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

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

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

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Evangelizing Pre-Christian People: A Thematic Perspective

George G. Hunter III

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

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

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

observed that churches that based their local mission upon Evangelical folk wisdom usually walked out of ripe harvest fields "empty handed."

So, when McGavran was a mission leader in India in the 1930's, superintending many churches whose leaders said they were doing "evangelism" but were not actually reaching pre-Christian people, he began asking, "How does the gospel *actually* spread? How do churches *really* grow?" In 1934, from a three-year field-research study of (what came to be called) India's "people movements" into Christianity, J. Wascom Pickett published a pioneering text. In the Indian Christian newspaper, *Sahayak Patrika*, McGavran published a review of Pickett's book. You can infer by his opening sentence that he liked the book: "There has come a book sent by God, and its name is *Christian Mass Movements in India*." With his background in behavioral sciences and field research in his Ph.D. studies at Columbia University, McGavran brought a perceptive mind to appraise Pickett's project.

As McGavran studied the book and then spent a month with Pickett studying growing churches, he became convinced that mission's conceptual frontiers could no longer draw from scripture, mission history, and theology *alone*. The complexity of mission's challenge also required *field research*. We needed to study enough growing churches and Christian movements, in enough tongues and cultures, to determine what growing churches *know* and what they *do* (that other churches do not know and do) to reach people, and grow, and become local Christian movements. Such churches and movements can model the ways forward for other churches. In churches that are growing with integrity and power, the God who acts in history is revealing the reproducible (or adaptable) *principles* that can inform the Christian movement's expansion elsewhere.

So, while on study leaves and supported by occasional research grants, McGavran studied growing churches on four continents over a 20 year period. He studied their growth history, observed their ministries, interviewed leaders and (especially) converts and, in time, described universal patterns that account for Christianity's expansion, presumably everywhere. McGavran's reflection, however, could be *prescriptive*, as well as descriptive. From the New Testament, he challenged the prevailing understanding of the *goal* of evangelism as to "get decisions." From the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and from the ministry modeled in The Acts of the Apostles, McGavran taught that evangelism's goal is to "make disciples," not merely to elicit decisions. Disciples, he taught, *follow Jesus Christ as Lord*, in the

Church and in the world.

Stephen Neill, the Anglican missionary statesman, used to similarly nuance the goals of Evangelism in term of the New Testament term *metanoia*, and he contended that God wants and the world needs the kinds of Christian disciples who have experienced three "turnings." People are called to turn 1) to Christ, 2) to the Body of Christ, and 3) to a vision of the kind of world that Christ wants—in terms like life, justice, and peace. Neill's model becomes especially useful with two additional observations: 1) These three turnings typically take place *one at a time* in a person's life; and 2) they occur *in any conceivable sequence*. (Bishop Neill used to reflect that most of the "useless" Christians were people in whom one or two of the turnings had been experienced, but not yet all three. Furthermore, he said, in Evangelism we are called to invite people into any of the three turnings they have not yet experienced.)

An interest in Stephen Neill's third turning is more in ascendancy than ever before. In many places where evangelical Christianity has grown substantially, from Asia, to Africa, to Latin America, church leaders confess that, although their churches have grown, their societies have not changed. More leaders are now clear that God wants His Will to be done "on earth, as it is in Heaven." So George Otis (www.sentinelgroup.org) produces books and videos dramatizing where "transformations" are taking place. Donald Miller and Ted Yamamori document how Pentecostal Christianity is developing a greater social conscience.³ Pete Wagner, who did his PhD in Ethics, has recently published *Dominion: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World*.⁴ (The new Evangelical desire for Christian influence in social reform is not a new discovery, but a re-discovery of the vision that inspired the nineteenth century Abolitionist Movement.)

The history of an evangelical understanding of *how* we work for a new world may soon parallel the history of our understanding of Evangelism. Once, as in the First Great Awakening, we were clearer about God's role in saving people than the Church's role. McGavran and the Church Growth school discovered more about what *we* do to cooperate with the Great Commission than we ever knew before. Today, evangelicals are clearer about what God does in social reform, and most of our efforts (like organized intercession) are related to the divine side. One day, scholars will do the field research in churches that are making a social difference to discover the reproducible principles behind the human side of Christian social engagement.

We are already clearer than before about one goal of Evangelism: while we are, indeed, called to join The Lord in making

citizens of Heaven, we are also called to join Him in making the kind of citizens for the world that the world needs, in great numbers, to populate the movements that will make a difference.

In time, other field researchers and interpreters joined Donald McGavran in what became "the Church Growth Movement." Such studies, however, were not confined to Church Growth people. In time, a number of behavioral scientists studied some of the same issues.⁵ Christian conversion has particularly been studied from several useful vantage points.⁶ Some scholars, notably Lyle Schaller, have studied churches with interests very similar to those of Church Growth people.⁷

This chapter addresses McGavran's formidable question: *How does effective evangelism actually take place?*⁸ We have, today, advanced some beyond McGavran's strategic wisdom. In this chapter, his most significant single principle will be sandwiched third among four strategic principles which can now be drawn from broader, and later, research. (To aid the reader's memory, I have imposed alliteration upon the four principles.)

Community

Apostolic Outreach is prepared for, and takes place within, and is deployed from, the several forms of Christian Community. As John Wesley famously observed, "Christianity is not a solitary religion." Some Christian leaders, in some generations, have known this since Jesus gathered twelve disciples and shaped them into the symbolic New Israel. The research and reflection behind my book on ancient Celtic Christianity and that movement's approach to mission⁹ helped me to drill deeper in understanding this principle.

The Celtic Christian movement's people were substantially reached by, formed within, and deployed from Christian communities. The Celtic Christian movement lasted from the fifth to the ninth centuries, and was the greatest sustained Christian mission in Christianity's history. The movement reached many of the peoples of (what is now) Ireland, Scotland, and England and, in time, many peoples of Western Europe. Their mission was widely assumed to be "impossible" to achieve—because Rome perceived the populations that the movement targeted as "barbarians;" by definition, people had to be sufficiently "civilized" to become "Christianized." By achieving the "impossible," the Celtic Christian movement brought Europe out of "the Dark Ages" and ushered in "the Holy Roman Empire." Their achievement is unexplainable apart from the contagious power of Christian community in several forms.

In the late fourth century, Patrick grew up in a Briton tribe in (what is now) northwest England. He was raised in a Christian family, and in the local church, and he learned the catechism—though he had not accepted the faith (and had rebelled against it) when, as a teenager, he was captured by pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland. As a slave, he lived much of the time in the compound with other slaves next to the tribal settlement of an Irish leader named Milieuc. In other periods, Patrick experienced isolation while he was herding cattle in a wilderness area miles from the settlement.

In the compound, there were (undoubtedly) Christian slaves who formed into Christian community and included Patrick in their company, praying with and for him. The community of faith back home was praying for him and Patrick now carried vivid memories of that community within him. In the wilderness periods, he began praying, more and more. In time, he became aware of the presence of God, and he recognized this presence to be the Triune God he had learned about in the catechism. Patrick experienced the gift of faith, and became devout. At the settlement, his fellow Christians and his captors observed profound change within him.

Patrick, after six years of life in slavery and now in his early 20's, escaped on a ship and returned to England. He acquired a theological education and served for two decades as a parish priest. In a dream years later, at the age of 48, he experienced a "Macedonian call" to take the gospel to the Irish. With the support of England's bishops and Pope Celestine, Patrick attracted and trained an "apostolic band" to join him in a mission to the Irish. In (or about) 432 A. D., the band sailed for Ireland, and made its way inland to Saul, where they planted the first church of the Christian movement in Ireland.

Patrick served as an "Apostle to the Irish" for the next 28 years. By his death in 470 A. D., the movement had reached at least 40 of Ireland's 150 tribes. Within the next two generations, all of Ireland was substantially reached, and so in one century Ireland changed from the least Christianized to the most Christianized province within the Roman Empire. This achievement came through, and not without, the power of Christianity Community, and through the astonishing proliferation of Christian communities and types of Christian communities.

Their basic early outreach pattern saw the apostolic band setting up camp next to an un-reached settlement—befriending the people, getting in ministry and conversation with the people, inviting the more receptive people into the band's fellowship and, in time, raising up a new church in the settlement, and then

moving on to replicate the process in the next settlement over. In time, the movement proliferated other apostolic bands, which made it possible to reach more settlements. So they proliferated bands that proliferated congregations.

At some point, probably while Patrick still lived, the movement learned from the monasteries of the Eastern Church, which they adapted into a new form of Christian community for the Western Church. In the East, people escaped from the world, and from perceived corruptions in the Church, into the monasteries—to save their souls. Now in the West, by comparison, people joined the monastic communities to prepare to extend the Church and to save other people's souls. Their purpose in (what is now called) "Celtic Spirituality" was to form people for ministry and mission. While the monastic communities were preparing Christians, they were also receiving pre-Christian seekers into their life. Indeed, the ministry to seekers within the monastic community helped prepare people for ministry and witness beyond¹⁰.

The monastic communities proliferated other kinds of communities for reaching and building people.

- They invented a new form of dyad—a group of two people, in which one person was the seeker or the newer Christian, and the other was his or her "Soul Friend." One's Soul Friend was not a superior, but was someone with whom one was willing to be vulnerable and accountable.
- They invented a form of Small Group—of a dozen or so people, whose leader was recognized as devout. Everyone met in their small group, in which they were in ministry with each other and with any seeker in their ranks.
- They proliferated worshiping congregations within the monastic community AND within the churches they planted. The maximum length of the available lumber in Ireland did not permit them to build churches to accommodate more than (say) 50 or 60 people at a time; so, that fact forced what, in any case, would have been their inclination; the monastic communities and the churches in settlements proliferated congregations from the beginning.
- In each season, they were preparing multiple apostolic teams to reach the settlements in their region. (The bands consisted of a dozen or so people; they assumed that Jesus probably got the number about right!)
- The apostolic teams (or "bands") moved out to plant churches in every settlement. The churches, in turn, pro-

liferated congregations, small groups, and ministries.

Celtic Christianity's penchant for Community was not, of course, the sole reason for the movement's expansion. (Church Growth is *never* sufficiently explained by a single cause.) The movement was "culturally relevant." It departed from Rome's mandate to do church "the Roman way" everywhere; it adapted to the local population's language, culture, and aesthetics, virtually everywhere. The movement was "emotionally relevant." Compared to the Roman left-brained rational approach, Celtic Christianity engaged the Irish and other "barbarian" peoples as a faith of the imagination and the heart. Furthermore, in contrast to the (male) clericalism that characterized Roman Christianity, Celtic Christianity was essentially a lay movement AND it included laywomen (such as Brigid and Hilda) in notable leadership. But the movement's grounding in radical community especially has much to teach us. Bede (the eighth century historian) profiles the monastic community at Whitby, founded and led by Hilda: "After the example of the primitive church, no one was rich, no one was in need, for they had all things in common and none had any private property."¹¹

For Protestant Evangelicals today, the most counter-intuitive theme in the Celtic model calls for welcoming pre-Christian seekers into the ranks of faithful groups and congregations *before* they have experienced grace or believed much of anything; *our* usual script, today, is to welcome people *after* they confess the faith. However, some of the most significant research with converts today strongly ratifies the Celtic model. For instance, John Finney and his colleagues surveyed and interviewed hundreds of converts, in several Christian traditions, in Great Britain. In *Finding Faith Today*, they report that most converts experience the gift of faith *through* the relationships they experience *within* a community of faith. For most people, "belonging comes before believing."¹² In my own field research, I have interviewed first-generation disciples since the mid-1960's. I have usually asked, "When did you feel like you really belonged, that you were wanted and welcomed and included in the fellowship?" More than half of the Boomer generation converts, and at least three-quarters of the Generation X and Generation Y converts report that they felt like that *before* they joined, or believed. As Western society becomes increasingly post-modern, the faith will increasingly be even "more caught than taught."

We could easily fill a book with case studies of pioneering churches who have reached and discipled people *as* they have proliferated faith-communities, large and small. One such case will do. When Craig Groeschel was a student at Phillips Theo-

logical Seminary in Oklahoma, he dreamed of starting a new church that one day would proliferate campuses; his faculty discouraged him. Then his Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church said No, the idea was not viable. The Evangelical Covenant Church made room for Groeschel's vision, however, and the rest is a history that is still unfolding.

Craig and Amy Groeschel started (what became) LifeChurch.tv, in a rented dance studio in Edmund, Oklahoma in 1996. Their mission, from the beginning, has been "to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ." Their design, from the beginning, involved 1) multiplying "Life-Groups," which would be ports of entry for many seekers and in which people would get in ministry with each other through relationships, caring, and accountability; 2) it involved multiplying congregations of the Edmund campus; and 3) the vision involved the (then) novel idea of becoming one church with many campuses.

By the end of 2001, seven congregations on two campuses were serving 5500 people per weekend. Three years later, they had four campuses and 16 congregations serving more than 12,000 people per weekend. By the end of 2007, they had expanded to a dozen campuses (AND an "internet campus"), with 49 congregations serving more than 21,000 per weekend. At this writing, LifeChurch's people are now meeting in more than 3000 LifeGroups, including some groups whose people are attached to the internet campus. The church is proactive in mission, locally and globally. The church supports missionaries in six nations on three continents. Whether the people are involved in Habitat for Humanity or some other expression of local mission, or whether they engage in short term experiences in supporting their missions in other lands, they typically serve in *teams*.

Compassion

Most Protestant leaders virtually count on *words alone* to communicate all of the meaning that Christianity has to offer. If (say) preaching and teaching can't get it all done, that is too bad. because that is what we were trained to do and like to do!

However, if we think about it even at the level of ordinary folk wisdom, we already know that "Actions speak louder than words," and "A picture is worth a thousand words;" and when someone's actions contradict their words, or even when their inflection or facial expression suggests a different message than their words, we believe the "nonverbal message" more.

At a more academic level, the anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, discovered that *Culture* is "the silent language," and that a

culture's language is only one of (say) ten "message systems" through which meaning gets communicated—though the communication takes place at a less conscious level than when we communicate through the language message system.

For instance, Hall explained that we also communicate in many ways through Space, and Time.¹³ Christianity has had some knowledge of these dimensions for a very long time. So we have found profound meaning in pilgrimages to "holy places," and we often designate "sacred space" within our churches; and we have used the "holy" days and seasons of the Christian Year to communicate, celebrate, and rehearse the faith's Story and its towering themes. Furthermore, from the earliest Christian movement and throughout much of our history, we have often turned to sacraments, music, drama, the visual arts, and visual symbols (like the fish and the cross) to communicate in ways that transcend mere words.

All of this is preamble to one cogent affirmation: Love Communicates. Love, understand in the New Testament *agape* sense of "good will," communicates volumes. As our fold wisdom reminds us, "People don't care how much you know; they want to know how much you care."

The present state of our understanding is more nuanced than that; the movement of many people toward Christian faith follows a sequence something like this. As a rough generalization:

- People become more receptive to involvement with a church during a season of their lives when they are "between gods;" they have given up on whatever they most recently relied upon to complete their lives and are open to something else.
- They are more likely to visit a church IF they have heard about it,
- And IF the church has a positive public image,
- And IF one or more church members (whom they know and trust) invite them—perhaps several times, or more.
- When they visit, they look for clear signs of *Life*, or *Energy*. Although often they cannot verbalize it, they realize they need Grace or Spiritual Power to overcome their sins and problems, to live new lives and to become the people they were meant to be (and have always wanted to be).
- And they look to see if there are people in the church who are "like" them—who would understand them, with whom they can identify, who might serve as role models,
- And they sense whether they can "relate" to, and make

sense from, the church's language, music, style, and aesthetics.

- IF they get this far, they are now looking to see how *committed* the people are to the church's truth claims and mission. As Dean M. Kelley once observed, most people are not epistemologically sophisticated; they cannot weigh competing truth claims about Ultimate Reality. So they likely believe the group that seems to believe in their message and cause the most, and sacrifice to advance it. (Conversely, mere church-attending nominal Christianity has NO magnetic appeal to lost people who are trying to find The Way.) Growing churches are "high expectation churches;" they expect a lot from their members, and many members rise to meet the expectations; they live by Christian disciplines AND are involved in a small group, a lay ministry, and in evangelism and mission.¹⁴
- Furthermore, IF they get this far they are by now observing how *loving* and *caring* the church is. They have heard that, whatever else Christians are supposed to be, they are people who love other people (and they often expect Christians to love nature's creatures as well). As our song affirms, "They will know that we are Christians by our love."¹⁵ People seem almost hardwired to check for what the New Testament calls *agape love* (which is defined not as a feeling but as "good will on fire").
- By now, also, the church is able to engage seekers more deeply if they have perceived the church to be *credible*. In interviews, they typically comment on how the church's *consistency* (between what it believes and what the church and its people do) impressed and moved them. And they especially comment on how *compassionate* they found the church to be. To misquote Paul ever so slightly: often, of all of the factors seekers look for, "the greatest of these is love."

Specifically, a seeker's radar detects how much the church wants and cares for *them*, and their families, and for people like them. I recently interviewed a couple who transferred from one church to another; they still more strongly affirmed the first church's doctrine, but their new church loved them and their handicapped child much more and they said, "for us, that made all the difference."

Seekers are also moved when they observe churches that engage in visible *outreach ministries* to target populations with special needs. Three examples will suffice:

1. It is almost impossible to find churches with visible ministries to deaf people that are not growing. Seekers are typically moved when they visit a church that cares enough to sign its worship experience, and to engage in other ministries, for the deaf people among them. Such churches typically reach three groups: deaf people, and their families and friends, and many other people who are attracted to a church that includes deaf people.
2. The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod attracts many people because of its remarkably organized and serious outreach to blind people. The denomination took seriously the fact that over 11 million blind and visually impaired people were living in North America, and were one of the nation's most under-served populations. They launched the Lutheran Blind Mission Society in 1994 (www.blindmission.org). Within a decade, the mission was serving blind people with the largest Christian library (of large print books, books in Braille, and cassettes) in North America. The mission trains and equips leaders for blind ministries, and helps faith communities of blind people get organized. Soon, the mission will make hymnals and liturgical service books, in large print and Braille, available to churches.
3. Ministry to addictive people is perhaps the most impressive movement in North American Christianity, and beyond. When two recovering addicts founded Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935, the Rev. Sam Shoemaker coached the new movement, but it was not primarily a movement within churches—due to the widespread stigmatizing that alcoholics then experienced from church people. In time, the movement learned more and more about the multiple causes of addiction, became clear that the affliction is a "disease" (in the sense that diabetes and allergies are understood within the "disease" paradigm), and its usefulness and power spread to people in the grips of other "chemical dependencies," and to people with food and gambling addictions.
4. In the 1980's, more and more churches became educated in such matters, and a quiet movement within churches began spreading—building on the 12 Steps of A. A., while offering a more complete revelation and recovery than A. A. can. More and more churches feature, and advertise, recovery ministries and recovery congregations; a huge sign by a church in Chicago reads "Recovery Spoken Here!" Today, the recovery movement is the

"underground awakening" of the early twenty-first century. More people are probably experiencing initial Grace through this movement than through all Evangelism programming, combined. And, when a church reaches addicts, and some experience profound life change, and the church is known for having "miracles" within its membership, this "catalyzes" much wider interest within the community.¹⁶

My colleague Bob Tuttle's flight to Orlando had landed. A man across the aisle had noticed Bob reading his Bible. The man asked, "May I tell you why I joined a church? I was working on a project in Anchorage, Alaska, and visited a church one Sunday. I noticed an attractive well-dressed middle-aged lady sitting on an aisle several rows ahead of me. A homeless young man entered the church. He walked down the aisle; the lady moved over and motioned for him to join her. I saw them smiling and talking together; I saw them sing together from a shared hymnal, and pray together. Following the benediction, she hugged him and slipped him a bill. I approached her, and commented on the lovely way she had treated her son. She replied, 'Thanks, but he is not my son; I never saw him before.' That afternoon, I telephoned my wife and said, 'Let's move to Anchorage. I have found a church that practices what it preaches!'"¹⁷

Connections

Donald McGavran devoted two decades of field research, in Christian movements on several continents, to the Big Question that most church leaders had long ignored: *How* does the Gospel spread? *How* does effective evangelism take place? In raising that question and finding answers, McGavran was defying perhaps the most entrenched myth in the theological academy—that the academy should stick to theory and that considerations of "method" is beneath intellectuals, if not obscene. McGavran discovered, however, that understanding the communication of Christianity's message to pre-Christian populations (especially to different cultures and in different languages) is a more formidable intellectual challenge than most academic intellectuals ever face.

McGavran discovered that growing churches and Christian movements are very complex phenomena, and that growth is always the result of multiple causes AND the Holy Spirit moving in the people's hearts. The mission of Church Growth field research was to identify as many of those causes as possible. Beneath the complexity, however, McGavran discovered that

wherever Christianity is expanding, one principle is always substantially behind it. Contrary to Protestant folk wisdom, the faith does not spread mainly through mass evangelism or media evangelism; it spreads mainly along the *social networks* of living Christians, especially to the social connections of transformed Christians and new Christians. The kinship and friendship networks of Christians provide "the bridges of God."¹⁸ Though multiple causes synergize to produce growth, it is people who reach and bring people, much more than preaching, literature, campaigns, or anything else.¹⁹

Which types of social networks are the most prolific can vary from one context to another. McGavran observed that, in traditional, tribal, and agrarian societies, kinship networks are the most prolific; Christians in those churches mainly reach people to whom they are related, by blood or marriage. In more urban and cosmopolitan societies, however, friendship networks are the most prolific; Christians in those churches mainly reach their friends, colleagues, and neighbors. McGavran also learned that God usually uses several relational bridges, not just one person, to reach most people—reminiscent of the reality reflected in First Corinthians 3:6—"I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase." Some church growth blends the two patterns. Pastoral, neighborhood, or friendship contacts may reach one person in a pre-Christian family, who then helps reach other family members.

Don Miller and Ted Yamamori's significant study of world Pentecostal Christianity ratifies and extends these insights. While Pentecostal churches in (say) Latin America or sub-Saharan Africa often feature public crusades, such events are more effective in supporting the identity and unity of Christians than in reaching non-believing people. (Sometimes, crusades influence people in one church to join another church, and a crusade may raise the faith's public visibility.) The basis of virtually all conversions, however, is personal relationships between Christians and pre-Christian people. Typically, the mother of a family is reached first, followed by her children and then the father. Following conversion, nurture and maturation in the faith are also mediated relationally. Indeed, people often experience their Pentecostal church like their new extended family; and in their small group life, they care for and minister to each other.²⁰

McGavran's most counterintuitive discovery revealed that *new Christians* can be more reproductive than most church leaders assume; as a group, also, they are more reproductive than first-generation converts who have been Christians for many years; furthermore, they are especially more reproductive than

people raised in the church—IF the church appropriately deploys them in outreach.²¹ This is the case for several reasons:²²

- New Christians usually have many more contacts with pre-Christian people than do long time church members.
- New Christians recall what it was like to try to make sense of their life without Jesus Christ as Lord; many long-time members have forgotten, and many people raised in churches never knew.
- New Christians still have about them the contagion of a new discovery, and the people in their social network who knew them “before Christ” are often attracted to the faith than can change people.
- Moreover, new Christians have not yet had the time to become linguistically corrupted by the “foreign languages” of preachers and theologians; they still understand and communicate in the target population’s vernacular language.

McGavran’s insight about the “Bridges of God” is, almost undoubtedly, the most important strategic principle behind informed Evangelism today. While it substantially *describes* how effective outreach takes place (when it takes place), when churches *prescribe* and teach relational evangelism to their people, the principle’s power is then amplified. At least a hundred million people across the earth are now Christians in part because churches and missions have consciously cooperated with this principle.²³

Churches usually express the principle programmatically in their own way. A church may make a mailing list of every pre-Christian person in a new convert’s social network, and send those people engraved invitations to the service when the convert will join the church, with a reception to follow. Another church may list every convert’s un-churched connections and then, with the convert, visit those persons, get in conversation with them, assess their receptivity, and invite them to become involved. Another church, when it receives new Christians into its ranks, may invite their “bridges” to stand with them as they are received; in time, the church’s people come to assume that such evangelism is “normal Christianity!” An increasing number of churches take a redundant approach to cooperating with the principle; they may do some version of everything in this paragraph, and more.

Once, in a conversation with McGavran, we identified some of the principle’s “unfinished business.” I suggested, “We know that people reach people in their social networks, but do we know *what kind* of Christians help pre-Christian people find their

way?” “We know that strong *feelings* are typically involved in Christian conversion; how do our people make their friends and relatives feel?” “When our people do reach out effectively, what kinds of things do they *say*?” “And what kinds of things do they *do*?” McGavran smiled broadly, agreed that such questions were strategically important and that, to his knowledge, we did not know the answers to those questions. He unilaterally deputized *me* to do the field research to discover the answers!

I did that research, 20 to 30 days a year, for the next six years, in a range of denominational traditions, and in such nations as Mexico, Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore, in addition to the USA.²⁴ I interviewed converts, and asked them to describe the person(s) who reached them, how they made them feel, what they said that helped make a difference, and so on. Also, when I led field seminars and workshops, I asked people to join my lunch table who fit the following description: They believed that evangelism is important and ought to be done, but they were not doing it.

I always had a full table! I interviewed at least 80 such groups, and I thereby discovered *the greatest barrier to Evangelism* in our churches. When I asked them *why* they were not doing evangelism even though they believed in it, they usually said something like “I’m not that sort of person.” When I asked them to describe the kind of person who does evangelism, to give me the adjectives, adjectives like these surfaced most often: dogmatic, holier-than-thou, narrow minded, self-righteous, pushy, aggressive, over-bearing, judgmental, hypocritical, insensitive, fanatic. *Over 90% of the adjectives were negative*; sometimes they added terms like “totalitarian,” and “spiritual fascists!” Once I gathered such data, I at last understood why so many of our people inwardly resist serving as “ambassadors for Christ.”

When, however, I asked first-generation Christians in interviews and seminars to describe the person(s) who most served as *their* bridge into faith, they gave me an astonishingly contrasting set of adjectives—such as loving, caring, informed, understanding, accepting, affirming, interested, concerned, encouraging, supporting, kind, and credible.

Notice, there is virtually NO overlap between the two lists! Our people’s folk wisdom (or the Idea planted by the Evil One) has convinced them that, to do evangelism, you have to become someone you wouldn’t want to be, someone who you wouldn’t even want to want to be. Occasionally, a seminar participant would nail the contrast as follows: “We have been duped into assuming that you cannot be like Jesus if you want to reach people for Jesus!” Sometimes, when they perceived that the kind of

people who help other people find faith and new life are NOT like the first list, but like the second, they concluded, "Being an ambassador for Christ *really* means being who we are already at our best, or would love to be!" When enough of our people discover *that*, they will realize that they may be the best prepared generation in centuries to fulfill the Great Commission. If enough of us discover this, our churches will become unstoppable movements.

You may have already anticipated the other contrasts. When I asked my lunch confidantes, "How do the 'evangelistic' type people make non-Christian people *feel*, the following "feeling words" were typical: guilty, damned, anxious, inadequate, angry, trapped, pressured, turned-off, uncomfortable, hopeless. New Christians, however, associated feelings like the following with *their* Significant Other: they felt valued, wanted, accepted, affirmed, respected, important, loved, worthwhile, comfortable, hopeful. People tend to believe their own data, so when attendees saw the contrast between how effective evangelizers allegedly make people feel and how they actually make them feel, they often volunteered, "Well, I would *love* for my friends to feel like that!"

When I asked Christians what the "evangelistic types" *say* and *do*, they gave many answers, but the most frequent were like these. They confront people, "invade their space," sling Bible texts at people, "preach at" people, and "push" people "to make a decision, now." Their message is often an oversimplified single theme from the gospel, often about "getting born again" or "going to Heaven."

What effective evangelizers *actually do and say* is the subject of the final section.

Conversations

Traditional Evangelism is "Presentation" Evangelism; our most entrenched paradigm has programmed us to "present the gospel" to people. For at least a century, several generations of evangelical Protestants have been scripted to learn and rehearse a summary of the Gospel and then orally present it to people in (say) two minutes. We called it "Personal Evangelism;" along with "Public Evangelism" (like Revivals and Crusades), these two approaches were the two tributaries of the Presentation River; presenting the gospel was *the* way to evangelize—to one person, or to 10,000. So we learned "The Roman Road," and "Evangelism Explosion," and "The Four Spiritual Laws," while Latin American Christians rehearsed the "New Life for All" formula. So the content shifted some over time, but the basic ap-

proach did not. We would talk, they would listen; and then we would invite them to decide to believe the message and/or pray the prescribed "Sinners Prayer." If they did, we declared them "Christians!"

Most of us learned that we must do Evangelism *that way*; the Presentation paradigm was the only game plan in town. The paradigm did, indeed, fit the personality and strengths of a small minority of Christians, and through them the approach often produced some new Christians; but the paradigm did *not* fit the personality and strengths of most Christians. Consequently, most Christians who believed that Evangelism should be done that way, did not do it much, or at all. Many people felt "guilty," throughout their entire Christian life, for their "failure" to do this.

While Christians, indeed, can fail to do the Will of God, the model exacerbated the problem. Most of our people have been unable to deliver "Personal Evangelism," in part because the model was insufficient, for at least four reasons:²⁵

- The formula we rehearsed typically left out too much of Gospel. Yes, the Gospel IS about second birth and eternal life, but it is also about the Love, Grace, Righteousness, Goodness, Peace, and Kingdom of God, and it is also about the forgiveness of sins and freedom from Sin, and reconciliation and redemption, and justification and abundant life and sanctification, and more. Furthermore, the Gospel includes Jesus' own message that calls us to a New Life, this side of death, in which we live no longer for our own will but His; and His message's wider themes proclaim a vision of Justice, Peace, and a Redeemed Creation. So our traditional message often omitted much of the Message! Furthermore, our gospel summary sometimes refracted a theme that *did* get included; while, for instance, Christianity IS partly about sharing by faith in Jesus' resurrection, it is even more about *fitting* us for Heaven than merely getting us to Heaven.²⁶
- When we presented a single theme of the Gospel as though it were the whole Gospel, we often observed two outcomes. First, if our single theme did not "scratch where they itched," or if our Answer did not engage any question they were asking, they often inferred that Christianity is "irrelevant" to their questions, issues, and struggles. Second, if they did accept the one truth-claim that we presented, they often assumed that was all that Christianity is about; if we told them later that following

Christ involves (say) faithfulness in marriage, or loving our enemies, or working for peace, or sharing the faith, that wasn't clear in their original contract; they suspected "bait and switch."

- The Presentation approach was based on a too-simplistic model of the Communication of Christianity's message: A Source, speaking perhaps a hundred words in two minutes, should be able to pour enough gospel content into the Receivers mind, without serious loss or distortion, to achieve "instant evangelism." The approach assumed that the Receiver already had enough of a Christian background to understand Christianity's key terms—which, in our increasingly secular society, is less and less a valid assumption. The approach ignored the many other known factors involved in Communication—that meaning gets communicated in many ways, from the credibility of the witnesser and the community, to the role of liturgy, music, testimony, narrative, drama, poetry, visual symbols and arts, and the sacraments, and the Receivers own internal processing of ideas. As we suggested above, Love communicates volumes. The Presentation approach was also oblivious to the fact that, for most people, the process that leads to conversion takes weeks, months, or years, typically a season or two.
- The Receivers often experienced what we called "Personal Evangelism" as *impersonal* salesmanship, or propaganda, or institutional membership recruitment—too much like what they once experienced from a used car salesman, a political candidate, or a fund drive. Indeed, the impersonal "hypodermic" approach to Evangelism, in which we give people a "gospel shot" and hope it "takes," is often counterproductive. When they sense that the witnessing Christian does not even know them, or understand them, or want to, the effort can confuse or alienate them. Sociologist Russell Hale once interviewed un-churched people in the eight most un-churched counties in the USA. He reported, "Most people can't hear until they have been heard."²⁷

Russell Hale's 1979 project prepared us for the bad news and the good news that, 30 years later, have become even more blatant. The bad news is that the population that is even open to a one-way religious presentation is a declining market. The good news is that more people are interested in honest *two-way conversation* than ever before.²⁸ "The Ministry of Conversation" is the reproductive approach whose time has come.

Peter Berger, the sociologist, framed the informed understanding of conversion in societies such as ours. His research taught him that, broadly, there are three essential steps involved in someone's Conversion. 1) Everyone has already been socialized into some "worldview"—a way of perceiving Reality. 2) In a pluralistic society (in which there is more than one worldview, like western society today), the main catalyst that opens people toward another worldview is *conversation* with someone who sees the world, and lives life, through a different worldview. 3) The process of Conversion is complete when a person has been re-socialized into the community that lives by the alternative worldview. So conversion takes place substantially through conversation, and not usually without it.²⁹

Effectiveness in such conversation involves *skills* that, alas, some people have acquired in their socialization and others have not; fortunately, the skills can be taught, and learned. A quarter century ago, many people became more effective conversationalists by studying Barbara Walters' *How to Talk With Practically Anybody About Practically Anything*.³⁰ More recently, four authors have reflected from their research in organizations and produced *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*.³¹ While the book is written especially for people in business, education, and other organizations, the insights are astonishingly relevant to evangelistic conversation. We are already fully aware that conversation with someone about (say) getting a second chance, or making sense of their life, or experiencing their purpose in life through becoming a Christ-follower is, to say the least, a "crucial conversation." Our awareness is ratified in the authors' definition that qualifies a conversation as crucial: "A discussion between two or more people where stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong."³² The authors teach a range of rather specific conversational skills, including skills for staying focused in the conversation (chapter 3), and for making conversation *safe* (chapters 4 and 5), and for listening with empathy (chapter 8), and for "speaking persuasively, not abrasively" (chapter 7).³³

The field with the clumsy name of "Symbolic Interactionism" provides perspectives for evangelizers—whether or not its founder, George Herbert Mead, had that in mind!³⁴ For instance, Mead pioneered the idea that we tend to define our Identity in ways that reflect how we believe that "Significant Others" have defined us. ("Mead Lite," pop psychology's simplification, says, "I am not who I think I am; I am not who you think I am; I am who I think you think I am.") Evangelism, therefore, would involve knowing some pre-Christian people well enough and liv-

ing credibly enough that when, in conversation, we told people who they could become as a follower of Jesus, they would experience this as affirmation and revelation.

Again, Mead took very seriously the idea that, within each of us, an "internal conversation" takes place, many times, every day; we talk to ourselves, much of the time. Moreover, we usually end up doing what we talk ourselves into doing. Then we tend to define ourselves as a person who does such things, for whom such things are important. This is a significant insight because, when people become new Christians, it is partly because they talked themselves into becoming Christians. In conversational evangelism, it is often useful to ask the seeker what they say to themselves, what they tell themselves about themselves. If they say (for instance), "I'm a loser," we can often earn the permission to tell them they are "wrong," and to suggest what we believe God wants them to tell themselves, and to suggest who they were created to be and, by the Grace through Christ, can be. In my interviews with converts in recent years, I have asked, "How did you start talking to yourself differently in the season when you became a new Christian?" I discovered that new Christians can always get in touch with how they used to talk to themselves, and how their self-talk started to change, and how their new self-talk helped change them.³⁵ We can often function as Christ's agent in coaching people on what to say to themselves. Furthermore, if what we do precedes or reinforces our self-definition to some degree, it is important to involve seekers and new believers in scripture, prayer, group life, worship, service, witness, social involvement, and the other things Christians do *before* they define themselves as people of Christian Faith.

In several ways (at least), the Ministry of Conversation transcends the inherited Presentation model. Conversations can represent more themes of the Gospel than presentations can. The interchange in conversations, in which the other person tells us what they heard us say, gives us the chance to say it differently and clarify our meaning. In conversation, we are free to draw from a distilled version of the message we once learned. For example, I often share from the affirmations³⁶ in the New Life for All movement in Latin America:

- God created all people for Life.
- In their Sin, people have forfeited much of what Life was meant to be.
- God came in Christ to offer New Life
- We can accept and experience that New Life through trusting and Following Christ.

- If we become Christ-followers, we are called to be faithful to that New Life in all of our relationships.

The New Life for All summary is useful, in part because: It engages people's increasing interest in experiencing Real Life *this side of the grave*; and it begins where Scripture does—with Creation rather than the Fall; and it does not merely imply the commitment to living our lives by God's will. In conversation, of course, we are liberated from "parroting" the message; it simply informs part of our contribution to the conversation. The other person typically experiences real conversation as *more personal* than what we have long called "personal Evangelism." Finally, in real conversation there will usually be natural moments to include the Holy Spirit in the conversation. (We usually call that "Prayer!") Indeed, people sometimes sense the presence of God during the conversation, and even more often they know the Presence as they see the conversation through a rear-view mirror.

The Ministry of Conversation is not a modern (or post-modern) discovery. It is extensively modeled and reflected in the New Testament, and conversation across social networks substantially accounts for a majority of the converts in most Christian movements in most cultures and in most eras. Historians consistently credit preaching more than is warranted, and conversation (of clergy and especially laity) less than warranted. While church history remembers "the great evangelists" as public preachers (perhaps because most writers of church history are ordained!), many of them (such as Jonathan Edwards, Charles G. Finney, and John Wesley) were also known in their lifetime as engaging conversationalists. Samuel Johnson reflected, "I hate to meet John Wesley; the dog enchants you with his conversation, and then breaks away to go and visit some old woman."³⁷

John Wesley's *Journal* reports an extensive ministry of conversation, including letter writing. Wesley coached his people to visit with people in their homes and other places. Wesley taught that conversation permits us to discern what gospel themes people are most open to, and it is the way to "get within" people and to "suit all our discourse to their several conditions and tempers." He concluded that conversation is *necessary* to reach most people. "For, after all our preaching, many of our people are almost as ignorant as if they had never heard the gospel. . . . I have found by experience, that one of these has learned more from one hour's close discourse, than from ten years' public preaching."³⁸

When Christians respond, today, to the unprecedented opportunity for Conversation Ministry, they typically experience

four discoveries:

- When, in conversation with us, seekers are free to ask *questions* about the issues or doubts that have impeded their quest for faith and life, they are often verbalizing this to another person for the first time in their lives. When they ask the question, or state the doubt, or “name the demon”—that gets it out into the open, and it often begins to *lose* some of its immobilizing *power* over the person before their Christian conversation partner ever says much.
- Christians discover that their time spent studying scripture and theology, and rehearsing the Gospel in liturgy, and reflecting upon sermons and lessons and spiritual experience, has NOT been “a total waste” as far as apostolic ministry is concerned! Indeed, Christians often discover that in those experiences they have been *prepared* with some of the insights and *answers* the seeker needs to hear. (Actually, God often gives us “beginner’s luck!”)
- While Christians discover that their Christian formation has already given them some answers to the questions that seekers really do ask, they also discover that they do NOT have answers to some of the other questions that seekers ask. This discovery drives them back to scripture, theology, and caucusing with other Christians who are engaged in witness and, from the questions that they could not at first answer, they *learn* more *useful theology* than they’d learn in an entire degree program in “desk theology.” Indeed, experience in apostolic ministry drives us to a deeper understanding of the gospel than time spent in church and academy, alone, could ever provide.³⁹
- Finally, Christians discover that people ask some questions for which we do not have, and kind not find, fully satisfying answers. (Questions around suffering and natural evil are typical.) But Christians discover that is okay, that seekers do not need all of their questions answered; they only need some of their questions answered—enough to know that Christianity has some good reasons on its side. In any case, seekers do not usually expect Christians to have all of the answers to life’s persistent questions. What helps them is not our answers to the questions we could not answer, but those we could answer. What helps them most is not usually our answers; years later, they may recall almost nothing that we said. Most pre-Christian people, after all, have

never had the opportunity to be in conversation with a trusted Christian who cared, and listened, and understood or wanted to understand, and wasn’t defensive or judgmental in the face of doubts and questions. What makes the most difference is “*the sacramental power of the ministry of conversation.*”

Case: Quest Community Church, Lexington, KY

An increasing number of growing churches are discovering the imperative and subtle power of the ministry of conversation. One case will dramatize the point.

Quest Community Church in Lexington, KY, averaged 148 people in attendance its first year. In its third year, Quest averaged 382; in its sixth year 1,025; now nine years old (as this is written), Quest ranks among the 50 fastest growing churches in the USA—now averaging more than 3400 in weekend attendance, and another 1000 for Wednesday evening worship and teaching for believers. The church’s total weekly attendance exceeds its (3400) membership. The church is building a new auditorium, which will almost triple the seating capacity to 2500. By the end of its seventh year, over 1300 people had become new Christians at Quest. Then, in the church’s eighth year, 1200 people publicly accepted Christ, and in the ninth year 1200 had committed through September.⁴⁰

To reflect from this chapter’s earlier themes, Quest Church’s outreach is community based, nurtured, and encouraged; the whole church seems to function as “the evangelism committee.” Invitation typically takes place across the members’ social networks; over 80% of the new Christians responded to one or more friends. But Quest Community Church was conceived from the ministry of conversation, and the church is rather obsessional about the leaders being in conversation with each other and with the members, and members being in conversation with each other, and especially with the leaders and members being in conversation with pre-Christian people and seekers—within and beyond the church.

Pete Hise, the founding pastor and now the “lead pastor,” worked his way through Asbury Theological Seminary by waiting tables at an Applebee’s Restaurant, where he engaged in conversation with fellow waiters and patrons; at least ten became converts. When Pete graduated from divinity school, he served for several years as evangelism pastor at First Alliance Church in Lexington. Then, in 1999, about 70 First Alliance members joined him in planting the new church. From the beginning, Quest targeted un-churched people, including “people

who don't like church" and people who have been "burned by church."

Quest church has been driven by (what I call) an "apostolic" agenda from its beginning. The church declares that its essential mission is "transforming unconvinced people into wholehearted followers of Jesus." The church understands itself to be "sent out" into the community, and the world, for this purpose. Hise looks upon Lexington as "a mission field." He believes that the society is now so secular, and that secular people are so far from the life of faith, that there are no longer any Church Growth "tips" or "techniques" that a stagnant church can adopt and thereby grow; nor is it possible for a traditional church to merely *add* evangelism to everything else it is doing and see much difference. Pete says, "It's got to be the main thing." Sharon Clements, Quest's worship and arts pastor, adds that the church "has to love lost people; without love, you will do more damage than good."

Quest Church embodies the key features of the apostolic congregation's worldwide profile. For instance:

- The church has "proliferated" congregations—four per weekend, a believers' congregation on Wednesday nights, a Recovery congregation on Friday nights, and a second campus in Frankfort, KY.
- The church has targeted pre-Christian people who aren't at all like "good church people," many with complex personal "issues." The miracles that are now apparent, in some of their lives, have "catalyzed" responsiveness in many other people.
- Quest church has virtually reinvented "cultural relevance" to the point of the complete "casualization of Christianity!" Quest has NO dress code; the drink holders attached to each seat are for coffee mugs. "Worship experiences" feature the music, style, films, and humor of younger un-churched adults. You especially notice the use of indigenous expression: no King James verbiage, no hymnals, no choir (but singing ensembles); the sanctuary is now an "auditorium," the testimonies are now people's "stories," the foyer is the "atrium," the ushers are "the receiving team." The church's auditorium features no traditional visual symbols of the faith, like stained glass windows or even a cross.⁴¹
- The church is passionate about "emotional relevance." Quest targets, welcomes, and engages people with "issues," like addictions and compulsions, spiritual doubts and confusion, self-esteem and identity crises, debts and

depression. Many visitors say they respond to the "energy," the "passion," the "hope," and the "extravagant love" they experience there. Many converts report a new emotional freedom.

- Almost half of Quest's people are involved in "Life-Groups"—in which 20 to 30 people meet, for teaching, ministry with each other, and (in smaller sub-groups) for conversation and prayer. Since "authentic community" is one of the church's core values, they invite everyone to discover, through a LifeGroup, "friends who will do life with you."
- Quest features a range of Outreach Ministries to distinct populations—such as a 13 week support group experience for people experiencing separation or divorce, and a Friday evening ministry for addictive people in recovery, and Good Sense ministries of workshops and counseling for people with financial struggles.
- The church is substantially involved in the world mission of its tradition, The Christian and Missionary Alliance—which is one of the three strongest "mission denominations" in the USA (considering its ratio of members to the number of supported overseas missionaries). Quest sends out multiple short-term mission teams per year, and supports mission on several continents.

Quest Community Church, however, is not merely a clone of the generic apostolic congregation profile. The church has developed its own ways of engaging a city. Take "Questapalooza," for example—"a party for the city." The church now schedules this one-day music and arts festival each Fall. The back windows of church members' cars become a thousand or more "moving billboards" announcing the festival. The event gives every member an "excuse" to invite their friends for the weekend's program—featuring fire works, carnival rides, and noted Christian rock bands, singing groups and soloists. The church, during the festival, publicly baptizes a roster of new believers, while each is telling his or her story on videotape. Going *this* public with their commitment has deep meaning for the converts, and the experience attracts new people toward the church and the faith. Over 1800 people came to the first Questapalooza: over 6500 came to the third.

Most of all, however, Quest Community Church is about the Ministry of Conversation. The church was conceived in conversations at Applebee's Restaurant. The favored mode of Christian witness is faithful conversation. The LifeGroup meetings split for a time into smaller groups, for conversation. Quest Church

modified the Friday experiences for the Recovery community to include a time for conversation, every Friday night.

Quest Church's greatest innovation can be observed at the conclusion of almost every worship experience. The form of the evangelistic invitation is to come forward and get into conversation with someone who will help the person, who is now seeking, to process the Christian Possibility for their lives; the seeker's conversation partner will listen and talk as long as necessary. All of Quest's several hundred leaders, and many other members, are committed, trained, and available for this ministry. They report profound meaning in "mid-wifing" new life.

The leaders reflect together on their experiences in evangelical conversation—to improve in the ministry. They discovered that the conversations are more often about life, and how to live one's life, than about doctrine or ideology. Sharon Clements reports, "Often, the single most important thing we do in these conversations is to ask questions, and then listen." Quest's leaders have learned that it is important to take enough time to earn the right to be heard. With the population Quest reaches, this ministry requires not being experienced to judge the other person; and it may involve appropriate self-disclosure—such as "I once had that same doubt." Quest's people have learned to listen for feelings as well as meanings, and then to rephrase what they are hearing so that the seekers sense and feel that their conversation partner understands them and empathizes with them.

Sharon Clements reports that, often, "People are moved when you give them time." She reports that leaders often experience a lengthy conversation following a service as "an inconvenience;" lunch, or a meeting, or another service, or something is usually scheduled, and waiting. "But our people take the inconvenience of evangelism as a joy." Pete Hise believes that, to reach pre-Christian people today, a church "must create a culture of authentic conversation."

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NOTES

1. Some churches elevate their "most spiritual" people to leadership roles. Spiritual devotion is, indeed, a prerequisite to *faithful* Christian leadership but (unless the church lives in an unchanging context, like a medieval village) is never, by itself, sufficient for *effective* leadership. Some "saints" make disastrous leaders; they have learned to love God better with their hearts, but not yet with their minds.

2. That rough Evangelical consensus shifts some over time, but many leaders in recent history have usually agreed that the Christian faith should spread through public revivals or crusades, or through tracts or billboards or bumper stickers, or through radio or television programs, or through an internet website, or through the Roman Road or the Four Spiritual Laws or some other formulaic approach to preaching to people, one on one.

3. See Donald L. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

4. C. Peter Wagner, *Dominion: How Kingdom Action Can Change the World* (Chosen Press, 2008)

5. See, especially, the writings of Rodney Stark, such as *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Roger Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America: 1776-2005: Winners And Losers In Our Religious Economy*, rev. ed. (Rutgers University Press, 2005), and Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

6. See, especially, Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Someone, one day, will read the literature on conversion and interview Christian converts in a range of churches and populations, and will write an influential text in "applied conversion studies."

7. Schaller has published over 40 books and has scattered his insights for informing congregational and denominational growth. Five books are most obviously related to expanding Christianity's ranks: *Growing Plans* (Abingdon, 1983), *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance* (Abingdon, 1987), *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Abingdon, 1991), *44 Steps Up Off the Plateau* (Abingdon, 1993) and *A Mainline Turnaround*:

Strategies for Congregations and Denominations (Abingdon, 2005). Two books especially address major paradigm shifts that many churches need to experience: *The Seven-Day-A-Week Church* (Abingdon, 1992) and *From Geography to Affinity* (Abingdon, 2003).

8. In McGavran's last major book, he clarified that the years of field research were primarily to inform "effective evangelism." See Donald A. McGavran, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988). Nevertheless, the second edition of *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980) remains his most comprehensive reflection. The 1990 third edition is essentially a condensed version of the second edition.

9. See George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000)

10. We know of at least one monastic community in the West that pre-dated the Celtic movement—the community of St. Martin of Tours—where Martin launched the first mission to rural people in Europe. We believe that Patrick, then perhaps in his late 20's, once spent time at Tours and reflected his way toward a somewhat *different* approach to reaching the Irish.

11. Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, translated by Bertram Colgrave (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) Book IV, ch. 23.

12. See John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992).

13. Hall introduced his (then) revolutionary idea that "culture is communication" in *The Silent Language* (Greenwich, CN: Fawcett Publications, 1959). *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) more thoroughly explored how humans communicate through space, and in *The Dance of Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983) through time. *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976) is his most nuanced treatment of these themes. His autobiographical *Anthropology of Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1994) reflects upon his experience in discovering other "primary message systems" within cultures.

14. See Dean M. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). Kelley reported that "strict" or "demanding" churches grow. In this writing, I have revised these insights to reflect how many of us, within Kelley's tradition, now characterize growing churches as "high expectation churches."

15. The study interpreted by Win Arn, Charles Arn, and Carroll Nyquist, *Who Cares About Love?* (Arcadia, CA: Church Growth Press, 1986) reviewed questionnaire data from thousands of laypeople in hundreds of churches. The study demonstrated a compelling positive correlation between a church's growth and its people's perceptions of how loving and caring the church's people are toward each other, toward

visitors, and toward the community outside the church. When they compared data by denomination, the dozen denominations that scored highest on "the Loving-Caring Quotient" were all growing.

16. Some church leaders regard my chapter on "Recovery Ministries as a Prototype for Outreach Ministries" as the best short introduction to addiction theory, the recovery movement, and recovery ministries. See George G. Hunter III, *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003) 119-148.

17. To root your mind and soul deeply in the apostolic tradition, read Robert G. Tuttle, *The Story Of Evangelism: A History of the Witness to the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

18. For McGavran's first and most comprehensive reflection on the gospel's spread through social networks, see Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1955). McGavran's discovery has been replicated many times. "Diffusion" scholars have demonstrated, for instance, that (presumably) all "innovations"—such as new ideas, technologies, and products spread across "diffusion networks." See Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, Fifth Edition (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003) chapter 8. More recently, scholars have discovered that *happiness* spreads across social networks! Indeed, "Happiness spread outward by three degrees, to the friends of friends of friends." See Maria Cheng, "Study Says Happiness Transfers from Person to Person," *Lexington Herald-Leader* (December 5, 2008) A-3.

19. The book by Win and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples: Every Christian an Effective Witness Through an Enabling Church*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998) is the most enduring approach to the ministry of evangelism based upon Church Growth research and reflection.

20. See Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) especially pages 22-25 and 197-199.

21. Willow Creek Community Church has taught converts, throughout the church's history, that the ministry of witness is central to Willow Creek's "Seven Step Strategy" for every member. Nevertheless, Willow Creek's recent self-study reported that their more mature converts are more like to engage in witness than newer converts. See Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (South Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association, 2007). I would suggest that the main reason for this is that Willow Creek's model expects Christians to engage in the ministry of witness *alone*—on the job, at the health club, etc. Most new converts, however, cannot (or feel they cannot) carry that much weight, alone. In the following paragraphs I show how, in the Church Growth tradition, we recommend that mature Christians join new Christians in their outreach.

22. McGavran and I once identified these reasons in a lengthy con-

versation, each of us drawing from our interview data.

23. We lack the sufficient data to validate this claim. I offer it as a very conservative estimate.

24. For a more complete report on this research see George G. Hunter III, *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) chapter 4.

25. This reflection is consistent with Willow Creek Community Church's Evangelism curriculum which, in the first lesson, helps people to discover that (what I have called) the Presentation approach IS one of eight approaches to faith-sharing we find modeled in the New Testament. See Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Zondervan, 1996). I am suggesting, however, that the Conversation model (which the *Contagious Christian* project did not feature) is the model most modeled and reflected in the New Testament, especially in the ministry of Jesus. (For verification, begin with John 4 and then peruse the rest of the New Testament!) Furthermore, I am suggesting that most (if not all Christians) can engage in the Ministry of Conversation.

26. See my book *Christian, Evangelical and . . . Democrat?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006) chapter three, "Christianity's Gospel and Its Ethic," for a more complete discussion of essential Christianity vis a vis the domesticated Christianity that many church people assume.

27. James Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

28. I should have reached this conclusion much sooner than I did. In the years when I was giving gospel presentations, when the receptors became people of initial faith—it was not because the presentation accomplished that objective. Rather, my presentation raised questions in their mind, and they maneuvered me into conversation, usually multiple conversations over time, and it was the ministry of conversation that helped make the difference—especially when we included God in the conversation!

29. See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Anchor Press, 1967). This understanding of conversion is spelled out in the second half of the book, which focuses on "Secondary Socialization."

30. (Doubleday Books, 1983). As I recall, the word *with* was a major theme; we learn to talk with people, not to them.

31. Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

32. *Crucial Conversations*, p. 3.

33. Richard Peace's *Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006) is an excellent Christian source for preparing God's People for the Ministry of Conversation. It is designed to prepare conversationalists for Christ within

groups, in 12 sessions.

34. Mead was a philosopher and social psychologist at the University of Chicago. His foundational text was actually written, following his death, from the class notes of several of his students. First published in the early 1950's, the most available version is George Herbert Mead and Charles W. Morris, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (University of Chicago Press, 1967). Mead, son of a clergyman, probably would have liked the Church taking his insights seriously!

35. For some analogous cases and inspiring reading, read some of the many published testimonies in the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous. These first-hand stories consistently feature how the people used to talk to themselves when they were in the grip of addiction's mysterious power, and how they began talking to themselves differently that helped lead to their recovery. See *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th. Ed. (New York City: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001)

36. The five affirmations are always the same, but the phrasing varies.

37. Quoted in Stanley Ayling, *John Wesley* (Cleveland and New York: William Collins Publishers, Inc., 1979) 5.

38. John Wesley, *Minutes of Several Conversations*, in Samuel Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978) 8:303.

39. Vincent Donovan spent 16 years as the (Roman Catholic) Apostle to the Maasai people of East Africa. His *Christianity Rediscovered* (Chicago: Orbis Books, 1978) reflects, as in the title, how much he learned about Christianity's gospel and ethic from the experience of interpreting its meaning to a pre-Christian population of a very different tongue and culture from his own.

40. Quest's figure for "new Christians" includes people who had been nominal members of other churches (at least at one time) but had never been, by their own report, serious Christians. The church's data does not permit me to say, with precision, how many of these people represent "transfer growth" and how many represent "conversion growth." My interviews with new Christians at Quest would indicate that about half represent conversion growth; they'd had no prior church to transfer from. My sample, however, is not large enough to validate my "educated guess."

41. Quest Community Church is a member of the Willow Creek Association. That association has been remarkably influential in spreading the "seeker church" model; the three largest churches in Lexington are all members of the Willow Creek Association, and we observe a similar pattern in many cities. Chicago's Willow Creek Community Church was founded in 1975 as (what I have called) an "apostolic experiment," and I regard it as the most important apostolic experiment in my life-

time. I was, I am told, the first professor in theological education to interpret insights from the Willow Creek project to the wider church. My books, such as *How To Reach Secular People* (Abingdon, 1992), *Church for the Unchurched* (Abingdon, 1996), and *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism* (Abingdon, 2003), introduced Willow Creek to many church leaders and (I am told) "legitimized" Willow Creek as a church "worth learning from." Willow Creek decided, early, to omit visual Christian symbols when they built their first facility. Innovative leaders do not get every decision right, and I have never heard or read a compelling argument for the omission of symbols. I suspect that Willow Creek's leaders bought, unreflectively, into the widespread (but unspoken) Evangelical Protestant bias that the sense of *hearing* is the only sense that matters, and that *words* are the main (if not the only) medium of God's revelation. While Protestants are not obligated to replicate Roman Catholic "smells and bells," I submit that all of the senses *do* matter, that multi-sensory communication is often more powerful than what can be achieved through hearing alone, and that the next pioneering churches may show us how to indigenize Christian symbols to the target population's aesthetic—as we have already learned to do with their favored genres of music. In every other major mission field on the planet, we have already learned how to develop indigenous expressions of Christian symbols.

Insights from Communication Theories that Inform Ministry with Pre-Christian Hispanics in the USA

Dan W. Dunn

Abstract

This article discerns insights from three communication theories to inform ministry with pre-Christian Hispanics in the USA. Pearce's Coordinated Management of Meaning theory speaks of the co-construction of social realities in diverse circumstances. Christians have experienced what it is to be diverse and yet through Jesus' love be able to co-construct an identity that focuses on our shared commitment to Him and His purposes. Combining our experience with insights from Pearce would equip us to contribute to the process of identity construction that Hispanics engage in. Baxter and Montgomery's Relational Dialectics Theory could guide congregations in helping families plot a course through the complexities of relationships. Finally, Hammerback and Jensen's theory of Reconstitutive Rhetoric helps us understand the value of inviting pre-Christian Hispanics to embrace a new identity that not only tells them how to act but also who to be.

According to the US Census Bureau, the 2006 population of Hispanics¹ in the United States was 43.2 million, which represents 15.5% of the total population in the USA. Between 2000 and 2006, the growth rate of Hispanics was 24.3%, compared to a 6.1% growth rate for the population as a whole. This rapidity of growth is expected to continue, so that by the year 2010 the Hispanic population is estimated to reach 47.8 million, and by 2020 it will reach almost 60 million.² In 2006 the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of Hispanics and American Religion (they refer to Hispanics as Latinos), and in this survey 7.8% of Hispanics self-designated as being secular.³ Based on the Census Bureau Survey figure of 43.2 million, 7.8% represents 3,369,600 Hispan-