

## THE LIFE OF DONALD MCGAVRAN: BECOMING A PROFESSOR

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Gary L. McIntosh

### **Abstract**

As McGavran's missionary career in India came to an end, publication of *The Bridges of God* opened new doors for research, teaching, and writing. The years 1955–1965 found McGavran moving from a missionary career to that of a professor and founding The Institute of Church Growth. In Eugene, Oregon, he met and befriended Methodist missionary Alan R. Tippett who became a partner in the spread of Church Growth Thought during the 1960s and 70s.

— Gary L. McIntosh has spent over a decade researching and writing a complete biography on the life and ministry of Donald A. McGavran. We are pleased to present here the fifth of several excerpts from the biography.

The battle goes not to him who starts but to him who persists.  
—Donald A. McGavran

With his work among the Satnamis coming to a close, Donald took his vacation in 1951 in the hills north of Takhatpur to begin writing a manuscript tentatively titled, *How Peoples Become Christian*. In addition to his own ministry among the Satnamis, he had done on-the-spot studies of growing churches and people movements in several other provinces of India for several denominations, and he was eager to share his discoveries. He hunted

for one hour in the morning and evening to provide for meals, spending the time in between working on his manuscript.

Inquiries with different publishers regarding his book began in 1952, and the rough draft manuscript was completed in 1953. Officials at the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS) read and conferred on the manuscript and were in general agreement that the title, *How Peoples Become Christian*, was a good one. After reading the initial manuscript, William D. Hall, director of the department of missionary education for the UCMS, wrote a letter on February 3, 1953, in which he commented, "I feel that this is a very significant book and that it certainly must be published. I agree so thoroughly with his basic concepts of thinking that I have found it difficult to pick out very many points of disagreement."<sup>1</sup>

After finishing the manuscript, Donald thought it was too strictly India. As a result, when the McGavran family left for furlough in the United States during the summer of 1954, the UCMS granted a request that he route his travel home through Africa so he could study people movements on that continent. Mary took the children and made a trip to England across Europe so the children could see many of the historical sights. Donald took off in May to travel across Africa, and rendezvoused in England in July with Mary and the girls. The trip was accomplished on a shoestring budget, but it allowed him to study twenty missions and hundreds of churches, evaluating mission policies as they related to church growth. He crossed Africa by plane, rail, bus, truck, bicycle, foot, and canoe, observing firsthand the growth of the church in six countries—Kenya, Uganda, Ruanda, Congo, Nigeria, and Gold Coast.<sup>2</sup>

After arriving in the United States for his furlough, Donald went directly to Yale University where he had been granted a research fellowship. He used the time that fall to continue his research on people movements and revise sections of his book, which was eventually published in 1955 as *The Bridges of God*. It was the most read book on mission theory in 1956, and it has continued to play an influential role in missiological thinking ever since. Reviews of the book lauded McGavran's courageous thinking. The September–October 1955 issue of the *Missionary Digest* wrote *The Bridges of God* is "the most up-to-date book on new missionary methods of which we know. . . . This book is one of the first to take account of the gigantic movements of the Holy Spirit throughout the world today. Mission-minded people should be deeply grateful to Dr. Donald McGavran for pointing the way."<sup>3</sup> The *Gospel Herald* declared, "The *Bridges of God* is stimulating and often disturbing reading . . . one of the most important books on missionary methods

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<sup>1</sup> Personal letter from William.

<sup>2</sup> For his report on this trip, see Donald McGavran, "A Continent is Being Discipled," *World Call* 36, no. 11 (December 1954): 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Missionary Digest*, September–October 1955.

to appear in many years.”<sup>4</sup> *World Outlook* almost shouted, “Warning! Read thoughtfully! A timely book! An important book! A sincere and courageous book. Dr. McGavran is equipped to speak authoritatively.”<sup>5</sup> No one knew it at the time, but the *Bridges of God* was destined to change the way missions was practiced around the globe, and it became the *Magna Carta* of the Church Growth Movement, the primary document from which the movement grew.

In 1954, the Anderson-McGavran family reached a milestone of one hundred years of mission work in India. The United Christian Missionary Society paid tribute to the family with the publication of two articles on the family’s missionary history. Retired mission director, Cyrus M. Yocum, wrote, “A Century of Service in India,” in which he briefly outlined the missionary service rendered by the McGavrans. The article was published in *World Call* in June 1954. His article was immediately followed in the July–August edition by one written by Donald, “India Through a Century.” He also wrote six articles that were published in 1955. One reflected on his recent visit to the Congo, another outlined the Disciples of Christ cooperative work in India, while the remainder focused on some aspect of missionary methods. One article that was published in the October 1955 issue of *The International Review of Missions* clearly demonstrated a new focus. In “New Methods for a New Age in Missions,” he proclaimed, “The objective remains the same—that the Church of Jesus Christ may grow and spread throughout the world, making available the power and righteousness of God to every nation through a living, indigenous church in every nation. The growth and expansion of the Church is demanded by the Great Commission.”<sup>6</sup> While he summarized the salient points found in *The Bridges of God*, Donald argued carefully for the “centrality of church growth” over social service or philanthropy to static churches.<sup>7</sup>

The next two years were spent in New Haven, Connecticut, where Donald and Mary served as the host couple at the Disciples Divinity House on the campus of Yale Divinity School. During these two years, Donald traveled a good deal studying church growth, while Mary manned the home front and worked part time at the Divinity School Library. When Donald was home, they held teas and suppers for the students and discussed missions.

Both Donald and Mary underwent routine health screenings in January 1955, as required by the United Christian Missionary Society for all returning missionaries. During his exam, Donald complained of pain in his chest

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<sup>4</sup> *Gospel Herald*, February 28, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> *World Outlook*, February 1956.

<sup>6</sup> Donald, McGavran, “New Methods for a New Age in Missions,” *International Review of Missions*, October 1955, 394.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 400–401.

and stomach, as well as infections of his hands and feet. The infections had been bothersome for thirty-three years, apparently due to the climate in India. Mary also showed signs of infection, but not a much as Donald. His chest pains were possibly related to gastric heartburn from a hiatus hernia. The pains in his stomach had been observed for some years. In 1937, Donald's appendix was removed due to chronic symptoms that led to suspicion of amebic involvement, but there was no improvement. The doctor noted that Donald was in good health even though he had been ill throughout his childhood—chickenpox, measles, German measles, mumps, and whooping cough—and as an adult missionary had attracted parasites, pin worms, chronic amebiasis, and malaria many times. However, after thirty-one years of service in India, they were both in good health.

The year 1955 proved to be one of celebration and transition for the McGavran family. Butler University celebrated its centennial on February 7, 1955, with a Founder's Day Convocation at which the school awarded Donald an honorary doctor of divinity degree, recognizing him as a world authority on religious education and of the people of India.

Following the furlough, Donald intended to return to India, but his mission board was both intrigued by his church growth discoveries and uncertain what to do with him. The leaders of the UCMS recognized that he was a world expert on mission practice and theory and felt that sending him back to his old mission work in India was not a wise move, neither for Donald nor for the mission.

For the summer of 1955, Donald and Mary were appointed to serve as hosts at the College of Missions house located at Crystal Lakes, Michigan. They spoke at several churches in northern Michigan and hosted a mission hour on Sunday afternoons between four and five o'clock. However, their future was uncertain. Apparently unknown to Donald, during July, Virgil A. Sly, executive secretary of the UCMS, offered Donald's services for up to three years to the International Missionary Council (IMC), publishers of the *International Review of Missions* headquartered in London. The IMC was one of the most influential Christian groups of its time, responsible for several respected studies and world gatherings of missionaries. The IMC had established a Department of Missionary Studies on the Life and Growth of the Younger Churches, and it seemed like a good fit for Donald. However, Charles W. Ranson, general secretary of the IMC, declined the offer with "extreme reluctance."<sup>8</sup> The reason for the reluctance was that two members of the IMC who knew Donald personally expressed hesitation. They respected Donald and his work but believed his rather individual approach would not merge well with the close-knit work of the Department of Missionary Studies. Looking back, this was a good decision, as the IMC was eventually absorbed into the World Council of Churches (WCC) in

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Charles W. Ranson to Virgil A. Sly, dated July 19, 1955.

1961. It turned away from an emphasis on evangelism toward political and social agendas, something that Donald would never have accepted. Providentially, the UCMS decided to send Donald on several tours of Puerto Rico, Formosa, Philippines, Thailand, Congo, and India to study the growth of the church in those lands. Those studies, and many to follow, provided the data and background for a number of books, articles, and reports that Donald would write over the coming decade.

Just before Donald left for Puerto Rico on October 25, 1955, to study the Disciple's missionary work, *The Bridges of God* was released by Friendship Press. His work and ideas were now available to missionaries all over the globe, and he looked forward to seeing what mission leaders would say regarding the book. In Puerto Rico, he studied the entire church situation—membership, leadership, and building program—as part of the *Strategy for World Missions* established by the UCMS to determine which of its mission fields had the greatest potential for growth. The study was completed in mid-December and was published in 1956 as “A Study of the Life and Growth of the Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico.”<sup>9</sup>

He returned in time to spend Christmas at home in the United States and then left in January 1956 for a five month study of Disciples of Christ missions in the Philippines, Thailand, Formosa, India, and Japan. Reporting to the UCMS in Indianapolis following his return in July, Donald pointed out that evangelistic opportunities existed in the mountain area of the Philippines and Thailand, particularly among the Tinguians of Abra and Apayao (Philippines) and the Chinese and Karens in northwest Thailand. He advised, “We must put in missionaries who are strongly evangelistic and those who will live in primitive outposts.”<sup>10</sup> This study was published as *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines* (1958) and led to an article, “The Independent Church in the Philippines” (1958).<sup>11</sup>

Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma, honored Donald at its May 30, 1956, graduation with an honorary doctor of literature degree, which was presented in absentia. The honor was given especially in recognition of his translation of the Christian gospels into the Chhattisgarhi dialect spoken by ten million people at the time and for his being an authority on the Hindi language.

That summer, the McGavrans stayed at the Disciple's missions house located near Yale University, where Donald wrote *Church Growth in West Utkal*. This study, completed during April 1956, in cooperation with the Baptist Missionary Society, was an investigation of over one hundred

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<sup>9</sup> Donald A. McGavran, “A Study of the Life and Growth of the Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico,” Indianapolis, IN: UCMS. Mimeographed.

<sup>10</sup> “Opportunities in Asia,” *World Call* (September 1956): 46.

<sup>11</sup> Donald A. McGavran, “The Independent Church in the Philippines,” *Encounter* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1958): 299–321.

congregations in India. A rough draft of the report was presented to a joint committee of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh church leaders, with the formal report written after he returned to New Haven.

In the summer of 1957, Donald and Mary moved to Frankfort, Michigan, where they served as hosts at the Missions House on the Disciples of Christ (Christian) church summer conference grounds. That summer, the McGavrans enjoyed a family reunion at Crystal Lake. Donald served on the faculty of the College of Mission and taught missionary candidates at the Christian Theological Seminary during the regular school year. Summer classes were held at Crystal Lake in Frankfort.

Donald received an invitation to return to the Philippines in early 1957, along with Earl H. Cressy, American Baptist missionary and missions professor,<sup>12</sup> to perform a survey for the Churches of Christ. The survey was part of "Operation Rapid Growth," which was designed to aid the United Church of Christ's constituency in its evangelistic efforts. They were given a preliminary budget of \$6,200 to cover travel, lodging, meals, three conferences, an office assistant, office supplies, and publication of the results. Donald served on loan from the UCMS, and Earl Cressy, being retired, served without pay. Donald surveyed the rural areas, while Cressy focused on the larger towns and cities. They looked for the churches that were making rapid and solid growth, so that the most fruitful methods could be identified. One of the main suggestions made was for the United Church of Christ to appoint one family specializing in evangelism for each conference or district. The final report was published in a book, *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines*, in 1958.<sup>13</sup>

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From 1953 until 1961, Donald's official status was as a professor in the College of Missions under special appointment. Back in 1927, the College of Missions had joined in partnership with the Kennedy School of Missions in Hartford, Connecticut, and for many years, courses were offered in three locations: Hartford, Connecticut; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Crystal Lake, Michigan. Throughout those years, Donald continued to be listed as a missionary to India, but his special appointments often found him studying the growth of churches in other countries, as well as teaching missions courses at Butler University (Indianapolis, IN), Phillips University (Enid, OK), Drake University, (Des Moines, IA), and Lexington College of the Bible (Lexington, KY).

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<sup>12</sup> Earl Herbert Cressy (1883–1979) was a missionary under the auspices of the American Board of Foreign Missions. He served in China and Thailand and was a professor at the Kennedy School of Missions.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Anderson McGavran, *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines* (Manila, Philippines: United Churches of Christ, 1958).

A new program was started in 1958 known as “peripatetic professorships” to supplement teaching in the field of missions at Disciple schools. This new program was birthed out of the Great Teacher Program, which raised \$127,747.45 to enable Disciples schools to “maintain a distinguished faculty and to attract additional quality faculty.”<sup>14</sup> As a peripatetic, or traveling lecturer, he taught during the fall semester at Phillips University (1957–58 school year) and the spring semester of 1958 at his alma mater, Butler University.

Both Donald and Mary traveled to Jamaica on July 10 so he could take a survey of church growth in that country. After returning to the United States, they went immediately to Des Moines, Iowa, so Donald could begin teaching in the Divinity School of Drake University for the autumn term of the 1958–59 academic year. During the school term, Donald participated in a commission on the theology of missions held at St. Louis, Missouri. He was engaged by the commission as a consultant on the authority and urgency of evangelism and suggested that the commission should “study mission as arising out of the understanding of God as known in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.”<sup>15</sup>

His subcommittee on evangelism continued working throughout 1959 in preparation for another gathering scheduled for October 19–20. As supportive reading, his committee was asked to read the World Council of Church’s Theology for Mission, which he dutifully did. Although parts of it impressed him as being logical, consistent, and carefully written, he could not imagine it being helpful to the Disciples cause. With an air of concern, he wrote,

The document seems to me to miss the passion of Christ and of Paul and of the early Church in general that men know Christ and be found in Him. Hence it is theologically weak.

It also suffers from an excessively broad definition of evangelism. Everything is evangelism. Hence it is theologically fuzzy.

Further while no one wants mechanical evangelism or a scalp counting, this document leans over backward to dissociate evangelism from the conversion of anyone. Evangelism is defined up and down and forward and backward, but the assumption throughout is that evangelism has nothing to do with whether anyone ever believes or not. Hence it will undergird indifferentism, but scarcely flaming evangelism. . . .

From the point of view of a theology of Mission this document says entirely too little about the relation of Chy [Christianity] to Non-Christian Faiths from Communism to Animism. It has a

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<sup>14</sup> H. L. Smith, “Classroom and Campus,” *World Call* (October 1958): 32.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of Meeting Commission of the Theology of Missions, October 18, 1958, 5.



mutually contradictory outlook. Its main emphasis seems to be that salvation is through Christ alone, and the outcome of all evangelism must be decision for Christ and into His Church. Yet it has a minor emphasis. It constantly uses phrases and sentences which by themselves imply that salvation through other religions is possible.

This I would like to see rectified.<sup>16</sup>

To aid in the discussion, Donald took time to rewrite the first 14 points (out of a total of 135 points), which he sent the chair and one member of the subcommittee. He offered to rewrite the entire document but only if it was used. Donald did not want to invest four days of time in rewriting the document and then have the chair of the commission decide not to use it. However, his invitation was not accepted.

During the fall of 1958, Donald became increasingly concerned about racial intolerance among Disciples of Christ churches. The Civil Rights Movement was heating up in the United States and after giving thought to the numerous issues, he came up with an idea to enlarge Christian unity. The plan was simple. In cities where Negro and Anglo churches existed, Donald suggested that both churches exchange three families for a period of six months. These "short-term missionaries" would share in worship, serve as teachers, work on committees, and even give financially to the exchange churches. Then, following their term of service, they would return to their own churches, and another set of three families would be exchanged. In so doing, Donald believed both churches would develop a better understanding of each other leading to Christian unity. This was not a total answer, but at least it would be a beginning. Donald later wrote about his concern to end segregation in an extensive article, "A Plan of Action for Churches," that appeared in the October 1961 issue of *Christian Herald*.

The five years of travel from 1954 to 1959 provided a laboratory for the study of church growth throughout the world. The studies added considerably to his understanding, and he published a second book in 1959, *How Churches Grow: The New Frontiers of Mission. The Bridges of God* showed how the church expanded largely through people movements, but this new book demonstrated that churches grow in many different ways, depending on the circumstances surrounding each church. The book was the first full expression of his church growth missiology. It was divided into five parts. Following the introductory part one, the remaining four parts were "Population Factors in Church-Growth," "General Factors in Church-Growth," "Methods of Church-Growth," and "Organization in Church-Growth." Two chapter titles also stressed church growth: "The Structure of Church Growth" and "Understanding Church Growth." One reviewer, Joseph M. Smith of the Christian Theological Seminary, cautioned, "His emphasis upon the central importance of 'church growth' seems, at times, to lead him into a kind

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from Donald McGavran to David McNelley dated January 2, 1959.



of commercial, utilitarian view of the gospel that would regard anything as Christian which gets ‘results.’” However, the reviewer concluded, “This is a book about *one* thing, whose central significance no one can doubt. It will merit careful study, therefore, by all who take seriously the words ‘Go . . . make disciples of all the nations.’”<sup>17</sup>

Donald was a visiting professor in the department of religion at Bethany College in West Virginia during the fall of 1959. He was quite proud to teach there, as four generations of his family had been associated with the school. His great grandfather, Samuel Grafton, was a member of the original board of trustees in 1840. His father John graduated in 1891, and his own son Malcolm graduated in 1951. He might have seen this position as the capstone of his missionary career, sort of coming full circle back to his roots. However, at sixty-one years of age, instead of coasting into retirement, he envisioned the starting of a graduate Institute of Church Growth (ICG).

“I am attempting to get a graduate ‘Institute of Church Growth’ established, and am writing to find out whether you are interested that it be at your seminary,” was the opening line of a letter Donald sent to three seminary deans from Eugene, Oregon, on April 21, 1959. He gave three reasons such a graduate school was needed.

1. Much missionary work is being done all over the world by boards and missions for a small return in the growth of younger Churches. Part of this is due to lack of resources and irresponsiveness of some populations. But very much more is due to the fact that church growth has not been stressed and missionaries and churchmen have not been trained in how churches grow in the specific populations to which they go. Missionaries are trained in everything but church growth. They study religions, cultures, phonetics, sociology, anthropology, agriculture, ecumenics and chic[k]en raising; but go out knowing next to nothing about how the churches (in the population to which they go) have arisen and are arising. The assumption is, of course, that having a BD from a standard seminary or having grown up in an American church and being earnest Christians, they know all they need to about church growth. The assumption is in grave error.
2. In all North America there is no educational institution giving training in church growth abroad. The Southern Baptists in Fort Worth have something which nearly does it. They see that carrying out the great commission means church growth (a very unusual insight) and teach something about it. But they are handicapped by their presuppositions. The rest of the Churches believe that carrying out the great commission means sending missionaries out and keeping them at work (any kind of work) whether the Church grows or not. Hence Divisions of World Mission are at present neither training mission-

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph M. Smith, “Discipling the Nations,” *World Call* (May 1961): 39.

aries in church growth, nor planning to train them. In consequence they will not get adequate church growth out of a generally responsive world. They will continue to do “splendid mission work” and gather and spend millions of dollars “for missions.”

3. However there is a rising tide of interest in church growth. Many factors are leading missionary statesmen to take church growth much more seriously than they ever have before. Returned missionaries also and nationals are manifesting new interest in the subject. The time is ripe for an Institute which specializes in church growth abroad. Our Church and our seminaries can render a notable ecumenical service at just this point.<sup>18</sup>

The letter went on to outline projected costs, faculty, curriculum, potential students, and the organization of such an institute. Donald had incorporated much from his years of teaching at Disciples colleges, universities, and seminaries that he included in his proposal. However, even though his vision was well thought out, all three seminaries turned him down.

Ross J. Griffeth, president of Northwest Christian College (NCC) in Eugene, Oregon, had discussed the idea for an institute when Donald served on the faculty during the 1959–1960 school year. President Griffeth expressed interest in calling Donald to be professor of Christian Missions at his college and helping him develop an Institute of Church Growth. Correspondence about this possibility took place in October of 1959 between Virgil Sly of the UCMS and president Griffeth. An agreement was reached whereby Donald would join the faculty on January 1, 1961, and the UCMS would provide his salary for that entire year. Ralph T. Palmer, head of the UCMS selection and training department, wrote to president Griffeth,

Don will continue on the present salary basis during his first year at Northwest Christian College and will be considered the peripatetic professor of the College of Missions until the conclusion of his first year of service with you ending December 31, 1961. The United Society and in particular the College of Missions is happy to do this for you and for Don because we feel it is a contribution we can make to the future of Northwest Christian College.<sup>19</sup>

The northwest corner of the United States was not the most promising place to begin an interdenominational Institute of Church Growth, but Donald seized it with both hands, particularly since it was his only offer. In 1960, they headed to Eugene, Oregon, to begin the Institute for Church Growth at Northwest Christian School. They purchased Fox Hollow farm and spent a great deal of time gardening, enjoying the view, and the starting of Donald's new career.

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<sup>18</sup> Letter from Donald McGavran to deans England, McCaw, and Norris of Christian seminaries dated April 21, 1959. The underlined emphasis in the letter is McGavran's.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Ralph T. Palmer to Ross J. Griffeth dated February 3, 1960.

Plans were quickly put into place to start the Institute of Church Growth in 1961. President Griffeth sent a letter to Addison Eastman, secretary of selection and training of missions for the National Council of Churches, on April 14, 1961, alerting him to the new Institute of Church Growth. In his letter, he described the purpose for the new institute.

The purpose is to provide a center for research and teaching at the graduate level. The central concern will be with the growth of churches in various lands. It is our hope that missionaries on furlough, nationals visiting America, and selected candidates of the various Churches and Boards will find the Institute a place where they can concentrate on church growth and learn and share experiences concerned with making disciples and multiplying sound churches of Jesus Christ. We believe that ours is the only Institute of this sort in our country, as a pioneering adventure, we shall need all the help and guidance we can muster.

Dr. Donald A. McGavran has been called to be the Director of the Institute of Church Growth. . . . Dr. McGavran brings to the Institute of Church Growth much first hand knowledge of how churches in many lands either grow or do not grow. This is his specialty. We believe he is eminently well qualified to direct our new Institute and make it of great service to the cause of Christian missions.<sup>20</sup>

After consultation with Donald, president Griffeth invited Bishop J. Waskom Pickett to speak at the initial Church Growth Lectureship in the fall of 1961. The purpose of the annual lectures was to present an outstanding missionary thinker who would speak on the continuing and central purpose of missions—planting and multiplying Christian churches throughout the world. The lectures were held October 29 through November 2, 1961. Bishop Pickett's gave seven lectures:

The Case for Rapid Growth of the Church  
The Tragedy of Retarded Growth  
Assembled Lessons from Asia, Africa, and Latin America  
Growing Churches Restrict Communist Growth  
Preaching Necessary but Insufficient  
Yesterday's Best Not Good Enough for Today  
Potential Christian Nations of Tomorrow.<sup>21</sup>

Pickett's lectures were published in 1963 as *The Dynamics of Church Growth* as part of a church growth series offered by Northwest Christian College.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from Ross J. Griffeth to Addison Eastman dated April 14, 1960.

<sup>21</sup> Lecture on Church Growth brochure. No date.

<sup>22</sup> J. Waskom Pickett, *The Dynamics of Church Growth: A Positive Approach for World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1963).

Questions regarding what Donald meant by church growth started surfacing from various corners of the missionary world almost as soon as *How Churches Grow* was released. In a letter to Donald Salmon, executive secretary of the department of evangelism of the UCMS, Donald explained,

I hold no brief at all for dishonest baptizing or pressuring people into joining the church, under conditions where we know they will not stay in it. I am not in the least interested in an evangelism, which is interested in numbers from the sake of the evangelist's professional reputation. But I am enormously interested in numbers for the sake of the salvation of men.

No numbers of the saved are ever mere. God is interested in lost sheep. The more brought in and fed and folded, the better pleased is God.<sup>23</sup>

In another letter to Bishop Richard C. Raines, president of the division of world missions of the Methodist Church, Donald spoke about the purpose of the Institute of Church Growth. "We ask: what are the most effective ways to spend the sacred resources of mission, so that men are in fact won to Christ and His churches are in fact established and multiply."<sup>24</sup>

On January 2, 1961, the Institute of Church Growth at Northwest Christian College opened with one lone student. Keith E. Hamilton, district superintendent of the Methodist Church in La Paz, Bolivia, was awarded a one thousand dollar fellowship to study at the Institute of Church Growth. He researched the problem of pastoral training in the Andes to church growth, and the study was published as *Church Growth in the High Andes* in 1962.<sup>25</sup>

The Evangelical Foreign Missions Association invited Donald 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 missiology throughout the world. Future 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.

In the midst of the challenges of spreading the church growth word, Donald relied heavily on his wife. She provided the stability of home that allowed him to travel, write, and speak throughout the world. A letter written by Donald to Mary McGavran in September 1961, reveals the love and appreciation he had for her.

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Donald A. McGavran to Donald Salmon dated January 14, 1960.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Donald A. McGavran to Bishop Richard C. Raines dated October 17, 1960.

<sup>25</sup> K. E. Hamilton, *Church Growth in the High Andes* (Eugene, OR: Institute of Church Growth, 1962).

Dearest Mary

In a few moments I shall be leaving this house and after a drive to Alajuela airport, leaving Costa Rica.

It has been good here, lots of contacts, some converts, many more encouraged, a good for the series collected, and I trust the work of God furthered.

Now I have but one thought—to hurry home to the most wonderful woman in the world. How good it will be to see you. How good it is to know that you are there and that we are together even when we are apart. Your goodness and kindness and graciousness, and good sense and that despite all my faults you go on loving me!

We have seen a lot of the world together, and sailed a lot of seas together and been in some terrible storms together, and done at least something of God's work together, and obeyed Christ's commands and planted His Church. Even when we have been physically apart—as we have been often—we have been in each other thoughts almost continually.

God bless and keep you Dearest and give us many years ahead in the harvest field—and sitting on the front porch rocking—if that is His will—together.

Love

Don

Although Donald did not know it at the time, they would have another twenty-eight years together to serve Christ and love each other.

The church growth lectureship with Bishop Picket went well in 1961, and Donald planned for an even larger lectureship in 1962. This one would involve Eugene A. Nida, executive secretary for translations of the American Bible Society, Robert Calvin Guy, professor of missions at Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Melvin L. Hodges, executive secretary for Latin America Foreign Missions Department of the Assemblies of God. Donald applied for a grant of two thousand dollars from the Sperry and Hutchinson Company in New York to fund the lectureship.

Things were moving forward in 1962. President Griffeth and McGavran hosted the Sterling professor of mission and oriental history, Kenneth Scott Latourette, for a visit to discuss the burgeoning institute, and he agreed to be included on the board of advisors.<sup>26</sup> Also added was Arthur Flemming, the president of the University of Oregon. Robert Prescott, owner of a small public relations firm, was hired to take the inner message of the Institute for Church Growth to the people of Oregon. He made a major contact for the Institute by arranging a meeting between President Griffeth, Donald McGavran, and Governor Mark Hatfield on December 12, 1962. In a letter

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from K. S. Latourette to Robert Prescott dated September 29, 1962.

to the Rt. Rev. Stephen Bayne Jr. at Lambeth Place, England, Bob Prescott described what was happening in Eugene as follows:

This is to solicit your favour and attention toward quite an unusual research project here underway in Eugene. Perhaps our fellow Anglicans may benefit from what is afoot.

I refer to a joint effort by Northwest Christian College and the University of Oregon to re-examine the entire field of mission strategy the world over and to improve it—a rather startling objective. . . .

The research program has gathered fellows from a wide number of denominations and points of emphasis around the world. Graduate work is being given both at the institute (technically on NCC campus) and across the street at the U of O. There is a very close collaboration with the U. of O Dept. of Anthropology. The anthropologists are quite delighted and enthused by the program. One of them told me wistfully: “This is the first time in the history of Anthropology any Christians came to us for help. We may have a few ideas. . . .”

The feeling around the town, the U of O and NCC is, among those persons who know about the program, one of high hope: Perhaps Christendom is not out of business, perhaps there are ways to bring over entire peoples, perhaps the long and painful researches ahead will prosper and bear fruit.<sup>27</sup>

Over the next four years, fifty-seven missionaries studied at the Institute while on furlough, and one of those students—Alan Tippett—became the second member of the church growth faculty.

In 1960–1961, Donald sent out offers of a one thousand dollar fellowship to men who wanted to study at the Institute of Church Growth. Three fellowships were available each year, and he was on the lookout for mid-career missionaries who showed promise for study at the Institute of Church Growth. The essential qualifications were field experience, fluency in a language other than English, as well as a wide knowledge of one’s field, mission, and indigenous churches.

At this same time, Alan R. Tippett (fifty-two years old at the time), a mid-career missionary with twenty years experience in Fiji, was seeking God’s direction for his life. On furlough in his native Australia, Tippett sent an article, “Probing Missionary Inadequacies at the Popular Level,” to an academic journal. Since the article was too practical, the editor turned it down but wrote Tippett informing him that the outside reader had recommended sending it to the *International Review of Missions*. The outside reader was Kenneth Scott Latourette. The article had been “written in Fiji, sent to America, then from America to England, published there, was read

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Robert Prescott Jr. to the Rt. Rev. Stephen Bayne Jr. dated May 24, 1962.

in America by Dr. Donald McGavran, who wrote to me [Tippett] in Fiji about it from America, and we two got into correspondence on the matter of mission at the popular level.<sup>28</sup> Tippett had read several of Donald's articles, as well as *The Bridges of God*, and realized that many of the tribes in Fiji represented typical people movements. After reflecting on the *Bridges of God*, he said to a friend in Fiji, "This is absolutely right but this man will never sell it to the mission Boards."<sup>29</sup>

Delighted that McGavran had written him "out of the blue," Tippett discovered that they shared a great deal in common. Both McGavran and Tippett had faced similar challenges in mission, and had reached similar conclusions. Through their correspondence, McGavran became aware of Tippett's interest in anthropology and its potential to inform mission practice. This led to the offering of a fellowship to come to the Institute of Church Growth to study for an MA degree and perhaps teach some of the courses. Years later, Tippett recalled this time:

McGavran had realized that he needed an anthropologist's support at selling a number of his ideas. He knew that evangelical Christians in America at that time saw anthropology as anathema. He offered me a fellowship to do his courses and write a study of Christian mission in the islands, and maybe help a little with the teaching. This was a good concrete offer. It would give me a little time to go further with my mission study, to observe how he had structured his courses, and to draw from his experience, to meet other missionaries from other lands, and to do some writing. The idea was that it would lead to an M.A. in Missions if I so desired. Otherwise I could be satisfied with a Certificate in Church Growth.<sup>30</sup>

Tippett's family encouraged him to accept McGavran's offer. They were settled in a new home in Australia, and this would give time for them to consider whether to seek another field of missionary work or await an opening to teach missions. Tippett decided to join McGavran in Eugene for what he surmised would be a year of study, but it turned into two and a half years!

Having boarded a ship at Melbourne, Tippett spent nearly the entire month of December 1961 at sea before arriving in January 1962 in San Francisco. There he transferred his baggage to a train and then took a bus to Eugene, Oregon. After spending the night at Fox Hollow, the McGavran farm located nine miles out of Eugene, Donald took him to Northwest Christian College to show him around the next morning. Tippett was shocked

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<sup>28</sup> Alan R. Tippett, *No Continuing City* (unpublished autobiography, 1985), 273. Two original copies are known to exist. One in the Alan R. Tippett collection at Canberra University, Canberra, Australia, and the other in the personal collection of Charles Kraft. Quotes are from the author's duplicated copy of the Kraft original.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



to find that the Institute was not what it appeared to be in the brochures. The brochures depicted the buildings of NCC, which Tippett had assumed belonged to the Institute of Church Growth. In reality, the Institute was comprised of a small office for Donald, with a large table and blackboard set between two stacks of books where classes were held on the third floor of the library. Tippett's own office was simply a library study carrel.

In the spring, Tippett became a student in McGavran's classes. Donald 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. Three other career missionaries attended with Tippett that January of 1962: William Read, Roy Shearer, and James Sunda. This was the first real team of fellows, since the first lone student, Keith Hamilton, had departed. They took "Principles and Procedures of Church Growth," which ran through each term. Together they discussed case studies from various mission fields, such as, the Philippines, Ghana, Liberia, Jamaica, Mexico, Orissa, and other places. The list of courses was in development, and some were never offered. No courses in theology of mission were offered in the first years, but when theology came out, it was geared to Donald's own slant on theology and the theological battles he personally desired to address.

The presence of Tippett, Read, Shearer, and Sunda put great pressure on McGavran. His basic teaching plan was to have students collect data on the field and bring it to the Institute where they could learn how to evaluate it, test it, and write it up. Hence, all four were researching, surveying, and writing at the same time under Donald's direction and oversight. To relieve the pressure, McGavran asked Tippett to teach the two subjects of anthropology and primal religions during his first year at the Institute, as well as a case study on Oceania. This allowed Donald to have a break so he could prepare a new course.

The convergence of these five men together in the winter and spring of 1962 proved to be a powerful encounter. Each was quite different in personality and denominational background, and each came from a different part of the world. Shearer was a Presbyterian with experience in Korea. Read, too, was Presbyterian but had worked in Portuguese. Sunda served with the Christian & Missionary Alliance in Western Dani. Tippett, a Methodist, did missionary work in Fiji. McGavran, of course, was Disciples of Christ from India. In spite of their apparent differences, they formed a solid team of researchers, each influencing and being influenced by the others. They shared a common conviction to fulfill the Great Commission, had all experienced people movements, and believed that research had an important place in missions. None of the four students accepted everything that Donald proposed, but they were all drawn to him, believing that he had picked up and continued the work of Roland Allen, Alexander McLeish, John Nevius, and other mission pioneers following World War II. Together

they produced some of the best studies and publications to come out of the Institute of Church Growth in Eugene.

A major discouragement encountered by Fellows during the first years of the Institute concerned the inability of NCC to grant a master's degree. The brochure that had been circulated among missionaries promised a master's degree in missions upon completion of thirty credit hours and the writing of a thesis. Unknown to them, however, this promise was made in faith as NCC was coming up for an accreditation review, and it was hoped the school would be approved to grant a master's degree. Unfortunately, the accreditation committee only approved the granting of a bachelor's degree citing the lack of an adequate library for a master's program. Rather than make a scene about this, the Fellows let it drop. They believed so strongly in what the Institute was doing for missions, none wanted to do anything to damage the Institute at its early stage of development.

Tippett, however, was greatly annoyed and confronted McGavran about it. In his directive manner, McGavran put it aside, telling Tippett to go across the street to the University of Oregon and work instead on a PhD in anthropology. Northwest Christian College and the Institute had a good working relationship with the University of Oregon. Its library had strong holdings in anthropology, history, and specialized in Pacific studies, a good fit for Tippett's interests. Once he resigned himself to having been, as he put it, "hoodwinked into a doctoral program," he decided to make the most of the opportunity. As it providentially turned out, Tippett was able to study under Hoer Barnett, the leading applied anthropologist in America at the time.<sup>31</sup>

Over time, McGavran began relying on Tippett's background in New Testament Greek, theology, and anthropology to communicate and defend church growth ideas to various audiences. The evangelical constituency that was drawn to Donald struggled to accept the insights of anthropology. Instead, they hungered to know if church growth ideas were biblical. McGavran called upon Tippett to develop a theology of church growth that supported people movement theories, as well as other findings coming out of church growth studies. Over time, they learned how to present their ideas to conservative theological audiences.

For the 1962 church growth lectures, Donald invited Calvin Guy, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; Melvin Hodges, executive secretary for Latin American, Assembly of God; and Eugene Nida, secretary for translations, American Bible Society, to interact as a panel with Donald as moderator. The four later contributed to *Church Growth and Christian Mission* (1965).

By 1963, the Institute of Church Growth was gaining prominence among missionaries, professors of missions, and mission executives. Two thousand

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<sup>31</sup> Tippett, *No Continuing City*, 278–279.

copies of *Church Growth in the High Andes* was in shipment (1300 to the Institute and 700 to Hamilton in Bolivia) as of March 1963, and nine additional books were in process from the research conducted at the Institute. Since he was sixty-five years old, Donald wanted to assure that the books would be published in the event of his death. In March of 1963, he asked president Griffeth for assurance that these undertakings would be honored no matter what happened to him.

One book in process was *Church Growth in West New Guinea* by James Sunda. Since president Griffeth had not authorized the printing, the cost for printing was shared between the Christian & Missionary Alliance and McGavran personally. The Institute was to receive 800 copies, with the remaining 1200 going to the Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA). *Church Growth and Group Conversion* was a reprint of the earlier work by Pickett, Warnshuis, and McGavran. Once again, Donald had moved forward without obtaining authorization, but he guaranteed that the book “will be paid for in full by me or my heirs.”<sup>32</sup> *Church Growth in Jamaica* by Donald McGavran was being paid for in total by the UCMS. Five hundred copies of *God’s Messengers to Mexico’s Masses* by Jack Taylor were printed. The cost was shared with the Baptist Spanish Publishing House (Southern Baptist) in El Paso, Texas. Wilton Nelson wrote *A History of Protestantism in Costa Rica*, and five hundred copies were printed. The Latin American Mission paid four hundred dollars, Wilton Nelson paid two hundred dollars, and Donald paid two hundred dollars of the costs. Eerdmans released *Church Growth in Mexico* by Donald McGavran in September 1963. It was the result of a joint project between Donald, John Huegel, and Jack Taylor. Taylor, a fellow studying at the Institute, and Huegel, a missionary from Mexico, each wrote one chapter, with McGavran contributing the other ten. Alan Tippett was slated to write *Dynamics of Church Growth in the South Pacific*. The book was eventually released in 1967 as *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*. Research fellows Roy Shearer, Gordon Robinson, and John Grimley were each working on manuscripts to be published in 1963, also. Eerdmans eventually published Shearer’s *Wildfire: Church Growth in Korea* in 1966, while Robinson and Grimley combined their writing projects to produce *Church Growth in Central and Southern Nigeria*, also published in 1966 by Eerdmans. The final writing project to which the Institute of Church Growth was obligated was *Church Growth in Brazil* by William Read, and Eerdmans released it in 1965.

The fact that Donald had to cover some of the costs of publishing books coming forth from the research conducted at the Institute reveals the fragile financial situation of the Institute at Northwest Christian College. However, “After 30 years in colonial mission McGavran knew how to exist on a shoestring and he ruled his institute as a colonial paternalist.”<sup>33</sup> For example,

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<sup>32</sup> Letter from Donald A. McGavran to Ross Griffeth dated March 5, 1963.

<sup>33</sup> Tippett, *No Continuing City*, 276.

research fellows never received their money directly. They had to pay for any expenditure for research personally and then turn in receipts for reimbursement from NCC funds. The largest charge against the one thousand dollar fellowship was for the publication of the research. Theoretically, Donald held a reserve for the publication of the manuscript, but he felt if money could be saved on one man's publication, he could use the savings to publish something else. Thus, he always looked for a publisher who was willing to take some of the risk, and if this failed, he would offer to subsidize a portion of the publication.

When president Griffeth invited the founding of the Institute at NCC, he was confident that funds could be raised to support the faculty, research fellows, and future publications. Unfortunately, funds were not easy to raise, which led to difficult times financially. This fact led Waskom Pickett to write a letter in May 1963 to the dean of the School of Theology at Princeton University, requesting the consideration of that school taking over the Institute of Church Growth. Pickett wrote,

My reason for writing to you is to suggest that you confer with Dr. McGavran regarding a possible location of his "Institute of Church Growth" at Princeton. McGavran is doing exploits in bringing the issue of Church Growth to the attention of concerned Christians around the world.

Several years ago, he opened an Institute on Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. The resources of the College are very limited. It is a small denominational institution, undergraduate only, and unaccredited until this year. Despite those handicaps, McGavran has drawn a number of students and has produced several valuable works.<sup>34</sup>

For reasons unknown, no arrangement was ever reached to take the Institute to Princeton.

Even through Tippett was somewhat disgruntled about being tricked into working on a PhD, he did enjoy helping McGavran communicate his missiological ideas. Tippett wrote,

I did not see then that we were creating a new missiology appropriate to the post-colonial era of mission. We did attract attention, however. Once, as conservative theologians we were establishing a scientific anthropological system, we began to emerge as a problem to the extremer liberal groups who had wiped us off as theologically unacceptable. We never came into debate with them because we never found a common base for discussion. Our biblical presuppositions were mutually exclusive.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Letter from J. Waskom Pickett to Elmer G. Homrighausen dated May 14, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> Tippett, *No Continuing City*, 282.

McGavran, Tippett, and the rest of the early students of church growth were not inclined to battle with extreme liberals who rejected biblical authority, nor with extreme conservatives who were biblical literalists. They chose, instead, to steer a course between these two poles where a large number of missionaries were searching for a fresh missiology that could reach the increasingly receptive peoples of the world. However, a confrontation with the World Council of Churches had been brewing for some time, and a showdown came in the summer of 1963.

At the WCC third assembly at New Delhi (November 18 through December 6, 1961), a resolution was passed asking for a consultation that “would make possible an exchange of findings and view of methodology between persons engaged in research into factors favoring or retarding church expansion, in terms of numerical growth.”<sup>36</sup> This reaction was brought about by the rising tide of criticisms directed at Donald and his church growth missiology.

Tippett saw two types of critics: “those who feared the effect of attacks on strategy, policy, vested interests, etc; and others who were ready to pull items out of his contexts just to score points against him.”<sup>37</sup> Some critics disliked Donald’s emphasis on statistics, feeling it stressed a man-oriented faith rather than reliance on the Holy Spirit. This criticism took two forms. One, it implied that church growth missiology had no doctrine of the sovereignty of God, and two, that quantity was more important than quality. Both were untrue. In response to these two criticisms, Tippett explained, “Granted, we opposed the theological defensiveness based on the notion that God, being in control, would give growth when and where He would. All we had to do was to be faithful.”<sup>38</sup> McGavran and Tippett responded by developing the biblical doctrine of stewardship. From their perspective, as faithful stewards of the gifts of God, missionaries ought to work for statistical growth under God’s sovereign guidance. To think that quality alone mattered was a fallacy. Quality and quantity are not exclusive concepts. True quality implied growth of the church. Most of the resistance came from reactions to Donald’s harvest theology, particularly the idea of reallocation of resources to receptive fields from non-receptive ones. This innovative idea brought a “hostile reaction from Boards with vested interests in resistant areas, especially in Islamic lands, for example. This was a major battle.”<sup>39</sup> Still, a third criticism was aimed at Donald’s dichotomy of discipling and perfecting as two parts of God’s working through the Spirit. These terms were unfortunate, as they did create misunderstanding. Donald simply meant evangelism (discipling) and spiritual growth (perfecting). However, he was frequently

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Middleton, *Development of a Missiologist*, 286.

<sup>37</sup> Tippett, *No Continuing City*, 283.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

attacked as discipling without perfecting, which is never found in his writings.

Underneath all of the criticisms, there is no doubt that Donald's polemical approach upset some of his critics. Tippett describes McGavran's assertive nature.

Both at the podium and on paper McGavran was an extremely aggressive person. Psychologically he expected opposition and to some extent looked for it. He was always at his best when he was most threatened. On the platform his style was oratorical and by repeated presentation, well honed. He developed metaphoric phrases and punch-lines. His thirty years on the mission field within colonial structures and dealings with missionary bureaucracy had left him ready to "enter the ring to spar" with any who would—bishops, scholars or board administrators. (The "top brass" he called them.) He "pulled no punches" and sometimes his punches really hurt. As a result of this he made enemies and critics, and many there were who would have been glad to see him brought down.<sup>40</sup>

In person, Donald was able to disarm even his most strident critics, but in public forums, his debating style, which first sprang forth during his college years, was quite evident.

The motivation of the WCC is not totally clear, but in 1963, Victor Hayward asked Donald to participate in a consultation on church growth at Iberville, Quebec, located near Montreal. About twenty participants were invited from around the world to examine the church growth view, discuss the difficulties it raised, and produce a statement for the church. McGavran invited Waskom Pickett and Tippett to join him at the consultation. They met in New York the day before going to Iberville to map out their presentations, discuss issues likely to come up, and decide who would answer them. The conference was held July 31 to August 2, 1963.

The WCC had structured the conference tightly to promote its viewpoint. Donald was not allowed to help design the agenda, but he was told where and when he and his team would speak. Of course, they were allowed to say what they desired during their presentations, but Victor Hayward controlled the conference closely. Hayward vigorously attacked the church growth perspective, but as the conference progressed, the hostility lessened. Donald spoke about methodology and application of research. Waskom Pickett addressed why missions are bogged down, and Tippett presented case studies demonstrating the application of church growth strategies. As the three men presented their case, opposition was reduced. The final session was spent ironing out a statement, which came to be called the Iberville Statement on the Growth of the Church. Commenting on the Iberville

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



Statement in his autobiography, Tippett wrote, "I think they took . . . us as a bunch of non-academic bush theologians, and intended to 'prick our bubble.' It didn't work out that way. We produced a fairly good church growth statement."<sup>41</sup> Instead of publishing the Iberville Statement, the WCC buried it in a file where no one was able to read it. However, it was later published at the urging of Donald, and in many presentations in the years following, the Institute of Church Growth used it quite effectively.<sup>42</sup>

That August, president Griffeth wrote Pickett that the Northwest Christian College was moving to incorporate the Institute of Church Growth as an organization separate from the college. Griffeth invited Pickett to serve as one of the trustees of the new corporation. The letter also informed Pickett that Governor Mark Hatfield had agreed to serve on the board of advisors for the Institute. Pickett replied on August 22, 1963, "If Northwest Christian College and the proposed Board of Trustees can find resources of finances and personnel to bring out the full potential of the Institute they will be remembered for a truly great service to the Kingdom of God." He continued, "A vast amount of understanding is being lost to the Church every year because of the lack of what this Institute should provide. No traditional School of Missions can make a comparable contribution."<sup>43</sup> The fact that Northwest Christian College was struggling to support the Institute was mentioned in a letter written in September 1963, by president Griffeth to Vincent Brushwyler of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society. He commented, "Our present problem is the same as that of every such enterprise, namely, adequate funds to support the work. Northwest Christian College entered this venture by financing the Institute of Church Growth out of a small financial reserve. We are working to establish a better and more secure financial foundation for the work. However, at present we are opportunists in faith."<sup>44</sup>

In December, Donald corresponded with David Barrett regarding suggestions Barrett had made that Donald change some wording in a new manuscript to appeal more to the left wing of the church. Donald's response reveals much about his theological position, as well as the character of his writing. He wrote,

For years, I held the liberal more or less secular position. I graduated from Yale and Union and Columbia and counted myself one of the enlightened. . . . I deliberately turned from what may loosely be termed liberalism, holding that it is not adequate understanding

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>42</sup> The Iberville Statement was published in *Church Growth and Christian Mission* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965). A copy of the Iberville Statement is found in the Appendix.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from J. Waskom Pickett to Ross Griffeth dated August 22, 1963.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Ross J. Griffeth to Vincent Brushwyler dated September 28, 1963.



of Reality, too one dimensional, and involves its adherents in much duplicity vis a vis the rest of the Church. So I use deliberately what I know sounds pious and perhaps simple—with deep sympathy for those to whom it seems so. I stood amongst them myself thirty years ago. I shall not be able to accept suggestions that I write to these friends' understandings and prejudices. I have to write what I believe.

These words of mine have been chosen, not carelessly, but deliberately, to shake people awake. Christian mission needs hard bold plans. I considered using other words—aggressive, well-devised, effective—but decided to stick with these provocative Anglo-Saxon words. They stick in the mind.

I have been fighting a battle to rouse missions to today's mal-administration, criminal negligence, bumbling bureaucracy and Churches (conservative and liberal, main line and Pentecostal) to today's opportunities and open doors. The capture of Geneva and large sections of New York by men who are not in the least interested in discipling the nations, who indeed believe that goal old fashioned and pietistic, must be borne in mind. If I were to change my terminology to woo Geneva, it would not touch her—I have tried—and would water down what I have to say to the rest of the Christian world.

I fear, my friend, that what I have written, I have written. I should have said this when you so kindly first proposed to do some editing. This was my mistake. Please pardon it. I made it because I will do everything possible to make what I say more effective. I have no particular pride of authorship; but do want to help redeem missions from their amazing ineffectiveness.

Perhaps I shall not build the temple. Perhaps there is too much blood on my hands. Perhaps God will raise up a Solomon and he will build it. Indeed, perhaps you, who can advocate discipling the nations without the opposition I have encountered (or engendered?), will bring out the definitive work on church growth. If so, I shall be delighted. Somehow the Church must recapture the initiative, turn from all these delightful by-paths, and carry out God's will in the discipling of ta ethne.<sup>45</sup>

Donald's passion to reach all the peoples of the world with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is apparent in his correspondence with David Barrett.

Looking back on this time some years later, Donald noted that the first two building blocks of what came to be known as the Church Growth Movement were started in Eugene, Oregon. The first was the founding of the Institute of Church Growth, and the second was beginning publication of the

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from Donald A. McGavran to David Barrett dated December 14, 1963.

*Church Growth Bulletin* (first circulated in 1964), a sixteen page bimonthly periodical edited by Donald and published by Overseas Crusades, Inc. Norman L. Cummings, home director of Overseas Crusades, Inc., had become deeply interested in church growth and wrote to Donald on April 2 offering to assist the Institute of Church Growth. Specifically, Overseas Crusades offered to provide a secretary for Donald, publish a bulletin on church growth, help with the recruitment of faculty, and provide exposure for the Institute through the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association (E. F. M. A.). The first issue of the *Church Growth Bulletin* was published in September 1964 and proved to be a key communication piece for the burgeoning Church Growth Movement. By the end of the year, over 1,200 leaders representing one hundred mission boards in the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America were receiving the *Church Growth Bulletin*.

From June 1964 to June 1965, the future of the Institute of Church Growth was in serious doubt. Although the Institute operated as an academic body, and was supported by president Griffeth out of the NCC budget, in point of fact the Institute had no constitutional existence. The affairs of the Institute were merely accounts in the books of NCC, and the Institute did not really exist except as an experimental program at NCC.

Donald was fighting to keep it open and listed Alan Tippett as professor of anthropology and church growth at the ICG even though Tippett was no longer on the payroll. The time away from his family had taken a predictable toll on Tippett. In December 1963, he told Donald he was going to go home to Australia. The combination of being away from family, teaching, speaking, and working on his PhD had taken a serious physical toll. His blood pressure had risen so that he needed medication, but that caused some depression. After some rest and prayer, he determined to stick it out and finish his comprehensive exam and the dissertation. The deadline for the finished dissertation was set for May 5, and he turned it in just fifteen minutes before the deadline. With defense set for May 29, Tippett was physically at the end of the tether. He ably defended his dissertation, "Fijian Material Culture: A Study of Cultural Context, Function, and Change"<sup>46</sup> and was on a plane home to Australia on May 30. In his pocket was an offer from Donald for a permanent post at the Institute, but he wanted to wait on that decision until he returned home and talked it over with his wife Edna. Anyway, he also wanted to see the Institute properly constituted, which did not appear to be happening.

President Griffeth kept working to incorporate the Institute independently of Northwest Christian College by establishing a Church Growth Foundation that would put the Institute on a solid financial footing for years to come, but nothing was quickly coming together. The fact that he

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<sup>46</sup> Alan Richard Tippett, "Fijian Material Culture: A Study of Cultural Context, Function and Change" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1964).

was retiring on June 30, 1965, meant the Institute would be left without its major administrative supporter at the college. Northwest Christian College had provided the Institute a yearly budget of fifteen thousand dollars. While not a huge sum, it put a great deal of pressure on the college, and without president Griffeth's encouragement, the college board was likely to stop supporting the Institute. President Griffeth even explored with McGavran the possibility of relocating the Institute to the Bay Area of California so it could be near the headquarters of Overseas Crusades.

In the midst of the struggle to keep the Institute going, good news came in the form of a fifty-four thousand dollar grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. During the spring, Donald had submitted two proposals to Charles G. Williams, director for religion at Lilly Endowment. One involved a survey team to study East Africa, and the other was for a similar project in Latin America. The proposal to fund a study of Latin American church growth was approved, and president Griffeth received a check on December 15, which provided a happy end to the year. The grant was to be dispersed to the Institute of Church Growth over the following two years.

God was at work behind the scenes preparing Donald 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 Donald and his students to refine research methodology and clarify basic terminology, as well as publish early church growth studies from around the world. Then, as Donald was thinking of retiring to a farm he and Mary had purchased in Eugene, somewhat miraculously, Fuller Seminary invited him to begin the School of World Mission in Pasadena, California.

### **About the Author**

Gary L. McIntosh is a speaker, writer, and professor of Christian Ministry & Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. As a church growth expert, he publishes *Growth Points*, a monthly publication read by over 7,000 church leaders. His most recent book, *Dining With Jesus: How People are Coming to Christ and His Church*, was released in January 2016. He may be reached at [gary.mcintosh@biola.edu](mailto:gary.mcintosh@biola.edu).