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Donald McGavran
Fuller Theological Seminary

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**"The Winnable World": Session Two
Manhattan Christian College, October 1981**

Donald McGavran

In 1981, Donald McGavran presented a series of lectures at Manhattan Christian College. Over the next few journals, we will publish this series in a continuing effort to honor McGavran and his legacy of Church Growth Missiology. This is the second in the series. —Editor

This article has been transcribed from the taped lectures.

Christian Friends, I was thinking this evening, as we sang that magnificent hymn of Charles Wesley, 'And Can It be that I Could Gain Interest in the Savior's blood,' you remember the last verse, it runs like this: "No condemnation, now I dread, Jesus, and all in him is mine. Alive in Him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown through Christ my own."

And I was thinking as we sang that verse and the other wonderful verses, of the uncounted millions who will never sing that, and whose hearts will not rejoice and who will never know that gospel. And maybe of the hundreds of thousands who will know it, because young men and young women like yourselves from Christian colleges all across this land and from churches all around this world will stream out, commanded by Christ to carry the good news to the ends of the earth. That's the only hope for hundreds of millions of people. So when you sing these hymns of the Christian church, when you sing these hymns that put to music the great themes of the gospel, remember ... remember those who are living without Christ, and who will never know him.

Now I am coming tonight to the second session of the "Missions Emphasis Week" to speak to you as a fourth generation man of the Christian Churches of Christ. My great grandfather

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gave a farm to Alexander Campbell, to help him start Bethany College. My grandfather was a member of the Christian Church at Liptnowhower. My father was a member of that church and went out as a missionary to India. I, myself, went out as a missionary of the Christian Churches, the Churches of Christ, in 1923, and I am still a member of the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches in California. I have a rather interesting arrangement, Mrs. McGavran and I belong to four churches, and we attend them in rotation so that we are blessed by a number of congregations.

Now the Christian Churches (Churches of Christ), have tried to be simple, New Testament churches. That was our plea. That was our appeal. We said to people, 'go to the New Testament. See the pattern that is there displayed, and duplicate it in your churches. Where the book speaks, we speak. Where the book is silent, we are silent.' And other people turned that around and said, 'Where the book speaks, we have nothing to say, we just obey. Where the book doesn't speak, where the book is silent, we speak.' And that's an excellent pattern ... that's an excellent pattern.

As I travel across this country, I see a great many of churches that do not call themselves Christian Churches or Churches of Christ, there Community Churches, there Bible Churches, there this and that, but they are also following the New Testament pattern. But they also call themselves New Testament churches. And that plea, made for the most rapidly growing brotherhood in North America for many years.

The marks of our movement, or the marks of our movement, are congregational autonomy (we found that in the New Testament), communing every Sunday (we found that in the New Testament), elders as leaders in the church (we found that in the New Testament), baptism by immersion (we found that in the New Testament). That's a good pattern. It's a simple thing. It's the thing that people gravitate as they take the Bible as their rule of faith and practice.

This evening, I am going to suggest that New Testament churches—New Testament churches—have another and more distinguishing mark than that. New Testament churches have another and more distinguishing mark than that. New Testament churches practice safeless, effective evangelism. New Testament churches are constantly engaged in missions. New Testament churches are vigorously growing churches. And if a church has all those other marks, but isn't a vigorously growing, constantly proclaiming, engaged in missions, congregation, I have serious doubts as to whether it's a real New Testament

church. Think that over. You'll find that that's a startling thought.

Now the churches of the New Testament are good models for churches in Kansas, and in California, and in Kenya. They were started by the apostles themselves. Many of the churches described in the Acts of the Apostles, had seen and heard the Lord Jesus himself. They had learned from his very lips. They had seen the risen and reigning King. They were committed churches. The churches of the New Testament can therefore be seen as a good pattern for our churches in America, and indeed around the world.

Let us examine them this evening at that most important point—growth and multiplication. Had the churches of the New Testament not grown and multiplied exceedingly, Christianity would have died in the very land in which it was born. God wants his church to grow. Remember that. God wants his church to grow. Growth is normal. Evangelism is the life-blood of every true church. The saved tell others of their salvation. There's a wonderful passage in 1 Peter 2:11. Where it is written clearly, 'And you ...' 'And you ...' 'And you ...' 'And you are a chosen people, you're an elite—your not just ordinary people—you're a chosen people. You are a royal priesthood.' Now the priests are those who have access to God. They speak directly to God. That's us. We are a priesthood, and not just an ordinary priesthood, but a royal priesthood, the people of God. And then that verse goes on to say what the people of God are to do—that they may declare His praises.' Now you don't declare praise in a 'whisper.' You don't cough and apologize and say, 'Well, you know I really ought to tell you something.' You DECLARE His praises—that's a strong word! Christians are those who declare God's praise, so that the world may hear, so that Christ may be made known.

The saved tell others about their salvation. Of course there are cultural and linguistic barriers there that have to be overcome, but God gives Christians power to overcome barriers. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, "Men of Cyprus and Cyrene, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Greeks of the Lord Jesus.' You see, up to that time, the Christians had been stopped by cultural barriers. They spoke to good people, decent people. How could they speak to pig-eating Gentiles, who had bacon for breakfast? Disgusting! Disgusting! How could they speak to them about the Savior? But 'on coming to Antioch, the men of Cyprus and Cyrene' overcame that barrier. I don't know how they did it, but they did it (A criminus history that we all don't pay attention to). And they spoke to the Greeks also, and many of them believed.

And there was great joy in that city. All this speaks directly to Christians in this community, and in this culture. It says to us that the normal Christian church goes out away from the building—away from the college buildings too—to tell others of Christ, to proclaim the Savior. It begs its friends and fellow citizens to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. It persuades them to become followers of the Redeemer who gave His life for them. It persuades them ... You know, persuasion and counter-persuasion is just one of the facts of life. I buy a new razor and it gives me a wonderful shave, and I go personally to persuade someone to go buy the same, I want them to get the same, smooth shave. Yes, we persuade others. If we really believe anything, we persuade them. So Christianity builds many believers and multiplies churches throughout the land. The churches in Judea were Judean churches. Those in Samaria were thoroughly Samaritan. Those in Corinth were thoroughly Corinthian. But they were all basically and independently Christian.

Now let us look at some of the evidence that the churches described in the New Testament were greatly growing churches. I don't want you to take this on my authority, just because, you know, I say it. I want you to read the New Testament for yourself and see there that you can't escape it once you've seen it.

Early morning on Pentecost, the church consisted of exactly one-hundred and twenty believers. That is all. During that day, three-thousand more were added to the Lord. Three-thousand in one day—what tremendous growth! What tremendous growth! Then we read that the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Addition took place on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, Friday, even on Saturday, and on Sunday. Acts 4:4 tells us that those who heard the word, 'believed.'

And the number of the men came to five thousand. One hundred twenty, three thousand, and a number of weeks later, the number came to five thousand. Well, if there were five thousand men there, my guess is that there were at least five thousand women, and probably ten thousand minor children. By that time, the Christians numbered twenty thousand communities. That's five, fourteenree, and follows. And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. When they were added they didn't come in ... dribble in, a man here, a woman here, and a young person someplace else. They came by multitudes! Now how many is a multitude? Well, I don't know. There's a bit of a multitude here this evening. But a multitude might be smaller than that. Perhaps, you have a group of fifteen here, twenty yonder, five someplace else,

and three. But multitudes of both men and women were added to the Lord. Growth like this took place in spite of beatings. Christians got beaten up for becoming Christians. And arrests. They were called before the Sanhedren and told, 'never to say another word about Jesus to anyone. You here me!' And nevertheless, the church grew. There under constant threat of severe persecution, Acts 5:42 tells us that despite all this fierce opposition, every day in the temple and at home, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Messiah. Now you have to understand that—the ordinary Christians were not there in the temple, preaching like I'm preaching to a skeptic audience, sitting in nice pews, while I have a pulpit. Oh no! Peter was not doing that. Peter was standing there in the temple, and there was a crowd passing in front of him, and sometimes two or three people would stop and listen to him, and sometimes fifteen or twenty would stop, and some of them heard him telling them about Jesus, and some laughed, and some of them threw tomatoes or rotten eggs (I don't think they had tomatoes in those days, it must have been rotten eggs) and went on, and said, 'This baboon, what's he talking about?' Peter went right on telling them about Jesus, declaring the praise of God, declaring the word—that was the New Testament church. Are we New Testament churches? Do you have the same kind of conviction? Do you have the same kind of enthusiasm? Do you members of the faculty count on generating that kind of enthusiasm in this group of students? Those were New Testament churches.

The sixth chapter of Acts records that in those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. How are those last few words significant? 'A great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.' That is of a particular interest, for it tells of a sudden turning of a new segment of society - the Levites, the priestly caste. Now Levites did not intermarry with other Jews. Levites did not marry daughters of Benjamin, or daughters of Judah. Levites married only daughters of Levi. Because in order to be a priest, a priest had to have an impeccable, Levitical ancestry on both sides for twenty generations. And if a Levite were to marry a daughter of Judah, his children could never have been priests. So Levites only married priests. And as the church started to expand, I expect the gospel was heard by the Levites right and left. But they were scared to become Christians and unite with these people, lest, you know, they damage their racial purity. And then the pressures got so great and the convictions got so great in the Levitical group, that they said,

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'Hey, let a thousand of us become Christians all at the same time, and then we can go on marrying Levites as long as we wish. And we'll still be pure Levites.' Well, that's what they did. And a great company of the Levites became Christians.

You see after they were baptized and became Christians, they of course continued to marry Levites only. The Bible is quite clear that whom you marry is your own business. Europeans largely marry Europeans. Syrian Christians largely marry Syrians. Hispanics marry largely Hispanics. That is a personal matter. Of course believers should marry believers. The Bible is quite clear on that point. All Christians will worship in churches, from which no one—Christian or non-Christian—is excluded or barred. But like the Levites, most Christians will marry according to their linguistic and ethnic yearnings. The Church of Jesus Christ must constantly believe that it is God's will for every ethnic segment of society to turn to Jesus, just like the Levites did. Because in him alone is eternal life. Through him alone, can men and women come to the Father. Whether my son or your sons—or sons and daughters of the great Portuguese, the French Canadians, Koreans, no one comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ. He only can confer eternal life. Rivers of eternal life must flow in every people, in every segment of society in the world.

The phrase, "panta ta ethnee," occurs again and again in the New Testament. God, as he revealed his will in the Old and New Testaments, always intended that all peoples should be saved. He said to Abraham, way back there (you read about it in the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis), "in thee shall all peoples of the earth" will be blessed. He was referring, of course, to the coming of the Lord. Multitudes—We have many minorities here in the United States. If I were to start to name them, it would take me a long time to name all of the minorities here in the United States. And it is God's will that multitudes of the minorities should believe, be baptized, count themselves Christians, and follow obediently in the Way. They will continue to speak their own language, and read the Bible to which they are accustomed. Vegetarians will remain vegetarians. Taco-eaters will continue to be taco-eaters. And Chinese will continue to eat Chinese food.

The book of Acts tells of many trials and hardships, which befell the New Testament churches. But in chapter nine and verse thirty-one we read, "So church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria, had peace and was built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit was multiplied." We read earlier about more than ever believers were "added to the Lord." The process of addition came. And became

multiplication. The five thousand men had become a Christian community of twenty-thousand. Then in a few years, perhaps two-hundred thousand or more. My friends, if we in Kansas are New Testament churches, we must be multiplying, growing churches. And the body of Christ must increase. And Christian churches and churches of Christ, and Christian colleges and seminaries, must be concerned *that* the church become a growing, multiplying church. Otherwise, the enormous multitudes outside the church will never hear.

As I walked down here from the Ramada Inn, I passed a group of Indian students, who study here in the University I spoke. And I said to myself as I passed them (they were talking a South Indian language, if they'd been talking Hindi I would've stopped and talked with them. But I don't speak South Indian: *ta lego atomo*). And so I came on here. And as I did so, I said to myself, "those students will not be in that meeting tonight." How I wish that they had heard Charles Wesley's great hymn. How I wish they had heard that Bible reading you gave us a moment ago. How I wish that their attention could be focused on the Savior. But it never will be, unless Churches of Christ become proclaimers of the Word, declarers of the praise of God the Father, Almighty!

It is clear that New Testament churches were filled with ordinary Christians, who testified to Christ effectively and constantly. Ordinary Christians. Remember that the great booth of the church, as it broke out of Jerusalem, and multiplied across the hills of Judea, that was done not just by ordinary Christians, that was done by refugee Christians. You read about it in Acts eight, four and following. The story is quite clear: Saul burst upon the church in a flurry of persecution. He entered household after household. He beat men, he insulted women, he ruined possessions, he burnt homes. Have you ever seen a beaten man? Red stripes across the back where the stick took it. Beating and bloody. And ribs occasionally broken. And kidneys damaged. Broken. That's what happened. And it says that the Christians, the ordinary Christians, all fled from Jerusalem.

It takes a lot to drive people out of their homes. It would take a lot to drive the people of Manhattan out of their homes. They'd resist very vigorously. But if the persecution were severe enough, they would leave. That's what those Christians did in Jerusalem. And they fled out across the Judean hills. They didn't flee like we would flee. If we fled, you know, we would just get in the car, and put a heavy foot on the accelerator and vaaaa-hoooom off we go. They didn't do that. Those beaten men tracked down the long hill, and then trekked up the other hill.

And way back there in the country, someplace, a nephew might come to his uncle's home. And when his uncle opened the door and saw this—a bloody, battered man, and frightened woman carry a couple of little children— he said to them, "what on earth has happened!" And the nephew would say, "Well, uncle, we're Christians. And a terrible persecution has burst upon us. And they came to my house. And, Uncle, they beat me up terribly, and they insulted my wife, and my kids were scared to death. And they burnt the house. And we didn't have any place to go. So we came here." And the uncle would take them in and wash their wounds, put them to bed. And in the morning when they felt better, they would be talking. And the nephew would be saying, "Uncle, I told you yesterday that we were Christians. Remember? I want you to become a Christian too." And the uncle would look at him and say, "Are you crazy? You became a Christian and got beaten up. Your possessions were ruined. And here you are a refugee and you want me to become a Christian! You're crazy." And the nephew would say, "No, uncle, I am not crazy. I am not crazy. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. And he gives great power. And all the agnoma, I am not all that sorry about it. And, Uncle, I want you to be his follower too. When he comes back, it's going to be wonderful. I want you to stand with me." He was preaching the gospel. That's what preaching the gospel means, my friends. And that's what you and I have got to do.

Evangelism has ceased to be what high-powered evangelists and highly paid pastors do on special occasions. Evangelism is what ordinary Christians (many of them students) do—led by the Holy Spirit. That is the New Testament pattern. If we do that, then it is quite possible that our churches will multiply. And out beyond our shores—China, and India, and Indonesia, and Africa—are waiting for the gospel, hands outstretched across the sea, begging us to come over and help them.

Now I want you to ponder this fact. It is normal for the church to grow. It is normal to evangelize. Mission is a normal activity of true churches. Now it isn't a normal activity for phony churches. It's not a normal activity of our 'soft' churches. It's a normal activity of true, living churches. Slow growth is not normal. Slow growth is a common disease of a church. A lot of churches suffer from this disease of slow growth. Fortunately, however, while it is quite common, it is easily cured and seldom fatal. God wants his church to grow. The Lord adds to the church. On occasion, he multiplies the church. It is common practice of New Testament churches to go out in communities who do not yet know salvation and tell them of the one sure

way—the *one sure way*—to life! And light. Christ is the light of the nations. Isaiah forty-nine, six, reads, "I will make you (you won't make your self) ... I will make you a light to all other peoples." All the tribes, and castes, and racial groups, in the whole wide world will hear through Christians. That's God's intent.

It is Satan who persuades churches that their chief task is to gather for worship, and sing God's praises, and partake of the communion. Now the worship of God is certainly one duty of Christians, and one of their great joys. But it must never be considered their only duty. Or even their chief duty and occupation. Christians are to proclaim the good news. That is their chief duty. When they carry out that duty, persuasively, sensitively, empathetically, with great conviction, then God blesses their labor. Believers are the more multiplied and there is great joy in the land.

When men and women, boys and girls become Christians, obey Jesus Christ in all things, live according to the directions given so clearly in the Bible, then not only do they receive eternal life, but listen, they receive *abundant* life here and now. Then the family benefits, the community benefits, the problems of the nation are solved, and rivers of righteousness, and peace, and goodwill, start to flow throughout the land. It is necessary to remember always that God's instrument for bringing social advance, justice, righteousness, and social structures (which give the poor and oppressed a chance) ... God's instrument is the church. When huge numbers had become Christians, then, those who were Christians (not others) had all things in common; And those same churchman started taking care of their poor churchman.

Whenever churches multiply, their multitudes hear God's Word, and come to believe that God wants a just society. Churches are where God develops a Christian conscience in regard to social evils, such as poverty, anti-ability, addiction to alcohol, the oppression of women, the rich oppressing the poor, and on and on. Non-Christians who never come to church, for example, never hear a moss thunder, "Let justice flow down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." They never hear that. Churches are the most potent instrument for the reformation of a society. If we want to see tremendous social improvement in this world of ours—less poverty, more brotherhood, more justice, more racial equality—let us multiply, sound, Bible-believing churches. Multiplied.

Now these words sound Bible believing are very important. Hereto the New Testament churches are our guide. They took the words of Jesus our Lord very seriously. They lived according

to the Holy Spirit, who guided them exclusively in biblical directions. This is true beyond a shadow of a doubt. Christians must be thoroughly biblical. Spirit-filled Christians, and sound churches, must be thoroughly biblical, spiritual churches. However we must not fall into the trap, which Satan sets for us at this point. Satan very smoothly saddles up to us and says, "Yes, yes! First reform the church, then speak to others. What you say will not be credible unless your own lives are thoroughly pure, one-hundred percent holy, loving and just." Thus he keeps many Christians and many churches from even attempting to multiply. While it is, of course, highly desirable for Christians to be holy, loving and just, we must remember that the Gospel is not 'look at us, see what wonderful people we are, then you too become like us.' That's not the Gospel, my friends. Oh no! Never! We are to preach Christ, not ourselves. Works of righteousness never saved anyone. We do not ask people to observe our holy lives. We invite them to look to Jesus, the sinless Son of God.

Christians evangelize in spite of their nominal and frail members. Evangelism is always carried on by a minority of the church: The warm-hearted Christians, who do not wait till all Christians have become utterly pure, utterly loving, and utterly good. That is what we observe in the New Testament churches, which grew greatly. They evangelized, when they were so racially biased, that it is recorded (Acts 11:19), that they "spake the Word to none but Jews." They didn't even preach the gospel to those dirty Gentiles. They were that racially biased. But nevertheless, they evangelized where they could. And the Holy Spirit led them out across that racial barrier to the evangelization of the Gentiles. And then we must remember that they also evangelized, quite effectively well, Annias and Saphara, were members of the congregations. They evangelized Gentiles, while the Judaizer Christians were insisting that only Gentiles who became Jews could be admitted to the church. All these and other blemishes (blemishes!) in the New Testament churches did not deter Christians from surging out in ceaseless, effective evangelism.

So today, we must drive the existing churches on course, but at the same time surge out in effective evangelism to non-Christians at home and abroad. That is the New Testament pattern. When Satan says, "Don't evangelize now. Wait till the church is made pure and holy." Don't listen to Satan! Obey the Lord Jesus, who said to his present followers (who by most people at that time were considered ignorant and unlearned men, Acts 4:13) Jesus said to them, "Go disciple all the peoples of earth—tribes and castes—go now! Baptize them. Teach them." Those are always marching orders for Christians. If we follow

the New Testament pattern for churches, our churches in Kansas and Iowa, and Nebraska and Missouri, and Arizona (have I covered most of you?), will copy the early churches in the following six significant ways:

One, we will accept the words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament as final authority. That's very necessary. We will accord the words of Jesus in the New Testament as final authority.

Two, we will hear the Lord say, "Go disciple—all the whites, the browns, the yellows, the greens, the blacks, the purples, and any other color there is—go disciple them!"

Third, we realize individual Christians and as individual congregations surge out and witness an invitation to our neighbors to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and be baptized in his name. And if we're not very good at it first, we learn. I have a grandson who's learning to play tennis. And he's not very good at it. He knocks the ball in all kinds of wrong directions. And to play with him is a headache. Because you spend most of your time bringing the ball back into the court. But he'll learn. He'll learn if we keeps at it. And we'll learn effective evangelism if we keep at it. But if we never try, we'll always be bubblers.

Four, we will concentrate on receptive people. Everybody's not the same. There are some highly receptive segments of society. Here in Manhattan and in Kansas and in Missouri and in California and around the world. We will concentrate on receptive people. Remembering the four-times, repeated New Testament command: "To go to those who want to hear and want to accept." You'll find those in Matthew 4, Mark 6, Luke 10 and Acts 13. There are very passages of scripture, very few sayings of Jesus that are repeated four times in the New Testament. This one is. Our Lord said, you know, as he sent out his apostles, "go to this village, if they don't accept you, shake off the dust of your feet and go on to the next one. It will be more tolerable in that day—more tolerable in that day—for Sodom for the village that rejected me." We're to seek out the receptive.

Five, we will hold steadily in mind that the goal is not mere proclamation of the gospel or mere distribute of the literature, or mere leading people to say, 'we receive Christ.' All those are good, but they're incomplete. The goal is ongoing churches of baptized, obedient believers, who themselves are going out to tell others. That's the goal.

And in the sixth place, we will count our own churches incomplete until they are vigorously engaged in sinner-converting, church-multiplying evangelism. That is a clear New Testament pattern. If we want to call ourselves New Testament churches, let us be quickly multiplying churches. And God put that pattern

there in sacred writ, so Christians everywhere—America, India, England, China, and on and on—may multiply churches of the redeemed. Sinners on their way to heaven, Christ comes as a servant, makers of the new world, revealed by God's grace, coming into being. Multitudes looking forward to his return, and pray, even so, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."

End

Song and vocal arrangement is performed

Writer

McGavran, Donald A. (1897-1990): Dr. Donald A. McGavran is widely noted as the founder of the modern Church Growth movement. After a distinguished career as a field missionary in India (1923-1954), he served as a traveling researcher and visiting professor of Church Growth missiology. In 1961 he founded the Institute for Church Growth in Eugene, Oregon and eventually became founding dean of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.