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## Introduction: Church Growth at the End of the Twentieth Century

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**Church Growth At the End of the Twentieth Century  
Introduction**

**Gary L. McIntosh, Editor**

The Eleventh Annual Meeting of the American Society for Church Growth actually began in my heart and mind when we last met in Pasadena, California in November of 1993. At that meeting our president elect, Dr. John Vaughan, challenged us with his presidential address, "The Church Growth Movement: Offense to the Cross?"

Those who were in attendance at that banquet will remember that Dr. Vaughan alerted us to a new wave of growing criticism regarding the Church Growth Movement. He briefly listed specific accusations recently made against our movement by renowned leaders such as Os Guinness, John MacArthur, and others.

While many of the criticism's were not new, Dr. Vaughan asked us to reflect deeply on whether any truth existed in such criticisms. As he reminded us, our hearts and motives must be pure. Clearly none of us involved in the Church Growth Movement wish to be an "offense to the Cross." Rather all of us have given our lives to promote the "cause of the Gospel."

Building on Dr. Vaughan's address, I conducted a study to determine the attitudes and perceptions of Christian leaders in the United States toward the Church Growth Movement. My findings were noted last November 1994 in my presidential address at our American Society for Church Growth meeting in Houston, Texas.

In brief I discovered five key perceptions that Christian lead-

ers have about the Church Growth Movement (CGM) in the United States.

- The CGM is a viable movement. Leaders sense that the Church Growth Movement is beneficial to churches and overall interest in church growth remains high.
- The CGM is worthy of study. Leaders believe church growth principles increase a church's potential for growth and thus are worthy of investigation and application.
- The CGM is theologically sound. While some leaders have various individual concerns, there exists a general agreement that the core of the CGM is theologically sound.
- The CGM is misunderstood. Leaders continue to suffer from the perception that the CGM is primarily focused on improving existing methods and achieving numerical growth rather than bringing about effective evangelism.
- The CGM is in transition. Leaders express ambiguity regarding the future of the CGM and its influence on churches in the United States.

While we can take heart in the first three perceptions, we must wrestle seriously with the final two. Thus, in response to Dr. Vaughan's presidential address in 1993 and the results of my survey, I invited some "friendly" critics to present keynote addresses at the annual meeting of the American Society for Church Growth in November 1995 at Chicago, Illinois.

Three brave individuals accepted my invitation to address the members of the American Society for Church Growth: Dr. Duane Litfin, Dr. Walt Russell, and Dr. Thom S. Rainer. Each keynote lecture was followed by a response from two members of the society and concluded with a panel discussion answering questions submitted from the audience. In addition, two lectures opened and closed the meetings. All lectures and responses are published in this edition of the journal in the order in which they were presented at the meeting.

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I thank all of the participants for giving time to research their topics, write an article for inclusion in this journal, and having the courage of Daniel to enter our den. Instead of being devoured, much love and collegiality was experienced as together we addressed significant issues regarding the Church Growth Movement.

Writer

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