

DONALD MCGAVRAN'S EARLY YEARS

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— Gary L. McIntosh has spent the last twelve years researching and writing a complete biography on the life and ministry of Donald A. McGavran. We are pleased to present here the second of several excerpts from the forthcoming biography.

Abstract

Donald McGavran was born in 1897. This article covers the years from his birth until 1923 when he and Mary McGavran sailed to India. His early life as the child of missionaries, his secondary education in the United States, service in WWI, college education at Butler University, seminary days at Yale Divinity School, and masters work at the College of Mission are presented.

Donald Anderson McGavran was born in Damoh, India, on December 15, 1897, in the red brick, two-story home John McGavran had helped build for the Rambos.¹ Appearing somewhat like a medieval castle, the home today has a long staircase leading to the second floor in the back, with a small courtyard in front of two gated doors on the ground floor. Encircling the roof is a brick fence about three feet high, giving the house its castle-like appearance. A low sloping roofline overhangs the front of the house, providing a shady place to sit during the hot afternoons.

¹ McGavran's birth date is listed as 1898 in some records, which is most likely a clerical error.

Donald's parents, John and Helen McGavran, were living in Damoh primarily due to the famine that had hit central India. It was a desperate time in many parts of India. Over fifty thousand people died in Bombay that year from the impact of infectious diseases such as bubonic plague and small pox. As far as resources allowed, their primary job was to care for approximately four hundred orphaned boys, as well as to alleviate the suffering of those in need.

The famine slowly ended in the year following Donald's birth. By his second birthday, it was all over. Rains had fallen, boys were no longer coming in such large numbers to the orphanage, and people settled into normal routines in Central Provinces. The orphanage, however, did not disband. Most of the orphans had no idea who their parents were or from what village they had come. They had arrived at the orphanage when they were only two to three years old. Even if their extended families and villages were identified, none of their families would take them back. They had eaten Christian food at the orphanage, and thus were considered out of caste. With all of these factors in mind, John and the rest of the missionaries in Damoh moved forward to build a permanent orphanage. They replaced the thatched structures with new dormitories. The boys slept on new brick and mud beds about two feet high, built with smooth sides to help keep the snakes and scorpions out. A housefather named Alfred Aleppa, a well-known Christian from South India, was hired. They built school buildings with eight classrooms so the boys could receive a good education. To train the boys for the time when they would leave the orphanage, they started a farm and a carpentry. The boys built fences to keep pigs away from the plants, dug wells for irrigation, and cared for the crops. The school served as a means of evangelism, and a few of the more intelligent and dependable boys were trained as teachers. Those who learned the Bible and spoke well were disciplined to be evangelists and, it was hoped, to be pastors of churches in the future.

John McGavran had been in India for eight years and in 1899, was ready for his first furlough. Before leaving, he purchased a half acre of land on the edge of Damoh, intending to build a church and hospital, which his sister Dr. Mary Theodora McGavran was starting. Since her arrival in Damoh, she had dedicated most of her time to caring for the orphans. Now that the boys were doing well, she turned her attention to treating the women of Damoh. Women would not go to a male physician, but they flocked to see Dr. Mary. To care for the women, she rented a room in town until a temporary building was built on the future church site. Later, it was replaced with the Damoh Mission Hospital. Gradually, men also started coming to the hospital. The patients gathered around the hospital every day, but before any patient was examined, a hymn was sung, a portion of the Bible read, and prayer for healing offered.

Aunt Mary, as Donald called her, was a good doctor and an exceedingly busy one. She soon oversaw a hospital and in-patient service, a full-time job

with fifty beds and one hundred percent occupancy rate. She did so much surgery that three doctors in the United States would consider themselves overworked if they did nothing else. On occasion, Mary would perform thirty cataract surgeries in one day. She would work with her right hand until it got tired, and then switch to her left hand for the rest of the surgeries. For many years, she was the only doctor within two days' travel. Her outpatient department regularly ran one hundred patients a day.²

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Grace was three, and Donald was two when the McGavran family left India in 1899 on furlough. On the way to the United States, the family stopped in England to visit Helen's parents. Upon arriving in the States, they settled in Hiram, Ohio, just a short distance from Columbiana in northeastern Ohio. Like other missionaries, John preached in churches throughout Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Virginia, telling about the ministry in India. The majority of the time, he preached on the Great Commission and insisted that true churches must obey the Lord by praying and evangelizing the world. As the "missionary from India," he held the attention of the astounded participants at state conventions with amazing accounts of famine relief and stories of evangelism. Middle American people were enthralled with his knowledge of Hinduism, as well as his exciting stories of missionary life.

The McGavrans returned to Damoh, India, in 1900, where John was assigned to evangelism touring once again. His knowledge of the Hindi language and his fine understanding of Hinduism made his assignment logical. John and Helen gladly devoted themselves to the task of winning men and women to Christ, since they believed doing so was the essential task of mission. Evangelism touring between October and April consumed most of John's time for the next six years. Nearly eighty years later, Donald recalled their gypsy-like lifestyle the family lived while traveling with John on his evangelistic tours. John would load all they needed,

for a month's stay on an ox cart and drive out to some village, put up tents in the shade of some tree and stay for a week or two, walking to 15 or 20 villages in the neighborhood. The floor of the tent was dry grass with a mat over it. We children enjoyed each new location, finding new trees to climb, and new grounds to play in. At night, there was a big campfire, around which villagers would gather to hear the gospel and see lantern slides. We children enjoyed these too.³

² Edward McGavran. McGavran Family Stories, 114–117. Author's personal archives.

³ Donald A. McGavran, quoted by Vernon J. Middleton in "The Development of a Missiologist," 6.

John was highly disciplined and focused on his work, which left precious little time to spend with the children. The time they spent with him on evangelistic tours combined work and play. Growing up, Donald and his brother and sisters did not have a close relationship with their father. “My father was good and kind,” Donald observed in later years. “We always had family prayers at breakfast. We did not have any play together, although we must have played checkers.”⁴

On furlough, John had raised money to build the Damoh church. He purchased a set of drawing instruments and drew several sets of plans, which were then presented to the other missionaries for their comments and suggestions. When a final drawing was approved, John oversaw the construction of the church that was completed in 1902.

When the weather turned extremely hot, usually July through September, Helen and the children went to Landour Mussoorie, one hundred miles north of Delhi. John would accompany the family for a brief vacation, and then return to Damoh to train his small evangelistic force of five to six men. During 1902, while the family was on vacation in the cooler high country, their third child, Edward Grafton, was born on May 14.

The normal system for raising children in missionary families during those years, and many years to come, was to hire a kindly woman called an ayah. She would watch over the children between the ages of one to five, generally keeping them happy all day long. The ayah talked, played games, changed diapers, gave naps, and put the children to bed on time. In many aspects, the system was good, for the children grew up speaking both English and Hindi and feeling at home in both worlds. This also allowed the missionary mothers time to do language study, teach classes, assist at the hospital, host Bible studies, and do numerous other tasks. Since the children did not leave home, contact with the parents was plentiful, so that family relationships were not seriously damaged in most situations. As long as the children were safe, they could do about anything they wished.

Living in Damoh had its adventures for young children. Donald, Grace, and Edward played in a yard or “compound.” The compound was also the home for many animals, some of them poisonous—ants, scorpions, and snakes. At night, they were most fearful of scorpions, since their sting not only hurt but also made a person sick. The scorpions lived in holes in the ground and would sometimes get into the house. On some dark nights, John would tell his children, “One-half anna (or one penny) for every dead scorpion that you bring in.” Each of them would take a lantern and a stick out into the compound. The scorpions were quick to duck into their holes, and Donald, Grace, and Edward had to be quick so as not to get stung. Before long, though, there were not many scorpions left.

⁴ Donald A. McGavran, quoted by Middleton, 6.

Another problem was the ants, particularly the red ones. There are many types of ants in India, and most varieties could be found around the compound. The big red ants were the worst. They traveled in large armies along regular paths and tunnels in the grass. Hundreds and thousands of them would march single-file on the roads and through the grass. If you saw them and stepped over them, they would just ignore you. If, however, you accidentally stepped on them, they would swarm all over your legs, biting and stinging something awful. Occasionally, the ants would swarm into a large clump hanging from a tree limb. Donald, his brother, and sister would find a washtub, fill it with water, and then carefully place it directly under the hanging clump of ants. Then they would take a sick and try to knock the swarm of ants off the limb so that it fell into the tub of water. If the swarm fell into the water, the ants all died. However, if it missed, the children would all run quickly away so as not to get bitten.⁵

The year 1906 found the McGavrans moving from Damoh to Bilaspur. Mr. Adams, the pioneer missionary in the district, left the field for good. At the mission's annual meeting in November, John was asked to take over the work in Bilaspur for the remaining three years of his ten-year term. His job entailed taking care of the large congregation in Bilaspur, as well as four to five smaller ones, and continuing his evangelistic touring. On top of this, he took over as the treasurer for the mission. This position involved receiving money from the mission office in the United States and distributing it to the school, hospital, orphanage, and evangelistic department. As treasurer, he had to keep track of all the receipts from each entity and compile reports to send to the mission headquarters.

John and Helen were veteran missionaries by 1907. They spoke the language well, knew the land and its people, and were in good health. For the most part, they knew Harda, Damoh, and Bilaspur better than all the other missionaries, since they had lived and worked in each place. John was a member of the executive committee of the mission, and his wisdom was highly respected and received. It was a good time in their lives, and it got even better with the birth of their fourth child, Enid Joyce, on January 30, 1907. During the year, Grace turned eleven, Donald ten, and Edward five. The children made the transition well. They liked the new bungalow in Bilaspur, because it was very big and surrounded by trees that provided new places to play. Their new bungalow was also sort of a hotel for missionaries from several different societies and denominations traveling through Bilaspur. Even though the children may not have appreciated it at the time, this gave them the opportunity to meet and hear from some of the leading missionaries of that day.

⁵ Edward McGavran. McGavran Family Stories, 10–13. Author's personal archives.

As usual, in the summer of 1907, Helen took the children to Landour. Grace and Donald, who had been home schooled all of their lives, attended a small school in Landour that was operated in a home by a number of missionary women. They hired a teacher who taught in old, one-room school fashion, that is, with children from all ages—from first grade to seventh grade—in the same room. Except for these few short months of formal education, the children learned primarily through unsupervised reading. Donald described his early education as follows: “There was nothing else to do, so we picked up all kinds of books and at first laboriously and later effortlessly read through them. We thus accumulated a lot of information and an excellent ability to read.”⁶ Even though the schooling was a bit primitive, the McGavran children did well in all subjects except arithmetic, which was a bit weak.

Evangelistic touring continued as the primary means of evangelism used in the Central Provinces, but in the closing months of 1907, John proposed that the Christians in the various mission stations come together for a week of revival. He approached missionaries from the Mennonite, Reformed, and Methodist mission stations with his new idea and suggested they hold the revival on a forty-acre island in the middle of a large river that flowed through the Central Provinces. Not only would this location not favor any particular mission agency, but it also would provide a non-threatening place for those of other faiths to attend. John always tried to make any meeting as Indian as possible, so he also recommended the gathering should not be called a revival. Instead, he proposed that it be called a *mela* (may-la), which was the common term for a religious fair in India. After visiting the island and discussing John’s idea, the missionaries agreed to accept his proposal. In March 1908, the first Mankughat (or Munku Ghat) Mela festival came into existence. For the next seventy-five years, the fair ministered to three thousand to five thousand Christians and non-Christians annually.

Donald attended the mela when he was eight or nine years old. There was an island at Munku Ghat. In the dry weather, the water flowed around just one side of the island, but normally water flowed totally around it. A big sand bar ran into the water at the foot of the island, and the area was full of muggars, or alligators. Donald and his brother and sisters swam on the side of the island where the water was swift and there were not so many muggars. Two guards were always posted—one up stream and one downstream—to warn swimmers to get out of the water if a muggar swam by. Most of the time, it was not much fun swimming, since muggars could sneak up on an unwary swimmer. Villagers were killed every year by muggars.⁷

⁶ Donald A. McGavran, quoted by Middleton, 8.

⁷ Edward McGavran. McGavran Family Stories, 100–104. Author’s personal archives.

One day while playing, Donald and his brother found a baby horned owl and picked it up to take back to their campsite. However, the mother and father owl flew down, pecked, and scratched them until they dropped the baby owl and ran into the dense bit of jungle near the river. As they worked their way through the underbrush, they came to the riverbank, and there on a little spit of rock lay an enormous man-eater muggar. The monster had unusually beautiful white scales instead of the normal dirty brown ones that are found on most muggars seen sunning themselves on riverbanks. Quickly they ran back to tell their father, who at first did not believe them. Because of their insistence, he took a 30.06 Savage rifle and followed his two sons back to the river. Sure enough, when they got back to the river, the muggar was still sunning on the rock, surprising their father. He took careful aim and fired at the mugger, and its great body twitched and lay still. Donald and his brother cheered, and then went to find a boat and some servants to haul it to land so it could be skinned. About fifteen minutes later, a boat arrived and cautiously moved within a few feet of the muggar. As the boat drew closer, the muggar suddenly came to life, and with a big flip of its tail, splashed ferociously and dived out of sight. John never liked to talk about that muggar, perhaps because no one would believe it was white. Donald and his brother had a lot of fun that day and always believed they had seen a rare white muggar.

Ten years of missionary service ended in April 1910, when the McGavran family left India for a furlough in the United States. Their trip took them through Bombay, Port Said, Naples, the Alps, Paris, and London. On the way, John attended the 1910 Edinburgh Convention, which turned out to redirect the missionary careers of John and Helen. In the United States, John decided to obtain a masters degree from the University of Michigan, so the family settled in Ann Arbor.

Grace and Donald, then thirteen and twelve years old, entered the seventh grade, while their little brother Edward, then eight years old, started third grade. All three made a good adjustment to American life in general and to American school life in particular. Their previous home schooling proved sufficient, as they were able to enter into their normal classes. Math proved to be the subject where they had the most catching up to do. Winter brought something the children were not very familiar with—snow! They loved it. Running and sliding on long, slippery sidewalks were enjoyable to all three. All of the children shared in chores around the house—washing dishes, sweeping, shoveling snow in the winter, and cutting grass in the summer. Donald was the only one to get ill. It turned out to be mumps, which left him permanently deaf in one ear. The summer of 1911 offered other delightful adventures at nearby Portage Lake. They fished for bass, pickerel, and sunfish. John spent most of his time away from the family on deputation, but in the fall, he and the children speared cisco, a whitefish found in northern lakes of the United States as they migrated down the river from Portage Lake to Lake Erie.

With their furlough ending, John and Helen faced a serious decision about the future. Their hearts were in India, and to return there would be the natural career choice. John was greatly respected for his ability with the Hindi language, creative evangelistic methods, administrative abilities, and knowledge of the culture. Both he and Helen continued in excellent health, and their numerous friends in India desired them to return. The children, however, were at the age where they needed better schooling than could be found in India. One option was to leave Grace and Donald with family or friends in the United States and the rest of the family return to India. Such was a common course of action for missionaries during that age. However, John's family could not take the children, and Helen's family lived in England.

Further, the younger children would quickly be in need of better schools, too. Edward was already nine and in fourth grade. In just two years, he would need a good junior high school. If they went to India, they would be expected to stay at least seven years, if not longer, before returning to the United States. Such a time line might work for four-year-old Joyce, but not for Edward. In the end, after several months of prayer and anguished discussions, they determined to take a leave from missionary service and stay in the United States. John would pastor a church, and the children would live at home and attend school.

John gave up his salary from the mission society and began looking for a church to pastor. It was three months—September, October, and November—before any church called them. No salary was coming in, and the family had to move. A member of the Christian Church in Ann Arbor owned a summer cottage, which the McGavrans used that fall. The summer cottage was cold, but the family managed. They carefully watched their spending, and with much fishing, they all ate well. Finally, in late November, the First Christian Church of Tulsa, Oklahoma, called John as pastor. First Christian was a dynamic, growing congregation with a worship attendance of about five hundred. They had just dedicated the second building with a seating capacity of one thousand—Tulsa's largest auditorium. Tulsa was a growing oil town of about twenty-five thousand population, and John accepted the church's call, moving his family there to begin a new chapter in their lives.

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It turned out to be a short chapter, but one that was thoroughly enjoyable. Life in Tulsa was typically American. The McGavrans lived just a few blocks from both church and school, and with no car, they walked everywhere. First Christian was located on the corner of Fourth and Boulder right downtown, so shopping was not a problem. Grace and Donald were in the midst of eighth grade and would attend their first year of high school in the fall of 1911. It was in this church that Donald made a personal

commitment to Jesus Christ and was baptized. Donald joined the church's Boy Scout troop, played basketball in the church's dusty basement, and went on seven-mile hikes to Sand Springs. One time he was hiking in the snow along the Red River and spotted a jackrabbit that was stuck in the snow. He caught it and took it home, where Helen prepared it for dinner.

The church flourished under John's evangelistic ministry, but decisions made at the Edinburgh Convention in 1910 were quietly bringing about changes that would take the McGavrans to Indianapolis. Missionaries meeting in Edinburgh issued a call for better training of missionaries, a call that the Foreign Christian Missionary Society and the Christian Women's Board of Missions decided to take seriously. Together the society and board raised \$400,000 to build the Missionary Training School (the name was changed in 1912 to the College of Missions). This was a very large amount of money for those days, but the two groups felt that training future missionaries to carry out the Great Commission on their ten foreign fields was a priority. The Missionary Training School started as a post-graduate institution, with entrance requirements being either a college degree or an appointment by a missionary board. The year 1910-1911 found a small group of students in attendance, but the following year (1911-1912), twenty-nine students enrolled. By the third year (1912-1913), sixty-four students were preparing for missionary service at the newly named College of Missions. In 1912, the college established the "College of Missions Lectureship," and Archibald McLean delivered the first series of lectures.

Progress on the new school started moving quickly, and a search for faculty began in earnest during 1912. John McGavran's reputation of experience, particularly with the Hindi language and culture, made him the sure choice for professor of Indian subjects. He was called to the new college to teach Hindi and comparative religion, that is, the study of non-Christian religions and how to present Christ to their adherents. As the lead professor in the department of Comparative Religion and Missionary History, he would develop a special department of Indology.⁸

Having accepted the professorship, John resigned from First Christian Church in December 1912. Saddened to lose John as pastor, the church nonetheless wished him and his family well as he undertook his new duties. Helen remained in Tulsa until the end of the school year, but John went to Indianapolis in January 1913 to prepare the way for his family. The rest of the family moved into a rented house in Indianapolis in May. The home was in an area of Indianapolis called Irvington. Grace and Donald started attending Shortridge High School five miles away and in the heart of the city. They rode an electric trolley each way, while Edward and Joyce walked the five blocks to Irvington Grace School.

⁸ For a brief history of the founding of the College of Missions, see "College of Missions," *Missionary Tidings*, July 1913, Volume 31, No. 4, pages 74-90.

About one and a half years later, the McGavrans built a home at 357 Downey Avenue, about four blocks from the College of Missions. They lived there from 1914 until 1922. Downey Avenue Christian Church served the college community from Butler College, the only college in Indianapolis at that time. The College of Missions was less than three hundred yards from Butler College. With both institutions being part of the Christian churches, their faculties often became part of the Downey church. Donald joined the Boy Scout troop and soon became one of the leaders. When attending the Christian Endeavor meetings with his sister, they were both shocked to find most of the members were “old people” of about twenty years of age. Since they represented the church’s youth group where students were mostly seventeen years old, they started a new Christian Endeavor Society for high school students.

At the College of Missions, John quickly became a favorite teacher. All students going to India took his courses in Hindi. In that course, they learned that the Hindi word “pathuk” means teacher. Turning the word into a pun, the students started calling John Pa Tuk and Helen (who also taught a course in Hindi) Ma Tuk. All students, no matter what field they were going to after graduation, took his Comparative Religions course. Professor McGavran designed a system for teaching Hindi that he put into a fifty-lesson book. Each lesson included thirty vocabulary words, grammar showing how the words were used (tenses), one page of sentences in Hindi to be translated into English, and one page of sentences in English to be translated into Hindi. It took two years to work through the fifty lessons, and Professor McGavran revised and improved the book over a number of years. The book was used by the Intermission Landour Language School as its text for teaching Hindi for many years.

For spending money, Donald mowed the lawn for Mrs. Atwater, the president of the Christian Women’s Board of Missions. He earned fifty cents each Saturday during the summer months. His interaction with Mrs. Atwater, as well as his observations of the Women’s Missionary Society and its work, led him to feel that women were the complete equal of men. Some years later, in the 1980s, he noted that the women’s missionary societies of those days predated the women’s rights movement of the 1970s.

World War I started in August 1914. The United States did not get involved right away, but the McGavrans were intensely interested. Helen’s brothers, sisters, and their children lived in England, Canada, and Australia. Therefore, they read the daily paper with great interest. Sadly, during the first two years of the war, several of the McGavrans’ cousins were killed in Flanders, Gallipoli, and northern France. Germany’s submarine warfare killed another two members of the family. Not surprisingly, the McGavrans were fiercely pro-Ally. Donald became increasingly frustrated that the United States did not enter the war. He simply could not understand how self-respecting Americans could sit on the sidelines of such a world-shaking

cataclysm, especially one that threatened to destroy freedom and make the Kaiser the ruler of the world.

Donald and his sister Grace graduated from high school in 1915. That summer, Donald worked in a print shop as a printer's devil. The job involved setting type into fifty or more little boxes on a large tray. He was paid ten cents an hour. His boss was rather profane and was a practicing atheist. Having grown up in a Christian missionaries' home, Donald was shocked at the language used in the print shop. However, he felt that the boss was fair and very patient as he learned to set type. In what could only be God's plan, Donald's experience in the print shop came in handy years later when he was manager of his mission's print shop in Jubbulpore, but that was much later in 1915.

Donald and Grace attended Butler College that fall, where Donald tried out for and made the debating team. Grace joined him as a member of the Philokurian Literary Society that met once a week. He also became an active member of the YMCA that fall. Donald found classes in biology, geology, and history fascinating, but most of the other courses were not as exciting to him. He made some A's, but mostly B's. In contrast, his sister Grace consistently made straight A's.

Personal frustration over the United States' lack of commitment to World War I led Donald to consider going to Canada and enlisting in a Canadian regiment in 1916. Since he was in college, he decided to wait. In April 1917, the United States finally declared war. Rejoicing that his country had awakened to the dangers, he immediately enlisted on April 28 in Troop "B" of the First Indiana Cavalry, a National Guard unit. His enlistment was for six years. A full regiment was never recruited, but the men drilled, marched, camped, and worked three nights a week from 7:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. in the Coliseum at the Indiana State Fairgrounds until they were officially called up for duty. The cavalry assembled for induction at the Indiana Fair Grounds on August 5, 1917, where they trained for two months before being sent to Camp Hattiesburg in Mississippi. One day, Donald was on KP duty with four other soldiers when a kindly older woman walked by. Glancing at the boys, she asked, "Don't all you boys wish that you were with your mama?" Immediately, almost as one voice, the soldiers shouted back, "NO, MA'AM!" They knew where they wanted to go.

Before the troop could acquire any horses, it was designated an artillery troop, and from that time on, carried the name of The Horseless Calvary of Indiana. Donald was assigned to Battery "F" of the 139th Field Artillery and trained for several months with three-inch guns. If he had thought the job in the print shop was shocking regarding the ways of non-Christians, being in the military opened his eyes even wider. Most of his fellow soldiers were a rough lot from Kentucky who used their free time to frequent whorehouses. Due to his Christian values, he found he could not participate with his bunkmates and spent much of his free time alone. To battle his

loneliness, he purchased a French grammar book and started to learn French. Self-discipline enabled him to gain fluency in a short time, and he began writing letters in French to his mother.

The war inched along and after twelve months in Mississippi, Donald started to fear that he would never see any real combat. Then a rumor spread among the troops that two men from Hattiesburg would be chosen to join the Rainbow Division, which was the first American brigade to go to France. He volunteered at once, but was surprised to find that fifty other men had volunteered, too. As the selection process gradually reduced the fifty to only three candidates, he was greatly encouraged to find he was one of the three. However, disappointment quenched his encouragement when he was eliminated, and the other two headed off to France.

Good news arrived in early September 1918 when the 139th Field Artillery received orders to go to France. They relocated to New York for additional training, and John McGavran traveled from Indianapolis to see his son Donald off. John was the type of father who seldom showed affection to his children, and his willingness to travel from Indianapolis to New York to see Donald expressed a deep sense of love. However, being a young man about to head off on a great adventure, Donald did not fully appreciate his father's gesture at the time. After sailing on October 28 for England, the ship encountered a German submarine off the southern coast of Ireland and narrowly escaped being attacked. Following another two weeks of training in England, the artillery was marched to a channel port, took a ship in the evening, and the next morning was in Havre, France. The men were packed into the transport like sardines. Since the sea was smooth, they only suffered from a lack of sleep. Once in port, the men traveled to Paris by train, and there they were transferred to a boxcar on which was written, "12 horses, 40 men." Upon reaching the boxcar, Donald noticed that there was not any food. He had noticed a huge pile of long French loaves in the marketplace. Therefore, he suggested to his comrades that they run back, pick up as many loaves as possible, and bring them back. Two others joined him, and they grabbed about sixty loaves. Just when they arrived back at the train depot, the train was pulling away. They broke into a run alongside the open boxcar door, putting the loaves of bread into eager hands. With the aid of those already in the boxcar, they were able to pull themselves up inside the car. The loaves were the only food they had for two days, and they served as pillows by night, as well.

Nervous excitement came over Donald and the rest of the men as they prepared to go into combat. On November 10, 1918, the train reached its destination about thirty miles from the front. Before they started marching north, their three-inch guns were exchanged for six-inchers, and the horses changed for motorized pullers, which were then quite an innovation. After marching for nearly a day, they could hear the guns of battle, but on November 11, armistice was declared. The war had ended just as the artillery had

come within a few miles of the battle. Donald never saw any action. Even though he would have given his right arm to see some combat, it was not to be. God had other plans for his life.

At once, the 139th was sent to Brest, the great harbor on the northwest tip of France. There they remained for a month, doing nothing except playing cards. Occasionally, Donald broke away for walks in the beautiful countryside, where his French came in handy. In December, they were loaded onto the first ship taking American soldiers back to the United States, and they arrived in New York on December 24, 1918. As the ship steamed up the Hudson River, it was greeted tumultuously with five or six tugs on one side of the river and another five or six on the other, each shooting streams of water into the air. The 139th marched down Fifth Avenue, hailed as returning heroes, even though they had not seen a day of action. After the march, the men went to a delousing camp in New Jersey and from there to Indiana, where at Fort Benjamin Harrison they were discharged on January 18, 1919. His discharge papers noted that Donald had grey eyes, brown hair, and fair complexion, was five feet four inches in height, and had excellent character.

Profoundly glad to be back at Butler College, Donald promptly enrolled in spring classes for 1919. He had been out of school for a year and a half and returned to Butler a more mature man. Butler College gave him enough credits for his military experience (eight units for military science and drill) and language credits for the French he had learned (also eight units), so that he was entered into the graduating class of 1920. His college courses included German, New Testament, sociology, zoology, English, math, philosophy, economics, and debate. Always active, Donald was a member of Tau Kappa Alpha, the German Club, and served as a class officer. His sister Grace had already graduated in June 1919 and had started teaching school. Edward was in his last year of high school, and Joyce was in eighth grade.

That spring semester, Donald was appointed captain of his debating team for a triangular debate on April 25 against Earlham and Wabash Colleges. The team was divided into two teams, one debating the negative, and one the affirmative. Donald participated on the affirmative team. Butler defeated both schools, which turned out to be a preview of things to come under Donald's leadership. At a few early debates, he observed a pattern. Three judges always judged debates. Donald noticed that when two of the three judges were pastors or college professors, the affirmative always won. However, when two of the three judges were lawyers, the negative always won. He quietly kept his discovery to himself. As captain of the debate team, he had a good deal to do with the selection of judges from a panel of nominees, and he made good use of his discovery. In his senior year, 1919 to 1920, the debate team won every debate, even though they had debated prestigious college teams in Illinois and Wisconsin.

He also rejoined the Butler College YMCA where he chaired the religious, and later, the membership committees. During June 13–22, 1919, he

attended a YMCA camp at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, where the entire direction of his life changed. Up until that time, Donald had seen himself as a reasonably good Christian but was determined that his career would be in some field other than missions or ministry. "My family has done enough for the Lord," was his attitude. "I will make money." He looked to law, geology, or forestry as fields, which were attractive to him. Day by day, those at the camp were challenged to surrender their lives completely to Christ. They were told to let God decide everything in their lives, including making money and choosing one's life work. For several days, Donald resisted. Finally he yielded and said, "Very well, Lord. It is clear to me; either I give up all claim[s] to being a Christian, or I go all the way. Since that is the situation, I choose to go all the way."⁹ Donald did not tell anyone about his decision; but from then on, he was sure that IF God had called him to the ministry or mission field, he would go. Two of his friends, David Rioch and Lyman Hoover, had similar experiences. For the next eleven months, they met weekly for Bible study and prayer. Lyman eventually served as a missionary in China. David, however, lost his faith while at medical school, which was a painful memory for Donald throughout the rest of his life.

It did not take long for Donald to get involved in ministry, as that fall he started preaching for a tiny new congregation in Speedway, five miles west of Indianapolis. When it came to pastoring a church, Donald was extremely green. The church consisted of three families and a group of children, and they met in an abandoned one-room country schoolhouse. For ten months, Donald made the round trip from Irvington to Speedway, arriving at 9:00 a.m. for Sunday school and worship, and then making the return trip home in the afternoon. In the congregation Sunday after Sunday, a woman of about forty-five sat on the front row. Because he was only at the church a short time on Sundays, Donald never found out much about this woman, that is, until his final Sunday there in July 1920. Only then did he discover that she was the madam of a house of prostitution!

In October, the senior class elected Donald as their president. The position gave him significant voice in student affairs and some input at faculty meetings. The senior class adopted several new programs, which were also adopted by succeeding classes, becoming part of the Butler tradition. Donald's senior year at Butler was perhaps the best of his life up to that time. Two key events happened that, along with the summer YMCA camp at Lake Geneva, were to be major change points for his life. That year Donald met and got acquainted with a sophomore named Mary Elizabeth Howard from the Christian Church in Muncie, Indiana. The first time she saw Donald, he was sitting in the back of a church service in his military uniform. Evidently,

⁹ Donald Anderson McGavran. *The McGavrans in America: A History of Two Hundred Years, 1755-1966*. Unpublished history, 1983: 40.

he made quite an impression on her, for as the school year progressed, they grew closer together and talked about the possibility of marriage.

Mary had been raised in Muncie, Indiana, the youngest child of Isaiah and Sarah Howard. Isaiah was a farm boy who moved to Muncie to work in a factory. He met Sarah in Singing School, where young people learned hymns, probably because there were not enough hymnals to go around at the time. She was the darling of the neighborhood, a pretty little girl who made friends easily and took part in many activities. Hers was a pleasant home with a wonderful grape arbor in the large backyard, making a shady walk all the way to the alley. Mary loved playing in the yard during the summer months, but in the winter, enjoyed ice-skating on a canal that used to run through the town.

She was a gifted soloist and often sang at her church, the Jackson Street Christian Church. Her parents owned a grocery store in Muncie, and before they lost it in the depression, were able to give Mary music lessons. When Mary was a baby, the Howards dedicated her to the Lord for missionary service, and as a child, they introduced her to missionaries who were invited to their home.

The Jackson Street Christian Church gave her a scholarship to attend Butler College, and her remaining tuition was met through the support of her parents and her brother Walter. Her parents borrowed the money to put Mary through college, and they spent the last few years of their lives in debt. She always felt guilty that her school debt might have caused their penury. Walter was an executive in an automobile business and adored his little sister. On Donald and Mary's wedding day in 1923, Walter sat in the back of the church and cried. He was brokenhearted that Donald was going to take his sister halfway around the world, and he would hardly ever see her again.

Soon after Christmas, Donald and Mary attended the Eighth International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions in Des Moines, Iowa, from December 31, 1919, to January 4, 1920.¹⁰ John R. Mott, Robert E. Speer, and Robert Wilder led the meetings. G. Sherwood Eddy delivered two keynote addresses emphasizing the need for social reform. The spiritual dynamic at the meetings touched many lives. At that convention, Donald and Mary made commitments to give their lives to missionary service. Donald and Mary, along with six other students, reported on the convention to the Butler student body at a chapel on January 13. Mary hastily sketched the needs of the world as presented at the convention. As president of the class of 1920, Donald closed the series of talks

¹⁰ Addresses delivered at the Eighth International Convention of the Student Volunteer Movement can be found in *North American Students and World Advance*, edited by Burton St. John (New York, NY: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1920).

by stressing the duty that devolves upon every true follower of Jesus Christ, which is the spreading of Christianity to all mankind.¹¹ Donald noticed the spiritual strength and commitment of Mary, as well as other wonderful qualities in her life, and seriously began courting her when they returned to school. They repeatedly referred to their common bond established at the Des Moines meeting. Shortly after arriving back at Butler, they were engaged in the spring of 1920. Donald graduated on June 17, 1920. The class of 1920 had fifty graduates.

Donald took a job during the summer at the Prest-O-Lite battery factory in Indianapolis, working the night shift. His job was to stand by a large pot of hot, molten lead, dip a ladle into it, and pour the lead into molds. The molds made tiny little bars, which made up the grids inside of batteries. Pay was based on how many of the small grids he made during each shift. From time to time, the molten lead needed to be replenished by dropping a twenty-five pound pig of solid lead into the pot. Occasionally, as Donald dropped the pig into the lead, it would explode, sending a shower of lead droplets into the air. Some of these landed on his skin and made ugly burns. Even with such danger, he did not quit the job. By the end of the summer, he was making very good money.

That summer, he decided to attend Yale Divinity School for two years of theological training, leading to a B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity) degree. His undergraduate degree at Butler only included twelve units of New Testament studies, and he decided additional work in theology, Old Testament, church history, and Christian education would be beneficial. He gained admission easily and moved to New Haven, Connecticut. He and Mary were separated for a year and a half while she finished at Butler and he at Yale, but they consistently wrote to each other. Donald found the class work at Yale stimulating but strenuous. He specialized in Christian education. Dr. Luther A. Weigle, who was to become highly influential among the National Council of Churches, was professor of Christian education at Yale.¹² He influenced Donald's philosophy of education, particularly on the way lessons ought to be prepared and taught. Some of the faculty stressed the higher criticism of Scripture, and Donald was influenced somewhat by the view of Richard Niebuhr that everything the church did could be considered evangelism. However, he continued to appreciate the conservative position held by the Dean of the seminary, Dr. Charles R. Brown.¹³ Kenneth Scott Latourette,

¹¹ "Student Delegates Report to Chapel," *Butler Collegian*, Vol. 35, February 10, 1920, 2.

¹² Luther Allan Weigle (1880–1976) was a professor at Yale Divinity School from 1916 to 1949. In 1924, he was appointed to the Sterling Chair in Religious Education, and in 1928, he succeeded Charles R. Brown as dean of the school.

¹³ Charles R. Brown served a dean of Yale Divinity School from 1911 to 1928. A former Congregational pastor, he was a professor of homiletics at YDS.

the rising young professor of missions, was away on sabbatical during the years McGavran attended Yale. Thus, Donald did not have the opportunity to study under Latourette, but Latourette's writings on the growth of the Christian Church throughout history significantly influenced Donald's perspectives. He ministered on weekends at a small Congregational church in Milton, Connecticut, where his preaching was expository and conservative in theology. However, one of his biographers, Vernon Middleton, shares that Donald did not leave Yale unaffected by its liberal views.

The Christian Century reported on April 27, 1922, page 539, that "Yale men challenge their leaders." The incident cited was the Danbury Conference of the Disciples of Christ. McGavran was one of the leaders of this student disagreement. In a letter to the editor McGavran expressed resentment that their "liberal and truth seeking movement" had been presented to the public in a "slightly distorted manner." The impact of the theological environment of Yale led McGavran to emphasize Christianization and gradualism over evangelism throughout his first term in India.¹⁴

Nevertheless, he did well at Yale, winning prizes in homiletics (he won the annual senior sermon contest), and he graduated cum laude in June 1922. Mary Howard also graduated from Butler College on June 12, 1922, and that summer, they were married on August 29, 1922.

Donald's father and mother decided to return to India in 1922. With two children (Donald and Grace) through college and in graduate school, and Edward halfway through college, John and Helen felt they ought to leave the College of Missions and return to India. Their decision was strongly protested by both the college and the United Christian Missionary Society. They believed that John and Helen could do the most good for missions by continuing to train future missionaries. However, Donald's parents felt called of God to be lifetime missionaries in India, and they could not be dissuaded. The reason they had stayed in the United States for the past twelve years (educating their children) no longer existed. Their youngest daughter Joyce would return with them to India and attend her junior year at the mission-run Woodstock High School, which was functioning well in 1922. That September following Donald and Mary's wedding, the senior McGavrans left for India. Their fellow missionaries, many of whom had been their own students in the years 1913 to 1922, would determine what they would do in India.

The McGavran family had worshiped at Downey Avenue Christian Church, and John was an elder of the church. Upon learning that John and Helen were going back to India, the church decided to give them a Model T Ford to take back with them. John and Helen drove the car to New York in September 1922, and then shipped it on the same steamer that took them to India. At the annual convention of missionaries in November, John and

¹⁴ Vernon J. Middleton, 14.

Helen were assigned to teach at Leonard Theological College located in Jubbulpore, which was run by three cooperating missions. This was the school where the best of the young men from the orphanage and boarding schools came as prospective evangelists. Students took a three-year course and practiced preaching the gospel in the city of Jubbulpore and in surrounding villages. It was a fitting assignment for John and Helen. There were twenty-five students, and both John and Helen were given classes to teach that occupied their mornings. John took students on preaching tours in the cool weather, so they could get experience in actual evangelism of non-Christians. The young evangelists actually had to be taught the Hindi religion, also. Since most of them had grown up in the mission schools from a young age, they knew Christianity better than Hinduism. Most had never read the Ramayan, Ganpati Hom Puja, or Gita. While they knew the popular names of Hindu idols, they did not know much about Hinduism itself. Thus, John taught a course on Hinduism and on how to present the gospel in an appealing and pertinent way. He gave lectures on how to preach to non-Christians and to Christian congregations. His course on how to expound the Bible was quite popular among the young men.

John also became editor of the *Sahayak Patrika* (*The Helpful Journal*). It was subscribed to by most of the missions in Central Provinces—Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Lutherans, Mennonites, and Friends—and was printed weekly by the Mission Press, of which he was the manager. He read many manuscripts, written in Hindi, of course. In addition to this weekly journal, the Mission Press published pamphlets, tracts, and books.

Helen McGavran, being quite musical, sang alto naturally. She set twenty-five bhajan (Christian hymns written in Indian meter and set in common, easily sung Indian songs) tunes to notation so they could be played by note on the common Indian hand organs. Helen sought to not only make the songs as Indian as possible, but also to standardize the music. A small hymnbook with her bhajans was published in 1927. At the college, she taught several classes for the wives of the evangelists studying there. It was hoped that some of the evangelists would become pastors of the churches, and it was important for them to have godly wives and good Christian homes. Helen taught the wives how to study the Bible, how to maintain a Christian home, and how to be a devout and able Christian.

The mission bought a two-acre track of land and built a missionary residence for them in Jubbulpore. It had two gates with a semi-circular road connecting them and running under a portico attached to the house, where coaches would enter and discharge guests. The portico was used for the Model T, one of the very first cars in Jubbulpore.

The year 1923 brought grief to the entire McGavran family, when Dr. Mary Theodora McGavran passed away on January 25, 1923, after a long illness. She died during surgery for complications that resulted from typhoid

fever. The case of typhoid that took her life was the third case that affected her. During Mary's first term at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, she had contracted typhoid, and it delayed her graduation. Later, in 1899, she again was threatened with typhoid fever, and this time was ill for weeks with Malta fever. It was months before she could properly move her feet.

Dr. Mary had been in India for twenty-seven years and had served for many years as head of the hospital at Damoh. Even though she loved caring for the physical needs of people, evangelism was a primary concern. She once declared her philosophy by saying, "I have grown to feel more and more that the hospital is a good place to preach."¹⁵ A memorial written about her states,

Few medical missionaries have endeared themselves to the natives more than Miss McGavran. She was the medical mother for the orphans at the Damoh orphanage and hers was the only hospital for many miles in either direction. Through famine and pestilence, she had continued her work with peculiar courage and devotion during her long term of service. It is impossible to measure the influence of this good woman as she ministered to the bodies and souls of the people in the great land which she loved better than life.¹⁶

Upon her death, the Damoh hospital closed due to a lack of medical personnel, and the missionaries and people felt keenly the loss of a special helper and friend. Later that summer, Donald and Mary named their first child, Mary Theodora, in remembrance of his beloved aunt.

Donald and Mary entered the College of Missions in September 1922 for one year's additional study before they joined John and Helen in India. Donald wanted to work on a Ph.D. following his two years at Yale. He had asked the UCMS to waive its requirement for a year of study at the College of Missions and to provide a scholarship for him toward his Ph.D. After considerable correspondence, Rev. Stephen Corey, the mission executive of the UCMS, decided that Donald should go to the College of Mission and delay his work toward a Ph.D. Somewhat disappointed, Donald decided to follow his mission's desires and enrolled at the College of Mission.¹⁷

¹⁵ Quoted in a side bar in *World Call*, March 1923, 2.

¹⁶ "Deaths of Missionaries," *Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers to the United Christian Missionary Society*, July 1, 1922–June 30, 1923, page 17.

¹⁷ An ad for the College of Missions in 1919 described the school as "A Residential Graduate School for the Special Preparation of Home and Foreign Missionary Candidates. Courses offered in Missionary Science and History; the World's Religions; Ethnic Philosophy and Literature; Medicine and Hygiene; The Social Sciences; Linguistics, and Languages of Mission Fields; Biblical Literature; Interpretation and History; Pedagogy and Psychology; Kindergarten and Domestic Science; Rural Ministry, and Ministry among Foreign Peoples of American Cities." Source: Butler Collegian, Vol. 35, November 21, 1919.

As a boy growing up in India, Donald spoke Hindi until May 1910, but he had forgotten most of it while living in the United States between then and 1922. Unlike some other missionary children, Donald's remembrance of the Hindi language did not just suddenly come back when he began to study it at the College of Missions. He and Mary had to study laboriously, learning vocabulary, tenses, and syntax. The one area that did come back easily was pronunciation. They studied for an hour a day in John McGavran's Hindi book, and by the time they arrived in Bombay in 1923, both Donald and Mary could speak a limited amount of Hindi.

Like his father, Donald early on showed an ability to teach. All ten mission fields of the United Christian Missionary Society had started Christian schools as a means of education and evangelism. In each school, an hour a day was given to the study of the Bible, and missionaries needed to be good educators. Since Donald had specialized in Christian education at Yale and had a B.D., the College of Missions asked him to teach a class on Christian education to the other missionary candidates. As a student, then, he also served as an assistant professor between 1922 and 1923. His sister Grace worked at the College of Mission as librarian during the year that Donald taught there.

During the year, he also preached at a small country church at New Point, Indiana, about fifty miles southeast of the College of Missions. It brought in a small income, but the main costs of his study at the college were met from a stipend paid by the UCMS. The experience of being a beginning professor and student in a student body of about fifty persons going out to different lands and peoples was inspiring. For most of the school year, Mary was pregnant. She then gave birth to Mary Theodore, named after Donald's aunt, on July 2, 1923. The ordination of a husband and wife was a rare event in those days, but in the summer of 1923, Donald and Mary were both ordained on June 5 as missionaries of the gospel of the Christian Church.

After graduating with a M.A. degree in June 1923, Donald was asked to be a faculty member during the summer for twelve youth conferences being held throughout the United States. The purpose of the young people's conferences was to challenge them to surrender their lives to Christ completely. It was hoped the conferences would assist young Christians to renounce nominal Christianity and to begin living truly born-again Christian lives. In short, it gave Donald the opportunity to do for others what the Lake Geneva YMCA conference had done for him in the summer of 1919. A report on his summer activities in the July 1923 issue of *World Call* prophetically mentioned, "With his clear-cut thinking and ability of expression, he is always able to make a strong and convincing address."¹⁸

After World War I, the nations and denominations of Europe were exhausted. This allowed the missionary societies of the United States to

¹⁸ "Loaned to the Department of Religious Education," *World Call*, July 1923, 50.

experience great expansion between 1920 and 1930. Opportunities in Europe, Latin America, and Asia were enormous. World evangelization was to thrive as never before, until 1930 when the recession cast a long shadow across the world. Donald and Mary McGavran were to go out to an Indian mission consisting of eighty-seven missionaries. To be sure, the ten fields managed by the UMCS were seeing little church growth, but everyone believed growth was just around the corner. The job of all missionaries, including Donald and Mary, was to do good mission work—education, medicine, and evangelism—and to leave the results to God.

About the Author

Gary L. McIntosh is one of the foremost experts on the life and ministry of Donald A. McGavran. His most recent book, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (with Charles Arn), was the 2014 Outreach Magazine book of the year for Leadership. Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D. is professor of Christian Ministry & Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, La Mirada, California.