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McGAVRAN'S FAMILY HERITAGE

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Abstract

Mission was the natural expression of Donald McGavran's heritage. This article traces the ancestral history of Donald McGavran's family line from James and Agnes Anderson, his maternal grandparents, and John and Helen McGavran, his mother and father. His connection to the Stone-Campbell Movement and William Carey's Baptist Missionary Society is discussed.

— 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 first of several excerpts from the forthcoming biography.

Mission was the natural expression of Donald McGavran's heritage.[1] His story cannot be separated from that of the generations of faithful Christians and missionaries who came before him. James and Agnes Anderson, Donald McGavran's maternal grandparents, went to India in 1854 as missionaries with the Baptist Missionary Society. His father journeyed there in 1891 as a missionary with the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, and the two families—Andersons and McGavrans—were united in 1895 when John married the Anderson's daughter Helen. In 1923, Donald and Mary

[1] Sentiment expressed by A. L. Fishburn in *They Went to India: Biographies of Missionaries of the Disciples of Christ* (Indianapolis, IN: Missionary Education Department, 1946), 89.

McGavran also sailed for India, where they served until 1954. Counted all together, the three generations of Anderson and McGavran families—grandparents, parents, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins—committed a total of 362 years to missionary work in India. It is an understatement to say it, but missions played a major role in the formation of Donald McGavran's life and ministry.

THE ANDERSONS

The roots of Donald McGavran's missionary life grew out of two families' lines—one British and the other Scotch-Irish. James and Agnes Anderson, McGavran's maternal grandparents, sailed for India from London in July 1854. Baptist missionaries appointed by William Carey's Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), they were destined for Bengal, the same area in which Carey (1761–1834) had served for forty-two years. The journey took the ship around the Cape of Good Hope and lasted six months, during which the ship encountered a calm section of the Indian Ocean and slowly drifted with the currents. Drinking water ran out. but in God's providential care, it rained, allowing the crew and passengers to collect enough water to survive the remainder of the trip. They faced another danger when the ship began to drift toward an island populated by cannibals, but once again, God provided escape when the winds came up and the ship was able to sail away from the danger.

It is likely that the Andersons responded to a much-needed call that was issued sometime between 1847 and 1854 for missionaries to go to northern India. In 1847, a long-standing and successful missionary of the BMS, William Robinson of Dhaka, wrote, "There is, dear Christian friends, something which causes great distress both to myself and, I believe, to every one in the mission: it is the fear, the almost certainty, that we are labouring in vain."[2] Robinson's letter reflected a feeling among missionaries in India's northern regions that their lack of evangelistic success had created a waning of zeal for public support in England. He felt that the work in India was dying from lack of missionary recruits, inadequate funding, and waning enthusiasm in the British churches.

Whether James Henry Anderson was aware of the concerns of the BMS is uncertain, but he enrolled in the Baptist College at Stepney in 1852 to prepare for missionary service. In his younger years, he was connected with the Congregationalists, but as a student in the Hackney Theological Institution, he embraced believers' Baptism. After three years of study there, he severed his ties to the Congregationalists and applied to finish at Stepney between 1852 and 1854. At Stepney, he worked with a theological tutor on a rigorous

[2] Quoted in Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 140.

course of study that included studies in Hebrew (reading through the grammar of Gesenius, Genesis 1–18, the Messianic Psalms, and Isaiah 1–12) and an introduction to Scripture (particularly the history of the sacred text). He also read Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*, Whately's *Logic* (books I, II, and III), Lathan on the English language, Paley's *Moral Philosophy* (books I-IV), and Butler's *The Analogy of Religion,* and attended a course of lectures on the study and interpretation of Scripture. In addition to all of this, James engaged in classical studies in Greek and Latin, read Romans in Greek and the whole of Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science,*[3] read some church history, and studied principles of systematic theology. While a student at Stepney, he applied to become and the BMS Committee accepted him as a missionary in December 1853.

After arriving in Bengal in November 1854, James and Agnes went first to Calcutta and proceeded from there to Jessore to begin work with the Rev. John Sale. They selected their field in India with minimal consultation. Denominations cooperated with each other very little, and missionary societies settled missionaries where they thought best. Writing in 1954 about his grandparents' missionary venture a hundred years before, McGavran noted,

> It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to understand the world of 1854. It was not merely a day of sailing vessels, oxcarts, camel trains, hand looms, with jungle unlimited, tigers, panthers, wolves and hyenas on the outskirts of every village, town and city in all India. It was not only a day when there was no knowledge of modern medicine and malaria was supposed to be caused by bad air. It was also a day when men accepted as axiomatic that there were inferior and superior races, that not much could be done to improve the physical lot of mankind, and that war, pestilence and famine were unavoidable fellow-travelers on our journey through this vale of tears.[4]

The Andersons applied themselves to the acquisition of the Bengali language, after which James gave himself successfully to the work of an evangelist preaching in bazaars, itinerating through villages, superintending schools, and administering small bands of converts for many years. India was strictly Hindu at that time. The caste system was accepted as god-given, and caste rules were strict. When James would visit a high-caste home, the place where he sat and walked would afterwards be washed with cow dung to render it pure again.[5]

In the absence of Principal John Trafford in 1866, James officiated as Principal of Serampore College, which was founded by William Carey as the

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[3] Wayland's work is sometimes referenced simply as *Wayland's Moral Philosophy*.

[4] Donald A. McGavran, "India Through a Century," *World Call* July–August (1954): 16.

[5] McGavran, "India Through a Century."

only graduate theological school in India with a government charter. Recurring lung problems at the beginning of 1869 forced him to relocate to the drier climate of the Northwest Provinces and Delhi for one year. Renewed health allowed him to return to Calcutta to work at the Intally Institution, but continued ill health led to his return to England for an extended furlough in 1870. It was during this furlough that a daughter (Helen Anderson, Donald McGavran's mother) was born on January 4, 1871, in Lewisham, England. After rest, the Andersons returned to India in 1872, but not to the damp climate of Bengal. Instead, James was sent to the milder climate of Allahabad in the Northwest Provinces, where he acquired a new language and worked as an evangelist until 1881.

Allahabad, the capital of the Northwest Provinces with a population of 105,000, was a popular pilgrimage for multitudes of Hindu people. It was here that Agnes superintended the Zenana work for "The Ladies' Association for the Support of Zenana Work and Bible Women in India." The Zenana Committee, as it was called, worked in conjunction with the BMS to provide for education and evangelism of women in India. A zenana was the part of a house in India where women were secluded, and the Zenana ministry involved lady agents, their assistants, and native Bible women visiting houses throughout the city and villages to minister the gospel to women. Even though Agnes suffered severe illness between 1877 and 1890, she continued to supervise the women who visited zenanas. Two daughters of James and Agnes, Jessie and Edith, served as Zenana workers, along with their mother, until their marriages. The Zenana ministry brought many women to Christ, as well as untold members of each woman's family. Upon retirement, Agnes received an honorary appointment to the Zenana Committee in respect of her years of missionary service.

Later, when the Andersons were stationed in Bhilaspur in Central India around 1880, James helped missionaries of the Christian Church get started in India, the same area that Donald McGavran was to serve from 1936 to 1954. The needs of the BMS called for his services in the district of Backergunge in Eastern Bengal, so he relocated and assisted native churches to become increasingly indigenous. Following another furlough in 1881, the Andersons once again attempted to work in Bengal and were stationed at Barisal. Much pastoral work was needed among the native churches of the district, which, along with evangelism efforts, was arduous and trying. Eight years of living and working in the hot climate took its toll on both James and Agnes, and in 1891, they retired from Barisal. After two additional years of service in Darjeeling, and nearly forty years of missionary work, they finally left for England in 1893.[6]

[6] Sources differ on the date of the Anderson's retirement. It is variously listed as 1890, 1891, and 1893. It appears that they officially retired in 1890 but continued to serve for another two to three years before returning to England.

Throughout the years, they had four sons and four daughters, five of which are known to have returned to India as missionaries themselves. On June 27, 1901, the Rev. James H. Anderson passed away. In a final tribute the BMS Committee commented, "Throughout his whole course of service the converts loved and trusted him; his missionary brethren had long looked up to him with respectful affection. He was a man of varied excellence—gentle and true, firm and persistent in all that he felt to be right, loyal to the Faith of the Gospel, and devoted to his Lord and Saviour."[7]

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Though the James Andersons retired in 1890, their missionary work continued through a few of their children and numerous grandchildren. One son, Herbert Anderson, gave forty-five years of his life to missionary work in India. Herbert Anderson was born in Churamaukali, India (Jessore District), on October 17, 1864. While receiving his education in England, he was baptized at the Baptist Chapel Hammersmith in Broadway, London, in 1881, and worked for ten months as a junior clerk for the British Foreign Bible Society.

He received his theological education at Rawdon College and was accepted by the BMS Committee as a missionary to India in 1886, sailing in October of that year. His first appointment was in Barisal, where he passed two exams in Bengali in 1887 and 1888. On December 3, 1888, he married Annie Ruth Allen (b. February 8, 1862 in Ceylon), who was also a child of missionaries. They worked together in India until her death in 1931. Herbert and Annie had three children—Allen (b. May 20, 1890), Janel Agnes (b. January 5, 1896), and Malcolm Noel (b. December 24, 1904). Following his parents' example, he ministered as an evangelist in rural areas of Bengal until 1889. At that time, he transferred first to Jessore and eventually to Calcutta and remained there until his own retirement forty-two years later.

As his leadership and administrative skills became known, he was appointed India Secretary in 1897, with responsibility to manage all aspects of the mission in India. Relational and full of humor, "Uncle Andy," as young recruits called him, was a supportive counselor to those older and an endearing guide to those younger than himself. His home was always open to any missionary needing encouragement. Wisdom, tact, and forcefulness marked his dealings with the home office and various administrative committees. Even with all of his administrative work, his evangelistic zeal never abated. At the same time, he took an abiding interest in removing social ills from Indian life. Of particular concern, he worked for the cause of temperance and promoted intermission and church union. He was unanimously invited to succeed Rev. Alfred Henry Baynes as BMS General Secretary in

[7] Information on James and Agnes Anderson provided by the Angus Library, Regent's Part College, Pusey Street, Oxford, Great Britain.

1905. However, the appointment would have required his return to England, so he turned down the offer, believing that his place was in India.

In all his efforts, he won the respect of the European community in Calcutta and was held in highest regard by Indian leaders and the common people. He became the first half-time secretary of the National Missionary Council of India shortly after its formation on February 4, 1914. During eight years of service to the Council, he helped galvanize support for aggressive evangelism as part of the Evangelistic Forward Movement launched by Sherwood Eddy in 1916.[8] Poor health led to his retirement in 1922, but Herbert stayed in India for many years after his retirement. In 1923, he was elected an honorary member of the BMS General Committee.

One biographer, Vern Middleton, mentions an incident that involved Herbert Anderson and his nephew Donald McGavran in 1946. Middleton notes,

> Due to Anderson's involvement in the Christian temperance movement in India, he became friends with Raja Ghopal Achariya. Achariya later became Governor General of India and invited Anderson to the Vice Regal Lodge in Delhi in 1946. Enroute to Delhi Anderson visited the McGavran home in Takhatpur. Donald McGavran had just read a book entitled, *Religious Liberty*, which addressed the issue of freedom of religious expression and propagation. Anderson and McGavran felt the book was exactly what the framers of India's constitution needed in their task. Thus, when Anderson was in Delhi, he diplomatically presented the book as a gift to Achariya who was a member of the task force for the framing [of] the constitution.[9]

When the Indian Constitution was eventually released to the public, it contained a rather strong statement guaranteeing freedom to preach, propagate, and practice one's faith. It is possible that together Herbert Anderson and Donald McGavran significantly influenced the inclusion of this statement through the gift of a book.

Herbert Anderson died on March 20, 1951. In memoriam, one of his admirers wrote, "Another outstanding servant of Christ has passed from us, whose consecrated and rich life was a benediction to all who knew him, and will be an inspiration to many who come after him."[10]

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Except for Helen Anderson, less is known about the missionary endeavors of the remaining Anderson children. In 1886, Isabelle Anderson married

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[8] Stanley, 155–160; and 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): 3.

[9] Middleton, 3.

[10] Quoted in a memorial to Rev. Herbert Anderson in *The Baptist Times*, March 29, 1951. Provided by the Angus Library, Regent's Part College, Pusey Street, Oxford, Great Britain.

George Walker Jackson, who was a missionary with the Disciples of Christ in Bhilaspur located in the Central Province of India. With a love for music and fluency in Hindi, the Jacksons developed an effective evangelism ministry. Two of their first converts were Hira Lal and his future wife Sonarin. In 1936, Hira Lal became Donald McGavran's Indian co-worker and a key part of the evangelistic work among the Satnami people. The Jacksons returned to England in 1891 and retired after George suffered a nervous breakdown. It was the same year that John G. McGavran (Donald McGavran's father) arrived in India to begin his missionary career.[11]

Jessie Anderson applied to and was accepted by the BMS in 1876, and spent time in Bangladesh. She served in the Zenana work in Allahabad until her marriage to Mr. Barrow in July 1878. Their work involved living in tents and moving from place to place every second or third day. Jessie taught the wives of the servants who traveled with them, most of whom had never heard the name of Jesus. Upon the death of Mr. Barrow, Jessie married Richard Henry Tregillus. They ministered together in Jessore, Khulna, Dowlatpur, and Serampur. The strain of the work in India undermined Mr. Tregillus's constitution, forcing them to return to London on furlough in April 1902. He experienced a hemorrhage on May 13 and passed away on May 14. Jessie retired from the BMS that year.

Upon acceptance to the BMS in 1886, Edith Anderson became a female agent in the Zenana ministry in Allahabad. After her marriage to Mr. Wood sometime in 1890, she retired from missionary service with the BMS.

Helen Anderson, about whom more will be said in a following section, became the wife of John G. McGavran in 1895 and the mother of Donald A. McGavran. She was born in England on January 4, 1871, while the Andersons were on an extended furlough. When Helen was two years old, the Andersons returned to India for seven years. They went back to London in 1880, returning to India in 1883 when Helen was twelve. The family then stayed in India until 1893. Helen attended Woodstock School in Landour, a boarding school for the children of missionaries, with her older sister Isabella, who was a teacher there. When she graduated from Woodstock, she went to Darjeeling to teach in a school established by tea planters. One of her students later became a noted leader in Parliament in London.

THE McGAVRANS

The second family line that formed Donald McGavran's missionary heritage was of Scotch-Irish ancestry. Solid historical information begins on June 4, 1755, when seventeen-year-old John McGavran I (1737–1769) purchased one hundred acres of land in Maryland. Before that date, several McGavran

[11] Middleton, 3–4.

traditions say one thing, while some say another. The threads of the big story are clear, while the fine threads are a bit fuzzy.[12]

The most probable tradition assumes that the McGavrans were a small Protestant branch of the McGauran or McGovern or McGarran (the name is spelled different ways) clan located in northwest County Cavan in Ireland. They intermarried with Presbyterians, Quakers, and Huguenots, the latter being expelled from France in 1685 and migrating to Ireland. Experts in weaving wool and flax, the family excelled in the manufacture of linen. Sometime between 1690 and 1754, some McGavrans immigrated to the New World. Substantial tradition says that a McGavran married a refugee girl, maybe Dorcas Delilah, who worked as a tutor to a family in Baltimore, Maryland. Roman Catholics in Ireland or France had blown up her father, perhaps a Huguenot, while meeting with other Protestants under a bridge. His widow and family embarked immediately for the New World. On the long voyage, all but the young girl of about sixteen years old died. After arriving in Baltimore, she became a tutor for a wealthy family and met and married a young McGavran, most likely John McGavran's father Mark.

John McGavran I married Margaret Hill, a Baptist woman, in 1760. They had four children—Mary (b. 1761), Margaret (b. 1763), Mark (b. 1766), and William (b. 1768). Upon John's death in 1769, his wife was left with 178 acres of land, some woolen and linen cloth, a log cabin, and a shop most likely in the village of Taylorville, Maryland.

The youngest son William was well educated. Like his namesake, grandfather William Hill, he was a fine penman and a teacher of calligraphy. His family attended Harford County Baptist Church. In time, he met Ann Thompson who lived on a nearby farm. The McGavran and Thompson farms were less than sixty miles from Valley Forge. Ann's father, Thomas Thompson, had served in Washington's army during the War of the Revolution. About 1789, William and Ann were married. Four children were born to them before the turn of the century—Elizabeth (b. 1791), Mary (b. 1793), Sarah (b. 1795 or 96), and John, II (b. 1798). Four more sons and three more daughters would be born between 1802 and 1816.

The cluster of families that lived in Harford County included the McGavrans, Graftons, Thompsons, Bakers, and Lucys. Records of land sales and other agreements indicate these families intermarried on a regular basis. The Graftons were descended from the Duke of Grafton, an illegitimate son of Charles the Second of England. Samuel Howell Grafton (b. 1758) courted and married Mary McGavran, the sister of William. Other marriages occurred that are not important to relate at this point. However, sometime between 1784 and 1818, the cluster of families explored the

[12] This section is adapted from a family history written by Donald McGavran shortly before 1984. See Donald Anderson McGavran, *The McGavrans in America: A History of Two Hundred Years, 1755–1966*.

opportunity of moving west. Life was dangerous during this period of history. However, the wild life of the frontier called strongly to men, especially the opportunity to live life as one wished and to obtain land at reasonable cost. Mark McGavran, William Hill Grafton, William McGavran, Samuel Howell Grafton, Thomas Thompson, and Nathan Baker all appear to have gone to Ohio several times before the families moved in 1818.

The Lewis and Clark expedition caused an explosion of exploration into the western parts of the United States. Congress authorized the National Road in 1806, and it was started in 1808. It ran from Cumberland, Maryland, one hundred miles west of Baltimore, to Wheeling on the Ohio River. The road was completed between 1818 and 1825, just in time for the small cluster of families to move to Ohio and Virginia. They were not the only families to move west. By all accounts, the road was a success as thousands of easterners used the road, causing some eastern states to demand its building be stopped because it was draining all the populations out of the east.

Properties in Maryland were put up for sale and sold. History tells us that wagons were built, and great care was exercised in choosing what to take in just one wagon. Tools, furniture, utensils, clothing, bedding, and anything that could be useful for establishing a new home in a new land were loaded into the wagon. Since there were no nail factories west of Philadelphia, some families burned their houses and recovered the nails from the ashes to take along. Sales records from Harford County show that William McGavran sold his land in 1817, no doubt in preparation for the move to Ohio. Since William McGavran had five sons, part of his motivation to move was likely related to the hope that his sons could obtain land as they grew into manhood.

By summer 1818, William McGavran, his wife Ann Thompson, three unmarried daughters, and five sons were living on 115 acres of land in what is now Lee Township of Carroll County, Ohio. Their three married daughters—Elizabeth Magatoggan, Mary Lucy, and Sarah Hill—also came with them and settled on their own farms in the area. Wild game—deer, elk, rabbits, turkeys, wolves, cougars, and bears—was plentiful. The whole area was covered with forest—oaks, maples, blue gums, cherries, and elms—that had to be cleared so corn and wheat could be planted between the stumps. The first years found the family working on the essentials of farming. They looked after the animals, cared for crops in the summer, cut and stacked hay and wood for the long winter, spun thread, and weaved cloth. The evenings, particularly winter ones, allowed William to use his skills as a teacher with the family. As they sat around the fire in the big open fireplace at the end of the cabin, they read aloud and recited the Bible and the other few books they had brought along. John McGavran II learned long portions, maybe in entirety, of Milton's *Paradise Lost* by heart and was still reciting them to his grandson John G. McGavran between the years 1876 and 1885.

Strong Christian conviction is a characteristic of the McGavrans that began in the 1600s. During the Scotch Reformation of the sixteenth century, they left the Roman Catholic Church at great cost to become Bible-obeying Christians. Repeatedly they fought for their land and lives against the Roman Catholics in Ireland, notably between 1683 and 1686. Their old world heritage was one of ardent beliefs, which they were ready to endorse with their lives. Not surprisingly, the family held its Christian convictions fervently as they journeyed to the New World.

People who immigrated to Maryland in Colonial times were primarily Roman Catholic but became Anglican when Lord Baltimore did so. The McGavran's area of Maryland had no church. The Anglican Church of the area was miles away, so they counted themselves in general as Christians until John McGavran married Margaret Hill when she was just eighteen years old. The moving figure in the McGavran's becoming Baptist was most certainly Margaret's father, William Hill. The records of the Harford County Baptist Church before 1802 were destroyed in a fire, but it is probable that since Margaret Hill was a Baptist, so was her father. In all likelihood, he was a founding member of Harford County Baptist Church, organized in 1754, since it was the only Baptist church in northern Maryland at the time. Any Baptist family in north central Baltimore County in 1760 must have belonged to the Harford County Baptist Church. As William Hill was well educated, he may have been an elder of that church, helping to organize and build its first building, which endures to this day. John McGavran respected his father-in-law and surely followed his lead into the Baptist church. It is known that John McGavran owned a large Bible, a treasured possession, which he willed to his wife. Their son William and daughter Mary are on the 1802 role of the Harford County Baptist Church. As they moved west, they went as Baptists, but took another major step of Christian faith soon after settling in the west.

The small cluster of families relocated to Ohio County, Virginia, and eastern Ohio. There they encountered a new non-denominational movement, called the Restoration Movement. Thomas and Alexander Campbell had moved from Scotland and Ireland to western Pennsylvania. Although they were Presbyterians, they admitted Christians from a different denomination to communion and were disciplined by their presbytery. Their own study of Scripture led them to espouse believer's baptism, and they joined a Baptist church and started speaking in the small Baptist churches that were springing up. Over time, they found the Baptists were nearly as sectarian as the Presbyterians, so the Campbells started a non-denominational movement in an effort to restore the New Testament church. They refused to use denomination names—Presbyterian, Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Quaker, Roman Catholic—preferring to call themselves what the first followers of Christ did—Christian, Brethren, Disciples, or Followers. The new movement was in derision called "The Campbellite Movement," but it continued to expand.

The McGavrans, Graftons, and Thompsons discussed the views of this new movement at length. In 1836, Samuel Howell Grafton, William Hall Grafton, and his wife Nancy Baker Grafton became Restorationists and helped build a Christian church in New Cumberland. About 1836, William Hill Grafton donated a farm to Alexander Campbell to help start Bethany College. Some McGavrans also joined the Restoration Movement.

John McGavran II married Margaret Wiley in 1825. Eli, his first son and future grandfather to Donald McGavran, was born in 1826. Margaret's father owned a farm in Columbiana County, Ohio, just twenty-five miles from the William McGavran farm. When William McGavran died at age eighty-five in 1853, John II sold the McGavran farm and moved northeast, where he built a two-story log cabin on the west end of the Wiley farm. Eli completed high school, but afterward worked to put his younger brother William (b. 1833) through college. William took pre-med courses and wanted to be a doctor, but he started itinerate preaching among the Christian churches.

When the United States Civil War broke out in 1861, Eli and William enlisted. Eli joined the 115th regiment of the Ohio Infantry Volunteers, while William became a member of the navy. A year of medical training in college qualified him to be a surgeon's steward on the Steamship *Saratoga* that was assigned to the Mississippi Squadron. It was not long before both sons faced action.

As a wagoneer for his company, Eli encountered a Confederate soldier in eastern Tennessee. Both he and the confederate were mounted on horses and armed with pistols. They rapidly fired six times at each other, but fortunately none of the bullets hit man or horse. Loading revolvers in those days took time and effort. A soldier had to pour gun powder out of a powder horn, ram it into one chamber, put in a wad of paper, ram in a bullet, and roll the cylinder to the next chamber to do it all over again, six times in all. Glaring at each other in obvious frustration, they galloped off in opposite directions to load their guns out of danger. Sometime later, Eli was captured by the Confederates and spent months in a prison camp. Conditions in the camp were horrible, and he came out of the war a shattered man. He did recover enough to teach school and do light farm work, but the mental and physical impact of his imprisonment left scars that never healed. At the end of the war, Eli was thirty-nine years old and still single.

During the siege of Memphis, the *Saratoga* came under attack from shore batteries and blew up, hurling William into the Mississippi River. He spent several months in the hospital recovering from his wounds before being reassigned to the battleship *General Sherman*. At the close of the war, he was honorably discharged, but due to continuing problems related to his wounds and exposure suffered during the war, he died in 1865.

Among the members of the small cluster of families that relocated to Ohio and Virginia in 1818 was Samuel Howell Grafton. He had married Mary McGavran in 1784 and had a son William Hill Grafton, who was born

in 1787. As a young man, he staked out a farm just east of New Cumberland near the Ohio River Valley in 1808. It was to this farm that his mother and father, Samuel Howell and Mary McGavran Grafton, moved in 1818 when they were both about sixty years of age. William Hill Grafton eventually married his first cousin, Nancy Baker. They had many children, one of whom was Sarah Virginia Grafton (b. 1827), Donald McGavran's future grandmother. The Graftons joined forces with Alexander Campbell, and William Hill gave a farm to help build Bethany College to train future Christian Church leaders.

Sarah Grafton attended an academy for her education, but it is not known which one or where it was located. Her sisters all married well-respected men in New Cumberland, but Sarah remained unmarried, perhaps because she was her father's and mother's only care giver.

Sarah did have at least one suitor, the local Methodist pastor. Entries in her diary for 1858 and 1859 show she was desperately in love with him, but when he asked her to marry him, she said no. As a member of the Christian Church, she felt the Methodist pastor was too sectarian, and she just could not marry him. Yet, the flame of love kept burning in her heart for the pastor until he moved to another church. The fire then slowly burned out. The same diary recounts another desire in Sarah's heart—to be a missionary. She deeply wished to become a missionary and spread the gospel abroad. While she never was able to fulfill this desire, she must have instilled the same desire in her son and daughter, as they both became missionaries in India.[13]

At the end of the Civil War, Sarah heard that Eli had just been discharged and was home. She wrote asking him to come for a visit and to bring "Cousin William, whom we shall ask to preach for us." As love would have it, a courtship ensued, and the next year, 1866, Sarah and Eli were married. He was forty and Sarah thirty-nine. Since Sarah's parents were seventy-nine and seventy-six and needed looking after, Eli moved to New Cumberland where he served as a member of the Grand Army of the Republic's New Cumberland Post.

John Grafton McGavran, Donald McGavran's father, was born to Eli and Sarah on August 12, 1867. Two years later, Mary Theodora was born on October 15, 1869. Tragedy struck the family in 1873 when Sarah, her father, and mother all died the same year. Eli was barely able to hold his emotions together. He asked Grafton relatives to look after young John and Mary Theodora, at the time nine and seven years old, so he could continue to teach school. Throughout this difficult time, God used the experience for good. John and Mary Theodora moved in with their grandparents. Since John II

[13] The diary of Sarah Grafton McGavran is in the archives of the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia. Her children (John and Mary) preserved it, and Donald McGavran gave it to the Medical College.

knew the Bible and long portions of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it is probable that he influenced both of them to trust God with their futures.

Eventually Eli married Lucinda Painter in 1876, and next to the two-story log cabin where his parents still lived, he built a frame house into which they moved. John and Mary Theodora grew up running back and forth between both homes. They attended Guilford Elementary School and Lisbon High School, which were just two and six miles away respectively. Eli resolved to give them both a good education, and John G. McGavran attended Oberlin College and Bethany College, while Mary Theodora went to Hiram College and the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia.

JOHN GRAFTON AND HELEN ANDERSON McGAVRAN

John G. McGavran was seventeen when he entered Oberlin College in 1885. The school was just eighty miles from the farm where he was raised. Then in 1886, he stayed out of college for two years to teach school. It is possible he needed the money for his education, or maybe since he was young, he missed his family. Perhaps he just wanted to gain some experience. Whatever his reasoning, in 1889, he matriculated at Bethany College sixty miles to the south, perhaps selling some farmland to finance the remainder of his and his sister's education. At Bethany, he became known as "Fighting Mac," but no one knows exactly why he received this nickname. The name may have stuck due to his Scotch-Irish fighting roots, or perhaps it was the result of his strong character. John graduated in June 1891 as the valedictorian of his class. That same year, his sister Mary Theodora entered the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

John considered continuing his education to become a doctor. However, Archibald McLean, president of Bethany College, challenged him to consider missionary service. McLean was one of the first people to raise concerns for missions within the Restoration Movement. In fact, while John was attending Bethany, Archibald McLean resigned as president to become the first Corresponding Secretary of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society. No doubt, John had listened to numerous passionate sermons extolling the virtues of missionary service given by McLean. The inward call of God, the memory of his mother's desire to be a missionary, the personal passion of McLean—all of these had fueled John's decision to follow his mentor into missionary service.[14]

[14] For a sample of the messages preached by Archibald McLean that moved John G. McGavran to dedicate his life for missionary service in India, see A. McLean, *Missionary Addresses* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Publishing Company, 1985). Pictures of four missionaries are found on page 66 of this book under the title of "Workers in India." The four workers include G. L. Wharton, W. E. Rambo, J. G. McGavran, and M. D. Adams.

Little did he know it, but John G. McGavran was heading to India toward the end of what Kenneth Latourette later labeled the great century (1815–1914), for it was during these years that Christianity truly became a worldwide movement. The expansion of the church in the 1800s was related to British and American expansion and the spread of Western culture. The next fifty years were to see multitudinous changes in nations and missions, but that was still a half-century away when John G. McGavran set out for India.

On September 19, 1891, after bidding goodbye to his sister, neighbors, and friends at church, John McGavran sailed for India. He took the train to New York City, and then steamers to London and on to Bombay. He was twenty-four years old. Once in India, he traveled an additional four hundred miles by train to Harda, a town of about six thousand people located in the northwest corner of Central Provinces. It was a daring adventure, as those who went to India from the United States were rare.

Missionaries from the Foreign Christian Missionary Society had entered Harda just nine years earlier in 1882. When G. L. Wharton, the pioneer missionary, began the work of the American Christian Churches and Churches of Christ in India, he found that missionaries from other denominations and societies had already taken up posts in the larger district headquarters. Since missionaries felt it was wrong to minister in the same place, he sought a town that was unreached and determined that the Harda Tahsil, with a population of 100,000 and located on a railroad, was just right. Each district in India has several Tahsils or headquarters, similar to county seats. Harda was the Tahsil for one of the sub-districts in the Central Provinces. The Harda district covered 1,200 miles (thirty miles north and south by forty miles east and west).

The valley floor of the Narbadda River created a fertile plain that covered two-thirds of the Harda district. Cotton, wheat, garbanzo beans, dal (lentils), and other grains grew well in the rich, black soil. Villages and towns of a hundred to a thousand residents spotted the region. The language was Hindi, but many families in the moneyed classes spoke Marathi.

Mr. Wharton met John McGavran in Bombay and accompanied him to Harda, where they were met by a small group of missionaries and a few tribal workers. The missionaries lived in bungalows in the railway community made up of Englishmen and Anglo-Indian people, and John was assigned a room in the Jackson bungalow. Sunday worship was held in the front room of the Wharton bungalow.

Immediately, John was put to work in the dispensary mixing medicines, visiting temples, and overseeing the mission school. It was the first public school in Harda, and his teaching and college experience made him the prime person to oversee the education of the students. Little time was available to study Hindi, but he quickly picked up a sufficient amount to allow conversation.

In the spring of 1882, another Christian mission station located in Bilaspur urgently requested that John come to supervise the woodcutting

for constructing the first Christian hospital in the area. Bilaspur was four hundred miles from Harda, but the need was urgent. John relocated and soon assembled a work force of laborers and carts to obtain the sal logs from the jungle. Sal trees yield teak like timber and are the most commercially important source of timber in India. After obtaining the suitable government permits, John had the trees felled, trimmed, cut, and loaded into the carts. Malignant malaria was prevalent in the deep jungles, and John did not realize the need to boil drinking water scrupulously. It would be another five years, 1897, before Sir Ronald Ross would connect malaria with mosquitoes. Thus, as might be expected, John came down with a high fever and became delirious. Since he was susceptible to infection by dysentery, diarrhea, or typhoid germs, the workers loaded him into a cart, which jostled him thirty-five miles back to Bilaspur. He was unconscious most of the trip. A female missionary doctor despaired for his life but gave him excellent care. In the providence of God, he began to recover. In late May or early June, when he was finally well enough to travel, the missionaries sent him by train to Darjeeling via Calcutta, a trip of seven hundred miles. Darjeeling is seven thousand feet above sea level, and in the cool mountain air, he soon regained his health.

While recuperating, he met and befriended James Henry Anderson, a missionary with the BMS. By this time, 1892, James Anderson was a fifty-eight-year-old veteran missionary. Darjeeling was the hill station where Europeans who lived in Calcutta and Bengal went in the hot summers to enjoy the cool climate. The Andersons were there for a short vacation. Their daughter Isabella had married a Christian Church missionary named George Jackson who served in Bilaspur. James Anderson had been loaned to the Christian Church by the BMS in the late 1880s and lived in Bilaspur a short time. He was very familiar with both the work and the missionaries in the area, and welcomed John G. McGavran lovingly.

Over the summer as he recuperated, John began to spend a great deal of time with Helen Anderson, then twenty-two years old. He found her to be lovely, intelligent, and delightful, but he did not say anything about his growing affections to her. During those years, the British ruled India, and British missionaries regarded American missionaries as of lower status. John may have felt insecure because Helen was British, and he was American. For whatever reason, he kept quiet about his feelings for her and simply enjoyed her company. In his quiet moments, he did begin to dream about the possibility of Helen becoming his wife, but he left Darjeeling in July 1892 without getting her address. In time, the Andersons also left the hill county and returned to their station in Bengal, separating John and Helen by hundreds of miles.

Back in Harda, John returned to managing the school, preaching in towns and villages, assisting at the hospital, and studying Hinduism and Hindi. Ten months slipped by before he found out that the Andersons had

returned to England. He obtained Helen Anderson's address and wrote to her on May 29, 1893. Not feeling comfortable in addressing her with the customary "Dear," he addressed the letter to "Miss Anderson." Trying not to appear presumptuous, he asked permission to continue to write to her. When she received the letter, Nellie, as she was then called, answered at once, saying she did not think any future correspondence would be profitable or a good way to get acquainted. John wrote back on June 14 of that year saying that since she felt that way, he would not write any more. Of course, he wanted to continue writing and felt badly that Helen had not responded more positively.

In an effort to forget about Helen, he threw himself into the work at Harda for the remainder of 1893. Fifteen missionaries of the Christian Churches lived in Harda, Bina, Bilaspur, and a few more stations. Their annual convention took place in Harda in November, and it was decided that Harda had too many missionaries. The mission wanted to expand its impact into the native state of Kawardha, some sixty miles west of Bilaspur and thirty miles west of Mungeli. John was selected to relocate to Mungeli with instructions to investigate Kawardha and obtain land for a mission bungalow and workers quarters. In due time, he went to Balispur by train, then by foot and oxcart to Mungeli and Kawardha.

Amidst all of his work and travel, John could not put Helen out of his mind. On February 11, 1894, he boldly wrote to her, addressing his letter, "Dear Miss Anderson." This time he said she was the most wonderful woman he had ever met and asked again for permission to continue corresponding with her. Reading between the lines, Helen clearly understood his intentions. She sent a return letter asking what took him so long to write again, as she had been waiting for eight months. Correspondence ensued and sometime in fall of 1894, they became engaged. It would be one more year, however, before they were married on October 26, 1895. In the meanwhile, there was work to be done.

While exploring the opportunity for a mission work in Kawardha, John met and befriended the raja, a local nobleman. Although the raja was friendly and welcomed the Christian Church mission, he indicated he would not give them free land. They could, of course, purchase land if they wished. The Hindus did not want another religion in their town, so any land the mission purchased would, of necessity, be outside the town. Evangelistic touring brought John to Kawardha several times, during which he found five possible locations to build a bungalow.

After two years in Harda, John was an experienced evangelist. Evangelistic touring, as the missionaries called it, was typically done in the cool season between October and March. John and Hiralal, his native helper, traveled to various villages in the area of Mungeli and Kawardha. They either walked or used an ox-drawn Tonga, a two-wheeled cart with a canvas top over two seats. Travel by Tonga was slow going, between two to four miles

an hour depending on conditions of the road. Piled high on one Tonga were all of the supplies—tents, beds, chairs, tables, boxes, and suitcases—while the missionaries rode in another one or just walked. Camp was established as near a river or talao (small lake or estuary sometimes spelled *talaus*) as possible to easily obtain water. The presence of visitors and the work of setting up camp attracted curious onlookers who were invited back in the evening for a meeting. After lighting some lanterns, John and his helper would begin singing. When people arrived, he read the Bible, preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and invited them to become Christ's disciples. Many variations of evangelistic touring occurred, but generally, this is the way evangelistic methodology was used at the time.

In the 1890s, many villages in India were fringed with vast forests or jungles in which tigers, panthers, wolves, pythons, elk, spotted deer, red dogs, and wolves could be found. Herds of black buck and wild pig roamed the fields eating the crops.

Not only was it dangerous to move about near the forests, but also the villagers often harbored superstitions about the unknown. Once, while camped out on an evangelistic tour, John shot three ducks, which fell into a nearby talao. He asked some of the people who were watching him to swim out and get the ducks. Acting fearful, they refused to do so, saying, "There is a dev, a god, in the talao. He will pull under any man who ventures to swim there." John inquired about possible alligators, snakes, and other potential sources for such a legend. The people said that no one had ever seen the dev, but they were certain one lived in the lake. The thought came to John to swim out and retrieve the duck to show the villagers that such a god really did not exist. By this time, a crowd had gathered around the lake, and they continued to beg him not to swim out into the lake. "The British will blame us for your death," they pleaded. However, John assured them that there were enough witnesses at hand who would vouch that he was warned. They still implored, indicating that about a year earlier, a man took an elephant into the talao to drink, and both the elephant and the man were pulled under and never came up. Since John knew it was nearly impossible to drown an elephant, he felt even more certain that this was just a legend with no basis in fact. Even though the people tried to dissuade him, he laughed and waded into the talao, commenting that there was no dev and that he was not afraid. When he reached the deeper water, about fifteen yards from shore, John noticed a slimy weed wrapping around his legs and arms. Growing within a foot or two of the surface, the talao was full of a fine-tentacled green weed, which would certainly pull a person down if his legs were caught in them. The villager's superstition was not so silly after all, and was well grounded in fact. He then swam back to the shore and found a plank of wood, which, upon returning to the talao, he pushed in front of him. By resting most of his weight on the plank, he was able to swim on the surface of the water, reach the ducks, and bring them back to shore. On the way back, he took a sample

of the weed to show to the villagers. It did not do any good. He was shocked to find that the villagers did not follow his own logic. Instead of proving that no god existed in the talao, John's brave act simply led the villagers to believe that he was a greater god than the one in the talao. To his horror, they brought a chicken and sacrificed it to him! If any people needed to be converted to Christ, it was the people of Kawardha.

A sequel to this story took place about twenty years later. Donald's brother Edward had never heard the entire story from his father, but got the full report on a hunting trip with an associate who had been with John when he shot the ducks and retrieved them from the talao. As it turned out, Edward and the associate were not far from that particular talao, which was called by the villagers the Enchanted Lake. Talaos are often places of worship for neighboring villages, and temples with intricate carvings usually are built with steps leading down to the lake. Outside the temple proper are altars and idols before which offerings and sacrifices are laid. Asking around, Edward and his companion found that this particular talao was well known in the area where they were hunting. Venturing to the talao, they found that it was still very much the center of community life in those parts of India, and looking around they noticed that some of the altars and idols had sacrifices and offerings before and on them. One altar, with no apparent idol, had an unusual amount of offerings. Edward asked a local priest what god or goddess that specific altar honored. His reply was that it was "to a white god who was here twenty years ago and who went into the Enchanted Lake and came out alive."[15]

Continued ministry in Kawardha was not to be, unfortunately. Famine conditions prevailed throughout India, and thousands of children were orphaned as parents and extended families died. At the annual meeting of the mission in the fall of 1894, it was decided that orphanages were the priority. Kawardha would have to be released. John disagreed and told the other missionaries he did not think giving up Kawardha was God's will for his life. His twelve fellow missionaries felt otherwise, and since he was the newest, youngest, and only dissenter, he decided the counsel of his colleagues was surer ground. Accepting their counsel, John relocated to Damoh in December 1894 to start an orphanage. One hundred years later, Kawardha was still unoccupied by missionaries.

No sooner had John taken up residence in Damoh did he experience the return of his old fever. Fortunately, the fever subsided within a week, and he was able to supervise construction of the first grass-roofed buildings for the orphans, missionaries, and workers. The Church Missionary Society was able to lease two hundred acres of wasteland southeast of Damoh for thirty

[15] This particular story is told in several places often with slightly different details. This version is a compilation of two different versions. One version is found in the *McGavran Family History* and the other in *McGavran Family Stories*, 200–206.

years from the British Deputy Commissioner of the Damoh District. The lease included an option to renew the lease, and that turned Damoh into one of the main stations for the mission.

In early spring, the Rambos, a missionary family from the United States, joined the work in Damoh. They moved into the first shed-like building with a grass roof that John had constructed. Soon Mr. Rambos decided the grass hut was not adequate and determined to build a two-story residence of the red sandstone found near Damoh. John scoured the nearby jungles and wasteland for stone, lime, and sand to make mortar for building the house. He hired laborers to cut the trees down, saw them into proper sized timber, and cart them to the building site. It took time, but the imposing house was built. People began calling it "The Castle." John, two single female missionaries, and the Rambos family lived in this house together for several months.

Multitudes of orphans were roaming the land, many dying like flies. They kept pouring into the orphanage. Writing in his diary, John noted, "The boys arrived today. They are all too far gone. Most of them will be dead before morning."[16] Orphans were gathered up and put on trains, sometime from as far away as three hundred miles. Several usually died along the trip to Damoh, but thankfully, most were saved. It was not always easy. Years later, Donald McGavran related the following story, as told to him by his father.

> One seven-year-old boy came in, and when a plate of rice and lentils was put before him, he just looked wearily at it. He was too far gone to eat. John had a sudden idea. He told another boy to try to snatch the plate away. The seven-year-old fought him off angrily—and then started to eat with relish. After that for several days the regular routine was to excite him with attempted stealing of his food and then watch him eat. He survived and became a teacher in the mission schools at Harda.[17]

Orphans were housed in the grass-roofed sheds. The eight feet high walls were made of sun dried bricks. Most sheds had thatched roofs, but a few had tiles. Consistent maintenance was necessary, or the roofs would leak badly in the raining season.

All of the missionaries battled constant sickness. One or more of them had a fever, dysentery, or some other illness. Some spent days in bed with high fever, while others had to travel to the mission station located in Bina approximately one hundred fifty miles away. Railroads were just reaching the Central Provinces, and the closest train station was in Saugar, fifty-five miles from Damoh. One of the Rambo children named Victor became seriously ill when his father was away from Damoh. Thinking Victor was going to die, John rented an ox cart from a merchant and with a horse, set out with Mrs. Rambo and Victor to Saugar. They came to a river, but the horse would

[16] Quoted by Donald McGavran in *McGavran Family History*, 31.

[17] *McGavran Family History*, 31.

not cross. Mrs. Rambo and Victor were transferred to the ox cart, and they eventually reached Saugar on the evening of the second day. From there, they took a train to Bina where a government doctor, a civil surgeon, lived. With Victor safe in the doctor's hands, John returned to Damoh.

The wedding of John and Helen finally took place on October 26, 1895. Anticipating his bride's arrival, in early October, John built a twelve by fifteen foot grass hut with a thatch roof and sides. It was a crude home, but it was livable in the cool season. Then in late October, he traveled by oxcart to Saugar and took the train to Bombay. Helen made the trip to India from England with her older sister Edith Wood. John and Helen were married in Bombay and left for their honeymoon in Pune. The honeymoon was not typical, because John came down with malarial fever. Helen spent the bulk of their honeymoon nursing him back to health. With John well, they took the train to Harda, then Bina, and on to Saugar. From there, they traveled by ox Tonga to Damoh and their grass hut.

Four months before the wedding, John's sister Mary Theodora graduated from the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia in June 1895. After a year's internship, she sailed for India on September 6, 1896, and arrived in time to deliver John and Helen's first child (Grace) in Damoh on November 21, 1896.

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.