

**The Life and Ministry of
Donald A. McGavran:
A Short Overview**

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Forward

A complete history of the life and ministry of Dr. Donald A. McGavran is still waiting to be written. Two doctoral dissertations have studied his life up to the year 1965, and both are recommended to the reader who desires to understand McGavran's life to that year.

The Church Growth Movement to 1965: An Historical Perspective, by Herbert Works, provides a chronological look at the development of the Church Growth Movement. It covers a significant part of McGavran's ministry up to the move of the Institute of Church Growth from Eugene, Oregon to Pasadena, California. *The Development of a Missiologist: The Life and Thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897-1965*, by Vernon Middleton, provides a biographical sketch of McGavran's first sixty-eight years of life.

Little study has been made, however, of McGavran's life and ministry from 1965 until his death in 1990. This paper is a basic start at understanding this portion of his career. I have written a short overview of McGavran's early years to provide a necessary chronology, but have highlighted more details for the years 1965 onward. The major resources for this paper have come from correspondence and other materials on McGavran found in the files of C. Peter Wagner, the McGavran Room of the U.S. Center for World Mission (Pasadena, CA), and the archives of the Billy Graham Center (Wheaton, IL), Butler University, and Christian Theological Seminary (Indianapolis, IN).

Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you have received an invitation to attend a meeting to be held in the office of the Dean Emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller School of Theology in January 1990. Several other people have also received invitations. In attendance with you will be the following: a foremost educator with a Ph.D. in Education from a highly respected university, an evangelist who has personally led over one thousand people to Christ, a church planter who established fifteen churches in the span of seventeen years, a linguist who translated the Gospels into a new language, an administrator who directed the work of a para-church organization in one of the world's largest countries, a world renowned mission strategist, and a well known author whose books and articles have changed the course of his discipline.

Of course, you accept the invitation, and after traveling to Pasadena, California, you make your way to the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary. After introducing yourself to the secretary in the School of World Mission, she leads you into the office of the Dean Emeritus. However, once inside you are surprised to find there are only two people attending the meeting—yourself and Dr. Donald A. McGavran. Then it suddenly dawns on you that the educator, evangelist, church planter, linguist, administrator, mission strategist, and author are all the same person.

Donald Anderson McGavran has been called the premier missiologist of the twentieth century. The purpose of this paper is to develop a brief overview of his life and ministry.

The Missionary McGavrans

The roots of Donald McGavran's faith grow out of two families' lines—one from England and the other from the United States. To trace the English heritage of Donald McGavran, one must begin with William Carey (1761-1834).

Widely thought of as the founder of the modern missionary movement, William Carey was born in the Northampton village of Paulerspury in England. While growing up in a nominal Church of England home, Carey adopted Christopher Columbus as his boyhood hero, listened to fascinating tales from his uncle, a sailor and world traveler, and avidly read *Captain Cook's Voyages*, all of which influenced his vision of the larger world. He made a profession of conversion to Christ in 1779 at age eighteen, and was baptized in 1783 having become a Baptist by persuasion.

Carey made a living as a journeyman cobbler, but began preaching at Baptist meetings, eventually becoming a pastor. He had a remarkable ability to learn languages, which he studied while cobbling shoes. His linguistic ability would serve him well during his missionary career in India, where he mastered several Indian dialects and translated the Bible and other Christian materials into various tongues.

An amateur mapmaker, Carey taught geography and began thinking of the world's populations without Christ. His concern for world evangelism became a consuming passion. Gradually he began to reflect upon the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:16-20, and came to the conclusion that Christ's command was binding on all generations, not just the early disciples and apostles. In 1792 Carey published his ideas in a booklet, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. As a result of his persistence, a Baptist society for propagating the gospel among the heathen was founded on October 2, 1792. The organization became known as the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).

The BMS appointed John Thomas, a Baptist physician, and William Carey as its first missionaries. Carey accepted his appointment to India and began a famous missionary career where he developed the methods of preaching, Scripture translation, print media, and pioneered efforts to move mission churches toward indigenous status (McBeth 1987:183-187). His emphasis on the Great Commission as the primary motive for missions may have been his major contribution to Donald McGavran's Church Growth Thought.

Donald McGavran's maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. James H. Anderson, sailed for India from London in July 1854 around the Cape of Good Hope, taking about six months for the journey. Baptist missionaries appointed by Carey's Baptist Missionary Society, they were destined for Bengal, the same city Carey had served in many years prior. While no direct linkage between the

Andersons and William Carey has been discovered, they were likely caught up in the missionary spirit to take the gospel to the same land where Carey had served.

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” (quoted in Stanley 1992:140). 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 back in England. He felt that the “work in India was ‘dying’ — dying from lack of missionary recruits, inadequate funding and waning enthusiasm in the British churches” (Stanley 1992:140). Thus, it is likely that the Andersons may have responded to a much-needed call for missionaries to go to northern India sometime between 1847 and 1854.

During the years surrounding 1854, Great Britain was the predominant missionary power. Since the British missionary societies had a high status with the Indian government, they were, so to speak, the official missionary societies. England’s rule was accepted without much resentment. Writing in 1954 about his grandparents’ missionary venture a hundred years before, McGavran states,

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 (McGavran 1954:16).

The James Andersons selected their field in India with minimal consultation.

Denominations cooperated with each other very little, and missionary societies settled missionaries where they thought best. The Andersons found India to be strictly Hindu. Donald McGavran remembers, "When my grandfather would visit a high-caste home, the place where he sat and walked would afterwards be washed with cowdung to render it pure again" (McGavran 1954:16). The Caste system was accepted as God-given, and Caste rules were strict.

The James Andersons retired in 1890, but their missionary work continued for another hundred years through their children and grandchildren. A son, Herbert Anderson, was appointed as a missionary of the BMS in 1884 and became secretary of the English Baptist Mission in India about 1900. Then, in 1914, he became the first half-time secretary of the National Missionary Council of India (Stanley 1992:155 &160). Another son worked in government service. Mrs. G. W. Jackson, a daughter, served in Mungeli. Another daughter, Helen, became the wife of John G. McGavran and the mother of Donald A. McGavran.

The McGavran side of the family was Scotch-Irish. They had suffered persecution in Northern Ireland in about 1781. Looking back at his family history, Donald McGavran recalled:

In Northern Ireland about one hundred and fifty years ago, a Protestant girl lost her father, who together with a group of fellow-Protestants in a secret

prayer meeting was blown to pieces by opposing Roman Catholics. The rest of the family took ship to America. On the way all but one of them, the girl I have mentioned, died of smallpox. Arrived in America she married a fellow-Protestant Scotch-Irishman by the name of McGavran (McGavran 1954:13).

With this kind of bloodline so committed to the Christian faith, it is little wonder that the McGavrans would be crusaders for the gospel.

In America the McGavran family united through marriage with the Grafton family. The Graftons were farmers living in the area of Bethany, West Virginia. Although it is not known exactly when, the Graftons had joined faith with Alexander Campbell (what is now called the Restoration Movement or the Stone/Campbell Movement). Donald McGavran's great grandfather Grafton helped Alexander Campbell found Bethany College by donating "a considerable amount of money and a considerable amount of land that young men might have the blessings of Christian education" (Letter from Donald McGavran to his grandson dated September 25, 1959).

John Grafton McGavran was born in New Cumberland, West Virginia in 1867 and grew up in Ohio. He and his sister Mary sold their farm so they could attend Bethany College. Both proceeded to give their lives to missionary service in India.

John's classmates' nick-named him "Fighting Mac" though no clear reason is ever given for the name. He planned to take medical training to be a doctor following college, however, an urgent call to missionary service given by A. McLean directed his steps to India.

In 1891, John Grafton McGavran, twenty-four and single, sailed from the United States for India where he served for the next twenty years as an evangelistic missionary. He began by doing solitary mission work in one village and helping out in mission stations located in Harda, Bilaspur, and Hatta. Eventually, he opened a mission station in Damoh, where he worked until 1910/1911. On a personal note, he married Helen Anderson in 1896. One account of their meeting mentions “she met John McGavran while spending a vacation with her parents in the mountains in India, later became his bride in Bombay, and went at once to the Damoh work (McGavran n.d.: 22). In time they had four children, among whom Donald McGavran was the second.

The work in India was long and strenuous. John McGavran’s first tasks were to look after day schools, Sunday schools, oversee evangelistic work, erect buildings, preach, teach, and care for mission business in Bilaspur. During a famine in 1898, he helped get the Damoh orphanage in working condition, which marked the beginning of a great institution for boys. He and another missionary, W. E. Rambo, were credited with saving a thousand children from starvation.

A furlough in 1910 brought the entire McGavran family to the United States. The family settled in Ann Arbor, Michigan while John earned an M.A. degree (1911) at the University of Michigan. As their furlough drew to a close, concern about the schooling needs of their children arose. Since they had no relatives in the United States with whom they could leave the children, and finding boarding school too expensive, John decided to leave his missionary

career and become a pastor. He pastored a church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and eventually became a professor in the new College of Missions in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Both John and Helen taught at the College of Missions until 1922 when the call to India once again became strong. Since three of their children were nearly through college, they decided to return to the land to which they had dedicated their lives. After returning to India, John became manager of the Press, editor of the weekly Hindi newspaper, and a teacher in the Bible College. Later he was elected acting secretary of the mission following the untimely death of the mission secretary. Unfortunately, high blood pressure resulted in him being struck with paralysis. The first stroke was light, but eventually three others followed. After the final stroke, John decided to return to the United States in 1929 so he could receive care from his second son, Dr. Edward McGavran, a medical doctor.

Helen McGavran was born in Lewisham, England. After marrying John McGavran and moving to Damoh, she found herself living first in a tent, later a grass hut, and eventually even a mud house. She trained Bible women, taught Sunday school, educated her own children at home, mothered the orphanage boys, and went on evangelistic trips with her husband. In addition she developed written materials for use by the Indian Christians, prepared a book of the Christian hymns of India, assisted new missionaries in learning the new language, and instructed them in aspects of Indian culture.

Dr. Mary Theodora McGavran, a sister of John, was born in West Virginia. After attending college in Hiram, she took professional studies at the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia. In 1896 she went to India as a missionary of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions of Great Britain. She served in India for twenty-eight years, setting up emergency hospitals, establishing a women's hospital, training people in preventative health care, and serving as medical advisor to the Christian community. She died in January 1923 in Jubbulpore following an operation.

Early Influences in India

Donald Anderson McGavran was born in Damoh, India on December 15, 1897. As a third-generation missionary, McGavran's family totaled 279 years of service in India by 1954.¹ Donald McGavran credited his early missionary training and experience to the friendship and guidance of his father.

He attended Butler University (B.A., 1920), Yale Divinity School (B.D., 1922), the former College of Mission, Indianapolis (M.A., 1923), and, following two terms in India, Columbia University (Ph.D., 1936).²

When Donald McGavran went to India as a missionary in 1923, he worked primarily as an educator under appointment with the United Christian Missionary Society of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In 1929 he became director of religious education for his mission before returning to the United States to work on his Ph.D. at Columbia University. After his return to India, he was elected field

secretary in 1932 and placed in charge of administering the denomination's entire India mission.

It was during the late 1920s and early 1930s that the stirrings of what would eventually become Church Growth Thought began to develop in McGavran's mind. There were several forerunners who contributed to McGavran's developing insights, such as William Carey, Roland Allen, and Kenneth Scott Latourette. The most direct influence, however, was J. Waskom Pickett, of whom McGavran was fond of saying; "I lit my candle at Pickett's fire" (Hunter 1992:159).

Pickett and McGavran were both influenced by the ministry of John R. Mott and the Student Volunteer Movement. The missionary awakening at Mount Hermon, Massachusetts in 1886, which was led by Dwight L. Moody, resulted in one hundred students dedicating themselves to missionary service and the founding of the Student Volunteer Movement. The slogan—"the evangelization of the world in this generation"—became a watchword for missions during the first two decades of the twentieth century. As a senior at Butler University, McGavran attended the Student Volunteer Convention at Des Moines, Iowa during the Christmas season of 1919. Describing that event, he writes,

There it became clear to me that God was calling me to be a missionary, that he was commanding me to carry out the Great Commission. Doing just that has ever since been the ruling purpose of my life. True, I have from time to time swerved from that purpose but never for long. That decision lies at the root of the church-growth movement (McGavran 1986:53).

Pickett served in India for forty-six years as pastor, editor, publisher, secretary of Christian councils, and bishop in the Methodist Church. Reflecting how John R. Mott influenced him to look for results, he writes,

Acting on advice given to me by the great missionary statesman, John R. Mott, I had determined to challenge every assumption that I could recognize as underlying the work of my Church in India, not to prove any of them wrong, but to find out, if I could, whether they seemed to be right or wrong as indicated by their results (Pickett 1973:6).

In 1928 Pickett was asked by the National Christian Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon to make an extensive study of Christian mass movements in India. The study required the development of research instruments, tests, and study of ten representative areas. The results were published in *Christian Mass Movements in India* (Pickett 1933).

McGavran read Pickett's book, enthusiastically endorsed it, and recommended to his mission headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana that they employ the services of Pickett to study why similar mass movements to Christ were not happening in their ministry area of mid-India. As supervisor of eighty missionaries, five hospitals, several high schools and primary schools, evangelistic efforts, and a leprosy home, McGavran had become deeply concerned that after several decades of work his mission had only about thirty small churches, all of which were experiencing no growth. At the same time, he saw "people movements" in scattered areas of India where thousands of people in groups, rather than as individuals, were coming to Christ. He wondered why his denomination's churches were growing at only one percent a year, while

other churches were seeing much higher rates of conversions to Christ.

McGavran assisted Pickett in the study and became the chief architect of the study in Madhya Pradesh. The results of the study were published under the title *Christian Missions in Mid-India*, which was later revised in a third edition to *Church Growth and Group Conversion*.

In 1937 McGavran wrote a book called *Founders of the India Church* in which he turned the spotlight on humble Indians who began people movements. The ideas that later developed into Church Growth Thought are rather remarkably present in this publication. This was the creative period in McGavran's life, as he was applying Pickett's insights to Indian history, literature, and social structure. McGavran later called this "a most creative period" (Letter to Herb Works dated December 11, 1973).

Through this study, McGavran discovered that of the 145 areas where mission activity was taking place, 134 had grown only eleven percent between 1921 and 1931. The churches in those areas were not even conserving their own children in the faith. Yet, in the other eleven areas the church was growing by one hundred percent, one hundred fifty percent, and even two hundred percent a decade. A curiosity arose within his breast that was to occupy his life and ministry until his death. He wondered why some churches were growing, while others, often times just a few miles away, were not. He eventually identified four major questions that were to drive the Church Growth Movement.

1. What are the *causes* of church growth?
2. What are the *barriers* to church growth?

3. What are the factors that can make the Christian faith a *movement* among some populations?
4. What *principles* of church growth are reproducible? (Hunter 1992:158).

During this same time period, McGavran was quietly changing his view of mission and theology. In the formative years of his childhood, *mission* was held to be carrying out the Great Commission, winning the world for Christ, and saving lost humanity. This was the view McGavran held when he returned to the United States for his higher education. While attending Yale Divinity School, McGavran was introduced to the teachings of the influential Christian professor H. Richard Niebuhr. According to McGavran, Niebuhr “used to say that mission was everything the church does outside its four walls. It was philanthropy, education, medicine, famine relief, evangelism, and world friendship” (McGavran 1986:54). McGavran espoused this liberal view of mission when he went to the mission field in 1923. As he became involved in education, social work, and evangelism in the real world of India, however, he gradually reverted to the classical view that mission was making disciples of Jesus Christ. Commenting on this change he wrote,

As my convictions about mission and church growth were being molded in the 1930s and '40s they ran headlong into the thrust that mission is doing many good things in addition to evangelism. I could not accept this way of thinking about missions. These good deeds must, of course, be done, and Christians will do them. I myself was doing many of them. But they must never replace the essential task of mission, discipling the peoples of earth (McGavran 1986:54).

As McGavran's theological views turned more conservative, and his studies of growing churches increased, he began to fervently encourage his mission and fellow workers to engage in direct evangelism. When his three-year term as mission secretary was up in 1936, he was not reelected. According to McGavran, in effect the mission said to him, "Since you are talking so much about evangelism and church growth, we are going to locate you in a district where you can practice what you preach" (McGavran 1986:56). It was clearly a demotion as evangelists worked with the poorly educated and illiterate people. Believing that it was God's leading, however, McGavran accepted his new appointment and spent the next seventeen years trying to start a people movement to Christ among the Satnamis caste. He felt his work was somewhat successful, but no people movement resulted. About one thousand people were won to Christ, fifteen small village churches were planted, and the Gospels were translated into Chattisgarhee. The years did, however, see the formation of his Church Growth Theory out of the hard realities of missionary service. He was no ivory tower theoretician!

Founding A Movement

With his work among the Satnamis coming to a close, McGavran took his vacation in 1951 in the hills north of Takhatpur to begin writing a manuscript titled "How Peoples Become Christian." In addition to his own ministry among the Satnamis, McGavran had done on-the-spot studies of growing churches and

people movements in several provinces of India for several denominations, and he was eager to share his discoveries with others. He hunted for one hour in the morning and evening, spending the time in between working on his manuscript. The rough draft manuscript was completed in 1953, but McGavran thought it was too strictly India. The McGavran family came to the United States on furlough during the summer of 1954. His mission granted a request to route his travel home through Africa so he could study people movements on that continent. In seven nations he saw twenty missions and hundreds of churches. He rewrote sections of his book, and it was eventually published in 1955 under the title *The Bridges of God* (McGavran 1955). This book has been labeled the *Magna Carta* of the Church Growth Movement. It became the most read book on mission theory in 1956 and has played a determinative role in Church Growth thinking ever since.

After arriving in the United States for his furlough, McGavran went directly to Yale University where he had been granted a research fellowship. He used the time to continue his research and begin writing a new book. Following the furlough, McGavran intended to return to India, but his mission board was intrigued by his church growth discoveries and sent him to various parts of the world to research the growth of churches in other countries. The study added considerably to his understanding, and in 1959 he published *How Churches Grow*.

A number of key elements then began to bring the Church Growth Movement into prominence. In 1958 McGavran resigned from his mission society to found an institution through which he could teach his newly discovered church growth theories. Since he was sixty years old, it was a risky move, but one he believed God desired him to take. Three seminaries turned down his proposals for a church growth institute, but eventually an offer came from an undergraduate college in Eugene, Oregon. The northwest corner of the United States was not the most promising place to begin an interdenominational institute of church growth, but he seized it with both hands, particularly since it was his only offer. On January 2, 1961, the Institute of Church Growth at Northwest Christian College opened with one lone student. Over the next four years, fifty-seven missionaries studied at the institute while on furlough. God was at work behind the scenes preparing McGavran for even larger influence around the world. The years at Northwest Christian College gave opportunity to develop case studies of growing churches, refine lectures, develop reading lists, and lead church growth conferences. The years in Eugene provided sort of an experimental workshop that enabled McGavran and his students to refine research methodology and clarify basic terminology, as well as publish early church growth studies from around the world.

The second member of the early team of Church Growth professors was Alan Tippett. In 1960-61 McGavran sent out an offer of a one thousand dollar fellowship at the Institute of Church Growth to men who wanted to study church

growth. Alan Tippett had read *Bridges of God* and realized that many of the tribes in Fiji represented typical people movements. He also wanted to study at an American University. Thus, by coming to the Institute of Church Growth, he was able to study Church Growth Thought and attend the University of Oregon for his Ph.D. Tippett arrived in January 1962, and in the spring became a student in McGavran's classes, while taking Ph.D. courses at the University of Eugene. McGavran was in need of someone to teach anthropology and animism. So he hired Tippett for four hundred dollars a term to teach anthropology harnessed to Church Growth Thought. Tippett received his Ph.D. in June 1964 and returned to the South Pacific. Since it looked like Tippett would not return, McGavran hired George Martindale—a Baptist missionary who had studied under McGavran and Tippett—to teach anthropology and animism. From June 1964 to June 1965 the future of the Institute of Church Growth was in doubt. McGavran was fighting to keep it open and listed Tippett as Professor of Anthropology and Church Growth at ICG even though Tippett was no longer on the payroll. Somewhat miraculously Fuller Seminary invited McGavran to begin the School of World Mission, and President Hubbard directed McGavran to recruit a faculty. McGavran wrote to Tippett to see if he was interested and available to come to Fuller as a professor. Discovering that he was available, McGavran convinced President Hubbard to offer Tippett a position on the new faculty (Letter to Peter Wagner dated August 30, 1975).

In 1961 the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association invited McGavran to speak at its September meeting in Winona Lake, Indiana. This meeting developed into an annual conference that touched over a thousand missionaries and had a pronounced effect on church growth thinking throughout the world. Other seminars on church growth were held on the campus of the Alliance School of Missions in Nyack, New York and on the campus of Biola College in La Mirada, California. Along with the seminars and conferences came the publication of the *Church Growth Bulletin* (first circulated in 1964), a sixteen page bimonthly periodical published by Overseas Crusades, Inc.

Moving to Fuller Theological Seminary

Just ten years following the founding of the seminary that bears his name, Charles E. Fuller, a well-known evangelist of the early twentieth century, spoke of a dream for a school of evangelism and mission in a sermon preached on the “Old Fashion Revival Hour” in 1957. In that sermon he declared,

But I’ll tell you something that is on my heart—and in the night hours I have been awakened time after time to pray—and that is that God would somehow lay it upon the hearts of the people world-wide to stand by in prayer and help us to make the Missions and Evangelistic departments of the Fuller Theological Seminary the best, highest, truest training departments in all the world for missions and evangelism (Fuller 1972:230).

Dr. Fuller’s dream began to take form just seven years later in the fall of 1964 when the president of Fuller Theological Seminary appointed a school of missions committee to consider the appropriateness of establishing a School of

World Mission. The principle members of the committee were William S. LaSor, professor of Old Testament, David Hubbard, president, and Daniel P. Fuller, professor of Hermeneutics. In addition two adjunct professors of missions, J. Christy Wilson, Sr., and J. Kenneth Strachan, provided insight to the committee.

The committee met each Monday afternoon to discuss the possibilities, potential curriculum, and to pick the brains of many missionary leaders in order to get a lead on how to establish such a school. Daniel Fuller remembers that,

Early in 1965 our attention focused upon Dr. Donald McGavran, who several years before had founded the Institute of Church Growth in connection with the Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. ...As the committee at Fuller Seminary carried on conversations with missionary leaders, the name of Donald McGavran and the term 'Church Growth' kept coming up. Why shouldn't a school of missions primarily emphasize the question of why churches grow? With such an emphasis in the forefront, a school would be less prone to veer away from the task of evangelism than might be the case if its primary emphasis were, say, linguistics, or anthropology (Fuller 1972:231).

While no mention was made of Donald McGavran, an announcement by Charles E. Fuller on March 7, 1965 alerted supporters of Fuller Theological Seminary to the new school.

...I feel that the time has come to found a school of world-wide evangelism, which will operate as a department of Fuller Seminary. ...Such a school would provide dedicated people with a chance to study under scholarly and godly men who have had rich experience in establishing the church of Jesus Christ in the various nations of earth. Here they could learn how to use the means available today for communicating with the masses, such as radio, television, and the printed page. Here they could receive training in how best to meet linguistical and cultural differences so as to be increasingly effective in proclaiming the Gospel (advertising insert dated March 7, 1965).

The following month, the spring 1965 *Bulletin of Fuller Theological Seminary* ran a lead article, "Fuller Seminary Announces New Graduate School of World Mission," in which it mentions that Donald McGavran was part of an international steering committee of missionary leaders to guide in the launching of the new School of World Mission. However, nothing is said about McGavran being the future dean. A simple statement announced, "It is expected that an announcement of key faculty appointments to the new missions school will be made within 60 days" (*Fuller Bulletin* 1965:3).

In the spring of 1965, David Hubbard extended an invitation to McGavran to move the Institute of Church Growth to Pasadena and establish the School of World Mission as a satellite school of Fuller School of Theology. McGavran accepted the invitation and emerged from semi-retirement at age sixty-seven to begin a second career. During June of 1965, two articles by McGavran were published: "Social Justice and Evangelism" in *World Vision Magazine* and "The God Who Finds and His Mission" in *Christian Standard*. Both articles note McGavran is director of the Institute of Church Growth and professor of Christian missions at Northwest Christian College, Eugene, Oregon.

In September 1965 the school opened with McGavran as dean and Alan Tippett as the second faculty member. Shortly after the opening of the new school, Fuller Theological Seminary sponsored a missions conference with the name "The Redeemed Community: Born to Care." The conference took place October 19-22, 1965. Dr. Cal Guy, professor of Missions at Southwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary, was the main speaker. Donald McGavran and Alan Tippett were involved on panel discussions. McGavran was listed on the program as the Dean of the School of World Mission and the Institute of Church Growth, with Tippett listed as Associate Professor of Anthropology and Missions. The final evening of the missions conference featured a closing program titled “Missions—Where the Action is...” McGavran was described in the program as “the Master of Ceremonies for the evening. He is the Dean of the School of Missions and Institute of Church Growth recently brought to Fuller Theological Seminary” (Undated advertisement for missions conference).

Over the next few years, McGavran added to the faculty Ralph Winter with Guatemalan experience, Charles Kraft with Nigerian experience, J. Edwin Orr an authority on revivals, and C. Peter Wagner with Bolivian experience.

Christianity Today published an article by McGavran “Why Neglect Gospel-Ready Masses?” on April 29, 1966. In the fall an inaugural service was held in the seminary chapel on Tuesday evening, September 27, 1966. The Rev. David Allan Hubbard gave a challenge to the new dean, Charles Fuller offered a prayer of inauguration, and Donald McGavran addressed the congregation on the topic “Call for Five Hundred Thousand.” Then, in October 1966, *World Vision Magazine* published “One Goal or Many” by McGavran. More notable is a letter from McGavran dated November 14, 1966 to Rev. C. Peter Wagner that states in part, “Your application for admission to the M.A. program of Fuller starting September 20, 1967 has been granted. Your application for Research

Fellowship of one thousand dollars is likely to be. I shall notify you when it is” (Letter dated November 14, 1966). A follow-up letter makes mention of Wagner having been granted the research fellowship, and also includes McGavran’s advice regarding a study of Pentecostals in Chile. A portion of the letter reads, “If Mr. Nichols can get you further funds to do a serious study of the Pentecostals in Chili, by all means take it. Be assured that I would love to have you do the Pentecostal study. It is a large gold nugget waiting to be picked up, and John Nichols will help you get around in Chili. By all means take it if you can” (Letter dated December 27, 1966). Peter Wager completed the research on Pentecostal church growth and wrote *Look Out! The Pentecostals are Coming* (1973).

McGavran had his eye on Peter Wagner for a teaching position in the School of World Mission in early 1968. While Wagner was finishing up his stay in the United States working on his M.A., McGavran wrote him a letter offering a three year teaching fellowship on the faculty of missions. The fellowship would have required Wagner to teach up to four hours in the School of World Mission, assist the other professors in the grading of papers, lead research seminars, and write book reviews for the *Church Growth Bulletin*. The most important requirement was the obtaining of a Ph.D. during the three years of the fellowship. However, in a letter dated March 5, 1968, Wagner declined the offer stating that he felt morally obligated to return to the work in Bolivia.

A picture in *Theology News and Notes* (May 1968) includes Dr. Ralph D. Winter, associate professor of missionary techniques and methods, along with

four students, one of which is C. Peter Wagner. Later that year, McGavran wrote Wagner in Bolivia inviting him to be a visiting lecturer in 1970. The field council of the Andes Evangelical Mission approved Wagner's absence during the months of January to March of 1970 so he could be a visiting lecturer at the School of World Mission on the topic of "Frontiers in Missionary Strategy." September 1968 found a major article on McGavran, "Apostle of Church Growth," published in *World Vision Magazine*. McGavran published two articles that fall and winter. One article appeared in *Japan Harvest* (Winter 1968-1969) on "Church Growth in Japan," and the other in *Theology News and Notes* (November 1968) on "The Church Growth Point of View and Christian Mission."

McGavran started off the year 1969 by writing a letter to Dr. Carl F. H. Henry regarding the need of the School of Mission to interact with scholars on the biblical approach to non-Christian religions. While a response from Dr. Henry has not been found, a response from Dr. Arthur Glasser, who was not yet on the faculty, after seeing the letter, gives a glimpse into the perspective of the School of World Mission in early 1969. Glasser speaks about the need for developing a biblical orientation to any studies that take place and then remarks, "After all, we are committed to the growth of the Church. We want our studies and productivity to further this central task. We dare not allow ourselves the least indulgence that would divert us in the slightest degree from the emphasis that has brought the SWM-ICG into being" (Letter to McGavran c. 1969). Writing to Peter Wagner, McGavran reveals his view on the advantages of missionaries studying at the

School of World Mission. He comments that, "it seems to me that study at the School of World Mission should be regarded by all missionary societies as a first class economy. It steps up the efficiency of the missionary considerably, particularly of those of your missionaries who are in Indian work, who will find the anthropology and church growth emphasis invaluable" (Letter dated February 13, 1969).

Just one week later, McGavran provides a glimpse into the struggle to get early church growth studies published. He writes, "These scientific, factual studies of the growth of the Church at present time do not have very much circulation. As a result they are not a very good bet financially, for any publishing firm" (Letter to C. Peter Wager February 27, 1969). In spite of this discouraging comment, by June of 1969, Eerdmans had published seven books in their "Church Growth Series", and five more were in production.

The rumor began circulating about this same time that Art Glasser might be coming to the faculty of the School of World Mission. McGavran responded to a letter of inquiry by saying, "In regard to Glasser, the situation is this. We have invited him to come to Fuller for a year of missionary studies. It is my hope that this year of study will lead to better things. I would love to have him on the faculty here..." (Letter to C. Peter Wagner March 14, 1969). Glasser participated in three church growth seminars held during the summer and early fall months. McGavran greatly appreciated Glasser's contributions and wrote, "Arthur Glasser's contributions in the last three church growth seminars has been

tremendous. I have been much in prayer that he will accept a call to SWM-ICG as one of the faculty. We could get no one more able, and no one who knows more about the present missionary enterprise” (Letter to C. Peter Wager September 18, 1969).

While at Fuller, Wagner had completed a thesis on church growth in Bolivia. McGavran felt it was one of the best studies to come out of the School of World Mission at that time. Writing to Joseph McCullough, the general director of the Andes Evangelical Mission, McGavran notes, “Last year while Peter Wagner was here he produced a first class study of the Evangelical Church in Bolivia. Indeed, we counted it as the best, or at least one of the best theses done here last year” (Letter dated March 14, 1969).

McGavran did not always use the term “Church Growth,” as is illustrated by an excerpt from a letter written in June 1969. Referencing proponents of church growth, McGavran says they are “those who carry a banner for great commission missions. They believe that ‘discipling the nations’ is the first and essential step in all future improvement of human relations” (Letter to Peter Wagner June 19, 1969). Writing a congratulatory letter to Peter Wagner after he was appointed associate director of his mission, McGavran uses the term “effective evangelism” for Church Growth. “You will have increasing opportunity to weave effective evangelism (Church Growth) into the fabric of theological seminaries and Bible Schools, and mission policies all across Latin America” (Letter dated September 16, 1968).

A good example of McGavran's extended travels is seen in his itinerary for the summer of 1969. He vacationed in Oregon from July 28 until August 8, and then made a trip to Wisconsin and on to St. Louis to visit his son and family. From there he traveled to Memphis, Tennessee for a visit and then led three church growth seminars in Winona Lake, IN, Ventnor, NY, and Philadelphia, PA. Even with all of his travel, he managed to write an article for *Christianity Today* on the topic of "Advanced Education for Missionaries" (September 26, 1969).

The task of being the founding dean of the School of World Mission was large. He mentions the heavy load in a letter to his pastor in November 1969 saying, "When we moved here in September 1965 – at the age of 68 – it was to take up the largest responsibilities of our lives and enter on a man killing job. I am not only dean of the School of Missions and Institute of Church Growth, with fifty career missionaries in attendance from many boards, I not only teach a regular load, supervise many researches, and administer the faculty and the School, but am also fuelling a quiet revolution in missions" (Letter to Dr. Conner dated November 9, 1969).

With 1969 coming to a close, McGavran fired off one last letter to Peter Wagner in Cochabamba, Bolivia that included two interesting facts. First, he reveals his passion for the growth of the church when he says, "More and more the Churches must see themselves called to mission in an era when vast church planting is both possible and the manifest will of God." Second, rejoicing, he closes his letter with, "Glasser is probably going to join us. We have long needed

a man with close connections with the EFMA IFMA wing, and now all we need is another one!!” (Letter dated December 12, 1969).

The 1970s

McGavran cared for his students, fellow professors, and their families. After Peter Wagner arrived and had started teaching in January 1970, McGavran wrote a thankful letter to Doris Wagner saying, “Just a line to tell you how pleased we are to have Pete here...We specially appreciate...your letting him come. And have been distressed to hear of the complications you have had after the operation. I hope that by the time this reaches you, you are well out of the woods and indeed on the go again and we are looking forward to your being here in about three weeks” (Letter dated January 30, 1970).

During February 1970, McGavran spoke at the annual conference for Evangelical Literature Overseas on the topic of “Church Growth and Literature.” Evidently, McGavran and Wagner continued discussing his joining the faculty of the School of World Mission through March 1970. A letter to Mr. And Mrs. Peter Wagner dated March 26, 1970 offers the following insights into Wagner’s appointment.

I was very pleased to get your note of March 18th which said, “Since the commitment is just about assured, you may want to consider keeping me ‘in’ by having copies of SWM minutes sent to me.” I do, indeed want to keep you “in” and you will receive the minutes regularly from now on.... From my point of view, and the timetable I have in mind for faculty movements, September 1972 would be a suitable time for you to join this faculty.

Before Wagner could make a firm commitment, he needed to talk with the director of the Andes Evangelical Mission about fulfilling his responsibilities and obligations. McGavran held a mutual concern that Wagner's transition would bring no harm to the Andes mission. In a letter to Joseph McCullough dated April 6, 1970 McGavran addresses this concern as,

...we have given Pete a very cordial invitation to join the faculty at the School of World Mission and he is giving it serious consideration. At the same time, both he and we are agreed that his work with the Andes Evangelical Mission as Associate director is of the highest importance and must not be jeopardized. Since an immediate move is not contemplated either by him or by us, I am simply leaving this in the Lord's hands, trusting that a way will be found of mutual profit to both the Andes Evangelical Mission and the School of World Mission.

A letter received by McGavran from Wagner (April 8, 1970) just two days after his wiring to General Director McCullough gave indication that a forthcoming merger between the Andes Mission and another mission might open the door to Wagner coming to Fuller earlier than originally expected.

A return letter was fired off immediately to Wagner in which McGavran gives a dynamic overview of how he viewed the function of the School of World Mission.

The function of this graduate school of missions in relation to the whole missionary enterprise is becoming clearer to me. We not only train a few hundred career missionaries, but by: training them, and focusing their conviction and experience on actual communication of the Gospel, and developing a consistent and biblical theory of missions which holds the evangelization of the world steadily in view, and ever aims to be faithful to a discipling of the ethne, and writing about these matters, and publishing books and articles on dynamic mission, and speaking, and teaching, and backing some activities and not others.

We influence styles in missions, and help steer long range goals in biblical directions, and fight crucial battles, knowing which battles are crucial and which are not, seek God's forgiveness for our wrong decisions, vigorously combat error – particularly error which is to death, and vigorously love the brethren.

God deliver us from being a mere school of missions. God grant us the high privilege of being a school of missions which is – to some small extent at least – a lamp to guide the feet of missions and a forum in which its central questions can be discussed and resolved.

The men on the faculty should be those who shiver a bit at the thought of such a demanding task, and delight in having a share in it, and fight to keep their thinking clear and clean and accurate and creative, and faithful enough to receive from their wonderful peers on a thousand fronts a respectful hearing - - - are you tuned in, my friend? (Letter dated April 8, 1970).

While McGavran continued to work towards Wagner coming to Fuller, Peter gave consideration to the pursuit of a Ph.D. at the University of Nairobi or a Th.D. at Fuller, neither of which was to happen in the long term.

The April 1970 issue of the *Fuller Bulletin* included a short article by McGavran "The Sunrise of Missions." In this article he responds briefly to another professor of missions who had written that missionaries should go home since the era of world evangelization was drawing to a close. McGavran countered with the claim: "Far from the mission era drawing to a close, it is just beginning. We stand in the sunrise of evangelization. The acceptance of the Lord Jesus we have seen nothing compared with that which we shall see."

The appointment of Arthur F. Glasser as associate dean and associate professor of missions was announced on May 1, 1970. President Hubbard delighted that "the addition of Arthur Glasser to our faculty brings us a missionary

scholar and spokesman of uncommon ability and proven dedication. He and the other full-time teaching staff in the School of World Mission will continue to blaze fresh trains of missionary research and education” (*Missionary News Service* May 1, 1970).

At the School of World Mission faculty meeting held on May 8, 1970, it was announced that the beginning of the Doctor of Missiology program had been accepted. McGavran was delighted in the faculty that was building in the school of Tippett, Winter, Kraft, Glasser, and in the future, Wagner. Writing to Wagner, he notes that it “is a remarkably strong and many sided faculty. Its impact in the world of mission will be notable. And needed, too. This is precisely the time for great things in the missionary world” (Letter dated May 28, 1970).

McGavran’s view of social responsibility is highlighted in a letter of June 17, 1970. He writes, “Social responsibility for evangelicals must be interpreted within the evangelistic, church-multiplying orbit – not (as our liberal opponents insist) as a substitute for evangelistic activity” (Letter to Peter Wagner). In a later letter McGavran mentions that “we need a top flight thesis on the...social action-evangelism issue. Someone needs to lay it on the line that evangelicals are deeply interested in social action and justice and the new day – but resolutely refuse to substitute these for soul salvation, insisting rather that social justice and social action are much more powerful when they result from soul salvation” (Letter to Peter Wagner November 25, 1970).

The growing impact of the Church Growth School was reflected in an article in *Eternity* during August 1970. Calling McGavran “Today’s Expert on Church Growth,” Dwight Baker wrote, “Whether speaking against the leaden traditionalism of past mission policies or the heavy pessimism of current theories of mission, his voice is a salutary corrective that needs to be heard—and heeded—today” (Baker 1970).

Early in September 1970 McGavran was leading a seminar on Church Growth at Winona Lake, Indiana. Plans changed and Peter Wagner was not expected to join the faculty in fall 1971. Correspondence continued back and forth between McGavran and Wagner reveals plans were made for Peter to teach a course at Fuller from February 9 to March 5, 1971.

The American Scientific Affiliation, which was made up of World Council Christians who were teachers of science in Universities, held its annual meeting at Fuller that fall. All six faculty members spoke—Shearer, Kraft, Winter, Tippett, Glasser, and McGavran. December 8 found McGavran leading a Church Growth seminar in Ventnor, New Jersey. Immediately upon his return to Pasadena, he entered the hospital for gall bladder surgery. The surgery took place on December 15, with the surgery going well. McGavran planned to be back in his office by the 22.

1971

“It was quite thrilling,” Peter Wagner wrote on January 26, 1971, “to see that the unanimous recommendation has gone to the seminary administration that I be invited to join the faculty in the summer of 1971” (Letter to Donald McGavran). The letter reveals that Wagner wanted to bring his family to Pasadena in August 1971, but that he might not start teaching until January 1972. Another letter written in March of the same year alerted McGavran that the turnover of assistant directors in the Andes Mission was going smoothly and more quickly than Wagner had thought would take place. Peter Wagner was not only coming to teach in the School of Missiology, but he was also being asked to direct the Fuller Evangelistic Association. Given the significant reputation he had in Latin American Missions, as well as published books and articles, the Faculty Senate of Fuller agreed to his incoming status as Associate Professor of Latin American Affairs (Letter to Peter and Doris Wagner March 15, 1971).

An interesting article by McGavran appeared in *The Opinion*, a publication of the students of Fuller Theological Seminary, on February 16, 1971. The article “How I Work,” offers a brief overview of McGavran’s practices. For example, the following excerpt provides insight into McGavran’s approach to writing.

My best known book *The Bridges of God* was written in the depths of an Indian forest where I spent my four week vacation in 1953. I stalked, rifle in hand, between five and six in the morning, sat at my typewriter from six to six, stalked again from six to seven, and wrote till nine. My last book *Understanding Church Growth* was written in the summer of 1968 when recuperating from an operation. Mrs. McGavran and I hid away in Dr. Schoonhoven’s house and there I

glued the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair for twelve hours a day. And walked two miles each evening to keep in shape.

The preparation for books, however, is done from day to day. Ideas come constantly and are written down. Books and magazines, which I devour as time permits, yield many ideas—some to quote with approval and some to slaughter. Ideas which come in the middle of the night are often duds, but I get up and write them down just the same. Some gleam.

I strive for clarity and truth in my writing. Obscurantist authors are my bete noir. I reject the assumption that the more difficult a sentence is to understand, the more profound is the writer. I, therefore, shun learned jargon and —as far as possible—technical and little used words.

I rewrite many times. My first draft is always revised ruthlessly. I like to use a professional editor for the final draft. When others are going to spend days reading—and thousands do—I owe it to them to iron out the wrinkles, remove the ambiguities, and make my position crystal clear. What I say must also be true—as true as it is possible to make it. Making it clear and true sometimes leads me into strife with rules of various sorts. My ancestors came from Ireland and I have scant regard for rules for rules sake. I do not hesitate to over-emphasize a point if the situation in 1971 requires it! If in 1981 the situation requires overstatement on the other side, I shall cheerfully comply (McGavran 1971:1-2).

Critics of McGavran have commonly mentioned his polemical style of writing as a problem. The article just quoted gives insight into McGavran's thinking as to why he often overstates his case.

Actually, McGavran had a spirit of graciousness toward his critics that was not always recognized. In a letter to Peter Wagner, Ralph Winter, Arthur Glasser, and Vergil Gerber, he suggests that the critics of Church Growth be dealt with kindly.

I suggest, therefore, that we bend over backward to be kindly and generous to those who are now reacting vigorously to 'church

growth thinking'. They will see the light – if God gives them to see the light; but it will take time. The truth will triumph. Let us give them that time and go on ploughing corn. Let us publish books which describe churches in honest, truthful detail. Let us analyze causes for growth and non-growth. Let us remember that the task is indeed great and complex and ours is only one part of the whole. Let us ask God to forgive our sins – and push resolutely forward as if we had not sinned. There is much ground to be gained and there are many adversaries to be overcome, and the day is far spent (Letter dated July 9, 1971).

The polemical tone of McGavran's writing flowed from his commitment to the Great Commission, rather than from a dislike of his adversaries. He believed passionately in the cause of Christ.

The Wagner family arrived in Pasadena on August 6, 1971 and stayed with the McGavrans until they were able to move into their new house. In the fall McGavran taught Principles and Procedures in Church Growth I with Dr. Roy E Shearer, a teaching associate in Mission and Church Growth. McGavran was in the Philippines and Singapore during November and December, so Shearer covered the remainder of the class. The course began on September 28 and ended on December 6. The outline of the course was as follows:

- Introductory session
- The Complex Faithfulness which is Church Growth
- God's Will and Church Growth
- Today's Task, Opportunity and Imperative in Missions
- A Universal Fog
- Facts Needed
- Discovering Reasons for Church Growth
- Sources to Search for Causes of Growth
- Helps and Hindrances to Understanding
- Revival and Church Growth

The course required the reading of fourteen hundred pages in *Church Growth and the Word of God* (Tippet), *Wildfire: The Growth of the Church in Korea* (Shearer), *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* (Adrian Hastings), and *Latin American Church Growth* (Read, Monterrosos, and Johnson). The course also required students to conduct research on their own fields of ministry.

Beginning with fifteen graduate students, over the years the School of World Mission grew to become one of the most influential schools of missiology in the world. By fall 1971, the school had “a faculty of six, a student body of more than eighty missionaries and nationals, from forty-one separate countries” (Fuller 1972, 233-234). Some 250 missionaries attended the school in its first seven years, with sixty-four receiving degrees. In his role as dean McGavran’s understanding of church growth continued to expand as he collaborated with colleagues like Alan Tippet, J. Edwin Orr, Charles H. Kraft, Ralph Winter, Peter Wagner, and Arthur Glasser. Along with these leaders, a significant vehicle for communicating church growth thinking was the William Carey Library, a publishing house devoted to producing books about Great Commission missions. McGavran’s continued travels and research eventually resulted in the publication of *Understanding Church Growth* in 1970 that is considered to be his *magnum opus*.

1972

McGavran made an extensive four month trip to Japan, Philippines, Thailand, West Java, India, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and England from November 1971 to March 1972. As usual, he conducted several church growth conferences and seminars, as well as helped establish a new School of Church Growth at Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal, India. Peter Wagner wrote to him in January about two disturbing events. The first involved articles against the Church Growth viewpoint written by Orlando Costas and Osvaldo Mottesi. Wagner writes, "If these papers are typical of their position, Dean, there is no question that they are moving theologically with the Geneva line, and this can only cause a dilution of their evangelistic desire and involvement." Wagner's second concern reflected the decision of the Latin American Mission to move the department of Evangelism in Depth into the Latin American Seminary, rather than into the Department of Evangelism. Since Evangelism in Depth was to be under the direction of the Seminary administration, Wagner suggested, "One does not need to have the gift of prophecy to see that this arrangement will soon neutralize the vision that Kenneth Strachan had when Evangelism in Depth was started back in 1960. This is most regrettable. The Lord will have to raise up something new and more vital in the days to come for Latin American, I am afraid" (Letter dated January 18, 1972).

On January 25, 1972, McGavran responded to Wagner's two concerns in a letter that reveals his classical theological position. He wrote,

I am grieved to hear that EID is going to be a department of the LAM Seminary switching to humanization as the one hope of the world. However unless we seminary professors keep on believing that —
the soul is eternal, the body transient,
the soul can be eternally lost or saved,
salvation depends on belief in “JC according to the Scriptures,”
membership in His Body is the outcome of such belief
and the Bible is the infallible Word which judges men rather than
being judged by men,
unless, in short, a straightforward biblical position is maintained (no symbolic meanings, no going behind the words to fanciful meanings) the pressures of the day will shove seminary after seminary over o the Uppsala position. SWM-ICG will be subject to the same pressures (Letter dated January 25, 1972).

While McGavran strongly felt a Christian society was something everyone wanted, he continued to believe such was only accomplishable through redeemed men and women. Peter Beyerhaus emphasized Church Growth’s commitment to biblical authority in McGavran’s introduction to an article in November 1972. He wrote, “Church Growth is not primarily a matter of statistics, methods, or church or mission policies; but rather of deep convictions. It becomes possible only when Christians who know Christ go out driven by belief in the unshakeable authority of the Bible (Beyerhaus 1972:267).

Eye of the Storm: The Great Debate in Mission was released by WORD publishing in February 1972 with McGavran as editor. The Fuller Evangelistic Association moved into new headquarters and Wagner headed to Mexico, Costa Rica, and Venezuela for three weeks to lecture on church growth in the Presbyterian Seminary in Mexico. McGavran had encouraged Wagner to go, as he felt it would provide a corrective to the misunderstandings perpetrated by Orlando Costas and others regarding Church Growth Thought.

John K. Branner published an interview with McGavran in the spring issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* titled, "McGavran speaks on Roland Allen." In the article McGavran states that he never met Roland Allen, and only began reading him after the publication of *Bridges of God*. While admitting that some of Allen's principles can be found in Church Growth Thought, McGavran notes that the big difference is that Allen never understood the concept of people movements. Church Growth did not grow out of Allen's principles on the expansion of the church, but from McGavran's studies with Pickett in the 1930s that culminated in the publication of *Church Growth and Group Conversion* (Branner 1972:165-174).

Christianity Today published an article by McGavran in the June 1972 issue titled "Yes, Uppsala Betrayed the Two Billion: Now What?" That same month the entire issue of *Theology, News and Notes* was devoted to the subject of missions. "Missions Today: Achievement and Hope" contained articles by C. Peter Wagner, Charles H. Kraft, Arthur F. Glasser, and Donald A. McGavran. McGavran's article focused on "The Theological Meaning of the Growing Interest in Church Growth in Asia."

A festschrift for Dr. McGavran was in development during 1972, and negotiations for publication were ongoing between Ralph D. Winter, Harper & Row, and Wm. B. Eerdmans. By July of the year Harper & Row had determined not to publish the book citing concerns over publication costs. Fortunately, Eerdmans agreed to publish it and have it ready for release in January 1973 at a

SWM event commemorating the seventy-fifth birthday of Donald McGavran. The 447-page festschrift included essays from twenty-six of McGavran's students and professional colleagues.

Donald and Mary McGavran celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on August 29, and the SWM professors honored them with a card shower sent to their vacation address in Eugene, Oregon.

An article appeared in *Asian Challenge* in July 1972 that was extremely critical of McGavran and the Church Growth viewpoint. "The Place of the Western Missionary in Asia" referred to McGavran's ideas as "very destructive" and "very dangerous." The author stressed misunderstandings of the Church Growth position by saying, "Glorifying God does not include starting churches and obtaining large numbers of nominal converts at the expense of all else." He stated, "If numbers are the only criterion of success, then it would seem that it pays to preach heresy!" (Adeney 1972:50-51). McGavran's approach to answering the article was "I counsel ignoring it. This sort of misjudgings of the c. g. position and of what I have been saying is commonplace. The truth will swamp it — given time" (Note to C. Peter Wagner dated September 23, 1972).

When McGavran became dean of the Fuller School of World Mission, he deliberately excluded pastors from North America. As a career missionary, his primary concern was international missions, and he desired to share his insights with those who would take the gospel to people who had never heard of Jesus Christ. Thus, the entrance requirements to the School of World Mission required

three years of cross-cultural experience validated by fluency in a second language, which effectively eliminated most church leaders in North America.

Pastors in North America, however, began to hear about the fresh insights coming from the new Church Growth School and encouraged Peter Wagner to apply Church Growth ideas to the American church. Wagner had already considered such a class after coming to Fuller full-time in 1971, and in 1972 he and McGavran taught a pilot class in Church Growth to pastors and denominational leaders from North America. A development report given to the Faculty Senate of Fuller School of Theology on October 2, 1972 notes, "The extension of Church Growth Studies will include America and this offering of an extension course on this subject at Lake Avenue Congregational Church" (School of World Mission report dated October 2, 1972). The class became the springboard for beginning the American Church Growth Movement.

The report to the Faculty Senate also included notice that the SWM faculty was preparing for the 1974 Congress on World Evangelization by compiling a list of all the people yet to be evangelized. This study became a significant part of Ralph Winter's lecture in Lausanne, Switzerland during July 16-26, 1974. The Billy Graham Association sponsored the Congress.

A listing of courses for the fall quarter 1972 shows McGavran and Wagner co-taught Principles and Procedures of Church Growth I, and McGavran taught Church Growth Case Studies. In the winter quarter McGavran and Wagner taught Principles and Procedures II, McGavran taught Indian Church, and

Wagner taught Third World Missions. During the spring quarter McGavran taught two classes—Theology Today and Advanced Church Growth. Wagner also taught two courses — Mission & Urbanization and Dynamics of Christian Mission in Latin America. A note circulated between Wagner and McGavran dated November 17, 1972 discusses the possibility of Wagner teaching Principles and Procedures alone, and he and McGavran team teaching Advanced Church Growth beginning in the 1973-1974 school year.

1973

The big event scheduled for January 23, 1973 was a dinner commemorating the seventy-fifth birthday of Donald McGavran. Secret plans had been underway for over a year to host the birthday party, and present the festschrift *God, Man, and Church Growth*. Faculty members, SWM students, and former students from the early days in Eugene, Oregon were invited to attend. Persons too far away to attend were invited to send testimonials to be bound in a book of memories and given to Dr. McGavran. The birthday party was billed as a promotional event, and McGavran was asked to write a paper on “Five Expectations for Fuller’s School of Missions in the Years Ahead.” This address was published in the June 1973 issue of *Theology, News and Notes*.

At the SWM Celebration 75, Peter Wagner presented the Book of Letters, President Hubbard the festschrift, and Dean Glasser shared thoughts from the SWM Faculty. Over 250 people attended the dinner celebration, but over 300

friends and associates from around the world wrote letters of congratulations that were presented to McGavran in the Book of Letters.

“Dividends, Church Growth, and Key 73” was written for *Christianity Today’s* January 16, 1973 edition. Key 73 was a cooperative effort among approximately 150 denominations and other groups in North America to give every person an opportunity to say yes to Jesus Christ and become members of his church. Acknowledging that Key 73 was important, McGavran nevertheless reminded readers that, “Key 73 must pass that acid test. The dividends declared a year from now should be written in terms of lasting growth of churches.” In the same article he described Church Growth thinking in America in the following eight statements.

- Accept the fact that God wants His lost children found, brought into the fold, and fed.
- Dig out the facts about the growth of congregations and denominations.
- Recognize the winnability of North Americans.
- Harness insights of the social sciences to evangelism and church growth.
- Pray and plan revival.
- Multiply evangelists — men and women, boys and girls.
- Multiply new cells of Christians.
- Expect rich dividends in the Christian Life Style.

McGavran briefly described the emergence of Church Growth Thought in America, and declared, “Many good programs of evangelism exist. Church growth evangelism’s merit is that it focuses attention on methods and aims which intend the growth of churches” (McGavran 1973b:1-2).

In April, *Missiology* carried McGavran's article "Loose the Churches, Let Them Go!" in which he calls for evangelism and discipleship that is strictly biblical and strictly Indian (McGavran 1973a:81-94). The next month Ralph Winter asked the SWM faculty for a list of their publications for the previous two years.

McGavran's list for the years 1970 to 1973 included five books, two chapters in books, four articles (three of which were in *Christianity Today*), one book in preparation, and twenty-one issues edited for the *Church Growth Bulletin*.

By June, McGavran was working on his address for the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism being held one year later in July 1974. The plan was for those presenting major addresses to prepare a 6,000-page paper by September 1973. These written addresses were to be compiled as Issue Strategy Papers and circulated to those coming to the Congress. The delegates would then read the papers and send in comments and questions. The comments and questions would be sent to the authors of the papers who would then prepare a forty-minute address in light of the questions and comments. McGavran had a tentative outline prepared as of June 25, 1973.

Over the summer months McGavran made trips to India (August 6-10), Kenya (August 13-17), Nigeria (August 20-24), and Ivory Coast (August 27-31) to conduct church growth workshops. He arrived back in Los Angeles on September 2, 1973.

No exact date has been found, but sometime in the first half of 1973 Peter Wagner suggested that "*body evangelism*" be used as a synonym for Church

Growth evangelism. McGavran disagreed with this new term and wrote to the SWM faculty that

Body life is life of the existing body. Body evangelism is evangelism of the existing body. That is its natural meaning. ...so once Body Evangelism has come in, it will be captured by the renewal people. "Body Evangelism" is hard to defend against capture.

I am not at all sure that we want to drop "church growth". It has come to mean exactly what it was intended to mean across great reaches of the world. It is a pity to give up something as successful and meaningful, and start defining a new term. But if it has to be done, let's get a term which has in it strong defenses against the reinterpretation of evangelism which is going on all sides.

Church Multiplying Evangelism has one of the two right meanings. Let's be slow about taking a backward step. (Note to SWM Faculty with no date).

Apparently McGavran was not completely tied to the term "Church Growth" but he did not want a term that focused inward on the existing body. Responding to McGavran's note, Vergil Gerber replied,

By all means, I hope that "church growth" will not disappear from our vocabulary! On the contrary, my idea is that the term "body evangelism" will contribute to its use and make it even more definitive in its meaning. I would hope that "body evangelism" would concisely point up that we're talking about evangelism that contributes to the growth of the Body of Christ, i.e. "church growth". So let's not do away with the term "church growth". Let's underscore its meaning by the use of the term "body evangelism". If it doesn't do that, I'm against it (Letter to McGavran dated October 15, 1973.).

Gerber was not totally against a new term as long as it contributed to a proper understanding of church growth.

During the 1970s McGavran was evidently not guaranteed a full-time teaching contract. On November 12, 1973 he sent a note to President David Hubbard asking if he would be invited to serve full-time for the school year 1974-1975. McGavran also asked to be appointed on “special duty” in India during the fall quarter of 1974. President Hubbard and Dean Glasser agreed to invite McGavran to teach full-time in 1974-1975, and to give him a sabbatical for the fall quarter so he could participate in lectures and seminars in East Asia and India. However, they also began to expedite Wagner’s teaching of the Church Growth courses, as well as limiting McGavran’s mentorship and teaching load for the winter and spring quarters (note to Dr. Hubbard from Dr. Glasser dated December 4, 1973).

A letter to the faculty written sometime in 1973, but without a date, shows McGavran’s concern that the School of World Mission remain faithful to the Conservative Evangelical position. He writes,

We should recognize the ease with which we can destroy the good will we have built up during the past eight years through establishing a record of faithfulness to the Word in the matter of discipling the nations.

That is a good and fragile thing. To the degree that it increases, students will increase, income will go up, money will be easier to raise, more books will be published, and all our various emphases will make greater impact. To the degree that it is eroded or seriously questioned, missionaries will be strongly advised not to come here, nationals will not be given travel funds to come, income will go down, fewer books will be published, and all the various emphases we make will suffer (Undated note from McGavran).

The major concern of McGavran was that the school remain faithful to its evangelical roots so that evangelical mission agencies would continue to send their missionaries to SWM for training. This was a concern not to be neglected, for forty-three mission boards from thirty-six countries of the world had missionaries at the School of World Mission in the 1973-1974 school year.

1974

The term “ethno-theology” had been invented by Charles Kraft to mean the clothing of essential biblical theology in the language, thought forms, logic systems, and philosophy and culture of the people being reached. McGavran voiced a concern in March 1974 that some might misuse this new advance in missiology to seek a supposed eternal truth that lay behind the plain meaning of the words of the Bible. He felt that the misuse of ethno-theology posed great danger, for, no matter how careful, it opened the missionary to the charge of changing the Bible to suit man’s convenience. McGavran felt that what would be gained in closeness to the local culture would be lost in a low view of the Bible (Note to SWM Faculty March 25, 1974).

McGavran held a three day church growth seminar at Northwest Baptist Theological College in Vancouver, British Columbia in February 1974. In April, he published correspondence with Victor Hayward in *Missiology* titled “Without Crossing Barriers? One in Christ vs. Discipling Diverse Cultures.” The publication was not an article, but rather a number of letters written between

McGavran and Hayward during 1971 and 1972. Victor Hayward, who was Associate General Secretary for Relationships with Christian Councils of the World Council of Churches in Geneva during the time of the correspondence, was upset over an article by McGavran that had appeared in the *Church Growth Bulletin* during May 1971. The correspondence is an interesting overview of what has come to be known as the homogeneous debate.

Once again, McGavran's heart comes out in a letter to the Secretary of the International Association for Mission Studies. In his letter McGavran shares his concern over the lack of biblical references and mission thought in the IAMS newsletter. As part of the letter's conclusion he writes,

I have felt free to write you frankly in regard to this matter because visitors to my school here have on numerous occasions praised our tremendous use of anthropology, sociology, cultures and our tremendous concentration on the contemporary situations, the contexts, the ethnic approaches, and the indigenous churches. Contextuality is, indeed, of high importance; but being contextual is not being missionary. The chameleon is highly contextual. Being missionary is making the Gospel contextual in order to make it effective. It is studying movements of innovation to aid the discipling of the nations (Letter dated June 18, 1974).

It is clear that McGavran was always concerned that whatever was done in missions led to the winning of people to Christ and bringing them into a local church.

McGavran continued his practice of traveling to conduct church growth training workshops in other countries during the summer vacation months. In July 1974 he attended the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, and in August

traveled to India, Kenya, Nigeria, and the Ivory Coast. However, it was at Lausanne that the Church Growth Movement came of age. The Fuller faculty played key roles in gathering data, as well as presenting papers and leading sessions. Tippet, Winter, and McGavran presented papers at plenary sessions. Wagner led a four day workshop on Church Growth. Eyewitnesses reported that on the first day only about fifty people attended Wagner's workshop. On the second day between two hundred and three hundred showed up, and by the final day over half of the people at the congress were trying to get into his session. The great success of Church Growth at Lausanne was due in part to the numerous missionaries that had been trained at the School of World Mission. Over one hundred of the attendees at Lausanne were Fuller alumni. This, along with the fact that McGavran and other faculty members had input into the design of the Lausanne agenda, put Church Growth on the map internationally.

Fall 1974 found McGavran on sabbatical in Bangladesh and India where he led eight seminars and workshops on Church Growth. He found that opportunities for church multiplication abounded in India but were being neglected due to "lack of vision, faulty theology, laziness and coldness, tied to old patterns of mission work, immobility — 'I am a specialist missionary'—dedicated to care for existing Christians, dedicated to turn over to Indians and return to Fortress America!!! But the fields are white and God is awaiting His people to harvest" (Letter from Calcutta dated November 16, 1974).

1975

The January 1975 issue of *International Review of Mission* carried an article by McGavran on “Barred Populations and Missionaries.” In this article McGavran presents three theses regarding missionary work. Thesis one is that “many churches find it difficult if not impossible to communicate the faith to those with whom they are in daily contact, since many populations are locked and barred to receiving the Gospel from the Christians in their neighborhoods and cultures.” Thesis two states, “It is God’s will for Christians and churches from *other* neighborhoods and cultures to send Gospel-proclaiming, church-multiplying missionaries to them.” Building on these two, thesis three concludes, “The strategy of missions recently popular with some Christians is inadequate and should be supplemented” (McGavran 1975:57-60).

One of the early and continuing criticisms of Church Growth theory in parts of the world experiencing rapid conversions is the many imperfect Christians often created. When large people movements take place, the maturing (or perfecting to use McGavran’s words) usually takes a back seat to the ingathering of new converts. Thus, these new Christians are often somewhat shallow and untrained. Some voices then call for a stoppage of evangelism so that the new converts can be perfected. A letter from McGavran to Rev. Chua Wee-Hian in London, England provides insight into McGavran’s perspective on this issue. He writes, “Much Christianization and many, many imperfect Christians!! What does Church Growth say to this? My answer is simple. Keep on baptizing as many as

possible and teaching them all things whatsoever the Lord commanded as vigorously as possible” (Letter dated March 3, 1975). McGavran felt it was best to win people to Christ and then worry about perfecting them later. Once new believers were under the direction of a new Lord and a new book—the Bible—at least they were on the right way.

One interesting perspective on the Church Growth Movement was communicated by letter to McGavran in March 1975 regarding the core criticism coming out of the Christian Reformed Church. Eugene Rubigh wrote,

Perhaps the most incisive problem that I face in Christian Reformed circles is this: The church growth movement addresses itself to the ideal church, calling it to use its enthusiasm strategically. As a matter of fact, however, it is only the ideal church that can fully claim God’s promise of growth. The imperfect church [that] may need searing calls to heal itself to become a fit instrument for such growth (Letter to McGavran dated March 4, 1975).

Looking at this basic criticism from today’s vantage point provides an interesting insight in that the trend to focusing on church health, rather than church growth today, is based on the same line of thought: churches must be healthy before they can grow. McGavran’s response to Dr. Rubigh is not recorded, but it is likely he would have rejected the need of a church to be perfectly healthy before it can grow.

Little can be found from McGavran’s pen on the subject of literature. However, in a letter to Jack McAlister of World Literature Crusade, McGavran suggests that literature can be used to determine areas of awakening interest in the Gospel. Once areas of interest are determined then “it is possible for

literature, if specially suited to the populations of wakening interest and of proved receptivity to bring into existence movements to Christ, each consisting of many congregations within one piece of the human mosaic” (Letter dated March 18, 1975). Later that fall, McGavran made a trip to India in part to investigate the Every Home Crusade of the World Literature Crusade. He found the Every Home Crusade teams to be effective. Homes were being visited and the Gospel shared with the six hundred million people of India. McGavran concluded, “No mission in India is doing anywhere near as much open, friendly, vigorous evangelization of the hundreds of millions who have never heard the name of Christ and never read a word of the Bible” (Report to the Faculty of SWM dated October 15, 1975).

In the same letter McGavran explains his understanding of “receptivity.”

He writes,

Record the size and growth rate of the Church in segment. This is the best indicator of receptivity. If hundreds (or thousands) are becoming Christians and responsible members of Christ’s Church, then receptivity is proven.

Carefully total replies received by you from exploratory distribution. This will show you areas of “awakening interest.” (I do not call this “receptivity”, I reserve that word for a degree of openness to the Gospel which results in ongoing churches.) Areas of awakening interest (in which there are relatively few churches — usually none — as yet) should be carefully studied to determine what it is which will enable these first faint signs of wakening interest to be led on to responsible membership in Christ’s Church.

McGavran felt that literature was best used to determine wakening interest, but it could be used, if properly designed, to lead people to membership in Christ's Church.

In May 1975 McGavran was informed that he would be going on half-time beginning with the 1975-1976 school year. It appears that he taught no classes in the fall, but did supervise the doctoral dissertations of six men. In the winter quarter he taught Christianity and Culture II, and in the spring quarter taught Theology of Mission Today and Advanced Church Growth.

The British Missionary Societies (Edinburgh House), which represented the mainline societies and boards in England, was in a mess in 1975. A lack of leadership kept the Society from establishing a unified direction. Some missionary societies resigned their membership in protest, while the more conservative societies continued their more progressive ways. Out of concern for what was taking place in England, McGavran wrote Sir Kenneth Grubb, who was then retired, advocating a British or European Consultation on British Missions and The Theology of Church Growth. Grubbs return letter expressed a similar concern, but did not hold out any hope that such a conference could be organized (Letters from McGavran and Grubb dated March 17, 1975).

Since McGavran was now on half-time status at the School of World Mission, he made two trips in fall 1975 to Asia (August 31 to September 26) and to churches in America (October 3-10). His main purpose for going to Asia was to lead a church growth seminar in Kuala Lumpur. He spoke in a number of

Methodist and Lutheran Churches. At the church growth seminar McGavran lectured several times a day for five days. Ralph Neighbor, a Southern Baptist missionary from Singapore, delivered lectures at the conference on urban church growth.

Returning to the United States, McGavran rested for one week and then headed out to do seven church growth seminars led by Peter Wagner and the Fuller Evangelistic Association. Along with McGavran and Wagner, Win Arn, Paul Benjamin, and John Wimber spoke at the seminars sponsored by the Evangelical Covenant Denomination. The seminars were held in Pasadena, CA; Portland, OR; Hartford, CT; Cleveland, OH; Minneapolis, MN; Chicago, IL; and Kansas City, KS.

1976

McGavran began 1976 struggling over the future of a School of World Mission student who was having a difficult time completing his dissertation. A note to Dean Glasser suggested if the student could not finish by the end of the winter quarter that he be encouraged to return to India and finish the dissertation from there. Part of the reason for McGavran's suggestion was the limited resources of the School of World Mission to give the student any financial assistance to remain in the United States.

Dean Glasser petitioned the Faculty Senate in February to renew the contract of Donald McGavran for the school year 1976-1977 on the same half-time basis of the current contract (note from Glasser dated February 17, 1975).

On March 22 McGavran sent a complimentary letter to Peter Wagner thanking him for a “fine presentation this morning which brought out the enormously complicated nature of the social mosaic in America. Human society is necessarily a mosaic of homogeneous units and all Christianization must take account of the fact. The validity of the H. U. must be taken seriously” (Letter dated March 22, 1976). McGavran suggested to Wagner that they should temporarily glorify the homogeneous unit to teach its validity. However, in the long run, he believed they should seek balance between cultural pluralism and the good of the whole.

On June 4, 1976 Dean Glasser passed along the SWM faculty suggestions for potential board members of Fuller Theological Seminary. The four names included Donald A. McGavran, Warren E. Webster, Eugene A. Nida, and Louis King. Of McGavran, Dean Glasser simply commented, “Qualified in every way” (Note dated June 4, 1976).

Once again the fall quarter found McGavran in India leading a series of eight church growth seminars during November 1976. He flew back to Columbia, North Carolina on November 28, but no information is given on what he did while there. McGavran continued working on a manuscript entitled *Understanding the*

Church in India and developing a class on Indian Church for the School of World Mission during the remainder of the fall.

1977

Principles and Procedures in Church Growth II was McGavran's course for the winter quarter in 1977. The purpose of the course stated, "This course purposes to harness theology, ethnology, linguistics, history, quantitative analysis, research, missionary experience, goal setting, and disciplined planning to the task of discipling ta ethne" (course syllabus for SWM 661). The class covered one chapter of *Understanding Church Growth* per period, with the final ten class sessions given over to student presentations regarding the growth of their own mission situations.

During the summer of 1977, seven major communities of the Church of Christ in Zaire (Protestant) invited McGavran for ministry and consultation. He reported his experience in an article for *Missiology* under the title "God's Royal Power in Zaire: An Evaluation of the State of the Church," which appeared in the January, 1978 issue.

1978

McGavran kept in touch with former students and tracked the growth of their missions after leaving Fuller. A letter written to Peter Wagner in March 1978

reveals McGavran's concern that one denomination was not seeing the growth he expected. He wrote,

I have just received and studied the October-December 1977 issue of the TARGET published by CAMACOP (Alliance Church in the Philippines). I then compared it with the data in Dr. Rambo's thesis of 1968.

The disturbing fact emerges that after we had in our school Rambo and Arthur and Castillo, it did not affect growth in number of churches or number of cants. These had reached a plateau and continued on it from 1968 to 1974.

The Church Growth Workshop led by Vergil and myself in 1974 resulted in CAMACOP setting demanding goals in both churches and cants. These goals were achieved in 1975 and 1976, but in 1977 they were only half achieved, and I wonder whether (after the spurt caused by the Workshop) CAMACOP was settling back into the plateau again.

This is a major question we should be asking ourselves here at the School. Are we feeding into the Churches and Missions enough church growth principles (and that is what all our courses are supposed to do) that plateaus will be avoided and policies, and concepts, and methods, and theological principles which encourage growth will be embraced? That is the question (Letter to C. Peter Wagner dated March 23, 1977).

The members of the Alliance Church that had been trained at SWM were on the Church Growth wave length. They professed to agreement with the Church Growth School of Thought, and especially appreciated the emphasis on understanding culture. If a church group or denomination should have grown it was the Alliance. Thus, the Alliance lack of growth fueled McGavran's concern to rethink the teaching curriculum at SWM.

About the same time a concern was growing in McGavran's heart and mind over the direction of the American Society of Missiology. Professors of comparative religions from State Universities were joining the ASM and changing

its direction somewhat. Originally Ralph Winter had felt the evangelicals could dominate and direct the ASM, but this appeared to be changing. The professors of comparative religion, and the Conciliar Wing, tended to include everything in missiology. Evangelicals, of course, viewed missiology much more narrowly. To more clearly define the core of Christian missiology or mission, McGavran called for a meeting of the SWM faculty to discuss the development of a diagram of missiology they could all agree to. He declared,

It should be clear that the Core is not dialogue with other religions, to discover what they say about God – sin – salvation – freedom – responsibility – heaven – hell – righteousness – justice – peace – atonement. Joint search for truth, each religion reconceiving itself in the light of other religions, is exactly what we want to rule out as CORE. It could be allowed on the rim, if properly qualified (Letter to Drs. Wagner and Glasser dated March 30, 1978).

Two possible diagrams, one by McGavran and one by A. William Cook, Jr., were included as possible diagrams to show the structure of missiology. On April 2 Wagner replied with a short note of agreement to McGavran. “I would like to see our faculty discuss and approve, by vote, a SWM model for missiology,” Wagner wrote (Note dated April 2, 1978). Two days later Dean Glasser replied to Wagner and McGavran with disagreement. He felt that since Ralph Winter was President of ASM and he (Glasser) was the editor of the journal, the evangelical position would be upheld. Glasser also reminded them that the Tippett model of missiology had already been accepted and published as the SWM model. However, Glasser agreed, “I do not think that anyone of us will ever advocate a

core whose focus is 'dialogue with other religions.' The core must be Jesus Christ as he is revealed in Scripture" (Letter dated April 4, 1978).

Two letters were exchanged between Martin Marty and McGavran between April 28 and May 8 discussing the Homogeneous Unit Principle. In response to Marty's article "Is the Homogeneous Unit Principle Christian," McGavran wrote,

The HU principle arose facing the three billion who have yet to believe. Tremendous numbers of people are not becoming Christian because of unnecessary barriers (of language, culture, wealth, education, sophistication, imperialistic stance) erected by the advocates. The HU principle was first enunciated by a missionary carrying out what our Roman Catholic brethren call "the apostolate." The Early Church acted in accord with the HU principle.

I suspect that the basic reason you are keeping an open mind toward the principle is that you sense its importance in the propagation of the Gospel. Do, I beg of you, think of it primarily as a missionary and an evangelistic principle.

Remember also, that those who advocate it also advocate full brotherhood. While I was formulating the Homogeneous Unit principle, Mrs. McGavran and I were the only white members of the All Black Second Christian Church of Indianapolis. We have spent more than thirty years living among dark skinned people in India, eating with them, working with them, regarding them in every way as brothers and sisters.

...There is danger, of course, that congregations (whether established according to the HU principle or not) become exclusive, arrogant, and racist. That danger must be resolutely combated.

...So be assured that Wagner and I and others using the Homogeneous Unit Principle are with you a hundred percent in your conviction that brotherhood and unity are of the essence. We hope you will be with us a hundred percent in our conviction that unnecessary obstructions to accepting the Christian Faith be recognized and done away with (Letter dated April 24, 1978).

Martin Marty responded to McGavran two weeks later. Marty began,

I am glad you could read in my Context something of the sense of respect I have for the School of World Mission and your concept of church growth. When I look at the devastation of Christianity in Europe, I am cheered by efforts to prevent the same elsewhere, and find your approach generally cheering. Let me keep going on record with that.

So your letter gave me much to chew on, ... You could also see that I am troubled, as you seem to be, by the two sides of the question. You are right, psychologically. But I recall Dean Krister Stendahl telling me twenty years ago how to read Paul's letters. He said they were written to people who already had an experience of Jesus Christ but did not know how to live together, and that he spent almost his whole ministry convincing Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free, people of differing classes and outlooks that they must embody close-up unity because it was the nature of the Christian case that they do so. So I hate to surrender too easily.

At the same time, I have found myself moving away from my own earlier mission approach, which stressed call to discipleship first, and now am ready to advocate the idea of calling people into supportive circles, where discipleship is "phase two," just as integration of people across life styles and classes or kinds is your "phase two," even if it does not become intimate (Letter dated May 8, 1978).

It is interesting that Marty essentially admits McGavran's point when he notes Paul wrote to those who "already had an experience of Jesus Christ." McGavran agreed that it was proper to stress brotherhood with those who were already Christian. The HU principle was to be used as a strategy to reach unbelievers—a missionary principle.

About the middle of December, McGavran sent a brief note to Wagner congratulating him on the manuscript of a book. In the note McGavran advises Wagner to "lay more emphasis on the theological principles. Church growth is essentially a theological position" (Note dated December 9, 1978).

A bit of correspondence from Wagner to McGavran in late December gives a picture of how the Church Growth Movement was being viewed. Wagner writes,

This is an exciting time to be associated with the Church Growth Movement, Dean. We are being heard, and if we are not always agreed with, the issues are becoming sharper.

...I agree that the discipling-perfecting issue is crucial. Only now are our brethren in the theological world beginning to understand its implications. For too long they were simply ignoring what we were trying to say. As its implications are further explored, the controversy will continue. Our position is devastating to all those who espouse a radical Christ-against-culture kind of Christianity and who locate evil in social structures rather than in the human heart (Letter dated December 21, 1978).

Wagner was specifically referencing five books that had been released within a few weeks of each other: *The Open Secret* (Newbigin), *Contemporary Missiology* (Verkuyl), *The Trinity Forum* (Olson), *The Other Side* (Crass), and *The Christian Ministry* (Armstrong). These books were taking pot-shots at the Church Growth Movement, but at least the Church Growth School was being acknowledged.

1979

Peter Wagner was quite excited about McGavran's newest book, *Ethnic Realities and the Church*, when he wrote, "The book is a gem – finely formed, cut and polished with facet after facet reflecting long experience, deep thinking, profound dedication, breadth of scholarship and research, unflappable optimism and soul-stirring challenge to get busy with God's great work" (Letter to McGavran dated March 12, 1979).

This new book presented McGavran's understanding of the Homogeneous Unit Principle. In a letter to Francis M. DuBose, Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, Mill Valley, California, McGavran remarked,

Ethnic Realities and the Church declares that conglomerate, multiethnic congregations and denominations are the most typical kind of churches in India...and are one way God has worked to establish the Church. He has blessed this way to the growth of His Church. *Ethnic Realities* also declares that monoethnic congregations and denominations are another way God has blessed...and that both ways ought to be recognized as legitimate.

Please do not be misled by the fact that *Ethnic Realities and the Church* is chiefly about India. India simply illustrates the world wide situation. David Barrett, in reviewing the book writes, "While the book is largely about India, it is equally applicable to every other continent. My data shows that people everywhere prefer to join mono-ethnic congregations and join multi-ethnic only when mono-ethnics are not available" (Letter dated March 12, 1979).

McGavran continued to stress the need for brotherhood as long as such a desire for brotherhood did not reduce the growth of a church within a particular segment of a society.

For several years, a Church Growth Award was given to the student who had done research, writing, and speaking on definite Church Growth topics. Nominations for this award had been left primarily in McGavran's hands for the first few years, but in May of 1979 he realized that the SWM faculty would eventually be making the selection. So, McGavran wrote Dr. Hiebert the following recommendations for selecting future recipients of what became the McGavran Award in Church Growth:

As the giving of this award in the future comes into the hands of the faculty—on probably Peter Wagner’s recommendation, I hope that you will bear in mind the present procedures and rules:

The Award Winner must be enrolled in SWIMICG in the year in which [the] [a]ward is made.

He must be judged on hi[s] church growth convictions, speakings, writings, and publications.

If no suitable candidate [a]ppears, the award should not be given. Let it accu[m]ulate till a candidate does appear who speaks, writes and publishes definitely church growth material (Note dated May 12, 1979).

McGavran particularly did not want the Church Growth Award being given to a person simply because he served as a missionary, learned a language, or distributed literature. His desire was that the award would be only for strict church growth research, speaking, and publication.

The fact that Peter Wagner was ascending to the leadership role for the Church Growth School is clearly reflected in the following letter from McGavran to Wagner .

Dear Pete:

At long last, I am reading Hadaway’s evaluation of the C.G. Movement which you kindly sent me on March 23rd.

It is interesting, competent and fair.

We have done well. God has blessed our efforts.

The next ten years will, however be crucial. Will the fire go out? Will other good things seize the center of the stage? Will holistic mission reassert itself? We shall see.

You will play a crucial role.

Yours in the comradeship of the missionary movement,

Donald McG

(Letter dated July 4, 1979)

Looking back from today's context it is apparent that McGavran was right.

Wagner played a major role during the next two decades of the Church Growth Movement. An evaluation of his role is yet to be made. However, some of McGavran's questions are still relevant.

The meaning of "holistic" mission was clarified in a follow-up letter to Wagner in June. Referring to the Lausanne Committee, McGavran wrote,

Its present muddy position is lining many younger Church leaders up, and some American Evangelicals, also, in favor of down-grading evangelism and up-grading social action. I'm sure that was not LC's intention; but that is the out come.

...Part of the issue is getting Christians focused on the three billion who have yet to believe, who exist in a hundred thousand "unreached peoples"; but that part will be snowed under, if Evangelicals down-play evangelism of all sorts in the interest of "holistic evangelism." The theological issue is clear – is the greatest deprivation (1) the lack of complete social justice, or (2) the lack of opportunity to hear of and believe in Christ. That is the issue. The only Christian answer is number 2. Let Lausanne say so. Often we pay too high a price for smooth running (Letter dated June 5, 1979).

Holistic evangelism was the mixing of social justice issues with classical evangelism. It was (and is) a theology which makes possible the substitution of social action for evangelization. McGavran felt that this mixing would dilute the mandate to make disciples, and he fought this viewpoint at every opportunity.

The Homogeneous Unit Principle was a hot topic toward the end of the 1970s, and McGavran found himself defending and clarifying his beliefs time and

time again. Writing to David Wasdale at St. Matthia Vicarage in London, England, McGavran gave further insight on this controversial principle.

I agree with you that the homogeneous unit principle has been formulated first overseas in tightly structured tribal or caste populations, where there is no “non-tribal” or “non-caste” society. In such populations either the Church does multiply congregations within each HU, or does not multiply congregations at all.

But in England and North America while some homogeneous units are almost as distinct as tribes and caste (i.e. Pakistani Moslems, or Chinese, or Jamaicans in London) most homogeneous units are rather vague in outline. The Prime Minister of England is a member of a Labor Union. Sons of coal miners become university professors. And on and on. In such a population the HUP, too rigorously applied, arrays itself against the gradual breakdown of loose ethnic and other units which marks the development of every unified nation, and against brotherhood and “oneness in Christ,” too.

...Christians use the HUP to multiply Christian churches, biblically faithful churches. They must not use it to defend prideful exclusive segregated congregations.

...The theological objections to the HUP common in the United States and England assume (erroneously) that evangelization accepting the HUP has denied the unity called for in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Actually HUP congregations and denominations are among the most active exponents of brotherhood and unity. All they affirm is that the practice of complete brotherhood (including inter-marriage) should not be made a condition for baptism. It was not in the New Testament Church and should not be today. It is a fruit of the Christian life, not a pre-condition for faith in Christ. The chief reason for this is (not to justify racial exclusiveness; but) to keep the door to salvation open to those very large blocks of humanity from which currently very, very few are becoming Christian... from which to become Christian is “to betray and renounce our people” (Letter dated October 30, 1979).

Once again, it is clear that McGavran meant the HUP to be used as a strategy for inclusion (i.e., bringing as many people to Christ and His Church as possible) and not as a strategy of exclusion (i.e., keeping people out of the Church).

One of the denominations that adopted Church Growth Thought as its primary strategy in the 1980s was the Church of the Nazarene. A passing remark in one of McGavran's letters in late 1979 is interesting in that it mentions Bill Sullivan who became director of Church Growth for the Nazarenes for over two decades. He remarked, "Your education, Pete, of the Nazarenes is bearing very good fruit in every way. They are off and running. I had a district superintendent from North Carolina, Bill Sullivan, who is training 200-300 Class Three leaders. When he gets that done, his 54 congregations will start to reproduce themselves in a big way. You will have him in your class this January – a good man" (Letter dated December 16, 1979).

Now eight-two years old, McGavran was coming to the close of his teaching career. The School of World Mission faculty desired to honor McGavran, as well as maintain an association with him as long as reasonably possible. Thus, on May 25, 1979, Dean Glasser petitioned the Faculty Senate, "We herewith petition the Administration to make possible the continued association of Dr. McGavran with the SWM faculty, for the coming year. We recommend that he be reappointed — Senior Professor of Mission, Church Growth and South Asian Studies (Note dated May 25, 1979).

1980s

As the 1980s began, changes were in store for the School of World Mission. For one, Dean Glasser passed on the deanship to Paul Pierson. After

ten years of service to SWM as Dean, Glasser continued on as Senior Professor.

In his outgoing article published in *Theology News and Notes*, he writes of

McGavran,

...our founder and senior mentor, Dr. Donald A. McGavran, continues with us in good health and good heart. Although his 82nd birthday is now behind him, the latter years of the '70s saw him produce what many feel have been his best books—separate studies on the churches in India and Zaire. And, from the sounds that filter through to my office from his tireless typewriter, I can well believe that the '80s promise “more to follow.” Indeed, in his class lectures and at special SWM convocations he continues to stir us to be more fully caught up in the task of making Christ known, loved and served throughout the world (Glasser 1980:4).

Glasser had overseen the expansive influence of the School of World Mission on the world scene. Beginning with the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelism (1974), SWMers had participated in virtually all major gatherings during the remainder of the decade—most recently the Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand. SWM was just beginning to respond to the American scene and the missiological debates of the 1980s.

At COWE debate had swirled around two issues key to the Church Growth Movement—the primacy of evangelism in the mission of the church and the people approach to evangelism. McGavran was not involved, but Peter Wagner presented a plenary report promoting the people approach to evangelism. After much debate the congress affirmed the primacy of evangelism, but the people approach to evangelism was somewhat misunderstood. While the feedback was positive, members needed more time to digest this new approach to evangelism.

Peter Wagner encouraged McGavran to take time off to write his memoirs. “if you did,” Wagner explained, “it would undoubtedly be the #1 church growth book of all time” (Letter dated April 4, 1980). Unfortunately, McGavran never got around to writing his memoirs.

Glasser queried McGavran in March regarding his desired level of involvement in teaching at the SWM. The letter appears to be a gracious way to let McGavran know that the Fuller administration wanted him to be around but to curtail his teaching load. “I have discussed with the FTS administration,” wrote Glasser, “our united desire that you continue to occupy your present office whether you teach courses or not. I am happy to report that the Provost and President agree that you should have access to your office for as far in the future as you wish. Indeed, we must keep Donald Anderson McGavran at the center of the SWM for as long as he wishes to remain in our midst!” (Letter dated March 31, 1980)

On June 5 Art Glasser informed McGavran that he had been reappointed as Senior Professor of Mission, Church Growth and South Asian Studies.

Glasser noted,

Of course, you can be sure that all of us on the SWM faculty are truly grateful to the Lord that you desire to continue in harness with us in the common task. Your presence, friendship and participation in the work of the SWM are much appreciated. Indeed, we wonder where we would be without your constant attention to “the priority” and your faithfulness in reminding us of your obligation to keep the SWM on track. God has certainly given you “the grace of discernment”. You see farther down that track than we do!

...A new crop of SWMers will be on hand with their candles, and we will want to set them burning from your flame (Letter dated June 5, 1980).

Dr. Glasser expressed his personal appreciation for McGavran and his wife, as well as encouraged him to take time to rest during the summer months.

For most of his teaching career, McGavran had focused on applying Church Growth ideas to peoples and countries other than the United States. An interesting development took place in 1980 as he planned a departure from his normal emphasis toward that of a focus on the United States. In a letter to Bob Meye, he explains,

In the winter quarter I shall be teaching a course, CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURES....I am planning a departure. I intend to use most of my time discussing adapting to culture in the United States. And not to the cultures of American ethnic minorities either, but to the cultures of the great white majority, the middle class and upper class whites, the university elites, the upper crust, and rulers of the media, political parties and labor unions.

McGavran's purpose in this course was to discuss what was a biblical and permissible adaptation to the culture within the United States. In the 1970s he had felt the SWM was "leaning too far in the direction of an uncritical adaptation to other cultures, to a deification of pluralism for pluralism's sake." His desire for this "planned departure" was to discuss the same issues as related to the American Church Growth scene. The course was accepted by the FTS administration and cross listed for theology and missiology students (Letter dated October 2, 1980; note dated October 6, 1980).

Charles W. Bryan, Vice President for Overseas Operations of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, invited McGavran to speak at

its winter staff conference from January 26-30, 1981. Bryan sent a letter to Dean Paul Pierson requesting that McGavran be released from teaching so that he could speak at this training event. Dean Pierson's reply reveals a magnanimous attitude and willingness to share McGavran with others. "He is such a valuable resource," wrote Pierson, "that he must be made available to the whole church of Jesus Christ, as God continues to give him strength" (Letter dated October 29, 1980).

Dean Pierson received a letter from McGavran in March 1981 that summarized a conversation between the two of them sometime the previous February. In the letter McGavran expresses his interest in resigning from the SWM. The letter in its entirety is interesting to the student of Church Growth.

Dear Dr. Pierson:

In continuation of our conversation of a month ago, I think I should inform you that it is my strong present inclination to withdraw from the School of Missions faculty on the 30th of June 1981. I shall have by then served the School of Missions for sixteen years. Several tasks which I want to do await my retirement. Under your effective direction, the School is prospering. On the other hand, because I teach here, many opportunities to serve the cause of missions do open up before me. As I serve them, the School of Missions and Fuller Seminary appear before the missionary world in a favorable light. So I have swung to and fro in regard to what I ought to do. Nevertheless at present I am inclining strongly toward terminating my relationship and working entirely out of my home. At your convenience, I think we ought to talk about the matter.

Having heard nothing for some time about my proposal that Fuller start a Missionary Archives, I presume that the seminary administration regards it rather coolly. If this is the case, I think I ought to withdraw my offer and plan to put my archives elsewhere.

As you may imagine, I regard the School of Missions and Fuller Seminary with affection. Being the founding dean of the School of Missions, it was

my privilege to develop a curriculum and a fundamental purpose – rather new among schools of missions – which have been widely copied. They are proving of great value in the carrying out of the Great Commission. If under your direction the School of Missions keeps its fundamental purpose bright, if our graduates are steered away from contemporary deviations and firmly based on effective world evangelization, then this School of Missions will continue, for many years, to lead the missionary enterprise of many lands.

God grant you and the School His richest blessings in the years ahead.

Very sincerely yours in Christ,

Donald McGavran

(Letter dated March 28, 1981)

Fuller Seminary did not accept McGavran's archives and he eventually placed them primarily in two locations—the Billy Graham Center Archives in Wheaton, IL and the U.S. Center for Missions Library in Pasadena, CA.

The term “Church Growth” was beginning to lose its technical meaning by 1981. In a letter to Elmer Towns, Peter Wagner explained, “I recall seeing an article in which the Xerox corporation, pioneers in photocopying, lamented over the fact that their brand name had become a generic term and that some were making ‘xeroxes’ on a Minolta! Those of us associated with the original Church Growth Movement would like to hope that a similar thing will not happen with our ‘brand name.’ ...It seems to me that those who originally coin such terms (when it is possible to trace them), should have the privilege of determining their meaning” (Letter dated October 12, 1981).

McGavran read and wrote appreciatively of Wagner's new book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*. He was, however, concerned with the use of the concept "Gospel of the Kingdom." To this concern he wrote,

I know that there are perhaps a dozen passages where The Word speaks of "the Good News of the kingdom of God"; yet I doubt if we help the cause by equating "the whole duty of Christians", the whole task of applying Christianity to contemporary life, and of implementating what we perceive to be God's will for man under these circumstances with "The Gospel". I think we are on sounder biblical grounds when we limit the word "Gospel" to the unquestioned good news that when weak sinful burdened men and women believe in Jesus Christ, accept Him as Lord and Saviour and become responsible members of His Body, the Church, then their sins are forgiven, the burden rolls off, they walk light and are saved. That is truly good news, very good news.

...In the dozen or so passages where Scripture speaks of "the good news of the kingdom", this must be understood as "The good news that King Jesus has come. Salvation is now available." The Lord clearly announced that those who would follow Him must be prepared for a very hard road indeed, be persecuted, leave father and mother, have no place to lay their heads, etc.; at the same time, they would at once be members of the elect, would be in the everlasting kingdom, would be the redeemed, the Body of Christ. That, not the resulting duties, is the good news of the kingdom (Letter dated October 30, 1981).

McGavran's insight into the problem of making the Gospel of the Kingdom synonymous with the Gospel of Salvation is being highlighted among critics of the Church Growth Movement even today. This perplexity has yet to be effectively resolved.

McGavran addressed the faculty and students of the School of World Mission on September 21, 1981 on the topic "Sunrise or Sunset in Mission Today?" His address was used for an article in the October issue of *Theology News and Notes*. In the article McGavran declared that it was the sunrise of

missions, not the sunset. Leaders simply needed to keep focused on the three billion yet to believe and move forward in faith.

Articles continued to flow from McGavran's creative mind during 1981. "The Entrepreneur in Modern Missions" spoke of the need to develop differing strategies to reach the lost as times change. In this article McGavran lists five stages of his missionary career and the changes in strategy that he made in each stage. The first stage was in the early fifties when he realized the Mission Station Approach was holding the church back from evangelizing the lost. He developed the people movement and bridges of God concepts as ways to answer this problem. In the later fifties he learned that a lack of interest in disciple-making was a major barrier. So, he determined to raise interest in the Church's fundamental purpose. When the early sixties came around, he felt that a lack of anthropological knowledge was hindering the Church's advance. He answered this challenge by designing strategies based heavily on sociological sciences, and by calling to the faculty anthropologists. A fourth stage occurred in the late sixties when the Conciliar Wing of the Church began to overlook the discipling of the nations. McGavran's strategy was to point out the new theology and theory, while calling the church to hold steady to classical evangelism. Finally, in the seventies he began to see that the older mission agencies and churches were abandoning the younger churches, while surrendering the call to evangelize the unreached multitudes. This called for a new strategy and he began to focus on challenging the older churches and missions not to leave the younger churches

alone to complete the missionary task. His point throughout the article is that new strategic fronts must be developed as the world changes.

By the 1980s Church Growth had begun to wane as the integrating force in the SWM. In the 1960s the School of World Mission was formed chiefly around the Church Growth paradigm. Students came to Fuller to study with McGavran and learn the fresh insights coming from the Church Growth School of Thought. When the 1970s dawned, Wagner was added to the faculty as the second professor in Church Growth studies. Other changes took place in the SWM, but the church growth emphasis continued strong. There were no “core” courses, but everyone who graduated from SWM took two courses in Principles and Procedures of Church Growth. Later Principles and Procedures was reduced to one course, but Strategy of Missions and Advanced Church Growth were added. Almost all students continued to take those courses. Eventually core courses were developed and church growth became just one of five core curriculums. All students continued to take Principles and Procedures, but fewer took the remaining two advanced courses in church growth. By the early 1980s Church Growth could no longer be viewed as the integrating force in the curriculum. With McGavran’s retirement, Peter Wagner became the sole professor of Church Growth on the faculty. By 1982 students who were graduating with “church growth eyes” were more the exception rather than the rule. Indeed the bulk of Wagner’s teaching on Church Growth was occurring in the Doctor of Ministry program where he taught twelve units of Church Growth

versus only four units at SWM. Of the 175 students taking courses in winter quarter 1982, only twenty-two took the advanced course *Strategies of Church Growth*. Wagner hoped a second professor of Church Growth would be hired once the McGavran Chair of Church Growth was established.

McGavran continued to defend the Church Growth School in a “response” to the article “Missiological Pitfalls in McGavran’s Theology” written by Gary Bekker. His rejoinder appeared in the April 1982 issue of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* where he sought to demonstrate his commitment to biblical ecclesiology and Trinitarian theology (McGavran 1982c:82-83).

One of the disappointments in McGavran’s career was the fact that his own denomination—Christian Church Disciples of Christ—had not, for the most part, adopted Church Growth Thinking. He was delighted, therefore, to discover that a Disciples of Christ minister was doing a doctoral dissertation on the Christian Church Disciples of Christ. “In reply to your kind letter of May 12th,” McGavran wrote, “let me say that I am very pleased that at long last there appears to be a church growth movement taking shape in the Christian Church Disciples of Christ” (Letter dated May 23, 1982). He continued, “It pleased me greatly that our Brotherhood (which lost 32% of our members between 1965 and 1975) is now waking to the extreme importance to EFFECTIVE evangelism.”

An interview with Donald McGavran appeared in *OMS Outreach* during 1982 in which he shares details of his life story. One interesting highlight of the interview occurs when McGavran shared his view of Christian mission. As

McGavran saw it, “Christian mission is bringing people to repent of their sins, accept Jesus Christ as Savior, belong to His Body the Church, do as He commands, go out and spread the Good News, and multiply churches” (McGavran1982b:7). It was his belief that evangelism had been confused with numerous good things, such as education, catechism classes, medical relief, and social programs. While McGavran felt all good works were necessary and helpful, they were not evangelism. Evangelism was an input term meaning that the lost should be won to Christ, and when that was done, they should be baptized and brought into the church. The result was an output term—Church Growth! As coined by McGavran, Church Growth is just the expected result of being obedient to the Great Commission. Church Growth was, and is, effective evangelism.

Mission Frontiers, the Bulletin of the U.S. Center for World Mission, announced the establishment of the McGavran Library on its campus in its August-September 1982 issue. McGavran gave a major portion of his personal library and papers to the U.S. Center. The library was arranged on the shelves at the U.S Center in the same manner and position in which McGavran had them in his own library.

In 1982, a new course was offered at Fuller. The course became widely recognized as MC510, and it focused on healing. The course created quite a stir at Fuller as well as among others who heard about it. Naturally people desired to know McGavran’s viewpoint, and he was interviewed for an article in *Christian*

Life. In the article McGavran admits that he came from a denomination that criticized healing, but that his own research over a ten to fifteen year period had led him to change his mind regarding the subject. “There are many causes of church growth. In some cases there has been great church growth without any healing at all,” wrote McGavran. “But on the other hand, a great deal of church growth has taken place by virtue of healing campaigns of one sort or another” (McGavran 1982:39). He concluded, “We must avoid thinking that the healing ministry is the only open door. It is not. God uses many methods. Our Lord used many methods. He healed, yes. But He also taught. So it is the total picture that we’ve got to see” (McGavran 1982:40).

At the end of 1982, McGavran’s article “Have We Shackled Missions to the National Church?” appeared in *Eternity* magazine. Espousing a theme common to earlier articles, he called for missionaries not to be sent just to help the national church, but to open new fields for reaching those who had not yet been evangelized (McGavran 1982a:21-23).

As 1982 came to a close, the essential Church Growth principles, as developed by Donald McGavran, could be summarized in three statements. First, the essential conviction of mission/church growth is to realize that God wants His lost children found and enfolded. Church growth explodes from the life-giving nature of the eternal God. Jesus Christ gave His disciples the Great Commission, and the entire New Testament assumes that Christians will

proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Savior and encourage men and women to become His disciples and responsible members of His church.

Discovering the facts of church growth is the second essential principle of Church Growth thinking. Responsible research into the causes and barriers to church growth must be completed. God has given us a Great Commission, and we dare not assume that all is going well, or that we are doing the best that can be done. The Lord of the harvest wants His lost sheep found, and we must be accountable to His command. Discovering the degree of growth or of decline and stating such facts meaningfully is crucial to faithful ministry.

The third essential principle is developing specific plans based on the facts that are discovered. Taking the initiative to set goals and develop bold strategies to win people to Christ and plant new churches must be the practical results of meaningful conviction and research. These three essential ideas form the core of Church Growth Thought, although several other principles were developed in conjunction with these three essentials.³

These three statements of the philosophy of Church Growth Thought form the elements of McGavran Church Growth thinking. While other principles and concepts would be added to Church Growth in the ensuing years, these elements continue to define the core.

McGavran continued to contribute articles to various publications even as he curtailed his travel and speaking engagements due to his age. The January 1983 issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* published "The Priority of Ethnicity"

in which McGavran appeals for leading people to Christ within their ethnic and social classes. He also answers fears that his strategy would perpetuate segregation and injustice (McGavran 1983).

After reading *On The Crest of the Wave* by Peter Wagner, McGavran wrote a kindly letter to Wagner praising the new book. The letter gives insight into McGavran's theological understanding of the missiological issues of the early 1980s. He told Wagner,

The essential question in all the confusion which surrounds mission and which permeates every discussion of evangelism, social action, and many other responsibilities which fall on Christians is the authority of the Bible.

If it is God's revelation, written by men, of course, but God's revelation nevertheless, then we must believe John 14:6 and kindred passages. But millions of Christians do not believe that the Bible is God's revelation at all.

While the leadership of the large conciliar denominations and state denominations has very largely lost any real belief in the Bible as God's Word (and assiduously conceals such loss by all manner of circumlocutions), most of the rank and file of practicing Christians still believe in the Bible as God's revelation.

THE ONLY WAY in which justice, according to God's own code revealed in the Bible, is going to be practiced by Marxists, Hindus, Muslims, Secularists, Buddhists, and others is for very, very large numbers in each of these camps to become ardent Bible-believing followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone needs to shout this across America and Europe. Perhaps you.

So, Pete, the battle goes on. If the Church Growth Movement can keep on insisting that accomplished enrollment of men and women in Christ's body is a God-commanded duty and privilege, much will have been accomplished (Letter dated August 29, 1983).

It is clear from this letter, and the article in *EMQ*, that McGavran continued to be concerned about the issue of evangelism and social justice. This particular question never reached a balanced resolution during his lifetime.

“New Urban Faces of the Church,” an article which appeared in the September 1983 issue of *Urban Mission*, was McGavran’s call for new forms of churches to reach the mosaic of new peoples flowing into the urban areas of the world.

Since urban mankind is a vast mosaic made up of innumerable pieces, my thesis is that the Church in the cities of the world must have multitudinous new faces. A significant part of the plateaued or declining membership of many congregations and denominations is that they have taken the page of the church in their segment of the population and imposed it on other segments where it does not fit and another model is required (McGavran 1983a: 3).

He wrote about the need for house churches, and provided a case study, along with Kip McKean, highlighting the Boston Church of Christ congregation (a congregation which later was much criticized).

Along with Arthur Glasser, McGavran coauthored *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*. This 250-page book focused on the most controversial missiological questions of the 1980s. The authors described four theories of mission and attempted to deal with them in comprehensive and scholarly fashion. While almost all reviewers recommend the book for careful study, some found the apparent appeal to collaborate with Roman Catholics unacceptable due to differences in doctrines of authority and soteriology. Unfortunately, it is not exactly clear in the book what McGavran had in mind, although he most likely

was thinking in methodological terms of collaboration rather than theological ones.

As 1984 dawned, McGavran's article "Do we need AEPM? Yes, for three reasons" was published in the January issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. The question he addressed was "Should evangelical professors of missions maintain a separate organization?" McGavran felt strongly that evangelical professors needed their own organization to promote biblical clarity, missiology as a part of the academy, and to maintain biblical priorities to disciple the nations. If evangelical professors only had the American Society of Missiology, McGavran felt the evangelical perspective would be swallowed up (McGavran 1984:67-71).

Perhaps the major accomplishment of 1984 was the publication of *Momentous Decisions in Missions Today*. Speaking from the vantage point of more than a half century of personal involvement in missions, McGavran addressed the major questions of the 1980s under four headings: 1) theological, 2) strategical, 3) organizational, and 4) methodological. He reaffirmed the primacy of Gospel proclamation, conversion, and church planting. More importantly, he focused on the importance of the cities and urban evangelism. Roger Greenway stated of this book, "I recommend the book highly to missionaries and their executives, to college and seminary students, and to Third World leaders who are concerned about the future of missions in, to, and from their countries" (Greenway 1985:56).

Often called the “Red Letter Day” of the Church Growth Movement, the Donald A. McGavran Chair of Church Growth was established at Fuller Theological Seminary on November 6, 1984. Designed to encourage and recognize Fuller faculty who had become a force in research and education within the field of Church Growth, Wagner was the obvious choice to be installed in the chair. By 1984 Wagner was well known in the Church Growth Movement having authored twenty-six books and numerous articles. Over 1,150 clergy had taken Church Growth courses from Wagner by 1984 through the Doctor of Ministry program, as well as many of the 2,700 alumni of the School of World Mission.

An editorial in *Global Church Growth* declared, “An endowed Chair of Church Growth bearing the name of the founder and occupied by the man who represents the future of the movement is now a reality. The Church Growth Movement has consequently gained both credibility and permanence” (Kent Hunter 1985:2)

Tim Matheny, executive director of the Center for Church Growth in Houston, Texas, interviewed McGavran for an article in the center’s newsletter. Published in spring 1985, the article records McGavran’s encouragement to the Churches of Christ to get back to making disciples through effective evangelism (Matheny 1985:1-2).

A significant article by McGavran on “The Hottest Race Issue in the World” was published in the April/June issue of *Transformation*, an international journal

of evangelical social ethics. The article rehearsed common themes in McGavran's writings dealing with the importance of understanding and reaching people within their cultural context. Once again McGavran used his intricate understanding of India's Caste system to illustrate his points. Two additional articles in the journal responded to McGavran's thesis (McGavran 1985:15-30).

Theology News and Notes published "That the Gospel Be Made Known" in the June 1985 issue. The article provides a glimpse into McGavran's thoughts as he neared the end of his missionary career and life. In this article McGavran reflects on his missionary journey and explains his pilgrimage down several rivers: the theological river, the missionary labor river, and the growth of the church river. He concluded, "My pilgrimage has taken place in the midst of these tremendous divine movements. God has used the Church Growth Movement far more than any of us laboring at it had dared to ask or think" (McGavran 1985a:13).

A letter arrived from Kenneth Ward in early 1986 asking for advice regarding church renewal. McGavran passed the letter along to Peter Wagner telling Rev. Ward that Wagner was better prepared to give direction to his inquiry. McGavran's continued concern for biblical fidelity is seen in the final paragraph of this short letter which reads, "We must move away from the liberal position which holds that the Bible is not the infallible, inspired Word of God and consequently emphasize only those part of it which they happen to like at the moment" (Letter to Kenneth Ward dated March 24, 1986).

McGavran was asked to describe his pilgrimage in mission for the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. His contribution, simply titled “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” provides a repository of his overall life and ministry in brief (McGavran 1986:53-58).

Fr. Devasia Vaghayil wrote McGavran from Meghalaya, India asking for his views on the subjects of missiology, ecumenism, the homogeneous unity principle, and impressions of the missionary methods of Catholics. The article is too long to quote extensively in this short paper, but his answer to the first question shows that McGavran viewed the Church Growth Movement as synonymous with missiology rather than simply a branch of missiology. He explained,

You asked, Is the church growth movement a branch of missiology? The answer is both yes and no. Missiology is the science of missions. However, what are missions? The great theologian, Richard Niebuhr, says that missions are everything done outside the four ways of the church. If you define missions in this way, then the church growth movement is certainly a branch. If, however, you define missions as I do—namely, the carrying out of the Great Commission—then the church growth movement is synonymous with effective evangelism and there with missions (Letter to Fr. Devasia Vaghayil dated June 10, 1986).

McGavran continued in the letter to explain the complex nature of missiology, as well as to answer the remaining three questions.

During the summer months, McGavran attempted to influence missionary executives, through a circular letter, to emphasize church planting. He asked, “Can you so emphasize a church-multiplying ministry that you will double, treble, or quadruple churches among believers? That, I suppose, is the bottom line in

this letter. That is a most necessary task. Only that will begin adequate harvest of the white fields which stretch around on every side” (Letter dated July 1986).

Even though McGavran was finding it difficult to read, he continued to study and advance his knowledge. A letter to Dr. Sam Wilson of MARC illustrates his personal study. Keeping form, McGavran encourages Dr. Wilson in the publication of the “unreached people’s” volumes. He says, “The idea which came to me in a flash of blinding white was in essence a simple one—namely, our Lord straightly commands His followers to disciple all the unreached people groups of the world.” He then proceeds to discuss the four major Greek words in the Great Commission quoting Kittel, the German authority on biblical words. This is something that was new to McGavran, as he rarely, perhaps never, quoted sources like Kittle in his previous uses of the Great Commission (Letter dated November 17, 1986).

A reply letter from Director Wilson dated December 4 stated, “I deeply appreciate your letter of the 17 of November, developing a truer significance for the words ta ethne. I could not agree with your more...You are absolutely correct that we have been deceived by our contemporary understanding. I would be enthusiastic in looking for a way to utilize anything from the prestigious pen of Donald McGavran in the *Unreached Peoples* series” (Letter dated December 4, 1986).

McGavran kept informed and involved in the School of World Mission faculty luncheons as must as possible during his final years. Pete Wagner made

a suggestion that the faculty luncheons be used to discuss central issues in missiology. In reply McGavran shared his feelings on what he believed was a danger to be avoided: “I have a feeling that the School of World Mission needs to make sure that in every class the goal is clearly ‘to be all things to all men in order to win some’ (1 Cor. 9:22). Unless we do this, the pressures for academic excellence will inevitably lead us to graduate men who know missiology very well but who bring very few of their brothers and sisters to faith in Christ” (Letter dated February 13, 1987).

The Church Growth Movement had gained much ground in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s. McGavran was concerned, however, about the lack of conversion growth in the American church. In October 1987 he wrote Wagner saying, “So much of the church growth going on in the United States is transfer growth or biological growth. The conversion of hard-core secularists and materialists—in short, of American pagans—is what we need to document” (Letter dated October 12, 1987).

One writer, Joe Webb, asked McGavran to review an article he had written for *Global Church Growth*. McGavran suggested that he focus on the fact that “Church growth insists that evangelistic effectiveness be measured by the number of men and women, boys and girls, who become lifetime, responsible, practicing Christians in ongoing congregations” (Letter dated October 10, 1987). A final paragraph provides a view into his way of writing letters and articles, as well as his work schedule. “I am sitting at your desk in the McGavran room

dictating this to Betty Ann,” wrote McGavran. “I am going to spend the rest of the morning here working at making the library in the other room more useful. I want books in it to be readily findable.”

Another letter to Joe Webb went out on December 10. Since Mr. Webb was writing a dissertation on a history of the School of World Mission between 1965 and 1985, McGavran provided an overview of his memory of those years. While the letter is not a complete record, McGavran lists nine items he feels ought to be emphasized in a history of the SWM. He writes,

First, there was an accurate description of what a school of missions really wants to do.

Second, another important task to which I gave much time during my years as dean was securing a faculty of seven full-time professors of mission.

Third, the absolute necessity for students at a school of world mission to describe exactly—repeat, exactly—the degree to which the populations in which they have been missionaries or national leaders are actually becoming Christians.

The fourth aspect of what the School of World Mission was doing was stress on effective evangelism done by SWM faculty during their summer and sabbatical quarters.

Fifth, Iberville and Winona Lake.

The sixth influence of the School of World Mission arose by the beginning of a publishing company called William Carey Library.

Seventh, very influential in forming missionary history was the Church Growth Bulletin.

The eighth aspect of the church growth movement has been a waking in nation after nation to the urgency of effective evangelism.

The ninth aspect of the work of SWM during the first ten or twenty years is the effect that it had not merely on career missionaries but on leaders of national churches.

These were the nine major aspects of the work that occurred at SWM from McGavran's perspective in December 1987 (Letter dated December 10, 1987).

Church growth was important to McGavran, but NOT any type of church growth. He emphasized this in a letter to Dr. John Vaughan in February 1988. John Vaughan is well known for his research on the growth of mega churches in the United States. After reading a report of churches that had grown by over 1,500 people between 1985 and 1986, McGavran wrote to Vaughan.

I read with particular interest your statistics about the ten churches whose attendance has grown by 1500 or more between 1985 and 1986.

I wonder whether in future issues you could address yourself to another very important aspect of effective evangelism—church growth. I would like to know how many of the gains in worshipers in the ten fastest growing churches were (a) children of existing Christians in that church. (b) Christians from other parts of the United States who had moved to the vicinity of the rapidly growing church, liked it very much, and joined it, and finally (c) converts. Those converts might have been secularists, humanists, agnostics, Shintoists, Hindus, Buddhists, or long lapsed Christians.

Until we know this, Professor Vaughan, we don't know how significant that growth is.

If the growth is simply that of Children of the church or devout Christians of other communities who have moved to the vicinity of these churches, it is not very significant. Church growth too frequently occurs in new suburbs and is simply a rearrangement of existing Christians.

What we must get is the kind of evangelism that seeks out the lost—the really lost— and brings them back to the Father's house.

With high regard, I remain Your comrade in the bonds of the Great Commission (Letter dated February 12, 1988).

This letter demonstrates McGavran's clear commitment to conversion as the crucial aspect of Church Growth, rather than biological or transfer growth.

Effective evangelism was a term McGavran used synonymously with church growth. It is not surprising that he used those words for his book *Effective Evangelism: a Theological Mandate*. The book was a compilation of lectures he had presented at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia during 1986. McGavran examines the strengths and weaknesses of theological institutions, and suggests that such institutions must accept the responsibility for training future leaders in the context of the real world. He felt that such training must include the goal of effective communication of God's Word so that churches may be multiplied.

Dr. Matthew Welde, executive director of Presbyterians United for Biblical Concerns, wrote McGavran in early 1989, passing along a copy of his address to Presbyterians in San Francisco, as well as a recommendation for *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate*. McGavran replied with a letter that shows an awareness of being in his final days. He wrote,

I was saddened to hear that of the eleven Presbyterian seminaries, in only one was a course on evangelism required.

Keep on pushing this idea, my friend. I am confident that it has God back of it. It will please our Heavenly Father greatly if seminaries throughout the United States recognize that if they are to turn our present static condition around, they simply must turn out thousands of ministers who are effective evangelists.

I write you as a 91-year-old. I am sure the Lord is going to call me home very soon. I pass the torch on to you (Letter dated February 7, 1989).

His concern for church growth that comes through conversion evangelism is quite evident, as well as his personal awareness of his place in life's journey.

Again, McGavran wrote to Dr. John Vaughan after receiving a report of the fastest growing churches in the United States for November-December 1988.

His concern for conversion growth is evident. "However, what I would very much like to see *Church Grow Today* explore is: How much of it is biological? How much of it is conversion? How much of it is transfer? ...we will not stop the static condition of many congregations and denominations until we vastly increase the number of conversions" (Letter dated March 29, 1989).

An article by McGavran appeared in the July issue of *Missiology* titled "Missiology Faces the Lion." To no one's surprise the article focused on the danger of stressing humanitarian care over evangelism of the lost. Four responses to the article were included along with a rejoinder from McGavran (McGavran 1989:335-355). In the same issue McGavran wrote a short article on the life and ministry of his former colleague Alan Tippett. Tippett passed away on September 16, 1988 and McGavran called him "a great missionary, a great teacher, a great missiologist, a great bibliophile, and a great saint of God" (McGavran 1989a:261).

The December issue of *Theology News and Notes* ran a short reflection from Donald McGavran in which he shared some of the major influences on his life. He mentions his call to ministry at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin in 1919, his experience in India as an educator from 1923 to 1936, his eighteen years of work

as an evangelist from 1936 to 1954, and his trip through Africa, Latin America, and the Philippine Islands on the way home in 1954. However, he notes that the most influential decision of his life was resolving to begin a graduate school developed to training career missionaries in Church Growth studies (McGavran 1989b:12).

On April 5, 1990 Mary McGavran passed away. They had been married for sixty-eight years. Less than three months later, Donald McGavran passed away on July 10 at the age of ninety-two. Dr. Kent Hunter, editor of *Global Church Growth*, wrote in “So Ends a Chapter of History,”

With the death of Dr. Donald McGavran, an entire chapter of Christian history comes to a close. His life, work, writings, teachings, and his influence on countless thousands of Christians throughout the world represents a unique era.

Throughout history, God raises up Christian leaders who have a specific task and direction. When they are gone, their movements often continue. Their influence is not buried with their mortal remains. Their vision continues to spark generations who follow. Their presence, unique as it is, is gone from this earth forever. There will not be another McGavran. Not now—not ever. An epoch represented in the life and work of our dear friend and “comrade in the bonds of the Great Commission” (as he so often signed his letters) comes to a close.

We go forward according to the guidelines of our leader, Jesus Christ, who said, “Go therefore and make disciples of *panta ta ethne*.” We go forward in the bonds of the Great Commission (Hunter 1990:1).

Recommended Reading

Middleton, Vernon James

- 1990 "The Development of a Missiologist: The Life and Thought of Donald Anderson McGavran, 1897-1965." Ph.D. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary.

Tucker, James Douglas, Jr.

- 1998 "Post-McGavran Church Growth: Divergent Streams of Development." Ph.D. Dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary.

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- 1974 "The Church Growth Movement to 1965: An Historical Perspective." D.Miss. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary.

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¹ For further information on McGavran's missionary heritage see "John Grafton McGavran—Scholar, Crusader and Saint," in *World Call*, Vol. XIII, No. 3 (March, 1931), 13-14. See also, "India Through a Century," in *World Call*, Vol. 36, No. 7 (July-August, 1954), 16-17.

² For further study regarding McGavran's career, see Donald McGavran, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April, 1986), 53-58. See also, George G. Hunter III, "The Legacy of Donald A. McGavran, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (October, 1992), 158-162.

³ Church Growth Thought can be summarized in seven foundational principles: People Movements, Pragmatic Research, Scientific Research, Social Networks, Receptivity, Priority of Evangelism, and the Central Purpose of Disciple-making. See, "The Church Growth Movement," in *Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 31-41.