

Donald McGavran and the Church Growth Movement

for Church Health/Growth and Christian Mission

Howard Culbertson
Southern Nazarene University

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Donald McGavran

Father of the Church Growth movement

- Born in India in 1897
- Parents and grandparents were missionaries to India



Captured by materialism

As a student at Butler University . . .

“My father has done enough for the Lord.
It is time for me to strike out for myself
and earn some money.”



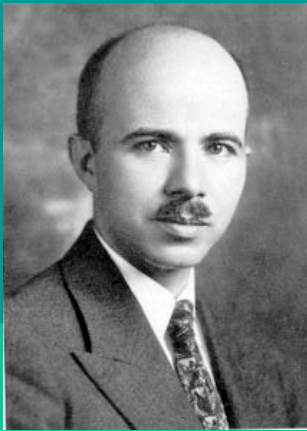
A change of direction

- Gave life to Christ, felt call to ministry
- Impact of Student Volunteer Movement
- Ph.D. dissertation on Hinduism and Christianity

Back to India

- 1923: Returned to India as a missionary with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)





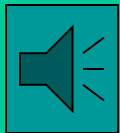
Missionary administrator

- Director of religious education
- Superintendent of leprosy home and hospital
- Translated Gospels into Chattisgarhi dialect

It wasn't all office work



- Fought off a wounded tiger and a wild boar
- Ended a cholera epidemic
- Climbed the Himalayas





- 1932-- became the head of mission

- Under him:

- 80 missionaries, 5 hospitals, high schools, primary schools, home for lepers

- 20-30 small churches growing at 1% per year

McGavran's conclusion

- Large amounts of money producing small results
- "It offended my Scottish nature."



So, what to do now?

Taking stock

- 1933 — McGravan's mission had 2,000 believers. Like many organizations in India, they had been growing 1% a year for decades.
- Some, however, were growing at 50% and 100% per decade.
 - McGavran: "I have to find out what these people are doing that other people are not!"

Enter: J. Waskom Pickett



McGavran said: “I lit my candle at his fire.”

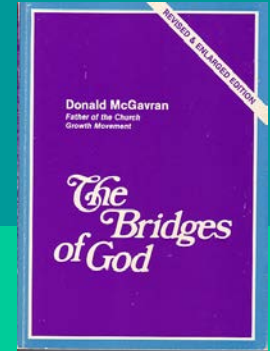
Who was this man?

- 1936 Pickett was studying the validity of “mass movements” to Christ McGavran traveled with him

Pickett's legacy

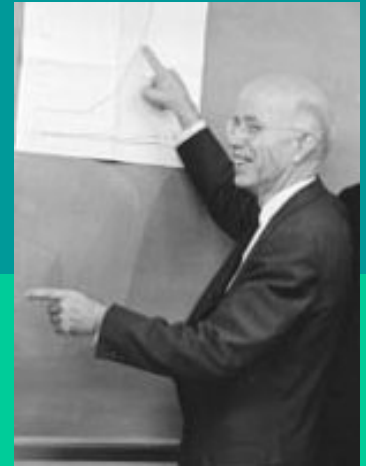
- Pragmatic, research-based orientation
- Keen awareness of social networks
- Burden for reaching the masses
- Study of reasons why people become Christians
- Seeing discipling and “perfection” as integral parts of evangelism

- 1936 McGavran left administrative position; spent next 18 years in church planting
 - (15 churches/ 1000 converts)
 - "Service is good, but it must never be substituted for finding the lost" and organizing them into communities of faith.



- 1955 wrote book: “Bridges of God”
 - Importance of family/friendship networks
 - Hint of Homogeneous Unit Principle
 - “People like to become Christians without feeling they have to cross racial, linguistic, social or class boundaries.”

- 1961 Church Growth Institute in Oregon; 1965 moved to Fuller Seminary
 - Plan: educate furloughed missionaries
 - Eventually, Americans would come to dominate the “church growth movement”



Students' first publications

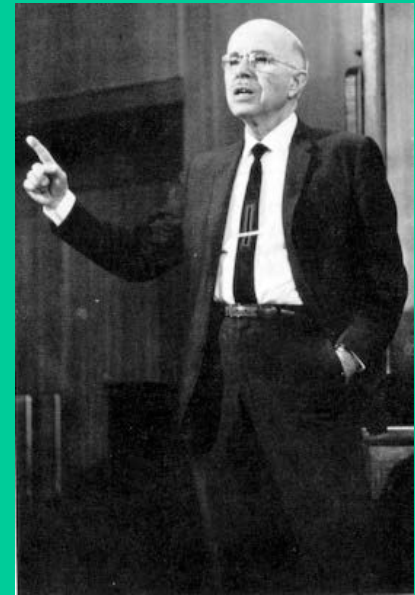
- "New patterns of church growth in Brazil" by William R. Read (1965)
- "Wildfire: church growth in Korea" by Roy E. Shearer (1966)
- "New Testament Fire in the Philippines" by Jim Montgomery (1972)

1970 Published "Understanding Church Growth"

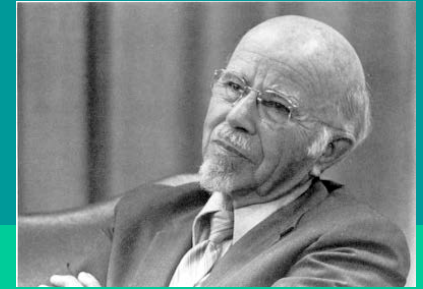


McGavran's use of scientific method

- Gather data
- Construct hypothesis
(potential solution)
- Test hypothesis
- Establish principle



McGavran's 3 questions



- When a church is growing, **why** is it growing?
- What **barriers, obstructions or sicknesses** prevent the natural life, vitality and growth of churches?
- What **reproducible principles** operative in growing churches can be used elsewhere?

“God wants His lost sheep found”

How can we do the most effective job in serving Him to accomplish that task?

McGavran and the modern Church Growth Movement



This PowerPoint presentation is available along with related materials and other PowerPoint presentations at <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ppt.htm>