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Each issue of the *Great Commission Research Journal* features recent dissertations and theses of interest to our readers. Particular attention is given to publications that present research on evangelism, church growth, church planting and multiplication, missional church, emerging/emergent church, communication theory, leadership theory, and other topics related to effective fulfillment of the Great Commission. Directors of doctoral programs, as well as graduating students, are encouraged to send notice of recent dissertations to Dr. Gary L. McIntosh, Dissertation Editor, at gary.mcintosh@biola.edu. Due to space limitations and the large number of dissertations published each year, only a few dissertations are featured.

As the *Great Commission Research Journal* traces its roots to the Church Growth missiology of Donald A. McGavran, this issue features recent dissertations that focus on some aspect of McGavran's life and thought.

"The divergence of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Movement in North America, 1955–2000." Author: John Albert Crabtree, Jr. Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003. 255 pages.

abstract

This dissertation demonstrates that a divergence of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Movement (CGM) has occurred in North America from 1955 to 2000. As a result of this divergence, the force of the movement has weakened because the focus of the movement has shifted.

Chapter two details the historical development of the Church Growth Movement in North America. Significant historical markers of the movement arise from this historical analysis. The point is that the CGM is a movement in search of its identity at the end of the twentieth century. A noticeable shift to a third generation of church growth leadership is apparent from this study.

Chapter three describes the streams of divergence of McGavran's movement. A baseline of McGavran's core theological and methodological principles serves as the point of departure. This baseline begins with the church growth idea and McGavran's theological foundation for the CGM. The relationship between church growth and evangelism reveals that McGavran's evangelism resulted in church growth. In addition, this chapter explains how the identity of the movement is dependent on the leadership of the movement. Included in this chapter is an analysis of the streams of divergence from McGavran's core theological and methodological principles.

Chapter four contains an analysis of the divergence of McGavran's CGM. An evaluation of the CGM itself provides an overall understanding of the divergence of the movement. An evaluation of church growth theology and church growth methodology provides an overall understanding of the current state of church growth theology and methodology. An evaluation of the divergence of McGavran's movement includes an analysis of both the relationship between church growth and evangelism and the relationship between leadership and identity.

Chapter five includes a discussion of a proposed strategy for church growth in a new millennium. This discussion begins with the idea of church growth evangelism. A theology of church growth evangelism is then constructed, which leads to a growth strategy for a new millennium.

"The Impact of Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth Missiology on Selected Denominations in the United States of America, 1970–2000." Author: Gary Lynn McIntosh. Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, 2005. 232 pages.

abstract

Donald A. McGavran served for thirty-one years as a missionary in India where he developed the foundational concepts of what came to be known as Church Growth theory. After retiring from the mission field, he founded the Institute for Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon, in 1961, and eventually moved to Pasadena, California, where he established the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965.

He was widely recognized as the father of the modern Church Growth Movement, and his missiological insights empowered new thinking in evangelism and missiology during the second half of the twentieth century.

This historical research study investigates the impact of Donald A. McGavran's Church Growth missiology on the Church of the Nazarene, the Reformed Church in America, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the United States from 1970 to 2000. This dissertation includes an overview of McGavran's core missiological insights that were communicated to church leaders. Also included is a description of how McGavran's Church Growth theory was adapted and communicated to church leaders through the Institute for American Church Growth, the Charles E. Fuller Institute for Evangelism and Church Growth, and the Fuller Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry program. Building on extensive interviews and study of denominational publications, this study traces patterns of adoption, rejection, and application of McGavran's insights in each of the three denominations.

The thesis of the dissertation is that McGavran's Church Growth missiology significantly influenced denominations in the United States of America between 1970 and 2000, but were most effective in denominations that intentionally institutionalized his principles. The study found that when McGavran's Church Growth ideas were embraced at all levels of the denominational structure, the denomination experienced a positive growth rate. However, when McGavran's ideas only penetrated the state or regional levels of a denomination, the growth rate of the entire denomination was not changed significantly.

"Post-McGavran Church Growth: Divergent Streams of Development." Author: James Douglas Tucker, Jr. Ph.D. dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998. 205 pages.

abstract

The Church Growth Movement initiated by Donald A. McGavran has been one of the most influential movements in twentieth century Christendom, especially in the United States. For most of its history, the movement retained its historic theological and philosophical base, mainly due to the strong influence of McGavran. Since McGavran's death, the movement has fragmented into different recognizable streams of church growth thinking. The purpose of this dissertation is to identify, delineate, and define these different fragments of the movement. This dissertation seeks to clarify which streams of church growth thinking are historic, McGavran-based streams and which are not.

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To prepare this dissertation, the writings of prominent leaders in the field of church growth were examined. Personal interviews with some of the prominent leaders in the field were also conducted.

Chapter one introduces the importance of and approach to the study. Chapter two briefly examines the history of the Church Growth Movement, from its inception to the late 1980s. This chapter also discusses the philosophical and theological foundation that was established by McGavran. Chapter three examines the divergences in contemporary church growth thinking. Chapter four distinguishes and differentiates the five major streams in contemporary church growth thinking. Each genre of church growth thinking is critically examined and compared to the movement's original foundation as laid by McGavran. Chapter five, the conclusion of the research, summarizes all relevant issues concerning the divisions within the Church Growth Movement.

The author concludes that the Church Growth Movement is no longer one unified movement. It has currently fragmented into five separate and distinct streams. Two streams have retained the theological and philosophical foundation established by McGavran; three streams have not.

The author concludes that church growth thinking that remains faithful to its historic foundation is still viable and missiologically sound. Church growth thinking that has strayed from its historic roots needs to be differentiated and distinguished from true, historic church growth.

"*The Americanization of the Church Growth Movement.*" Author: David Lowell Cook. M.A. thesis, Auburn University, 1998. 234 pages.

abstract

Donald McGavran is the recognized founder of the Church Growth Movement. Influence by J. W. Pickett's Christian Mass Movements in India, McGavran adopted and refined Pickett's principles and methodology, seeking to reform Christian missions. His quest led him to Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission where he focused on training missionaries to implement his ideas. In 1972, this focus expanded to include North American churches. Following McGavran's lead, Win Arn and Peter Wagner emerged as the Americanized movement's major interpreters and proponents. Arn played a pivotal role in teaching and promoting Church Growth to the local church. Wagner expanded the academic teaching of Church Growth, and along with John Wimber, led in the pentecostalization of the movement. This Americanization of Church Growth theory profoundly influenced the church. A review of the periodicals *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today*, reveal the mix of mainline and evangelical church responses to the Church Growth Movement.

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"*An Examination of Selected Theological Topics in the Thought of Donald A. McGavran.*" Author: Patrick Julian Melancon. Ph.D. dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997. 216 pages.

abstract

This dissertation describes the historical development of the theology of Donald A. McGavran, the doyen of church growth thinking and the subsequent Church Growth Movement. It traces his theological development from his early childhood in India to his more mature years as leader of the Church Growth Movement at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The study is divided into six parts, each forming a chapter. The first part introduces the subject of the dissertation and reviews the relevance, method, and sources of the research. The second chapter examines McGavran's background and his part in the history and maturation of the Church Growth Movement.

Chapter three cites the forces that shaped McGavran's theology. Critics, his education, Jarrell Waskom Pickett, utilitarianism, and significant theological events shaped and reshaped his thinking. Each of these influences contributed to basic tenets to which he held.

The fourth and fifth chapters describe McGavran's soteriology and ecclesiology in a systematic format. Each shows the depth of McGavran's thinking and the interrelatedness of his theological concepts.

Chapter six concludes the dissertation by discussing issues that influenced McGavran's theology and public opinion concerning McGavran's church growth principles. The author's final words appeal for a reevaluation of McGavran's theology by adherents and critics alike.

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"Donald Anderson McGavran's Theology of Evangelism and Church Growth as a Basis for Theological Education." Author: John Albert Crabtree, Jr. Th.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997. 127 pages.

abstract

The purpose of the thesis is to assess Donald Anderson McGavran's theology of evangelism and church growth as a basis for theological education. Specifically, the thesis of the work is that the unifying theme of McGavran's theology is effective evangelism, which prompted him to say that effective evangelism must be the essential priority of theological education.

Chapter three is devoted to a discussion of McGavran's theological assumptions. McGavran's general assumptions are broad statements that provide an overall understanding of his theological framework. The specific theological assumptions delineate the theological categories in McGavran's theology of evangelism and church growth.

Chapter four contains a discussion of McGavran's theological assumptions as a basis for theological education. McGavran's philosophy of Christian education provided a foundation for his proposals for theological education.

Chapter five assesses McGavran's theological assumptions as a basis for theological education. McGavran was convinced of the real possibility to Christianize America through the effects of theological education. The theological institutions of America must assume their God-given responsibility to place effective evangelism at the core of their theological system.

"The development of a missiologist: The life and thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897–1965." Author: Vernon James Middleton. Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1990. 410 pages.

abstract

This dissertation is a historical research into the life and thought of Donald Anderson McGavran. This study seeks to trace the spiritual, intellectual, and missiological development of the man. With the cooperation of five archival centers, and formal interviews with key informants primary source materials were assembled to enable the author to retrace the frustrations, disappointments, and mistakes that were made. However, the strong determination and the vibrant spiritual faith of McGavran kept him in strong pursuit for answers to the problem of missionary compound Christianity and institutionalized religion. The church growth theology and principles he developed have all arisen out of issues he sought to address during his thirty-one years of service in India.

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In the first chapter the author examines the environment of colonial India at the turn of this century. The dissertation demonstrates that his early years were conditioned by orphanages, itinerant evangelism, and godly parents.

The second chapter describes McGavran's life as a young, first-term missionary who wrestled with the ineffective educational methods of evangelism and the naive philosophy that gradualism and Christianization would eventually cause the bulwark of Hinduism to crumble before the kingdom of Christ.

The third chapter is set in the depression years, amongst powerful people movements from among India's low castes, and in the spiritual renewal fostered by the National Council of Churches of that land. McGavran was thrust into the unenviable position of being the administrator of that field. Serious shortfalls in funding forced him to make some very critical assessments of the many good activities of his mission.

The fourth chapter details the influence of J. Waskom Pickett and Hendrik Kraemer on McGavran's strategy to start a people movement among the Satnami peoples of Chattisgarh. It was during his seventeen years of struggling as a village evangelist that the church growth ideas begin to germinate and bear fruit.

The final three chapters trace the process whereby these ideas were internationalized, and eventually propagated through the forum of books, seminars, an institute, and a bulletin to impact world missions.

"A Comparative Analysis of the Missiologies of Roland Allen and Donald Anderson McGavran." Author: William Nolan Burkhalter. Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984. 295 pages.

abstract

Two of the most important missiologists of the twentieth century, with respect to the philosophy of mission methodology, have been Roland Allen and Donald Anderson McGavran. Both of these men have received a great deal of attention and have markedly influenced the way in which the Christian mission has been perceived and undertaken. They have often been identified as within the same "stream of thought," and have been studied widely by many engaged in missionary praxis. The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a critical and comparative analysis of the thought of both men.

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The methodology of the dissertation takes cognizance of the historical framework and pragmatic purposes of the two missiologists. A historical background study is provided of that aspect of missiology which is central to both men: the philosophy of mission methodology.

The missiological systems of the two men are presented. This is done using the same five rubrics for each: (1) his analysis of his contemporary missionary situation, (2) his use of Scripture, (3) his theology of missions, (4) his ecclesiology, and (5) his principles of missionary practice. The system of each man is also evaluated as to strengths and weaknesses.

Using the same five rubrics, the missiological systems of the two men are compared. Similarities and differences are found under each rubric. That which locates the two within the same "stream of thought" is highlighted, as is that which differentiates them. Both the similarities and the differences are very significant.

The conclusion to the dissertation underscores some of the theological and methodological principles for mission which can be gleaned through the study of the two missiologists and the interaction of this author with their work. These principles are not meant to be hard and fast rules but elastic guidelines which can be used to develop mission methodologies which are appropriate for their particular contexts.

"*The Church Growth Movement to 1965: An Historical Perspective.*" Author: Herbert Melvin, Works, Jr. D.Miss. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission, 1974. 366 pages.

abstract

In less than twenty years, a new term emerged into prominence in the Christian vocabulary. The term "church growth" labels a concept that has generated both controversy and strong advocacy. To trace the genesis and early evolution of the church growth school of thought is the purpose of this dissertation.

The church growth idea can be traced to Donald Anderson McGavran, a missionary in India for thirty years. Concerned about the unpretentious record of early twentieth century efforts and out of his frustration in India, McGavran sent reverberations through the mission world with his first major book entitled *Bridges of God*. This call for change in missionary strategy questioned the traditional "mission station approach," proposing, instead, "people movements" as the means by which missions should achieve maximum effectiveness.

McGavran cannot be considered the only person to perceive the need for change in mission strategy; though he became the primary spokesman for the movement. As a result of his perseverance, an institute was launched for the training of missionaries in the church growth approach to missions.

Although the major impact of the movement and response to it has come in the post-1965 period, the early indications of response appear in the period considered by this study. Response was varied, ranging from active debate and rejection to enthusiastic acceptance. The theological position of the responder frequently influenced his response, although the movement had carefully avoided adopting a controversial theological stance.

In addition to a general bibliography, this dissertation includes a bibliography of all McGavran's writings from 1920 to 1973. One appendix is a roster of all the students of the original Institute of Church Growth, located in Eugene, Oregon, between 1961 and 1965.

This study provides insight into the development of a movement which exercises significant influence in the world of Protestant missions. Beyond this, it provides an illustration of the capacity of the church to correct itself and to find a new vitality by which to accomplish its task.