazarene University.

However, the weaknesses of the national district could be delineated as the followings. While the delineations are attempted, some types of alternative way to the weaknesses will be spelled out to promote an improved system of making Christlike disciples. As it was said, this essay tries to propose an organic and trans-hierarchical governing system instead of the

current pyramid model or a type of monarchical system of the unified church. The organic model, instead of pyramid governing system, is rather the fundamental model in the Bible for serving leadership of the Church. Let's look at the critical points:

< Table 1 > A History of the Divisions of Districts, Church of the Nazarene in Korea

District	Period	Geographical Divisions	Events
One District	1955-1973	National Assembly	The First District Assembly
Two Districts	1973-1981	Central District, South District	
Four Districts	1981-1982	Central District, South District, East District, Honam District	In 1994, "District Assembly" was changed to "Annual Conference"
Five Districts	1982-2002	YoungNam District was merged from South District	Five Annual Conferences
National District	2002-2012	National District with Eleven Zones	Annual Conference was changed to National District Assembly. - 259 Churches in 2002.
National District	2013 Present	National District with Six Zones : Seoul Zone (48), KyungDong Zone (47), KyungGiNam Zone (53), CheonAn Zone(50), HoSeo Zone (49), South Zone(44)	- 291 Churches

**A. The leadership of national superintendent** is limited to half time duty, because the superintendent engages in dual responsibilities of both superintendent of the district and pastor of a local church. Japan and Taiwan have a similar scheme of dual responsibility of district superintendent. In Korea while the superintendents take care of 291 local churches, 42 churches in Taiwan, and 70 churches in Japan, and also they are doing ministries to their own local churches. It is a considerable limitation of the scope of leadership to prolific administration and superintendent exercises. National superintendent should be full time responsibility to maximize the leadership for effective *mission dei*. The Manual indicates a possibility of the dual responsibility, but it would be the case for a small or phase I level district.

Paul's major duty was not local church ministry, even though he was doing local church ministry from time to time. Occasionally Paul did local church ministries on temporary basis as churches are in urgent need of special care, supervision, or particular spiritual encouragement. It is true that his duty was implemented also with tent-making ministry, while he was a general superintendent. But it is known that it was not his major work for his life time engagement. In the Bible and our statement of ecclesiology the *episkopos* implies

overseer “to articulate the vision and need for resources for different parts of the church body, to participate in the allocation of resources to the needy areas of our world ministry, and to unify the church in mission and message.” The *episkopos* oversees the churches to find out any needs of the vision of *mission dei*, spiritual care, or material support. For this the *episkopos* is primordially a fulltime responsibility.

The *episkopos* was not a hierarchical administrator or governor but overseer for providing needy things and articulating the vision of the churches. Korean church uses authoritative term “bishop”(Gamdok, 감독, 監督) utilizing Methodist terminology since 1994 instead of “superintendent,” which is our Manual term for the *episkopos*. “Bishop”(監督) in Taiwan and “superintendent”(理事長), which denotes “chairperson,” in Japan are used respectfully. In Japan there is no judicial or legal person but only national church of the denomination, so that they use the term “superintendent”(理事長).

Even though the bishop is an English Biblical term, it is known as a mistranslation of *episkopos* by the fifty four scholars of a Bible translation appointed by King James IV. “Overseer” is deemed right translation instead of “bishop” for *episkopos*, and the term “superintendent” seems to imply somewhat hierarchical implication, as it denotes *super* dimension.<sup>1</sup> This essay would carefully surmise that *overintendent* could be a closer term to the Biblical *episkopos*.

**B. Hierarchical image** of government of the International Church of the Nazarene has been modified to post-hierarchical association and organic ministerial body. “International Headquarter” was changed to “Global Ministry Center,” that the Church seems to ensure that the ministry of the Church is not of hierarchical or pyramid type of leadership but of organic structure of the global Church.

*Hierarchical image* of national district superintendent in East-Asian districts need to be moderated as soon as possible, as a rushed transformation of human civilization occurs from industrial wave to a smart technological society, which impels the world into a flat ground.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Kung critiques church offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, because those offices lost their Biblical meaning of serving function, and he emphasizes holy, catholic, and apostolic church. The hierarchical dominant system such as papal system of Catholic Church contradicts with priesthood of all believers. Tasks of church are based on gift rather than rank stipulation by the church.

The alteration of the civilization wave would reshape the world toward more horizontal socio-relations with empathic interpersonal interaction than ever before. The church is in need of a model of decentralized collaboration system for effective *missio dei*. Without having urgent change of the hierarchical image into an organic model, they might encounter significant challenges soon and eventually stride themselves behind the curtain of human history.

The nature of leadership in the New Testament is functional rather than positional responsibility in ministry of the Church. Frank Viola acutely exposes that the KJV English Bible contains hierarchical and authoritative implications instead of using the original meaning of the terms in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

< Table 2 > Authoritative Translations of the Biblical Terms

<b>Biblical Terms</b>	<b>KJV Authoritative Translations</b>	<b>Original Meanings</b>
<i>ekklesia</i>	church	assembly
<i>episkopos</i>	bishop, high-church officials	overseer
<i>diakonos</i>	minister, clergyman	servant, busboy
<i>praxis</i>	office	function
<i>proistemi</i>	rule	guard
<i>presbuteros</i>	Elders, ecclesiastical officers	wise old men
<i>poimen</i>	Pastors, pulpiteers	caretakers

Some contemporary evangelical churches move toward postmodern evangelical ecclesiology, after facing challenges from the failures of modernity such as logocentric Christian education, hierarchical church system, emphasis on exclusively individualistic salvation, and fashion of Western or Euro-centric cloth. Those churches, which are sensitive to the postmodern trends, are Emerging Church, Organic Church, Deep Church, Fat Church, Global Church, etc. Those churches are identified as postmodern evangelical churches here, and this essay takes them in a critical way. The emerged ideas from the critiques on the challenges of modernity are the followings of the table as an attuned ecclesiology to the arising culture of postmodern epoch.

< Table 3 > Modern and Postmodern Ecclesiologies

<b>Ecclesiology of Modernity</b>	<b>Postmodern Evangelical Ecclesiology</b>
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<sup>2</sup> Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2008), 282, 304.

Ideology	Limitations	Ideology	Ecclesiology
Structuralism	Hierarchical System <i>Positional Ministry</i>	Post-Structuralism	a. Primordial Church b. <i>Functional Ministry</i>
Individualism	Personal Salvation	Post-Individualism	a. <i>Social Church</i> b. Horizontal Relations
Eurocentrism	<i>Colonial Missions</i>	Post-Eurocentrism	a. Global Ecclesiology b. <i>Post-Colonial Missions</i>
Logocentrism	Christian Knowledge	Trans-Logocentrism	a. <i>Practical Body Ministry</i> b. Spiritual Activity
Liberal Theology	Decline of Spirituality	<i>Postmodern Orthodoxy</i> Radical Orthodoxy	a. <i>Primordial Gospel</i> b. Radically Flat-Community

The postmodern evangelical churches take functional flat system instead of hierarchical scheme, body and spiritual action rather than logocentric Christian education, socio-relational community instead of exclusively individualistic spirituality, and global church of GloboChrist. Here we need to be careful of using the concept of the GloboChrist, because it has some type of pluralistic implication. It should be the universal Christ. Functional flat system, body and spiritual action, and global church are postmodern theological feature in their characteristics.

Those emphases on the body and spiritual action, socio-relational community, and global church of the universal Christ necessitate to be incorporated into East-Asian Christian ministry for attunement to postmodern flourishing development of the Church. This new horizon of ecclesiology requires to be elaborated further, based on those crucial facts of the postmodern evangelical ecclesiology, for a promising implement of Christian ministry.

**C. *Three years of one term superintendency*** in Korea also limits the scope of leadership, and it does not convey the Biblical concept of leadership and also contradicts with the Manual. Paul exercised his general superintendent duty for almost his life time as well as Peter, Mark, John, etc. Korea national superintendent serves only one term of three years for superintendency, which interfere long range consistency of governing policy of the denomination. Changing leadership in every three years including district secretary, financial book keeper, educational director, mission and evangelism director, NMI director, NYI director, etc., can not bestow solid administrative consistency for effective ministerial performances. In Japan district superintendent serves for two years term in maximum two

times, if he is reelected. In Taiwan a newly elected district superintendent serves for two years first, and if the district superintendent is reelected, then the elected can serve the district for another four years, and so on as long as reelected. Longer service term is necessitated; and full time duty of district superintendent than what they are now for that “*district superintendents direct their pastoral and spiritual leadership toward the churches, members, and clergy of a defined area.*”

**D. District and General Assembly** are *Ecclesia*,<sup>3</sup> and the assembly of Korea national district needs a further spiritual celebration of the Divine grace in a manner of the Biblical ecclesiology rather than merely dealing with business agendas and management proceedings. The Biblically based Wesleyan ecclesiology celebrates and enjoys the Divine grace. Kenneth Collins and Randy Maddox emphasize that the core idea in Wesley's theology is grace, and Kenneth Collins added holiness to the grace as the significant ideas in Wesleyan theology.<sup>4</sup> Not only local churches but also district assembly ought to share testimonies of the responsible grace in atonement and sanctification one another in a collective way. And district leadership should promote further establishing preaching points of the word of grace during district assemblies.

The three modes of grace in Wesleyan theology, prevenient, saving, and sanctifying graces, are distinctive and deserve celebration as “responsible grace.” It is different from a postmodern Augustinian interpretation of grace postulated by radical orthodoxy theologians. Their interpretation is the grace of universal emanation over the nature, and yet, as in the Wesleyan theology, it is “the responsible grace” in cooperative way with Divine persuasion for regeneration and sanctification. “*Faithful discipleship is an outward sign of God's inward grace in us; likewise, it is the sign of divine grace at work in the world that God so loved.*” The Church celebrates the divine grace in practice of faithful discipleship. During the assembly time, functional practices of *kerygma*, *didache*, and *koinonia* of the Church are

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3 In the statement of ecclesiology of our church “We identify with the scriptural account of <sup>3</sup>the people of God, confessing ourselves to be part of one, holy, universal, and apostolic church.” Albert Outler identified the characteristics of Wesleyan ecclesiology based on biblical foundation as unity, apostolicity, catholicity, and holiness. It seems that the identity of our Church is a biblically based Wesleyan ecclesiology.

4 Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994); Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).

necessary; apostolic ordination,<sup>5</sup> edification of unity in Christ,<sup>6</sup> demonstration of catholicity of the Church, and testimony of holiness experiences need to be essentially flourished in the district assembly.

Testimony of the Grace should be practiced in pastors' verbal reports rather than in merely written documents. Even though pastoral reports should be the highlight of the assembly, because of the large size of the district of 291 churches, it has been almost impossible to have pastoral reports within the given period of assembly time. Of course the highlight of assembly is the ordination of elders and deacons as a practice of the apostolic tradition by general superintendent.<sup>7</sup>

**E. Division of the national district** into at least 6 districts of phase III level is necessary, and each district could have many more than 30 churches in Korea. The Manual indicates that 20 churches with 1,000 members and 10 ordained pastors are required for becoming a regular district at phase III level.<sup>8</sup> About 30 churches seem to be an ideal number to have an empathic relationship to share practical spirituality and mission task. Those culturally adopted provisions indicate that each zone must have more than 35 churches to become a zone, and when the zone has more than 50 organized churches, it is possible to have another zone. This provision contradicts with the Manual and has practical limitation of the ministries in relation to postmodern emphatic socio-relations.

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5 In terms of apostolicity Wesley wanted to emphasize apostolic proclamation of the Word instead of personal successor of church history. He recognized ordination of bishop and presbyter for authority and unity of the church. Church is holy as community people called out by holy God. Church is the place where the grace of God is working for practical sanctification. Wesley understood preacher and evangelist are special workers inspired by Divine spirit, but they did not have authority of ordination and perform sacrament. Pastor and priest are official ministers. Wesley took granted for official positions of bishop, presbyter or priest, and deacon; bishop and priest are outward priesthood as doing ordination and perform sacrament, and deacon is extraordinary minister as doing preaching and evangelism.

6 Church has unity in one Holy Spirit, Lord, faith, one God. Wesley did not want his followers to separate from Anglican Church but emphasized unity. While he recognize diversity of Church such as to take granted of the differences in mode of baptism or forms of prayer for possible denominations. But he believed that church is basically universal in the savior of Jesus Christ.

7 "General superintendents exercise an apostolic and pastoral ministry toward the whole denomination, maintaining the church's unity in doctrine and holiness, modeling Christ's life through collegiality, and casting a vision that the whole church can embrace."

8 *Manual of Church of the Nazarene, 2009-2013*, 200. 2.



Japan has one national district of seventy churches with one national superintendent to work for the whole nation. Taiwan has a similar system with Japan, that one national superintendent take care of forty two churches all over the country, even though the country is relatively smaller than that of Japan and South Korea. Japan needs to have at least three districts to have empathic relations of the churches for effective church growth; Taiwan can have two districts as a similar reason to Japan. It is known that Taiwan has a tentative dual zone as a prelude to two regular districts.

The primary role of district is to focus on function of *ecclesia* and *mission dei* through creative evangelism, operative church planting, and spiritual development, that are attuned to postmodern trends, while reducing district business agendas. Postmodern people would enjoy transcendental deep play or transcendental spiritual play, as they are going to have more time, which is going to be benefited from a development of smart technology. People would like to have a small group with adhesive and empathy mind as a new mode of collective life to engage in transcendental deep play.<sup>9</sup>

**F. Enhancement of national board and moving toward having national superintendent** to represent each nation are recommended for effective government, communication, and leadership within inner country as well as with inter-countries and global ministry. A form of national superintendent is recommended also for edifying unity within the national districts. It seems that to have national superintendent is not a cultural adaption but a Biblical and Wesleyan form of leadership as homogeneous unity for enhancing *missio dei* and catholic unity of the Church.

**G. Homogeneous International fields** should be more activated for facilitating practically operative international missions and to enhance a durable coherence of the international

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<sup>9</sup> Based on the carbon energy, the second wave of industrialization provided mass production and urbanization of densely populated society, which entailed mega congregation and wealth of the church. As the post-carbon energy era is coming with high development of smart technology, the society and life of human being will be changed in drastically different way. The high development of smart technology will reduce human labor and provide more essential humanistic life, which people would have more free time for leisure and entertainment than ever before. The society is going to have more horizontal relations rather than pyramid or hierarchical relations. Jeremy Rifkin, *The Third Industrial Revolution* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 9-32.

churches; such as that Korea, Taiwan, and Japan are to be *one international field*. These three countries have common ground in cultural affinity, emphasis on education, living conditions, etc., even though their languages are different from one another. Already Korea has had relationships with Taiwan and Japan at the level of superintendents and national leadership team. Korea and Taiwan have had meetings of pastors as hosting retreat conference at each country, without having supervision from regional or general offices. Also Korean Churches engage into mission works in a durable way with Korean Chinese people to expand preaching points and house churches. Homogeneous international field of East-Asian countries ought to be enhanced or the existing field to be further facilitated for meeting the demands.

**H. *Cultural adaptations of policy and government of the Church in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan*** may be less necessary than they have been, because a global culture arises as general uniform of global ethos, and in the fundamental way the meta-narrative of the Biblical truth is trans-cultural, which is becoming more conveyable among East-Asian cultures. As the Gospel is trans-cultural, and a general uniform of culture in the coming era is going to be more feasible for evangelism, this essay would think cultural adaptation could be a minor matter. Our manual says, in the article XI Church, that “. . . *The Church is a historical reality, which organizes itself in culturally conditioned forms; . . .*” The diversity of culture has not been ignored, but the cultural adaptation would be less necessary as a new epoch of global culture is coming to be. Particularly cultural adaptations of specific policy and government of the Church in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan may be less necessary than they have been. In the scope of policy and government of the Church in the manual would be conveyable in East-Asian cultures without cultural adaptation as they have an acquired general culture, which is globally acceptable.

**I. *Critical adaptation of the ideas from postmodern evangelical churches*** is needed for renovating traditional form of ministry toward updated ecclesiology. Recently, emerging church and organic church overly emphasized a flat system of leadership and lay ministry, which resulted in that the function of ordained elders in the Bible was weakened. As apostolicity of the Church was relatively ignored, the Churches face questions on authenticity of pastors of local churches. Without ministers’ sincere training in biblical hermeneutics,

doctrinal understanding, history of the church, and practical ministries, those ministers would face immeasurable difficulties to do effective ministry. Their over emphasis on flat and horizontal system deteriorates unity of collaborations and organic administrative relations and interferes effectiveness in expansion of the kingdom of God through church growth. It is known that John Wesley emphasized theological education, and Methodist church founded many reliable and sound seminaries and Christian universities for training ministers in USA and other part of the world.

Informal gatherings and worship services of emerging church pertain to both positive and negative challenges. It is positive to invite young people easily to join the worship services, and it is negative to violate the solid communion of the saints. Informal worship is a type of Nazarene style of liturgy, and an organized and formal style of worship ought to be developed further to enhance unity of spiritual formations and solid communion of the saints.<sup>10</sup> Radical orthodoxy would provide theological basis for Emerging Church, which was deemed to have a potentiality to become a sound postmodern church. But James A. K. Smith is an academic and a proponent of social theory of the Church, which was initially postulated by John Milbank, who identified his theological position postmodern Augustinianism.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Smith would not agree with informal theological education and social movement of Emerging Church.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of critical analysis on postmodern evangelical churches, the functional flat system would be an ideal rather than realistic, because in the history of Christian church there has never been a flat system. In the case of Korean church, Western modern Church was introduced KJV hierarchical ecclesiology into Korean society, but Korean society already had a Confucian hierarchical culture. Nowadays, Korean church wears position-centered hierarchical cloth, which is even stronger color than Western fashion based on KJV Church, because in addition to KJV hierarchical fashion Korean Church has been Confucian

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10 James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 31-107, 109.

11 John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short 'Summa' in Forty-Two Responses Unasked Questions," in *The Postmodern God; A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 265.

12 In terms of social theory of the church, Jurgen Moltmann and Stanley Grenz also insisted social church based on social triune God. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 161-174. < Table 4 > Theological Methods

hierarchical and relational culture. This essay postulates that a post-hierarchical or trans-hierarchical scheme, which could be more effective and functional for the church growth, as it has been exposed in a long history of the Church. The trans-hierarchical system denotes a balanced system between the functional flat and hierarchical system, which appears in the Bible as a semi-decentralized one.

### *III. Conclusion*

There could be many reasons for not growing much of the East-Asian churches during the last two decades, specially in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, but this essay insists that the primary reasons is the ecclesiological inconsistency between governing system of East-Asian and the Biblical ecclesiology. This essay proposes a critical reconstruction of the East-Asian policy and government of the church. The fact that *the leadership of national superintendent* is limited to half time duty needs to be changed to full time responsibility. *Hierarchical image* of national district superintendent in East-Asian districts ought to be moderated as soon as possible. *Three years of one term superintendency* in Korea, two years of maximum two terms in Japan, which limit the scope of leadership, should to be changed to the Manual arrangement. *District assembly as ecclesia* needs to be facilitated for ecclesiological function of *kerygma, didache, and koinonia*. *Division of the national district* into at least 6 districts, that is to say, the current 6 zones can be upgraded to regular phase III level district. *Enhancement of national board and moving toward having national superintendent* ought to be developed further. *Also homogeneous international fields* should to be more practically activated to facilitate operative international missions and to enhance a durable coherence of the international churches. *Cultural adaptations of specific policy and government of the Church in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan* may be less necessary than they have been. In the scope of policy and government of the Church in the Manual would be conveyable in East-Asian cultures. In certain extent, *critical adaptation of the ideas from postmodern evangelical churches* is needed for renovating traditional or outdated form of ministry toward culturally updated ecclesiological ministry. An ecclesiological model for reshaping needs to be further extracted, more than what it has been discussed, from reinterpretation of the Biblical and Wesleyan ecclesiology in relation to critical assessment of postmodern evangelical churches.

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