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## Introduction Winter 2009

Alan McMahan

*Biola University*, alan.mcmahan@biola.edu

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College of Graduate Studies  
Indiana Wesleyan University  
(765) 677-1038  
E-mail: [bob.whitesel@indwes.edu](mailto:bob.whitesel@indwes.edu)
- Vice President:** Dr. Ed Stetzer  
President of Lifeway Research and  
Missiologist  
Lifeway Christian Resources  
(615) 251-2320  
E-mail: [ed.stetzer@lifeway.com](mailto:ed.stetzer@lifeway.com)  
[www.lifewayresearch.com](http://www.lifewayresearch.com)  
Blog: [www.edstetzer.com](http://www.edstetzer.com)
- Second Vice President:** Dr. Robert Logan  
President, CoachNet International  
Ministries  
(323) 225-5953  
E-mail: [loganoffice@coachnet.org](mailto:loganoffice@coachnet.org)  
[www.coachnet.org](http://www.coachnet.org)
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(See Introduction for contact information and photo)
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(See Introduction for contact information and photo)
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(See Information for Subscribers and Writers on inside back cover for contact information)



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**Introduction**

**Alan McMahan**

The Journal of the American Society for Church Growth, since its first publication in 1991, has been on the leading edge of reporting original research and best practices relating to church growth and evangelism in North America. With John Vaughan as the founding editor, and continuing for a much longer time (14 years) with Gary McIntosh as editor, the Journal has made a significant contribution to help the church understand the opportunities and the challenges before it in the ever-changing context of ministry.

With support from others such as C.J. Fithian, who has long served as Layout Editor, and Carol McIntosh, who for years has managed the mailing list among other things, and for John Peck, who contributed his editorial expertise to this issue, the Journal has prospered. Their excellent work behind the scenes has enabled these issues to reach you in good order. The American Society for Church Growth, and the church at large, owes a debt of gratitude for each person's sacrificial labor.

With this issue, I have assumed the General Editorship of the Journal under the new and vigorous sponsorship of the School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University. In the spirit of the Journal's founding, the School of Intercultural Studies, now celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has long been in the business of preparing men and women to cross the barriers that prevent people from hearing the good news of the gospel of Christ. Biola's commitment to this task insures the continuation of the Journal into the future, a future that will bring many new opportunities for expansion and impact.

This edition of the Journal serves as a transition piece, moving the Journal toward a new future. The following details some of the changes that are underway:

1. This issue will be the last edition that is published under the name, "Journal of the American Society for Church Growth." The new name will be "Great Commission Research Journal," following the name change of the "American Society for Church Growth" to the "Great Commission Research Network."
2. The first edition of the Journal under the new name will begin with the next issue in Summer of 2009 and will be published thereafter twice a year in Winter and Summer.
3. The Great Commission Research Journal will be expanded in size (from 100-150 pages for the Journal of the American Society for Church Growth to 150-200 pages under the new name). Eventually its content and readership will also be increased in order to report on international research and successful models of evangelism and church growth from around the world.
4. To accomplish what Gary McIntosh has done single-handedly for the last 14 years, we have assembled a team of editors, who will work together to produce a refereed Journal that scans the horizon for emerging research. Making up the team is:

Phil Stevenson, North American Editor  
Director of Evangelism and Church Growth  
The Wesleyan Church  
P.O. Box 50434  
Indianapolis, IN 46250-0434  
E-mail: [stevensonp@wesleyan.org](mailto:stevensonp@wesleyan.org)  
Blog: [sisuphil.blogspot.com](http://sisuphil.blogspot.com)



J. D. Payne, Book Review Editor  
National Missionary  
North American Mission Board  
Board  
Associate Professor of Church Planting  
Church Planting and Evangelism  
Evangelism  
Director, Church Planting Center  
ing Center  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
E-mail: [jpayne@sbts.edu](mailto:jpayne@sbts.edu)  
[www.northamericanmissions.org](http://www.northamericanmissions.org)

Gary L. McIntosh, Dissertation Editor  
Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership  
Talbot School of Theology  
13800 Biola Ave.  
La Mirada, CA 90639  
E-mail: [gary.mcintosh@biola.edu](mailto:gary.mcintosh@biola.edu)  
[www.churchgrowthnetwork.com](http://www.churchgrowthnetwork.com)



Following very shortly will be other changes and improvements that will deliver a new host of tools and resources for researchers, teachers, consultants, students, and practitioners of church growth, evangelism, and Great Commission strategies. We will keep you abreast of those changes as they develop.

Now would be a good time to renew your subscription to the Journal and encourage your friends to do the same. The Journal is provided as a free benefit to members of the Great Commission Research Network, ([www.greatcommissionresearch.net](http://www.greatcommissionresearch.net)) and would provide a greater benefit than a subscription to the Journal alone.

This issue of the Journal features articles on a variety of salient topics beginning with a favorite contributor, George Hunter. George presents a thematic perspective on how pre-Christians are actually reached, going beyond the more simplistic, linear, singular answers that are often given. Dan Dunn's article continues the focus of reaching pre-Christians but focusing more specifically at the Hispanic sub-culture in the U.S. using the insights gleaned from communication theory.

The next two articles focus on the missional church with Derrick Lemons describing the changes that have taken place within the dialogue on this topic since Karl Barth's first presentation on it in 1932. Phil Stevenson follows with an article using contrasting paradigms to distinguish between being "healthy" or "fit" linking it to what a missional church ought to be.

The next three articles approach a variety of topics led by a refreshing re-examination of the debate between evangelism and social action, in which Norman Wilson seeks to free us from the modernist interpretations that have polarized these two facets of the church's ministry. Drawing from diverse fields such as biology, sociology, and business management, Gary McIntosh examines the relationship between a church's size and its development, recognizing the impact of economies of scale on growth and organizational culture. He summarizes with 12 principles that have implications for a church's ministries and organization. Tom Steffen's insightful observations drawn from his experience

as a missionary in the Philippines shows how narrative theology spanning the whole story of scripture is a superior method of evangelism in an increasingly post-modern America.

This issue of the Journal wraps up with book reviews of *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, by Alan Hirsch. Kenneth Bickel, Darren Cronshaw, J.D. Payne, Bob Wenz, and Gordon Penfold each render their evaluation of the book and describe its significance for the current ministry context.

In the next months and years to come I believe you will find within these pages helpful insights that will benefit your thinking, your service, and ministry. I will look forward to serving you and together exploring what God is doing around the world.

—M. Alan McMahan, General Editor  
Journal of the American Society for Church Growth

Associate Professor and Chair of the Undergraduate Department  
School of Intercultural Studies  
Biola University  
13800 Biola Ave.  
La Mirada, CA 90639  
(562) 903-4844 Ext. 3269  
[alan.mcmahan@biola.edu](mailto:alan.mcmahan@biola.edu)



### Evangelizing Pre-Christian People: A Thematic Perspective

George G. Hunter III

Christian leaders are called to love “the Lord of the Harvest” with mind and heart. In our Christian traditions, believers have affirmed some people in leadership roles because, in part, they seem to understand and articulate the tradition’s folk wisdom best, and they seem to have the combination of spirituality and “street smarts” needed to lead the churches into the future that God wills.<sup>1</sup> New leaders, however, too often assume that “our tradition’s” folk wisdom is enough, or they assume that they know as much as the people think they do! Some leaders even assume their own (or their peer group’s, or their tradition’s) infallibility!

Our capacity to actually lead churches and Christian movements, however, is limited by the “Intelligence” that informs our strategic decisions. Computer geeks tell us, “Garbage in, garbage out;” the outputs can be no better than the inputs. The Intelligence that can inform strategic thinking is acquired through learning and discovery. The discoveries usually come from asking the right questions and, like drilling for oil, from asking and drilling in the right places, for long enough, for the insights to emerge. Donald McGavran’s career stands as an enduring model of this principle.

McGavran especially dared to ask the Big Question that most church leaders had ignored for generations (because they had already agreed on the answers!): *How does the Church do Evangelism effectively?* McGavran discovered that all that most leaders knew for sure was their (socially constructed) consensus on how new people *ought* to be reached and how churches *should* grow.<sup>2</sup> McGavran observed that, often, what a company of people has agreed upon *might not* constitute the valid Intelligence that would be necessary for navigating the future they desire. He