

## DONALD MCGAVRAN: AN EVANGELISTIC MISSIONARY

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— 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 here the fourth of several excerpts from the biography.

### ***Abstract***

During the second half of Donald McGavran's time in India from 1937 until the early 1950s, he worked as an evangelistic missionary among a low caste tribe of people. This article follows his story of planting fifteen churches, seeing new believers come to faith in Christ, and the further developing of his principles of church growth.

From Donald's view, he was in an incredible situation. God had revealed how his church was growing and would grow in the future. Donald felt deeply that his duty was to guide his own brethren with this new insight, but doing so brought about so great a clash between him and the mission leadership that he could not do so. It was all very frustrating, but Donald went about his new evangelistic work among the Satnamis with fervor, trusting God was leading him. He served as the chairperson of the mission's evangelistic committee, and the evangelistic work bore fruit during the twelve months

of 1937. Eighty-two non-Christian adults were baptized, much more than in past years.<sup>1</sup>

The northeast region of Central Provinces was known as Chhattisgarh. Throughout the years, the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS) had seen a number of baptisms from the Satnamis and considered them one of the most hopeful people groups for a mass movement towards Christ to occur. Bilaspur, Takhatpur, Mungeli, and Fosterpur were on an east and west line in Chhattisgarh. At the time, about 100,000 Satnamis lived in Chhattisgarh, and about 50,000 lived within ten miles of Fosterpur, Mungeli, and Takhatpur. As far back as 1916, the Chhattisgarh area had evidenced great potential for evangelistic work. More Christians lived in villages in Chhattisgarh than anywhere else. Donald and the UCMS deemed it wise to push the evangelistic work in Chhattisgarh, particularly among the Satnamis, even to the apparent neglect of other fields. Donald was to oversee the evangelistic work in Bilaspur, Fosterpur, Jubbulpore, Kotah, Mungeli, and Takhatpur for the next seventeen years.

The Satnamis were a rural people, essentially laborers or owners of small farms. A sub-caste of the Chamars,<sup>2</sup> the Satnamis had become followers of Ghasi Das about one hundred years before. He had led a revolt against the caste system, referred to God as *Satnam* (The True Name), and taught that people needed neither idols nor temples to worship Him. Ghasi Das also encouraged the Satnamis to live a moral life by giving up liquor, tobacco, and meat. Most importantly to Donald, Ghasi Das had foretold the coming of a white man who would bring the *Book of the True Name*, and he told his people to accept the white man's teachings when he came. Quite naturally, Donald and the other missionaries in the area took this to be a prophecy of the coming of the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A movement for Christ had started among the Satnamis, which was ninety-nine percent rural. Donald believed a full mass movement of Satnamis to Christ was about to take place, but they needed additional funding to undergird such a movement. He wrote promotional letters home that brought in money, even during the times of depression and war. His area of mission work received more money than others in the UCMS did, which led to envious feelings among his colleagues. Part of the envy was the result

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics gathered from a pamphlet, "Reporting the Work of the Evangelistic Committee of the India Mission of Christian Churches." Donald McGavran was chairman of the evangelistic committee.

<sup>2</sup> The traditional work of the Chamars was to skin cattle and tan hides. Many Chamars in Central Provinces had nothing to do with tanning, yet they were still considered untouchable by high caste people.

of Donald's perspectives regarding the distribution of funds. He believed that funds should not be distributed equally among all fields, but that more money must be directed into fields that were showing results in terms of conversions, baptisms, and new churches. The area of Mungeli and Takhatpur was such an area, reporting up to ten times as many conversions and baptisms than all the other stations combined.<sup>3</sup>

The major insight that he felt God had shown him was that the normal way people confessed their faith in Christ was through a family, caste, or tribal group. Reflecting back on this time, Donald wrote in 1986,

As I read Waskom Pickett's *Christian Mass Movements in India*, my eyes were opened. I suddenly saw that where people become Christians one by one and are seen as outcasts by their own people, as traitors who have joined another community, the church grows very, very slowly. The one by one "out of my ancestral community into a new low community" was a sure recipe for slow growth. Conversely, where men and women could become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ while remaining in their own segment of society, there the gospel was sometimes accepted with great pleasure by great numbers.<sup>4</sup>

The studies Pickett had conducted demonstrated conclusively that winning people to Christ one-by-one was an ineffective manner to proceed. Since all societies are made up more or less of homogeneous units, "It is only when a series of individual decisions generate enough heat to lead a whole group to act as a unit and when enough group decisions have been taken to set the caste or tribal alight that the church really grows."<sup>5</sup>

A story Donald related in an article in March 1942, demonstrates in a small way the process that normally took place to start a movement toward Christ.

Budru and Hatharin, his seventeen-year-old wife, were in a village group who were considering becoming Christian. No one could quite make up his mind to move. Finally Budru, the youngest of the lot, came out openly for Christ. That started things. First his father, then his unmarried sister, then his oldest brother and family, then an uncle, all living in the same village became Christians. Today we have a church of seven families there—a new group in a

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<sup>3</sup> Vernon James Middleton, "The Development of a Missiologist: The Life and Thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897–1965." Ph.D. dissertation Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1990, 101.

<sup>4</sup> Donald McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10(2): 56.

<sup>5</sup> Donald A. McGavran, "How Great Races Are Christianized," *World Call* (November 1938), 43.

new village. A month later Hatharin's father in the Amora church, one of our older village groups, and two months later Hatharin's younger sister and her husband in Jora, one of our brand-new village groups, became Christian. Thus family relations give us avenues along which the Christian faith spreads. We have enquirers in over fifty villages, who say, "Our relatives have become Christian. We shall become Christian too."<sup>6</sup>

By the end of 1938, Donald had come to believe that the end of missionary activity was to guide people into genuine belief in Christ and to help start Christian movements within social stratum. He felt this new understanding of mission strategy was transferrable to the racial and economic groups in America, to the great clans of China, and to the major tribes of Africa. It was, essentially, the way the church had grown since Pentecost. Donald gave major credit for his new line of thinking to Bishop Pickett's new book, *Christ's Way to India's Heart*.<sup>7</sup> Pickett found that the cooperative group way of church growth, more often called the mass movement, was the way to win large numbers of people to Christ in India.

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The McGavrans sailed from Bombay on March 11, 1939, and arrived in London on March 30 on their way to the United States for their second furlough. They arrived in New York on the SS *Queen Mary* on April 6. That year, Donald and Mary had a scare when Margaret Winifred "The Pooh" contracted infantile paralysis that nearly took her life. By the time they arrived in New York, she was recovering, which was welcome news to the family. Upon their arrival, Grace, Donald's sister, met the McGavran family and spent time with them before they traveled to Indianapolis. Donald traveled extensively, reporting on the work of the mission in India. He constantly told the story of how groups of people were coming to Christ through mass movements. He told anyone who would listen of the desperate need and momentous opportunities for the gospel of Christ in India. That summer, his father died in Indianapolis on July 4, at the age of seventy-two. John's funeral service was held at the Downey Avenue Christian Church in Indianapolis. On a brighter note, Donald and Mary gave birth to Patricia Faith on August 27. When the family attended the International Convention in Richmond, Virginia, Patricia was honored as the youngest person in attendance.

The major focus of the McGavran's furlough was the promotion of the "Growing Church Fund." To provide the financial foundation for his work

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<sup>6</sup> Donald A. McGavran, "Budru's Family Became Christian," *World Call* (March 1942), 39.

<sup>7</sup> J.W. Pickett, *Christ's Way to India's Heart* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing, 1938).

among the Satnamis, Donald proposed that the United Christian Missionary Society establish a special fund of \$25,000. The Growing Church Fund, as it came to be called, was used to support evangelism and church growth by providing support for evangelists, preachers, and teachers for new people groups coming to faith. Donald had written in December 1937, to Cy Yocum, the Asian Secretary of the UCMS, asking for this fund to be established, but it was not until 1939 that the plan was officially endorsed. Twenty-five thousand dollars was a tremendous amount of money in the depression years of 1937, and even though it was approved, it fell to Donald to raise the money. He wrote a series of articles giving accounts of conversions, people movements, and power encounters. Growing liberal theological influences within the Disciples of Christ had caused some evangelical churches to reduce their giving to missions, but Donald's evangelistic articles tapped these latent resources. He wrote personal letters to donors describing in detail how the money would be spent, providing illustrative stories of how families had been converted, pastors had been trained, and churches had been built. He even wrote to his fellow missionaries in India enlisting their assistance in raising the money. In each letter, he provided materials, which he had written, to help the missionaries with their promotional activities. Throughout his entire furlough, he traveled widely, speaking at churches, camps, youth groups, and to individuals about how they could become involved in the Growing Church Fund and reap eternal dividends. It took some time, but by 1943, the \$25,000 had been surpassed.<sup>8</sup>

After a fruitful furlough, the McGavrans sailed on the *SS President Pierce* from San Francisco in late July and were back in Takhatpur in the early fall of 1940. In the first month following their return, four people were baptized. In addition, a small revival of sorts occurred when six people who had earlier reverted from the Christian faith returned, resulting in ten additions to the Satnami church.<sup>9</sup> That fall, he co-authored *Founders of the Indian Church* with G. H. Singh. The book told the personal stories of early converts to Christ in India. All during this time, he continued to defend a conservative view of the Bible, even as some in his own denomination began turning toward a more liberal view. By 1940, some people were espousing the view that Christ went to the cross merely because he was following a pacifist way of love for which he was crucified. Donald wrote a response in *The Christian Evangelist*, stating,

Our Lord did not go to the cross merely because he was following the way of love, merely to avoid the way of force. That is a total perversion of the Gospel message... the center of the death of Jesus Christ according to the Bible is that he went [to] the cross as an

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<sup>8</sup> Middleton, 103.

<sup>9</sup> Donald A. McGavran, "The Desert Shall Bloom," *World Call* (February 1941), 46.

active act of redemption. There he purchased our salvation. There he bore our sins. We emphatically do not have just a good man plodding along the way of love and finally being crucified by the world which follows the way of force. On the contrary, Christians have God Incarnate, the Son of God, becoming the great sacrifice for sin.<sup>10</sup>

While some defined the gospel in very broad terms, Donald held fast to the traditional view that the gospel meant, “We do not have to depend on our own goodness and our own righteousness, but that we are saved by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, that belief on him and obedience to him gives power to live victoriously.”<sup>11</sup>

With the added financial resources from the Growing Church Fund, Donald moved forward in church planting and in evangelism that was even more aggressive. He set goals and encouraged his evangelists and pastors to work even more diligently for conversions, increased literacy, lay witnesses, and adult training. While not all of the goals were met, people continued to turn to Christ, and new churches emerged in greater numbers than in other fields of the UCMS. Wherever five families became Christians in a village, the Growing Church Fund put a pastor-evangelist to conduct an extensive program of Christian instruction and worship.

In December, an announcement stated that Donald would become a regular contributor to the *United Church Review*, a monthly publication read throughout India by church leaders from numerous denominations. One of the editors, William Hazen, left for furlough, and Donald took over as editor of the section of the magazine called, “Things New and Old,” beginning with the January 1941 edition. As editor of this department, he was to share with the magazine’s readers the writings and happenings of the missionaries who were bearing the “brunt of the Christian battle.” He also had to read numerous other publications and digest them for his readers. The position gave Donald an opportunity to continue to influence thinking throughout his own mission, as well as among other missionaries and Indian leaders. His own mission had taken away his leadership position, but writing gave him an even wider audience.

Not surprisingly given the times, his first article spoke to the issue of “Christianity and War.”<sup>12</sup> For two decades leading up to 1941, most Christian voices spoke against war and expressed hope to see war outlawed forever.

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<sup>10</sup> Donald A. McGavran, “Pacifism and the Atonement,” *The Christian Evangelist* (1940), 266.

<sup>11</sup> Donald A. McGavran, “A World Fellowship of Churches,” *World Call* (November 1941), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Donald McGavran, “Things New and Old,” *The United Christian Review* (January 1941), 16–25.

Christian writers often favored a pacifist point of view that led to neutrality in some countries, notably in the United States. However, the rise of Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini, with their clear scorn for Christianity and their ruthless suppression of Jews and those who spoke out against them, caused even Christian voices to begin speaking in favor of war by 1941. After searching their hearts concerning the world war, Christians in India stood firmly with England. With their long ties to English missionaries, such support was expected. Even in the United States, neutrality was dropped as a watchword, and “Aid to Britain” took its place.<sup>13</sup>

Leaders among all areas of life—government, church, and business—faced a growing concern that the Axis Powers might invade India. By August 1941, plans for evacuation of women and children were carefully devised. Merchants no longer sold maps of India, since they would aid an invading army. Officials required some of the larger cities to be blacked out periodically, and vendors sold shades and curtains to block out windows and give protection from flying glass. Missionaries were informed that they could expect budget cuts of fifty percent, but Donald told his readers to expect to live on only twenty-five percent. “All Christians in India need to live life *now* on a war basis,” he wrote in February of 1941. He stressed that God would bountifully supply funds even though resources were sure to be strained, possibly exhausted. However, the support would come, in Donald’s mind, from the missionaries themselves. “We must tighten our belts and give in amounts thought to be absolutely impossible,” he challenged. “Doors which God has opened must be entered. Ripened harvests must be reaped,” was his reasoning.<sup>14</sup>

Even in the midst of a depression and war, evangelism and church growth continued to occupy his thought and practice as he wrote articles and evangelized the Satnami people. The war heightened his awareness that the Holy Spirit brings about receptiveness to the gospel at different times for different groups of people. In the difficult times the missionaries were facing, he felt that abundant opportunity existed to establish growing Christian movements throughout India. Though the war years were difficult, he continued to encourage his fellow missionaries and Indian workers that the Holy Spirit had prepared certain people to welcome Christ. It was to those prepared people that evangelistic touring, preaching, and prayers were to be extended. He wrote, “Let us not go to people who reject the Gospel, but to those who have been prepared by God to accept His Son.”<sup>15</sup> In his call to go to receptive peoples, Donald refused to ignore unoccupied areas. “Even

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<sup>13</sup> Donald McGavran, “Things New and Old,” *The United Church Review* (March 1941), 60.

<sup>14</sup> Donald McGavran, “Things New and Old,” *The United Christian Review* (February 1941), 37.

<sup>15</sup> Donald McGavran, “Things New and Old,” *The United Church Review* (May 1941), 108.

in the midst of a world struggle,” he explained, “... our eyes must be turned toward these unoccupied territories, and our lips and our hearts must seek aid from God that His saving knowledge may be made known to all these who lie in the darkness of ignorance and sin.”<sup>16</sup>

His love for formulas came out in a discussion defining “A Great Church.” He wrote, “I am of a mathematical turn of mind. I love formulas.”<sup>17</sup> Donald felt that a great church was a self-multiplying one, and he devised a formula to eliminate inexact thinking. He suggested that a church should divide the total number of new converts (not counting the children of church members) by the total number of existing members. Any church that scored 0.10 or higher was a great church. Another way to look at the formula is that a great church needed ten or fewer members to win a convert to Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Some missionaries felt that the war would lead to a decline of churches, but Donald was optimistic about the future growth of the church in India. “We live in a land of expanding opportunities,” he declared. “I am impressed with the fact that the Christian movement no longer ought to be seeking openings—it ought to be entering opened doors, it ought to be buying up undreamed of opportunity.”<sup>19</sup> Even though some missions and missionaries had neglected evangelism, he felt that “evangelism will come back into its own, and the unsaved will be confronted with the claims of our Lord. But I do not believe the Church will be smaller. I see no virtue in Lilliputianism.”<sup>20</sup>

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The entire month of October 1941 was dedicated to evangelism in the Takhatpur area, which resulted in thirty-one baptisms—one a day. This was a great victory since conversions and baptisms did not come easily in the midst of Hinduism. It took great courage and conviction to turn from one’s ancestral faith and turn to Christ. Such courage is illustrated in the following two stories of conversion reiterated by Donald.

The other night as I took the confession of a good, hard working man and his sweet little wife, the man’s mother stood near by, pouring out abuse on the pair, telling them never to set foot in her house again, and railing on me as one who was breaking up families and leading people astray.

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<sup>16</sup> McGavran, “Things New and Old,” 140.

<sup>17</sup> McGavran, “Things New and Old,” 313.

<sup>18</sup> Church growth writers and church planters have used this formula since the 1950s. This is the first use of this formula that the author has been able to find.

<sup>19</sup> Donald McGavran, “Things New and Old,” *The United Church Review* (August 1941), 195.

<sup>20</sup> McGavran, “Things New and Old,” 157.



Another time a man's baptism was accompanied by loud wailing on the part of his thirty-year-old daughter. She cried as if her heart would break. She stopped the baptism with her piercing screams. Finally, after waiting patiently there waist deep in the river for the noise to stop, I called aloud to the crowd on the bank, saying, "That is not a woman crying. That is Satan, who has gone into that woman and is crying because his victims are being released. Stop crying, Satan." The wailing stopped as if cut off with a pair of shears and the baptisms proceeded in a notable calm.<sup>21</sup>

The Growing Church Fund was helping greatly through provision for the training of new pastors for churches and preachers to evangelize in the villages. It also helped build new church buildings where needed. In addition to guiding the evangelism and church planting work, Donald continued to supervise a leper asylum with eighty lepers, a boys' hostel with forty-five boys, a women's home with seven women, as well as a dispensary that treated thousands of sick people a year. All of this took place in the midst of a semi-famine. Three crop failures in succession had hit the Satnami people. People resorted to eating the seeds of weeds and boiled leaves. Donald stretched the resources of the mission as far as possible, feeding fifty-three of the poorest children one meal a day and providing two pounds of grain a day to one hundred and seven of the hardest hit churches. Yet, in the middle of this great difficulty, God blessed with the addition of forty new people to the Christian community and the establishment of four new churches in October alone. Writing in February 1942, Donald reported,

The year ending October 31, 1941, has been a good growing year. It has seen the addition of about 250 men and women and children to the Christian fold from among the Dumars and Satnamis. Two villages where a year ago there were no Christians, and three other villages where a year ago there were only three Christian families all told, now have 32 Christian families in them. Thus, five new worshiping groups—village churches—have been established. In three other new villages where there were no Christians at all before, there are now three and four families of Christians, not quite enough to be called "worshiping groups," but likely to graduate into that category in a few months. In addition to this, every one of the village churches existing in October, 1940, has been strengthened by baptisms from among the True-names and Dumars.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Donald McGavran, "Evangelism in Central India," *World Call* (February 1942), 11.

<sup>22</sup> Donald A. McGavran, "The End of the First Year of the 'Growing Church in India,'" *World Call* (February 1942), 26.

The year 1942 brought more indications that the Japanese forces might invade India proper. The war situation was more serious. Burma, which was a part of India, had already been invaded. The lengthening shadow of the Japanese sword had fallen across Australia and the Indian Ocean. The imminent threat to India posed a problem not just for the British rule of India, but also for India's hopes of self-rule (*Swaraj*). Donald called the Christians to prayer.

The time has come sorrowfully to admit that the world is not as good as we thought it was. The time has come to pray to God that those who are turning back the tide of invasion may be blessed by God, given courage and resource, comfort in wounds and death, and be supported by His will to make an unflinching stand. The time has come to pray God that the Fascist Japanese armies may be confounded, swept away as was Pharaoh's annihilated as were the prophets of Baal.<sup>23</sup>

He felt that Christians had underestimated the sinfulness of man. It was time to pray for an allied victory. Otherwise, the church would face systematic attempts to annihilate it, and religious freedom would become obsolete if the Axis forces were victorious. The church must pray, but "the chief duty of all Christians is to carry on," he wrote in April, "confident that we are in God's hands, and He cares for us. We serve Him who has turned even death into a door to eternal life. So with hearts at rest let us *carry on*, building the Church on its granite foundations."<sup>24</sup>

Donald took his twelve-year-old son Malcolm along on an evangelistic trip on December 14, 1941. When they got to the village, Donald was shocked, and those assembled for baptism openly dismayed Malcolm. All were very poor, and several were sick. One man had suffered a stroke and could barely move, but with aid, he did hobble to the place of baptism. His wife appeared to be lazy and a bit of a fool. Their son appeared to be unpromising as a future leader. Donald went ahead with the baptism, trusting that God not only can save but also can restore hope to those without much promise. Four months later, God had worked dramatically in the lives of this family. The father had died, but the mother became a steady worker. The son, Sukhi, turned out to be one of the fastest learners in the village, taking first place in an examination on memorized Scripture. God was working miracles in the lives of broken people.

The work of evangelism underwritten by the Growing Church Fund continued to bear fruit. Baptisms were taking place in Kotah, Bilaspur, Fosterpur, Mungeli, and Takhatpur on a regular basis. Forty-four baptisms took

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<sup>23</sup> Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Church Review* (March 1942), 65.

<sup>24</sup> McGavran, "Things New and Old," 90.

place in Takhatpur around April and May 1943, with another ten in the other areas. Not all effort was focused on evangelism. The famine continued, and Donald distributed relief money to needy Christians to help them survive and plant new crops for the coming year.

Although Donald and his team of pastors and evangelists were seeing conversions to Christ, and new churches started throughout the Mungeli and Takhatpur areas, his fellow missionaries were not happy. They deplored the fact that most of the money from the Growing Church Fund was going to the stations in Mungeli and Takhatpur, and they did everything in their power to divert some of the money to their own stations. A committee of missionaries oversaw the fund, but the guidelines directed that they give funds only to mission stations where conversions were taking place. Since most of the missionaries gave their time to institutional maintenance of these stations, rather than to evangelism, the bulk of the money went to Donald's stations. He wrote about the intense ill feelings in a letter to Cy Yocum,

We find our work constantly handicapped, and the growth of the church endangered, the loss of the battle partially provided for because we seem to engender in our fellow missionaries, at least in some of them, that this is our work, that when the mission makes grants toward the work they are doing something for us personally, expanding our ego. Naturally, the question arises, "Why should Don get everything?"<sup>25</sup>

While the tension did not degenerate into a personal feud, the conflict continued to build. Donald sensed that he was being pushed out of the group of missionaries due to his radically different views of how missionary work should be carried out. At one point, he requested a transfer to some work other than evangelism. Donald felt if he were in a different role, he could continue to raise funds for the Satnami work without creating the feeling that it was going to his personal area of ministry. When the field secretary, W. B. Alexander, retired in early 1943, the conflict did not get any better. The new secretary, Kenneth Potee, had never engaged in evangelistic work and was out of touch with the situation in which Donald served. His frustration continued to mount, but he continued to employ his approach to evangelizing and church planting even in the storm of protest from his fellow missionaries and administrators.

Donald remained focused on evangelism throughout 1943 and 1944. Two concerns caused him to take up his pen. First, he addressed the growing anti-conversion movement in India. In August 1942, the senate of Bombay University had quietly forged a new policy that no educational institution affiliated with it could offer any activity, including classes, that had

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Donald McGavran to Cy Yocum, December 5, 1942, quoted by Middleton, 104.

an objective to convert students from one religion to another. In February of 1943, the principal of Sophia College agreed to the new policy. Donald felt the principal had delivered the Christian school into the hands of the anti-conversionists. It was impossible, from his own perspective, to guarantee that students, teachers, and the atmosphere and activities of the school would not lead to some student accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He wrote,

No Christian College can give an assurance that it will not permit *any* activity which has for its objective the conversion of students to the Christian faith. The absolute maximum which any Christian College could concede is that no classes expounding the Christian faith, will be required of the students. Any assurance more than that is beyond the power of a Christian College to give.<sup>26</sup>

Donald decried the fact that no one had offered a defense of conversion, and he proceeded to provide one. He asked if the application of the new policy would apply to teachers who professed atheism and tried to lead students away from religion entirely. His main argument was that, "The right to change one's religious faith, freedom of conscience, the right to persuade others to change their faith" was the lifeblood of progress. "Conversion," he said, "is a national good. Nothing would be better for India than for it to become a vast battleground of ideas."<sup>27</sup>

The other issue that engaged his thinking was the idea that in doing a good work, one was preaching the gospel. Donald agreed that everything a person did became a medium for evangelism, but that not every good work was evangelism. As an example, he pointed out that when Christian doctors or teachers carried out their work with an irrepressible conviction of faith, they inevitably passed on that conviction. Their patients and students knew they had been around a convinced and earnest Christian. Unfortunately, he felt it was quite possible that a person could do good works for years and not communicate the gospel, particularly if the person doing the good work was not passionate about his faith. "One of the pitfalls which the Devil prepares for the saints," he wrote, "is the belief that in the doing of a good work one preaches the gospel." A person could only preach the gospel in the doing of good works if he had a conviction that expressed itself enthusiastically.<sup>28</sup>

By the end of World War II, the Takhatpur field, which was about twenty-five miles long and twelve miles wide, had around eight hundred Christians scattered throughout more than forty villages. Donald had organized

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<sup>26</sup> Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (April 1944), 58.

<sup>27</sup> McGavran, "Things New and Old."

<sup>28</sup> Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (March 1944), 39.

an extensive program of discipleship and training. Five pastors helped in the supervision of village churches, each of which had a leader who was either trained or under training. Once each month, all of the pastors came to Takhatpur for one or two days of training, inspiration, and counsel. They discussed problems, made plans, and went over the Bible lessons for the following month. Since most of the villagers were illiterate, the focus was on memorization of Scripture, the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the first Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, Christian songs, stories of Christ's life, and the contents of a small leaflet ("The Ten Advantages") that presented ten benefits of becoming a Christian. Each year, an oral examination was given to the villagers to ascertain their progress, as well as to evaluate how well the pastors were doing their work with their flocks.

Evangelism took place in a number of ways. Like his father before him, Donald used a Christian *mela*, or retreat, for evangelism and spiritual nurture of the people. Under his guidance, each year about seventy-five to one hundred village Christians gathered for seven days near Takhatpur for Bible classes, inspirational sermons, courses on better farming methods, prayer, worship, singing, and recreation. Evangelists toured in villages around Fosterpur when the roads were passable. They pitched tents near several villages, and during the day, they called on people in their homes, in their fields, and wherever they could be found. At night, they held a large meeting with music, magic lantern pictures, sermons, and stories of the life of Jesus. Touring teams consisted of both men and women, with the women evangelists working with the village women. At times, they brought a small box of simple health remedies and offered a small dispensary to the people. When difficult cases were found, they were referred to the nearest mission hospital. Teams always offered books for sale for those who could read. The length of time spent at each site depended on how much interest the people showed. Most often, the tour lasted from one to three weeks. Teams made modifications to the tour for each local area. In the winter of 1945–46, evangelists enriched their regular program in the Mungeli and Fosterpur areas with the production of a *bhagwad*, or drama. From two to five in the afternoon, they sung and read Scriptures. Then at night from nine to midnight, they gave a drama based on the afternoon's texts. At least four thousand villagers attended during the week.

As World War II ended, the entire missionary cohort in India started thinking about the state of the church in post-war India. An independent country was in the making. Men began to meet in late 1946 to begin drawing up a new constitution, and the missionaries saw a new day approaching for Christian missions. It would no doubt be a day of opportunity and opposition. Churches of the Disciples could be found in many villages. Pastors and evangelists who were thoroughly India were serving, and thousands of non-Christian family members were connected to a church or mission. The possibility that some new mass movements to Christ would develop

seemed highly probable. It was certain that new opposition to Christianity would also come from the new India. Anti-evangelism laws were sure to be put into place. Donald also felt that efforts would be put forth to limit Christian teaching even in Christian schools. A coalition of ultra nationalistic orthodox Hindu leaders was of the opinion that the Christian faith had to be emasculated. Essentially what they desired was to make Christianity just one of the many castes found in India. The ultra nationalists were fine with Christians worshiping in their own caste, as long as people from other castes did not become Christian. Thus, the only people who could be Christian would be those who were born into the so-called Christian caste. Donald deplored such a suggestion. Christianity was against caste. In his opinion, the Hindu caste system was just legalized racism. The reason the Hindu leaders were so against Christianity was because they knew it rejected the caste system, since all people were created equal in the image of God. Thus, missionary leaders were thinking and preparing for restrictions that might hamper the growth of the church. Some of the restrictions they expected to be put into place included government sanctions for building new churches and Christian cemeteries, government selection of teachers for Christian schools, i.e., non-Christian teachers, and the elimination of free speech. What would actually happen once India became independent was still in the future, but these were some of the concerns of the missionaries at the time.

Arising from these concerns of his, and indeed the entire missionary enterprise in India, in January 1947, Donald wrote an open letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, that was published in *The United Church Review*. His letter defended the role that missions and missionaries played in bringing about the independence of India. He wrote,

Dear Mr. Nehru. As India achieves her independence and takes her rightful place in the assemblage of nations, we foreigners of the Christian Missionary enterprise wish to place before you some political aspects of the Missionary Movement.

The Missionary Movement of the Christian churches of the world is not a political movement. It has had no political aims. It has exploited no pe[o]ples. It has sucked no wealth out of any land. On the contrary it has poured a river of money and life into every land which it has visited—money given as an offering to God in churches all round the world, and life which was dedicated above all to the service of man and the glory of God. The Missionary Movement essentially called on men and women to repent of their sins and to turn to God in Christ to find power to live a victorious, abundant life. In the development of that life, the Missionary Movement brought to India a very material awakening, demonstrated the possibilities of progress. The speed at which India has advanced has, we believe, been definitely accelerated by the

presence of Christian Missions. And the battle for independence has been assisted by the Missionary Movement—not directly it is true, for we were the guests of the British Government, but indirectly through spreading and proclaiming in Britain and America Christian concepts which necessitate democracy and self-rule. We maintain that we have been of material assistance in the achievement of swaraj. So, in the past, while the Missionary Movement is purely religious movement, it has had political results, most of which have been favourable to India.<sup>29</sup>

Following this strong introduction, Donald went on to argue the case that conversion to different faiths was good for India and its future. It is best to read what he said in his own words.

What about the disadvantages, you may ask, of the continued conversion of large numbers of Hindus and Muslims? The question is a fair one. The genuine missionary of Jesus Christ will proclaim his Lord, whom he believes to be Saviour and Judge of the world. And a certain number of those who hear will believe. But we fail to see why the adherence of any major group of men to any understanding of God should be thought of a disadvantage. The growth of the Radhaswami sect, of the Arya Samaj, of the Kabirpanthis, of the Sikhs is, it seems to us, a cause of rejoicing. These are fresh understandings of God and those who accept them usually live better lives, nationally more productive lives, than they would had they been unchallenged. Indeed, we would go farther, and say that in a town when Kabirpanthism is vigorously proclaimed and lived, all other religions, including the Christian faith, are lifted to higher levels of achievement. Nothing so stagnates religion as lack of competition and lack of conversion. In a similar way, we believe that nothing has been so good of Hinduism and Islam as the presence of Christian Missionaries in India. And surely the small number of converts so far accepting the Christian faith—8 million out of 400 million—is no cause for a shot that Hinduism and Islam are in danger!!! If a man who is a Christian becomes a Hindu he is still an Indian, a citizen of this great land. And if a man who is a Hindu becomes a Christian he is still an Indian and a citizen of Bharat Mata.<sup>30</sup>

Donald's entire message to Nehru sought to show that the Christian faith was a political good for independent India. He hoped that the letter would assist the new leaders of India to see the Christian enterprise from a fresh perspective, rather than just from the ultra nationalist view.

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<sup>29</sup> Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (January 1947), 195.

<sup>30</sup> McGavran, "Things New and Old."

As time went by, Donald came to understand how the Hindus accepted or rejected mission work. Whenever evangelistic or medical work was exercised in a small community centered on a mission compound, the more zealous the Hindus became. "In both cases the Christian appears as a foreigner. His motives are suspected. He appears as an appendage of a foreign missionary."<sup>31</sup> He discovered that this type of mission work, which had been going on for about one hundred fifty years, usually won converts one by one, if at all. On top of such slow evangelistic success, each convert created a stir in the community, became the talk of the town, and frequently resulted in stern responses from the zealous Hindus. In such a climate, the medical and educational work became suspect as simply bait for inducing people to become Christians. However, another form of mission work did not create animosity. When the missionary focused on the Christian community, helping it to reach out naturally to family and friends, and when converts were won to Christ, there was a noticeable lack of animosity. The conversions were natural, taking place without the direct intervention of the missionary. Missionaries were then viewed as servants of the Indian church; the Indian church attracting new adherents was to be expected.

Donald called the first approach *stationocracy*, by which he meant the tendency of mission agencies to continue carrying on work centered on the mission station, even when such practice did not result in the growth of the church. "Probably the greatest single opponent of the missionary enterprise," Donald declared in his straightforward style, "other than Satan himself, is stationocracy."<sup>32</sup> These initial ideas, which first sprang forth as small shoots in February 1947, would show up in full bloom eight years later in his first book, *The Bridges of God* (1955).

In his last "Things New and Old" editorial for the March 1947 issue of *The United Church Review*, Donald cautioned his fellow missions not to take a stand on the future of India's independence. Calling it "Serpents Coils," he suggested the wisest position for the missionary was to "remember that his role is strictly that of a spectator."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Donald called missionaries to view the scene in the light of eternity, of sin and salvation, and of heaven and hell, and to continue to stick to their role. "Above all," he challenged, "the Indian Church and its servants would do well to stick to India as seen through the eyes of Christ—people who have, when outside of Christ, no Redeemer, hundreds of millions of them."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (February 1947), 219.

<sup>32</sup> McGavran, "Things New and Old," 219.

<sup>33</sup> Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (March 1947), 241.

<sup>34</sup> McGavran, "Things New and Old," 245.



On a trip to Jubbulpore in the spring of 1947, Donald met a deacon in the church that he had baptized in 1936 while working among the Dumars. Back in 1936, his soul was just being seized by evangelistic work, and he could only spare one night a week to preach the gospel. Using different methods to attract the attention of the Dumars—tea parties, dramas, weddings—Donald preached the Word at all opportunities. After two years of work, he was finally able to baptize four families of Dumars, the first of their caste ever to believe. Now, thirteen years later, he met one of the men he had won to Christ who shared that in the intervening years, fifty other families of Dumars had been brought to faith in Christ.<sup>35</sup> Donald rejoiced in the growth of the church in Jubbulpore as he headed back to the United States on another furlough.

The main reason for Donald's resignation as editor of "Things Old and New" was that a third furlough was beginning in May 1947, and it would last until early 1949. He took a two-day flight from India to New York arriving on May 5, so he could attend meetings of the UCMS in Indianapolis on May 8. Mary and the younger children came by boat and arrived in San Francisco about May 15. The two oldest daughters were already in college in the United States. That summer, Donald attended the international and world conventions of the Disciples of Christ held in Buffalo, New York. Looking ahead to 1950, the convention recommended that all churches consider making 1950 a year of intensive evangelism. Speaking about India specifically, convention members honored the British government for granting India its freedom and praised the beginning of a United Church in South India.<sup>36</sup>

Arrangements were made for the McGavrans to live in the Crystal Lake, Michigan community for part of the summer of 1948, so the family could be united together after being apart for so long, with the older children now living in the United States. The Crystal Beach community was a very popular resort area in the summer. The Michigan Disciples of Christ had a conference grounds located there, where Donald and Mary spoke at missions conferences. Donald taught two courses in missions at The College of the Bible summer session held in Lexington, Kentucky, from June 21 to July 31. He had his choice of teaching two of three courses—"The History and Drama of Missionary Expansion in India," "The Western Church Cooperating with the Church in India," and "Indian National Leaders and Christianity."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Donald McGavran, "Preaching the Word in India," *World Call* (September 1947), 16–17.

<sup>36</sup> "Resolutions Approved by the Convention," *The Christian Evangelist* (September 10, 1947), 899–900.

<sup>37</sup> "McGavran to Teach in Lexington, KY," *The Christian Evangelist* (May 26, 1948), 533.

When requested, the McGavrans spoke to churches and Missionary Societies throughout 1948, eventually moving to Vancouver, Washington, in December 1948, where they prepared to sail back to India in early 1949 for their fourth missionary tour. At fifty-one years of age, Donald was beginning to look ahead to retirement. He wrote a letter to executive secretary Yocum in fall 1948, inquiring about retirement allowances. Yocum replied that, "Retirement under the Pension Fund becomes available at 65 years of age and according to the rules of the Society a missionary may retire at 65 and he must retire at 67." Yocum further explained, "At 65 years of age, if by that time a missionary shall have served at least 35 years, the retiring allowance on the present basis on which we are paying into the Pension Fund, is \$1600 per couple or \$800.00 per missionary. In the case of the death of the husband or the wife, the survivor continues to receive his or her \$800.00 plus one-half of the husband's or wife's pension."<sup>38</sup> The retirement conversation was a bit premature, as he would not retire for many years, and his most well-known work was still ahead of him.

Donald's theological beliefs were conservative, a fact that he revealed again in an article, "Why I Am a Disciple," published in June 1948. He believed in the authority of God's Word, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, and belief in Christ Jesus alone for salvation. He viewed himself as a "disciple" of Christ rather than a "Disciple" of Christ. The first spoke to his allegiance to Christ, while the second spoke to his allegiance to a denomination. Yet, he was a member of the Disciples of Christ and felt fellowship's genius lay in having no creed but the Bible. Admittedly, it was a difficult genius to practice, but he strongly believed it was worthy of an attempt. "The disciples of Christ," he wrote, "have always maintained that they have no creed but Christ, and no rule of faith and practice but the Bible, and that each believer and church is free to interpret the Bible in accordance with his intelligence and conscience." Throughout his life, Donald put this genius into practice by working with many Christian denominations and associations, and by not demanding those among whom he worked hold any particular theological interpretations. "I specifically reject any one interpretation of the Scriptures as essential to discipleship or salvation," he wrote. "All who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the Bible as the rule of faith and practice are disciples of Christ, and those who agree to make these two and only these two the requirements for membership in the church are disciples in the sense in which I am a disciple."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Letter from C. M. Yocum to Donald A. McGavran, December 9, 1948.

<sup>39</sup> Donald McGavran, "Why I Am a Disciple," *The Christian Evangelist* (June 9, 1948), 575-576.

On their return to India, Donald and Mary, along with their daughters Pat and Winifred, were able to stop in Japan for a day and a half in Tokyo and a half day in Nagoya. Due to the kindness of veteran missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Hendricks who drove them around, they met and interviewed a number of evangelists and other missionaries evaluating the mission work.<sup>40</sup> This brief visit resulted in Donald writing two articles that appeared in *The Christian-Evangelist* in March 1949. He reported that a potential harvest existed for evangelism, church planting, and general Christian work was open, but that more workers and financial investment was needed if the Christian churches were to take hold of the opportunity. His articles revealed his growing thought about the allocation of mission resources. Whereas the traditional approach to resource allocation by almost all denominations was to divide personnel and money equally among the different fields, Donald challenged his own mission to distribute resources based on the growth of the field.

There is urgent need . . . for our great missionary society to conceive its task in dynamic terms. The churches of our brotherhood carry on foreign missions, not to be carrying on foreign missions, but to be planting churches, making converts, baptizing men and women, establishing the kingdom of God. It follows then that the claims to support in any field should be in some relationship to the growth of the church in that field." He fervently believed that the "claims of each field to funds and staff are directly proportionate to its fruitfulness."<sup>41</sup>

Part of Donald's perspective regarding allocation of funds was possibly due to his own experience in India where he had seen the number of staff dwindle from ninety to just fifty people between his arrival on the field and 1949.<sup>42</sup> However, while there is no doubt his personal experience contributed to his thinking, his views about the reallocation of resources to fruitful fields of ministry was a key change in his strategy of mission.

Another aspect of his changing mission theory and strategy was the necessity of emphasizing disciple making through evangelism, baptism, and church planting. In a long personal note, Donald described his changing view of mission between 1949–1952,

An essential part of the picture was the hundred or more pieces of mission work going on in our mission. These were the very life of the mission. Our close friends were carrying these on. The best thinking was that these were the best that could be done at this

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<sup>40</sup> Donald met and interviewed the famous evangelist Toyohiko Kagawa for three hours at a train depot while Kagawa waited for a train to take him to another city for an evangelistic crusade.

<sup>41</sup> Donald McGavran, "A Christian Looks at Japan," *The Christian-Evangelist* (March 23, 1949), 281.

<sup>42</sup> C. M. Yocum, "Policy is Not Static," *The Christian-Evangelist* (June 22, 1949), 606.

time to advance Christ's Cause. They were carried on with verve, prayer, and full confidence that they were in God's will.

A noted missionary speaker of a sister mission, known on the International Scene wrote that the three essential elements in missionary training were spiritual maturity, intellectual acuity, and social awareness. Given these, anything the missionary might think it necessary to do was, under his circumstances, right. Our entire missionary force, including myself, would have subscribed to this dictum.

There were our wonderful medical works. My life, on two occasions, was saved by medical missionaries. Mission work could not go on without them. When I moved to Takhatpur, and saw a couple of converts die for lack of medical care, I resolved to build a hospital, and did so.

Our mission maintained many boarding schools and day schools. These served the whole community, non-Christian and Christian alike, and rendered an outstanding service. Thousands of children and young people were receiving daily Bible lessons. Our standing in the land was greatly enhanced by the excellent schools we maintained. In 1940 one of the first things I did was to bring in the sons of new village Christians to a [boarding school establishment], and see that they got continuous Christian education. In 1949 I lifted the Hindi Middle School to English level and developed it into a high school. In this Mary Pollard played a significant part. Yes, the schools were essential pieces of mission work.

To produce tracts and books we ran a Mission Press. I was Superintendent for years. To train the scores of teachers for village schools, our friends the American Mennonites ran a Normal School. We heartily approved of that piece of mission work. We trained our village teachers there. The Evangelical and Reformed ran a Leprosy Home, to which we sent desperate cases of leprosy; until in 1925 we opened our own leprosy home, of which in 1940 I became the superintendent.

I need not illustrate further. "Mission" in our part of India had become "Carrying on pieces of charitable work of many different kinds."

Yet the net outcome of all this utterly good work was a non-growing Church getting, year by year, more sealed off from the general public—and less likely to light spiritual fires among non-Christians. What was happening in our mission was happening in most other missions.

Even where God had granted a people movement, the drive to improve the new Christian, to make him more biblical, more worshipful, more literate, more honest in many cases stopped the

ingathering. The mission concentrated on spiritual nurture. It was almost as if the missionary body had concluded that given spiritual nurture, growth (as much as God desired) would automatically follow: a position which the whole history of the [Christian church refutes].<sup>43</sup>

The outgoing and ingoing tendencies of the church were well recognized by Donald, but he acknowledged that both were necessary rhythms for the church. As an exception, of course, he felt strongly that the ingoing tendencies did not automatically result in the church going out in evangelism. Thus, he challenged the Christian church to increase its efforts in evangelism and to reallocate existing resources. He concluded, "We must cease to regard as a primary objective 'keeping a great work going.' We must even in far greater measure than we have in the past make our primary objective the establishment of churches, the baptism of men and women, the multiplication of salvation."<sup>44</sup> To this end, Donald believed denominations and mission societies should hold unproductive fields lightly, while pouring resources into those where the church was growing.

Easter services in 1950 for the 1,200 Christians of the Takhatpur area were a highlight for them and the McGavrans. Donald rode his bike to the village of Keontadabri to attend the Good Friday services at the little church of fourteen families, several of whom had come out of idolatry that year. Nineteen other *churchlets*, as Donald referred to them, were scattered across two hundred square miles of the Indian plain around Takhatpur. By Saturday night, Donald had made his way to Lata Village where he encountered a crowd of several hundred Christians and their non-Christian relatives gathered in the village square to watch a film shown on a portable movie projector powered by a generator. The film was about the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Master and Savior. Early in the morning as the church young people prepared to lead the sunrise service, Donald arose and quietly peddled out of the village. Three miles later, as he passed Jabalpur, he cycled passed the assembled church, calling out to them, "He is risen!" They answered back, "He is risen indeed!"

When he finally arrived in Takhatpur, the sunrise service was just ending, and four people were being baptized in the local river. Then, having eaten breakfast, he went on to Pendridih. The large church there was full with about two hundred people celebrating eight baptisms. "Altogether there were fifteen baptisms and 164 meetings in the 20 branches of the Takhatpur church."<sup>45</sup>

Mary McGavran served as the convention chair for the fall missionary gathering that was held in Jubulpore. Several outstanding Indian leaders

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<sup>43</sup> Donald A. McGavran, Unpublished notes, 1949–1952.

<sup>44</sup> McGavran, "A Christian Looks at Japan."

<sup>45</sup> Donald McGavran, "Victory to Christ," *World Call* (July–August 1950), 44.

and pastors addressed the assembled delegates with K. L. Potee, the mission secretary, bringing the opening message. The theme was “The Enduring Church,” and Donald gave a message titled, “Opening New Areas for Evangelism.” As would become his regular course of action, Donald’s message was a report of his recent tour of Surguja, which had been formerly closed to evangelism but where the ban was not lifted.<sup>46</sup> Following the independence of India, the Central Provinces, where the Disciples Mission was located, was named Madhya Pradesh. To the northeast, the former native states of Korea, Surguja, Jashpur, and Udaipur were absorbed into the new area of Madhya Pradesh. On a previous visit, Donald found Surguja to be a tightly closed area where Christians coming for a visit had to promise not to preach. As the government changed following India’s independence, McGavran found that Surguja, particularly about one thousand families of Uraon people, was open to the gospel. The Uraons were animist rather than Hindu or Muslim and had less to unlearn when adopting the Christian faith.<sup>47</sup>

By 1951, Donald’s new ideas on evangelism were becoming increasingly systemized. In an article published in the journal, *World Dominion*, for January-February 1952, he first used the phrase “church growth” in reference to the concept of redistribution of funds to where evangelism was potentially more fruitful. “The Christian movement in India,” he explained, “has not yet faced the fact that in India to-day there are many places where one pound of Christian effort produces a hundred pounds of church growth, and there are many other places where a hundred pounds of Christian effort does not produce one pound of church growth.”<sup>48</sup>

Since 1929, conversations had taken place about the possibility of church union in North India. Not much action, just talk, took place for two and a half decades. Church union in South India awoke leaders in North India to the possibilities, and discussions opened again in 1951 under the name of the Negotiation Committee. By March of that year, a Plan of Union was developed ascertaining how five denominations—Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Wesleyan—could unite into one church. Four observers from the Disciples of Christ met with the Negotiating Committee at its second meeting in Allahabad from March 25–28, 1952. Donald was one of the four, and he reported his findings for the *Baptist Missionary Review* in the September-October issue of that year. Each of the four observers attended the meeting with favorable feelings toward church union, but

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<sup>46</sup> “Indian Churches Gather for Annual Assembly,” *World Call* (March 21, 1951), 281–282.

<sup>47</sup> Donald F. West, “The Indian Church Moves Ahead,” *World Call* (July–August 1951), 17–18.

<sup>48</sup> Donald Anderson McGavran, “Comity—A Tool of the Growing Church,” *World Dominion: An International Review of Christian Progress* (January–February 1952), 39–40.

concerns and questions arose, the primary one being, “Could the Disciples unite with this kind of a Church and preserve a satisfactory degree of their unique contribution and of their convictions concerning the nature of Christianity and of the Church?”<sup>49</sup> What shocked Donald the most was the fact that while it appeared the union would take equally from each denomination, the essential aspects of the scheme was dominantly Anglican. “What is really proposed,” Donald felt, “is a plan to re-unite the non-conformist Churches which broke away from the Church of England with the Indian Branch of the Anglican Church.”<sup>50</sup> It troubled him that there would be a mutual laying on of hands. This, in effect, would allow the Anglican church to re-ordain ministers from the other four denominations in the historic succession, according to the Church of England practice, from the original laying on of hands alleged from St. Peter through the bishops of Rome to the Church of England priests. Donald was amazed that the Baptists at the discussion were okay with this. Privately, he wondered why the union agreement did not require every pastor to be mutually baptized again by immersion and sprinkling. A communion service was held at the meetings, but again it was entirely Anglican and officiated by only Anglican clergy. Since the “free churches” believe the doctrine of historic succession is false, the fact that only Anglican Communion was administered during the meetings worried Donald. What would such a united church look like twenty-five years into the future? Would free church convictions be absorbed back into the Church of England’s theological viewpoint? This issue came up again in the use of prayers, which were only taken from the Anglican prayer book. No Methodist, Presbyterian, or Baptist prayers were allowed. Donald’s conclusion was that there had been an accommodation on non-essential points, but on essential points, it was completely Anglican. “But such a Plan of Union,” Donald declared, “is now and will remain totally impossible for any informed layman or minister of the Disciples Churches. We are for union, but not for union at such a price.”<sup>51</sup> In response, Donald and others of immersion persuasion called for a meeting to be held in January 1953 to consider the union of churches with congregational and Baptist views.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Donald A. McGavran, “The Disciples of Christ Look at a Plan of Church Union in North India,” *Baptist Missionary Review* (September–October 1952), 167.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>52</sup> The Church of North India was formally established on November 29, 1970. The churches of the UCMS divided with twenty-two churches continuing as Christian churches, while the remainder joined the new denomination. Donald was unhappy with the new denomination, as it was essentially an Anglican governance system. Donald and Mary McGavran continued to financially support the independent churches in India throughout their lives.

As the 1950s dawned, Donald and Mary may not have realized it, but their work among the Satnamis was gradually ending. In May 1952, a woman cooking in her home started a fire that consumed the village of Navapara, a small village near Takhatpur. The church property, the pastor's home, and five homes of Christian families were spared. In the aftermath of the fire, the small Christian community in Navapara, as well as that of Takhatpur, responded by sending relief in the form of clothes, food, bamboo, and tile for rebuilding homes. Within one month, every family who had lost a home in the fire had a new home, and the community sowed fields with seed for a hopeful harvest. The years that Donald and Mary had put into the work bore the fruit of kindness. As one village leader expressed, "There is no religion on earth which helps people like the religion of Jesus Christ."<sup>53</sup>

During nearly two decades among the Satnamis, Donald had pioneered evangelism in about twenty villages around Takhatpur. Rather than winning converts one by one and taking them out of their social network, his approach was to gather a nucleus of converts who could encourage each other before organizing a church. After a church was organized, he selected one of the local Christians to be the pastor and gave him the job of caring for the Christian believers and enlarging the church's sphere of influence. Occasionally, he gathered the pastor into his home for intensive training. Christian children were sent to the boarding schools at Pendridih or Mungeli to be educated and prepared as church leaders in the future. This approach bore fruit in the seventeen years the McGavrans served with the Satnami people, a situation that did not go unnoticed. On his way home from the World Convention in Melbourne, Australia, Spencer P. Austin, executive secretary of the department of resources for the United Christian Missionary Society, visited Donald and Mary in Takhatpur. After preaching in Keonta Davri (eight miles from Takhatpur), visiting Pendridih, and talking with Donald and Mary into the late night, he later reported, "In no mission field did I see a better planned evangelistic emphasis related to the educational, medical and agricultural programs sponsored by the church."<sup>54</sup>

### **About the Author**

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<sup>53</sup> Donald A. McGavran, "The Big Fire of Navapara," *World Call* (January 1953), 42.

<sup>54</sup> Spencer P. Austin, "One Memorable Day," *World Call* (March 1953), 20.