
Editorial: The Responsibility of the Seminary For World Evangelization

by Frank Bateman Stanger

As we begin the decade of the '80s, there is an inescapable obligation for evangelical Christians to think clearly concerning the meaning of evangelism and to be gripped afresh by the Church's responsibility for world evangelization.

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ is the most important assignment ever given to the Church. The Church's faithfulness in responding to the Great Commission across the centuries is the reason why the Church exists in every part of the world today. To be more personal, each of us would not be a Christian today if somebody, somewhere, had not been faithful in fulfilling the Great Commission.

The future of civilization is dependent upon the penetration of individuals and society by the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth must be faced that even now western civilization is in such a state of deterioration that, unless spiritual renewal occurs miraculously and quickly, it will collapse. But this civilizational crisis is also global. Biblical Christianity appears as the only resource adequate for saving contemporary persons and society from devastating doom.

Never has the need for world evangelization been greater. The world population is now just over 4 billion people. All who are called Christian, both committed and nominal, number approximately 1.2 billion. This leaves about 2.8 billion of the world's population in need

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of Christian evangelization.

Many missiologists believe that we stand at the threshold of the greatest era of evangelization the Christian Church has ever known. The Covenant of the World Congress on Evangelism, held in Lausanne in 1974, declares:

We rejoice that a new missionary era has dawned. The dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing. God is raising up from the younger churches a great new resource for world evangelization, and is thus demonstrating that the responsibility to evangelize belongs to the whole body of Christ. All churches should therefore be asking God and themselves what they should be doing both to reach their own area and to send missionaries to other parts of the world. A re-evaluation of our missionary responsibility and role should be continuous. Thus a growing partnership of churches will develop and the universal character of Christ's church will be more clearly exhibited.

From its founding nearly six decades ago, Asbury Theological Seminary has been committed to evangelism and missions. This is clearly implied in the purpose of the Seminary as stated in the original Articles of Incorporation: "It shall be the objective of this seminary to prepare and send forth an . . . evangelistic ministry." Across the years scores of our graduates have gone into all parts of the world to serve as evangelists and missionaries. We have both a Chair of Evangelism and a Chair of Christian Missions in our present academic structure. From time to time, guest faculty are brought to our campus to teach additional courses in both evangelism and missions.

But our emphasis upon missions and evangelism is far more than academic. It is the spirit of our campus. Our services on campus have an evangelistic ring about them. Our pastors-in-the-making are trained to preach evangelistically. All of our courses are taught with an emphasis upon the personal experience of scriptural truth. We have an active missionary organization, known as World Outreach, which enthusiastically promotes missions and supports missionary projects around the world. A missionary conference is held on campus annually. Students are taught how to make their local churches increasingly missionary-minded and active.

The Responsibility of the Seminary for World Evangelization

Asbury Theological Seminary is now standing on the threshold of a great new advance in evangelism and missions. On November 13, 1979, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted to establish the E. Stanley Jones School of Evangelism and World Mission as an integral part of the academic program of the Seminary.

Included in the dynamics which motivated the Administration and Trustees to establish such a school of evangelism and world mission are considerations such as these:

- 2.8 billion persons throughout the world are undisciplined.
- 155,000,000 persons in the United States are undisciplined.
- Opportunities for world evangelization are greater now than ever before because of communications potential and opening doors in many countries previously closed, e.g., China.
- A facility for advanced graduate training in evangelism and missions does not exist in the Wesleyan community.
- The fulfillment of Christ's "Great Commission" to make disciples of all nations is at the heart of the purpose for which Asbury Theological Seminary was established.
- The purpose, doctrinal commitment, institutional independence and geographical location in the mid-east region uniquely qualify Asbury Theological Seminary to provide a center for such training in evangelism and missions.
- The Wesleyan movement on the world front has reached a plateau in growth and influence and is in danger of future decline, because of a neglected emphasis on evangelism and missions.

The new School of Evangelism and World Mission at Asbury Theological Seminary is named after the late E. Stanley Jones, whom many declare to have been the most influential evangelist/missionary of the 20th century. Dr. Jones liked to refer to himself as missionary to India and evangelist to America. Actually, like his spiritual forbear, John Wesley, the world was his parish.

Permission to name the school after her father was given by Eunice Jones Mathews, wife of Bishop James K. Mathews, of Washington, D.C. In the official letter of approval to the Board of Trustees, Mrs. Mathews wrote:

I think my father would be pleased — shall I say: is pleased. He would, of course, insist on openness in every way: to all who love the Lord regardless of race; openness to such truth

as the Holy Spirit reveals. He would not wish for a narrow, confining Gospel to be advocated and proclaimed. Rather, he would rejoice in the liberating word, a fullness of message offering abundant living to all people. He would want Jesus Christ preached according to the Wesleyan perspective: "in all His offices." He would want the Kingdom emphasis to be set forth: "An Unshakable Kingdom and an Unchanging Lord," the Gospel seen as corporate as well as individual in its scope.

But you know my father's spirit. In remembering him he would desire that Jesus Christ should be honored and lifted up.

The E. Stanley Jones School of Evangelism and World Mission will provide degree programs at the Master's and Doctoral levels designed especially for pastors, full-time evangelists, international students preparing for ministry in their home countries, career missionaries, and church leaders from around the world. Based on cross-cultural communication, the curriculum for the school will include anthropology, linguistics, communications, Bible translation, missiology and regional studies, as well as a focus on the theology and history of missions. The focus of the School will be concern for the evangelization of North America, as well as all other cultures and sub-cultures of the world.

Inherent in such an academic program of evangelism and world mission will be the outreach of communication from the School. When the problem has been defined, the solution developed and implemented, and its effectiveness evaluated, the results will be communicated from the campus to the public. The communication process will include the extensive use of non-print media, research reports, published articles, creation of a journal, books, and participation in major evangelism and missions conferences.

Thus Asbury Theological Seminary will be on the "cutting edge" of theological education in the 80s, which is already being characterized as the "decade of evangelism."