

INTRODUCTION

Alan McMahan, General Editor

Some jockey for power in the political arena; others seek to change the world by accumulating wealth. Still others believe in the ability of intellectual persuasion to improve the human condition. While some good can be propagated through each of these means, history has shown that Christians have had the most influence when they have relied primarily on the power of the gospel to change lives and transform society. That does not mean, of course, that faith should be considered relevant only to the matters of the heart, but ultimately the power to establish a more just society will require that we become new creations through the power of Christ.

This message remains the primary mandate of the Great Commission and the motivating urgency of this Journal. With that in mind, the opening article in this issue represents Part 2 of Chris Little's "Case for Prioritism," which continues from Part 1 published in the Winter 2016 issue. In this issue, evangelical holism is compared and contrasted with prioritism, and a case is made for why prioritism is more in line with biblical missiology. Whether you agree or disagree, this article will provoke you to think deeply about this debate, with the goal to help you take an informed position on this important subject.

The next two articles reflect on the impact Donald McGavran (a prioritist) had upon the trajectory of evangelical church planting, church growth, and missions. Nelson Searcy and Matthew Easter write about the ways McGavran's teaching and writing affected the growth of three Journey

churches in New York, San Francisco, and South Florida, as well as many others throughout the country. Identifying key concepts from McGavran's thinking, the authors show his impact through real-world examples.

An expert on the life and work of Donald McGavran, Gary McIntosh, in an excerpt from his biography, explores the roots of McGavran's early interest in the growth of churches in India and his encounter with J. Wascom Pickett's seminal research on people movements, in which whole communities were reported in coming to Christ. Gary's work shows how these early explorations shaped McGavran's thinking, and he summarizes McGavran's quest to discover reproducible principles to help churches around the world grow.

Looking at McGavran's legacy from a different perspective, Christopher DiVietro proposes in his article that some assumptions in McGavran's worldview led some of his epistemological descendants focused on North American church growth to veer away from the original focus of McGavran's teaching. Replicating methods and applying abstract principles that were divorced from a consideration of context resulted in strands of the movement that practiced a kind of syncretistic pragmatism. His reflections on McGavran's legacy invite thoughtful response.

Moving our discussion from a philosophical and historical focus, Christina Toy explores the important new opportunities that are emerging through the use of technology-based oral ministry strategies. These strategies recognize that primarily oral cultures find it difficult to follow linear, propositionally presented truth typical of literate societies and prefer the media of stories from which they derive meaning. This reality is not unlike the post-literate, or secondary literacy, of populations among Western young people who increasingly prefer interaction through the media of story and technology-enabled social media. Evangelists, church planters, and missionaries are well advised to consider the implications of such shifts in communication as they seek effective engagement with their target audiences.

Looking at evangelism methods from another interesting perspective is the article offered by Eugene Curry on how wearing clerical clothing affects the rate at which certain people approach the evangelist to discuss religion. If this quantitative study shows how the personal apparel of the evangelist can open or close doors for conversations of faith, what other external factors might be in play that affect the perception of the Good News we are trying to share?

Concluding the section of articles, Bill Easum recounts his pilgrimage in church growth over the years, depicting how in the mid-1980s, he found a like-minded passion in the leaders of the movement, such as Carl George, Gary McIntosh, Elmer Towns, and others. These leaders refined his thinking and motivated him further in his own calling of coaching pastors of more than 700 churches and publishing extensively on the topic. Perhaps

the description of Bill's journey will mobilize even more to pick up the challenge to see churches grow.

In each issue of the Great Commission Research Journal, it is also our custom to feature reviews of books that are making a significant contribution to our understanding of how churches grow and how people are coming to Christ. Our reviewers in this issue take on a number of such books that are worth your consideration. Many thanks go to David Yetter, Jamie Booth, William Ingram, Joey Chan, and David Russell Bryan who have provided helpful insights and a critical evaluation of these works.

Appreciation is also deserved by our editorial team: Parnell Lovelace, our North American Editor; Len Bartlotti, our International Editor; Mike Morris, our Book Review Editor; Gary McIntosh, our Dissertation Editor; as well as Joy Bergk, our Publication Manager (who has helped publish now fifteen issues of this Journal!); Laura McIntosh, our Technical Editor (who has also been with us for fifteen issues); and Rachel Donawerth, our Administrative Assistant.

It is our hope that this issue of the Journal will prompt more thoughtful action to broadcast the gospel as Good News, resulting in new waves of disciples for the kingdom. We welcome new contributions or responses to those included here that align with these goals.