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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.

THE CASE FOR PRIORITISM: PART II

Christopher R. Little

— Editor's Note: The following article is being published in two parts due to its length. This article represents the second part; the first part appeared in the Winter 2016 issue of the journal.

Abstract

Debate is no stranger to evangelicalism. Rigorous dialogue among evangelicals ought to be welcomed as it clarifies issues, forms convictions, and sets agendas. The missiological disagreement between prioritists and holists is a case in point. Prioritists feel constrained to redress holistic reconfigurations of such fundamental concepts as gospel, kingdom, and mission. For the sake of the nations, this article seeks to compare and contrast prioritism with holism, trace the historical emergence of evangelical holism, offer reasons why prioritism more accurately represents a biblically informed approach to mission, and concludes with means by which readers can determine which viewpoint to affirm and promote.

WHY PRIORITISM?

Prioritists would do well to continue to listen to and learn from holists as all "see in a mirror dimly" and "know [only] in part" (1 Co 13:12). However, more persuasive arguments will need to be articulated by holists for prioritists to compromise any of the following convictions.[1]

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[1] In addition to what is presented here, other works promoting prioritism include David Hesselgrave, "Holes in 'Holistic Mission,'" *Trinity World Forum* (Deerfield, IL: Trinity

Almost two millennia ago, Augustine of Hippo, while referencing the Great Commandment, shed light on the nature of mission by commenting, the "divine Master inculcates two precepts—the love of God and the love of our neighbor—and as in these precepts a man finds three things he has to love—God, himself, and his neighbor—and that he who loves God loves himself thereby, it follows that he must endeavour to get his neighbour to love God, since he is ordered to love his neighbour as himself."[2]

Augustine says two things here which must not go unnoticed: 1) the way to loving oneself is to love God; and 2) the way to loving one's neighbor is to encourage him to love God as well. Thus, although there are many ways to express the Great Commandment, its purest manifestation comes when God's people persuade others to love God. This is the highest display of love a person can ever show, because, as Piper notes, "our greatest satisfaction" and "our greatest good, comes to us *in* God."[3] Therefore, when it comes to the lost, the best way to obey the Great Commandment is to implement the Great Commission.

Evangelical Divinity School, Spring 1990), "Holistic Christianity? Yes! Holistic Mission? No! . . . and Yes!" (cf. http://www.dake.com/EMS/bulletins/hesselgrave.htm), "Redefining Holism," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35/3 (1999): 278–84, "Evangelical Mission in 2001 and Beyond—Who Will Set the Agenda?" *Trinity World Forum* (Deerfield, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Spring 2001), "Holism and Prioritism," in *Paradigms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005), 117–39, "The Eclipse of the Eternal in Contemporary Missiology," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 7 (2008): 53–66; Robertson McQuilkin, "An Evangelical Assessment of Mission Theology of the Kingdom of God," in *The Good News of the Kingdom: Mission Theology for the Third Millennium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 172–78, "The Missionary Task," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 648–50, "Lost Missions: Whatever Happened to the Idea of Rescuing People from Hell?" *Christianity Today* 50/7 (2006): 40–42; Christopher R. Little, "What Makes Mission Christian?" and "My Response," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 25/2 (2008): 65–73, 87–90, "In Response to 'The Future of Evangelicals in Mission,'" in *MissionShift* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010), 203–22, "Breaking Bad Missiological Habits," in *Discovering the Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 481–97, *Polemic Missiology for the 21st Century* (Amazon Kindle, 2013); Kurt Nelson, "The Universal Priority of Proclamation," *Occasional Bulletin of the Evangelical Missiological Society*, Winter (2007): 3–6; Stan Guthrie, "A Hole in Our Holism," *Christianity Today* 52/1 (2008): 56; "The Greatest Social Need," *Christianity Today* 53/1 (2009): 18–19; Philippe Sterling, "Is There a Hole in Our Gospel?" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring (2011): 83–97; William Larkin Jr., "The Contribution of Acts' Understanding of Kingdom of God and Salvation to the Prioritism-Holism Debate" (unpublished paper read at the Evangelical Theological Society, November 2011).

2   Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, NY: Random House, 1950), 692.

3   John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 130; *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 40.

This point leads to the next. In the face of horrendous injustices in the economic, social, political, and environmental spheres of present-day human existence, one injustice far surpasses them all. As Orthodox mission theologian Anastasios Yannoulatos rightly contends, the Christian

> believes that for every human being there is no treasure more precious than the truth that was revealed by the word of God. Therefore, he feels that the people who suffer injustice most in our time are those who have been deprived of the Word, not because they themselves refuse to listen, but for the simple reason that those who have known it for centuries have not been interested in passing it on. He further feels that his "honour," "justice," "faith" and "love" cannot be genuine, if he does not try to do something practical—the best he can—in this direction. Like St. Paul, he feels that he is "under obligation . . . both to Greeks and to Barbarians . . ." (Rom. 1:14). He cannot look upon the Cross . . . and at the same time simply confine himself to praising the Crucified One . . . without sharing the universal purpose of this sacrifice.[4]

The most recent statistics indicate that those subjected to this predicament amount to over 2.1 billion unevangelized individuals.[5] Surely this is the most currently pervasive and eternally consequential injustice confronting the mission of the church. This is not to excuse or minimize human suffering in any way since "Christians are rightly concerned about the grievous imbalances of wealth and food and freedom in the world." Nevertheless, Christians must go beyond the horizontal dimension to the vertical one and press the question, "What about the most devastating imbalance of all: the unequal distribution of the light of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ?"[6] This is what the early church as well as the church during the modern missionary era focused on,[7] and which the contemporary church must do again.[8]

In addition, Jesus and Paul on mission have much to interject into this discussion. Rather than painting a contrasting picture between these two, which prioritism has sometimes inadvertently done as a result of allowing

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[4] Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 59–60.

[5] Todd Johnson, et. al., "Status of Global Christianity, 2015, in the Context of 1900–2050," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39/1 (2015): 29.

[6] Samuel Moffett, "Evangelism: The Leading Partner," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Fourth Edition (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 599–600.

[7] Cf. footnote 41.

[8] In this regard, James and Biedebach comment, "What has been the effect of [holism] in Africa? It's an oversimplification, but the result is *the wrong missionaries doing the wrong things.* The African church needs help. Good at celebration and community, the

holism to define the terms,[9] there is clear continuity between the Son of God and his apostle to the Gentiles regarding mission. Holists have described Luke 4:18–19 as the "mission statement" for Jesus' life which combines "faith with action to overcome injustice and oppression."[10] A closer look at the passage, however, shows that

> of the four infinitives from Isaiah that show the purpose of the Spirit's anointing and sending of Jesus, three involve preaching. The poor are evangelized (*euangelizomai*); the prisoners have release and the blind have recovery of sight proclaimed (*kērussō*) to them; the year of the Lord's favor, the Jubilee year, is proclaimed (*kērussō*). The other purpose is to send the oppressed away in freedom. Luke, then, regards the primary activity of Jesus' ministry as preaching. Other tasks are present, such as Jesus' healing and exorcism ministry or his sacrificial death and mighty resurrection, but these either validate or become the content of the gospel message.[11]

African church (with a few notable exceptions) needs all the help it can get when it comes to church planting, spiritual depth, and theological training. However, the West is currently sending primarily two kinds of missionaries to Africa: first, missionaries who are *unprepared* to truly help the African church—wonderful, compassionate, college-age girls who have come to do orphan care; and second, missionaries who are *underprepared* to help the African church—enthusiastic men or couples who are eager to lead mercy projects, but whose lack of theological training and ministry experience means that they can offer little help of real significance to the African church. The work they do is emotionally rewarding for the missionaries and for the churches that send them. However, fewer and fewer of the kinds of missionaries who will make a long-term difference in Africa—Bible translators, church planters, and leadership trainers—are being sent. Pastors and church leaders in the West can do a lot to reverse the trend. First, missionaries on the field need to be encouraged to keep their eye on the ball: what a missionary *can* do and what a missionary *must* do are not always the same. Sending churches can encourage their current missionaries by regularly letting them know that the boring, humdrum, *strategic* proclamation work that they are doing is of the highest significance. Secondly, preachers who are committed to proclamation-focused missions need to speak out, offering the church something better than they're getting from the social justice bloggers and the popular missional authors. It won't be easy. Who wants to be (unfairly) branded as being against orphans or clean water? We don't. But the price of silence is high: the church is poised to lose a generation of missionaries to secondary work such as building schools and digging wells. And if history has anything to say about the matter, we might lose the gospel too" (ibid., 49–50).

9   Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 144ff.

10 James Engel and William Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 23.

11 William Larkin, "Mission in Luke," in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 158.

Moreover, at the end of Luke 4, one encounters the statement, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (v. 43; cf. Mk 1:38). Hence, a careful reading of this chapter shows that the "mission statement" of the Messiah centers on proclamation (cf. Jn 18:37). In conformity to Jesus' mission, Paul testifies, "for this purpose I [Jesus] have appeared to you, to appoint you . . . a witness . . . rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Ac 26:16–18). Elsewhere, Paul is even more specific, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void" (1Co 1:17). Thus, if such an orientation marked out the two greatest missionary exemplars of the New Testament, one needs to come up with a legitimate reason why it does not hold true for those who desire to follow their example today.

The mission theology of Luke-Acts also contributes substantially to the debate. Graham Twelftree maintains, "In the light of the contemporary conviction that the mission of the Church comprises both evangelistic and social action—alleviating social ills—it is astonishing that Luke, the New Testament writer who has provided the most detailed theology and practice of mission, offers no support for such a view." Evidently, "Luke sees Jesus as bringing eschatological salvation in the form of forgiveness, exorcisms and healing, not in any social action. . . . [He] sees salvation not in political or economic but in spiritual and personal terms," and in Acts, the "mission of the Church in relation to those outside the community of believers is portrayed as continuing the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus. The care of the disadvantaged is directed solely to believers, ignoring the plight of a materially needy world." In light of this, he concludes, "In the face of loud contemporary voices to the contrary, we probably have to conclude that . . . social justice or social action is not part of Luke's theology and practice of mission. Rather, social action is directed to the Christian community [cf. 2:45; 4:32; 6:1–6; 11:27–30; 20:35]. It may not be inaccurate to say that, *whereas we preach the gospel to each other on Sundays and seek to bring social justice to the world, Luke maintained that the Church should preach the gospel to the world and apply social justice within the Church.*"[12]

Another vital subject that is rarely if ever considered in this discussion is the ministry of the Spirit of God in the church's witness. According to Harry Boer, "there is a surprising and unanimous testimony in the New Testament to the relationship between the Spirit poured out at Pentecost and the witness of the Church." The evidence he presents in support of this thesis is

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[12] Graham Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke's View of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 196–97.

at least threefold: 1) several versions of the Great Commission show "the inescapable correlation" between the witness of the church and the work of the Spirit (cf. Mt 28:20; Mk 16:20; Lk 24:47–48; Ac 1:8), signifying that "the Spirit who indwells the Church and constitutes her life is a Spirit of witness"; 2) the terms associated with the activity of the promised Paraclete as described in John 14 to 16 include "*teach, remind, guide, show, convict, witness*" and thereby indicate that the Spirit is "Christ's witness in and through men to the Church and to the world"; and 3) the apostles in general being "filled with the Holy Spirit and [speaking] with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (Ac 2:4) and Peter in particular proclaiming the truth about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Ac 2:14ff), "establish that the central task of the Church is to witness to the great works of God in the power of the Spirit." In light of this, Boer concludes, "If the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost is so centrally the origin and the undergirding, informing and empowering principle of the missionary witness of the Church, it would seem reasonable to expect that he should also have the greatest significance for the *concrete manner* in which the actual missionary work of the Church is performed."[13]

Finally, the book of Revelation would seemingly be the last place to look in support of a prioritistic orientation for the church's mission throughout the ages. However, Marshall concludes that it is appropriate to view the New Testament writings in their entirety as "documents of a mission" which in turn give birth to "missionary theology." As such, he contends that the "primary function of the documents is . . . to testify to the gospel that is proclaimed by Jesus and his followers."[14] John's Apocalypse clearly fulfills this agenda. "[M]ission is not just present but is a key theme in the book" and displayed on three levels: "1) God conducts his mission/witness via judgment . . . . 2) The Lamb witnesses by giving himself up to be slaughtered so as to purchase/redeem people from sin to God . . . . 3) The people of God witness by proclaiming these truths to the world and being willing to suffer for them." In relation to this last level, most commentators agree that the "two witnesses" of 11:3 actually "symbolize the witnessing church."[15] The interpretive clue to identifying these witnesses as the church comes in 11:4 where they are referred to as the "two lampstands." According to Schnabel, "As the seven golden lampstands that stand in God's presence (1:12, 20; 2:1) represent 'the church as the true temple and the totality of the people of God' empowered primarily 'to witness as a light uncompromisingly to the world,' so 'the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth' in

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[13] Harry Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 101–12, 205.

[14] Ibid., 34–35.

[15] Grant Osborne, "The Mission to the Nations in the Book of Revelation," in *New Testament Theology in Light of the Church's Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 347, 363, 365.

11:4 represent the church in its role as witness. The number two . . . derives from the biblical law requiring at least two legal witnesses in a courtroom."[16] What this means is that "the church's role in the final period of world history is portrayed primarily by means of the image of prophetic witness . . . following Jesus Christ the faithful witness [1:5; 3:14]."[17] Richard Bauckham claims that the entire scene of 11:3–13 is actually

> more like a parable, which dramatizes the nature and result of the church's prophetic witness to the nations. Because it is a parable, it can be taken less as a straightforward prediction than as a call to the churches to play the role which God intends for them.
>
> The story serves to show how it is that the prophetic witness of the church in the final period before the end can achieve a result which the prophecy of the past has not achieved: the conversion of the nations to the worship of the one true God.[18]

Furthermore, the "word 'witness' (*martys*) does not yet, in Revelation, carry the technical Christian meaning of 'martyr' (one who bears witness by dying for the faith). It does not refer to death itself as witness, but to verbal witness to the truth of God (cf. the association of witness with 'the word of God': 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4; cf. also 12:11) along with living obedience to the commands of God (cf. the association of witness with keeping the commandments: 12:17)."[19] This witness of God's people, along with miraculous displays of God's power, contributes to the nations giving "glory to the God of heaven" (11:13), that is, to their conversion. It therefore becomes abundantly clear that the "reason why the church was drawn from all nations (5:9; 7:9) [is] so that it can bear witness to all nations."[20] In other words, the "world is a kind of courtroom in which the issue of who is the true God is being decided. In this judicial context Jesus and the followers bear witness to the truth."[21] Accordingly, this "witness is the means by which God's mission of bringing repentance to an evil world is taking place. The world turns against God's people in hatred, rejection, and violence, but the saints turn to the world with gospel proclamation, bearing Christ's weapon, the sword that comes out of his mouth proclaiming judgment and calling the nations to repentance."[22]

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[16] Eckhard Schnabel, "John and the Future of the Nations," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12/2 (2002): 248.

[17] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 1993), 285.

[18] Ibid., 274.

[19] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 72.

[20] Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 265.

[21] Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 73.

[22] Osborne, "The Mission to the Nations," 366.

Even though there is a difference of opinion on the extent to which the nations repent and convert,[23] what is not in dispute is the emphasis given to the witnessing role of the church in Revelation. As such, no matter which interpretive framework is adopted (i.e., preterist, historicist, futurist, or idealist), the final book in the Christian canon presents a consistent picture regarding the mission of the church in relation to the world—a focus on the verbal proclamation of the word of God on the part of a suffering church so that the "healing of the nations" (22:2) may at last come to pass.

WORD OVER DEED

If there is one remaining task for prioritism to clarify, it is this: in what sense can evangelism be considered the priority in relation to all other ancillary activities in the mission of the church?

There is first of all a *theological* priority. It is disappointing that in some of the major contemporary works on holistic/integral mission, the reality of hell is given either scant recognition or ignored altogether.[24] The explanation for this may be the need to address the physical aspects of humanity against the spiritual in an effort to rectify the supposed dualistic tendencies of prioritism in which the spirit takes precedence over the flesh.[25] What prioritism asserts, however, is not that the spirit is more important than the flesh, but that eternal realities always outweigh temporal ones. As Tim Chester explains,

> to say that physical and spiritual belong together is very different from saying that the temporal is as important as the eternal. The Bible consistently says we should make the eternal future our priority. In Matthew 10:28 we read: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." Is that dualism? Is this saying that the soul is more important than the body? If it is, then it is Jesus who says it. But in fact Jesus goes on: "Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). The issue is not

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[23] See the discussion by Osborne, 357–62.

[24] E.g., it is mentioned once in *The Mission of God* (306), *The Mission of God's People* (100), and in *The River of God* (195), but not at all in The Micah Network Declaration on Integral Mission (cf. http://www.micahnetwork.org/sites/default/files/doc/page/mn_integral_mission_declaration_en.pdf), the Lausanne Occasional Paper on "Holistic Mission" (cf. http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP33_IG4.pdf), *Walking with the Poor*, and *Recovering the Full Mission of God*. For more on this subject, see Hesselgrave, "The Eclipse of the Eternal in Contemporary Missiology."

[25] E.g., Bruce Bradshaw, *Bridging the Gap: Evangelism, Development, and Shalom* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1993), 27–28; "Holistic Gospel in a Developing Society: Biblical, Theological and Historical Backgrounds," 202.

whether the soul is more important than the body. . . . The issue is that our eternal fate is more important than what happens to us in this life. . . . [T]he priority of the eternal future means that the greatest need for all of us is to be reconciled to God and so escape his wrath. . . . So the biggest problem we all face is God's judgment. . . . Time and again this has proved the greatest challenge facing Christian social involvement—to keep in view the greatest gift we have to offer a needy world: the words of eternal life.[26]

Indeed, "Placing that which is temporal and unsatisfying alongside that which is eternal and teleologically final as special components of a life of service presents a mystifying incongruity. 'Labor not for the bread that perishes but for that which endures to eternal life' (Jn 6:27)."[27] One can only hope that those who affirm "*the nonultimacy of death*" will eventually come around to advocating the primacy of evangelism.[28]

> Second, there is an *abiding* priority. Stott believed that the distinction between evangelism and social action is often artificial. Although some individual Christians are called to specialist ministries (some as evangelists, others as social workers, and so forth), the Christian community as a whole should not have to choose, any more than Jesus did. In many missionary situations such a choice would be inconceivable. The evangelist could not with integrity proclaim the good news to the victims of flood or famine while ignoring their physical plight.[29]

In sympathy to this view, Wright maintains, "The language of the 'priority of evangelism' implies that the only proper starting point must always be evangelistic proclamation. *Priority* means it is the most important, most urgent, thing to be done first, and everything else must take second, third or fourth place. But the difficulty with this is that (1) it is not always possible or desirable to the immediate situation, and (2) it does not even reflect the actual practice of Jesus."[30]

What is implied in these statements is that the existential context should be allowed to dictate the terms of mission. This same sentiment was expressed at the WCC's Uppsala assembly (1968) in the catchphrase "the world sets the agenda."[31] However, not the context, the world, or anything

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[26] Tim Chester, *Good News to the Poor* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 58–60.

[27] Thomas Nettles, "A Response to Hesselgrave," *Trinity World Forum* (Deerfield, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Spring 1990), 6.

[28] Chris Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 439.

[29] John Stott, "The Battle for World Evangelization," 34.

[30] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 318.

[31] Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 197.

else other than divine revelation can be allowed to establish the missionary impulse of the church. In reality, "if we wish to reflect on 'biblical foundations for mission,' our point of departure should not be the contemporary enterprise we seek to justify, but the biblical sense of what being sent into the world signifies."[32] The reason why this is critically important is because "If . . . social advance is put first in time . . . it is obvious that faith in Christ is not the foundation but the coping stone of social and moral progress [and consequently] we have, by deeds which speak louder than words, taught men to seek 'all these things' first [rather than] the Kingdom of God and His righteousness."[33] Jesus and Paul, both of whom launched their ministries with proclamation (Mk 1:14–15; Ac 9:19–20), avoided this pitfall in mission in direct contradiction to the holistic mandate. In John 6, when the hungry multitudes sought the blessings of the kingdom apart from submission to the King, Jesus redirected their attention to this truth, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (Jn 6:35). Also, even though Paul's church planting efforts negatively impacted the business ventures and livelihoods of people (Ac 16:16–21; 19:19, 23–27), he refused to shift his priorities. By implication, what this shows is that 1) there can be mission without social action, but the same cannot be said for proclamation; 2) the *missio Dei* determines the *missio hominum*, not vice versa—that is, God's mission cannot be subjected to our mission, but rather our mission must be subjected to God's; and 3) the personal aspirations of God's servants are not what define the *missio ecclesiae*, but rather the divine obligations placed upon it with regard to the lost (cf. Lk 19:10; Jn 5:30; 1Co 9:19–22; 10:32–33). As such, those involved in social work must remember that while "evangelism and social action are partners in many situations, it is inadequate to think of them as corresponding activities of equal impact [because] the greatest need of the poor, as it is for all people, is to be reconciled with God."[34] Thus, even while arranging a tourniquet for a lost person bleeding to death, the good news of how to avoid the wrath of God by believing in Jesus Christ must still be shared (cf. Jn 3:36; Eph 5:6).

Third, there is a *strategic* priority to word over deed. Lesslie Newbigin is well known for saying that "to set word and deed, preaching and action, against each other is absurd. . . . The words explain the deeds, and the deeds validate the words."[35] Wright also labels the logic of those who believe that

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[32] David Bosch, "Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission," in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 177.

[33] Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 83.

[34] Chester, *Good News to the Poor*, 73.

[35] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 137.

prioritizing evangelism in mission will naturally result in societal transformation as "flawed." The main reason for this accusation is that new Christians won by those who have emphasized gospel proclamation will imitate their example and not engage in social action themselves.[36] However, such viewpoints open themselves to sustained critique.

Besides the fact that non-Christians can replicate the philanthropic efforts of Christians, a rarely acknowledged truth on the part of holistic practitioners is that compassion ministries are "a bane as well as a blessing."[37] This is true on at least two accounts: 1) they lead to "unethical conversions" as people convert "to Christianity in order to receive charity or material advancements,"[38] and 2) they produce "rice converts" as a result of the activities of "[r]ice missionaries."[39] Hence, to assign the same intrinsic value to word and deed is both problematic and counterproductive.

It is also significant to note that since "our natural inclination [is] to avoid the stigma and rejection associated with Jesus," it is easy "to find comfort in the notion that our deeds matter more than our words; indeed, that our deeds can *substitute* for our words. Not to worry, we seem to say, we're preaching the gospel every day. We're just doing it with our actions." When this idea comes to fruition in mission we easily "gravitate toward those parts of our calling that receive cultural approval while shying away from the part that generates cultural censure." Both Jesus and Paul were successful at overcoming this predicament: "Jesus neither spoke of nor carried out anything that could be called 'social action' in society at large" and Paul's confidence was so strong "in the gospel's inherent Spirit-infused power that he could rejoice even when it was being preached not merely in the absence of 'embodied action,' but out of overly sinful motives [cf. Php 1:12–18]."[40]

In addition, it is unwarranted to underestimate the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit having a positive, beneficial impact on society through the transformed lives of believers (cf. Ro 12:1–2; Eph 4:26; 1Th 4:10–12; 2Th 2:7; 1Pe 2:12; 3:16–17). On the subject of slavery in the early Christian period, for instance, Kenneth Scott Latourette comments,

> Christian teaching ameliorated the lot of slaves. While Paul commanded slaves to obey their masters as slaves of Christ, doing their work as unto him and not unto men, he also exhorted masters to

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[36] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 320.

[37] David Hesselgrave, "Redefining Holism," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 35/3 (1999): 281.

[38] G. P. V. Somaratna, "Buddhist Perceptions of the Christian Use of Funds in Sri Lanka" in *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 15.

[39] Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money.* Revised and Expanded (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 77.

[40] Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden, and Harold Lindsell, *In Word Versus Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 21, 49, 52, 92.

forbear "threatening" their slaves, remembering that there is no "respect of persons" with Him who is in heaven, the Master of both earthly masters and slaves. In a very touching letter Paul returned a fugitive slave to his master, pleading with the latter to receive the runaway as a brother in the Lord. Paul also declared that in the Christian fellowship there is neither bond nor free, but that "all are one in Christ Jesus."

Christianity undercut slavery by giving dignity to work, no matter how seemingly menial that might be. Traditionally, labour which might be performed by slaves was despised as degrading to the freeman. Christian teachers said that all should work and that labour should be done as to Christ as master and as to God and in the sight of God. Work became a Christian duty.

Before the end of the fifth century slavery was declining. This was not due entirely . . . to the influence of Christianity, but the latter contributed to it.[41]

Hence, the supposed fallacy of "infinite regress" which assumes that emphasizing evangelism in mission will not positively affect society is a denial of history.[42] Indeed, a Wilberforce is predicated upon a Wesley.

Furthermore, promoters of holistic mission must be careful of burdening the church in mission with expectations that surpass biblical ones. As Duane Litfin observes, the "Roman Empire of the New Testament era was the epitome of an unjust society, but nowhere do Jesus or his apostles argue . . . that challenging these structures is the task of the church."[43] Yet the high aspirations of holism make "the church *alone* responsible for the disintegration of society [and thereby links] the church with a cause that cannot succeed in the present age."[44] In reality, the church "never can *promise* the solution of economic, social and political problems . . . for the simple reason that the Church cannot pretend to govern the economic and political factors that determine the outward course of the world at large."[45]

Even if holists disregard such criticisms, one is still left wondering how they would respond to those who say, "I do not want your help . . . despite all the nobility and charitableness of spirit in which you offer that help, for I have my own spiritual resources to draw upon and want to become saved according to my own fashion?" In truth, "There is, from the standpoint of secondary motives and purpose that have been falsely converted into pri-

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[41] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Volume I: to A.D. 1500* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1975), 245–46.

[42] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 320.

[43] Samuel, Sugden, and Lindsell, *Word Versus Deed*, 164.

[44] Hesselgrave, "Holes in 'Holistic Mission,'" 4.

[45] Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1963), 430.

mary ones, no valid answer to this argument."[46] To avoid this situation, it is imperative to acknowledge that "the gospel has been spread abroad without [holistic ministries], and we need to be reminded that they are not indispensable. If we forget it we make social progress our gospel and become more concerned about social progress than spiritual regeneration."[47]

Fourth, there is a *geographic* priority. An important discussion that is noticeably absent in the materials promoting holistic mission is the measures by which to determine when its goals have actually been achieved. Within the last few decades, the global community has witnessed a hurricane in New Orleans, floods in China, tsunamis in Banda Aceh and Japan, a typhoon in the Philippians, and earthquakes in Haiti and Nepal. If history is any indicator, more natural catastrophes are unfortunately just around the corner. Each time they occur, calls go out for resources to be deployed in meeting the physical needs of those affected. Nevertheless, few ever stop to think, let alone voice, whether or not this is the best use of the church's resources, given that one-third of the world's population remains in dire need of the gospel. This leads to the next point.

Last, there is a *financial* priority. The historical record shows that efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions of people have taken away from evangelistic ministries both in time and treasure.[48] This situation persists into the present. For example, Frew Tamrat, principal of the Evangelical Theological College in Ethiopia, reports that

> those ministers who have a clear calling to be evangelists prefer to involve in social work than preaching the gospel to the lost. If you are a social worker involved in development work, you will be paid more than the evangelist who labors in taking the gospel to unreached people groups. As a result, this has created among believers in Africa and especially in Ethiopia the idea that the work of preaching the gospel is the lowest job of the church. Even though the churches involvement in humanitarian work has brought significant improvements among several communities, its over emphasis has deprived the church from making the preaching of the gospel its priority. In fact, in some places, development works that are run by churches have been causes for church splits and division. In some extreme cases, because of conflicts among church development/social workers, the church has been dragged to court and this has resulted in the church losing her witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ.[49]

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[46] Ibid., 293.

[47] Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (London: World Dominion Press, 1960), 99.

[48] Donald McGavran, *How Churches Grow* (London: World Dominion Press, 1959), 12.

[49] Email to the author, July 27, 2014.

One church in the same country was even shocked "by the fact that there were more [foreign] financial resources [made] available for relief and development work than for evangelism."[50] Such incidents are lamentable in and of themselves, but as Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert note, they fall short on another level altogether: "You can make a good case that the church has a responsibility to see that everyone in their local church community is cared for, but you cannot make a very good case that the church must be the social custodian for everyone in their society."[51] In fact, the "New Testament . . . never commands the church's diaconal work to assist people outside the church. What the New Testament authorizes . . . is that the church's diaconal ministry should be directed toward needy Christians."[52] Therefore, in light of its limited funds, the "church should tend toward doing those activities and spending its resources on those projects that *more directly*, rather than *less directly*, further its central mission. . . . [T]hat doesn't mean that the church will only ever do activities that are a *direct* fulfillment of its mission. . . . [T]he point is simply that there is in fact a mission given to the church by its Lord that is narrower than 'everything we could do.'"[53]

CONCLUSION

After contrasting prioritism and holism, recounting the road to evangelical holism, describing some of the weaknesses of holism and strengths of prioritism, and delineating the reasons why word takes precedence over deed

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[50] Mark Thomsen, *Mission at the Dawn of the 21st Century: A Vision for the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Kirk House Publishers, 1999), 261.

[51] Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2011), 176.

[52] David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 158. However, N. T. Wright counters that the reason why one does not witness the New Testament church performing anything approximating social action today is because of its miniscule size (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013], 449). In response, if the Antiochene church could organize famine relief for the church in Jerusalem (Ac 11:27–30), if Paul could coordinate the Gentile collection project for the same church (Ro 15:25–27; 1Co 16:1–4; 2Co 8–9), and if the church in Ephesus could create "no small disturbance concerning the Way" among devotees of Artemis (Ac 19:23ff), then why couldn't it have also implemented programs to counter all manner of socio-economic, political injustices throughout the Roman empire? It surely could have, and thus, the reason why it didn't can only be that it felt called to fulfill other agendas in relation to society. As Scot McKnight surmises, "*kingdom mission admits the primacy of evangelism but sees the locus of the social dimension to be first and foremost in the church as a witness to the world*" (*Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014], 152).

[53] DeYoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?* 235.

in mission, the two perspectives are thrown into stark relief. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible after all that has been said that some may still find it difficult to decide which view to affirm. The following questions are meant to be of assistance in this regard:

1. Are the eternal needs of human beings more important than temporal ones?
2. Is what Jesus did for humanity on the cross infinitely more significant than anything the church can do for others?
3. Does the gospel involve what Jesus has done for others, not what the church can do for them?
4. Is the greatest injustice in the world today not social, economic, political, or environmental in nature but the unequal distribution of the word of God whereby the lost may be reconciled with their Creator?
5. Is it acceptable to move on to unevangelized areas to introduce the gospel rather than remain behind to address the perennial humanitarian problems Christians face?
6. Is it appropriate to spend the majority of the church's resources in mission on evangelistic rather than social ministries?

If a person is able to answer most of these questions in the affirmative, then that person leans toward prioritism. Such a person will unapologetically defend and act upon the view that although the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ may not be the only blessing the church in mission has to offer the world, it is beyond measure the greatest blessing it has to offer.

About the Author

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HOW DONALD MCGAVRAN HAS IMPACTED ONE URBAN CHURCH PLANT AND INDIRECTLY INFLUENCED THOUSANDS OF OTHER CHURCHES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE JOURNEY CHURCH OF THE CITY

Nelson Searcy and Matthew C. Easter

Abstract

This essay offers five specific principles from Donald McGavran that have directly influenced The Journey Church in New York City, San Francisco, and Boca Raton, Florida, and indirectly thousands of other churches (through the writing and coaching ministry of Nelson Searcy with Church Leader Insights). McGavran's principles of missionary eyes, goal setting, assimilation, homogeneity, and a Great Commission focus have proven invaluable in this church plant and offer a similar value to other churches seeking to make a difference in their communities.

INTRODUCTION

Although I never met Donald McGavran, he has had an enormous impact on my ministry. McGavran's wisdom and work have shaped not only my own urban church plant, but also other churches around the world through my extensive writing and coaching.

I started The Journey Church in Manhattan in 2002. Following the method I have since written about in *Launch: Starting a New Church from Scratch*, my team and I began with six monthly services before our grand opening on Easter Sunday. We had no money, no members, and no consistent place to meet. Given the challenges we were facing in trying to get this young church off the ground, I was ecstatic when one hundred ten people came for our kickoff service. However, the next Sunday I learned my first church growth principle: not everyone who attends church on Easter comes back the following week. We had fifty-five people return. Over the next three months, through my dynamic leadership and charismatic preaching, I grew the church down to thirty-five.

The decline from one hundred ten people to thirty-five people brought me to a crisis point. I realized that if something did not change, we would have to close our doors before the end of the year. I prayed and asked the Lord what we needed to do. Then I panicked. In the process, I also learned my next church growth principle: before God does a work in your church, he must do a work in you. God began to work in me as I transitioned from being a *student* of church growth to being a *practitioner*.

The shift to church growth practitioner was significant for me. Until that point, I had been a student in the truest sense of the word. I was a voracious reader of all things related to growth and evangelism. I had been in hands-on ministry for over a decade, working on staff at small churches and at a mega-church. Until I leapt into the trenches of starting The Journey Church in Manhattan, I had never been in the lead chair. I had never been the one responsible for making the big decisions. As I adjusted to my new role, I began asking myself significant questions: *What does it mean to be a practitioner? How do I put these ideas I've studied into place? How do I really begin to live out the principles I've found to be true?*

During this crucial time in my ministry and in my growth as a leader, Donald McGavran's teaching began to permeate my consciousness. I started discovering the breadth of his wisdom by learning from those who came after him. Through studying the work of Peter Wagner, Elmer Towns, George Hunter, and Gary McIntosh, my interest was piqued about the man who not only trained them, but who also sparked the entire modern Church Growth Movement. Committed to learning all I could about McGavran, I devoured his classic text *Understanding Church Growth*. The insights it contains are so profound that I keep a copy close by and reread it every year.

Because of McGavran's teaching, I began to consider questions like: *Am I taking care of my first time guests? How well am I assimilating newcomers? Am I being intentional about new believer follow up?* Now fully entrenched in my role as a practitioner, I was beginning to understand the necessity of putting proven church growth principles into practice.

Slowly but surely, as my team and I began to pray more than ever before, strive to preach the Word as clearly as possible, and implement McGavran's

teaching into our framework, the church began to turn around. The process was slow and laborious, but The Journey Church survived—and has thrived. Now multisite, The Journey is certainly not the largest church in America. We have never tried to be. Instead, we focus on ministering in difficult communities. Our intentional church planting philosophy is to start churches in areas that are eighty percent or higher unchurched, hence our presence in New York City, San Francisco, and South Florida. In the future, we plan on expanding to Los Angeles and London, in addition to other large, urban areas.

The following five church growth principles from McGavran have proven to be indispensable at The Journey, as we have grown from a congregation of thirty-five into a healthy, large, multicity church, reaching thousands of new believers every year.

PRINCIPLE ONE: KEEP MISSIONARY EYES

> *Christian mission is bringing people to repent of their sins, accept Jesus as Savior, belong to his Body the Church, do as he commands, go out and spread the Good News and multiply churches.*[1]

Adopting McGavran's view of Christian mission has also been described as choosing to have "missionary eyes." When we grasped the importance of having missionary eyes at The Journey, we began to look at our area of service as a true mission field. We went from seeing ourselves as church planters to seeing ourselves as missionaries—an important mental shift whether ministering locally or on an international scale. We had to be intentional about stepping back and objectively observing the people in the environment to which we were called. What were they dealing with? How were they hurting? What did they need from us?

Missionaries approach situations differently. They are willing to endure more difficulty. They understand spiritual warfare and often spend more time on their knees. Approaching every day from a missionary perspective has had tremendous impact on how my staff and I think about what God has told us to do. For example, when recruiting others, we are essentially looking for those who are willing to be missionaries without getting their passport stamped. After all, crossing the Hudson River into New York City feels like crossing into international territory, in many ways.

We have found it particularly important to cultivate missionary eyes in staff members who come from highly churched areas. Staff from the "Bible belt," for instance, have to be intentional about recognizing that what they took for granted in their previous areas (such as basic biblical knowledge or

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[1] "Interview with Dr. Donald McGavran." *OMS Outreach* 18(2): 82–83 (quoted in Gary L. McIntosh, "The Life and Ministry of Donald A. McGavran: A Short Overview," presentation, ASCG annual meeting, November 2005, 77).

a general understanding of the value of attending church) does not apply in their new mission field.[2] Not only do we have to be diligent about helping them understand their new ministry context, they must also be willing to adopt the missionary perspective so critical to ministering effectively.

Sometimes it gets difficult to maintain my own missionary heart. I get so caught up in doing church that I forget to think like a missionary. One of my favorite exercises is to spend some time sitting at one of the many outdoor cafés in my neighborhood, watching the people stream by. I remind myself that eighty percent of those I see are unchurched. I remind myself of their hurt, their darkness, and their spiritual emptiness. Taking time to observe the people in the community to which God has called me always stokes a sense of responsibility within me and refreshes my missionary eyes.

PRINCIPLE TWO: SET GODLY GOALS

Nothing focuses effort like setting a goal. As Christians seek to do effective evangelism, they need to set membership goals. Goal setting focuses their efforts on the main task.[3]

Goal setting is a largely overlooked concept in the church world, but McGavran understood the importance of setting godly goals and spoke on the topic often. His views resonate with me, as I am a goal setter by nature. Over the years, we have worked at The Journey to incorporate wise, God-directed goal setting into our church growth strategy. Through this process, I have learned that while there are good goals we can define and toward which we can work, there are also goals we should be careful about setting.

We have learned to keep goals focused on areas where we have the ability to control key factors, while resisting the temptation to set goals that should be exclusively God's business. For example, one time we set a goal for first-time guests at The Journey, but I am not sure that is something we are able to control. We can pray for guests. We can set a goal to train one hundred percent of our people to invite their friends. We can do measured, strategic outreach in the community. However, we likely should not set a specific goal for the number of guests who will come from those efforts. We have no control over who walks through our doors; only God does.

In the same vein, The Journey has never set a conversion goal. Conversion is not something we can control. We can, however, set goals that God might bless in order to bring more people to a place conducive to conver-

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2   See Barna's recent study on the "least churched cities in the U.S.," which ranks each of The Journey's ministry areas in the top 11 "churchless cities" (San Francisco—1; New York—10; West Palm Beach—11). Accessed 4 February 2016, http://cities.barna.org/barna-cities-the-top-churchless-metro-areas/.

3   Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 265.

After I finished the next service, I made my way down to see how they were doing. As I approached the crowd, I saw a marquee that read, "Gay Porn Awards." We were doing servant evangelism for people in line to get into the Gay Porn Awards! On top of that, our current teaching series, as highlighted on the invitation card we were distributing, was a relationship series called, "Pure Sex."

Fast-forward two and one-half years. After I gave a convocation address at Liberty University, a young man approached me. He introduced himself and said, "Somebody from your church gave me a granola bar when I was standing in line for the Gay Porn Awards in New York a couple of years ago." He said, "I never came to your church, but the invitation was enough to get me out of that line and point me back toward where I needed to be."

God-sized, God-breathed things can happen when you step out and set a goal. We may have only made about forty touches that day in New York, but one young man's life was changed. Additionally, those forty touches counted toward the million we were trying to make over the course of the year. While we did not hit the goal, we made about 865,000 touches in twelve months. Those touches have led to countless stories of God changing lives, as is evidenced by our record number of baptisms that year.

We have set many other goals along the way. Years ago, we set a goal to be a seven-day-a-week church. We wanted to have people from our small groups doing community service in some form or fashion every single day of the week. We have hit that goal consistently for a number of years now.

We also set goals for the number of people in our small groups. In fact, one of our most controversial goals is to have 110% participation in our weekly groups. Many have misunderstood this goal. They question how 110% participation is even possible. Our goal focuses on 110% of our average attendance. If our average attendance each week is one thousand people, it is not the same thousand people every week. Some come every other week, some once a month. The mix is always slightly different.

Based on one thousand attenders, our goal is to have eleven hundred people in groups. We want everyone who calls The Journey home, even if they are not there every Sunday, to be in a group. I am not sure we have ever hit 110%, but we have been over 100% several times. When I compare that percentage to the average small group ministry, which garners about 30% attendance, or a good Sunday School, which gets about 50%, we are glad we set the focused, God-sized goal we did.

PRINCIPLE THREE: HARNESS THE POWER OF ASSIMILATION

Church growth follows where Christians show faithfulness in finding the lost. The purpose is not to search, but to find. When existing Christians, marching obediently under the Lord's command and filled with his compassion, fold in the wonders and feed the flock, then churches multiply.

> *But, when they permit men and women who have made costly decisions for Christ to drive back into the world, then indeed, churches do not grow. Faithfulness in proclamation and finding is not enough. There must be faithful aftercare. Quality goes hand-in-hand with quantity.*[6]

If there has been one approach at The Journey that has influenced our growth more than anything else, besides the amazing blessing of God, it has been our assimilation system. We learned the value of assimilation early in our church's life. In that first year, when our church was steadily declining, I felt God saying to me, "What are you doing with those first time *gifts* that I am sending you?" I said, "Wait a minute, you mean the first time *guests* that you are sending me?" God said, "No. Every week I send you first time *gifts*. How are you responding to those gifts?" I said, "Well ... I'm counting them. There are usually about twenty people in the room. I can look around and say, 'I have never seen you, I have never seen you,' and I'm writing down a few of their names when I catch them." God said, "Maybe you can do better than that."

After that, my staff and I began thinking about how to better welcome first time guests and what kind of follow up work we should be doing each week. We started asking questions like: *How should we welcome newcomers? How can we create an environment in an Upper West Side Manhattan culture where people will want to give us their contact information? How do we reach out to them without them scaring them off? What will make them want to come back? Can we develop a process for this?*

Over time, we began to develop our assimilation system, a small portion of which I detail in my book, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church*. In fact, we became laser-focused on assimilation. I knew that if I could get first time guests to come back a second time, they would be more likely to become regular attenders. As regular attenders, they would be more likely to experience the truth of the gospel, be convicted by the Holy Spirit, follow God in faith, trust Jesus for the first time, follow him in baptism, and begin to grow as disciples.[7]

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[6] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 6.

[7] Biblical scholars and sociologists have noted the same phenomenon in both Scripture and society. As Rodney Stark writes, "*Conversion … occurs when, other things being equal, people have or develop stronger attachments to members of the group than they have to nonmembers*" (Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996], 18, italics his). See also John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," in Charles Y. Glock (ed.) *Religion in Sociological Perspective: Essays in the Empirical Study of Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1973); Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 74; Willem Kox, Wim Meeus, and Harm't Hart, "Religious

God helped me recognize that my role as a pastor was not just to proclaim or to feed, but also to fold, as McGavran teaches. Now, I get an assimilation report each month, and I consider it the most important monthly report I review. Recently, our assimilation rate hit an all-time monthly high: 41.9% of our first-timers came back for a second visit. Unfortunately, that month was followed by a month where we hit an all-time low, with a retention rate of just 31.5%. The next month we were at 33.7%, and then the month after we were back up to 37.7%. These are important percentages for me to study. They also help with setting goals for assimilation rates we would like to maintain throughout the year. As part of the intentional goal setting I mentioned above, we have an ongoing God-sized goal of maintaining a 40% assimilation rate.

At The Journey, we have discovered that if we can get a first-time guest in the door, one out of three—and sometimes closer to one out of two— of them will come back. When they return, the assimilation and discipleship process continues. They hear the gospel preached, rub shoulders with believers, and begin to grow spiritually. Assimilation is so key that now, when pastors I coach ask me where they should begin in their efforts to improve the state of their churches, I tell them to start with assimilation. It is foundational to everything we do as church leaders.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: BE MINDFUL OF THE HOMOGENOUS

UNIT PRINCIPLE

Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.[8]

The Homogenous Unit Principle is the most controversial idea McGavran purported. This principle holds that every individual wants to become a

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Conversion of Adolescents: Testing the Lofland and Stark Model of Religious Conversion," *Sociological Analysis* 52 (1991), 238; Eugene V. Gallagher, "Conversion and Community in Late Antiquity," *JR* 73, no. 1 (1993), 14; Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 128–36; and Matthew C. Easter, "The Anabaptist Vision of the Church and Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in Joel B. Green and Tim Meadowcroft (ed.), *Ears That Hear: Explorations in Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 162–165.

[8] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 223. The homogeneous unit is simply a section of society in which all the members have some characteristics in common. Thus, a homogeneous unit (or HU, as it is called in church growth jargon) might be a political unit or sub-unit, the characteristic in common is that all the members live within certain geographical confines (95). He goes on to say, "The homogeneous unit is an elastic concept, its meaning depending on the context in which it is used. However, it is a most useful tool for understanding church growth" (96).

Christian without crossing racial, linguistic, or cultural barriers. McGavran first arrived at this truth by observing the problems missionaries were having in India because of the country's caste system. In short, he found that it was difficult for someone from a lower caste to effectively share the gospel with someone from a higher caste, and vice versa.

Therefore, if a missionary were thought to be associated with a lower caste system, he or she could not witness well to those in a higher caste. However, if the missionary were perceived to be part of the same caste that he or she was trying to reach, the potential converts were much more open to the gospel message. Right or wrong, McGavran held that this principle applies to every type of people group. Like reaches like. While there are exceptions, people generally prefer to hear the gospel and to worship within an environment where the other people are like them.

Given the Homogenous Unit Principle, I struggled with how to reach a city as diverse as New York. I was not sure how to decide what audience on which we should focus. While I was wrestling with this issue, a wise pastor advised me, "Don't worry about it so much at this point. Hold services for a few months, see who shows up, and then call that demographic your target." That is exactly what we did. After several monthly services, we took a good look at the type of people coming through our doors and asked ourselves what they had in common. Then we tried to reach more like them, as McGavran's principle dictates.

What Rick Warren has said is true: it takes all different kinds of churches to reach all different kinds of people.[9] It is also true that the most effective churches focus their efforts. More success comes from focusing on a specific demographic rather than broadly trying to reach everyone. Some argue that the Homogenous Unit Principle is constricting, but I have found that it leads to more freedom and fruit.

At The Journey, we have used the Homogenous Unit Principle to identify the type of people we are best at reaching and to help multiply our efforts in those communities. During the first decade of our church, we were most effective at reaching artists and young professionals. As such, we focused our servant evangelism efforts on places like the backstage door of Broadway theaters after the nightly performances or in the center of Wall Street at the end of the business day. This allowed us to attract more of the type of people we were already attracting, which led to synergy, connection, and growth.

The Homogenous Unit Principle has also been criticized for perpetuating a segregated church.[10] We have not found that to be the case. For McGavran,

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[9] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 36.

[10] See, for example, David Swanson, "Down with the Homogeneous Unit Principle?," *Christianity Today* (August 2010; accessed 4 February 2016: http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2010/august-online-only/down-with-homogeneous-unit-principle.html).

as for us, the homogeneous unit is best understood as a section of society in which all of the members have characteristics in common, and this need not be limited to racial identity. A homogeneous unit might be comprised of any number of characteristics that the members share within certain geographical confines. As such, it is an "elastic concept."[11]

When we began thinking through how the Homogenous Unit Principle applied to starting The Journey, our prayer was that the church would look like the city. New York City is highly multicultural, and The Journey is a true reflection of that diversity. The race and class composition inside our church largely matches the demographic makeup of Manhattan. We have discovered that, for us, homogeneity is centered not on race or class, but on life situations, interests, and common activities.

Now that The Journey is larger and operates in multiple cities, our focus is much broader. Since we have more people, we can reach different segments of society and minister to all types. Nevertheless, as the church grows and matures, we are seeing a new homogenous unit arising in our church: the unity of Christ, just as Paul expected (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).

PRINCIPLE FIVE: STAY FOCUSED ON THE GREAT COMMISSION

These good deeds must, of course, be done, and Christians will do them. I myself was doing many of them. But they must never replace the essential task of mission, discipling the peoples of Earth.[12]

One of McGavran's early driving concerns was that the term *evangelism* was becoming watered down. Rather than referring to the spreading of the gospel, it had become confused with educational and social programs. Therefore, he coined the term *church growth* as a way to describe the work of the Great Commission. At its core, church growth is about effective evangelism; it is about a passionate focus on reaching people for Jesus. As McGavran noted, the good deeds that many call evangelism are beneficial, but they are not evangelistic by default. Churches have to do more than serve the community. That service must contain an intentional effort to share the gospel message.

Early on in a church plant, most churches are very committed to the Great Commission. In fact, they are willing to live and die by it. As churches grow older and larger, however, keeping a strong external focus on fulfilling the Great Commission becomes more difficult, even when the pastors are personally committed to evangelism.

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[11] "The homogeneous unit is an elastic concept," therefore, "depending on the context in which it is used" (McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 96).

[12] Donald A. McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (1986), 54.

Recognizing this danger, we have intentionally made it a defining goal at The Journey to keep a relentless, laser-like, uncompromising focus on the Great Commission. We strive to filter every decision we make through the lens of Jesus' words:

> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19–20).

CONCLUSION

McGavran's work continues to impact The Journey Church to this day. After our tumultuous beginning, God used, and is still using, McGavran's principles to grow us into the church that Christ wishes us to be. Now firmly into our second decade of ministry, I eagerly and prayerfully look forward to what the future holds as we continue to be guided by God's Word and McGavran's timeless church growth principles.

About the Authors

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DONALD MCGAVRAN:
AN EVANGELISTIC MISSIONARY

Gary L. McIntosh

— 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.[1]

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,[2] 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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[1] 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.

[2] 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.[3]

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.[4]

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."[5]

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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[3] 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.

[4] Donald McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 10(2): 56.

[5] 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."[6]

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*.[7] 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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[6] Donald A. McGavran, "Budru's Family Became Christian," *World Call* (March 1942), 39.

[7] 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.[8]

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.[9] 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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[8] Middleton, 103.

[9] 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.[10]

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."[11]

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."[12] 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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[10] Donald A. McGavran, "Pacifism and the Atonement," *The Christian Evangelist* (1940), 266.

[11] Donald A. McGavran, "A World Fellowship of Churches," *World Call* (November 1941), 13.

[12] 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.[13]

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.[14]

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."[15] In his call to go to receptive peoples, Donald refused to ignore unoccupied areas. "Even

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[13] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Church Review* (March 1941), 60.

[14] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (February 1941), 37.

[15] 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."[16]

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."[17] 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.[18]

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."[19] 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."[20]

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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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[16] McGavran, "Things New and Old," 140.

[17] McGavran, "Things New and Old," 313.

[18] 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.

[19] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Church Review* (August 1941), 195.

[20] 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.[21]

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.[22]

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[21] Donald McGavran, "Evangelism in Central India," *World Call* (February 1942), 11.

[22] 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.[23]

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."[24]

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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[23] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Church Review* (March 1942), 65.

[24] 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 <u>our</u> 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?"[25]

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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[25] 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.[26]

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."[27]

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.[28]

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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[26] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (April 1944), 58.

[27] McGavran, "Things New and Old."

[28] 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 plated 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.[29]

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.[30]

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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[29] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (January 1947), 195.

[30] 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."[31] 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."[32] 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."[33] 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."[34]

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[31] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (February 1947), 219.

[32] McGavran, "Things New and Old," 219.

[33] Donald McGavran, "Things New and Old," *The United Christian Review* (March 1947), 241.

[34] 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.[35] 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.[36]

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."[37]

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[35] Donald McGavran, "Preaching the Word in India," *World Call* (September 1947), 16–17.

[36] "Resolutions Approved by the Convention," *The Christian Evangelist* (September 10, 1947), 899–900.

[37] "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."[38] 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."[39]

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[38] Letter from C. M. Yocum to Donald A. McGavran, December 9, 1948.

[39] 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.[40] 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."[41]

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.[42] 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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[40] 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.

[41] Donald McGavran, "A Christian Looks at Japan," *The Christian-Evangelist* (March 23, 1949), 281.

[42] 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].[43]

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."[44] 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."[45]

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

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[43] Donald A. McGavran, Unpublished notes, 1949–1952.

[44] McGavran, "A Christian Looks at Japan."

[45] 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.[46] 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.[47]

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."[48]

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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46 "Indian Churches Gather for Annual Assembly," *World Call* (March 21, 1951), 281–282.

47 Donald F. West, "The Indian Church Moves Ahead," *World Call* (July–August 1951), 17–18.

48 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?"[49] 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."[50] 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."[51] 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.[52]

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[49] Donald A. McGavran, "The Disciples of Christ Look at a Plan of Church Union in North India," *Baptist Missionary Review* (September–October 1952), 167.

[50] Ibid., 168.

[51] Ibid., 172.

[52] 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."[53]

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."[54]

About the Author

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[53] Donald A. McGavran, "The Big Fire of Navapara," *World Call* (January 1953), 42.

[54] Spencer P. Austin, "One Memorable Day," *World Call* (March 1953), 20.

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSIFICATION IN THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Donald McGavran observed isolationist tendencies in the church and proposed both methodological consistency and sociological analysis as factors critical to evangelistic success. Later, church growth thinkers devolved into a syncretistic pragmatism that, over time, rendered the church as irrelevant as the church McGavran sought to combat. I synthesize various strands running through the history of the Church Growth Movement and isolate contributing factors to diversification through critical interaction with a contemporary of Donald McGavran—Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin's understanding of the relationships among gospel, church, and culture serves as the foundation for understanding how a church can slip into a position of either syncretism that overvalues culture or a position of irrelevance that undervalues culture.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of modernity and Christendom carried significant ramifications for the church's understanding of its identity and mission. Most significantly, churches became complacent and privatized enclaves that placed less emphasis on spiritual growth to instead pursue institutional stability. Eager to help the church recover its evangelistic identity, Donald

McGavran proposed methodological consistency and sociological analysis as factors critical to evangelistic success and church growth. McGavran first published these preliminary concepts in the 1950s, which formally developed into the Church Growth Movement in the 1960s. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, the Church Growth Movement in America bore little resemblance to McGavran's original proposal. Eventually, the Church Growth Movement splintered into several streams, each of which appeared to possess its own unique qualities, characteristics, and identity. This article identifies *diversification* as the process through which the Church Growth Movement separated into numerous streams as it matured, each stream identified by particular nuances and degrees of similarity to McGavran's original propositions. Scholars recognize diversification within the Church Growth Movement but disagree when categorizing the various expressions of church growth thought, use different demarcating dates in tracing diversification, and have not identified a common cause undergirding diversification. I synthesize various strands running through the history of the Church Growth Movement and isolate contributing factors to diversification through critical interaction with a contemporary of Donald McGavran—Lesslie Newbigin.

Though ministering at the same time and within the same vocation as McGavran, Newbigin produced a strikingly different ecclesiology by emphasizing the missionary nature of the church while intentionally avoiding a cultural relationship that was relevant to the point of syncretism or irrelevant to the point of isolationism. Newbigin pointed to three emphases within McGavran's original thinking that were problematic: the relations of numerical church growth to the message of the kingdom, the meaning of conversion and its relation to both discipling and what McGavran called *perfecting*, and McGavran's understanding of how the church interacts with the culture.[1] Newbigin's conception of the relationships among gospel, church, and culture is the most important church growth critique he offered because it served as the foundation for understanding how a church can slip into a position of either syncretism that overvalues culture or a position of irrelevance that undervalues culture.

McGavran originally observed isolationist tendencies in the church and incorporated culturally driven methodologies to combat ecclesiological irrelevance. Later, church growth thinkers devolved into a syncretistic pragmatism that, over time, rendered the church as irrelevant as the church McGavran sought to combat. Scant academic interaction exists between church growth advocates and the particular critique offered by Lesslie

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[1] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission,* Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 124.

Newbigin; I use this critique to show what factors in McGavran's original thinking precipitated diversification within the Church Growth Movement. I argue the emphasis later church growth manifestations placed on syncretistic methodologies subsequently isolated churches from their context; and that undue cultural dependence resulted in isolation rather than contextualization.

MODERNITY AND THE CHURCH

Modernity emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, distinct from either classical or medieval culture and emancipating humanity from its bondage to ecclesiastical and theological authority.[2] This period of intellectual discovery known as the Enlightenment increased man's confidence in himself and in his own ability due to significant epistemological and scientific advances.[3] Fleischacker argued that the Enlightenment posed a challenge to religious traditions and pre-modern assumptions because of man's newfound confidence.[4] Developments in this time period included a revolt against authority and subsequent pursuit of autonomy, reason's ability to separate fact from opinion, the recognized reliability of nature, humanistic optimism, belief in human ingenuity and progress, and civil tolerance.[5] Baum identified two precipitating causes of modernity: immanent humanism and scientific reductionism. Immanent humanism excluded reference to God and relied on practical reason rather than religious faith in its pursuit of a just and peaceful world. This immanent humanism negatively affected ethical validity in the realm of truth; values were interpreted as mere sentiments while ethics were reduced to a utilitarian calculus employed in the service of one's own self-interest.[6]

A major implication of modernity was the dichotomization of faith and knowledge—facts were elevated to supreme importance through rationalization, objectivity, and verifiability. Values and religious beliefs were relegated to mere superstition and subjectivity, while human ability alone was

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[2] James Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought Volume 1: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century* (2nd ed.) (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1997), 6.

[3] Andrew Hoffecker, "Enlightenments and Awakenings: The Beginning of Modern Culture Wars," *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. Andrew Hoffecker (United Kingdom: P & R Publishing, 2007), 240.

[4] Samuel Fleischacker, "Enlightenment and Tradition: The Clash Within Civilizations," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42 (2007): 351.

[5] Livingston, 6–10.

[6] Gregory Baum, "The Churches Challenged by the Secularization of Culture," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46 (2011): 345–346.

seen as reliable.[7] Bolger itemized modernity's bifurcation: "religion from politics, business from the family, the mind from the body, the community from society, science from religion, and the individual from everything else."[8] This dichotomization of faith and knowledge compartmentalized existence into sacred and secular spheres: religious belief was permissible only in the sacred sphere while the rest of existence flourished in the secular sphere.

The topic of mission provides an interesting nexus between the church and modernity. As modernity created a religious sphere that pushed faith to the periphery of society, the church became a religious institution addressing only spiritual matters rather than the entirety of life.[9] Specifically, following the end of World War II and lasting until well into the 1950s, mission efforts within the church were understood as an ingathering and extension of the church. Congregational energies were consumed with maintaining buildings, accumulating new members, and supporting new programs. Sociologically, congregations grew increasingly isolated and estranged from the centers of work, leisure, power, and influence.[10]

As a result of these congregational developments, mission efforts of the church took on a predominantly geographical emphasis—mission activity was something done for a specific time in a specific location. Mission stations became a prominent strategy, mirroring the bifurcated modernistic paradigm by providing a gathering place for Western Christians to meet while ministering in non-Western countries; the mission station church was merely an extension of the Western church through which ingathering could take place overseas. No thought was given to contextual appropriateness or the potential obstacle of cultural irrelevance. As indigenous peoples converted to Christianity, they were separated from their cultural groupings and segregated into the life of the mission station compound.[11]

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[7] W. Shenk, "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge," *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America (Gospel & Our Culture)*, ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 70.

[8] Ryan Bolger, "Practice Movements in Global Information Culture: Looking Back to McGavran and Finding a Way Forward" *Missiology: An International Review* 35 (2007): 182.

[9] Ibid.

[10] John Hendrick, "Congregations with Missions vs. Missionary Congregations," *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America (Gospel & Our Culture)* ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 299.

[11] Bolger, 182–183.

Western culture became the vessel for the gospel as mission station churches unwittingly created isolated pockets of Western Christian subculture, forcing believers to identify with Western values but live among and interact with indigenous people groups who were neither Western nor Christian. Conversion to Christianity meant converting to Western culture and experiencing significant cultural distance between Christians and indigenous non-believers.

THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

McGavran published *Bridges of God* in 1955 to address the theological, ethical, missiological, and procedural concerns arising from the intersection of the church and modernity; its publication provided insight where there had previously been a vacuum of both knowledge and training. As the Church Growth Movement matured, two arms developed: McGavran's School of World Mission represented international missiology while both the Institute for American Church Growth and Wagner's Charles E. Fuller Institute for Evangelism and Church Growth represented North American Missiology. The American arm branched further into the Popular Church Growth Movement, characterized by Systems Research, Survey Research, Polling Research, and Anecdotal Research.[12]

This American arm of the Church Growth Movement began to take on a different tenor than that which McGavran originally intended. McGavran relied on statistical, sociological, and numerical methods only for evangelistic accountability, but Peter Wagner further developed the use of social sciences and social scientific method, proposing "consecrated pragmatism" as a means of practically implementing the Great Commission without compromising doctrinal and ethical principles of the Word of God.[13] Wagner's consecrated pragmatism relied on cultural, historical, and theological sources. Culturally, Wagner utilized popular methods extant within a given culture; if raising funds happened most efficiently through direct mailers, then a church imitating popular methods of direct mail advertising was not only acceptable, but also preferable. Historically, it was prudent to observe which methods of evangelism God had blessed and which methods he had not. Theologically, Wagner relied on the Bible and noted its examples of successful and reproducible strategies; Nehemiah's ability to rebuild the wall

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[12] Gary McIntosh, "Why Church Growth Can't Be Ignored," *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 2010).

[13] Scott McKee, "The Relationship Between Church Health and Church Growth in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church" (D. Min. Diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2003), 26.

of Jerusalem in 52 days using volunteers was one example of Biblical pragmatism.[14] Peter Wagner, along with Win Arn, introduced these insights to American ecclesiological circles after they were first gleaned from missionary efforts in the global south. Denominational leaders, mission executives, and entrepreneurial pastors from across the United States flocked to conferences, seminars, and seminary classes in order to learn how to use these principles in reaching the lost in their communities at home and abroad.[15]

Despite the widespread and longstanding academic pedigree originally accompanying the Church Growth Movement, by the 1990s, church leaders eager to learn about church growth thinking stopped looking to professors for influence and inspiration and instead looked to other successful pastors who had grown large congregations employing church growth principles. When this happened, American pastors appeared to take the forms of church growth but not the philosophy. Church growth advocates soon focused on method instead of missiology, leading to an application of a mission technique rather than a philosophy of mission.[16] When pastors saw churches growing, they studied the growth itself rather than the fundamental church growth principles driving growth. It was easier, more direct, and more reproducible to imitate a method instead of understanding what made that method effective and why. If one growing church placed a coffee bar in its narthex, other churches followed suit without understanding what purpose the coffee bar served. If a pastor sincerely desired fruitful ministry, a growing church was assumed to be ministering in certain successful ways that, upon imitation, would bear similar fruit.

Despite McGavran's original desire to synthesize theology, theory, and practice, church growth resources that offered purely practical, step-by-step instructions were increasingly in high demand: books, workbooks, tapes, videos, seminars, conferences, and consultations spread rapidly. Methodological imitation emphasizing form over philosophy ultimately left pastors disappointed as they realized they could not merely implement culturally based and sociologically driven pragmatic formulae that had been successful at other churches. Amid improper implementation of church growth

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[14] Charles Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1981), 72–73.

[15] Alan McMahan, "Church Growth by Another Name: Challenges and Opportunities for the Future of a Movement," *Great Commission Research Journal* 1(2009): 11–12.

[16] Ed Stetzer, "The Evolution of Church Growth, Church Health, and the Missional Church: An Overview of the Church Growth Movement From, and Back to, Its Missional Roots" (Paper presented at the 50th anniversary celebration of Donald McGavran's Bridges of God, 2005), 12. Retrieved from www.christianitytoday.com/assets/10231.pdf.

thinking rooted in form rather than philosophy, interest in the Church Growth Movement waned.[17]

A 1994 study of 150 ministry leaders—46 church executives, 29 pastors, and 75 church growth leaders—asked participants to categorize the Church Growth Movement as concerned with either improved methods, numerical growth, or faithfulness to the Great Commission. The study found 21% of pastors identified the Church Growth Movement as concerned primarily with improved methods; another 21% chose numerical growth, and 18% chose faithfulness to the Great Commission. Responses of church executives paralleled those of pastors: 25% selected improved methods while 23% selected numerical growth, and 23% selected faithfulness to the Great Commission. In contrast, 43% of church growth leaders identified faithfulness to the Great Commission as the primary identity of the Church Growth Movement while only 26% selected improved methods. Further, 50% of executives, 48% of church growth leaders, and 57% of pastors felt the Church Growth Movement had plateaued.[18] Ultimately, the Church Growth Movement faded as a dominant ecclesiological methodology in America.

THE CHURCH HEALTH MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

Rick Warren provided a nomenclature for America's new dominant ecclesiological methodological focus, affirming, "The key issue for churches in the Twenty-First Century will be church health, not church growth."[19] Asserting church growth happens when church health is pursued, Warren emphasized prioritizing the health of a local church body and assumed growth would follow: "When congregations are healthy, they grow the way God intends…. If your church is genuinely healthy, you won't have to worry about it growing."[20] McKee expanded on this thinking: "Focus on health, and growth will come. Quality brings quantity. Growing churches are assumed to be healthy, especially in contrast to what are pejoratively called 'maintenance' churches."[21] Warren proposed a list of church health markers he viewed as a) well-rounded, holistic indicators of spiritual growth, and b) more informative than purely numeric indicators.[22] A church needed

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[17] McMahan, 12.

[18] Gary McIntosh, "Thoughts on a Movement" (Paper presented at the ASCG Annual Meeting, 1994), 10.

[19] Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 17.

[20] Ibid.

[21] McKee, 36.

[22] Rick Warren, "Comprehensive Health Plan: To Lead a Healthy Church Takes More Than Technique" *Leadership* 18 (1997): 22–29. Retrieved from http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1997/summer/7l3022.html.

to grow relationally warmer through fellowship, spiritually stronger and deeper through discipleship and worship, broader through ministry, and larger through evangelism. Warren preferred the term *church health* because he saw it as more specific and more telling.[23] Size provided no information about the health of a congregation, but a healthy congregation will naturally grow.

To date, Christian Schwarz' *Natural Church Development* is accepted as the most popular work on church health.[24] Schwarz' popularity and credibility stems from the extensive research he conducted, which included one thousand churches in thirty-two countries on five continents.[25] Schwarz' definition of health emphasized empowered leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships.[26] Further research analyzed a multitude of church health authors and found similar emphases across the entire movement. McKee summarized the entire church health movement with eight characteristics: effective structures, authentic community, transforming discipleship, engaging worship, mobilized laity, wholehearted spirituality, empowering leadership, and intentional evangelism.[27] While continuity within the church health movement is expected, comparison of the church health and Church Growth movements reveals a similar and surprising degree of continuity.

Despite Warren's articulation, Schwarz' popularity, and other manifestations of the church health movement, McIntosh observed Schwarz' eight essential qualities of church health were merely re-affirmations of previous church growth values.[28] Church growth principles had become so deeply imbedded in church health leaders that they did not realize they were actually employing church growth insights. Table 1 shows striking continuity when comparing Warren's and Schwarz' professed church health values with seven church growth vital signs as summarized by Van Engen.[29] Herein lies a fundamental connection: while the church health movement in America was a reaction to the perceived shortcomings of the Church Growth Movement, it was not that much of a departure. Christian Schwarz proclaimed himself a church health advocate, but he more accurately represents later church growth thinking.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] McIntosh, "Why Church Growth."

[25] Stetzer, 14.

[26] McKee, 46.

[27] Ibid., 33.

[28] McIntosh, "Why Church Growth."

[29] Charles Van Engen, "Centrist View," *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* ed. Gary McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 2010).

TABLE 1

Continuity Between the Church Growth and Church Health Movements

Church Growth	Rick Warren	Christian Schwarz
Membership from one homogeneous unit	Warmer through fellowship	Loving relationships
Provides adequate services to members	Stronger through discipleship	Holistic small groups
	Deeper through worship	Inspiring worship service
Well-mobilized laity	Broader through ministry	Gift-oriented ministry
Proven evangelistic methods	Larger through evangelism	Need-oriented evangelism
Dynamic leadership		Empowered leadership
Properly arranged Biblical priorities		Passionate spirituality
Structural balance		Functional Structures

Similar confusion appears when considering Warren's specific explanation of why he moved away from the Church Growth Movement:

> I stopped using the phrase around 1986 because of the things I didn't like about the church growth movement. I don't like the incessant comparing of churches.... Another thing I didn't like was the movement's tendency to be more analytical than prescriptive. A lot of the church growth books were not written by pastors; they were written by theorists.[30]

Yet, the church health movement affirms original Church Growth Movement principles. McGavran was eager, more than anything else, to connect theology and theory with practice—the very thing Warren accuses the Church Growth Movement of not doing! From whence did Warren's critique arise? Nowhere does McGavran promote the thinking Warren decried; neither theoretical reliance nor congregational comparison is a principle one could glean from McGavran. What happened?

DIVERSIFICATION

Inspired by McGavran's intense desire for accountability in evangelistic efforts, the Church Growth Movement worked. Perhaps it worked too well (if one can say that) because what church growth thinking produced in America were churches large enough to garner popular attention and invite

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[30] Rick Warren, "Comprehensive Health Plan."

imitation. What, then, precipitated methodological diversification among those who came after McGavran?

Towns observed the introduction of church growth thought brought with it an explosion of megachurches.[31] Larger churches were not necessarily healthier or more fruitful, but they certainly exerted considerable influence on their neighborhoods and elicited significant media attention. Other pastors inspired by the apparent success of megachurches sought to influence multitudes and attract financial resources in the same way megachurches could. Later, church growth advocates, no doubt smitten with success (and understandably so, given the eagerness with which they desired to see the gospel take root in the hearts, minds, and lives of those who did not believe) turned church growth principles into formulaic expressions dependent on human ingenuity rather than divine initiative.

Indeed, church growth practitioners appeared to develop an evangelistic model that relied on human intelligence, ingenuity, and creativity. George Barna's 1988 publication of *Marketing the Church* was a deviation from the substance of McGavran's original thought in favor of a pure public relations and marketing campaign strategy.[32] Church growth devolved into setting goals, developing methodologies, and evaluating those methodologies in light of what appeared to work.[33] Guinness details several instances of purely methodological practice. One church growth consultant proclaimed he could put five to ten million baby boomers back in church within a month by doing three things: a) advertise, b) let people know about product benefits of the church, and c) be nice to new people. Another consultant proclaimed the advent of technology would significantly decrease the amount of supernatural intervention required on the part of the Lord. A research study asserted the first rule of church growth was that a church would never grow beyond the limits of its parking lot. Guinness conceded there was much practicality in sociological research and subsequent methodological implementation, but he noted they were modernistic insights that must remain subservient to the authority of Scripture. Guinness concluded, "The church of Christ is more than spiritual and theological, but never less."[34] Additionally, apparently successful methodologies did not always prove reliable upon closer inspection. Ellas and Yeakley, for example, criticized Christian Schwarz' research as being pseudoscientific and lacking hard data; they asserted his

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[31] Elmer Towns, "The Beginning of the Church Growth Movement," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 13–19.

[32] McIntosh, "Why Church Growth."

[33] Gailyn Van Rheenen, "Reformist View," *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* ed. Gary McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 2010).

[34] Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Hourglass Books, 1993), 38–39.

claim to have discovered universally applicable principles for church growth was a grandiose accomplishment no researcher would ever make.[35]

Pastors who saw the success of early church growth churches identified such success with formulaic marketing strategies and cultural observation practices and endeavored to reproduce the same. In each of these examples, one sees a subtle syncretism at work: church growth practitioners relied heavily on culturally-informed practices that placed too much authority on human ingenuity and too much weight in cultural relevance. In this sense, church growth proponents were modernistic in their reliance on internal human logic and external observation. Sociological research—such as the cultural observation method advocated for in Wagner's consecrated pragmatism and the examples offered by Guinness—was originally intended as a buttress to church growth thinking but instead became a cornerstone.[36]

Eventually, methods occurring at the popular level made their way into academic research. David Hesselgrave's 1988 analysis of the thematic content of book reviews and articles published in the major mission journals—*Missiology*, *International Review of Missions*, and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*—confirmed an absence of theological foundations and asserted contemporary missiology gave more attention to social science and history than theology.[37] Rainer agreed:

> Since 1988 most of the literature identified with church growth has been concerned with methodology; methodology of worship; methodology of marketing; methodology of leadership; methodology of evangelism; etc. It is easy to understand why critics are screaming that a new idolatry is being promoted by the Church Growth Movement. Methodology, once subservient to and a tool of theology, would now appear to be an end instead of a means.[38]

Church growth proponent Aubrey Malphurs further admitted an accurate criticism of the Church Growth Movement was its overemphasis on practical, pragmatic, and methodological elements.[39] Indeed, many pastors heard the success of church growth advocates and copied their methods without reflecting on the principles inherent therein.[40] Guder agreed, arguing, "The Church Growth Movement addresses evangelism more methodologically than theologically; it focuses largely on how we do evangelism, since the

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[35] John Ellas, and Flavil Yeakley, "Review of Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches, by Christian Schwarz," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* (Spring 1999): 81, 93.

[36] Van Rheenen, "Reformist View."

[37] McIntosh, "Why Church Growth."

[38] Thom Rainer, "Celebration of Criticism," *Global Church Growth* 30 (1993): 6.

[39] Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 27.

[40] Stetzer, 13.

'why' of mission is assumed with the principle that God desires the numerical growth of the church."[41] Guder concluded,

> We simply may not assume that our formulations of the gospel, as familiar and time-tested as they may be, exhaust the fullness and the scope of God's great good news, culminating in the life, death, resurrection, and mission of Jesus Christ. Evangelism will depend upon our answer to the questions: What is the gospel? What is the fullness of the apostolic message? What is salvation? What does the church's gospel mission intend? What is the *missio Dei* ("mission of God") that defines the identity, purpose, and way of life of the church?[42]

Effectiveness had become a key factor in determining the evangelistic success of church growth thinking and human ingenuity in methodological efficiency the means.

These principles created reimagined mission station churches rather than gospel-formed people movements.[43] While McGavran's original framework emphasized conversion and the consequential ethical shifts in one's lifestyle, later church growth thinking operated within a fundamentally vertical approach that relegated salvation to an individual, private, and completed transaction. One's "savedness" was of primary importance while little attention was paid to the past, present, and future work of salvation occurring within both individual and corporate contexts. The gospel assumed in later manifestations of church growth theory is soaked with the privatized and individualized assumptions of late Christendom.[44] Instead of engaging the world with a holistic gospel affecting one's salvation and lifestyle, church growth thinking perpetuated the modernistic bifurcation of public and private by relegating salvation to a privatized sphere of existence. This inward-focused isolationism renders modern churches little more than antiquated and nostalgic museums, compounds one must enter to hear the gospel.[45] Van Engen pointed to Christian Schwarz' Natural Church Development as representative of a church growth descendent exhibiting isolationist tendencies by observing Schwartz' eight essential qualities—empowered leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships—lack any reference to culture or context.[46] With the exception of need-oriented evangelism, the qualities concern almost

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[41] Darrell Guder, "Evangelism and the Debate over Church Growth," *Interpretation* 48 (1994): 147.

[42] Ibid., 148.

[43] Bolger, 184, 191.

[44] Guder, 150.

[45] Bolger, 184.

[46] Van Engen.

exclusively the internal life of a congregation and display little or no awareness to contextualization or local cultural engagement.

Church health proponents like Rick Warren argued the Church Growth Movement emphasized numerical growth as a primary indicator of effective spiritual fruit and instead prioritized congregational health, which then became a standard later imitators emphasized. Eventually, church health thinking devolved into the pursuit of a methodology grounded in congregational health and succumbed to the same isolationist pitfalls as church growth thinking.

> By emphasizing ecclesiology, with a limited Christology and an
> absent missiology, the Church Health Movement stepped outside
> of the scriptural and theological foundations leading to blindness
> to the world outside the church walls. Churches which focused on
> church health were struggling with how they ought to "do church"
> in order to be healthy, not by whom and to whom they were sent.[47]

The Church Growth and church health movements each reacted against a perceived fault in preceding ecclesiological practices; though they pursued different avenues to get there, both streams produced congregations increasingly isolated from their context. Table 2 summarizes both the Church Growth and church health movements in regards to the perceived shortcomings against which they reacted. In a sense, the reliance on culturally informed techniques such as marketing, logistics, demographical research, and methodological ingenuity stemmed from a syncretism that overvalued cultural sources of authority. Syncretism led to methodological copycatting

TABLE 2

Comparing the Church Growth Movement and the Church Health Movement

	Reacted Against	Emphasized Instead	Result
Church Growth Movement	Isolationist and complacent mission station churches	Evangelistic accountability, culturally informed sociological research	Methodological and purely pragmatic copycatting regardless of context
Church Health Movement	Methodological and pragmatic copycatting within the Church Growth Movement	Church Health, maturity of believers, effective church functions	Inward focus that cared for the health of the members to the exclusion of a church's context; irrelevance

[47] Stetzer, 15.

that, in time, rendered those very practices obsolete. As cultural sources of authority shifted, failure to shift methodological practices accordingly rendered congregations increasingly isolated and irrelevant. Reliance on culture led to isolation from culture.

The application of these principles created static churches that organized social services and evangelistic programs as a function of methodologically inspired program-driven activity rather than true spiritual formation efforts. Though McGavran's initial thinking promoted centripetal mission efforts that sent missionaries out with the gospel, church growth thought devolved centrifugally into church compounds attracting nonbelievers; evangelistic efforts emphasized bringing people into a fixed location to hear the gospel rather than going out and engaging them in their own context. Despite the initial emphasis on contextualization, the diversification of church growth thinking resulted in churches that were contextually isolated rather than contextually sensitive.

Centrifugal thinking was successful when the surrounding context shared a common cultural heritage, namely, Christendom. However, Hunsberger observed that by the late 1980s, the church's former privileged position in Western societies under the Christendom model had disappeared and would not return.[48] We can reasonably conclude, therefore, that church growth thinking is an inadequate strategy given the collapse of Christendom. Desperately seeking to incorporate a means of ministry antithetical to mission station churches, McGavran inadvertently inspired the very types of organizations he sought to replace. Mission station churches created Christian subcultures among unreached people by serving as an extension of the Western church in non-Western settings; as indigenous peoples converted to Christianity, they were separated from their cultural groupings and segregated into the life of the mission station compound.[49] In similar fashion, contemporary manifestations of church growth thinking create isolated Christian subcultures in a post-Christendom context; thus, the onus rests with the non-churchgoer to cross cultural boundaries when attending church.

Differing Views on Diversification

The literature presents a number of possibilities when trying to categorize and classify diversification within the Church Growth Movement. Towns proposed three phases of church growth thought—one including

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[48] George Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America (Gospel & Our Culture)* ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 6.

[49] Bolger, 182–183.

McGavran, Wagner, Eddie Gibbs, and himself, a second including Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and John Maxwell, and a third including the plethora of churches, pastors, authors, denominations, and research institutes who have specialized in certain niche aspects of the Church Growth Movement. Towns contended it was this third stage most responsible for diversification in church growth thinking.[50] McIntosh (2003) drew clear distinctions between a technical understanding of church growth and a popular understanding; technical church growth is anything related to the principles and theories arising from Donald McGavran while popular church growth is anything that purports to help grow a church.[51]

Tucker argued that the loss of McGavran's leadership led to diversification within the Church Growth Movement and highlighted five separate streams of church growth thinking. The *McGavran Church Growth with a global focus* stream relied on social sciences, pragmatism, and contextualization but never relied on these tools over the biblical record. The *McGavran Church Growth with an American focus* stream mirrored the first stream but displayed an inherently American emphasis. The *American Popular Church Growth* stream was seeker driven and prioritized the felt needs of the unchurched rather than the biblical mandate for evangelism. *Third Wave Church Growth* depended on C. Peter Wagner and emphasized the normalcy of signs, wonders, healings, miraculous gifts, and Holy Spirit power encounters. The *American Neo-Orthodox Church Growth* stream was comprised of mainline liberal churches that prioritized sociological, pragmatic, and contextualization while rejecting what they felt were McGavran's narrow views on biblical authority, Christology, and soteriology.[52]

Tucker recognized five streams of church growth thinking, but Rainer recognized four epochs. *The McGavran Era* (1955–1970) is most recognizable as the season during which McGavran exerted direct influence and leadership on the Church Growth Movement. The *Identity Crisis Era Part I* (1970–1981) was a span of time during which church growth proponents carried McGavran's original framework into a distinctly American context. During *The Wagner Era* (1981–1988), C. Peter Wagner became the Church Growth Movement's leading spokesperson and the first to defend church growth thinking against a myriad of detractors who criticized early American manifestations. *Identity Crisis Era Part II* (1988–present) is most recog-

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[50] Elmer Towns, "Effective Evangelism View," *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement* ed. Gary McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. Kindle Edition, 2010).

[51] Gary McIntosh, "A Critique of the Critics," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 47.

[52] Sonny Tucker, "The Fragmentation of the Post-McGavran Church Growth Movement," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 26–32.

nizable today since the most common characteristics of churches adhering to church growth principles are numerical emphasis, contemporary worship, and seeker-sensitive focus.[53]

In addition to a myriad of opinions concerning how to classify the various categories of church growth thinking following McGavran, disagreement exists as to when such diversification occurred. Tucker argued the Church Growth Movement lost its identity in 1988 as McGavran's health failed and his influence diminished.[54] Towns argued diversification began in 1980 when church growth thinking shifted from the classroom (led by academics) to local churches (led by practitioners).[55] Bolger noted the Church Growth Movement lost its association with Donald McGavran in the 1990s as church growth became synonymous with powerful marketing and large suburban megachurches.[56] It is not likely one single classification of diversification within the Church Growth Movement accurately presents a comprehensive lineage. Rather, each of the various categorizations together illustrates some aspect of how the streams divided. Regardless, a clear and compelling understanding of why diversification occurred requires further investigation. Lesslie Newbigin— a missionary and contemporary of McGavran—is foundational to this further investigation.

NEWBIGIN READS MCGAVRAN

A missionary in India for forty years and a contemporary of Donald McGavran, Lesslie Newbigin was equally as passionate about proclaiming the gospel as McGavran but disagreed with him concerning technique and method of proclamation. McGavran developed the primary church growth components while serving in India, but Newbigin began to think differently about the mission of the church upon returning to his native England and seeing Western society through the eyes of an outsider; immersion in an Eastern context uniquely prepared him to observe the ways in which the gospel is at the same time embedded in and disparate from a given culture. Further, Newbigin's experience as a Western missionary in a non-Western context gave insight into cross-cultural communication by challenging the

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[53] Thom Rainer, "Assessing the Church Growth Movement," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 54–57.

[54] Tucker, 25.

[55] Elmer Towns, "The Beginning of the Church Growth Movement," *Journal of Evangelism and Missions* 2 (2003): 17–18.

[56] Bolger.

worldview implicit in language and forcing him to balance both syncretism and irrelevance.[57]

   More than formulae based on methodological technique and cultural research, Newbigin considered the fundamental assumptions at work in evangelism and asked how the church could faithfully proclaim the gospel in a society that was increasingly antithetical to the gospel despite the church's fundamental identity having traditionally been informed by the surrounding culture.

> How, then, can there be a genuine encounter of the gospel with this culture, a culture that has itself sprung from roots in Western Christendom and with which the Western churches have lived in a symbiotic relationship ever since its first dawning?[58]

For the church to effectively witness to the lordship of Jesus in contemporary society, it must not merely offer an alternative means of existence as isolationist church growth proponents inadvertently did, but instead demonstrate the holistic and all-encompassing reality of the gospel. Newbigin differentiated between *declaratory* churches that discussed and interpreted the work God has done in and through history and *performatory* churches that realized their place within the kingdom. Performatory churches understood that they were to play an active, facilitating role as God brings history to its goal of redemption and reconciliation.[59] With this reading, it is not unfair to categorize McGavran as declaratory and Newbigin as performatory; McGavran's efforts resulted in the very alternative existence he sought to avoid while Newbigin pursued the gospel in all its facets and nuances. Newbigin pointed to three emphases within McGavran's original thinking that were problematic and prevented performatory ministry: the relation of numerical church growth to the message of the kingdom, the meaning of conversion and its relation to both discipling and what McGavran called *perfecting*, and the relationships among gospel, church, and culture.[60]

   The Church Growth Movement made numerical growth of the church into one of the most important aspects of authentic evangelistic mission.[61] McGavran was correct to ask why the church did not possess a more burn-

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[57] Michael Goheen, "Gospel, Culture, and Cultures: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Contribution" (Paper presented at the Cultures and Christianity A.D. 2000 International Symposium of the Association for Reformational Philosophy, 2000), 1–2. Retrieved from http://www.biblicaltheology.ca/blue_files/Gospel,%20Culture,%20 Cultures,%20Newbigin.pdf.

[58] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 9.

[59] Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 131.

[60] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 124.

[61] Guder, "Evangelism," 152.

ing concern for the multiplication of believers and more evidence of its happening. Indeed, in reading the New Testament, one recognizes joyfulness in the rapid growth of the church; however, what is absent in Scripture is evidence that numerical growth of the church was a matter of primary concern. The church is least recognizable as the church when it pursues growth through artificially contrived means such as marketing campaigns, technological manipulation, and pseudoscientific research; when numerical growth is prioritized and utilized as a means of assessment, the church more closely resembles a military operation or commercial sales drive.[62] Guder distinguished between a yearning for growth and an undue emphasis upon numerical growth, arguing yearning for numerical growth is a true mark of the church while the actual amount of numerical growth is a matter of historical, sociological, political, anthropological, religious, and cultural factors and does not point to the trueness of the church.[63] Having made numerical growth the sole determining factor of successful evangelism, as the Church Growth Movement matured and diversified, its proponents developed methodological processes that promoted numerical growth as a standalone metric of evangelistic success.

Newbigin also criticized McGavran's desire to separate conversion from obedience, arguing conversion necessarily involved the whole person. Originally, the announcement of the gospel ("the reign of God is at hand") led immediately and comprehensively to a call to be converted ("repent"), a call to believe in the present reality of God's reign, and a call to follow Jesus. All of these belong together as part of a single action rather than divided into quantifiable subsections.[64] Later church growth thinking adhered to McGavran's separation between conversion and perfection, allowing churches to perpetuate a bifurcated and isolationist existence.

> The impact of the gospel upon the world is viewed as a second stage, linked with the idea of "perfecting." The horizontal relationships of the gospel are to follow after the vertical. The most important thing is to get people saved (and counted) and into growing churches, and thus all methods and techniques of evangelization are to be single-mindedly focused upon that purpose. Conversion tends also to be viewed in a reductionist fashion, as a one-time event leading to incorporation into the church. Conversion as continuing response to the claims of Christ (Rom. 12:1–2) and growth as continuing evangelization of the faithful are viewed as perhaps too complicating an approach. These things can come later.[65]

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[62] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 126–127.

[63] Guder, "Evangelism," 152–153.

[64] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 135.

[65] Guder, "Evangelism," 150.

McGavran's distinction between "discipling" and "perfecting" strains the tension between the personal and ethical dimensions of conversion. If the two functions are seen as separate, can the implications of the two be separated in the event of conversion? The gospel by which converts are discipled is always a call to repentance—to following Jesus and doing the will of God.[66]

Instead, Newbigin underscored the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit and the supremacy of Jesus Christ in conversion: if the church that bears the gospel also defines the ethical implications of conversion, missionary activity simply becomes church activity.[67] When personalized and privatized salvation is centralized, the church becomes a consequence of salvation rather than the context.[68] It is the Holy Spirit who "brings the truth and power of the gospel home to the hearts and minds of people outside the church and gives them free insights into the will of God, by which the church itself is corrected and its understanding of the gospel is enlarged."[69]

Finally, Newbigin (1995) took issue with what he called the inability of church growth proponents to recognize and honor the differences of culture, arguing, "the consequence of this failure is that conversion separates the converts from their own culture, robs them of a great part of their human inheritance, and makes them second-class adherents of an alien culture."[70] McGavran, argued Newbigin, ascribed absolute value to particular forms of social organization—something that is both historically naïve and theologically intolerable.[71]

This critique is notable since contextualization played such a prominent role in McGavran's original thinking.[72] Newbigin admitted the existence of customs, traditions, and norms for conduct upon which humans rely for guidance. However, these customs, traditions, and norms are neither changeless nor absolute.[73] McGavran subscribed to the cultural homogeneity of modernity and advocated for unique indigenous churches such that each people group had its own church within its own culture and location.[74] Mission station churches represented a high view of Western culture, ven-

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[66] George Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 191.

[67] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 137.

[68] Craig Van Gelder, "The Covenant's Missiological Character," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 190–191.

[69] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 137.

[70] Ibid., 141.

[71] Ibid., 142.

[72] Tucker, 24.

[73] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 143.

[74] Bolger, 189.

erating its way of life as superior to all other cultures.[75] Later church growth thinking expressed a similar hubris by viewing culture as something one could identify, target, and reach.[76]

McGavran's overreliance on cultural sources of authority combined with the emphasis later church growth advocates placed on effective methods yielded a church more reminiscent of a modern organization than a missionary congregation. Ministers in the contemporary church receive payment for the work they do within the church walls. Churches do not invest in people movements outside the walls of the church, and all money goes to preserve the church rather than pursue people movements. Mission is done with a plan, and programs increase numbers rather than equip members to foster movements outside the church.[77] Christians view themselves as consumers of church activity rather than as the church itself and consumers for whom religious goods and services are provided by the institutional church. Evangelism, then, devolves into membership recruitment.[78] Methods become goals, and proper program execution is mistaken for faithful ministry.

Newbigin recognized contemporary cultural pluralism called for a more culturally sensitive church. He envisioned:

> A fellowship of churches open to and rooted in all the cultures of humankind within which they are severally placed, and so renewing its life through ever-fresh obedience to Christ as presented in the Scriptures that is becomes an increasingly credible sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's reign over all nations and all things.[79]

Cultural sensitivity and contextual appropriateness are necessary requirements for the church because they are not ultimately determinative in evangelism—the gospel is. The church "must be understood in terms of God's salvific purpose for all of creation. The gospel creates the mission of the church, and the church is sent into the world to be the community of witness of God's healing love."[80] Such a church recognizes the location of a congregation is not a particular place (mission station) or people (people movement), but a social space of connections. In this sense, churches must

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[75] Ibid., 183.

[76] Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 73.

[77] Bolger, 183.

[78] George Hunsberger, "Sizing up the Shape of the Mission," *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America (Gospel & Our Culture)* ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 339.

[79] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 150.

[80] Guder, "Evangelism," 153.

be flexible enough to gather, disperse, connect, and disconnect with great fluidity, capable of morphing into many different configurations. Homogenous units do not exist in global flows, and followers of Jesus must learn how to relate with fellow kingdom agents by forming "church" in many different flows and practices.[81] This flexibility is necessary in contemporary society considering each human community's exposure to a wealth of cultural diversity. Jesus, as he is met in Scripture, has a purpose to unite every aspect of every culture to himself in a unity that transcends, without negating, the diversities of culture.[82]

Newbigin looked at previous evangelistic efforts and noted, "We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture."[83] The Christian who carries the gospel unwittingly carries his native culture as well. "The missionary does not come with the pure gospel and then adapt it to the culture where she serves: she comes with a gospel which is already embodied in the culture by which the missionary was formed."[84] Newbigin proposed a three-cornered relationship between the gospel, the church, and a particular culture.[85] Hunsberger illustrated this relationship and expanded on it by showcasing the dynamics emerging along each axis of the triangle: the *conversion encounter* axis between gospel and culture, the *missionary dialogue* axis between culture and church, and the *reciprocal relationship* axis between church and gospel (see Figure 1). The gospel is relevant in a specific culture insofar as it is embodied in terms that culture understands; embodiment without challenge leads to syncretism, while challenge without embodiment leads to irrelevance. Avoiding both syncretism and irrelevance allows the church to pursue a biblical vision of Christian community that is relevant in any context without relying on a specific cultural presentation.[86] The gospel must always embody and challenge the culture equally.

McGavran's descendants within the Church Growth Movement failed to completely or successfully embody the gospel in a particular culture because they did not offer a challenge to go along with the embodiment, instead accepting culturally informed methods without question or critique. Appropriating culturally approved methods such as demographical research, logistical needs, and media advertising but never filtering them

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[81] Bolger, 189.

[82] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 149.

[83] Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 144.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 147.

[86] Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet," 8–10.

FIGURE 1.

Newbigin's Three-Cornered Relationship Between the Gospel, the Church, and the Culture

through the lens of Scripture set later church growth practitioners adrift in the morass of culturally grounded human ingenuity. Numerical growth was assumed a requisite sign of evangelistic fruit, but as Newbigin[87] and Guder[88] both showed from Scripture, the desire for numerical growth did not necessarily result in the appearance of numerical growth.

Lesslie Newbigin pursued an ecclesiology that intentionally prioritized the gospel's transformational power, the church's contextual sensitivity, and an ongoing cultural dialogue. Donald McGavran pursued an ecclesiology that emphasized effective numerical growth, a methodology that separated conversion and obedience, and a sociocultural hermeneutic that distorted the relationships among gospel, church, and culture. Each of these three emphases in McGavran's thinking were contributing factors that, when distorted over time and interpretation, resulted in the contemporary manifestation of modernistic bifurcated mission station churches. While McGavran may not have intended to influence the organizational identity of Western churches in this way, the foundations he laid established an inevitable course of meth-

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[87] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*.
[88] Guder, "Evangelism."

odological dilution over time. Despite McGavran's attempt to redeem modernistic isolated mission station churches, diversification within the church growth thinking produced the very type of organization he vilified.

CONCLUSION

Donald McGavran, a devoted follower of Jesus and faithful missionary for many years, conceived his earliest ecclesiological thoughts while on the foreign mission field but never considered America a mission field itself. Eager to see the church faithful in fulfilling its call, he relied on modern sociological principles to further the church's evangelistic and missionary efforts. McGavran's epistemological descendants replicated technique and applied abstract church growth principles without contextual consideration, creating segmented and isolated churches—a manifestation of Christian subculture—operating with a modernistic bifurcated worldview. McGavran's emphases inadvertently led to a diluted and distorted American church that duplicated the bifurcated mission station McGavran initially sought to replace.

McGavran's goal was to increase the effectiveness and influence of the church; his thinking presumed an inherent centrifugal and attractional nature of the church appropriate for a predominantly Christendom-informed sociocultural context. Rather than engaging people groups with the gospel, too often contemporary church growth adherents create isolated Christian subcultures in the midst of a society that is no longer influenced by Christendom. McGavran's inability to extricate himself from the legacy of modernity manifests itself in a variety of ways through later church growth adherents.

Lesslie Newbigin, a contemporary of McGavran and equally experienced missionary, exhorted the church to lay aside its privatized isolationist existence and properly pursue the relationships among gospel, church, and culture. Returning to Western Christianity after forty years of ministry in an Eastern context uniquely prepared him to observe the ways in which the gospel is at the same time embedded in and disparate from a given culture.

The church must not assume it is the sole locus of God's activity in the world but should recognize God is already sovereignly working in unique cultures throughout the world. Once the church seeks to partner with God in the work he is already doing rather than initiating that work and expecting his blessing therein, the gospel is able to be embedded in a given culture insofar as it accepts those cultural elements that promote relevance while challenging those cultural elements that entail syncretism. The sociological research and methodological reliance of the Church Growth Movement were syncretistic in their acceptance of cultural practices and did not submit those practices to Scripture. Logistical and pragmatic considerations

are not wrong but must not become more authoritative than Scripture. The late modern world is culturally diverse and intimately connected; seeking contextually appropriate gospel embodiment while avoiding either cultural syncretism or isolationist irrelevance is a biblically faithful approach to multicultural evangelism and mission.

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TECHNOLOGY-BASED ORAL MINISTRY STRATEGIES: THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WESTERN LITERATE AND MAJORITY WORLD ORAL CONTEXTS

Christina Toy

Abstract

Modern technology has ushered in a third era of communication—secondary orality. The literate West and oral Majority World represent two polarized societies. As awareness of orality grows, technology must be part of the developing approaches to ensure continued effective ministry. Technology-based oral ministry strategies are the best way to bridge the gap between the Western literate and Majority World oral contexts. This paper will discuss characteristics of the third communication era, including inadequacies of current ministry approaches, the biblical basis for technology-based oral strategies, and implications of secondary orality in alternative ministry strategies' development and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Between the Western and Majority World contexts, a barrier exists as fundamental as language or culture—that of a society's communication mode. A person's mode of communication affects his or her epistemology, cognition, and values in tremendous yet subconscious ways. However, the gap which exists is seldom acknowledged and thus, is ignored in most current ministry approaches. The advent of technology such as television, radio, and

the Internet has ushered in a third era of communication, commonly referenced as post-literacy or secondary orality.[1] This new 'massage'[2] or mode of communication does not eclipse the other two, namely orality and literacy; however, it can provide significant tools to bridge the gap created by two drastically different communication modes. Orality and literacy are characteristics of two polarized societies in the Majority World and Western contexts respectively. Because modern technology has ushered in a third communication era of secondary orality, technology-based oral ministry strategies, such as oral Bible storying, are some of the most effective means of bridging the communication gap between Western literate and Majority World oral contexts.

THE COMMUNICATION GAP

According to most communications experts, the world is currently in a third era of communication. Primary orality, the first communication era, was superseded by the era of literacy in the Western context with the advent of writing, then the printing press. Orality is still the dominant communication mode in the Majority World context. Literacy is deeply entrenched in the West and is rapidly spreading in the Majority World. Recently, the world has transitioned to an era of post-literacy or secondary orality. Since only two major shifts in communication style have happened throughout history, an understanding of the characteristics of post-literacy is vital for continuing effective ministry. Postman posits the idea that culture "is recreated anew by every medium of communication—from painting to hieroglyphs to the alphabet to television. Each medium … [provides] a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility."[3] Christian theologian Terje Stordalen asserts that "media do not transport messages neutrally from sender to receiver; they provide shape, sensational activation, social setting, etc., to

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[1] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

[2] 'Massage' is used to refer to the way the senses, aural or visual, are stimulated by the medium through which a message is communicated. cf. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1962). "Oral-aural communication massaged the ear. Writing and print communication massaged the ear. Electronic communication and particularly television, stimulates and massages many of our senses simultaneously. We live in an age of the polymorphic massages of our senses." Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age* (Lima, OH: C.S.S. Pub., 1993), 47.

[3] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 10.

that message by virtue of their technological, social, and aesthetic properties and propensities, through specific formats and forms."[4]

<div align="center">Characteristics of Primary Orality</div>

For an understanding of post-literacy, one must also explore the attributes of pre-literate orality and literacy. This paper will utilize Ong's definition of "primary orality" as "the orality of culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or printing. … It is 'primary' by contrast with the 'secondary orality' of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print."[5] Although primarily oral societies in the strictest definition of the term rarely exist now because of globalization and urbanization, primary orality will be used to refer to societies whose dominant mode of communication is orality without the use of print or technological media.[6]

One of the most fundamental differences between oral and literate societies is that primarily oral societies think in stories. Abstract or universal concepts are illustrated through stories, such as the use of folktales to convey a society's moral values to children or Jesus' prolific use of parables during his earthly ministry. Although universal concepts are grounded in particulars through stories, it should be acknowledged that there are "ways in which speakers of non-written languages use oral media quite specifically to deal with abstract concepts."[7] An additional attribute of oral forms of communication is "the 'performative' function of speaking— the way in which speech is used to actually perform an action," such as verbally making a contract.[8] Primary orality is also cyclical, using alliteration, repetition, and other mnemonic devices to communicate a memorable message.[9] Another characteristic of oral cultures is that the speaker and audience are both present and engaged in a speech act, requiring some kind of response from the audience. Finally, primary orality uses simultaneous massage of the senses,

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[4] Terje Stordalen, "Media of Ancient Hebrew Religion," in *Religion Across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013), 23.

[5] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 11.

[6] By "technological media," I am referring to mass media, which utilizes modern technology, such as television, radio, the Internet, and social media platforms.

[7] Ruth H. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 57. Finnegan's work was a response to the argument that non-literate individuals cannot grasp abstract concepts, cf. Marshall McLuhan's discussion of Africans and film in *Gutenberg Galaxy.*

[8] Ibid., 57.

[9] Ong, *Orality & Literacy*, 34, 39.

engaging visual and auditory senses of the audience because of the physical presence of both the speaker and hearer. However, the dominant sense engaged is the hearer's auditory sense.

Characteristics of a Primarily Oral Society

In conjunction with its preferred communication mode, a primarily oral society also tends to be event oriented, group oriented, and honor and shame based. Because members of primarily oral societies by necessity must be present in order to communicate, they tend to focus on community. A correlation between a focus on honor and shame and deeply relational societies is prevalent in many cultures worldwide.[10] Particularly in relational cultures, stories and experiences are the primary means of developing one's belief system and thus best means of facilitating "a shift to a biblical worldview … developed over time and through story."[11] Most primarily oral societies are in Majority World contexts, and approximately 5.7 billion people are primarily oral communicators.[12] A clarification should be made that not all oral preference communicators are non-literate. In her Orality Assessment Tool, Lynne L. Abney includes a short summary and examples of five different levels of literacy. For illiterate, functional illiterate, and semi-literate people, stories are the dominant mode of communication. A person may be functionally illiterate or semi-literate and prefer to communicate through oral means. In many African contexts, "even among those who are educated, there is a preference for hearing their language rather than reading it."[13] Many cultural pressures influence a person's communication preferences.

Characteristics of Literacy

In literate societies, abstract concepts are communicated through ideas, not stories. In juxtaposition to primary orality's cognitive processes through stories, literate thought is characterized by ideas or concepts. The first radical communication shift from orality to literacy brought incredible changes to people's cognition and epistemology. Along with literacy's linear massage, or way the senses are stimulated by the medium, literacy also disambiguates

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[10] Steve Evens, "Naked and Ashamed: A Case Study of Shame and Honor in Central Ethiopia," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts: Honor & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference,* ed. Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 36.

[11] Ibid., 43.

[12] "Statistics and Facts," International Orality Network, accessed October 22, 2015, www.orality.net/statistics_and_facts.

[13] Margaret Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together: The Intersection of Heart and Mind," *Orality Journal* 2, no. 1 (2015): 64.

meaning through a logical, linear presentation of information. While "the auditory field is simultaneous, the visual mode is successive."[14] By nature, written literature also makes the reader more detached from the author in contrast with communication through oral literature, which "depends on personal performance, on audience response and on the *direct* personal interaction between author and public[;] *written* literature … facilitates the opportunity for the independent and withdrawn author, and for abstract meditation divorced from the pressures of an immediate audience or from the immediate need for action."[15] Literate media draws a correlation between the modern idea of objective truth and the permanence of written communication. "The past can become something objective and analyzable, rather than a transmutation or reflection just of the present."[16]

Characteristics of a Literate Society

In contrast with primarily oral societies, literate societies are characterized by a time orientation, are individualistic, and focus on guilt and innocence rather than honor and shame. In the West, print learners generally prefer to communicate one-on-one and learn mostly alone, "view matters abstractly and analytically," and "value brevity and being concise."[17] Additionally, literate cultures prefer an institutional rather than communal lifestyle, deferred gratification, and linear life perspective.[18]

The Communication Gap Between Non-Literate and Literate Societies

Because those who are primarily oral communicators think differently from those who are highly literate, the communication gap between the two must

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[14] McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 111.

[15] Finnegan, *Literacy & Orality*, 18. It is important to note that Finnegan was speaking primarily about television, radio, and other passive forms of media. Social media actually "encourage[s] 'conversations,' whether on blogs or Facebook pages…. It is so easy to respond to the new media, to create, to modify, and to transform, that passivity is discouraged." [cf. John Mark Reynolds, "The New Media: First Thoughts," in *The New Media Frontier,* ed. John Mark Reynolds and Roger Overton (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Ann Watts Pailliotet and Peter Mosenthal, *Reconceptualizing Literacy in the Media Age* (Stamford, CT: Jai Press, 2000), 34–36.]

[16] Ibid., 20–21.

[17] W. Jay Moon, "Teaching Oral Learners in Institutional Settings," in *Beyond Western Literate Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, ed. Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013), 146.

[18] Charles Madinger, "Will Our Message 'Stick?' Assessing a Dominant Preference for Orality for Education and Training," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 129.

be addressed in order to minister effectively. Although orality and literacy are the respective attributes of two polarized societies, emphasis of the group versus individual and other more immediately obvious differences can obfuscate the subconscious but vital cognitive differences between oral and literate preference communicators. As Westerners, honor and shame are "experience-distant. We are very often oblivious to these fundamental honor-shame dynamics in our world and in the Bible simply because we do not have our social radars tuned to receive those signals."[19] In the same way, Westerners often misunderstand the oral communication style preferred by those in the Majority World.

Many missions organizations are currently using technology superficially, providing literate materials via the Internet or other modern technology, rather than modifying the presentation of the message for a more oral communication method. For example, books are distributed electronically, and sermons from thousands of churches are made available through podcasts or live streaming through their websites. However, if an oral communicator listens to a podcast of a sermon given by a typical American pastor, it is likely that the oral communicator will receive minimal benefit from the sermon. Although she or he has more access to literate resources through modern technology, the message is still fundamentally literate. Because of the assertions of propositional truths and the expository preaching style of Western preachers, the message is still unclear. In order to allow deeper comprehension of a message, the presentation of the message must change fundamentally to become more suitable for an oral communicator.

Characteristics of Secondary Orality

With the second major shift to a post-literate society, one must understand that the literacy era "has encountered today the new organic and biological modes of the electronic world. … And it is this reversal of character which makes our age 'connatural,' as it were, with non-literate cultures."[20] Communication through electronic media recaptures primarily oral societies' parallel, rather than serial, processing of information because technology like television simultaneously stimulates the visual and auditory senses like oral storytelling does.

Although primary and secondary orality share many common features, because of its unique massage, secondary orality also has some distinct attributes. Post-literacy is uniquely marked by high volume access to information,

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[19] Christopher L. Flanders, "Honor and Shame: A Review of the Process and Articles," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts: Honor & Shame and Assessment of Orality Preference*, ed. Samuel E. Chiang and Grant Lovejoy (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 80.

[20] McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 46.

virtual community, and shifted ideals. This era is known as the "Information Age." "The visual and aural space of our own physical and social context today is voluminously occupied by ads, images, and sound bytes. Our term for this is 'media saturation.'"[21] Postman discusses the dramatic alteration of what he calls the "information-action ratio," asserting that access to such a vast amount of information made "the relationship between information and action both abstract and remote."[22] While information is more readily accessible, people are losing the ability to identify relevant, important information.

One of the hallmarks of new media is the ability to connect virtually. "Virtual reality is embedded in physical reality to an ever-growing extent in the lives of most Westerners, Asians, and significant populations in the developing world. Internet access goes with most of us everywhere we go, connecting us to friends and family."[23] This phenomenon is transforming a traditionally individualistic Western society into a more communal, group-oriented culture. A transition from guilt/innocence to honor/shame has been noted by shame researcher Dr. Brené Brown.[24] Western shame has a different nuance than other kinds of shame, but social media is increasingly focusing on the aspect of community scorn, as seen in the rise in cyberbullying.[25]

Values Held by Post-Literate Societies

A distinctive of secondary orality is shifted cultural values and ideals. One of four types of technologies, "intellectual technologies," "include all the tools we use to extend or support our mental powers."[26] Every intellectual technology embodies "an intellectual ethic, a set of assumptions about how the human mind works or should work."[27] According to Heidebrecht, technology, especially the Internet, has given modern Western society the values of efficiency, invisibility, and novelty. Technology has also transformed information into a commodity, through decentralization of power in media

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[21] Andrew J. Byers, *TheoMedia: The Media of God and the Digital Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 10.

[22] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 68.

[23] Elizabeth Drescher, *Tweet If You [Love] Jesus: Practicing Church in the Digital Reformation* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2011), 5.

[24] c.f. Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2015).

[25] http://honorshame.com/types-honor-shame-cultures/, updated April 22, 2015, accessed December 17, 2015. cf. http://honorshame.com/geography-shame-east-vrs-west/, updated July 2, 2014, accessed December 17, 2015.

[26] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 44.

[27] Ibid., 45.

distribution.[28] Similar to Heidebrecht, Tapscott discusses eight attributes of Millennials which set them apart from their predecessors. They desire freedom and choice, personalization, transparency, integrity and openness, entertainment in every sphere of life, collaboration and genuine relationships, speed, and innovation.[29]

<div align="center">BRIDGING THE GAP THROUGH TECHNOLOGY</div>

A gap between the communication modes of primary orality and literacy is evident. However, there is not a strict dichotomy of literacy and orality. "Even in the same culture and in the same historical period there are different uses and different media interacting together. Thus people … can switch from one form of discourse to another as appropriate, whether these discourses are distinguished by different linguistic registers, differences between prose and verse, emphases on oral or written media, or a mixture of all these."[30] The three eras of communication exist simultaneously. The key is to utilize this third era of communication to bridge the gap between the previous two. Never before has such a unified, globalized community existed; it is made possible through technology like the Internet. Because the advent of technology has come so rapidly, it has not been utilized to the fullest potential. The use of literate evangelism, discipleship, and training alone are ultimately unhelpful for sustainable ministry among an oral preference culture because the message of the leaders and pastors trained using Western literate methods becomes inaccessible to the majority of their language community.[31]

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR TECHNOLOGY-BASED ORAL

MINISTRY STRATEGIES

Throughout history, many different types of media have been used to express language, culture, and religion. For centuries, Christianity has utilized predominately oral and written media to disseminate its good news; however, it has also used various other media. In its broadest sense, "a medium would be any device that facilitates communication between human beings including … technological or social structures and traditions needed to perform

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[28] Heidebrecht, *Beyond the Cutting Edge*, 105–113.

[29] Don Tapscott, *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 34–36.

[30] Finnegan, *Literacy & Orality*, 167. Cf. John McWhorter's TED talk on texting, accessed March 28, 2016, www.npr.org/2013/12/13/248191096/is-texting-actually-advancing-language.

[31] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 65.

communication."[32] Although in the first section of this paper, media is primarily used to refer to current technology, many of those who discuss religion and media use the term in the broad sense.

From Genesis 1, it is clear that "God is the Creator, and therefore the first and ultimate source of media. The original and most fundamental purpose of media was to communicate and reveal the wonder and beauty of God."[33] Throughout the Old Testament, various forms of media were used to communicate, both God with humans and humans with one another, such as direct divine communication through speech, dreams, the Torah, and scrolls.[34] Because the ancient Hebrews were primarily an oral society, they used a variety of media to remember in the collective consciousness the things that God told them were important. Many of today's primarily oral societies share characteristics with the ancient Hebrew culture, such as repetition, seen in frequent restatement or repetition of clauses in Psalms and Proverbs, and their honor/shame focus.

During Jesus's earthly ministry in the Ancient Near East, the Jews upheld a rich oral tradition. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus engaged many people with parables and illustrative stories. "In the New Testament we see clearly what a master communicator Jesus was, tailoring his communication methods to fit his audience. He communicated in a way that reached all who were willing to listen."[35] Through his incarnation, Jesus as the Logos (ὁ λογος), or the Word, most radically adapted his communication mode for his audience to understand him.[36]

From the beginning, Christianity has been both an oral and literate movement.[37] However, until the Protestant Reformation, the Christian population had been largely composed of oral communicators with a small minority of educated, literate people.[38] The Protestant Reformation marked a huge change in the way the church used media. With the exception of the scribal tradition of the monks in the Middle Ages, the oral communication mode had dominated the church. However, the leaders of the Protestant Reformation primarily used print media produced by Gutenberg's printing press to disseminate their ideas. Another hallmark of the Protestant

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[32] Stordalen, "Media of Ancient Hebrew Religion," 22.

[33] Byers, *TheoMedia*, 221.

[34] cf. Ex 3, Nu 22, Ge 37–41, Eze 3, Da 5, 2 Ki 22, Jer 36.

[35] Ibid., 66–67.

[36] Jason S. Sturdevant, *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 72.

[37] Peter Horsfield, "The Ecology of Writing and the Shaping of Early Christianity," in *Religion Across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2013), 38.

[38] Ibid., 46.

Reformation is the translation and distribution of the Bible in the vernacular languages so that for the first time, it was available to the masses. Through the Reformation, literacy among Western Christians gained much prestige, becoming associated with spiritual maturity. Now, that same correlation of literacy with spiritual maturity subconsciously affects Westerners' evangelism and theological education approaches and is transferred to converts.[39]

With a literate emphasis on linear thought, Western Christians favor systematic theology, which presents attributes of God and the major tenets of the Christian faith topically. Often, they present the gospel in ways that appeal to a literate person and focus on propositional truths, such as the "Four Spiritual Laws."[40] Even in a non-Western context, "typical pastor training methods are usually based on a literate worldview at the expense of the oral worldview of the people among whom they are called to minister."[41]

In response to the ineffectiveness of a literate ministry approach among the Majority World, a narrative theology has emerged, primarily driven by Asian theologians. Because the Bible is composed primarily of stories, a story ought to "play a critical role in our life. In essence, story has to do with life, a real life, a life you and I live in this world. Your life and mine consist of stories from the moment we were born to the moment we die."[42] While systematic theology appeals to and addresses many of the questions held by Western Christians, it is essential to acknowledge that differing modes of communication and cognition exist. Part of the process of contextualizing the gospel and ministry approaches is to evaluate a society's preferred methods of communication.

MEDIA SATURATION:
THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR USING TECHNOLOGY-BASED MINISTRY STRATEGIES

Since Creation, God has used various forms of media to engage with humans. However, since the fall, media has been used in corrupt ways. Media saturation, the term used to refer to the reality that people are constantly bombarded by media, is perhaps more noticeable now. The concept of media saturation has always existed. In fact, "the context of the Shema—the words Jesus designated the most binding command on our lives—is a call to media saturation. It is a call to be saturated with the TheoMedia of God's words."[43] Andrew Byers defines TheoMedia as the media God uses to engage his peo-

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[39] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 64.

[40] A evangelism method developed by Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), http://crustore.org/four-laws-english/. This evangelism strategy also assumes a guilt/innocence worldview and a basic understanding of Christianity.

[41] "Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 65.

[42] Song, *In the Beginning*, 48.

[43] Byers, *TheoMedia*, 11.

ple, presenting a parallel but distinct way of living righteously. Christians have been called to live in the world but not to embrace it wholeheartedly, instead carefully evaluating whether the culture aligns with biblical truths. To be responsible stewards of the gospel in light of current technological advances, "the church has to reflect on its own role as object or subject in media perception, on its role in canvassing for people's attention so that they turn their attention to God."[44]

The role of the church has not changed in this third era of communication. However, the ways in which it may engage non-Christians must change. To reach both primarily and secondarily oral preference communicators, Christians must "conceptualize and articulate Christian beliefs—the gospel—in a manner that contemporary people can understand."[45] This can be done through "the cognitive tools, concepts, images, symbols, and thought forms—by means of which people today discover meaning, construct the world they inhabit, and form personal identity."[46]

Using Stories for TheoMedia Saturation

One of the best ways to provide an alternative to media saturation is to use stories for TheoMedia saturation.[47] This can happen in both Western and Majority World Contexts, especially since Western Christians are affected by secondary orality and the desire for experiential rather than propositional truth. Stories are inherently more relatable to one's life than abstract concepts. Doll asserts that one can "replace a person's core heritage story with what God's word says about origins, value, relevancy, and you can change their worldview."[48]

The Least Reached Are Oral Communicators

Because there are currently 5.7 billion people in the world who are oral communicators, it should not be a surprise that "75% of the remaining languages that still need scripture are spoken by oral communicators."[49] The sociolinguistic people groups which are almost completely unengaged are primarily oral societies. Since Jesus called his followers to make disciples of all people groups, "orality methods and strategies are foundational to communicating the good news of Jesus to everyone and making disciples among all people groups."[50] Even "after 100 years of literacy oriented mis-

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[44] Haberer, "Media Ethics," 114.

[45] Byers, *TheoMedia*, 3.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 69.

[48] Ibid., 65–66.

[49] Ibid., 63.

[50] Jerry Wiles, foreword to *Beyond Literate Western Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 17.

sions, more than 75% of Africa does not read well enough to manage basic Bible passages, and many more who can read, simply do not enjoy the process. Even among those who are educated, there is a preference for hearing their language rather than reading it."[51] If Western Christians truly want to minister effectively among those in Majority World contexts, "there needs to be more emphasis on making scripture available in an aural media so that its power might be released in a familiar communication context. Even for many who have become literate, it is hearing the word aloud that moves their heart."[52] After engaging with an individual or community in their preferred mode of communication, a Western Christian can slowly transition to other modes of communication. "God's word has been listened to by many more people throughout history than it has been read. Our first priority should be to communicate his word in a culturally acceptable method."[53] Because of the ways which technology is affecting cognition and community, using technology-based oral ministry strategies in this increasingly globalized era is one of the most effective ways to communicate the gospel.

APPLICATION

DEFINING TECHNOLOGY-BASED ORAL MINISTRY STRATEGIES

Technology-based oral ministry strategies are approaches to ministry designed for oral communicators, utilizing the distribution methods provided by modern technology, such as smartphone applications, or "apps," and the Internet. Ministry can range from evangelism and discipleship in local contexts to cross-cultural missions. Because of their implied rather than explicated meaning or truth by analogy, stories can help change a worldview more effectively than the presentation of obviously differing ideas.[54] "Stories can effectively illustrate ideas but they best serve to reroute paths to honor and shame amidst Christian witness and theological education. Effective Christian narratives align human attributions of worth (i.e., what and who is honorable and shameful) with God's eternal code of honor."[55] Technology-based oral ministry strategies also make use of modern technology, making possible the simultaneous stimulus of the aural and visual senses. Though similar to the primarily oral communication method, technology-based oral communication has the advantage of greater perma-

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[51] Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together," 64.

[52] Ibid., 68.

[53] Ibid., 71.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Jayson George, "Reconstructing Central Asian Honor Codes via Orality," in *Beyond Western Literate Contexts* (Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2015), 27.

nence and dissemination to a larger audience than the physical audience of primary orality.

Because of the fundamental shift in cognition and epistemology which the advent of modern technology has caused, technology-based oral ministry strategies are helpful in a variety of contexts. In Western contexts, it is especially useful for ministry to those with a non-Western mindset, such as refugees and immigrants, and with Millennials. In Majority World contexts, it is a useful ministry strategy for both short-term mission trips and missions organizations and non-government organizations engaged in long-term cross-cultural work.

Opportunities in Western Contexts

In Western contexts, many refugees and immigrants from non-Western contexts, such as Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and even East Asia, have an oral preference in communication style. Although they may be functionally literate, they still prefer an oral communication style, which encompasses the relational aspect of communication, simultaneous massage of the senses, and thinking in stories, rather than in ideas.

In juxtaposition, many Millennials were born into a Western context; however, because of a variety of factors, their exposure to modern technology has transformed the way they think. They are also focused on relationships and community, whether in person or virtual, and are shifting to an honor/shame culture. Because of postmodernism, many Millennials are attracted to experiential learning and the variety of interpretations available in a story, rather than the propositional truths presented in most Western sermons.[56] They thrive on collaboration and interaction. Rather than only listening to a sermon full of exposition and propositional truths, they prefer an interactive format.[57] Ministry strategies can gain much from current research in the field of education concerning experiential learning and new media literacy.[58]

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[56] Jon Huckins, *Teaching Through the Art of Storytelling: Creating Fictional Stories That Illuminate the Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 56–57.

[57] cf. Touch Press, accessed December 18, 2015, touchpress.com. Touch Press is a software and app developer focused on multimedia, interactive content, such as T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Wasteland," with additional interactive content and commentary (thewasteland.touchpress.com/?tpnav=1).

[58] cf. Diana Oblinger and James L. Oblinger, *Educating the Net Generation* (Boulder, CO: Educause, 2005); Dennis Adams and Mary Hamm, *Literacy in a Multimedia Age* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2001); Gunther R. Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Spoken Word is a popular way to engage in ministry and spiritual conversations with Millennials. Spoken Word poetry is a form of self-expression stemming from hip hop and rap. Although many people participate in Spoken Word poetry slams, videos of Spoken Word are highly accessible through websites like youtube.com and vimeo.com. David Bowden is a professional Spoken Word artist, author, and speaker who uses Spoken Word as an avenue to share the gospel and advocate for issues like ending Bible poverty and international development.[59] Several videos of his Spoken Word poetry have over 100,000 views on YouTube.[60]

The Bible Project is another creative use of multimedia to engage with the secondarily oral society.[61] The goal of the Bible Project is to provide animated videos which give an overview of each book of the Bible and how that book fits into the metanarrative of the Bible. They are also producing another set of videos that discuss major themes of the Bible, such as holiness, Messiah, or the Law. The collaborative aspect of the project is even highlighted by a dialogue narration, rather than just one narrator. A true hybrid between literate and secondarily oral communication modes, the Bible Project provides a free study guide which can be downloaded to stimulate further discussion about the video's topic, with the suggestion that the study guide be completed with friends.

In both Western and Majority World contexts, the deaf community can access the Bible and other resources through technology-based strategies that would otherwise be completely unavailable. Because there has been so much difficulty developing an orthography for signed languages, which typically use one or both hands and facial features and rely heavily on spatial elements, video is the best way to distribute Biblical resources. "Tools like the Deaf Bible app, bring hope to the Deaf on a global level. Digital access brings Truth to anyone with a mobile phone, computer, tablet, or satellite dish—all at no cost to them."[62]

Opportunities in Majority World Contexts

Technology-Based Orality in Short-Term Missions

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[59] dbpoetry.com/welcome, accessed November 19, 2015.

[60] cf. "I Am" (https://youtu.be/bYTypUb_Jc4), "I Believe in Scripture" (https://youtu.be/EZdzjf5uuv4), "No Excuse" (https://youtu.be/QKCMbbeMaxM), "Death: His Sting and Defeat" (https://youtu.be/8rhwbcRqUgY).

[61] The Bible Project, accessed December 17, 2015, jointhebibleproject.com/.

[62] Deaf Bible Society, accessed December 16, 2015, www.deafbiblesociety.com/mission/bible-translation.

[63] "Orality," Living Water International, accessed November 18, 2015, www.water.cc/orality.

[64] EveryVillage, accessed November 18, 2015, everyvillage.org.

Rather than try to communicate the gospel through a Western, literate method, organizations such as Living Water[63] and Every Village[64] use technology-based oral ministry strategies for short-term missions. Every Village is a missions organization that works in South Sudan; their goal is to provide each village in South Sudan with clean water, a church, and a radio. Because of South Sudan's low literacy rate, Every Village utilizes contextualized oral Bible stories, presented by short-term and long-term missionaries and broadcast through solar-powered radios. Technology like radio allows the number of listeners who have access to each Bible story to grow exponentially. Living Water's primary goal is also sustainable change through meeting both physical and spiritual needs. Although they are best known for their work drilling wells internationally, Living Water is also concerned about the need for an oral communication method. They provide periodic Orality Training Workshops which are designed to train people to craft contextualized oral Bible stories for a multiplicity of situations.

Technology-Based Orality in Long-Term Missions

A number of missions organizations are also utilizing technology-based oral ministry strategies for long-term ministry. OneStory is a partnership among "C&MA, Cru, Pioneers, TWR, Wycliffe, YWAM, and other Great Commission agencies, churches and individuals."[65] Their goal is to engage over 5,000 unreached people groups by 2020, and they are mobilizing Christians in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who will work in their own countries and go out to other nations as well.[66]

Other examples of technology-based, oral ministry strategies include the Jesus Film, the Scripture App Builder, and storying apps. Since 1979, the Jesus Film has been translated into more than 1,300 languages and shown to billions of people across the world.[67] The Jesus Film is designed to communicate the gospel through the meta-narrative of the Bible, and it uses portions of the book of Luke as the script. Through the bible.is app, the Jesus Film is instantly accessible to millions of people throughout the world.

The Scripture App Builder is a software program designed to work in conjunction with Paratext, a Scripture translation and publishing software used by many Bible translators. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) developed the Scripture App Builder to create applications for smartphones that use the texts in Paratext and audio files. These Scripture apps can use audio files synchronized with each book of the Bible, and each verse or por-

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[65] OneStory, accessed November 18, 2015, onestory.org/about.

[66] Ibid.

[67] "Statistics," Jesus Film, accessed November 17, 2015, http://jesusfilm.org/film-and-media/statistics/statistics.

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tion can be marked in the audio file so that the verse is highlighted while the audio of that verse plays. The Scripture apps can also be distributed quickly, easily, and inexpensively. While printing and publishing a book or portion of the Bible usually requires many resources and funds, the Scripture app can be distributed wirelessly through Bluetooth, micro SD cards, the Google Play Store, and more.[68] The same software behind the Scripture App Builder can be applied to storying apps. Once a story has been crafted and recorded, it can be distributed instantly through a phone app. The app developer can even set an expiration date for the app so that a rough draft can be distributed for community testing, then six months later, the final draft of the story can be redistributed through an updated version.[69] The storying app can use pictures depicting scenes from the Bible along with the text, which provides an inexpensive primer for a literacy program. For many language communities, literacy is more highly valued than an oral mode of communication; therefore, a storying app, which serves as a literacy primer, helps bridge the gap between orality and literacy.

The International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has developed Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) and is utilizing technology distributed online.[70] For example, thirty stories from both the Old and New Testament have been recorded by native speakers of Hassaniyya, a dialect of Arabic spoken in Mauritania, and are available for anyone who has access to the Internet.[71]

<div align="center">Methods of Implementation</div>

Although some organizations are using technology-based oral ministry strategies, it is not yet widespread. However, important techniques can be gleaned from these organizations in the areas of development, distribution, and use of these strategies.

Development of Technology-Based, Oral Strategies

When developing a technology-based oral ministry strategy, one should utilize participatory methods and ensure cultural contextualization. Participatory methods are "a range of activities with a common thread: enabling

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[68] "Scripture App Builder Features," SIL, accessed November 17, 2015, http://software. sil.org/scriptureappbuilder/features/#audiosynchronization.

[69] Personal communication with Sam Smucker on June 17, 2015.

[70] "Orality," International Mission Board, accessed November 19, 2015, orality.imb.org.

[71] "Hassaniyya," International Mission Board, accessed November 19, 2015, https:// orality.imb.org/resources/?id=3.

[72] Susan Keller, "Deciding and Planning Together: Engaging Oral-Preference Communi- cators Using a Participatory Approach," *Orality Journal* 4, no. 2 (2015): 11–12.

ordinary people to play an active and influential part of decisions which affect their lives."[72] A participatory approach involves a participatory mindset, focusing "on doing with others, rather than doing things *to* or *for* others," participatory techniques, "a wide variety of ways of doing things which help people participate maximally," and participatory tools, each of which "helps a group to address a certain type of issue."[73] A participatory approach is particularly appealing for a predominantly oral culture because it engages their preference for orality, community, individualized groups, immediate gratification, circular life perspective, and group orientation.[74]

By utilizing participatory methods, the facilitator involves members of the target audience. When a facilitator partners with members of the target audience, he or she can ensure that the result is culturally appropriate. An issue encountered by the Jesus Film producers is that not all body language and gestures are appropriate or convey the same meaning in every culture. The facilitator also creates a more sustainable project by training nationals to continue the ministry.

Ernst Wendland proposes seven suggestions concerning the development of oral ministry strategies, especially as it pertains to Bible translation and Scripture engagement and use, in the areas of analysis, testing, publishing, research, scripting, training, and networking.[75] Those facilitating the development of oral ministry strategies should be trained in analysis. Careful exegesis with orality in mind, especially on the discourse level, should lead to finding similar "oral-aural cues" in the target language, perhaps "employing appropriate and natural language *correspondents* (e.g., rhythmic utterances, rhymes, etc.)."[76] In testing a translation or message, they ought to be "thoroughly 'tested' (and revised) with the ultimate *performance dimension* in mind—that is, orally, aurally, individually, and communally."[77] Oral interpretation should even influence publishing decisions, such as page layout, font size and clarity, or meaningful paragraphing.[78] In the area of research, producers and researchers should meet regularly to discuss ways to transform "specific audience needs/desires and current media resources into Scripture products that more successfully serve the particular socio-religious constituency for whom they are intended."[79] Careful script-

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[73] Ibid., 12.

[74] Ibid., 32.

[75] Ernst R. Wendland, *Orality and the Scriptures: Composition, Translation, and Transmission,* ed. George Huttar (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2013), 336–349.

[76] Ibid., 338.

[77] Ibid., 339.

[78] Ibid., 341.

[79] Ibid., 343–344.

ing involves ensuring that the appropriate cultural and biblical background information is communicated in some way, whether through "performance-related *background* notes and *production* guidelines" or other supplementary aids.[80] Training must be provided for both facilitators and the "prospective audience-consumer groups" on how to use the diverse resources available to develop "an *integrated* program of teaching, learning, (re)telling (or *singing!*), and living the messages of Scripture."[81] Finally, networking must take place among "mutual interest sections within translation agencies."[82] Inter-agency cooperation and communication is vital.

Distribution of Technology-Based, Oral Bible Stories

Current technology allows for widespread access in ways that primary orality cannot. While the Internet is an incredibly powerful resource that is continually becoming more accessible, applications for smartphones, micro SD cards, and solar powered radios are also increasingly prevalent. In some sensitive areas of the world, SIL is piloting animated video projects. Rather than use and potentially endanger national Christians as actors, missionaries are creating animated videos of contextualized Bible stories.[83]

Value of Technology-Based, Oral Ministry Strategies

Technology-based, oral ministry strategies are a highly effective way to engage in ministry because it ensures accuracy and reaches a broader audience than traditional oral approaches. These strategies also allow for progressive engagement, building a bridge through orality with the possibility to transition to literate forms of communication in conjunction with orality.

Accuracy and Accessibility

With spoken word, the speaker and his or her audience are both present and interacting, but this interaction is not permanent. With literacy, words become much more permanent and can be accessed later. The accessibility and permanence of literacy is maintained with the use of technology to record oral communication. Video and audio can be recorded, manipulated, and copied onto micro SD cards or formatted for smartphone applications

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[80] Ibid., 344.

[81] Ibid., 345–346.

[82] Ibid., 346. cf. Biblical Performance Criticism, accessed December 18, 2015, www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org.

[83] Personal communication with Michael in March 2014. For security purposes, Michael's full name cannot be disclosed.

[84] "Audio Players Use," Form of Biblical Agencies International, accessed November 19, 2015, http://www.scripture-engagement.org/content/audio-players-use.

to be distributed. The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) describes several ways audio players can be used in ministry.[84] Recorded audio can be checked and edited in ways that a story told to a live audience cannot.[85] Recorded oral communication can ensure more accuracy in the retelling of Bible stories and minimize the danger of syncretism.

These forms of communication through technology also provide a much wider audience for stories. Primary orality is characterized by direct communication between a speaker and his or her audience in the same physical space. However, space limits the number of people who are able to hear a message at one time. Additionally, lack of access to transportation on the part of the intended audience members or difficulty in obtaining access to a sensitive area of the world are pitfalls to primary orality. In contrast, technology-based, oral strategies take the message to their audiences. Oral Bible stories in a database online are also accessible to people of that ethnicity who have migrated. "The Persian Oral Bible project consists of 130 biblical stories and combines biblical stories with testimonies from Persians who have decided to follow Jesus."[86] These stories are accessible to Persians wherever they live around the globe.

Progressive Engagement

Currently, Sam Smucker, an SIL missionary, is leading the Sepik Partnership Engagement Strategy (SPES) program in the East Sepik province of Papua New Guinea. The SPES Program's goal is to engage with the hundred language groups in the East Sepik which are not currently viable candidates for a traditional Bible translation project. The region is undergoing tremendous culture change because of factors like globalization and urbanization; thus, many of the languages are endangered and dying. The SPES program intends to build relationships between SIL and these language groups, offering the opportunity for a two year oral Bible storying (OBS) program and more education on increasing the vitality of their languages. The hope is that after a two year OBS program, some of the language communities will have enough community support and desire to maintain the vitality of their language so that a deeper relationship with SIL may result, including a traditional Bible translation project in some of these languages.

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[85] cf. Render, a software developed by Faith Comes By Hearing that facilitates oral Bible translation, accessed March 12, 2016, http://www.renderpartners.com/. HearThis is a software program that allows communities to record audio for their already translated Scriptures through a simple UI, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.sil.org/resources/software_fonts/hearthis.

[86] "Persian Oral Bible," International Mission Board, accessed December 18, 2015, https://orality.imb.org/resources/?id=81.

This is an example of progressive engagement. In the same way that missionaries are taught to contextualize the gospel to the culture and translate it into the target language, starting with an oral communication method is vital to engaging a culture initially. However, because of a variety of sociolinguistic factors, such as language prestige and the indigenous view of literacy and orality, the language group may also desire literate materials.[87] Technology-based oral ministry strategies are not meant to replace literacy completely. However, the gospel ought to be presented first in the way that is most easily understood for the hearers.

CONCLUSION

The area of orality is increasingly gaining more awareness. As Christians concerned with the expedient accomplishment of the task of world evangelization or the "ministry of reconciliation" which God has entrusted to us, we must evaluate and effectively use all of the tools at our disposal. Current technology is irrevocably changing cognition and culture, and we must utilize approaches like technology-based oral ministry strategies to convey the good news of Christ and his kingdom for his glory.

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[87] cf. Doll, "Literacy and Orality Working Together."

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About the Author

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THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF CLERICAL CLOTHING ON EVANGELISM: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Eugene A. Curry

Abstract

Clothing has been shown to have a quantifiable effect on the perceptions of research subjects in a variety of contexts. This study seeks to establish whether this general principle applies to Christian evangelism. While subtle, the study finds that the wearing of a clerical collar leads to measureable differences in the rate at which specific sorts of people approach an evangelist to discuss religion. Wearing a collar increases the rate of engagements with men and non-Christians, relative to wearing business casual clothing. Conversely, wearing a collar leads to fewer engagements with women and Christians. Possible explanations and applications of this disparity are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian gospel is said to be eternal and unchanging, and it transcends culture. However, the ways in which one shares that gospel are not so. Communication is a decidedly acculturated affair, and as culture is variegated and constantly changing, the particulars of effective communication are deeply contextual, variegated, and changing, too.

Against the backdrop of the intersection between culture and Christian evangelism, the notion of "incarnational ministry" has become rather popular among missiologists and other thinkers in related fields. In order to

present the gospel effectively, so the thinking goes, one must understand and occupy the cultural space of those one hopes to reach. The idea is that by adopting the cultural norms of a given society, one can lower the barriers that might separate the would-be evangelist from potential hearers, putting the audience at greater ease. Such a self-presentation allows for the communication of the gospel without the sense of unnecessary foreignness that might frustrate the process. So, as Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers counsel in their seminal work on the subject, "We must love the people to whom we minister so much that we are willing to enter their culture as children, to learn how to speak as they speak, play as they play, eat what they eat, sleep where they sleep, study what they study, and thus earn their respect and admiration."[1]

The same noble intent that lies at the back of the incarnational approach to cross-cultural missions also informs many Christians' attempts to minster within their own culture and other closely related "near-neighbor" societies. In such familiar contexts, the incarnational orientation often takes the form of presenting one's self as "one of the guys," of adopting the dress and style of the normal layperson a Christian minister is likely to meet in the course of his ministry. By being more familiar and more relatable, the would-be evangelist again hopes to lower unnecessary barriers that might hinder the communication of the gospel.[2] That is, the proverbial man on the street may be more inclined to genuinely hear the gospel if it is presented by someone with whom he can more obviously identify.

However, is such a *hyper*-targeted incarnational approach truly helpful? Does a willingness to present one's self, not just as part of a target culture, but as part *of a part* of a target culture—the lay part specifically—really translate into greater evangelistic effectiveness? To be sure, such a strategy likely increases an evangelist's relatability, but does it not also consequently undermine his visibility (what Paul Avis calls the church's "findability") and credibility?[3] Doctors, police officers, firefighters, even plumbers and waiters typically wear uniforms of sorts to advertise their presence and competency to serve in their appropriate capacities. Historically, clergymen have done the same, too. Even the quintessential historical heroes of the incarnational model—men like Hudson Taylor and Robert de Nobili—intentionally and

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[1] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 24–25.

[2] Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex, "The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective," *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no. 4 (January 1972), 727.

[3] Paul Avis, *A Church Drawing Near: Spirituality and Mission in a Post-Christian Culture* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 191. Cp. Jeffery J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2003), 348–353.

visibly associated themselves with the vocationally religious segment of their target cultures: Taylor affected the long fingernails of a classical Chinese religious scholar and de Nobili embraced the trappings of an Indian guru.[4] Might it be that missionaries and evangelists, if they were to dress in a way that advertises their presence and intentions, a way that signals their own ministerial vocations and competency, would be able to share the gospel more effectively as a result? Perhaps in the church's rush for intercultural self-assimilation, we have lost some of the benefits of *intra*-cultural differentiation.

PAST EXPERIENCE

Over the course of the last decade, I have sought to share the gospel on university campuses in a sustained capacity. I set up a small table along a busy walkway, put out some candy, business cards, and New Testaments, and I posted signs inviting passersby to sit down for a conversation about Jesus. In the course of this ministry, I have sometimes worn what could be called business-casual clothing; at other times, I have worn more overtly ministerial attire, including a clerical collar. People see the signs, hear my friendly invitations, and sometimes they stop in for a chat. Often those who stop are Christians looking for advice, or prayer, or merely hoping to encourage me with a friendly word. At other times, I receive non-Christians—atheists, agnostics, and adherents of other religions like Islam. In these instances, I share the good news of Jesus, offer my interlocutors a copy of the New Testament, and seek to engage with their questions and concerns as best I can. It has been a thoroughly worthwhile ministry, and one that I hope to continue for years to come.

For some time, though, I have wondered what effect the different kinds of clothing I have worn in the midst of this outreach have had on my ability to speak with students and others about the gospel. Casual clothing makes me more approachable, one would think. However, the clerical collar makes me more identifiable and seemingly professional. Do the benefits of one style of dress outweigh the benefits associated with the other?

I recently resolved to investigate the matter quantitatively, but it seemed that there simply was no quantitative data available on the topic. To be sure, researchers have studied similar issues in connection with other fields: past studies have found that subjects perceive interviewers, therapists, and college professors as more competent and reliable when they wear formal,

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[4] Jedd Medefind and Erik Lokkesmoe, *Upended: How Following Jesus Remakes Your Words and World* (Lake Mary, Florida: Passio, 2012), 79. Ed Mathews, "History of Mission Methods: A Brief Survey," *Journal of Applied Missiology* 1, no. 1 (April 1990), accessed January 5, 2015. http://web.ovu.edu/missions/jam/histmeth.htm.

professional clothing.[5] In addition, other research has found that, when it comes to retail sales at least, this perception of expertise translates into greater effectiveness—a greater effectiveness that outstrips the benefits of any "incarnational" considerations even: seemingly "expert" salesmen are more successful than salesmen that resemble their customers in various ways.[6] However, when looking for data on the quantifiable effects of clothing in connection with evangelism in particular, little is apparently available.

Internet and library searches did turn up a good deal of thoughtful commentary by ministers and evangelists discussing the pros and cons of clerical dress, but it was all anecdotal and thematic in nature. Some people, like Samuel Wells of St. Martin in the Fields in London, England, strongly endorse the clerical collar in the context of outreach as a way of implicitly communicating that "this conversation we're about to have, this conversation we're having, could be the most important one of your life."[7] Others sound a more cautious note, like Roger Pittelko (formerly of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana), warning that many fear the collar "hampers evangelism" because it serves as "a mark of high status," which some may find off-putting.[8]

Desiring to move beyond such general notions and to get at some hard numbers, I decided to conduct an experiment of my own. I would continue to evangelize at a local university as I always had—sometimes wearing casual clothing, sometimes wearing clerical dress—and I would track the number and kind of people who approached my humble booth, comparing the results of one strategic self-presentation against the results of the other.

STUDY DESIGN

Park University in Parkville, Missouri, had given me permission to evangelize on campus, so that was to be the setting for the study. Parkville is proximate

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5 Barbara K. Kerr and Don M. Dell, "Perceived Interviewer Expertness and Attractiveness: Effects of Interviewer Behavior and Attire and Interview Setting," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 23, no. 6 (November 1976). Jennifer M. Dacy and Stanley L. Brodsky, "Effects of Therapist Attire and Gender," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1992). Karen Lightstone, Rob Francis, and Lucie Kocum, "University Faculty Style of Dress and Students' Perception of Instructor Credibility," *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2, no. 15 (August 2011).

6 Arch G. Woodside and J. William Davenport Jr., "The Effect of Salesman Similarity and Expertise on Consumer Purchasing Behavior," *Journal of Marketing Research* 11, no. 2 (May 1974).

7 Samuel Wells, "Dressed for the Moment," *Christian Century* (November 19, 2014), 33.

8 Roger D. Pittelko, "Clerical Collar—To Wear or Not To Wear?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (April 2001), 155.

to Kansas City, with a history that extends back to before the Civil War. Park University itself is a liberal arts school founded in 1875. Originally Presbyterian, the school was purchased by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in the 1970s, only to be sold again in more recent history, thus acquiring its current non-sectarian character. The university's student body is remarkably diverse, with more than a third of the residential students being internationals from a plethora of Latin American, European, African, and Asian nations.

The study took place over the course of sixteen Monday sessions, falling between September 29, 2014, and March 30, 2015. On half of these sessions, I would wear business-casual attire; on the other half, I would wear a clerical collar—alternating every two sessions. To ensure that I was collecting genuinely comparable data in the course of the study, I planned to evangelize at the same place on campus, on the same day of the week, at roughly the same time of day, for about two hours each day, with the same setup. Therefore, for about two hours each Monday, sometime between 10 AM and 2:30 PM, I would appeal to students, faculty, and other passersby from my evangelism table situated in a wide hallway leading to the university's library.

The table would contain some business cards, some New Testaments, a bowl of candy, and it would bear several small signs displaying the words, "LET'S TALK ABOUT JESUS" in bold font, as shown in figure 1. A pair of chairs would be provided for potential conversation partners.

I would greet the people who came within comfortable earshot of my table with a pleasant greeting, some variation or other of, "How are you doing today? Do you have time for a chat?" Should a person sit down for a

FIGURE 1.

The table *in situ*

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conversation, after a brief personal introduction, I would ask them a specific question: "Do you consider yourself a follower of Jesus Christ, or are you still weighing your spiritual options?" The conversation would then develop from there in an organic fashion, touching on those points of the Christian gospel that seemed most relevant to the situation at hand. After we had finished our conversation and the visitor had departed, I would record the individual's visit, noting his or her gender, nationality, and religious identity.

HYPOTHESES

Prior to carrying out the study, I made a number of hypotheses concerning the expected results against which I could compare my actual findings.

Hypothesis 1

In keeping with past research concerning other vocations, I predicted that wearing a clerical collar would attract more individuals to my table for religiously-themed conversations, relative to dressing in business-casual shirts. If more formal, professional attire increased the perceived expertise of professors and therapists, and the perception of expertise in salesmen led to better sales, presumably similar dynamics would apply in the context of evangelism. By advertising, as it were, my identity as a vocational Christian minister, more people would think that the proffered spiritual conversations would probably be worthwhile—that I would have the training and information needed to answer questions meaningfully and to thoughtfully engage with objections. If the potential conversation partners had this perception of the relatively greater value of the possible conversations, they would seek out those conversations at a greater rate relative to the control sessions.

Hypothesis 2

On the basis of my past experiences, I hypothesized that, relative to dressing in business-casual clothing, wearing a clerical collar would attract a greater number of specifically non-Christian individuals to my table. Inquisitive and assertive skeptics had always seemed drawn to the collar. Sometimes they have had questions, sometimes they have had complaints, and sometimes they have provided me with my most substantive conversations I have enjoyed as a part of this outreach. For whatever reason, though, the presence of the collar serves as a kind of lightning rod with this community.

In addition, given the very large number of Muslim students enrolled at Park University, it seemed plausible that such students would be attracted by the presence of the collar. Many of these Muslim students hail from nations with very little Christian presence—let alone overt and unabashedly proselytizing Christian presence. Perhaps these individuals would be attracted to a conversation with a Christian evangelist for the sheer novelty of the experience. If their mental image of a Christian clergyman were mediated

to them primarily through television and movie depictions (depictions in which clerical collars are nearly ubiquitous), then reflecting such depictions would key into their mental images and effectively advertise my presence and purpose.[9] As Alvin Reid has noted, even the "radically unchurched" recognize and understand the meaning of a clerical collar.[10]

Hypothesis 3

Finally, as a corollary to the second hypothesis, and being mindful of the overlap between international students and Muslim students, I predicted that, relative to dressing in business-casual shirts, wearing a clerical collar would attract a greater number of international students generally.

With these hypotheses in place, I set about conducting the experiment, hoping both to see the predictions either confirmed or disconfirmed and also valuing the evangelism for the spiritual results it might produce in the lives of those I met.

OUTCOMES

As in the past, many people of various backgrounds stopped at the table, and we shared meaningful conversations. Some of the conversations were rather short—consisting of little more than personal introductions, a profession of Christian faith on the part of the visitor, and a brief prayer shared together. Other conversations lasted much longer—particularly those that involved passionate unbelievers who were eager for a thoughtful dialogue on multiple points of disagreement between us. I was able to share the gospel message many times, to distribute several copies of the New Testament, to pray with a number of people, and to give informational flyers relevant to various apologetics topics when appropriate.

Following the study protocol proved easy enough, as did ascertaining and recording the desired data. Each day of the study, I recorded the time I began evangelizing, the time I finished, and the data concerning the specific individuals who responded to my invitations and approached me. The data concerning the evangelistic program, presented in terms of absolute numbers, is summarized in Table 1.

When these absolute numbers are divided by the amount of time spent evangelizing, the disparity in overall time spent is accommodated for, and directly comparable rates of engagement emerge. This information is contained in Table 2.

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9 Larry A. Witham, *Who Shall Lead Them?: The Future of Ministry in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 187.

10 Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 395.

TABLE 1.

Results in absolute numbers

	Clothing worn by evangelist	
	Clerical	Business-casual
Total time evangelizing	8 hours	7.25 hours
Total people engaged	25	24
Men	19	11
Women	6	13
Christians	18	22
Non-Christians	7	2
Americans	19	15
Internationals	6	9

TABLE 2.

Results per hour

	Clothing worn by evangelist	
Engaged	Clerical	Business-casual
Total people	3.125	3.310
Men	2.375	1.517
Women	0.750	1.793
Christians	2.250	3.034
Non-Christians	0.875	0.276
Americans	2.375	2.069
Internationals	0.750	1.241

These rates of engagement can be translated into percentages, with the rates associated with business-casual dress serving as a control or baseline against which to compare the rates associated with wearing the clerical collar. That information is presented in Figure 2.

DISCUSSION

As can be seen in Figure 2, I encountered notably different outcomes while wearing a clerical collar when compared against wearing more familiar business-casual clothing. Looking back to the original hypotheses, some were borne out, and others were not.

First, the prediction that more people generally would approach the table when I wore a clerical collar was marginally confirmed. However, the

FIGURE 2.

Rates of engagement with a clerical collar compared to business-casual as a baseline
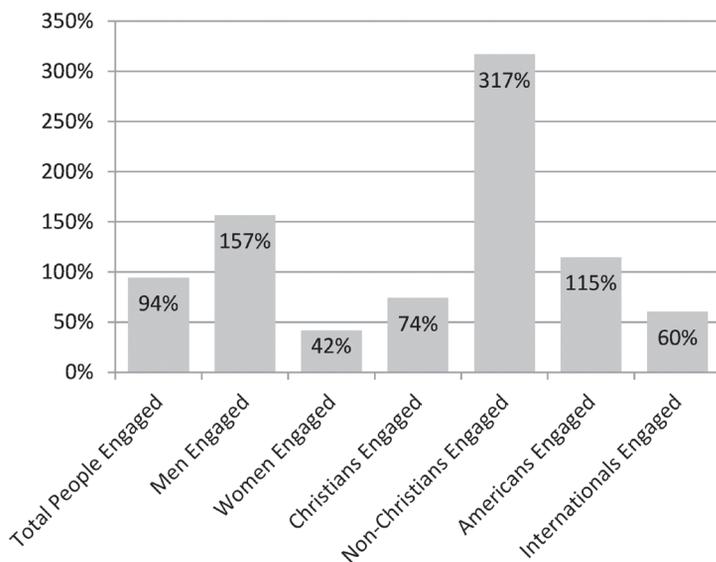
difference in the rate of engagement was small enough as to be statistically negligible. For all practical purposes, then, people in general approached the booth at roughly the same rate regardless of the style of clothing I wore.

Second, the suspicion that more non-Christians in specific would approach the evangelism table when I wore the clerical collar was dramatically confirmed. Indeed, the rate of such engagements with non-Christians (i.e. Muslims, atheists, agnostics, etc.) while wearing the collar was nearly twice that of the control sessions. Such a quantifiable finding is in keeping with my anecdotal impressions from previous outreach attempts.

Third, the prediction that more internationals would approach the table when I wore a collar was disconfirmed. Internationals approached the table under such conditions at only 81% of the rate that they approached the table when I wore business-casual dress.

Finally, a wholly unexpected outcome of the study presents itself in connection with gender. Relative to the control sessions, men approached the table 25% *more* often, and women 25% *less* often, when I wore the clerical collar. While predictions of gender-based differences in the rates of engagement were not among the initial hypotheses of this study, this outcome seems significant enough to warrant attention.

Perhaps this particular finding is related to the differing degrees to which men and women value expert testimony relative to the testimony of non-experts. Past research has found that men tend to find expert opinion

relatively more valuable than do women. As Sonia Livingstone discovered vis-à-vis television debate programs, "Men are more likely to consider experts more worth hearing than the laity while women especially emphasize the importance of giving a say to ordinary people."[11] If more overtly professional dress communicates a sense of expertness, and men find such expertness particularly valuable while women do not, it would explain why the presence of distinctly clerical clothing attracted more men and fewer women to enter into religiously-themed conversations at the table. Such is only speculation, though, and further investigation is necessary to come to any settled understanding of the cause of this notable outcome.

LIMITATIONS

It needs to be said that the present study is more a beginning than an ending to the discussion of the effect and use of clerical clothing in connection with Christian evangelism. The body of literature that deals with the topic in an empirical and quantifiable fashion is quite small, as noted above—perhaps limited to this study alone. Are the outcomes of this study bound in time or space to the particular context in which the research took place? Might additional studies in other nations or other social settings produce similar results? Ministers have spoken of their impressions concerning the seemingly different effect of clerical dress in different cities in the American Midwest.[12] If researched systematically, would these impressions be borne out? These questions can only be answered with additional research conducted in a variety of settings.

CONCLUSIONS

While nuanced, this study provides empirical evidence in support of the notion that—sometimes at least—ministers seeking to play the part of an evangelist are wise not to blend in to their target culture *too* much. Visibly distinguishing oneself as a member of the clergy through the use of a culturally relevant symbol of one's vocation, such as clerical dress, can lead to greater numbers of *certain sorts* of evangelistic engagements. When an evangelist wishes to reach non-Christians specifically (e.g. to share the gospel—the most obvious and direct work of an evangelist), wearing clerical clothing can help to facilitate this. Further, should one wish to engage with men specifically in evangelistic conversations, a clerical collar can, apparently, be an asset here, as well. Conversely, if an evangelist is seeking to attract Christians to himself (e.g. to announce the formation of a new church in an under-

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[11] Sonia Livingstone, "Watching Talk: Gender and Engagement in the Viewing of Audience Discussion Programmes," *Media, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 3 (July 1994), 434.

[12] Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 136.

served area perhaps), or if he is seeking evangelistic conversations with women specifically, then this study indicates that foregoing a clerical collar in favor of a more familiar and non-descript style of dress may be preferable.

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MY PILGRIMAGE IN CHURCH GROWTH

Bill Easum

I had never heard of church growth until I was almost finished with my pastoral ministry, but I have lived its principles every moment, at one time as a pastor and now as a consultant. However, I have gotten ahead of myself.

YEARS PRIOR TO CONVERSION

I did not grow up in the church. My parents would take me to church on Easter, but that is all. Religious or faith conversations were nonexistent in our home. In fact, sharing any emotion was not encouraged. I had good parents, but for some reason, they did not give me much guidance growing up. So much of what I learned about life came from my peers, and that is seldom good. I will leave the years prior to my conversion to your imagination.

When I was sixteen and a half, I noticed a girl I decided I was going to date. The problem was, the only way she would date me was if I went to church with her, so I did. It was a strange experience for me. It was a Baptist church, and they were so different from the stayed Methodist Church to which my parents took me on Easter. The only saving grace was that the pastor, Andy Odem, played golf and invited me to play with him. Now the backdrop for this is that I was preparing to drop out of school in a year or two and try my hand at professional golf. Andy and I played golf once a week.

THE DAY OF CONVERSION

Unlike many conversions today, mine was a Damascus Road experience. One day while walking off the tee of the third hole at Hancock Golf Course, Andy asked me if I was a Christian. I remember telling him, "Of course; isn't everyone in America?" By the time we got to the green, not only had Andy debunked my response, he had also convicted me to the point that when we got to the green, we kneeled and prayed, and bingo, my life was changed forever. Andy, wherever you are, I am so grateful God sent you my way.

MY EARLY MINISTRY

The next few years were like a whirlwind. By the time I was seventeen, I was preaching wherever I could—at missions, on sidewalks, and occasionally at the tiny Onion Creek Baptist Church on the outskirts of Austin, Texas, where I grew up. These were formidable years in learning how to hone my evangelistic skills.

From there, I went to Baylor and got a major in history, religion, and Greek. Those were also formidable years for a new Christian. I was surrounded by Christian friends—something I had never really experienced. Their passion for the Great Commission was infectious, but still no mention of church growth.

Next, I went to Southwest Baptist Seminary, where at the age of twenty, I was called to be the pastor of Cranfills Gap Baptist Church. For the next three years, I drove the eighty-five miles to seminary and back, visiting and preaching on Saturday and Sunday. It was not much of a church, but we led the association in baptisms three years in a row. At this tiny West Texas church, I honed my preaching.

MY DESERT WANDERINGS

It was also at this tiny church that I began to experience the politics and bigotry that plague most denominations. Without going into the specifics, I left the church altogether and entered the University of Texas Law School. I did not know or appreciate at the time the strings my dad had to pull in order to get me into law school.

At law school, I realized just how debased people could be. The language of the professors was shocking. However, what upset me the most was that the students were actually hiding books in the library so others could not finish their bibliographies. I was like a fish out of water. Little did I know that I was being prepared for ministry in an unchurched culture.

Now keep in mind, I had graduated from seminary and had passed three languages required for my entrance exams into the doctoral program at Southwestern when I quit. For the next year, I attended classes at law school and hated every minute.

ANOTHER SHOT AT SEMINARY

While attending law school, I attended a Methodist Church because I had heard the pastor was a maverick, which he was. He was asking all the questions that Methodists did not want asked at the time. However, he took a liking to me and spent time with me explaining Methodism. He introduced me to the writings of John Wesley with whom I fell in love. God continued to fill me with passion for the Great Commission, which I would soon learn was the heartbeat of the Church Growth Movement.

One day while getting a haircut at my grandfather's barbershop, this pastor called and asked if I still wanted to be a preacher. Of course, I said yes. "Then get yourself up to SMU and see the dean of Perkins School of Theology. You will need to do a semester of church polity if you want to be a Methodist."

Off I went to Dallas. What I discovered was that the dean did not like ex-Baptists. He turned me down and sent me home. This was a low point in my life. I had to reexamine if God was telling me to return to law school or perhaps even pursue professional golf.

I did not know at the time that the pastor who sent me to see the dean was the brother of the president of SMU. It was not long before he applied enough pressure to the dean that I received a phone call telling me I was now welcome to attend Perkins School of Theology. I returned to Perkins and to the office of the dean where I learned that I would be admitted only to audit classes but not admitted as a full student. I would have to earn admission by meeting with the dean every week to discuss infant baptism—no quasi Baptists allowed!

I decided that if I had to do a semester getting one course to be a Methodist, I might as well spend another semester and get another degree. I spent the next nine months doing a three-year Masters degree. At this point, I still had never heard of the Church Growth Movement or of Donald McGavran.

After attending classes for nine months, finishing the entire Masters program, writing my dissertation, and passing my oral exams, the oral committee asked me if I would accept a teaching position on the faculty. They were shocked to learn that I was just auditing the courses and still had not been admitted. When my supervisor heard this, he went to the dean and demanded that I be admitted as a full student. Four days before graduation, I was admitted and allowed to graduate. After four years of college and five years of seminary, still no mention of church growth. I was simply committed to helping fulfill the Great Commission.

The year I graduated from Perkins School of Theology, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged to become the United Methodist Church. For some odd reason, they wanted me to attend the merger conference and participate in the ordination service. I was clear from the start that I would not be baptized again. After several rounds of arguments, they agreed to allow me to participate in the ordination service

without being baptized again. Go figure. There I was with two hundred others being ordained, all kneeling except me. I was standing. When the bishops went around the circle laying hands on those being ordained and came to me, one bishop did not understand the arrangement and tried to push me to the floor. Finally, another bishop stopped him, and they continued laying hands on the others. Needless to say, it was a night to be remembered.

MY PASTORAL YEARS

In 1967, I was assigned to a couple of UM churches. They did well, but they were the armpits of the world. Still these churches flourished, and still I had not heard of church growth.

Then in 1969, I was assigned to restart a failing, nine-year-old church that was on life support. After getting rid of half of the remaining thirty-seven people, the church exploded in growth. Twenty-four years later, the church was one of the largest UMC churches in South Texas.

In 1982, Lyle Schaller came to our church to help me decide if I should retire at the church. It was unusual for a United Methodist pastor to stay for more than a few years, and I was entering my thirteenth year as their pastor. His conclusion was I could stay as long as I kept under the bishop's radar. While with us, he asked my people many questions that I would later know came straight out of church growth without ever mentioning the movement.

In 1986, I had the same experience when Kennon Callahan came to our church to help me sell the purchase of a million dollars' worth of contiguous property for parking. He, too, used church growth principles without mentioning the movement. Could it be that God was up to something?

During these twenty-four years, we became a teaching church. Groups would come from all over to see how we were growing in a denomination that was declining. Before long, they began asking me to come to their church and help them. Both of these men taught me about church growth without ever mentioning it by name.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH CHURCH GROWTH

In the mid 1980s, I was introduced to Leadership Network that was assembling what was then called mega churches (over 1000 in worship). At this conference, I was finally introduced to church growth. I met Carl George, and I began to understand that the essence of my ministry had been based on fulfilling the Great Commission, thus church growth in action. God had prepared my heart for this moment.

This conference was an electric time for me, as it was the first time I had been around anyone whose heart beat as mine did. These men lived and breathed the Great Commission. All the principles stemmed from it. Now I had a name for my understanding of ministry. It had all been about church

growth. It was so good to no longer think I was weird, as all my United Methodist friends kept telling me. I knew something was wrong. Their churches were declining while mine was growing. Surely, I was not totally off base. Now I felt I could move full steam ahead without worrying about their criticisms or outreach dislike.

Sometime after that, I was invited to become part of The American Society for Church Growth, where I was introduced to Donald McGavran and the details of the Church Growth Movement. It was clear to me at the time that both were interpreting the heart of the New Testament Great Commission. Later, this organization would change its name to "Network for Great Commission Research."

Soon I was introduced to the likes of Gary McIntosh, Chuck Hunter, Bob Whitesel, Elmer Towns, and many other giants in the faith. These folks were kindred spirits and validated all that I had done and was doing in ministry. One of the great disappointments of my life is that I did not meet these giants in the faith earlier. I had no real guidance and had made so many mistakes. I am just glad our paths finally crossed. These men greatly influenced my life for which I will always be grateful. Several years ago, the society blessed me with the prestigious Donald McGavran award for outstanding leadership in church growth.

What I now realize is that God continually plowed my fertile ground with biblical church growth principles without me knowing it. I know that church growth principles are simply biblical principles given a contemporary name and system-like approach to ministry. Church growth is about applying biblical principles to carrying out the Great Commission. It does not matter what it is called—truth is truth, and the Great Commission is the heartbeat of God. Why else would Jesus' last will and testament be, "Go make disciples of all people groups?"

Because of this, it is hard to understand why church growth is looked upon as passé. Church growth has received a bad rap over the last few years. Those who say it is all about numbers just do not understand or do not want to understand. How can that be?

I have a theory about why people are discounting church growth. In order to apply the principles, the results must be measured. Most pastors do not want to measure results, because most pastors are not having good results and do not want to look bad. It is impossible to bluff one's way through church growth.

CONSULTING MINISTRY

By 1993, I was traveling two hundred days a year while pastoring a thriving church. Before long, my wife said, "You need to choose—the church or consulting." There really was no choice. I could achieve more for the Great Commission consulting with churches than I could by pastoring one church.

So with little in the bank, my wife and I set out on a new journey and started 21ˢᵗ Century Strategies, which would later become Easum, Bandy, & Associates, and now The Effective Church Group.

Over the next twenty-four years, I consulted with over seven hundred churches, coached hundreds of pastors, and trained thousands of people. This incredible journey took me to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. I saw amazing types of thriving congregations both small and large, but all of those that were growing were applying church growth principles whether or not they knew it.

Before long, I was traveling 250 to 300 days a year, consulting with churches and denominations and speaking at conferences.

THE YEARS OF COACHING

The last few years, I have turned my attention to coaching, and I have had a blast. During this season, I have been taught that pastors do not like to be held accountable for executing their mission. They do not like to measure the results of their work. As a result, my latest book is called *Execute Your Vision*, to be released in the fall of 2016.

MY BEST ADVICE TO A YOUNG PASTOR

When conducting an interview, I try to remember to always end by asking this question, "If you had one thing to say to a young pastor, what would it be?" I have always wanted someone to ask me this question, but they never have. Let me conclude by telling you what I would tell them if they asked. I would tell them, "Follow your dream and never, ever allow anyone, or any group, or anything, or any church to stifle it. If you do, you will be miserable all the rest of your life."

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MY PILGRIMAGE IN CHURCH GROWTH

BOOK REVIEWS

Nebel, Tom and Steve Pike. *Leading Church Multiplication: Locally, Regionally, Nationally*. Saint Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2014. 262 pp. $20.00.

Reviewed by David Yetter, Executive Minister for Converge PacWest (formerly Northern California Baptist Conference). David received a B.S. in Christian Education from Biola University and an M.A. in Biblical Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. His ministry career has included senior and associate pastorates in varied and diverse communities and churches in California and Texas. He gives his ministry energies to starting and strengthening Jesus-loving, gospel-sharing, life-giving, world-changing churches.

Leading Church Multiplication by Tom Nebel and Steve Pike is an abundantly practical handbook for church planting practitioners at different institutional levels. Though not an exhaustive guidebook on church planting, it is chock-full of wisdom garnered from frontline leaders who have helped propel church planting networks forward. They share helpfully and refreshingly from failures and successes.

Steve Pike founded, and for eight years directed, the Church Multiplication Network (CMN), which is the church planting arm of the Assemblies of God, USA. CMN helped plant more than 1,800 new congregations since its inception in 2008. Steve has planted, parented, and led church planting at the regional and national level. He and his wife are now leading The Urban Islands Project, a new urban church planting initiative.

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Tom Nebel served as local church planter, regional director, and National Church Planting Director of Converge Worldwide. He assisted the start of nearly 800 new congregations. Tom is the author of *Big Dreams in Small Places, Church Planting Landmines,* and *Parent Church Landmines.* Tom continues to be a church planting consultant and provocateur.

Leading Church Multiplication addresses three parts of the church planting conversation: Part One, "Foundations for a Church Planting Culture"; Part Two, "Essential Systems and What to Do with Them"; and Part Three, "Leader Strategies, Landmines, and Booby Traps."

Part One covers eight areas of an organization's church planting culture. Nebel and Pike's gold standard model for church planting, and the only model fully discussed, is a partnership model. This model is well illustrated by the interstate highway system of the United States. "For the interstate system to succeed, each sphere of government had to do what it does best and let the other spheres do what they do best" (20). This gives way to "family planting," in which churches reproduce churches in partnership and with guidance and support from regional and national entities. It is touted as superior to "homeless plants," also known as parachute drops or "orphan plants," which are started by regional networks and then supported by churches (25–28). Racial bias in a denominational culture is confronted in Part One when Nebel applies Cornelius' story (Acts 10) to challenge organizational blinders (31–35). Further critical topics include intra-organizational communication; event-driven training, recruiting, and momentum generation; finding and focusing on vision and mission; and learning from church planting movements outside the United States (68–71).

Church planting systems and implementation are tackled in Part Two. After imploring church planting leaders to ground all systems in God through prayer and spiritual expectancy, the meat and potatoes of Nebel and Pike's church planting systems are explained. Building a church planter farm system, identifying potential church planters, utilizing church planter quality controls, and funding planters and plants make up the core of the book. Most often, the recruiting process of many churches and denominations is their "weakest link" (112). The promotion of churches planting churches along with an assortment of suggestions, ideas, principles, and striking observations—"I have observed many churches with less than 200 attendees multiply very effectively" (161)—conclude Part Two.

Part Three explores leadership challenges and how to sidestep common mistakes to be a good steward of opportunities. For any who, like the authors, "don't like to repeat mistakes" (226), this part addresses a leader's personal health, the importance of operating with wisdom and according to the law, how to get the most value out of a workforce, the value of recording agreements on paper, and utilizing a scorecard for managing a potential

planter's environmental risks. Intriguingly, the final chapter boasts a risk management tool that increases church planting success that also saves time and money (243, 249).

Unmistakably, drawing from an impressive depth of knowledge gained over several decades of experimentation, implementation, and collaboration with church planting world practitioners, Nebel and Pike wrote *Leading Church Multiplication* for church planting leaders and learners. Specifically, their audience is anyone "leading a church multiplication movement: locally, regionally, nationally" (12). As the title suggests, this is not targeting someone merely curious or new to church planting, nor is it well suited for church planters determined to work independent of a parent church or network. The intended message is that church planting is best done in partnership and "doesn't need to be complicated to be effective" (12).

Reading like a how-to manual, the book spends next to no time offering philosophical or theological apologetics for church planting. Nor does it spend much time supporting suppositions, believing "there are books and articles and blogs and webinars and conferences and t-shirts to reinforce these" (131). The emphasis is "*how to* get started" (emphasis added, 131).

What the book lacks in answering why, it more than makes up for in addressing how. Nebel and Pike's strengths are undeniable and possibly unparalleled in chapters 11, 12, and 22. These rich, practical pages pack wisdom, warnings, and tools for engaging and evaluating potential planters: "These are time-tested drawings I've used hundreds of times," Nebel says of four napkin charts imploring pastors to consider planting for personal and kingdom-based benefit (126). The authors include relevant outlines, acrostics, and diagrams for planter assessment, coaching, and training: "As you learn [coaching] techniques, you'll be positioned to use this [WAIT] methodology in a variety of settings: at home, at work, in ministry… everywhere!" (137). They outline a risk assessment tool that increases planter success while decreasing risk, expense, and grief: "When I've shown this tool to denominational leaders, I've often said, 'I'm about to save you $100,000'" (243). This eight-question tool purportedly raised the planting success rate from 80% to 90% in one denomination. These three chapters should be required reading for all church and denominational leaders as they build and evaluate church planting systems.

Throughout the entire volume, church planting maxims abound, especially for the denominational leader. "Begin with the assumption that the people around you are trying to do the right thing for the right reason" (233). "When coaching, try to have 75% of what comes out of your mouth in the form of a question" (138). "The bottom line when it comes to money and church planting is that money does not guarantee success" (144). "Plan and scale your structures and systems to exceed what you believe is needed

to make the preferred future a reality" (94). "Everything will take longer than you think" (234). "Size is not a significant determining factor of a church's readiness to plant" (161). These ministry tidbits are relevant and noteworthy.

"Learning from the World," chapter 6, proves inspirational and educational as lessons from international church planting movements are collected for use in the United States. Rapidly multiplying, and indigenous church plants are prolific in parts of Asia, Africa, Great Britain, and Latin America. While aspects of these movements will be unique to developing world experience and God's unique and sovereign plan, taking note of foreign leaders' prayer life, faith, and multiplication free of organizational impediments would be prudent (68–71).

A truly unique chapter, "Leading from the Second Chair," addresses a specialized niche. Here regional church planting leaders in church networks are encouraged and instructed to elevate the value and activity of church planting through "leading up." This is because "a church organization that does not prioritize the starting of new faith communities will lose its ability to be on mission with Christ because it will cease to exist as an organization" (206). The chapter is a gift to second-chair leaders from men who have served well from the second seat.

Overall, the book's narrative reads unevenly. Though each chapter offers applicable elements for local, then regional, and finally national leaders, the chapters themselves—and the paragraphs within chapters—alternate intended audiences without warning. Neither does the "argument" of the content necessarily build linearly, with the "Maintaining Momentum" chapter and the risk management chapter fitting more reasonably in the systems discussion of Part Two, rather than their respective Parts One and Three. Further, the chapter "Spiritual Dependence" lacked the vitality and ingenuity found throughout the rest of the book. Its most riveting story, a girl in Kenya's divine power encounter, was borrowed from the book, *Prayerwalking*. Having assisted in starting more than 2,000 churches in the United States, it seems odd Nebel and Pike did not draw from a notable illustration of spiritual dependence closer to home.

The book set the context for most of what Converge Worldwide, Tom Nebel's and my denominational network, does in church planting. As a regional leader, I now better understand and can endorse how Converge leads churches to plant churches with systems and standards guided and guarded by the regional and national offices. *Leading Church Multiplication: Locally, Regionally, Nationally* fills my toolbox so I can better support church planting effectively and enthusiastically.

With all the insight gained and know-how gathered, however, a final proverb is apropos: "church planting is one part strategy and one part miracle" (251).

Bonifacio, Joey. *The Lego Principle: The Power of Connecting to God and One Another.* Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012. 220 pp. $14.99.

Reviewed by Jamie Booth. Booth earned a B.A. in Bible from Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, and an M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. Currently, he is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree from Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, California. Booth serves as the Executive Pastor of Calvary Christian Church, Lynnfield, Massachusetts.

The Lego Principle is about connection. Using the example of Legos, the children's toys, Joey Bonifacio explains the power of Christ followers connecting both to God and to other believers. Just as a Lego connects to other Legos above and below it, so, too, are we to connect to both God above and others around us. Bonifacio purposes that this connection to both God and others is the mark of true discipleship, resulting in genuine church growth. The idea of connection leading to discipleship and church growth is something that Bonifacio has seen firsthand. His church grew from 165 students in 1984 to over 72,000 members meeting in 15 church locations today in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Drawing on the experience of his own church's growth, Bonifacio demonstrates the importance of connecting to God and people through the three main sections of his book. The first section of the book defines and outlines what discipleship looks like from this perspective of connection. Joey maintains that discipleship is not about classes or events but about relationship. He shares, "Christians commonly say, 'Christianity is not a religion, it is a relationship,' and yet all too often behave otherwise. Just like LEGO bricks, our life is about connecting to the top with God and connecting with others" (13). He shares that churches miss the mark of true discipleship by focusing on getting people into classes, events, and programs of the church, rather than into deep relationship with God and others.

Further, Bonifacio describes discipleship through relationship as the main priority of the church. He states that many churches fail to create disciples because they only make discipleship a part of what they do, rather than making it the sole focus. Bonifacio states, "As coffee is to 7-Eleven, so often is discipleship to churches. They take it on as part of their purpose and not *the* reason for their existence. I have found that churches tend to place discipleship on their shelves the way 7-Eleven has only an area in their stores for coffee" (23). For Bonifacio, discipleship and getting people connected into growing relationship is not just one thing that the church should be doing; rather, it should be its primary focus.

The second section of *The Lego Principle* covers how relationship with God and with people is built. Bonifacio believes there are four key building

blocks to relationship, which include trust, love, forgiveness and communication. These four are important because "trust is the foundation of relationships; love is the motive; and forgiveness is what resets, reboots, and restores them, communication is the process by which relationships thrive and grow" (104). He contends that all relationships look different, but these four building blocks are necessary whether we are talking about our relationships with our children, parents, spouse, friends, or God.

The final section of *The Lego Principle* concerns values. He shares, "You may be wondering why I'd want to dedicate an entire section of a book on discipleship to the subject of values. The answer is quite simple—because values are about the heart" (122). What we value shapes us as believers and as a church. Our values then, according to Bonifacio, should be God (chapter 9), people (chapter 10), Jesus (chapter 11), ministry (chapter 12), and every day (chapter 13). If we value these things, we will grow as followers of Christ; however, if we put other things such as "comfort and convenience, money and material things over our relationship with God and people, nothing much will change" (123).

The *Lego Principle* is an insightful and helpful book. Bonifacio's aim throughout *The Lego Principle* is to show that discipleship through relationship "is God's strategy for transforming the world," and he accomplishes this goal (19). First, Bonifacio demonstrates the power of relationship on the individual person. Quoting Francis Frangipane, Bonifacio says, "While the doctrines of Christianity can be taught, Christlikeness can only be inspired" (10). To grow in holiness, we need more than knowledge of God; we need relationship with him and with others to sharpen us and point us to greater holiness. Classes and events are great for informing us, but relationship and example are needed as "man's capacity to know what is right and wrong does not automatically translate to an ability to live rightly" (57). The challenge is that the church has become so class- and program-driven that many people are going through the motions doing church (i.e., classes, services, etc.), rather than being inspired toward Christlikeness. Churches would do well to listen and learn from Bonifacio's warning here.

Bonifacio further explains that people's lives will not change without this genuine connection by looking at the book of Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve. Bonifacio shares that a consequence of the fall was brokenness of relationship that led to "fear ('I was afraid'), insecurity ('because I was naked'), and cover-up ('so I hid')" (50). He rightly contends that fear, insecurity, and guilt are emotional issues that cannot be corrected simply with education. Bonifacio adequately demonstrates these consequences of the fall can only be overcome with the love, acceptance, and the relationship he discusses throughout the book.

Bonifacio explains that once we are reconnected with God and the issues of fear, insecurity, and shame are addressed, our lives should begin to radically transform. As we are connected to Christ in relationship, our

values and priorities should change. Bonifacio gives numerous examples, such as the example of money. Before a renewed relationship with Christ, most people would value money more than God. Once our relationship with God has been repaired, we see that Christ is supremely more valuable than money or anything else (178). Renewed connection with God radically changes a person's focus and priorities in life, which results in true discipleship and greater Christlikeness. Bonifacio again accomplished his goal and showed the power of connection in a person's life by looking at these changed values.

Connection with God results in individual transformation and discipleship, but that is not the only connection that *The Lego Principle* addresses. *The Lego Principle* also adequately shows the power of connecting with others and the impact it can have on a church, a community, and our world. The life-transforming power of Christ is not something that we are to keep to ourselves, but rather it is to be shared with others by entering their world and connecting with them. Bonifacio effectively demonstrates this by looking at the life of Christ:

> In every recorded interaction that Jesus had with people, we see Him making disciples as He went on His way…. He attended weddings, visited with friends, played with children, and was present at funerals…. He talked about agriculture, construction, education, the environment… The Bible also says He slept, ate, prayed, worked and went to the synagogue. He lived out life in His body while building relationships and making disciples. He modeled the very idea of going and making disciples every day (182).

Bonifacio's main point is that discipleship through relationship "is God's strategy for transforming the world," and this happens through connecting with the world around us as Christ did (19). Discipleship and repaired relationship are not just for what is happening between us and God, but they should be shared with others as we engage in genuine relationship with our community. We are to use everyday life to interact with others and help them connect with God as we have. Bonifacio explains, "At the heart of this final discipleship principle is the phrase *as we go*: to work, to school, to play, to visit relatives, to the grocery, to the salon, to soccer matches, to church, to dine with friends, on a business trip…. In short, as we do 'life' in our 'body' every day, we go and make disciples" (183). Bonifacio effectively demonstrates that discipleship and church growth occur when we connect to those around us.

The Lego Principle is a terrific book that every pastor and every follower of Christ should read. Its implications have far-reaching effects on how we live our lives as individual believers and also on how we structure and teach at church. It is a poignant reminder of both Jesus' greatest command "to love God" and his second command "to love others" (Matthew 22:36–40). Bonifacio makes the point well that if we are going to change our world, it begins with connecting to God and then connecting with others.

McIntosh, Gary L. *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2016. 187 pp. $15.99.

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Gary McIntosh is a nationally and internationally renowned speaker, writer, and professor of Christian ministry and church leadership. He is a church growth expert, who has published hundreds of articles for Christian periodicals and has authored or coauthored twenty-four books, including *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today.* Dr. McIntosh teaches at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, and he also leads the McIntosh Church Growth Network, an organization that provides consulting, church leader coaching, and workshop presentations. He is a recipient of the Donald A. McGavran award from the Great Commission Research Network, the Distinguished Alumni award from Colorado Christian University, the Donald A. McGavran award from Fuller School of Intercultural Studies, and the Robert B. Fisher award for Faculty Excellence at Biola University. He received his Master of Divinity at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary and his Doctor of Ministry and Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Gary McIntosh's passion for evangelism rings loud and clear throughout *Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today.* The "central premise of his book" is that every believer becomes "truly missional." To become truly missional, he states that evangelism has to be "restored to a primary place in life and the ministry" (21) of the church and every Christian. McIntosh believes that "few leaders (today) understand how men and women are finding faith or connecting with a church" (21). Leaders are looking at decades-old research, which is no longer valid. McIntosh gives two examples from his research. First, research from the 1980s indicates "that 85 to 90 percent of people" (21) who come to Christ do so because of family and friends, while according to McIntosh's current research in this book (from 2016), only "59 percent of faith-conversions" (21) are a result of family and friends. A second example he points to where leaders are quoting outdated research is in terms of the role a pastor plays in conversions. Thirty years ago, pastor(s) accounted for "just 6 percent" (21) of conversions, whereas today pastors account "for 17 percent" (21) of all conversions. His book provides needed information for leaders today.

Growing God's Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today is an academic study about how people are coming to faith, but it is not purely an academic study. McIntosh offers thoughtful and insightful questions and

practical applications to help the local church develop evangelism that can reevaluate the current postmodern culture. The book "is organized around ten crucial questions—five biblical and five practical" (25).

The five biblical questions McIntosh attempts to answer in *Growing God's Church* that center around mission are the following: "What is our mission? What is our priority in mission? What is our role in mission? What is the focus of our mission? What is the context of our mission?" (25). Understanding the mission of Jesus leads to understanding the mission of the church. The mission of Jesus, according to McIntosh, "was doxological" (28). That is, Jesus' ultimate mission was to glorify God, "but his [Jesus'] earthly mission was to 'give eternal life' to all mankind (John 17:2)" (28, 29). "The mission of the disciples flowed out of Jesus' mission" (34). The early church understood that Jesus was sent "to bring eternal life to lost humanity" (34), and the church was to continue his mission. Mission, according to McIntosh, is proclaiming "that eternal life is available to those who believe in Jesus Christ, particularly in his death on the cross, his burial, and his resurrection. It is to proclaim that Jesus is the unique savior of the world and he is the only way to the father, the only way to eternal life" (36). The church's priority is to "proclaim the good news of salvation to all the nations (peoples) of the world, beginning at Jerusalem and then moving outward in concentric circles until reaching the ends of the world (v. 47: Acts 1:8). This was the priority of the church. This is the priority today!" (48–49). This priority does not exempt the church from the ministry of service. McIntosh states that proclaiming the good news "does not mean we should ignore serving our communities and mankind" (49). However, our commission "is to go, sharing the gospel of salvation made possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is our priority" (50).

His book clearly states that every follower of Jesus Christ has a role in evangelism. "Our role in mission is to take responsible action at three levels of evangelism" (60). The three levels of evangelism are presence (60), proclamation (61) and persuasion (62). *Presence* evangelism involves good works, which are "the foundation for" evangelism. (61). We are then to *proclaim* the gospel, that is, adding "good words to good deeds" (61). Finally, our role is to *persuade* people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, "rather than just converts" (62). This substantiates that making disciples is the focus of the local church. The church "is to baptize, and the group is to teach. Maturity into full discipleship takes place in Christ's body, in the local church" (73). Disciple-making ministry is centered in and throughout the church. According to McIntosh, "The actions of the apostles and early disciples point to the fact that our mission today is about the church" (82). He points out that the church belongs to Jesus (78). "The church is … something new" (78). The church is "permanent" (79). The church's primary task "is to make disciples, which includes gospel proclamation and

assimilation of new believers into local churches where they may begin the process of spiritual formation" (86).

In the second section of the book, he answers five practical questions: "Who led you to faith in Christ? What method most influenced your decision for Christ? Why did you begin to attend church? Why do you remain at your church? What is the pastor's role in evangelism?" (25). This section feels more academic than practical because of his use of survey data to substantiate his points. McIntosh goes to great lengths to give helpful insights on the way that Americans come to know Jesus Christ. He also compares this to the ways Americans used to come to know Christ. McIntosh breaks down the survey data by gender, generation (Builders, Boomers, GenXers, and Millennials), and region (rural, small town, small city, medium city, large city, and metropolis). The survey data provides a helpful overview of how religious life has changed in the last forty-plus years. After answering each question, he ends each chapter with "Down-to-Earth Ideas." Some of these insights are fresh (e.g., "have one or two individuals each month share their testimony during a worship service" [102], "move the meet-and-greet time from the beginning of your worship service to the end" [113], "create casual forms for spiritual conversations, especially for younger adults" [151], etc.). On the other hand, many of the down-to-earth suggestions, such as to "be sure that there is an open and welcoming spirit in the church toward all guests" (141) and "maintain a passion for winning the lost to Jesus Christ" (150), have been previously suggested; however, these previously-suggested ideas do not negate the importance of his proposals. His book is a good resource of ideas that provides strategies for making changes.

According to McIntosh and his research, the most effective methodology of "winning nonbelievers to faith in Christ is simply conversation" (155), although McIntosh would say conversation is "more of a principle than a methodology" (155). What makes conversation more of a principle than a methodology is that it "works in all times, places, and among all peoples" (155). Conversation does not stand in isolation; it works with other principles. Conversation takes place in the context of relationships. McIntosh offers ten other principles that have been effective in churches that are fruitful in evangelism. These are:

Principle 1: Effective evangelism is demanded by God (156).
Principle 2: Effective evangelism is measurable (156).
Principle 3: Effective evangelism focuses on existing relationships (157).
Principle 4: Effective evangelism is intentional (158).
Principle 5: Effective evangelism is a balance between truth and relationship (158).
Principle 6: Effective evangelism is a result of training believers to share their faith with others (159).
Principle 7: Effective evangelism involves nonbelievers in church activities before they believe (159).

Principle 8: Effective evangelism leads new believers into community (160).

Principle 9: Effective evangelism is supported by prayer (160).

Principle 10: Disciple making is a process (161).

One might be tempted to dismiss this book, believing that it is purely an academic endeavor; however, it is more than that. Although *Growing God's Church* is based on research, the goal of the book is to help pastors, church staff, churches leaders, and denominational leaders fulfill the Great Commission. The book offers both helpful—although not always new—insights and potential common pitfalls to be avoided, all of which could lead to much greater success in growing local churches.

Wilson, Jared C. *The Prodigal Church: A Gentile Manifesto against the Status Quo*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 240 pp. $15.99

Reviewed by Joey Chen. Joey has a passion for what God is doing in cities and is currently lead pastor at Sunset Church in San Francisco, California. He is also presently working on a D.Min. at Talbot School of Theology. He earned his M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and his B.A. from Cedarville University.

One may find it difficult to keep track of all the books that claim to help leaders build a successful church. These kinds of books often give steps, a how-to guide, or a map of how to become a bigger and better church. Jared Wilson's new book, *The Prodigal Church*, stands out because it is not selling success, but it provides a gentle call to question if "the success," as defined historically in other books on church growth, is the kind we should want. Wilson is concerned that the American church may not be making the type of disciples it intends, and its practices may be counterproductive to the church's mission. He wants the reader to evaluate the ideologies and practices of the attractional church model and realign them with the gospel.

To set the tone, he spends the first chapter explaining that he does not want the book to be a rant, an argument for a traditional church, or a reactionary rejection of current models, but he wants the book to "call to question ourselves" (21).

Over the next six chapters, Wilson defines the attractional church and evaluates its ideology and practices. He defines the attractional church as "a way of ministry that derives from the primary purpose of making Christianity appealing" (25). He is upfront about his low opinion of this model, yet consistently points out its positive contributions and resists exaggeration.

Wilson recognizes the noble aims of the attractional church in its attempt to reach non-Christians and its desire for contemporary relevance. However, he sees a glaring problem with the lack of emphasis on the gospel. He says, "Too often this message of Christ's death has become assumed, the

thing you build up to rather than focus on" (27). This observation is the heart of Wilson's problem with the attractional church.

Wilson sees two ideologies driving the attractional church—pragmatism and consumerism. He criticizes pragmatism because it assumes that "what works" is wise and beneficial. He identifies consumerism as being ingrained in the Church Growth movement, but questions whether consumer desires should be the primary concern of the church. Wilson deems it a mistake to assume "that the customer's interests are legitimate" (55).

To evaluate practical matters of the attractional church, Wilson turns to worship services, the use of Scripture, programs, discipleship, and pastoral care. He gives each of these topics its own chapter, and the force of his evaluation is strengthened by his clarity in summarizing the attractional model, while evaluating it through the lens of Scripture.

In the concluding chapters, he offers a practical way forward and a personal story. Practically, he suggests that we measure the right things by asking different questions such as, "How many of our people are being trained to personally disciple others?" (158) While humbly and boldly sharing his painful, personal struggles, he found the attractional church missing the hope of the gospel.

Wilson's aim is to gently challenge the status quo of the attractional church, and I believe he is successful in persuading the reader with his pastoral concern to think carefully about how one "does church." Wilson started by asking the reader to be open to an important evaluative question, "What if what we're doing isn't really what we're supposed to be doing?" (24) Throughout the book, he successfully evaluates the ideologies and practices that do more harm than good in the attractional church and leads the reader to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He succeeds in his tone of gentleness because from beginning to end, he demonstrates recognition of his own bias. I appreciated his resistance to self-promote when he said at the end, "I have no interest in getting you to be a Calvinist or to join The Gospel Coalition.... I'm not trying to sell you a label. There's no offer, here at the end of this book, to join a club" (194). At the end, Wilson's vulnerability in sharing his personal story demonstrated the kind of openness he was asking from the reader to challenge oneself. Wilson is successful because his convictions are seasoned with respect and humility.

Most importantly, he is successful in persuading the reader that all is not well in the attractional church. He accomplishes this by undercutting the trust in numbers as a gauge of health and success by looking at recent research. He notes that recent research shows that "by and large the people filling these church buildings week in and week out turn out to be other Christians" (35). In other words, rather than making disciples of non-Christians, the attractional model has succeeded primarily in transfer growth. He understands that those who are proponents of the attractional church may

see this as a failure of other churches, so Wilson convincingly uses Willow Creek's REVEAL survey to demonstrate that numbers do not tell the whole story and that bigger is not always better.

Anyone looking for a concise biblical critique of pragmatism and consumerism should read Wilson's book. He brings pragmatism and consumerism under the microscope of Scripture and summarizes the danger in these ideologies clearly: "The way the church wins its people shapes its people. So the most effective way to turn your church into a collection of consumers and customers is to treat them like that's what they are" (54).

While addressing the practice of the attractional church, I found the chapters on the use of Scripture and worship services to be most beneficial. Wilson's evaluation of the attractional church's preaching and use of Scripture is severe. Turning to research, he reports that in the time when the attractional church is growing in numbers, it has grown less Christian because "only 62 percent of the born again Christians surveyed strongly believe that Jesus was sinless" (74). This is because the emphasis on practical application and cultural relevance often treats the Bible "more as a reference book than as a story, and more as a manual of good advice than as an announcement of good news" (72). He makes a firm indictment of this kind of preaching because it may actually teach the law and "unwittingly facilitate the condemnation of the lost" (88). Rather than assuming Jesus and the gospel, he believes it must be made explicit and given the spotlight.

When it comes to the attractional church's worship services, he asks, "Are we gathering as watchers or beholders? Are we gathering to see a performance or to see the passing by of the glory of God?" (103) Wilson addresses the use of "video venues" as a practical application of his theology of worship. Especially helpful is the thought that "video venues assist the idolization of and overreliance on preachers" (117). If pastors are to find faithful men and train them up in the word according to 2 Timothy 2:2, video venues may hinder that aim.

Wilson's book, while persuasive and clear, is not without flaws. The flaws do not ultimately undercut his purpose, but they do show areas that need further development. Chapter 6 is the weakest chapter, as he does not show how busyness combined with having too many programs is unique to attractional churches. He effectively critiques the problems of busyness and offers up the alternative "simple church" model, but does not clearly connect how busyness is tied to the attractional model. He assumes that the attractional church "increases its programs, its classes, its opportunities" (217). To further weaken his critique, he uses the example of LifeChurch, a church he deems to be based on attractional principles, and shows how they have adopted the "simple church" model. This may be humble and respectful, but it is not helpful in proving his point.

Another underdeveloped part of his argument is practical suggestions on how to make the change from attractional to gospel centered. In

chapter 8, he offers a helpful suggestion that the church must measure the right things, but he only offers six questions that would help to measure the right things. This left me wanting more meaningful reflection on how to make the change.

Last, Wilson was probably focusing on the main problematic areas of the attractional model; however, his indirect mention of evangelism and his neglect of addressing global missions left a significant gap that needs to be addressed.

Even though I would consider myself within the same tribe as Wilson, I still learned a lot from him and consider the book valuable as he clearly articulates some of my concerns with the attractional model. Wilson's efforts may be directed at those within the attractional church model, but I believe it is still a necessary corrective for those within the "gospel-centered" tribe because many churches still practice and rely on the attractional model. The ideologies are not limited to those already in the attractional church, and it would have been helpful for Wilson to unpack how his tribe struggles with them as well.

The Prodigal Church makes a persuasive call for attractional church leaders to realign their churches with the gospel. Wilson convincingly addresses the weaknesses of the attractional model and offers a call to something bigger than just numbers and growth—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I would strongly recommend this book to leaders within the attractional church that need pastoring through the difficult task of self-evaluation. Even if one is outside of the attractional church, it is still worth reading as a clear manifesto and a helpful reminder to all who wish to center their churches on Jesus Christ. Wilson's gentle call for the church to realign with the gospel and repent of its obsession with numbers is a needed one for the church to maintain its mission of making disciples and have the kind of success that matters for eternity.

Parr, Steve R. *Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities.* Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2010. 218 pp. $12.12.

Reviewed by David Russell Bryan, B.A. in Theology from The Baptist College of Florida, Adv. Masters of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and current Doctor of Philosophy student in Church Vitalization and Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He serves as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Kemp, TX.

First developed in 1780 by Robert Raikes, Sunday School is often considered as an antiquated model of ministry. Steve Parr, Vice President for Sunday School and Evangelism with the Georgia Baptist Convention and adjunct professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, issues a clarion call to churches not to ignore the impact a strategic, purposeful, and organized

Sunday School can have, not only in a church, but also in an entire community. Parr addresses one of the most glaring questions with the Sunday School model of ministry today. Does Sunday School still work? According to Parr, no matter the name of the method of ministry (small groups, connections groups, or life groups), Sunday School still works. However, Parr clearly delineates that success does not hinge on name or place where Sunday School happens, but rather its success is in proportion to whether "it is done well and correctly focused" (27).

Relying upon the 2005 and 2008 statistical data of churches with the fastest growing Sunday Schools within the Georgia Baptist Convention, Parr observes that churches that prioritized Sunday School had a significant increase in baptisms. Not only did baptisms increase, but also assimilation rates significantly increased. Parr states, "Of those who immediately became active in Sunday School, 83% were still active five years later. By contrast, only 16% were still active if they did not become active in Sunday school immediately after becoming a believer" (18). In light of these findings, Parr wonders why others would even question the validity of a Sunday School ministry. Yet, he knows they do criticize it.

Observing the life and ministry of Jesus, Parr argues that the principles gleaned from Jesus' teaching and discipling in small groups affirm the need for a Sunday School ministry. As seen throughout Jesus' ministry, "relationships are the source of ministry, fellowship, and accountability" (40). In addition, Parr correctly understands that Jesus' ministry and ultimately the Great Commission emphasize that the end result of these relationships and fellowships are to impact others. In other words, the ministry of Jesus was both purposeful and influential in people being discipled and sent out to reproduce what they had learned from him. For Parr, to question the value of Sunday School and its ability to impact the lives of others is also to question Jesus' method of discipleship.

While the reasons people question Sunday School are plenty, the primary reason Sunday School is approached with skepticism can be summed up in that far too often, Sunday School is implemented unintentionally and without purpose. As a result, people not only believe that Sunday School is ineffective, but they also do not want anything to do with it because they have personally experienced its ineffectiveness. Because of this unfortunate reality, Parr's work focuses on providing a simple strategy that can make Sunday School work again. Using the word WORKS as an acrostic, Parr contends that Sunday School will work when it Wants to grow, when it Organizes to grow, when it Reaches out to the lost, when it Keeps all members connected, and when it consistently seeks to Sharpen the skills of its leaders.

The reader may be surprised to see the evangelistic thrust Parr emphasizes with an intentional Sunday School. The evangelistic thrust emphasized by Parr correctly challenges churches that they are not only to be evangelistic (if they desire to be biblical), but also that Sunday School is one of

the greatest, if not the greatest, evangelistic strategies waiting to be implemented in the local church. Parr states that Sunday School is to be an "intentional evangelistic tool" (16).

To be an intentional evangelistic tool, Sunday School requires effort and hard work. However, Parr states, "I fear that some leaders have abandoned Sunday School not because it does not work, but because of the work involved in making it work" (79). Unfortunately, Parr's discernment is precise. Within the context of parachuting out of a plane, Parr intimates, "Too many classes meet in the plane to enjoy the flight, but never make the leap." (72). Why? Because "there is a discomfort" (72). As long as churches and classes are unwilling to address the discomfort, Sunday School will continue to be a significant strategy with both an untapped potential and negative reputation.

Parr states that not only is hard work important, but also "working at the right things is more important" (93). In order to work at the right things, organization is paramount. Parr's emphasis on organization is refreshing, specifically as it relates to the biblical model of ministry found in Ephesians 4:11–14. According to Parr, the pastor should be the "key leader" if Sunday School is going to be effective (95). For Sunday School to be important and organized, it must be important to the pastor. As its importance grows with the pastor, he then is able to equip and enlist others for the ministry of Sunday School. Parr is to be lauded for his emphasis on both a Sunday School that wants to grow and organizes to grow.

As with any ministry, wanting the best and implementing the right resources can be challenging. However, Parr does not leave the reader wanting. Parr provides practical guidelines and steps to take as a church moves forward to implement an effective Sunday School that not only transitions Sunday School teachers to Sunday School leaders, but also shifts the focus from those who attend to those the class seeks to reach. In addition, following these guidelines enables the church not to settle for counting heads, but rather it allows the church to evaluate qualitatively the discipleship and growth of new believers.

Parr's primary emphasis in *Sunday School that Really Works* is to provide a model and platform for churches to experience significant evangelistic growth. If the advice, wisdom, and practical steps are implemented, three results are certain: the lost will be reached, lives will be changed, and leaders will be sent out (23). Every pastor and church desiring to see renewal and a reignited evangelistic fervor within its family of faith cannot afford to overlook Parr's strategy. While the main thrust of the work is about Sunday School, the foundation of the work serves to call the church to effectively and intentionally fulfill the Great Commission through one of the most often overlooked and relegated-to-the-past ministries. Do not question whether Sunday School works. Question whether you are ready to work!

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What is the Great Commission Research Network or GreatCommissionResearch.net?

The Great Commission Research Network is a worldwide and professional association of Christian leaders whose ministry activities are based on the basic and key principles of church growth as originally developed by the late Donald McGavran. Founded by renowned missiologists George G. Hunter III and C. Peter Wagner, the GreatCommissionResearch.net (formally the American Society for Church Growth) has expanded into an affiliation of church leaders who share research, examine case studies, dialogue with cutting-edge leaders, and network with fellow church professionals who are committed to helping local churches expand the kingdom through disciple-making

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The GCRN provides a forum for maximum interaction among leaders, ministries, and resources on the cutting edge of Great Commission research.

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How Do I Join the GCRN?

For further information on membership, the annual meeting and registration, please visit www.greatcommissionresearch.com

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Once a year, the Great Commission Research Network (formerly the American Society for Church Growth) presents the Donald A. McGavran Award to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the Church Growth Movement in the United States.

The award recipients to date are:

Win Arn	1989	Ray Ellis	2002
C. Peter Wagner	1990	John Ellas	2003
Carl F. George	1991	Rick Warren	2004
Wilbert S. McKinnley	1992	Charles Arn	2005
Robert Logan	1993	John Vaughan	2006
Bill Sullivan	1994	Waldo Werning	2006
Elmer Towns	1994	Bob Whitesel	2007
Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr.	1995	Bill Easum	2009
George G. Hunter, III	1996	Thom S. Rainer	2010
Eddie Gibbs	1997	Ed Stetzer	2012
Gary L. McIntosh	1998	Nelson Searcy	2013
Kent R. Hunter	1999	J.D. Payne	2014
R. Daniel Reeves	2000	Alan McMahan	2015

The Win Arn Lifetime Achievement Award

Eddie Gibbs	2011	John Vaughan	2014
Elmer Towns	2012	Gary McIntosh	2015
George G. Hunter III	2013		

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