

INTRODUCTION

Alan McMahan, General Editor

The breath-taking shift in American's cultural, religious and moral values in the last eight years has been nothing short of dizzying as many Americans are changing their opinions on a host of issues ranging from immigration, the legalization of marijuana, the definition of marriage, America's foreign policy, and so on. Navigating the changing context and understanding its implications for the church demands new perspectives and new approaches, while maintaining a clear focus on the biblically based guiding principles that will help the church be effective. This issue of the Great Commission Research Journal examines some of the changes that are taking place that need to alter the way we work to complete the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

For years now evangelicals have studied the philosophical challenges raised by post-modernism and developed ministries to reach a generation that was disenchanted with the promises that modernism and science offered. Now the terrain is shifting again. In our first article in this issue, Thomas Sieberhagen suggests that post-modernism is crumbling, and will soon be replaced by the next big wave of Neo-realism. In this he sees a new opportunity to proclaim the gospel to those whom post-modernism has disappointed.

Dave Page documents the dramatic loss of those who previously retained a loose attachment to a faith tradition but who now have shed all religious affiliations. These "Nones" are different from Seekers and need to be

approached differently. In this article the reasons behind this shift is examined and suggestions are offered about how to re-tool our ministries to reach this new, emerging group.

If the philosophical and religious orientations in America are changing, so are the demographics. Indeed, the United Nations projects that by the year 2050 that 90% of the U.S. population will live in cities and so will 70% of the rest of the world's population. The next article on the "Strategic Nature of Urban Ministry" explores the implications of urbanization, migration, and globalization as it relates to the progress of the Great Commission and the potential impact the church can have on society and culture.

The next two articles revisit some of the roots of the church growth movement by looking at the developmental and historical journeys of two key contributors to our understanding of how churches grow. Gary McIntosh offers his third in a series of articles on the life of Donald McGavran, this one focusing on his years as a missionary to India that would eventually launch him leading one of the most significant missiological movements of the 20th century. Gary's full biography on McGavran with emphasis on his later years of ministry will be published by the end of this summer.

As part of our legacy series, Kent Hunter's autobiographical account of his journey in the field of church growth follows. Dr. Hunter has been one of the more prolific writers and thinkers in the investigation of growing churches and has written 30 books and 750 articles on the subject. An understanding of his life and the motivations that led him to this endeavor is instructive and inspiring.

Our last two articles focus on understanding and reaching immigrant and multi-ethnic communities in the United States. Bishop Parnell Lovelace, Jr. applies a missiological understanding to the formation of multi-ethnic teams that can more effectively reach out to the increasing diversity of most church's local contexts as well as in efforts abroad. Citing examples of multi-cultural congregations in partnership with mission agencies he shows the advantages of multi-ethnic leadership.

In light of the recent thaw in Cuban-American relations, Antonio Lopez' article on the Cuban immigrant population in the United States is thought provoking and relevant. Understanding this group and developing appropriate ministries to reach them is the focus of his study, even as it relates to other Latin American immigrant groups scattered throughout the country.

In each issue of the Journal it is also our privilege to provide insightful book reviews covering a range of new publications that touch on the topics related to effective evangelism and church ministries. Appreciation goes out to a team of talented reviewers under the direction of Mike Morris, our Book Review Editor. This issue of the Journal features reviews prepared by Cory Seibel, Matthew Costner, James Farrer, Beau Brewer, Amy Nicholson

Jones, Lavern Brown and Gary Westra. Many thanks go to them and their effort in producing these good reviews as well as our editorial team: Gary McIntosh, Mike Morris, Joy Bergk, and Laura McIntosh. Their labor to produce each issue of the Journal is much appreciated.

For our rapidly changing world, it is hoped that the resources contained here will be helpful and spur more effective engagement with the harvest.