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THE LIFE OF DONALD MCGAVRAN: COMING OF AGE

Gary L. McIntosh

Editor's Note: Gary L. McIntosh has spent over a decade researching and writing a complete biography on the life and ministry of Donald A. McGavran. We are pleased to present the ninth excerpt from *Donald A. McGavran: A Biography of the Twentieth Century's Premier Missiologist* (Church Leader Insights, 2015).

Abstract

In the mid-1970s, criticism of the Church Growth Movement gradually began to wane. Donald McGavran reduced his teaching load to half-time, although he continued to teach for another decade. McGavran and Win Arn continued teaming together on books and films, and even Peter Wagner turned toward a focus on North American Church Growth. The Church Growth Movement came of age, and it would flourish throughout the remainder of the 1970s and into the 1980s.

Coming of Age

Donald was always defending church growth thought from its critics, and one of the early and continuing criticisms of church growth theory in parts of the world experiencing rapid conversions was the many immature Christians that were often produced. When people movements took place, the maturing (or “perfecting” to use Donald’s terminology) usually occupied a back seat to the ingathering of new converts. Thus, these new Christians were often somewhat shallow and untrained.

Some voices called for a stoppage of evangelism so that the new converts could be perfected. McGavran disagreed. “Much Christianization and many, many imperfect Christians!! What does Church Growth say to this? My answer is simple. Keep on baptizing as many as possible and teaching them all things whatsoever the Lord commanded as vigorously as possible.”¹ He felt it was best to win people to Christ and then worry later on about perfecting them. Once new believers were under the direction of a new Lord and a new book—the Bible—at least they were on the right way.

McGavran wrote very little on the subject of literature. However, in a letter to Jack McAlister of World Literature Crusade, McGavran suggested that literature could be used to determine areas of awakening interest in the gospel. Once areas of interest are determined, he stated, “it is possible for literature, if specially suited to the populations of wakening interest and of proved receptivity to bring into existence movements to Christ, each consisting of many congregations within one piece of the human mosaic.”²

Later that fall Donald made a trip to India, in part to investigate the Every Home Crusade of the World Literature Crusade. He found that the Every Home Crusade teams were effective. Teams were visiting homes and sharing the gospel with the six hundred million people of India. He concluded, “No mission in India is doing anywhere near as much open, friendly, vigorous evangelization of the hundreds of millions who have never heard the name of Christ and never read a word of the Bible.”³ He

1 Donald McGavran to Chua Wee-Hian, March 3, 1975.

2 Donald McGavran to Jack McAlister, March 18, 1975.

3 Donald McGavran, Report to the Faculty of SWM, October 15, 1975, 5.

encouraged those involved in literature distribution to

[r]ecord the size and growth rate of the Church in segment. This is the best indicator of receptivity. If hundreds (or thousands) are becoming Christians and responsible members of Christ's Church, then receptivity is proven.

Carefully total replies received by you from exploratory distribution. This will show you areas of "awakening interest." (I do not call this "receptivity," I reserve that word for a degree of openness to the Gospel which results in ongoing churches.) Areas of awakening interest (in which there are relatively few churches—usually none—as yet) should be carefully studied to determine what it is which will enable these first faint signs of wakening interest to be led on to responsible membership in Christ's Church.⁴

McGavran felt that literature was best used to determine awakening interest but that it could also be used, if properly designed, to lead people to membership in Christ's church.

Donald was informed that he would be moving to a half-time status beginning with the 1975-1976 school year.⁵ He taught no classes in the fall but he did supervise the doctoral dissertations of six men. In the winter quarter he taught Christianity and Culture II and in the spring quarter Theology of Mission Today and Advanced Church Growth. That same month he received a personal letter of thanks from Ralph Winter the closeness of their relationship. After thanking Donald for writing a forward to one of his books, Winter remarked, "I just mean to write this little letter of appreciation for all you have meant to me and how very rewarded I have been by being associated with you. I may not fully mirror all your concerns but there is no man I know who more fully mirrors mine."⁶

Since Donald was now on half-time status at the SWM-ICG, he made two trips in fall 1975, to Asia (August 31 to September 26) and to churches in America (October 3-10). His main purpose for going to

4 Donald McGavran to Jack McAlister, March 18, 1975.

5 Donald McGavran to A. F. Glasser, May 11, 1975.

6 Ralph Winter to Donald McGavran, May 13, 1975.

Asia was to lead a church growth seminar in Kuala Lumpur. He spoke in a number of Methodist and Lutheran Churches and, at the church growth seminar, lectured several times a day for five days. Ralph Neighbor, a Southern Baptist missionary from Singapore, also delivered lectures at the conference on urban church growth.

Interest in American Church Growth continued strong, as revealed in a report by Win Arn.

Since our last board meeting (June, 1975), I have traveled over 90,000 miles... conducted 655 seminars and training sessions, with over 7,500 in attendance. This ministry has touched over 1300 local churches, representing 20 different denominations in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Church Growth thinking is going forth!⁷

He also announced that the *Church Growth, America* newsletter would be changed to a magazine format beginning with the January 1976 issue. The issue would include enlarged special features and have a circulation from seven thousand to ten thousand, working toward a goal of twenty-five thousand. The new Advanced Growth Seminar would be held January 11-16, 1976. Most surprising was notification that all of Arn's available speaking dates for 1976 were already full. The Institute had also started franchising its materials and seminars to individual denominations.

Another Advanced Growth Seminar for professionals was held from August 30 to September 3, 1976. Speakers included Donald McGavran, Arthur Glasser, Ray Ortlund, Ralph Winter, Peter Wagner, C. W. Perry, Charles Mylander, Tom Wolf, David Hocking, John Wimber, Russ Reid, and Win Arn. A second seminar was offered from January 3-7, 1977, using the same line-up. The popularity of the Institute for American Church Growth's Advanced Growth Seminars led to Arn taking a group of church leaders on a traveling seminar from July 11-29, 1977, to Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Arn took along his daughter, Arnell, Donald, and a cameraman. McGavran and Arn led the group on an experiential study in the growth of the church throughout the centuries, giving lectures on the early church at

⁷ Win Arn, report to board of directors, Arcadia, CA, December 30, 1975.

several locations. All throughout the trip, film was shot of McGavran and Arn conversing about the growth of the church in Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and Philippi. Donald's lectures from this trip formed the text of a future book on the theology of Church Growth.

Arn reported to Donald on a recently received report from the Churches of Christ in Australia:

It is an exciting, documented story, of how God used Church Growth thinking to change an entire denomination, in one continent, from decline to growth.

Similar results are now starting to surface in America. I was recently in the state of Washington, following up one year later, a series of Basic Seminars I conducted. You will be pleased to learn, that in that denomination (Free Methodist) among the churches in that district, they grew more in that one year following the seminars, than they did in the years of 1968, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, and 75 combined! Praise the Lord!

These are busy days... have been working hard... in the last 60 days I have spent 5 1/2 at home... seeing the Lord increase His Church... and feeling fulfilled and useful in His service.⁸

After seeing the report from the Churches of Christ in Australia, Donald recommended that it be rewritten as an article. However, he cautioned that only the actual results be used, rather than projections of growth. The institute proceeded to develop a letter citing the report, but calculated the results from actual growth during 1975-75 and added projections for 1976-77. Donald was not pleased with this mixing of actual results and mere projections. He commented in a note that,

I advised as gently as I could that all use of this "letter... be stopped ... and that we wait till [they] could provide the actuals. Then let us rejoice and publicize the real results.

Even my good friend Win Arn has not learned to be ruthless about hopes and projections and to separate them rigidly from

⁸ Win Arn to Donald McGavran, October 22, 1976.

actually achieved membership.⁹

At the semi-annual board meeting of the institute, Arn reported that the message of church growth had reached sixteen thousand people, representing nearly seven thousand churches.

Donald and Arn started working on a new manuscript that was to be released in 1977— *Ten Steps for Church Growth*. On December 14-15 and 21-22, McGavran and Arn recorded a taped conversation based on this book. Barbara Arn served as moderator on the tapes, asking questions that Donald and Arn answered. Chip Arn did the recording, which was edited and released along with the book during 1977. The tape set— *10 Steps: 120 Minutes of Dynamic Church Growth Concepts*—comprised six cassette tapes covering the information from the book in a conversational manner.

As awareness of the Institute for American Church expanded, Arn began receiving invitations from as far away as Japan to lead church growth seminars. Donald was excited that Win was going to Japan but apprised him of the barriers to church growth in that country.

I note you are going to be in Japan this summer. Excellent! By all means use the three films and all the visuals. What is really needed is laymen acting as pastors of small house churches of their own intimates.

Make this the constant emphasis of your teaching. Japan is suffering from a clericalism, that only the pastor has any authority. At present, pastors resist scab labor (lay action). That must change. Ephesians 4 can be used to very good effect.

You will have a fruitful time there.¹⁰

Arn's ministry in Japan was well received, but it was a missionary endeavor, as the host churches paid only for his travel and lodging.

At the end-of-the-year IACG board meeting, the members were pleased to see that American churches were continuing to respond to church growth seminars and training. During the year the institute had

9 Donald McGavran note, October 27, 1976.

10 Donald McGavran to Win Arn, February 1, 1977.

grown from two full-time and two part-time employees to ten full-time employees. Since its beginning the institute had operated from Arn's home, but in light of the early rapid growth, in 1975 they had moved to offices on Foothill Boulevard, in Arcadia, California. Now the IACG needed to relocate to larger facilities once again. Arn recommended to the board that the institute move to offices located in the Grosvenor Building in Pasadena (adjacent to the Pasadena Hilton). The conclusion to Arn's proposal contained insight into his thinking at that time.

I recommend that we move to these new facilities. This recommendation is submitted, believing we must grow and fulfill our purpose and mission, add staff, and reach the potential that God has for the Institute. However, this is another "leap of faith" . . . without guaranteed support and incurring obligations on a three-year lease. These situations always send chills up my spine.¹¹

The board of directors approved the proposal, and the institute moved into new facilities at 150 South Los Robles, Pasadena, California, at the end of the summer months. The new letterhead listed Win as President/Executive Director, David Winscott as Vice-President of Seminars, and Charles Arn as Vice-President for Communications.

Donald attended a SWM-ICG faculty meeting in June, where the future sequence of classes was distributed, finding to his surprise that he was not listed as a professor for the 1976-1977 school year. As Dean Glasser was out of his office, Donald wrote a letter asking the school to retain him as a professor for that school year. The letter revealed his thinking, at the age of 77, regarding his teaching career. He wrote,

You know my position. I have repeatedly said to President Hubbard that I do not want to stay on for a day after he feels I am not making a contribution to the School which others cannot make. I have said the same to you. With some men, who want to hang on, the administrator resorts to devious means: makes them feel uncomfortable, drops sly remarks, omits them from future

11 Proposal to IACG Board of Directors, May 23, 1977.

plans, etc., etc. But you and David know that this is not needed with me. I don't need the money. I have many other things to do. When the time comes that you and President Hubbard, for any reason at all feel you want to replace me, I will depart easily and with good feeling.¹²

Glasser replied two weeks later,

Please believe that I have never desired to sever your connection from the School of World Mission. Indeed, I have no higher priority than to keep your flag flying on our masthead for years to come. You are at the heart of our program and your contribution to our students is invaluable. Our best lure to potential SWMers is to hold before them the possibility and privilege of studying under the 'Apostle of Church Growth.' Enough said!

But Glasser could not stop himself from offering one last declaration of commitment to Donald. "You are still needed to help us hold it [SWM] to its high objectives—the promotion and defense of 'Great Commission Missions' and the growth of the Church."¹³ The end result was that Donald was given freedom to travel one quarter a year, while teaching two quarters half time. He was also to retain his office as long as needed, along with secretarial assistance.

Wagner had taken over as associate editor of *Global Church Growth* as sort of an understudy to McGavran. Everyone knew the time was coming for Donald to relinquish the editorship, and discussions were beginning in that direction. One concern Donald had about the newsletter was the book of the month club recommendations, which were not always church growth books. He became so frustrated in the summer of 1975 that he shouted through the typewriter, "This is the last time. My integrity is the issue. To name as book of the month in the Church Growth Book Club a book by a man who openly opposes E2 and E3 missionaries, is deceitful."¹⁴

12 Donald McGavran to Arthur Glasser, June 16, 1975.

13 Arthur Glasser to Donald McGavran, July 1, 1975.

14 Donald McGavran to Ralph Winter, July 9, 1975.

A new policy resulted, specifying that only books supportive of church growth theory would be recommended.

Donald loved Wagner but grew a bit frustrated by the way the faculty emphasis was playing out. When Wagner came onto the faculty, Donald had viewed him as his understudy who would take over the focus on international church growth. However, Wagner's move toward American church growth meant that a part-time professor was teaching international church growth. Donald wrote, "It is clear that Peter, correctly sensing a huge field in Church Growth in America, is devoting himself body and soul to American Church Growth."¹⁵

Donald's answer to this dilemma was to integrate the faculties of the School of Theology and the School of World Mission by having Wagner move to the School of Theology in the area of evangelism. This never occurred, but the suggested highlighted Donald's disappointment that Wagner was moving toward American Church Growth. In Donald's view, Arn was the one to focus on American Church Growth, with Wagner left to focus on international church growth. Things were not to play out in this manner, as both Arn and Wagner had already moved toward American Church Growth. Donald resigned himself to Wagner's new direction and wrote to Jim Montgomery, "I rejoice in the sudden great interest in American Church Growth—sparked quite largely by Peter Wagner's and Win Arn's work and I have backed them in every way."¹⁶

Even Donald was turning somewhat toward America, speaking at more and more conferences in the United States, a fact he personally regretted, admitting to George Hunter, "I observed that in accepting your gracious invitations to Miami, and the meeting of national evangelists in October 1978, and in writing my books with Arn and you, I was going the same route."¹⁷ Hunter encouraged Donald not to discount the church growth gains in the United States, as it was a large, influential country. "America may be God's special place for church growth sensitivity and strategizing right now, and I would not quickly discount that." Hunter continued,

15 Donald McGavran to Arthur Glasser, July 12, 1975.

16 Donald McGavran to Jim Montgomery, December 24, 1975.

17 Donald McGavran to George Hunter, III, May 8, 1978.

You are right, of course, in your passion for the infinitely greater task for the other continents, mission fields, and peoples. At the same time, do not discount the very great base that we are in process of laying for church growth missiology and related concerns here in America in the 1970s. Think of how many people are reading church growth, thinking church growth, taking courses in church growth, subscribing to church growth periodicals, are going through doctor of ministry programs focusing on church growth now, all in very great numbers.”¹⁸

Hunter realized that the expansion of church growth teaching in the United States would ultimately spill over to other parts of the world. Church growth in North America would find its way across the oceans. This was true, as American ideas and ideals influenced much of the world, but Donald worried about the long-term growth impact. “Most organizations by good planning, concentrating publicity and judicious encouragement can bring about a spurt of growth,” he admitted. “But after the spurt is over, how do we secure the ongoing will to growth and the ongoing power for growth?”¹⁹

It was Donald’s belief that most schools of mission highlighted specialties, wrongly assuming that evangelism would take care of itself, and he did not want Fuller to make such a mistake. Additionally, he desired the SWM to hire two church growth professors, one to cover international missions and one devoted to the North American scene. Glasser felt that the SWM should make an unequivocal pledge to Donald that the school would retain the centrality of his missionary concerns, especially the Lord’s concern and passion for the salvation of lost men and women.

One way to make this possible was the establishment of the McGavran Chair of Worldwide Church Growth. Glasser believed that having an endowed Chair of Church Growth would essentially guarantee perpetuation of the distinctives of the Church Growth Movement. He also desired that the SWM install Donald in the chair as Distinguished Professor and create a five-year plan for his continued teaching, leading to

18 George G. Hunter, III to Donald McGavran, June 5, 1978.

19 Donald McGavran to George G. Hunter, III, June 26, 1978.

eventual retirement. Donald agreed that “[t]he establishment of a Chair for Worldwide Church Growth will provide the on-going structure needed to keep this distinctive bright at Fuller’s School of Missions.”²⁰ The SWM faculty recommended both of Glasser’s ideas to the joint faculty of Fuller on August 19, 1975.²¹

A little known fact is that the SWM-ICG faculty considered becoming an autonomous school during 1975 and 1976. The Hartford library was available, and the SWM wanted the missions portion, while FTS wanted the remainder of the books. As the SWM faculty discussed the Hartford library, the longer and larger aspects of the whole FTS came into view. Faculty members of SWM decided that they needed a major research-study-strategy center of missions, and that SWM must be the central piece. They even drew up a list of potential board members at a gathering on March 4, 1975, and looked at potential buildings to either rent or purchase, one of which was the Pasadena College campus. The idea was to bring together in one location several mission agencies, including libraries, research agencies, and publishers. In addition, the faculty believed that they needed to separate from FTS due to their different clienteles, communities served, tasks, literary needs, and institutional dynamics. Ed Dayton suggested that the SWM constituency was quite different than those of the FTS and School of Psychology (SOP):

The broad church community to which SWM relates is different than the communities to which the other Schools relate. First, they are multi-national and that of course means multi-cultural. Second, they tend to be activists, pragmatic. In the midst of desperately wanting people to know Christ, they may be technologically simplistic and perhaps even naïve. Third, they tend to a particular cross-section of the church, those concerned with evangelism. These are the people we serve and these are the people to whom we look for financial and spiritual support.²²

20 Donald McGavran to Arthur Glasser, August 22, 1975.

21 Arthur Glasser to the joint Faculty, August 19, 1975.

22 Ed Dayton, “PRELIMINARY DRAFT: A SELF-STUDY,” Faculty of School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary (April 26, 1976), 9.

A meeting was arranged between Piece Beaver, Winter, President Hubbard, and Fuller trustee chairman Weyerhauser in Chicago to discuss the concept. Weyerhauser was fearful that if the SWM were to become autonomous it would establish a precedent, and the School of Psychology might desire to leave Fuller as well. His main concern was that the SOP would lose its evangelical moorings if it pulled away from the School of Theology. Some members of the SWM felt that the SWM was being sacrificed for the SOP.²³

The proposal that Ralph Winter had made to purchase the 35-acre campus of Pasadena College was not accepted. Winter, however, felt so strongly about the idea that he resigned from the faculty of SWM and with his wife, Roberta, founded the U.S. Center for World Mission in 1976 with no staff, one secretary, and just \$100 in cash. He mounted a fund-raising campaign to purchase the Pasadena campus himself. The focus of the U.S. Center was on cross-cultural evangelization, especially toward those who had had yet to hear and to believe. Donald called Winter's plan "a most timely, strategic and significant movement,"²⁴ but he and the SWM faculty did not happily accept everything that Winter desired. Kraft drafted a letter to Winter expressing some of the feelings of the SWM faculty. Generally, he noted that they loved the idea of a Center for World Missions but disliked Winter's idea of establishing a new university (eventually called William Carey University).

Winter was a highly creative individual, but he tended to become bored easily. Over his career he had moved swiftly from missionary work in Guatemala to Latin American studies to Theological Education by Extension (TEE) to teaching at SWM to mentoring doctoral students, and so on. The SWM faculty felt that establishing a university was simply another in Winter's long list of interests, of which he soon would become bored. While they supported the idea of a Center for World Mission, they wished that Winter would remain at the SWM instead of burdening himself with a new institution, its property, fundraising, etc.²⁵ Donald's

23 Ralph Winter to SWM Faculty, January 27, 1976.

24 Donald McGavran to Ralph Winter, May 9, 1977.

25 Charles Kraft to Ralph Winter, September 22, 1977.

response to Kraft's letter was to "[s]ay nothing. Plough corn."²⁶ Winter went on to be the director of the U.S. Center for World Mission, as well as the founder, president, and chancellor of William Carey International University.

Wagner spoke to a gathering at Fuller, where he defended the Homogeneous Unit Principle. Afterward, Donald sent a complimentary letter thanking him for a "fine presentation this morning which brought out the enormously complicated nature of the social mosaic in America. Human society is necessarily a mosaic of homogeneous units and all Christianization must take account of the fact. The validity of the H. U. must be taken seriously."²⁷ McGavran suggested to Wagner that they should temporarily glorify the homogeneous unit to teach its validity. However, in the end, he believed they should seek balance between cultural pluralism and the good of the whole. He also expressed concern that Wagner's exegesis of Acts 6 would not stand up to intense scrutiny, explaining, "The cause of homogeneous unit theory is not helped by eisegesis."²⁸ Wagner responded that while he appreciated Donald's views, he had tested his hypotheses with several informed audiences and exegetical literature and felt his interpretation of Acts 6 was reasonable.

The SWM-ICG faculty was surprised early in the year to find that fellow Fuller Seminary professor, Ralph P. Martin (1925-2013) had written an article highly critical of church growth. "Church Growth is Not the Point" appeared in the British evangelical publication *Life of Faith*. As professor Martin had not bothered to talk face-to-face with any of the School of World Mission faculty members, Dean Glasser was notably upset and sent a letter of protest to Provost Glenn Barker. During this time a major controversy was swirling in theological circles concerning *Man as Male and Female* (1975) by professor Paul King Jewett. Former professor Harold Lindsell had written a critique, and evangelicals were widely criticizing Jewett's work. Several faculty members from the SWM-ICG also had serious misgivings over the way Jewett interpreted Scripture, but they were still trying to maintain solidarity with the other two schools

26 Donald McGavran, open note, September 22, 1977.

27 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, March 22, 1976.

28 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, March 22, 1976.

of Fuller. In light of this backdrop, to find that professor Martin had written an article critical of church growth theory was a distressing blow to the SWM faculty. Glasser explained to Barker,

The SWM is committed to the thesis that the New Testament, rightly understood, sounds a vastly different note from “Church Growth is Not the Point!” True, it speaks of divine sovereignty: only God can save and only Christ can build the Church. But the New Testament also speaks of human responsibility. Our loyalty to this second dimension as well as to the first transcends our loyalty to the Seminary. Hence this letter of protest.”²⁹

Glasser saw it as highly unfortunate that professor Martin was not seeking to maintain the unity of the three schools and that he was unwilling to discuss the matter with the SWM faculty before putting his disagreements into print.

Pacific Christian College, located at the time in Fullerton, California, conferred on Donald the degree of Doctor of Divinity on May 28, 1976. Shortly afterward, Dean Glasser passed along the SWM faculty suggestions for potential board members of Fuller Theological Seminary. The four names included Donald A. McGavran, Warren E. Webster, Eugene A. Nida, and Louis King. Of McGavran, Dean Glasser simply commented, “Qualified in every way.”³⁰ Glasser recounted that, as of June 1976, SWM’s 11th year, there were 173 active students, of which 71 were career missionaries and 67 nationals. The six full-time faculty had written thirty articles/reviews and four books/booklets. SWM professors were making themselves and the church growth approach known.

Church Growth in North America received a boost with the publication of Wagner’s *Your Church Can Grow* (Regal) in 1976. This book, along with McGavran and Arn’s *How to Grow A Church*, became the two primary church growth texts for pastors in the United States and Canada. This new book presented an excellent summary of church growth thought as it stood in 1976. Wagner’s “Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church”

29 Arthur F. Glasser to Glenn Barker, April 2, 1976.

30 Arthur Glasser to David Hubbard, June 4, 1976.

became a standard formula for analyzing church growth in his Doctor of Ministry classes for more than twenty years and influenced the thinking of a generation of North American pastors. However, it was not without its critics, who accused Wagner of employing too much pragmatic American business and advertising language. In addition, as Donald had warned in an earlier letter, critics voiced concern over Wagner's "lack of serious involvement with Scripture."³¹

The three schools of Fuller found themselves in the heat of battle after former professor Harold Lindsell wrote *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976). Lindsell recounted the history of FTS and the way in which it had disavowed inerrancy. The book was about more than Fuller, but it clearly implicated Fuller as a school that had drifted away from affirming the full authority of Scripture. The resulting furor prompted President Hubbard to address the controversy in two speeches. He first defended FTS at a seminary convocation on April 8, 1976. His address, "Reflections on Fuller's Theological Position and Role in the Church," affirmed that "[t]o the uniqueness and full inspiration of the Bible we are committed."³² Then, in June, he distributed a statement "What We Believe and Teach," in which he affirmed, "We stand in full fellowship with the apostles, the reformers, and the evangelical missionaries of the centuries. None of us denies the infallibility of the Bible; none of us claims the infallibility of our faculty."³³

Lindsell seemed to focus his concern primarily on the FTS and not on the SWM, but some critics were including the SWM under the same judgment. For example, in an article published in the *Christian Century* Donald Dayton, a professor of theology at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, included the Church Growth Movement in the battle. He maintained that "the high commitment of Church Growth teaching to the social sciences, especially anthropology, has led to incorporation of a large

31 Howard A. Snyder, "How Some Churches Grow—Sometimes," a review of *Your Church Can Grow*. *Eternity* (November 1976), 62.

32 David Allan Hubbard, "Reflections on Fuller's Theological Position and Role in the Church," presented at the FTS Convocation (April 8, 1976), 9.

33 David Allan Hubbard, "What We Believe and Teach," a position statement (June, 1976), 6.

portion of the relativism and pragmatism of the modern world view.”³⁴ After reading Dayton’s article, Wagner wrote to his SWM colleagues, “It looks like the fat’s in the fire and the SWM is now in the Battle for the Bible.”³⁵ Including SWM in the battle was odd, especially since all of the core SWM faculty at the time affirmed inerrancy!

Of the numerous Church Growth principles enumerated by Donald and the SWM faculty, what became known as the Homogeneous Unit Principle (H. U. or HUP) created the most controversy. Wagner and biblical scholar John Stott discussed the possibility of convening a consultation to discuss the principle. The idea was to invite four or five persons on both sides of the issue to Pasadena.³⁶ The meeting took place between May 31 and June 2, 1977, on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary. Five SWM faculty members prepared papers discussing the methodology, anthropology, ethics, history, and theology of the HUP, and five others presented responses. Some twenty-five representatives interacted as the ten presenters debated. The five presenters included McGavran, Kraft, Wagner, Winter, and Glasser, and the responders included Harvie Conn, Robert Ramseyer, Victor Hayward, John Yoder, and Rene´ Padilla. John Stott served as moderator. Other SWM faculty members in attendance were Paul Hiebert, Edwin Orr, and Alan Tippett. President Hubbard also participated, along with a few other faculty members from FTS.

The conclusion of the consultation, which was generally positive, was published as “The Pasadena Consultation—Homogeneous Unit Principle” in the first Lausanne Occasional Paper. Writing to Glasser, McGavran commented on the conclusion to the Pasadena Consultation, “I have read with care The Pasadena Consultation. It is good—remarkabl[y] good & will advance the cause. Your ‘vibes’ are correct—that getting the thing to occur at all was important. And John Stott’s skill in drawing both ends together brought victory out of disaster.”³⁷

Once again, the fall quarter found McGavran in India leading a series

34 Donald W. Dayton, “The Battle for the Bible: Renewing the Inerrancy Debate,” *The Christian Century* (November 10, 1976), 979.

35 C. Peter Wagner to SWM Faculty, November 12, 1976.

36 John Stott to Peter Wagner, September 16, 1976.

37 Donald McGavran to Arthur Glasser, June 4, 1977.

of eight church growth seminars during November 1976. He flew back to Columbia, North Carolina, on November 28, where he continued for the remainder of the fall working on a manuscript titled *Understanding the Church in India* and developing a class on Indian Church for the School of World Mission. That December he signed a contract with the William Carey Library for a reprint of *Church Growth & Christian Mission*, which Harper & Row had originally published.

After observing religious freedom being trampled underfoot in numerous countries of the world, Donald wrote a letter to the President of the United States asking that the State Department protest such lack of freedom. He specifically noted infractions in India and Greece. “We trust your administration will promptly reverse this policy of silence,” he demanded, “and will champion religious freedom all around the world.” Donald was not asking for military or economic reprisal but “to bring public opinion to bear. America ought to mobilize world opinion against all such infringements.”³⁸

In March Wagner received an unexpected letter from Billy Graham with an invitation to conduct an “in-depth study of our crusades—the preparation, and the follow-up.” Graham explained, “I believe you are in a position to make suggestions that would be extremely helpful to us. I wish we could get together more often. There are few people in the Christian world that I admire any more than I do you. I believe the Lord sent you to the Kingdom for such a time as this.”³⁹ The letter concluded with Graham providing his phone number and asking Wagner to call him with suggestions. Wagner sent a copy of the letter to Donald, asking for his thoughts, and he replied, “Seize with both hands Billy Graham’s cordial invitation to make an in-depth study of his Crusades from the point of view of their effect on church growth.”⁴⁰ There is no evidence that Wagner ever did this, but Win Arn did.

Principles and Procedures in Church Growth II was Donald’s course for the winter quarter in 1977. As the syllabus stated, “This course purposes to harness theology, ethnology, linguistics, history, quantitative analysis,

38 Donald McGavran to President of the United States, February 9, 1977.

39 Billy Graham to Peter Wagner, March 7, 1977.

40 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, March 14, 1977.

research, missionary experience, goal setting, and disciplined planning to the task of discipling *ta ethne*.⁴¹ The class covered one chapter of *Understanding Church Growth* per period, with the final 10 class sessions given over to student presentations regarding the growth within their own mission settings.

The proposal for the McGavran Chair of Church Growth continued to be considered but advanced slowly. One of the issues was raising enough money to fund the chair. Donald and Mary decided to fund the launch of the chair themselves, but Donald desired that the chair continue to be devoted to his perspective of church growth and not to the “good and peripheral ways of looking at mission.” “If I can’t be sure the chair will stay true to church growth thought, “I won’t make the gift,” he wrote to Wagner.⁴² In July 1978 Donald mailed a general letter to friends and former students of the SWM, alerting them to several items of interest, chief of which was announcing the establishment of a Chair of Church Growth, which would be endowed with eight hundred thousand dollars. He shared that the first gift of half that amount had come in but he did not divulge that he and Mary had donated the sum.

“This is the first Chair of Church Growth to be established anywhere in the world,” he proclaimed, “and will play a significant part in focusing attention on church growth as the continuing center of the missionary enterprise and as a chief and irreplaceable purpose of the Christian mission to the world.”⁴³ While this appeared to be a most cheerful announcement, Winter was concerned and offered a “serious and sincere warning” to Donald about funding the Chair of Church Growth. From Winter’s viewpoint, it was wrong for Fuller to allow Donald and Mary to bear such a heavy financial burden. In particular, he did not feel that any written document could “define, defend and retain across the years” Donald’s design for the Chair.

“You can be sure,” Winter warned, “the human language, which English is, will not prevent them from interpreting it in any way they wish later on.”

41 Course syllabus, SWM, 661.

42 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, May 4, 1977.

43 Donald McGavran to friends and former Students, July 1978.

Winter believed there were already clear signs that FTS was “progressively taking away the autonomy of the School of World Mission.” It was plainly evident that the faculty of the School of Theology continued to “regard the School of Missions as teaching ‘Sunday School theology.’” Giving the institution of Fuller so much money when its “track record to this point is bad and definitely getting worse—I speak of course not in moral terms, but in regard to the relationship of [F]uller to the cause of missions,” was just not a wise use of Donald’s and Mary’s money.⁴⁴ In the end, they did donate the money, but Winter’s warnings were to prove true, if not until thirty years later.

The year 1977 brought another change to the faculty when Tippet announced his retirement and return to his native Australia. This, of course, meant a search for his replacement. After they had turned away one candidate, the SWM faculty invited Paul G. Hiebert (1932-2007) to join them as professor of anthropology. He had grown up in India and served there as a missionary, which attracted the support of Donald for his appointment in 1977. Although he contributed numerous excellent books and articles to further the understanding of cross-cultural missions, students of Church Growth know him best for his article “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” published in 1982. This article helped pastors in North America begin to understand the nature of spiritual power issues. Hiebert taught at the SWM until 1990, when he accepted a new teaching position at Trinity in Deerfield, Illinois.

Along with Paul Hiebert, Dean S. Gilliland (1928-2013) joined the SWM faculty in 1977 as Associate Professor of Contextualization of Theology. Having served as a missionary in Nigeria, Gilliland was another in a line of practical missionary scholars called to teach at the SWM. With a Ph.D. from Hartford Seminary, he was the first professor at any major seminary to have the word “contextualization” in his title. His focus on developing a Pauline theology of mission resulted in the publication of *Pauline Theology and Mission Practice* in 1983. Together Hiebert and Gilliland signaled the beginning of a second wave of faculty who were not directly recruited and hired by McGavran.⁴⁵

44 Ralph Winter to Donald McGavran, August 18, 1978.

45 For an overview of the history and faculty members of the School of World Mission (now In-

In 1974, while serving the Fuller Evangelistic Association, Wagner had become a founding member of the board for Arn's Institute for American Church Growth. During his tenure, Wagner increasingly moved the FEA toward American Church Growth, and his involvement with both the Institute for American Church Growth and the FEA created a conflict of interest. Thus, when his three-year term on the Arn's Board of Directors expired in 1977, he chose not to serve another term. Wagner and Arn mutually agreed that it would be best for Wagner to give his time to the Fuller Institute. However, Wagner continued to participate as honorary chairman of Arn's advisory board and to teach Advanced Growth Seminars at the IACG.

Under the direction of Wagner, and with Wimber's leadership, FEA developed as a consultation ministry. By October 1977 four diagnostic tools, three training kits, and seven workbooks had been written to help pastors analyze their churches. Yet Wimber's days as director of American Church Growth for the FEA were slowly coming to an end. He had previously been discouraged by his experience at Yorba Linda Friends Church, never intending to return to the pastorate. However, after he and his wife, Carol, left the Friends church, they began hosting a small Bible study in their home in October 1976. The small meeting grew to 50 people within a few weeks. By May 1977, the Bible study was averaging 150 in attendance, and Wimber was designated pastor. In 1978 Wimber decided to resign from the FEA to devote full time to his growing church. The church became Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda and eventually part of the Vineyard Church movement in 1982. During the 1980s, Wimber went on to become well known for his emphasis on healing. By the time of his death in November 1997, he had led in the planting of 448 Vineyard churches in the United States and another 238 in other countries.⁴⁶

By 1977, the monopoly on church growth that SWM-ICG had enjoyed was quickly coming to an end. Church growth was routinely being

tercultural Studies) see *SWM/SIS at FORTY: A Participant/Observer's View of Our History* by Charles H. Kraft (William Carey Library, 2005).

46 Steve Nicholson, "John Wimber the Church Planter," Vineyard USA (Fall 1998), 1. Accessed November 18, 2004. <http://www.vinewardusa.org/publications/magazines/vov/fall_98/features/jrwChurch-Planter.htm>.

accepted as a subject in universities and seminaries. The *Church Growth Bulletin* had been the first publication featuring articles on church growth insights, but more than a dozen similar bulletins, journals, and newsletters were available around the world by the end of 1977. Wagner, Arn, and many others were flooding the marketplace with books strictly addressing church growth issues. Things, too, were changing at SWM-ICG. Donald wrote to President Hubbard,

As I phase out, no one seems likely to replace me in the overseas field. Peter Wagner is tremendous; but the field of American church growth is still greater. IT claims almost all his time. Of all the men on the faculty, Glasser stresses growth overseas most—yet his main thought is theology.... I don't know the answer; but call the matter to your attention.⁴⁷

He did have one proposal, however, and that was to explore the possibility of hiring Tetsunao Yamamori (b. 1937) as professor of evangelism in the School of Theology. Robert “Bob” Munger was moving toward retirement from the position of professor of evangelism, and Donald thought a new professor with a church growth view of evangelism would be an excellent fit. Yamamori also had a PhD in sociology. Since FTS was not his own school, Donald felt the idea had to be passed through President Hubbard first. The idea was not to be accepted, but Yamaoria eventually did join Arn's IACG.⁴⁸

Donald continued to exert as much influence as he could on getting the right man into the School of Theology to teach evangelism. In January 1978, he recommended another possible candidate—George G. Hunter III. Hunter had been professor of evangelism at the Perkins School of Theology, was head of the board of discipleship for the United Methodist Church, and had been a scholar in residence in 1977 at SWM. Nothing transpired, but Donald persevered and suggested to Wagner eighteen months later, “Let's team up on getting George Hunter here to take Bob

47 Donald McGavran to David Hubbard, September 27, 1977.

48 Yamamori went on to teach at Biola University's Talbot School of Theology and eventually served as president of Food for the Hungry International from 1984-2001.

Munger's place. He would be most popular and effective. No one could do a better job." Wagner scribbled a reply to the bottom on Donald's note and sent it back. It read, "I would love to have Hunter here. But I have talked with Meye and—believe it or not—they have no budget for replacing... Munger!"⁴⁹ Yet again Donald's suggestion was not acted upon.

Plans were underway to expand the organizational structure of Arn's Institute when the board held its semiannual meetings on December 15, 1977. The suggested organizational chart showed plans for six vice presidents over the areas of education, communication, seminars, development, administration, and cross-cultural outreach, and Ted Yamamori's name was scratched in for vice-president of education.

Since FTS was not seriously considering Yamamori to be a professor, Donald suggested to Arn that he consider hiring him at the IACG. Discussions with Yamamori moved along well enough for Arn to announce that "Dr. Ted Yamamori will join the staff of the Institute as of July 1." Yamamori had graduated from Northwest Christian College with a BA in Ministry in 1962, just one year after Donald had started the Institute of Church Growth there. Somehow, over the years, Yamamori had caught the church growth bug, and he wrote *Church Growth in Japan* (William Carey Library, 1974), *Introducing Church Growth* (Standard Publishing Co., 1974), and *Church Growth: Everybody's Business* (Standard Publishing Co., 1976). Donald felt he was the right person for the job.

The job was to direct the new "Center for American Church Growth Studies." Established under the umbrella of the IACG, the new center was to equip lay church leaders through correspondence study and classroom courses in church growth/evangelism. The Center planned on providing continuing education for professional church leaders, as well as conducting research to support churches and denominations in their evangelism programs. Since Yamamori held a PhD in Sociology of Religion from Duke University (1970), he appeared to be well suited to lead the new center.

This was another "leap of faith" as they needed \$40,000 to fund the center for its first year. Yamamori began on July 1, 1978, and worked to develop a curriculum for "Growing Churches Through Lay Leadership."

49 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, September 7, 1979.

Arn rejoiced in an August 16 update to the board members: “Good news... Praise the Lord!... The financial goal (\$40,000) for establishing the Center has been achieved! (\$50,000 received.) This provides ‘running time’ for the Center to generate funds. The Lord’s blessing is evident in this new venture.”⁵⁰ Along with his rejoicing, Arn shared that all institute reserves had been used up during the summer months. However, the seminar schedule for fall 1978 was strong and would relieve the financial burden. Arn announced that well-known seminar leader Olan Hendrix was working with the institute in an associate relationship.

In the beginning days of the Church Growth Movement, both McGavran and Tippett worked to defend church growth against its critics. After Wagner came onto the faculty in 1971, he had gradually assumed the role of church growth apologist. He had been instrumental in bringing the Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Committee to Fuller for a consultation on the Homogeneous Unit Principle and had also invited Orlando Costas, a critic from South America, to join the SWM as a visiting professor, in part to engage in constructive dialogue with him regarding church growth. Implicit in all of Wagner’s books, and sometimes explicitly, he sought to answer the critics. Part of the problem was that almost every denomination or pastor or denominational leader was scheduling a church growth conference, with speakers expounding on the topic who had no professional training in the academic field of Church Growth! Wagner explained at one such conference: “Last week, Jim Ogden, evangelism executive of the American Baptists in Valley Forge called me up and ‘confessed’ that he had set up a conference for all their top brass on ‘church growth’ but that he read my book only two weeks ago, and realized that he didn’t have a single church growth expert on the program.”⁵¹

Maintaining the brand name “Church Growth” demanded continued defense, an important part of which was found in the FTS doctor of ministry program. In the fall of 1974 FTS opened a continuing education program for professional ministers. The new doctor of ministry program brought together the resources of the School of Theology, the School of Psychology, and the School of World Mission. Providentially, Wagner was

50 Win Arn to IACG board of directors, August 16, 1978.

51 C. Peter Wagner to Don Gill, August 9, 1977.

appointed a member of the curriculum committee as a representative of the School of World Mission. Under his influence, the curriculum committee added two new doctor of ministry courses on church growth, beginning in 1975, and two more in 1978.⁵²

Building on the response generated from the initial pilot course in 1972, Wagner's classes filled up quickly. The increase of students in Wagner's Church Growth I and Church Growth II courses was driven in large part from the influence of Arn's Institute and the FEA's Department of Church Growth. After their introduction to church growth through these two institutes, church leaders naturally looked for more education in the field. The Fuller doctor of ministry degree program provided just what pastors and denominational executives were seeking. About 150 pastors and denominational executives received training in church growth through the doctor of ministry program in 1977. In fact, the demand for Wagner's church growth doctor of ministry classes was so great that he had to offer two simultaneous classes in 1978 and beyond. Those who went through the program were taught the difference between technical "Church Growth," which arose from McGavran's initial research, and popular "church growth," which was tied closely to well-known pastors of growing churches. Unfortunately, the urge to be part of a growing movement led those who were not Church Growth to fly a banner of church growth even though they did not know the theory.

Donald kept in touch with former students and tracked the growth of their missions after they left Fuller. A letter written to Wagner in March 1978 shows his concern that one denomination was not seeing the growth he had expected.

I have just received and studied the October-December 1977 issue of the TARGET published by CAMACOP (Alliance Church in the Philippines). I then compared it with the data in Dr. Rambo's thesis of 1968.

The disturbing fact emerges that after we had in our school

52 "The History of Fuller Theological Seminary," Fuller Theological Seminary, Accessed September 3, 2004. <http://www.fuller.edu/catalog2/01_Introduction_To_Fuller/2_The_History_of_Fuller.html>.

Rambo and Arthur and Castillo, it did not affect growth in number of churches or number of cants [preaching stations]. These had reached a plateau and continued on it from 1968 to 1974.

The Church Growth Workshop led by Vergil and myself in 1974 resulted in CAMACOP setting demanding goals in both churches and cants. These goals were achieved in 1975 and 1976, but in 1977 they were only half achieved, and I wonder whether (after the spurt caused by the Workshop) CAMACOP was settling back into the plateau again.

This is a major question we should be asking ourselves here at the School. Are we feeding into the Churches and Missions enough church growth principles (and that is what all our courses are supposed to do) that plateaus will be avoided and policies, and concepts, and methods, and theological principles which encourage growth will be embraced? That is the question.⁵³

The members of the Alliance Church that SWM had trained were on the church growth wavelength. They professed to agreement with the Church Growth School of Thought and especially appreciated the emphasis on understanding culture. If any church group or denomination should have grown, it was the Alliance. Thus, the Alliance's lack of growth fueled Donald's concern to rethink the teaching curriculum at SWM.

Donald was invited to speak at the United Methodist Congress on Evangelism from January 2-6, 1978, in Miami, Florida. The congress featured 22 simultaneous evangelism conferences in one event. The title of one was "The National Conference on Church Growth," with Donald as the featured speaker, along with George G. Hunter, III, executive for evangelism in the UMC. At the time Donald was not well known in United Methodist circles. Lyle Schaller was editing a series of books for Abingdon called the Creative Leadership Series and felt that a book on church growth coauthored by McGavran and Hunter would be well received. Schaller felt that this would be a good way to introduce Donald to the UMC constituency.

The idea was for Hunter to take Donald's seven lectures at the congress

53 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, March 23, 1977.

and use them as the basis for chapters in the book. Following the conference, Donald expressed to Hunter that he felt the people who attended were more interested in renewal than evangelism. I was “distressed to hear practically no prayer for effective evangelism, for new members added to the Lord, for growing congregations, and new churches. This blessed vagueness is probably the basic reason why your emphasis on evangelism/church growth is so desperately needed.”⁵⁴ Hunter took Donald’s addresses and turned them into three chapters, writing three others himself. Regarding their book, Donald suggested six potential titles: (1) *Effective Evangelism Today*, (2) *Bridging the Social Action/Evangelism Chasm*, (3) *Meeting Today’s Desperate Needs*, (4) *Growth: God’s Will*, (5) *Dynamic Churches: God’s Purpose*, and (6) *Bulls Eye for Churches*. The book was eventually released as *Church Growth Strategies That Work* (Abingdon, 1980).

About the same time a concern was growing in Donald’s heart and mind over the direction of the American Society of Missiology (ASM). Professors of comparative religions from state universities were joining the ASM and changing its direction somewhat. Originally, Winter had felt the evangelicals could dominate and direct the ASM, but this appeared to be changing. The professors of comparative religion, along with the Conciliar Wing, tended to include everything in missiology. Evangelicals, of course, viewed missiology much more narrowly. To define more clearly the core of Christian missiology or mission, Donald called for a meeting of the SWM faculty to discuss the development of a diagram of missiology to which they could all agree.

It should be clear that the Core is not dialogue with other religions, to discover what they say about God—sin—salvation—freedom—responsibility—heaven—hell—righteousness—justice—peace—atonement. Joint search for truth, each religion reconceiving itself in the light of other religions, is exactly what we want to rule out as CORE. It could be allowed on the rim, if properly qualified.⁵⁵

54 Donald McGavran to George Hunter, III, January 9, 1978.

55 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner and Art Glasser, March 30, 1978.

Two possible diagrams, one by McGavran and one by A. William Cook, Jr., were offered as possible diagrams to show the structure of missiology. On April 2 Wagner replied with a short note of agreement to Donald. "I would like to see our faculty discuss and approve, by vote, a SWM model for missiology."⁵⁶ Two days later, however, Dean Glasser replied to Wagner and McGavran with a note of disagreement. He felt that since Winter was President of ASM and he (Glasser) was the editor of the journal, they would uphold the evangelical position. Glasser also reminded them that Tippet's model of missiology had already been accepted and published as the SWM model. However, Glasser agreed, "I do not think that anyone of us will ever advocate a core whose focus is 'dialogue with other religions.' The core must be Jesus Christ as he is revealed in Scripture."⁵⁷

Religious historian Martin Marty (b. 1928) exchanged letters with Donald discussing the Homogeneous Unit Principle. In response to Marty's article "Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle Christian," McGavran wrote,

The HU principle arose facing the three billion who have yet to believe. Tremendous numbers of people are not becoming Christian because of unnecessary barriers (of language, culture, wealth, education, sophistication, imperialistic stance) erected by the advocates. The HU principle was first enunciated by a missionary carrying out what our Roman Catholic brethren call "the apostolate." The Early Church acted in accord with the HU principle.

I suspect that the basic reason you are keeping an open mind toward the principle is that you sense its importance in the propagation of the Gospel. Do, I beg of you, think of it primarily as a missionary and an evangelistic principle.

Remember also, that those who advocate it also advocate full brotherhood. While I was formulating the Homogeneous Unit principle, Mrs. McGavran and I were the only white members of the All Black Second Christian Church of Indianapolis. We have spent more than thirty years living among dark skinned people in

56 Peter Wagner to Donald McGavran, April 2, 1978.

57 Arthur Glasser to Peter Wagner and Donald McGavran, April 4, 1978.

India, eating with them, working with them, regarding them in every way as brothers and sisters.

There is danger, of course, that congregations (whether established according to the HU principle or not) become exclusive, arrogant, and racist. That danger must be resolutely combated.

So be assured that Wagner and I and others using the Homogeneous Unit Principle are with you a hundred percent in your conviction that brotherhood and unity are of the essence. We hope you will be with us a hundred percent in our conviction that unnecessary obstructions to accepting the Christian Faith be recognized and done away with.⁵⁸

Martin Marty responded to McGavran two weeks later.

I am glad you could read in my Context something of the sense of respect I have for the School of World Mission and your concept of church growth. When I look at the devastation of Christianity in Europe, I am cheered by efforts to prevent the same elsewhere, and find your approach generally cheering. Let me keep going on record with that.

So, your letter gave me much to chew on.... You could also see that I am troubled, as you seem to be, by the two sides of the question. You are right, psychologically. But I recall Dean Krister Stendahl telling me twenty years ago how to read Paul's letters. He said they were written to people who already had an experience of Jesus Christ but did not know how to live together, and that he spent almost his whole ministry convincing Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free, people of differing classes and outlooks that they must embody close-up unity because it was the nature of the Christian case that they do so. So, I hate to surrender too easily.

At the same time, I have found myself moving away from my own earlier mission approach, which stressed call to discipleship first, and now am ready to advocate the idea of calling people into supportive circles, where discipleship is "phase two," just as

58 Donald McGavran to Martin Marty, April 24, 1978.

integration of people across life styles and classes or kinds is your “phase two,” even if it does not become intimate.⁵⁹

Marty essentially conceded Donald’s point when he noted that Paul wrote to those who “already had an experience of Jesus Christ.” Donald agreed that it was proper to stress brotherhood with those who were already Christian. The HU principle was to be used as a strategy to reach unbelievers—a missionary principle.

About the middle of December McGavran sent a brief note to Wagner congratulating him on the manuscript of a book. In the note McGavran advised Wagner to “lay more emphasis on the theological principles. Church growth is essentially a theological position.”⁶⁰

A bit of correspondence from Wagner to McGavran in late December pictures how people viewed the Church Growth Movement.

This is an exciting time to be associated with the Church Growth Movement, Dean. We are being heard, and if we are not always agreed with, the issues are becoming sharper.

I agree that the discipling-perfecting issue is crucial. Only now are our brethren in the theological world beginning to understand its implications. For too long they were simply ignoring what we were trying to say. As its implications are further explored, the controversy will continue. Our position is devastating to all those who espouse a radical Christ-against-culture kind of Christianity and who locate evil in social structures rather than in the human heart.⁶¹

Wagner was specifically referencing five books that had been released within a few weeks of each other: *The Open Secret* (Newbigin), *Contemporary Missiology* (Verkuyl), *The Trinity Forum* (Olson), *The Other Side* (Crass), and *The Christian Ministry* (Armstrong). These books were taking pot shots at the Church Growth Movement, but at least they were acknowledging the

59 Martin Marty to Donald McGavran, May 8, 1978.

60 Donald McGavran to Peter Wagner, December 9, 1978.

61 Peter Wagner to Donald McGavran, December 21, 1978.

Church Growth School.

As Wimber was preparing to leave the FEA, he and Wagner looked for a new director of the Department of Church Growth. They remembered a pastor from Florida, Carl George, who had influenced them by asking insightful questions following a seminar. After serving as a youth minister in a Baptist church in Miami, George “went to Gainesville, Florida, where he founded the University Baptist Church and pastored it for thirteen years. During that time, he was instrumental in sponsoring several new church starts.”⁶²

Unknown to them at the time, George had made a life-changing decision to leave his pastorate to move into the field of church consultation. George explains,

My own calling came after fifteen years as a local church pastor, when God took away my peace for a period of weeks and brought me and my wife to the realization that my gifts were very much in the area of church consulting. It was an emotional experience for us to come to grips with this and to surrender, in prayer, to the God who was calling us to undertake this kind of work, even though we had no idea how to initiate it. When Peter Wagner and John Wimber called from Pasadena, California, the next morning, Wagner’s opening question was “What’s God doing in your life, these days?”⁶³

George spent the next seventeen years (1978-1995) as director of the Fuller Institute. During 1980 the Fuller Evangelistic Association and Fuller Theological Seminary formally established the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth (CEFI). The purpose of the new institute, no longer formally affiliated with Fuller Theological Seminary, was to provide “churches with training, research, and service

62 C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and Elmer Towns, *Church Growth: State of the Art*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 235.

63 Carl F. George, “Questions About the Congregational Consulting Enterprise.” Unpublished manuscript, 2004.

in evangelism and church growth.”⁶⁴ During George’s tenure as director, the Fuller Institute reached a high point of serving “ten thousand pastors every month, in tapes, training materials, seminar events, and satellite downlinks.”⁶⁵

Similar to Wimber, George came to the Fuller Institute with little formal training in McGavran’s missiological thought. He recalled,

Reading Peter Wagner’s book, “Your Church Can Grow,” opened my eyes to a set of concepts that led to my taking graduate work in social psychology at the University of Florida. It was while there, studying social movements and pondering recent church history, that the Lord prepared me for the call and subsequent service at Fuller. What I brought to Fuller in terms of spiritual formation, practical experience and academic studies were foundational to my appreciating the pioneering work in applied cultural anthropology and missiology that informed McGavran’s works.”⁶⁶

After coming to the Fuller Institute, George continued to read Schaller, Wagner, and McGavran. Another staff member of the Fuller Institute, R. Daniel Reeves, also played an influential role in assisting George in understanding McGavran’s missiology. Holding both MA and DMiss degrees from the School of World Mission at Fuller, Reeves served on the teaching and consulting staff of the Fuller Institute from 1977 to 1987.⁶⁷ During those years he “had many conversations about McGavran and missiology” with George that almost certainly provided direct influence regarding McGavran’s missiological insights. In addition to all these influences, George’s extensive field observation of exemplary congregations

64 “The History of Fuller Theological Seminary,” Fuller Theological Seminary, Accessed September 3, 2004. <http://www.fuller.edu/catalog2/01_Introduction_To_Fuller/2_The_History_of_Fuller.html>.

65 Carl F. George, “Questions About the Congregational Consulting Enterprise,” Unpublished manuscript, 2004, 2.

66 George, 2-3.

67 Daniel Reeves also earned a DMiss and PhD in Intercultural studies from Fuller’s School of Intercultural Studies (formerly the School of World Mission).

added to his base of church growth knowledge.⁶⁸

George contributed to the advancement of the Church Growth movement with his studies on small group systems, breaking growth barriers, and developing the first formal training program for church growth consultants—Diagnosis with Impact. Reeves recalled,

Jon Huegli, from Ann Arbor, helped Carl design the course. Jon and I both were involved substantially as presenters and facilitators along with Carl. I was more involved in the field accompanied visits and supervising cases than either Jon or Carl. Some of the best leaders of the church growth movement got their most practical training during this intensive two year internship, including Bob Logan, Sam Metcalf (president of Church Resource Ministries), John Ellas (Center for Church Growth), and Ray Ellis (Free Methodists).⁶⁹

The training program involved trainees in a two-year internship consisting of a “week of classwork in Pasadena; four supervised cases spread over at least fifteen months... readings; and an intensive closing week of classes.”⁷⁰ George’s study of small group systems in larger churches, and his prescriptions for effective ministry that arose from the study, became widely known as the meta-church philosophy of church ministry.

As 1978 ended, the Church Growth Movement had truly come of age, both internationally and nationally in North America. The Fuller Doctor of Ministry program was training 150 students a year in Donald’s church growth insights, and both CEFI and Arn’s IACG were running full speed ahead, communicating church growth teaching to thousands of pastors and church leaders. However, the best days of the Church Growth Movement were still to come.

68 R. Daniel Reeves, email to the author, January 27, 2005.

69 Reeves, 2005.

70 Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and Elmer Towns, *Church Growth: State of the Art*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 166.

About the Author

Gary L. McIntosh is a speaker, writer, and professor of Christian Ministry & Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. As a church growth expert, he publishes *Growth Points*, a monthly publication read by over 7,000 church leaders. His most recent book, *Dining with Jesus: How People are Coming to Christ and His Church*, was released in January 2016. He may be reached at gary.mcintosh@biola.edu.