

THE NECESSITY OF THREE GENERATIONAL FAITH TRANSMISSION

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ABSTRACT

Since the mid-20th century, Korean Protestantism has been in serious retreat as a result of demographic decline and the onset of postmodernism. Consequently, church growth has plateaued, and a substantial proportion of Korean young people have exited the church. This study will argue that three-generational faith transmission, through integrated worship and faith training in the church and home, is essential to reverse this trend. Combining biblical interpretation, empirical research, and theological analysis, this study will emphasize the importance of a strong spiritual legacy across three generations and show that this can have a positive impact on the revival of the church and the well-being of society.

Keywords: Faith transmission, spiritual discipline, three-generational faith, Korean Protestantism, post-modernism

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Following the advent of Protestantism in Korea, Korean churches have garnered national support for diverse initiatives, including opposition to Japanese colonialism, the elimination of illiteracy via modern education, advancements in the treatment of tuberculosis and leprosy through Western medicine, and the enhancement of women's status (Chung, 2015; Chung et al., 2021; Chung, 2023). There was a huge influx of Christians to South Korea in the early 20th century. The spectacular ascent, however, started to wane toward the century's end (Kim & Chung, 2021). Postmodernism and the declining birth rate have greatly affected the decline in teens and children's participation in church activities (Yim, 2019). Some worry about the fate of Christianity in Korea in light of recent surveys showing that a significant portion of South Korean youth are desisting from church attendance (Choi, 2019; Kim, 2020; Jeong et al., 2021, 2022; Kang et al., 2021). Researchers have examined the factors contributing to this decline, yet they have not focused much on the transmission of religion across generations, from grandparents to parents to grandchildren (Bengtson et al., 2016; Smith & Snell, 2009). To address that knowledge vacuum, this research examines how integrated worship practices help maintain and pass on Christian faith from one generation to the next within the framework of families and churches (Vermeer, 2018).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This investigation encompasses aspects of biblical theology, church history, and a selection of works from various fields, taking into account methodological stances in both quantitative and qualitative analysis (Kim & Chung, 2013, 2014; Kim & Chung, 2023, 2024; Lee & Chung, 2024; Lee et al., 2024). It paves the way for a sufficient research program to investigate and define the relevance of religion transmission throughout three generations. Using various data gathered from prestigious South Korean institutions, we have explored a wide range of themes, including church engagement. Additionally, we researched the role of the parents and pastors in Christian nurture and the nature of shared services at home and church (Kang, 2020). We owe both of these sources for confirming typical spiritual behaviors that were aiding faith transmission (Edwards, 2020).

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 James W. Fowler's "Theory of Faith Development"

James W. Fowler's "Theory of Faith Development" (1981) examines the progression of faith throughout an individual's life, emphasizing the psychological maturation linked to religious convictions. In his work, Fowler likens religion to a living organism that adapts to each person. He elucidates the intricate process of passing religious ideas across generations by examining how various generations comprehend, assimilate, and engage with these beliefs. This exploration of faith maturation reveals how the understanding and practice of religion can differ significantly among generations. Understanding this dynamic is crucial, as it sheds light on the mechanisms through which faith is transmitted; however, it remains a topic of debate whether Fowler's approach adequately preserves the fundamental principles of each religion over time. Although generations may articulate their beliefs in distinct ways, it is imperative to uphold the core tenets for genuine intergenerational transmission. Fowler's argument posits that the expression of faith by a generation is contingent upon the individuals who engage with that religion, which complicates the continuity of these beliefs. Nonetheless, he fails to clearly articulate how the transmission of the core tenets of a religious faith serves as a means of preservation and intergenerational transfer of that religion. Ignoring the fundamental doctrines of faith can, indeed, distort the core content of the religion while omitting vital components necessary for successful intergenerational transmission. Fowler's theory therefore requires supplementation in this regard. Religions undergo numerous transformations depending on cultural context—such as time and place—however, the fundamental doctrines must remain constant. To effectively communicate the tenets of a higher religion, it is imperative that the essential doctrines are not interpreted in various ways depending on an individual's developmental stage; instead, the fundamental concepts ought to be conveyed as immutable truths that are steadfastly upheld across generations. Fowler's "Theory of Faith Development" provides a notable advantage by deepening our understanding of interpersonal faith transformations among different religions. However, it has not adequately addressed the issue of maintaining essential core beliefs through generations. Thus, we must persistently transmit the enduring principles of religion (this is vital) while recognizing the changes that take place over time. However, it is crucial to find a balance between these elements, for the essence of faith can indeed evolve (although its core remains intact).

3.2 Christian Smith's "Religious Socialization Theory"

In his "Religious Socialization Theory," Smith focused a family-centered lens on the transmission of religious beliefs and practices to children. Smith claims that children's faith is shaped by their parents' faith (Smith & Denton, 2005). He examines the familial basis of parental modeling and its importance in terms of religious succession, but he essentially offers a fresh perspective on modeling religious identity from one generation to another. When Smith focuses on how behaviors of parents influence the religious decisions of children, he makes some very astute observations about the family dynamics of religious transmission. However, his hypothesis is problematic since it disproportionately prioritizes parental influence over other social factors, including peer groups, communities, and institutional contexts. Connections established within the family, church, communities, and society significantly influence an individual's religious experience. Consequently, to get a comprehensive knowledge of the generational transmission of religion, any model of faith transmission must account for elements outside family characteristics.

3.3 Robert Wuthnow's "The Role of Faith Communities"

According to Wuthnow's (1999) study, religious groups play a crucial role in passing on religious views from one generation to another. In his view, religious groups do more than just help those in need; they also help families preserve their religious traditions by teaching their children to pray and attend religious services regularly. The unwavering support that members of religious organizations provide to one another is a key factor in people's spiritual development. In his writings on the subject of religion and community, he stresses the centrality of the church as the highest religious institution. The church's crucial role in spreading and promoting religion expands the conventional notion of family. In his investigation of religious continuity over three generations, Wuthnow may have overlooked the special function of the family.

3.4 John Westerhoff's "Traditional Faith"

Westerhoff (1976) asserts that traditional religions prioritize a vibrant spiritual heritage above stringent legal codes or the dominance of other belief systems. He asserts that generations pass down Christian teachings and practices. Everyone is important on their own spiritual journey, according to his three-generational notion of religious succession. In his view, practicing one's faith is more important than just professing one's views. One criticism of Westerhoff's discussion is its inadequate allocation of time for didactic instruction. Investigating religion and the transmission of faith over generations is crucial for the survival of religious communities. Consequently, we must acknowledge the experiential and theological-doctrinal dimensions of religious succession.

3.5 "Family Ministry and Faith Transmission" by Diana Garland

Based on her research in family ministry, Garland determines that the home is an essential setting for the dissemination of religious thoughts and practices. She maintains that, despite the challenges posed by evolving social dynamics and external conflicts, the home remains the primary place for spiritual growth and dissemination (2010). The continuity of religion between generations relies on strong familial connections, and she elucidates the mechanisms that sustain these relationships. Critics of Garland's methodology have noted that her focus on family and psychological elements supplants the spiritual and theological foundations of faith

transmission. Over three generations, a seamless integration of spiritual observance and biblical education within the familial framework is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of religious succession. A theological realignment that facilitates more effective engagement with the spiritual demands of faith transmission may result in potential improvements in psychological understanding.

3.6 Assessment

The aforementioned scholars have made substantial academic contributions that have improved our understanding of the transfer of religious beliefs from one generation to another. But the spiritual and theological elements needed to proclaim the biblical faith are somewhat missing from these models. Rather, they concentrate on easily recognizable traits, particularly those that have to do with psychology, culture, or interpersonal dynamics. Personal growth, active involvement in family and church, and a strong theological and doctrinal basis are the three pillars upon which a complete approach to passing religion down through three generations rests. We cannot ignore the way the Bible promotes Christian religion by highlighting its supernatural elements. A thorough familiarity with both the theological and practical aspects of Christian spirituality is required. It is crucial for families and local churches to work together in order to pass Christian faith down through the generations.

4.0 DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The Necessity of Three-Generational Faith Transmission

Both the Old and New Testaments place significant importance on the transmission of biblical beliefs throughout three generations. In the Bible, God, who desires His teachings and covenantal commitments to persist beyond a single generation, emphasizes throughout scripture the importance of establishing a faith heritage that goes beyond familial bonds. This biblical worldview emphasizes the theological need to transmit religion sequentially from grandparents to parents and ultimately to grandchildren in order to preserve it through generations.

4.1.1 The Old Testament Principles

The Old Testament (OT) proclaimed the value of transferring the faith from one generation to the next. God, as the creator of humanity, made an unchanging and eternal covenant between the present and future generations. Joseph's narrative in the OT is a necessary demonstration of the relevance of this faith transmission over centuries. Abraham's great-grandson Joseph epitomizes the fulfillment of God's promise in his life. Directly leading to Joseph's steadfast trust and faith, the faith handed down from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). He reflected how God's providence was realized through him. Joseph zealously maintained the faith his predecessors had given down, proving how God worked with him. Joseph's narrative emphasizes the need for observing one's religious beliefs. Against severe hardship, Joseph resolutely stayed in his dedication to God and fulfillment of the promise God had made with Abraham. It is obvious that transferring one's faith from one generation to the next demands more than just Sunday School classroom education; it also includes the believer's lived experiences and unshakeable commitment. This

spiritual teaching gains weight from God's love going "to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:5-6). This future-oriented perspective emphasizes the eternal link between God and His believers, as well as the need for faithful loyalty across generations. Being in line with God is a blessing not only to the individual believer but also to their family in the long run. More specifically, Psalm 78:4-6 sheds light on the passing of faith from one generation to the next. Such phrases as "tell to the coming generation" and "the children yet to be born" all refer to the interdependence of different generations as a reminder that passing on one's religion is an ongoing duty that must keep through the ages. Psalm 78:6 tells the importance of teaching present-day believers as well as laying the groundwork for future generations' faith transmission. Psalm 78:7 is the concrete evidence of this teaching: "so that they would put their hope in God." The aim is not only to impart facts and figures but to help people put their confidence in God and follow His instructions with all their heart. In this context, the transmission of religion from one generation to the next becomes more important. This is more than simply a historical tale; it is a tool for teaching the next generation to be faithful decision-makers. Accordingly, passing the faith down through three generations is an essential means of keeping a constant contact with God, rather than just passing on knowledge. The manner in which religious schools are conducted also reflects the importance of passing the religion down through generations. "He created statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children" (Psalm 78:5) underscores this fact. This implies that we should approach the transmission and teaching of religion methodically rather than relying solely on oral tradition. The fact that the 'statutes' and 'law' cited here serve as the foundation for this doctrinal instruction demonstrates the need for organized and continuous transmission throughout generations. Deuteronomy 6:6-9, which instructs parents to teach their children God's commands in a practical manner, aligns with this.

As we have seen in the above passages from the OT, the church and family have a crucial role in disseminating Christian doctrines in the postmodern world. It is very serious for the contemporary church to devise practical approaches to enable the dissemination of Christian teachings over three successive generations. Psalm 78:4-7 delineate modern implementations of the theological concept of faith transmission, facilitating the interchange of Christian doctrines throughout the three generations in both the household and the church, therefore facilitating interactions between different generations within the fellowship.

4.1.2 The New Testament Principles

There are many examples in the New Testament (NT) that mention the necessity of transferring faith from one generation to the next. "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and, I am persuaded, now lives in you too" (2 Timothy 1:5), Paul writes, justifying a personal example of such transmission. By tracing the faith of Timothy's family—grandmother, mother, and himself—back three generations, Paul establishes a straight line of transmission. From this verse, we can learn that both parents and grandparents play crucial roles in transmitting Christianity down through the generations. "Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), Paul says. Here Paul argues the need for parents to actively shape their children's faith in God's ways, echoing the OT commandment that explains the importance of

religious teaching inside the home. The NT calls all members of a Christian family to participate in the process of spiritual maturation over multiple generations.

The early Christian communities described in Acts were more like extended spiritual families, with members of all ages and sociopolitical-cultural backgrounds sharing the faith. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you and your household will be saved" (Acts 16:31), Paul and Silas tell the Philippian jailer. The concept of 'household' salvation emphasizes the importance of community and family. Although the book does not explicitly articulate anything about biological three-generational transmission, it does support the concept that Christianity should pervade all family interactions, influencing whole households and, therefore, generations to come. In 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul claims that Christian faith within the family has a great spiritual influence. He praises the sanctifying impact of believing spouses and parents on their children. These verses address marriage and mixed-faith settings, but they also instruct how the NT cares about the family's spiritual well-being and expects faith to pass on to their children.

4.2 Challenges in Generational Faith Transmission

The biblical principles to pass the Christian faith from one generation to the next have many obstacles in today's secularized world. Young people are growing apart from conventional religious norms and practices, which form difficulties to overcome generational gaps. There is a growing chasm in the knowledge and practice of Christianity among the three generations as a result of secular postmodern influences (Kim, 2021). The biblical paradigm nonetheless provides applicable wisdom in the face of these difficulties. Worship practices that bring people of different generations together, whether at home or in church, may help bridge these differences. Well-disciplined faith transmission may be modeled for families and churches in Deuteronomy 6, which draws on the OT paradigm of regular family-based doctrinal education, and in Ephesians 6, which emphasizes the need for familial faith growth.

5.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The research results show that families that regularly pray, read the Bible, and worship have a much better chance of passing their religion on to the next generation (Bengtson et al., 2016; Smith & Denton, 2005). According to Smith and Snell (2009) and Vermeer (2018), churches should highlight the significance of family-integrated worship by providing parents and grandparents with extensive tools to foster Christian religion at home. All churches should prioritize programs that encourage worship across generations and provide families with the opportunity to grow in their religion together, whether at home or in a formal religious environment. Local churches in South Korea as well as in the world should be encouraged to organize events that bring together children, parents, and grandparents for various worship services, family prayer sessions, and Bible studies.

When looking at Korean Protestant churches that have succeeded in passing the faith from one generation to the next, Mokpo Changjo Presbyterian Church stands out as a model. An American Southern Presbyterian missionary named Eugene Bell (1868–1925) established Yangdong Church on March 5, 1897, laying the foundation for this church. The church's transformation to inter-generational worship, spearheaded by Pastor Kyung-Youn Kim, who is now serving as president of Kwangshin University, was a major factor in its development and

vitality. In an effort to bring people of all ages together in worship, Pastor Kim—an early proponent of Korean Protestantism's "Three Generational Faith Alignment"—rearranged the church's education programs. Kim's discipleship training program, "Three Generational Faith Succession Discipline," was established to support this endeavor (Kim & Chung, 2021). It was different from "the traditional theme discipleship programs used in Korean Protestant churches" (Choi, 2024). This method helped Christians of all ages understand the Bible more fully, which resulted in a profound spiritual awakening and the congregation's voluntary adherence to various church activities.

'Seoul Sedaero Church' ministered by Pastor Seung-Heon Yang is another example model. The name 'Sedaero,' which translates to 'Three Generations' in English, suggests that the church's central ministry theme is the "Integration of Three Generations in Faith." Pastor Yang developed the term 'Orange Worship' to describe his inter-generational ministry, symbolizing the synergy created by blending the love of the family (represented by red) with the truth of the church (represented by yellow) to spiritually nurture the next generation (Yang, 2017; Yoo, 2015). His pastoral philosophy is based on the belief that the spiritual heritage of one generation must be faithfully and powerfully transmitted to the next. He justifies his generational ministry with the following statement:

I was appointed as a Sunday school teacher on January 2, 1972, and 45 years and 5 months have since passed... Whatever I did, my focus was always on children. Initially, I ministered with children, then toward children, and now for children; that is how I and others perceive my calling as a children's ministry worker... The core of children's ministry is 'story continuity.' The essence of our calling is to ensure that the blessed story of our faith is passed down. Moses passionately urged the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 6:4–9), yet Israel failed to pass on their story to the next generation, and as predicted, the consequences were dire (Judges 2:10). One might wonder, 'Is it really that serious if the story is not passed on?' It absolutely is. Losing the story is not just a religious issue; when God's people lose their faith story, the individual, the family, and the entire nation spiral into a dark and tragic history (Yang, 2017).

This is not someone else's story—it is directly evidenced in the history of Korea. Had Elder Don-Uk Kang, his daughter Ban-Seok Kang, and his son-in-law Hyong-Jik Kim recognized the future of the nation in the growing Il-Sung Kim (who later became the Communist dictator of North Korea) and firmly instilled in him the story of faith in the God they knew and loved, the history of Korea would have unfolded very differently. "Looking at North Korea, led by Jong-Un Kim [Il-Sung Kim's grandson], [Yang] realizes the immense responsibility that children's ministry workers bear" (Yang, 2017).

Seoul Sedaero Church has been embracing people of all ages since its founding in 2002. A team of ministry experts at the church meets the unique needs of different generations. By creating a unified worship experience for families via "Orange Worship," Pastor Yang hopes to provide a solid spiritual foundation for generations to come (Yoo, 2015). Parents should set a positive example, and the church should prepare qualified Sunday school instructors to help their children grow into strong Christians. The Christian home is an ideal place for children's ministry because it is there that parents should lead their children in spiritual growth. Church and home go hand in hand, highlighting the value of mutual support between the two.

Converging the sincerity of the Christian institution with the warmth of the home increases the effectiveness of the transmission of biblical principles. Not content with only imparting biblical knowledge, children's ministry seeks to shape the spiritual character of the child through the study of the Bible. The Scripture emphasizes personal development above mere knowledge gain and seeks to restore humanity's image to that of God. Instead of a regimented school setting, a caring and warm community is the best setting to do children's ministry. Jesus knew that knowledge alone cannot change personality; he refrained from establishing educational institutions. People's connection with one another was what changed people. Therefore, the church ought to function as an effective ethereal family commune. In order to keep educational institutions from splintering, it is quite essential to embrace a life-cycle approach to children's ministry that emphasizes seamless integration across all areas. For the children's ministry to be successful, it is vital to hire qualified Christian teachers to run it. Eliminating barriers between different age groups, between the home and the church, and between the classroom and pastoral care is the only way to achieve a more united approach. Many youths are hesitant to participate in church events due to a lack of understanding of their responsibilities as church members. Knowing one's privileges and obligations as a church member is essential for a child. Christians of Coptic origin in Egypt have endured Islamic persecution for almost 2,000 years, but they have remained faithful. This historical example shows Christian leaders how to be a driving force for the Christian community via children's ministry. We work together closely to build this community. According to Yang (2017), this paradigm offers valuable lessons for the Korean church of the future.

Having said that, there are two major conditions to consider when organizing worship services that span generations, with the aim of fostering Christian succession across three generations. From the practical point of view of serving the church, leaders should consider a multitude of factors. Gathering information on the ages, educational backgrounds, each person's maturity, commitment, temperaments, and family circumstances of churchgoers might be an important first step (Yoo, 2015). This is what ensures the smooth operation of worship services that welcome worshippers of all ages. In addition, we can create a peaceful environment for diverse engagement by recognizing and nurturing the latent creative and spiritual qualities of the church congregation. Second, churches should take stock of their assets and constraints before organizing worship services that welcome people of all ages. With a solid understanding of these factors, churches may make educated modifications and encourage participation from all members. Thirdly, the use of the term "Three Generational Faith Succession" during worship services may cause certain members of the congregation to feel excluded. To point out this potential issue, continuous education and comprehensive and careful pastoral care are required.

From a theological perspective, there are a few things that need extra attention. Knowing the church's background, worship style, and culture inside and out is a crucial wisdom for every worship leader to have (Yoo, 2015). The findings of this study highlight the need for investigating alternative Christian ministries that pay homage to Korean Protestantism's illustrious heritage while reiterating the relevance of scripture-based preaching in both traditional and inter-generational worship services. In this regard, it is necessary to revive sacraments like baptism and communion that have fallen into disuse so that those who partake in them may experience their whole spiritual meaning. It is the church's duty to educate its people about the liturgical calendar so that celebrations of Christmas and Easter may have deeper spiritual significance. People of all ages should gather at these significant events for

community worship and fellowship, reinforcing the basic principles of inter-generational worship and fostering faith transmission. If the global church adopts these all-encompassing strategies, it may learn from the Korean church's example the theological and practical lessons necessary to unite and comprehensively cultivate the faith of future generations.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In today's postmodern South Korean culture, it is more important than ever for Christians to pass their faith on to the next generation. Following biblical principles of faith transmission and encouraging three generation integrated worship practices are two ways families may make sure their Christian heritage lasts. This study emphasizes the importance of families in developing and maintaining Christian faith, as well as the role of churches in facilitating the transfer of faith from one generation to the next.

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