The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation
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About a year ago the secretary of your Ohio Conference contacted the president of our Seminary in response to the request of your conference that a Seminary professor be asked to "give a paper on the Church Growth Movement as it affects our practice as a church body and as parish pastors." Since I am the one at the Seminary whose call specifically includes evangelism as a part of my teaching responsibilities, this assignment quite naturally fell to me. It was, by the way, an assignment which I gladly accepted since it prodded me into doing what I have had on a "to do" list for some time, ever since teaching a course on the Church Growth Movement in the summer of 1986.

The request from your conference also offered a suggested title for this paper: "What Can We Learn from the Church Growth Movement and Still Remain Confessional?" I have broadened it somewhat to "The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation."

It would perhaps be helpful at the outset to provide you with a brief road map of what lies ahead. We are dividing this essay into the following parts:

+ The history of the Church Growth Movement
+ Key principles of the Church Growth Movement
+ An evaluation of Church Growth Movement principles
+ A biblical, Lutheran theology of church growth

Before we begin a brief excursion into the history of the Church Growth Movement it would be good for us to define our terms, especially the term Church Growth as it is used by the proponents and practitioners of the Church Growth Movement. Church Growth Movement leader, C. Peter Wagner, writes, "Church growth is not some magic formula which can produce growth in any church at any time. It is just a collection of common-sense ideas that seem to track well with biblical principles which are focused on attempting to fulfill the Great Commission more effectively than ever before."[i]

Putting it more precisely, Wagner defines Church Growth as

all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership.[ii]

The founding father of the Church Growth Movement, Donald A. McGavran, calls Church Growth

an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and to persuading men to become His disciples and dependable members of His Church.[iii]

Church Growth people do not equate Church Growth, as they define it, with evangelism. They see Church Growth as something broader than evangelism in that Church Growth covers such areas as church planting, church diagnosis, assimilation, nurture, spiritual gifts, small group dynamics, in short, everything that contributes to making churches grow.

Perhaps the most inclusive definition, and the one we will be assuming in the course of this essay, is the one put forward by the North American Society for Church Growth:

Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function, and health of Christian churches as they relate specifically to the effective implementation of God's Commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20).[iv]

That definition is immediately elaborated on:

Students of church growth strive to combine the eternal theological principles of God's Word concerning the expansion of the Church with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences, employing as the initial frame of reference the foundational work done by Donald McGavran.[v]

History

The mention of McGavran's name reminds us that nothing happens in a vacuum. Such is also the case with the Church Growth Movement. It began as a response to a specific, observable phenomenon: A few churches in a specific mission field were growing rapidly. Most, however, were growing very slowly or not growing at all. This phenomenon led to the question: Why are some churches growing while other churches are not growing? The answers found to that question are what the Church Growth Movement is all about.

The above, of course, is a simplification. That is the situation, however, which did face Donald A. McGavran, a third generation missionary to India and the recognized "father" of the Church Growth Movement, as he engaged in mission work back in the 1930s. What he did in response to what he saw resulted in what today is called the Church Growth Movement. Since, as McGavran's pupil and present Church Growth Movement leader, C. Peter Wagner, puts it, "Church growth is a movement rooted in Donald McGavran," and "anyone who does not accept the McGavran paradigm is not a church growth person."[vi] It would be good for us to take a brief look at this man and his work.

McGavran, who passed away this past summer at the age of 92, went to India in his mid-30s as a missionary of the United Christian Missionary Society. In all he served as a missionary to India for 28 years, although the last eight years of that time were spent outside of India conducting church growth studies in many other countries on behalf of the United Christian Missionary Society to test out the theories of church growth that he was formulating.

As McGavran examined the numerical growth within the mission stations of his Disciples of Christ denomination in mid-India and then the growth rate of the mission stations of all the denominations in the same region, he discovered that under 10% of them were experiencing any significant growth. The growth rate of the congregations of his own Disciples of Christ denomination, in fact, was only 1% in ten years. A few congregations in mid-India, however, were growing at a rapid pace, some as much as 100% a year.

Why such a difference? In a recent, largely autobiographical, volume, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate*, perhaps McGavran's final book, he describes three "rivers of thought" that influenced his "pilgrimage" to his present convictions regarding growth and non-growth of churches. First of all, he gradually came to the conviction that his theological education had been flawed. A 1920 graduate of the Yale Divinity School, McGavran's theological training was of the liberal variety, particularly in regard to the nature of the Scriptures and the mission of the church. He had entered the mission field with a low view of the authority and thus normative value of the Scriptures and with a social gospel approach to mission work. While on the mission field he gradually moved to a more conservative theological stance. He writes, "I saw clearly that unless the Bible was accepted as God's authoritative, infallible revelation, there was no reason at all for missionary labors."

The fact that the Bible is God's authoritative, infallible revelation and therefore needs to be taken seriously also in the mission Christ himself gave to the church is, according to McGavran, "the theological conviction underlying the Church Growth Movement."[vii] In a certain sense, the Church Growth Movement

arose as a protest against a liberal, social gospel, welfare-centered kind of mission work that was seeking to better people's lives but wasn't much interested in making disciples. We cannot help but applaud McGavran's determination to take the Scriptures seriously, although, as we will see, the way he and other Church Growth leaders make use of the Scriptures often leaves something to be desired.

A second observation, or "river of thought," in McGavran's "pilgrimage" was that more effort seemed to be directed toward remaking people into the image of the culture of the missionaries than into the image of God. McGavran came to realize that different doesn't necessarily mean inferior. The missionary should seek to understand the culture of the people group among whom he is working; but what he will seek to change is not their culture, unless it contradicts the Scripture, but their religion. He writes, "The Church Growth. Movement urges that people become sincere practicing Christians while remaining ethnically, culturally, and economically themselves."[viii] Again, on the surface we would have little argument with this point. Not far beneath the surface of this statement, however, is McGavran's controversial homogeneous unit principle of Church Growth.

McGavran's third "river of thought" was that the effectiveness of evangelism must be measured by the growth rate. It is this third axiom, that effective evangelism is to be equated with outward growth, that occupied most of McGavran's time as he tried to determine what causes and what hinders growth. The result was a number of Church Growth "principles." The axiom that the effectiveness of mission labors should be measured in terms of results and the Church Growth principles that arose from this axiom have occasioned a major share of the criticism of the Church Growth Movement.

In formulating his Church Growth principles, McGavran was influenced considerably by Bishop J. Wascom Pickett's book, *Christian Mass Movements in India* (1933). Through case studies Pickett illustrated that when Christianity is spreading "contagiously," it is spreading along the social networks of one or more active credible Christians and that the faith spreads more easily within a social unit than across social units. In 1955, McGavran published his *Bridges of God*, which expands on Pickett's thesis. McGavran's *Bridges of God*, together with his 1970 book, *Understanding Church Growth* (revised in 1980 and 1990),[ix] form the basic texts of the Church Growth Movement.

C. Peter Wagner, who calls *Bridges of God*, the "Magna Carta of the Church Growth Movement,"[x] does a good job of summarizing the content of this book. It deals with four primary issues, each of which have become cornerstones of the Church Growth Movement. First, as Wagner puts it, a theological issue: It is God's will that his lost people be found and that therefore evangelism is not just proclaiming the gospel but making disciples. This in time came to be known as the harvest principle.

Secondly, an ethical issue: Pragmatism. All efforts should be evaluated by their results, which are measurable primarily in numbers.

Bridges of God deals, thirdly, with a missiological issue: Pickett's people movement theory, that is, simultaneous, multi-individual, interdependent conversions that occur within a specific people group, and its corollary, the homogeneous unit principle, that, as McGavran put it, "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers," a principle developed in more detail in *Understanding Church Growth*.

The fourth issue Wagner calls a procedural issue: Recognizing and acting on the difference between discipling and perfecting. A big problem, as McGavran saw it, was that missionaries were spending too much time perfecting those they had evangelized and not enough time and energy making new disciples.

Further on in this essay we will examine and evaluate these principles and others that were derived from them. Here our intention is to understand the historical situation from which they arose. It is not an over-simplification to equate the Church Growth Movement with Donald McGavran. His key spokesman and current leader of the Church Growth Movement, C. Peter Wagner, goes so far as to say:

> No one is forced to agree with everything McGavran ever said or wrote. But if you don't accept his way of looking at the Church—if you have any major conflict with *Understanding Church Growth*, our basic text—then you should use some other name because you're not part of the Church Growth Movement.[xi]

We would be remiss, therefore, if we passed by McGavran too quickly.

In 1961, at the age of 63, McCavran resigned from the United Christian Missionary Society and founded the Institute for Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. Four years later, in 1965, McGavran moved his institute to Pasadena, California, at the invitation of Fuller Theological Seminary and there became the dean of a separate graduate school, Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission. He gradually built up a faculty of experienced missionaries who had served in all parts of the world. The first six faculty members have all contributed to the body of Church Growth literature: Alan Tippett, an Australian with twenty years of mission work in the Fiji Islands; Edwin Orr, an evangelist from England; Ralph Winter, missionary to Guatemala; Charles Kraft, with years of experience in Nigeria; Arthur Glasser, who served under the China Inland Mission; and C. Peter Wagner, missionary to Bolivia.

Virtually all, if not all, influential persons in the Church Growth Movement today have either taught at or graduated from Fuller's School of World Mission. Ralph Winter, for example, has established a world missions publishing house, the William Carey Library, and in 1976, the U.S. Center for World Mission. Graduate Edward Dayton founded MARC (Missions Advanced Research and Communication). The studies of both MARC and the U.S. Center for World Mission are widely used by mission boards today, including our WELS Board for World Missions. As of 1985, the School of World Mission had awarded 22 Ph.D. and 151 D. Min. degrees. The various doctoral theses have contributed to a growing body of Church Growth literature.

The year 1972 marked the beginning of a major change in emphasis in the Church Growth Movement. Up to this point the focus had been exclusively on world missions. The School of World Mission faculty consisted entirely of men with world mission experience. Entrance requirements to the School of World Mission excluded most Americans since a minimum of three years of cross-cultural experience was a pre-requisite along with knowledge of the language of a second culture.

At that point Church Growth leaders, particularly C. Peter Wagner, began to ask the question: Could the same principles of Church Growth that appear to work on the world mission field be just as applicable to mission work in North America? At the suggestion of Wagner, McCavran and Wagner team-taught the principles of Church Growth in a series of weekly three-hour seminars to a group of 25 local pastors and lay people assembled at Lake Avenue Congregational Church in Pasadena. Their teaching met with such an enthusiastic response that the major focus of the Church Growth Movement from that point on began to switch from the foreign to the domestic field.

One member of that Lake Avenue Congregational Church class, Win Arn, was at least partially responsible for this new focus. Arn was an evangelism executive for the Evangelical Covenant Church. Following this seminar, he left his post and in 1973 founded the Institute for American Church Growth, which produces Church Growth films, video presentations, newsletters, books, manuals, etc., and offers many Church Growth programs either in person or by way of attractive kits. Arn is a good communicator who has quite effectively disseminated Church Growth principles across the United States.

Before we examine some of the principles of the Church Growth Movement, we should perhaps take a look at a few more of the present leaders. C. Peter Wagner, as mentioned above, was a missionary to Bolivia, where he served for 16 years. While on the mission field he read McGavran's *Bridges of God* and dismissed it. But in 1967, while home on furlough, he took a course from McGavran and was "converted" to McGavran's views.

In 1971 Wagner joined the faculty of Fuller's School of World Mission and in 1984 became the first occupant of the McGavran Chair of Church Growth. A prolific author and widely acclaimed as an excellent teacher, Wagner is undoubtedly the primary spokesman for the Church Growth Movement today, particularly as its principles are applied to work in the United States. He is a staunch defender of these principles, taking almost a proprietary interest in them. In a 1985 *Global Church Growth* interview Wagner, striking out against what he calls "fraudulent 'church growth,'" writes,

What has come out of the School of World Mission is the only Church Growth Movement…. I'm committed to keeping the brand name safe. Church Growth is not generic term. It's a patented product.[xii]

Closely connected with Fuller's School of World Mission is the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, now headed by Carl George. This institute provides Church Growth consultations for churches and denominations. It also trains others to be Church Growth consultants.

A chapter in *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986) entitled, "Who's Who in Church Growth," lists 62 people, among whom are five Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod clergymen, the only Lutherans mentioned, by the way. Kent R. Hunter is director of the Church Growth Center, Corunna, Indiana. Similar to Win Arn's Institute for American Church Growth, Hunter's institute produces Church Growth materials and offers Church Growth consultations. Roger W. Leenerts serves as Director for United States Ministries on the Board for Mission Services, a position similar to the WELS administrator of the Board for Home Missions. Elmer W. Matthias is professor emeritus of Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, where he taught evangelism and church growth. While at Concordia, he authored an article in the *Concordia Journal* (Mar 1984) entitled, "This Lutheran Sees Value in Church Growth." Stephen A. Wagner is a parish pastor in Texas, the author of "Heart to Heart: Sharing Christ with a Friend," a program in friendship evangelism. The fifth LC-MS man listed, Waldo J. Werning, is more well known for his work in the area of stewardship; but he has also written a book entitled, *Vision and Strategy for Church Growth*.

With the possible exception of Werning, all of the above have received degrees from or done some study at Fuller's School of World Mission. it should be noted that while men such as these represent one point of view within the Missouri Synod today, the pro-Church Growth position, there are others who stand in the opposite camp.

One more name on that list of 62 should perhaps be mentioned, Lyle E. Schaller, With C. Peter Wagner, Schaller is a prolific writer. He is also a parish planner, church consultant and resource leader for workshops. While the Church Growth Movement likes to claim Schaller as one of its own, Schaller tends to be his own man. Many of the principles he espouses, however, are very much compatible with the principles of the Church Growth Movement.

The Church Growth Movement originated, then, in reaction to a recognizable fact: Some churches on a mission field were growing and some were not. The search to understand what makes churches grow has resulted in today's Church Growth Movement, a highly visible and dominant voice in mission work both here and abroad. A good share of literature on the subject of missions and evangelism today is written from a Church Growth perspective.

Key Church Growth Principles

We turn our attention now to some of the key Church Growth principles. We will have to be rather selective here. Some have counted as many as 146 such principles.[xiii] What is a Church Growth principle? McGavran/Arn define it this way: "A universal truth which, when properly interpreted and applied, contributes significantly to the growth of churches and denominations."[xiv]

How does one discover such a universal truth? By a process of careful observation. one observes where the church is growing and then asks why. The answer or answers one finds leads to the discovery of one or more Church Growth principles. It should be noted that Church Growth leaders have softened their assertions somewhat in recent years. C. Peter Wagner, for example, admits that in the past he and others maintained that any church can grow if it follows the right principles. He has come to speak a little more guardedly about the universal validity of these principles. They are "usually helpful," he writes, but "every church growth principle has exceptions."[xv]

We are going to examine six primary Church Growth principles. These six were chosen for two reasons. First of all, they can readily be traced back to the father of the Church Growth Movement, Donald McGavran. Secondly, most of the more recent principles, including those geared toward Church Growth in the United

States, are derived from these basic principles. Even the six principles we will look at, as you will see, are very closely interrelated. First, and the foundation on which all the other principles rest, the

Harvest Principle

McGavran writes, "The Church Growth Movement maintains that the central purpose of all evangelism must be finding the lost and bringing them back to the fold."[xvi] Kent Hunter puts it this way: "A person is not evangelized until he or she becomes a responsible member of the body of Christ."[xvii] In simple terms Wagner defines the harvest principle as follows:

> Our task is to locate the ripened harvest fields and reap them in Jesus' name. This is the harvest principle.[xviii]

All of this echoes McRavrarn's oft quoted comment, "God wants his lost children found."[xix]

Church Growth people distinguish between harvesting the crop and merely sowing the seed. At other times they put it in terms of a "find theology" as opposed to a "search theology." A search theology of missions is the conviction that "in Christian mission the essential thing is not the finding, but going everywhere and preaching the Gospel."[xx] Search theology sees mission work as broadcasting the seed, without much concern for the harvest. Find theology is, as the term indicates, the conviction that mission work is "a vast and purposeful finding."[xxi] Find theology concentrates heavily on bringing in the Harvest. Wagner writes, "While God ripens the harvest, he does not reap the harvest. He expects us to be his agents in reaping."[xxii]

Again, Wagner writes:

> Sowing the seed is not an end in itself; it is a means toward the end of producing the fruit…. If we follow the harvest principle, evaluate our activities in terms… not of how many missionaries we send, but how many lost people we reach and bring to Jesus Christ. We will never be satisfied with "good" outreach programs that are supposed to bring people to Christ but do not.[xxiii]

Church Growth proponents point to the New Testament to support their harvest principle/find theology convictions. McGavran writes, "The New Testament Church… did not badger and bother people who resisted the Good News, but hurried on to those who were ready to become believers…. Christians besought those who could believe and enter eternal life."[xxiv] Jesus' parables, it is noted, often emphasize an actual finding. The lost coin is found; the lost sheep likewise. In the parable of the wedding feast "issuing the invitation was not the end: partaking of God's feast was. If one group would not accept the summons, then the servant was to find other men who would."[xxv] Just as Jesus Christ came to seek and to save, so the church today should seek and find.

That, accordingly, means going to where the harvest is ripe, which leads to a second key Church Growth principle:

Receptive People

McGavran defines receptive people as a segment of society "friendly to the idea of becoming Christian." "Societies," he says, "ripen to the Gospel at different times,"[xxvi] people's hearts being made receptive by "God's prevenient grace."[xxvii] The key is to be at the right place at the right time, "winning the winnable while they are winnable."[xxviii]

Jesus, it is claimed, followed such a strategy in his ministry and taught his disciples to do the same. Wagner quotes Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10:5,6: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He then comments:

By doing this, Jesus was sending his workers into a ripened harvest field. At that point the Samaritans were not ready…. The Gentiles were not ready either…. If the twelve apostles had gone there while Jesus was still alive, they would have had little fruit indeed…. God had prepared more Jews to listen to the gospel of the kingdom at that point in time than Samaritans or Gentiles. Jesus knew this and acted on this information…. As a competent strategy planner, Jesus took as many precautions as possible to see that the output of energy resulted in the maximum harvest.[xxix]

It goes without saying that Wagner stretches this passage to say more than Jesus intended to say. There is a tendency in the Church Growth Movement to be somewhat slipshod in exegesis in an attempt to find passages to back up their principles.

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed is another such example. It is given a novel interpretation to undergird the receptive people principle. Win Arn writes, "There seemed no doubt in Christ's mind that the 'seeds' should be planted in 'fertile soil.'"[xxx] Wagner speaks of the good soil as "people who have been so prepared that they hear the word and understand it." His conclusion?

One way to increase the effectiveness of evangelistic strategy planning is to determine ahead of time which individuals or groups of individuals have hearts prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the Word.[xxxi]

How does one determine who these receptive people are? That brings us to a third Church Growth principle:

Testing the Soil

The purpose of soil testing is to determine which people group might be most receptive to the gospel at any given time. Jesus himself, it is claimed, taught his church to be soil testers, when he told the Twelve as he sent them out, "Inquire who is worthy" (Mt 10:11). "This," says Wagner, "is a method of seeking out the receptive."[xxxii]

Wagner points to three major elements of soil testing. First, look where churches are growing. Identify the geographical area and people group within that geographical area where this growth is occurring. Then calculate the remaining harvest by subtracting the number of practicing Christians from the total population of the people group. This group that has not yet become Christian can be fertile soil for planting the seed and reaping a harvest. McGavran calls this "discipling out to the fringes."[xxxiii]

Secondly, look where people are changing, whether it be socially, politically, economically or psychologically. Changes can be produced by such factors as war, internal migration, natural disasters, land reform, change of residence, recession, urbanization or industrialization. People in times of transition, it is claimed, tend to be receptive people.

Thirdly, says Wagner, churches should concentrate their work among the masses. Why? Because the masses, that is, the common, working people and the poor, are usually more receptive than the classes, that is, those who are more comfortably situated in life.[xxxiv]

In summary, soil testing is accomplished by a process of observation (Where is growth occurring now?) and a reliance on the social sciences (What kind of people seem to be the most receptive and under what circumstances?). Even in the eyes of Church Growth leaders, soil testing remains an inexact science; but their goal is to remove as many elements of uncertainty as possible. Wagner writes: "I dream of the day when some courageous and energetic computer expert will catch a vision of serving God by working out computer programs for evangelistic soil testing."[xxxv] Given the proper input, the computer, presumably, would be able to direct missionaries to the fields most ready for harvesting.

What about areas of low receptivity? Those areas, according to McGavran, should not necessarily be abandoned. Rather we should "occupy fields of low receptivity lightly,"[xxxvi] while we expend the majority of our energies on fields that have shown themselves to be ripe for the harvest.

Another way, according to Church Growth thinking, to increase the chances of reaping a harvest is to carry on mission work within a specific people group. In Church Growth terminology this is usually called the homogeneous unit principle.

Homogeneous Unit Principle

A homogeneous unit, or a people group, is defined as "a section of society in which all the members have some characteristics in common,"[xxxvii] e.g., language, geography, caste or class. It is perceived as "the largest possible group within which the gospel can spread without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."[xxxviii] In McGavran's words:

> Humanity is a vast mosaic of tens of thousands of pieces.… Each segment must be won to Christ on its own level. If it is invited to join a church composed of people living on a different level, it will reject Christ very largely because the Savior is obscured by his congregation…. The growth of the church will not meld green, white, black, yellow, purple, and red pieces of the mosaic into one dark grey piece. No, the red will remain red, the white will remain white, the purple will remain purple. But in each of the thousands of ethnic unit societies of the redeemed will multiply.[xxxix]

McGavran maintains that "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers," and that "in most cases of arrested growth of the Church, men are deterred not so much by the offence of the cross as by non-biblical offenses" which are cause by forcing people to cross linguistic, class or racial barriers.[xl] "Christianity," contends McGavran, "like electricity, flows best where there is good contact. The power of God acts best within a people."[xli]

When a number of people within a specific homogeneous unit, or people group, become disciples of Christ, McGavran calls this a "people movement," which he defines as

> the joint decision of a number of individuals—whether five or five hundred—all from the same people, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other groups of that people, across the years… to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of members of that people.[xlii]

McGavran uses the *panta ta ethne* ("all nations") of Matthew 28:19 to back up his homogeneous unit principle. In McGavran's thinking *panta ta ethne* are not all the nations of the world, but the individual pieces of the mosaic, the individual people groups, within the nations. He sees the words *panta ta ethne* as a scriptural mandate to evangelize primarily within people groups. He speculates that in the early Christian Church the Jews, who "liked to become Christian without crossing racial barriers," stopped becoming Christians once Gentiles predominated and they had to join a "house church full of Gentiles"; so they "turned sorrowfully away." He further surmises that "in the initial turnings to the Christian faith in northern Europe, the principle that men like to become Christian without crossing barriers kept whole countries out of eternal life for centuries."[xliii]

The contention of Church Growth leaders that the Christian faith spreads most effectively within homogeneous units, or people groups, has led to a fifth Church Growth principle:

New Church Planting

McGavran writes, "If God's plan for the salvation of the world is to be carried out, a mighty multiplication of living congregations must occur in most pieces of the mosaic in most countries."[44] "There is no other way," McGavran contends, "in which the multitudinous pieces of the human mosaic can become Christian....Requiring converts to join conglomerate congregations will hinder the church from rapidly spreading to *panta ta ethne*."[45]

The principle here, you note, is not simply the multiplication of congregations, but the multiplication of congregations that serve specific people groups. According to this principle, for example, you would expect more growth among the WELS congregations in the inner city of Milwaukee if separate congregations were established for the blacks and the whites or for the Anglos and the Hispanics. They might even share the same facilities; but two congregations, each composed of its own kind of people, would do better than one that tries to combine different pieces of the mosaic. Wagner writes, "of all the scientific hypotheses developed within the church growth framework, this one as nearly as any approaches a 'law'....Show me a growing church, and I will show you a homogeneous unit."[46]

But what about those pieces of the mosaic in which there are at present no or very few Christians? Church Growth literature calls such units of society "unreached people," which are defined as "a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside (cross-cultural) assistance."[47] It is estimated that there are approximately 17,000 such unreached people groups. They are found not only in primitive parts of the world but also in the United States.

New church planting is required here also, but of a specialized kind. What is called for is cross-cultural church planting. In Church Growth language this is called "bridging growth," defined as "the increase of a church's membership through the process by which new churches are planted in cultures different from the culture of the base church." This is sometimes called E-2 and E-3 evangelism, E-2 being church planting in a somewhat different culture and E-3 church planting in a culture that differs greatly from the base church (E-0 evangelism is evangelizing one's own members; E-1 is near-neighbor, "our own kind of people" evangelism).

Those involved in E-2 and E-3 church planting, since they are not a part of the piece of the mosaic in which they are working, will want to turn the work over as soon as possible to those who are part of that particular people group. Our WELS Board for World Missions operates under a similar policy of seeking to establish indigenous churches as quickly as possible, churches marked by the four "selfs," self-administering, self-financing, self-disciplining and self-propagating.

This brings us to the sixth Church Growth principle we want to examine, actually two closely related principles:

Discipling, Not Perfecting; Disciples, Not Decisions

The discipling, not perfecting principle is that one should not demand too much from people before baptizing them and taking them into the church. Get them in and then later give them further instruction. In that way one brings more people into the church more quickly. This is not to say that Church Growth spokesmen downplay the importance of nurture. Just the opposite is true; in fact. They emphasize the need for continued postbaptismal instruction. But it is to say that they don't want to hinder growth of the church by demanding too much of new converts before they can be accepted into the church.

The question of how much sanctification should be expected before a person is fully accepted as a Christian is more of a problem for those of the Reformed persuasion than for Lutherans, as Robert Koester brings out:

This concern largely becomes a moot point when acceptance of the Gospel is faith in Christ's forgiveness. A confession of faith in Christ's forgiveness makes a person as much a Christian as

they ever will be. The ethical issue enters afterwards when the person is growing to live his life as the Lord wants him to....In this regard, the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel has a built-in antidote for what McGavran saw happening in the churches in India which resulted in his discipling/perfecting issue.[50]

The obverse of the discipling, not perfecting principle is that of making disciples, not decisions. While the former principle cautions against demanding too much, too quickly, of a new convert, the latter cautions against being satisfied with too little. The disciples, not decisions principle is directed to a large degree against a "crusade" approach to Church Growth which measures results by the number of decisions recorded at an evangelistic meeting.

Central to both of these related principles is the Church Growth Movement's concept of "disciple." Wagner presents a three-part definition. First, a disciple is a person who has come to believe in Jesus Christ. But there is more. Wagner adds a second identifying mark of a disciple: obedience. He writes: "In order to become [emphasis added] a disciple one has to agree to obey Jesus from that point on. It means that Jesus is Lord as well as Saviour."[51]

Note how Wagner here confuses justification and sanctification by turning obedience, a fruit of faith, into a part of faith.

The third identifying mark of a disciple, according to Wagner, is "responsible church membership." Wagner realizes he is on somewhat shaky ground here. He writes, "From a purely theological perspective, a disciple is made when the power of the Holy Spirit comes and makes that person a new creature. But," he adds, "while theologically this is valid, strategically it is not very helpful....The transformation in the person's life is invisible. So how do I know whether it has really happened?"[52]
This is his answer:

> The test used through the years by the Church Growth Movement is responsible church member-ship. A person's commitment to Christ may be invisible, but the same person's commitment to the Body of Christ is visible and measurable. The two commitments should not be separated. If a person who professes to be a Christian is not a responsible church member, I need at least to raise questions about the validity of the profession.[53]

To his credit Wagner adds, "By this assertion, I do not mean that church membership saves anyone. Only faith in Jesus Christ can save. But strategically speaking, we need to measure the outcome of our activities in some way, and responsible church membership is a reasonable measurement."[54]

A disciple, then, in Church Growth thinking, is one who has come to believe in Jesus Christ, has agreed to obey Jesus and has become a responsible member of a church.

The third element of this definition of a disciple makes it relatively easy to do the kind of ongoing measurements and analyses that are part and parcel of the Church Growth Movement. Using that definition as a starting point, it can be concluded that growing churches are effectively carrying out the commission to "make disciples" while churches which are not growing are not effectively carrying out that commission.

According to this scenario, two kinds of research should be engaged in if churches are to become more effective disciple-makers. On the one hand, researchers should be investigating "growing churches and growing denominations to find out why they are growing." Those engaged in this research should seek to distinguish between "reproducible patterns of growth and those which cannot be duplicated," the idea being to uncover growth patterns "possible to ordinary congregations, ordinary pastors, and ordinary missionaries."[55]

On the other hand, congregations that are not growing should engage in careful selfstudy to determine what factors are hindering their growth. To use Church Growth terminology, they need to "remove the fog." They need to penetrate "the rationalizations, propaganda, inaccuracies, and unknowns and get at the facts concerning the growth history, present condition, and future possibilities" of their congregation.[56] Ultimately

they should be able to come up with the proper "growth mix," that is, "the combination of ingredients which taken together and in the right proportions produces effective church growth."[57]

The bottom line throughout, as the term Church Growth Movement itself suggests, is growth. Make harvesting your concern, not just planting. Look for receptive people. Test the soil and concentrate your efforts on fertile soil. Plant churches within homogeneous units. Make disciples as measured by a growing number of responsible new church members.

Evaluation

Even from this brief glance at the Church Growth Movement it is not difficult to understand why a number of studies, written from the evangelical Lutheran perspective caution against "buying into" the Church Growth Movement. Back in 1981, upon examining the writings of Donald McGavran, Professor E.H. Wendland of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary wrote, "One does not get too far into McGavran's writings without coming to an uneasy feeling that one is dealing with a supersalesman, who in his enthusiasm is becoming guilty of overselling his product."[59]

At the same time, however, Wendland has some good things to say about McGavran:

In an era when many churches have become thoroughly shot through with humanistic pro-paganda and anti-supernaturalistic philosophy, McGavran comes upon the scene as a welcome change. He at least professes to take the Bible seriously....McGavran also takes mission work seriously....To McGavran mission work is a life-and-death matter. He most urgently wants to extend every effort toward making the most efficient use of time, talent and money to carry out what he earnestly believes to be the greatest task in the world....He is utterly fearless in his at-tacks upon theological liberals...who no longer regard aggressive church planting as essential to the well-being of God's kingdom on earth....He is eager to develop "bold plans" for maximum efficiency in gathering in a great harvest. Many of his assessments are based upon a first-hand knowledge of mission problems, offering many practical suggestions for evaluating and dealing with these problems in an effective way.

We note some of the same commendable emphases in McGavran's disciple, C. Peter Wagner: placing priority on the Great Commission, looking to the Scriptures as the final authority, and holding to the conviction that people apart from Christ are lost forever. Wagner writes:

Although many people today would like to disguise it, they cannot just wish hell away. Hell is real. It is a place of wrath and torment. Once in hell there is no way out, for hell is the ultimate consequence of sin...When you think of hell—eternity apart from God with no escape whatsoever—other human problems seem relatively small. Freedom from poverty and fear, racial brotherhood, just social structures, health and well-being—these are all important kingdom values, but none comes close to being as important as liberation from the wrath to come....You cannot pick and choose which parts of the Bible you like and which you don't like. The Bible is not a divine smorgasbord. You have to take it all, not just what appeals to you....That means you have to take seriously what Jesus said about the separation of the sheep and the goats and the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels....The heathen are lost. They will be lost as long as Christians fail to reach them with the good news of eternal life through Jesus.[61]

From all outward indications there is a genuine, fervent desire on the part of those involved in the Church Growth Movement to bring as many into the fold as possible in the time the Lord gives us before his return. It is this desire that spurs them on to a pragmatic examination of mission methodologies, to use what works and discard what doesn't. We want to state this clearly at the outset as we now proceed to evaluate what

the Church Growth Movement offers. When we point to errors in the Church Growth Movement, we are not impugning motives; but we do need to "test the spirits" (1 Jn 4:1) by the litmus of the Word.

It is not difficult to recognize that the principles of the Church Growth Movement breathe a Reformed spirit. Church Growth Movement leaders, most of whom come out of the Reformed camp, do not try to conceal this fact. Arthur F. Glasser, who served as dean on the faculty of the Fuller School of World Mission, frankly states: "Church growth theology has a distinctly Reformed hermeneutic."[62]

Among the theological weaknesses, therefore, we might expect to find and actually do find in Church Growth literature are such as the following:

Doctrinal Pluralism

Most Church Growth writers display a fundamentalistic attitude toward doctrine, which considers certain, "fundamental" biblical doctrines to be untouchable, but allows a latitude of thinking on other doctrines. Reformed theologian, Bernard Ramm, defines a fundamental doctrine as "one of such importance to the Christian faith that if denied the faith itself would collapse....The fundamentals are therefore that cluster of doctrines that are non-negotiable; they have no viable alternatives. Destroy this theologica1 cluster and you destroy Christianity."[63]

Ramm recognizes that this definition presents a difficulty: "The problem with such a cluster is that it is easier said than done. Who determines what belongs in the cluster?...Any list of fundamental doctrines is a human venture and liable to human error." But that doesn't keep some, including Church Growth leaders, from making the attempt. McGavran, for example, writes:

> Each denomination is a separate branch of the one universal church....As long as each branch is firmly in the vine, as long as each branch believes on Jesus Christ as God and only Savior and the Bible as the inspired and totally reliable Word of God, real differences in regard to baptism, ecclesiastical organization, and other less central doctrines can be tolerated.[65]

What counts above all is a common concern "that God's command to effectively evangelize the peoples of the world be carried out."[66] Accordingly, at Fullers' School of World Mission "distinctive doctrines of different denominations were seldom mentioned....To debate the mode of baptism would not advance the cause of effective evangelism."[67] The bottom line is "effective evangelism," defined as growth. It is this spirit that leads Church Growth leaders to look with admiration to such men as Robert Schuller of Crystal Cathedral fame and Korea's Paul Yonggi Cho with his 500,000 member congregation, regardless of their doctrinal aberrations. Church Growth practitioners reason that what these men are doing must be right because their churches are growing.

It is this spirit, by the way, that is leading the Church Growth Movement to embrace ever more closely the charismatic's concept of "signs and wonders," or "power," evangelism; for, again, charismatic churches, in general, are growing more rapidly than other churches. A newly-revised version of McGavran's *Understanding Church Growth* (1990), edited by C. Peter Wagner, now includes a chapter on "Divine Healing and Church Growth," written by Wagner.

Again and again in the Pastoral Epistles the Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy and Titus to concern themselves with and contend for "sound doctrine." We today will want to do no less. Only the truth builds the Church.

This is not to say, however, that one cannot learn certain things even from those whose doctrine is heterodox in some areas. But we will have to be very selective, realizing that "success" is not to be equated with outward growth, but with faithfulness to and with the Word. "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor 4:2), faithful to the Lord who has given them the trust.

We see also in the Church Growth Movement a

Downplaying of the Means of Grace

Reading Church Growth literature tends to leave one with the feeling that following a set of sociological principles produces growth, this in spite of the claim of McGavran that "men cannot make the Church grow—only God's Holy Spirit can do that." Such a statement sounds good; but it does not go far enough in that it does not connect the Holy Spirit's work with the means of grace, as do the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

Eddie Gibbs, an associate professor at Fuller's School of World Mission, is the author of a chapter entitled, "The Power Behind the Principles," in *Church Growth: State of the Art*. He states correctly that "the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit is integral to church growth at every phase"[69]; but never in this whole chapter does he mention the means the Spirit uses to accomplish this work. Glenn Huebel, a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod clergyman, participated in a two-year church growth project in his district led by Win Arn's Institute for American Church Growth. Though he did find it to be helpful in some ways, he points to this same weakness: "The danger of the Church Growth Movement is that its principles, on an outward plane, work with or without the Word. The means of grace are not an essential part of the system."[70]

That would include the sacraments also, as one might expect from a movement that is rooted in Reformed thinking. In Church Growth literature the Lord's Supper is ignored and baptism is looked upon, not as a means of grace, but as an act of obedience on the part of one who has already become a believer.

In an extreme case of minimizing the importance of the means of grace, Win Arn's son, Charles, who works with his father in the Institute for American Church Growth, goes so far as to say,

> People today who respond to the Christian faith....are those who respond to the love and caring of Christ's people, not to a set of ideas or theological statements. People are not talked into the kingdom. They are loved in. Reflecting God's unconditional love is the essence of the Christian gospel. And love is experienced, not verbalized.[71]

We are not discounting the need for Christians to display love, of course, love for each other and love for souls who are still "separate from Christ" and thus "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). A Christian who fails to practice what he professes or a congregation that turns a cold shoulder to a visitor can certainly adversely affect an unbeliever who now may want to have nothing to do with a religion that produces such people. So he refuses to listen to the only message that saves. But to turn love into a means of grace—that is something else.

This downplaying of the importance of the means of grace on the part of many in the Church Growth Movement would seem to stem from several factors. For one thing, we note an

Inadequately Defined Goal

As noted previously, the Church Growth Movement takes its marching orders from Matthew 28:19. Christ's commission to his Church is to "make disciples of all nations." With that, of course, we have no problem. The problem lies in the way the Church Growth Movement tends to equate discipleship with church membership, which, by the way, it erroneously equates with membership in the Body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. As we quoted above, Wagner says, "We need to measure the outcome of our activities in some way and responsible church membership is a reasonable measurement,"[72] reasonable, of course, because it is visible while faith is not.

Though this does not appear to be the intention of Church Growth practitioners[73], you will note here a shift in emphasis from creating faith to creating church members. With this shift, this altered goal, comes a corresponding shift in means to accomplish the goal. Now the primary question is no longer: What is needed to bring this person out of darkness into light? out of death into life? out of hostility against God into peace and friendship with God? Instead the question is: What can we do to make our church—its buildings and grounds, its people, its worship, its programs—as attractive as possible so as to bring more people in?

Please do not misunderstand what we are saying. We are not saying that congregations should be unconcerned about their buildings and grounds, or about being friendly to visitors, or about making their worship vibrant and uplifting, or about establishing and maintaining attractive programs of nurture that will help people in their Christian growth. We spend time with every senior class in the Seminary talking about the value of all of this and more. We are saying, however, that if the Church is in the business of making disciples, then all of the above are only auxiliary to its main work: the proclamation of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. In Church Growth Movement literature, because of the shift in focus toward church membership as the primary goal, since it, unlike faith, is quantifiable, this order tends to get inverted. Hence a de-emphasis on the importance of the means of grace. Greg Jackson is not overstating the case when he writes, "We have forfeited orthodoxy when we calculate visible membership growth as the primary sign of success, making correct teaching secondary."[74]

There is another, deeper factor that results in an inadequate treatment of the means of grace in Church Growth literature, and that is a

Faulty Understanding of Sin and Grace, Law and Gospel

Decision Theology

This is seen in the Arminian "decision theology" that is common to all Church Growth literature except, for the most part, that produced by Lutherans. Decision theology is an attempt to answer the unanswerable question, "Why some and not others?" It robs sin and grace as well as law and gospel of their full meaning.

"As for you," writes Paul to the Ephesians, "you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Eph 2:1). Sin is not just some bad things we do or good things we fail to do, a situation which, with some help from God, we might be able to rectify. Sin is a condition of spiritual death.

Dead people can't make a decision to become alive. The Church Growth Movement, with its Arminian presuppositions, operates on the assumption that they can make such a decision. Church Growth people talk about three levels of evangelism: Presence, or 1-P, evangelism; proclamation, or 2-P, evangelism; and persuasion, or 3-P, evangelism. Persuasion evangelism, writes Elmer L. Towns, "is not only proclaiming the gospel, but it also involves persuading or motivating the unsaved to respond."[75] This is McGavran's harvest principle, or find theology, on a personal level—that one should not be satisfied with simply proclaiming the message but should also persuade the person to respond favorably to it.

As with most, if not all, Church Growth principles, there is a certain element of truth here. If the commission Christ has given to his Church is to make disciples, we will not be satisfied with a one-time proclamation of the Word. We will want to water the seed we have planted. Our concern will be to bring a person—through continued proclamation of law and gospel—to the point where the Holy Spirit turns his heart from unbelief to faith. For that matter, we will not stop then either, but will continue to nurture the faith the Spirit has engendered through the gospel. In that ongoing effort we will certainly seek to speak the Word persuasively and compellingly. The Apostle Paul did just that in his ministry.

The problem arises, however, when there is a shift in emphasis from reliance on the power of the Word to reliance on the persuasiveness of man. "My message and my preaching," wrote Paul, "were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4,5). This is all we can do when we realize that the unbeliever is completely dead in trespasses and sins and that, therefore, only a miracle of God, through the gospel, can give him new life. But that is also all we need to do. God does the real work.

Felt Needs

The Church Growth Movement also displays a faulty understanding of the Scripture's teaching on sin and grace, law and gospel with its popular felt needs approach to evangelism. One must "test the soil" to find

"receptive people," those who are "friendly to the idea of becoming Christian." How does one find such people? Look for needs that the church can fill. Robert Schuller's maxim, "The secret of success is to find a need and fill it," turns up quite often in Church Growth literature. George Hunter writes: "God's Spirit works through the events and circumstances of some people's lives to create receptivity, to "warm the heart" for the gospel....Our gracious God goes before us into the hearts and consciousness of people, preparing for an evangelical harvest."[77] C. Peter Wagner defines a felt need in this way: "The conscious wants and desires of a person; considered to be an opportunity for Christian response which stimulates within the person a receptivity to the gospel."[78]

It is not difficult to see the problem here if one proceeds directly from the felt need—whether it be loneliness or alienation or grief or poverty or marriage or family troubles or the need for a friend or whatever— to the gospel. As Charles Cortright correctly puts it, "The 'felt needs' emphasis...can so easily lead to a distorted Gospel."[79] That it does do just that in at least some of the literature of the Church Growth Movement can be demonstrated by the following statement of George Hunter:

> We must first demonstrate the relevance of our gospel by beginning where people are in their conscious needs and motives. Having demonstrated the relevance of what we are about to share, thereby winning their attention, we then *plug in the facet of the gospel that is relevant good news for the need or motive that has been engaged* [emphasis added].[80]

The gospel thus becomes a band-aid to cover up a minor sore, leaving the gaping wound untouched. The real problem—sin, alienation from God—has not been exposed, and the real gospel, the good news of full and free forgiveness won by Jesus, has not been proclaimed. The person might well conclude that all is now right between him and God because he now feels better about his problem. But that, of course, is a cruel deception; for it could lull one into a false sense of spiritual security. Without the forgiveness of sins there is no salvation regardless of how many felt needs of this life have been satisfied. A "gospel" that does not proclaim the forgiveness of sins, new spiritual life and salvation is not the gospel.

We should mention at this point that even when Church Growth literature connects the term "gospel" with eternal salvation, it does so in a way that empties this beautiful word of its full meaning. McGavran writes, "The historic message of the Christian Church has been: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.' The Church has good news for the world. It is that sinners by repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ are saved by grace through faith."[81] McGavran/Arn put it this way: "'Whoever believes on the Son will have everlasting life.' This is the gospel."[82] You will note that in these quotations the gospel is being defined in terms of people's response to it rather than in terms of its content. This points to a basic weakness of Church Growth theology: Its failure to understand, appreciate and articulate the message of objective justification.

Returning to the subject of felt needs, Robert Koester devotes nineteen pages of his thesis to a discussion of this matter.[83] His conclusion: "There can be no room for ambiguity on this issue. Either the felt needs approach is the best way to do evangelism, or it is a tool that is inherently dangerous to the Gospel message understood as the message of the forgiveness of sins."[84] We agree with his assessment as long as he is referring, as he says elsewhere, to "felt needs theory *as understood by Church Growth*" [emphasis added]. This approach, which minimizes sin and grace and dilutes both law and gospel of their content, is, as he says, "antithetical to Lutheran theology."[85]

We are not as pessimistic about the future of our Synod on this issue, however, as Koester appears to be. This writer has yet to encounter any individual in the ministerium of the Synod who holds to the Church Growth Movement's position on felt needs. We are of the conviction that our pastors would equate looking for felt needs with looking for openings through which they can then bring law and gospel to people. As Koester himself acknowledges, "We should be open to looking for points of contact on which to build a discussion of the Law and Gospel,"[86] just as Jesus did at Jacob's Well and Paul at Athens Areopagus. The Scriptures are silent as to what our points of contact might be. They are not silent, however, on the need to proclaim both the

law to expose sin and the gospel to announce the forgiveness won for all by Jesus, once a point of contact has been established.

This writer has found helpful the little diagram devised by Paul Kelm:

Problems------> PROBLEM------> SOLUTION------> Solutions

The point of contact we have with an unbeliever will generally begin with surface issues, not the real problem of alienation from God, unless he or she has already had some connection with the Word, in which case the law may have already had some effect. These surface issues, or problems, will tend to be on a horizontal, person-to-person level. They can be door-openers, however, pre-evangelism, we might call it, to lead into a discussion of the real PROBLEM, the vertical one, mankind's rebellion against God. Then one has the privilege of revealing the real SOLUTION, the good news of a universal atonement through Christ, the benefits of which are offered to the repentant sinner as a free gift received by faith. After that we are in a position to talk about the problems which provided the point of contact. We won't promise, "Now that you're a Christian all your problems will vanish"; but we will promise that the same God who didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all will also along with him freely give us everything else that we truly need (cf Ro 8:32).

According to the Church Growth felt needs approach; on the other hand, one would leap right from "problems" to "solutions," thus eliminating both law and gospel. The "gospel" simply becomes the solution to the many problems of life rather than the solution to the problem. Perhaps, because the term "felt needs" is being widely used in this way and thus is open to misunderstanding, it would be advisable for us not to use it and simply to talk about the need to find a point of contact or an opening which can provide an opportunity to verbalize law and gospel.

Homogeneous Unit Theory

The homogeneous unit theory likewise stems from a faulty conception of sin and grace, law and gospel. If it is true, as McGavran states, that "the great obstacles to conversion are social, not theological"[87] and that "men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers,"[88] then his homogeneous unit theory is the only way to go.

The truth of the matter, however, is that nobody "likes to become a Christian." People might like to become church members if the church and its people and its programs are packaged attractively enough. But nobody likes to become a Christian. "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (Ro 8:7, NASB). That's the non-Christian. He is dominated 100% by the flesh and is thus 100% against God. The great obstacle to conversion lies within the person, not without. The problem is sin; the solution is God's grace in Christ. The means to deal with the problem is the means Christ has given to his Church, law and gospel.

Does this mean that we should disregard anything written on this subject? Not necessarily. Even though the theological base is flawed, there are certain common-sense elements of truth worth considering. We need to approach the matter with the basic presupposition that we are dealing here, not with what makes a Christian out of a person, which is the Spirit's work through law and gospel, but rather with what might give one the opportunity to bring law and gospel to people. We are in the area of pre-evangelism rather than evangelism.

Differences in race, language, class—all of these can be barriers to getting people to come and hear the message of salvation. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free (cf Gal 3:28), but the unbeliever is not "in Christ." This needs to be taken into account on both the home and world mission field. Within the United States, for example, we are beginning to work among the large Hispanic population and also, in some areas, among recent immigrants from Southeast Asia. The language and culture of both of these groups is markedly different from that which surrounds them. It may be easier to bring them together in their own homogeneous group and in that group tell them of God's salvation, than to seek to bring them into a group whose culture and language are foreign to them.

This is not a matter of falling in line with McGavran's contention that non-biblical offenses are more difficult hurdles to cross than the offence of the cross.[89] It is rather a matter of doing whatever it takes to gain an opportunity to bring to people the good news of forgiveness, new spiritual life and eternal salvation in Christ.

Visions and Goals

The Church Growth Movement has a strong interest in numbers. McGavran, in fact, writes, "The numerical approach is essential to understanding church growth."[90] In Church Growth thinking the effectiveness of one's ministry is measured to a large degree by numbers. Wagner, in fact, evaluates Jesus' ministry in this way. "As an evangelist," Wagner writes, "Jesus was an outstanding success."[91] How did Wagner determine this? By the fact that the number of Jesus' followers grew from 12 to 120 in just three years, a remarkable annual growth rate of 115%. Wagner conveniently ignores the fact that 115% is a dismal record in light of, e.g., Peter's "success" on Pentecost Day and subsequently. If numbers are to serve as the basis for measuring success, than the disciples were more successful than their discipler.

We see the Church Growth Movement's interest in numbers also in its emphasis on goal setting. We believe that Robert Koester sounds a good caution here. He reminds us that some goal setting can proceed from a faulty understanding of sin and grace, law and gospel. In particular, goal setting is improper when it intrudes into areas God has reserved for himself. Koester writes:

> In our sphere of responsibility, the means are the end. The ultimate end for which we hope—the conversion of souls—is God's responsibility....The nature of the Gospel...forces us to focus on preaching the Gospel. It is within these parameters that we must devise goals, visions and methods....The issue does not revolve around whether a person has zeal to win the lost. The issue revolves around whether that zeal is confined to the area of our responsibility or whether we move outside of it. The result is that in the former case, the integrity of the Gospel is maintained, while in the latter it is compromised....My concern is to remain within the circle of my responsibility....This understanding precludes establishing percentage or absolute "faith goals" *as a tool to bring about the growth of the church* [emphasis added].

In brief, Koester's point is that we can, and perhaps should, be setting ministry goals, e.g., number of evangelism calls we intend to make or number of new missions, home and abroad, we plan to open, but that we should not be setting goals in the area that is God's doing, i.e., producing results. We can only plant and water the seed; God makes it grow (cf 1 Cor 3:6). The Augsburg Confession, Article V, puts it this way: "That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, *who works faith, where and when it pleases God*, in them that hear the Gospel [emphasis added]."

This does not mean, however, that for planning purposes we, cannot, on the basis of past experience, make certain projections of what we might expect in the future. We regularly do this, for example, when planning the seating capacity of a new church. Another example: Experience might show that one can normally expect x percent of those who begin a Bible information class to complete it and publicly confess faith in Christ as their Savior. If one of a pastor's ministry goals, therefore, is to aim to get x number of people into a Bible information class during a given year and, under God, he meets that goal, he can have a relative idea of the number whom he will confirm as a result of these classes. The goal, however remains in the realm of what the pastor is called to do—to plant the seed and water it.

Some Conclusions

We could look at many more Church Growth principles, a good share of which are not the creation of the Church Growth Movement, but which have become an integral part of Church Growth thinking. To name just a few:

> Preparing a clearly articulated congregational philosophy of ministry;
> Building a congregational "church growth consciousness";
> Exerting strong, yet humble, pastoral leadership;
> Utilizing statistical studies to spot strengths and weaknesses;
> Providing a good balance of what Church Growth people call "celebration, congregation and cell";
> Giving attention to "church growth ratios";
> Mobilizing the entire membership to ministry in accordance with their spiritual gifts;
> Offering a program of evangelism in the congregation that involves all members;
> Engaging in an ongoing program of new member assimilation.

Each of these principles could well be approached in the way we have looked at such principles as felt needs and planning and goal-setting. We could point out their strengths and their weaknesses. Rather than attempting to dissect these principles one by one, however, which would require another paper this size and then some, it would appear to be appropriate at this point to pull things together by asking the question: What do we do with the Church Growth Movement? In this writer's thinking, there are four possible answers to this question.

On the one hand, we could simply accept uncritically everything that the Church Growth Movement offers and thus become a part of the Movement. We feel safe in saying that no one in our midst is advocating such an action, that all would agree with the statement of Paul Kelm: "To 'buy into' the Church Growth Movement would be to 'sell out' truth we hold dear."[93] Remember the statement of C. Peter Wagner, "If you have any major conflict with *Understanding Church Growth*, our basic text—then you should use some other name because you're not part of the Church Growth Movement."[94] Though there is much in the Church Growth Movement that commends itself, we can hardly endorse it without some major reservations, such as brought out in this essay.

A second option would be to totally reject the Church Growth Movement and everything about it. There are some in our midst who apparently are of the conviction that this is the proper course of action. Such a conviction is born of the fact that the theology which underlies the Church Growth Movement is the theology of the Reformed Church which breathes a spirit different from the theology of evangelical Lutheranism. It is the opinion of some that it is impossible to separate anything that arises out of a Reformed theological context from the theology itself.

The problem with this approach is that it ignores the fact that there are some good suggestions that can be gleaned from Church Growth literature and research, if one reads with a discerning eye. Very few of the principles of the Church Growth Movement, in fact, are totally devoid of commendable features.

A third option, which some in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are espousing, is to publicly identify oneself with the Church Growth Movement, but to be a Lutheran voice in the Movement, publishing "Lutheran" Church Growth material. Such is the course, for example, that Kent Hunter is pursuing with his Church Growth Center in Corunna, Indiana.

We have almost ignored Hunter in this paper. That is by design. Our intention has been to let you listen especially to Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, the two major voices in the Church Growth Movement. A reading of Hunter reveals that he does shore up some of the weaknesses of Church Growth theology. To give just one example, in his book, *Foundations for Church Growth*, he includes a brief but well-written section on "Church Growth and the Means of Grace in which he gives the Word and Sacraments their due. Hunter does not steer totally clear of some questionable Church Growth concepts, however.[96]

Another person who is attempting to be a Lutheran Church Growth voice is LC-MS pastor, David Luecke, a member of the faculty of the School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. Judging from what he has written, Luecke to this point has been only marginally successful in this attempt.[97]

It does not appear to be wise, for any number of reasons, or workable, for that matter, to publicly identify oneself with the Church Growth Movement and then to try to "Lutheranize" it.

There is a fourth option, which is the choice of this writer. It is the same kind of approach Lawrence Crabb, a Christian counselor, advocates over against the use of secular counseling resources. He calls it "spoiling the Egyptians" (Ex 12:36 KJV), after the action of Israel at the time they left Egypt, when they took from the Egyptians what would stand them in good stead on their journey.

So, Crabb suggests, Christian counselors can be benefited by a selective use of secular insights, "carefully screening" them "to determine their compatibility with Christian presuppositions." He realizes this is no easy task: "In spite of the best intentions to remain biblical, it is frighteningly easy to admit concepts into our thinking which compromise biblical content."[98] But Crabb is convinced that it is worth the effort.

We agree. Certainly it is better than accepting uncritically the presuppositions of secular psychology. It is also better than identifying oneself with a particular school of psychology, e.g., the behavioral school, and then trying to "Christianize" it. And, since even unbelievers can observe human behavior and offer some helpful insights, it is better than a total rejection of all that secular sources might be able to offer. This "spoiling the Egyptians" approach to psychology and counseling, a careful, selective use of what others offer, is the approach followed in our seminary's instruction in counseling.

We are convinced that this is also the best way to approach the Church Growth Movement. The parallel is not an exact one, of course, since Church Growth Movement principles do not spring from a secular source. Though there are obvious advantages to this, there is one disadvantage. It may be easier to discern the error of some secular psychological principles, since they are blatantly anti-Christian, than to discern the error of a certain Church Growth Movement principle which may be couched in language more harmonious to our ears.

Yet this writer is confident we won't go astray in adopting a "spoiling the Egyptians" approach to the various Church Growth Movement sociological principles and the research that produced them. We can be selective, utilizing what is good and helpful, while at the same time refraining from identifying ourselves directly with the Movement.

We will keep on the right track if we remember two things. First, we need to remember that sociological research and principles do not build the Church. They serve a ministerial, supportive role, not a magisterial role. Only the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace, builds the Church.

Sociological principles, therefore, must never assume a position of greater importance than the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. Nor dare they even be placed on the same level as Word and Sacrament. The Church doesn't grow when proper sociological conditions are met. The Church doesn't grow when proper sociological conditions are met and law and gospel are preached. The Church grows when law and gospel are preached (Is 55:10,11).

The second thing we need to remember is that the Church Growth Movement tends to ignore the first thing we need to remember. C. Peter Wagner writes, "Church growth...looks to social sciences as a cognate discipline,"[99] that is, a discipline which is allied with rather than subservient to theology. Wagner actually goes further than that. He says,

The classical approach judges the validity of any experience on the basis of previously established theological principles. In contrast, Church Growth leans toward a phenomenological approach which holds theological conclusions somewhat more tentatively and is open to revising them when necessary in the light of what is learned through experience.

Wagner's thesis, it would appear, is that if your theology at present doesn't have room for a factor that causes churches to grow, then it is time to revise your theology. Test by the results rather than by the Scriptures.

We need to read with care, therefore, with eyes wide open to the presuppositions of the writers. Evaluate carefully. Examine in the light of Scripture. In general, adapt rather than adopt. This writer is confident that the pastors in the ministerium of our Synod have the training and ability to exercise such discernment. They are able to do the necessary sifting and in this way to benefit from whatever Church Growth Movement study and research offer that may serve to enhance the ministry of preaching law and gospel.

Toward a Biblical Lutheran Theology of Church Growth

In an attempt to summarize what we have been trying to say in this essay, we offer the following theses on church growth. We pray that they may be of some help in grappling with this issue.

1. Without Christ mankind is totally lost and condemned and without hope (Ro 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22; Eph 2:12).
2. Mankind's greatest need is the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God (Ro 6:23; Eph 2:3b).
3. Through his perfect life and willing death Christ has redeemed the world (Ro 5:6-8; 3:23-24; 5:18-19).
4. As a result of Christ's work of redemption God has declared the whole world to be not guilty (Ro 5:18-19; 2 Cor 5:19-21) (universal, objective justification).
5. Christ's universal atonement establishes the whole world as the Church's field of witness. Hence, Christ has commissioned his Church to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).
6. The Church consists of all believers in Christ. All Christians, therefore, as priests of God, have a part in the mission of making disciples (1 Pt 2:9-12; 3:15-16; Mt 5:14-16).
7. A disciple is a believer in Jesus Christ (Mt 28:19; compare Mk 16:15) (individual, subjective justification).
8. The Church is to make disciples by using the means of grace (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47-48).
9. Through the law, God reveals to the world its sin and convicts it of its lostness (Ro 3:20; 7:7).
10. Through the gospel in Word and Sacrament, God brings to the world the message of the finished work of Christ (2 Cor 5:18-19).
11. Only the gospel produces true growth of the Church. The gospel in Word and Sacrament is the living, powerful means of grace by which God saves lost and condemned people (Ro 1:16; He 4:12; 1 Pt 1:23; Ti 3:5; 1 Pt 3:21).
12. Conversion is a miracle of God, solely the work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel and not in any way a self-determined decision of an individual or group of individuals (2 Th 2:14; 1 Cor 12:3).
13. One who has been converted by the Holy Spirit through the gospel has been born again and has become a member of the Kingdom of God, that is, the Holy Christian Church (in 3:3,5).
14. While there may be converted people outside of visible gatherings of people around the means of grace (normally the local congregation), there are no converted people outside of the Holy Christian Church, the Una Sancta (Eph 4:4-6).
15. It is God-pleasing to appeal to a convert to join with others who have united in a fellowship around the means of grace, i.e., a local congregation (He 10:24-25; 2 Pt 3:18).
16. This appeal, however, is in the realm of sanctification rather than justification. Care must be taken to maintain the distinction that sanctification follows justification and that

sanctification is seen as that which is necessary, but not that which is necessary for salvation (1 in 4:19; Ro 3:28; in 15:1-8).

17. The primary concern of Christians toward non-Christians must always be for their eternal salvation (Mt 16:26). Hence the greatest need is to bring unbelievers to repentance and faith in Jesus through the gospel and thus into the Holy Christian Church. Making disciples is more important than making church members (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:46; in 14:6; Eph 5:23).

18. As Christians use the means of grace to make disciples, they will remember the nature of the unbeliever, that he is spiritually blind, dead and an enemy of God (1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1; Ro 8:7). This has implications for witnessing: We should not expect a proper spiritual interest, understanding or motivation on the part of the unregenerated; We should not be discouraged if we meet with an initial negative response; We need to be persistent and persuasive in our witness (Ac 9:22,28-29; 17:2-3; 18:4; 19:8).

19. As Christians use the means of grace to make disciples, they will also remember the nature of the means of grace. God's Word is clear, sufficient and efficacious. This likewise has implications for witnessing: We are not to manipulate people with psychology or emotion (2 Cor 4:2); We are not to seek to argue people into rational submission (1 Cor 1:18-25); We rather are to plant and water the seed of the Word, doing so as clearly, simply and often as possible, trusting God to make it grow and produce disciples. This is "church growth" in the biblical sense (1 Cor 3:6-7).

20. As Christians use the means of grace to make disciples, they will remember that while they can do nothing to add to the power inherent in the gospel, they can unconsciously put barriers in the way of the gospel, making it more difficult to communicate it to unbelievers (2 Cor 6:3).

21. The social sciences, which make observations about people and societies in God's creation, may assist Christians in their work of making disciples, especially by apprising them of possible points of contact with the unchurched and by alerting them to possible external barriers which may keep people from being willing to listen to a Christian's testimony. Thus the social sciences can help the Christian in his quest to become all things to all people so that by all possible means he might win some (1 Cor 9:22).

22. The social sciences can observe and measure only that which is visible, i.e., outward growth, not that which is invisible to all but God himself, i.e., faith and growth of the Church (2 Tm 2:19).

23. The social sciences should not be used, therefore, for measuring the "success" of one's ministry. A successful ministry is measured by a faithful stewardship of "the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1-5).

24. Faithful stewardship means, first of all, remaining sound in doctrine. It also means making the best use of our time and gifts and resources, which may well include a judicious use of the findings of the social sciences—all to be used in the service of the gospel (Jer 23:28; Mt 24:14-30).[101]

25. Since God causes his Church to grow through the means of grace, use of the social sciences must, therefore, always be subservient to the use of the means of grace (Ro 1:16).

All praise and glory to our gracious God, who has given us his Son and the gospel in Word and Sacraments. May we, as we pursue the mission mandate to "make disciples of all nations," honor the Son and the gospel in all we do and say.

Appendix: Guidelines for Evaluation

These "Guidelines" for evaluating an evangelism program or technique were written by Dr. Samuel Nafzger, executive secretary of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, as a part of an essay, "Theological Concerns in Evangelism and Church Growth," delivered to a Great Commission Convocation within the Missouri Synod in 1984. Subsequently, with some minor modification, they became a part of the document, *Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement*, prepared by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. What follows is a quotation from pages 48 and 49 of that document: From a Lutheran perspective the key question is: "How does the author apply Law and Gospel?" More specifically, the following questions should be asked:

a. Does the program or technique suggest approaching the unconverted first with the Gospel rather than seeking to discover whether the person has a knowledge of his or her sin and lost condition without Christ?

b. Does the program or technique present the Gospel in a way that suggests that human beings have the ability within themselves to make a decision for Christ rather than that faith comes through the operation of the Holy Spirit?

c. Does the program or technique, either directly or indirectly, focus attention on what is taking place within the individual rather than on what took place on the cross of Jesus Christ? Does it tend to regard the presence of certain extraordinary—or even ordinary—gifts of the Spirit as a basis for certainty of forgiveness and salvation? Does it foster the impression that faith is a good work that merits God's favor?

d. Does this program or technique suggest that there are at least three categories of people—unrepentant sinners, believers or those who have accepted Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, and disciples and those who have accepted Christ as both Lord and Savior?

e. Does the program or technique give the impression, either directly or indirectly, that spiritual growth is always visible to the human eye and can therefore be measured by statistics and plotted on charts and graphs?

f. Does this program or technique create the illusion that the acceptance of the Gospel by sinners is attributable to the use of this program or technique?

g. Does this program or technique lead to the conclusion that the lack of positive results, when this occurs, is attributable solely to the way in which it was implemented?

When questions such as these must be answered in the affirmative, there is confusion of sanctification with justification and a falling into work-righteousness.

But Lutherans must also guard against the opposite error, the separation of faith and good works which results in apathy, lethargy, and indifference. The following questions must also be asked.

a. Is the lack of numerical growth in our congregation the result of a failure to prepare carefully and to execute a plan for reaching those people in our community who do not know Christ?

b. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to our failure to keep records and to make use of statistics and measuring devices to see weaknesses and discover trends?

c. Have we made wise use of the resources and insights at our disposal—for example, the social sciences, the arts, etc.—in proclaiming the Gospel and in furthering Christian nurture?

d. Are we guilty of excusing our apathy and indifference for sharing the Gospel through a kind of "glorification of littleness"?

e.   Do we tend to attribute an absence of numerical growth to faithfulness rather than to laziness and inactivity?

f.   Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to a failure to communicate the Gospel clearly?

When these questions can be answered in the affirmative, then we have separated justification and sanctification and have fallen into the error of cheap grace or indulging sin.

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Endnotes

[i] C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (1984), p 43.

[ii] Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (1976), p 12.

[iii] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 26.

[iv] This definition appeared in *Growth Partners*, vol. 3 no 3, May/June 1986, p 1.

[v] *Ibid*, p 1.

[vi] C. Peter Wagner, *Global Church Growth*, vol. XXII, no 1, Jan-Mar 1985, p 9.

[vii] Donald A. McGavran, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate* (1989), p 57.

[viii] *Ibid*, p 59.

[ix] *Understanding Church Growth* was the end result of a series of nine annual seminars on Church Growth conducted by McGavran at Winona Lake, Indiana.

[x] C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p 23.

[xi] *Global Church Growth*, vol. XXII, no 1, Jan-Mar 1995, p 9.

[xii] *Global Church Growth*, vol. XXII, no 1, Jan-Mar 1985, pp 9-10.

[xiii] John Vaughan, in *The Complete Book of Church Growth* (1981), p 109.

[xiv] Donald A. McGavran and Win Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (1977), p 15.

[xv] C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (1984), p 43.

[xvi] Donald A. McGavran *Effective Evangelism* (1988), p 108.

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[xix] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 32.

[xx] *Ibid*, p 27.

[xxi] *Ibid*, p 28.

[xxii] Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (1984), p 19.

[xxiii] Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), pp 62, 60.

[xxiv] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 33.

[xxv] *Ibid*, p 34.

[xxvi] *Ibid*, pp 170, 246.

[xxvii] Donald A. McGavran and George G. Hunter III, *Church Growth Strategies That Work* (1980), p 26.

[xxviii] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 291.

[xxix] C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), pp 67, 68.

[xxx] Win Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (1982), pp 26, 27.

[xxxi] Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth*, p 62.

[xxxii] *Ibid*, p 67.

[xxxiii] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 242.

[xxxiv] C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), pp 79-86.

[xxxv] *Ibid*, p 77.

[xxxvi] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 262.

[xxxvii] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 95.

[xxxviii] C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), p 181.

[xxxix] McGavran, *Effective Evangelism* (1988), pp. 111-113, 116.

[xl] McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), pp. 223, 230.

[xli] McGavran, *Bridges of God* (1955), p 94.

[xlii] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 335.

[xliii] *Ibid*, pp. 230-232.

[42] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 335.

[43] *Ibid*, pp 230-232.

[44] *Ibid*, p 75.

[45] *Ibid*, p 406.

[46] C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church* (1976), pp 110,116.

[47] Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), p 181.

[48] *Ibid*, p 182

[49] Wagner, *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p 283.

[50] Robert J. Koester, Law and Gospel: The foundation of Lutheran Ministry with Reference to the Church Growth Movement (1989), p 77fn.

[51] C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), p 53.

[52] *Ibid*, p 54.

[53] *Ibid*, p 54.

[54] *Ibid*, p 54.

[55] Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (1980), pp 118,119.

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[58] Two legthier studies, in particular, should be mentioned: Law and Gospel: The Foundation of Lutheran Ministry with Refernce to the Chruch Growth Movement (1989), by WELS pastor Robert J. Koester, a dissertation sumitted to the faculty of the School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, and THe Chruch Growth Movement: ALutheran Analysis (1985), by LC-MS pastor Steve O. Scheiderer, a master of sacred theology thesis submitted to Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

[59] E.H. Wendland, "Church Growth Theology" *(Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 78, no 2, April 1981), p 112.

[60] *Ibid*, pp 110-111.

[61] C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian* (1983), pp 41, 44, 49.

[62] Quoted by E.H. Wendland in "Church Growth Theology" (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol 78, no 2, April 1981), 111.

[63] Bernard L. Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage* (1973), pp 91-92.

[64] *Ibid*, p 92.

[65] Donald A. McGavran, *Effective Evangelism* (1988), p 105.

[66] *Ibid*, p 107.

[67] *Ibid*, p 107.

[68] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 198.

[69] C, Peter Wagner, ed., *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p 190.

[70] Glenn Huebel, "The Church Growth Movement: A Word of Caution" (*Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol 50, no 3,4, July-Oct 1986), p 180.

[71] C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), pp 66-67.

[72] C. Peter Wagner, Strategies for Church Growth (1987), p 54.

[73] McGavran, for example, writes: "No one is advocating multiplying unconverted, nominal Christians. No one is advocating adding 'mere numbers.' Effective evangelism never brings in merely an additional warm body" (*Effective Evangelism* [1988], p 125).

[74] Gregory L. Jackson, "Conversion through the Holy Spirit" (essay delivered to the Ohio Pastoral Conference of the Michigan District of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod at Gibsonia, Pennsylvania, October 1989), p 18.

[75] C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p 44.

[76] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 170.

[77] George G. Hunter III, *The Contagious Congregation* (1979), p 106.

[78] C. Peter Wager, *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p 290.

[79] Charles L. Cortright, "Church Growth and Its Implications for the Use of the Means of Grace in a Confessional, Liturgical Church" (essay delivered at the Free Lutheran Conference of the Peninsula, held at Grace Lutheran Church, San Mateo, CA, Feb 2, 1989, p 18).

[80] George G. Hunter III, *The Contagious Congregation* (1979), p 100.

[81] Donald A. McGavran, *Bridges of God* (1955), p 93.

[82] Donald A. McGavran and Win Arn, *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (1977), p 28.

[83] Robert J. Koester, *Law and Gospel: The Foundation of Lutheran Ministry with Reference to the Church Growth Movement* (1989), pp 96-115.

[84] *Ibid*, p 109.

[85] *Ibid*, p 100.

[86] *Ibid*, p 107.

[87] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 215.

[88] *Ibid*, p 223.

[89] Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (1980), p 230.

[90] *Ibid*, p 93.

[91] C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (1976), p 165.

[92] Robert J. Koester, Law and Gospel: The Foundation of Lutheran Ministry with Reference to the Church Growth Movement (1989), pp 86, 94, 95.

[93] Paul E. Kelm, "The Church Growth Movement: An Explanation and Evaluation" (1986), p 2.

[94] "Global Church Growth," vol XXII, no 1, Jan-Mar 1985, p 9.

[95] Kent R. Hunter, *Foundations for Church Growth* (1983), pp 39-42.

[96] We refer anyone interested in pursuing this matter further to the master of sacred theology thesis of Steve O. Scheiderer, *The Church Growth Movement: A Lutheran Analysis* (1985).

[97] Cf Luecke's books, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance* (1988). Cf also the review article on the book by the writer of this essay in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (vol 87, no 2, Spring 1990), pp 137-142.

[98] Lawrence J. Crabb Jr, *Effective Biblical Counseling* (1977), p 47.

[99] C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth: State of the Art* (1986), p 33.

[100] Wagner*, Strategies for Church Growth* (1987), p 38.

[101] Cf the helpful diagnostic questions in *Evangelism and Church Growth With Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement* (1987), a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, questions which, if answered in the affirmative, suggest that "we have separated justification and sanctification and have fallen into the error of cheap grace or indulging sin" (cf Appendix for more detail):

a. Is the lack of numerical growth in our congregation the result of a failure to prepare carefully and to execute a plan for reaching those people in our community who do not know Christ?

b. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to our failure to keep records and to make use of statistics and measuring devices to see weaknesses and discover trends?

c. Have we made wise use of the resources and insights at our disposal—for example, the social sciences, the arts, etc.—in proclaiming the Gospel and in furthering Christian nurture?

d. Are we guilty of excusing our apathy and indifference for sharing the Gospel through a kind of "glorification of littleness"?

e. Do we tend to attribute an absence of numerical growth to faithfulness rather than to laziness and inactivity?

f. Is a lack of new members attributable, at least in part, to a failure to communicate the Gospel clearly?