

# Donald McGavran and the Church Growth Movement

for Church Growth and Christian Mission

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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.”



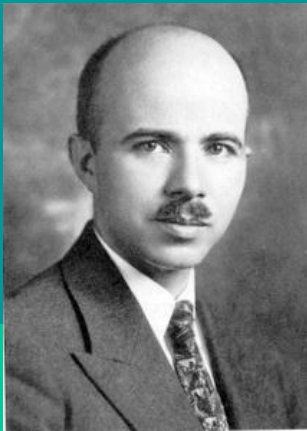
# A change of direction

- 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)





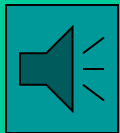
# Missionary administrator

- 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 — McGavran'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.”

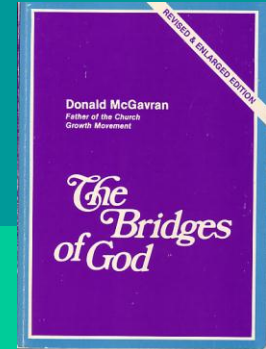
Who was this man?

- 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"



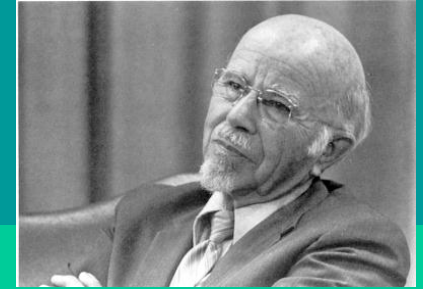
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# McGavran's use of scientific method

- 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

