

EDITORIAL

W. CURRY MAVIS – A TRIBUTE

Frank Bateman Stanger*

Every person's life has drama in it. This is what makes a personality colorful. This is one of the reasons every individual has his own distinctive way of influencing others.

We pay tribute today to one in whose life the dramatic began at an early age. Can you picture a very young hard working farm boy in the Mid-west who at a very early age had an unusual craving for both school and church? Certainly attendance at either afforded at least a temporary release from his strenuous farm labors. Or can you visualize a young fellow and his twenty two months older brother traveling to school together in a horse and buggy, or on a horse-drawn sled in the winter, or later in a Model T Ford that wouldn't start when it got wet? Once after a heavy snow storm they had to ride on a freight train in order to get to high school.

These brothers became college roommates. Often they hitch-hiked to college. Upon occasion they drove a Model T Ford, and it turned out to be a rather precarious situation whenever there were horses wandering in the roads at night. Once they returned to college riding in the caboose of a stock train.

These brothers have maintained a close relationship throughout their entire lives. Attending high school and college together, they also worked four summers together at the Fisher Body Plant in Pontiac, Michigan. Both brothers have a deep appreciation for one another. Curry's brother, Dr. Vivien Maves, was retired in 1971, as Professor of Educational Psychology at Evansville University.

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The Model T car seemed to be indispensable in young Curry's life. When it came time for his wedding day the Model T was headed east from Iowa for New York City and made the trip in good order (except for the one time he tipped over in it).

From the beginning life was very real, life was very earnest—little wonder is it that all of W. Curry Mavis' life has been characterized by intense activity, significant achievements, unforgettable episodes, lasting influences.

W. Curry Mavis was born in West Salem, Illinois. He was converted and called into the Christian ministry at the age of nine. He received the A.B. degree from Greenville College in 1928 and the M.A. degree from New York University in 1934. The University of Southern California awarded him the Master of Theology degree in 1943 and the Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1945. He was elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa as a result of his doctoral studies. His alma mater, Greenville College, honored him with the Doctor of Divinity degree in 1953.

His vocational vita reads as follows:

Pastor of Free Methodist Church, Riceville, Iowa, 1928-1930
District Superintendent, Minnesota-Northern Iowa Conference,
1931-1936

Pastor, College Church and Professor of Religion at Wessington
Springs College, Wessington Springs, South Dakota,
1936-1939

President, Los Angeles Pacific College, Los Angeles, California
1939-1941

Pastor, Free Methodist Church, Pomona, California, 1941-1944

Pastor, Free Methodist Church, Pasadena, California, 1944-1945

Professor of Religion, Greenville College, Greenville, Illinois,
1945-1947

Dean of John Wesley Seminary Foundation and Professor of
Pastoral Work, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore,
Kentucky, 1947-1960

Professor of Pastoral Theology, Asbury Theological Seminary,
1947-1973

He has participated in several study sabbaticals abroad. He is the author of *Advancing The Smaller Local Church, Beyond Conformity, The Psychology of Christian Experience*, and *Personal Renewal Through Christian Conversion*. For ten years he was the editor of *The Christian Minister* magazine.

EARLY IMPRESSIONS

I remember well those early days when I was first privileged to be associated with W. Curry Mavis. One meeting stands out in bold relief. It was in 1959 and I had recently been elected Executive Vice President of Asbury Theological Seminary. It was during one of my visits to campus before I had assumed the duties of my new office. I visited with him in his office on the second floor of the Henry Clay Morrison Administration Building.

I was deeply impressed by his personableness, his approachableness, his skill in personal communication, his capacity for creating an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness. I knew at once that here was a Christian gentleman, wholeheartedly dedicated to Jesus Christ, fully committed to his vocation, convincingly loyal to the Church of Jesus Christ. I sensed that the basic heartthrobs of his life and academic ministry found expression in his confidence that the Spirit of Jesus Christ should and can be dominant in every personal situation, in every interpersonal relationship, and in all valid expressions of institutional life.

DEEPENING IMPRESSIONS

Those who know W. Curry Mavis and are associated with him personally and professionally sense the depth of his character, the breadth of his interests and abilities, the height of his spiritual devotion, and the length of his influence.

He is a man of unusual professional versatility. His wide range of vocational activities bear eloquent witness to this—pastor, evangelist, conference superintendent, educational administrator, teacher, scholar, author.

He is a Christian gentleman who is characterized by unusual personal sensitivities. He possesses a deep capacity for reacting understandingly and sympathetically to people and situations, and has an unusual genius for communicating effectively at such times. He has never yielded to the assaults of professionalism. His responses are utterly sincere, and his counsel is always without any kind of veneer.

He is a man of deep spiritual dedication and unrelenting personal discipline. He is a Christian through and through. He practices the Presence of God. He is skilled in the use of spiritual devotional practices. He is an ardent churchman. Particularly has he manifested his disciplined life in the continual aliveness of his mind. He has kept his intellect alert.

He has been intent upon the continuing pursuit of truth. He has kept professionally abreast in his field.

He is a man of courage and unyielding convictions. He has been willing to pay the price, sometimes at great personal cost for what he believes. But his own intense convictions never keep him from being both objective and tolerant in his relations to others. He has the genius for seeing things objectively, for penetrating to the heart of issues, for seizing upon reality. He has the ability to adjust his own level of maturity to any lesser level of immaturity as he seeks to help others arrive at a fuller degree of truth.

He is a man with an unusual concern for an educated ministry. For three decades he has given his life to the training of ministerial students, and most of this time on the graduate theological level. He has always been a leader in his denomination in the advocacy of a well-trained ministry. He was one of the founders and the first Dean of the John Wesley Seminary Foundation at Asbury Theological Seminary. Because of his love and concern for students he has been totally committed to his teaching task. Wherever he has taught or lectured, on or off-campus, he has been intent on making "good ministers" better for the sake of Jesus Christ and His Church.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Indelible is the influence of an individual when good first impressions become deepening impressions which in turn become lasting impressions. Truly the life and ministries of W. Curry Mavis will have an abiding influence upon all who have known him, upon all the institutions which he has served, and in support of all the high and worthy causes to which he has committed his life.

W. Curry Mavis has made a lasting impression upon his family and friends. They rise up and call him "blessed."

As a teacher he has made a lasting impression upon the almost endless line of students he has taught. As representative of this let me share what one of his most gifted students, and one of the Seminary's most distinguished alumni, has said about him:

I remember his great skill in human relationships. From my perspective then as an aspiring minister, he seemed to be a good and honest man with a savy about life. Moreover, he seemed willing to interact realistically with others. He made it clear to me that there were changeless principles from which one took his sightings in dealing with other persons.

I remember too his well organized classroom lectures.

I remember Dr. Mavis as a helpful personal counselor, easy to approach and easy to trust.

This same alumnus summarized it all by saying that Dr. Mavis had influenced his life and ministry perhaps as much as any other human being apart from his parents.

W. Curry Mavis has made a lasting impression upon Asbury Theological Seminary. For twenty six years he has walked the halls of the Seminary, taught in the classrooms, counseled in his office, worshipped in the chapel, shared his spiritual ministry from the pulpit, knelt in prayer with his colleagues and supported with his gifts and concern every significant development in the life of the Seminary.

In addition to his years of service as head of the Department of Pastoral Ministry he also served for 12 years as the Chairman of the Division of Practical Theology. His continuing faithfulness, his cooperative spirit, his academic concerns, his administrative finesse resulted in significant academic leadership in the life of the Seminary.

W. Curry Mavis has made a significant contribution to his church. He has always been a churchman. He has been a loyal son of the denomination which mothered him. He has served with distinction on all levels of denominational activity and leadership. In these recent years, he has served the church in a specialized way as a result of his concerns for Christian-oriented, church related higher education. For a long time he has been a member of the Board of Trustees of his alma mater, Greenville College, and recently served for a period as Chairman of the Board. Truly it has been his prayer: "Thy Kingdom come—through the Church, through Christian education, through ministerial training."

What more could a person ask—to have made a lasting impression upon his family and friends, upon his students, upon the churches, the colleges, and the theological seminary that he served, upon his denomination, upon the large concerns of the Kingdom of God throughout the world! Eternity alone will reveal the full influence of his life and ministry!

The quality of the life of W. Curry Mavis, and the occasion of the writing of this tribute, are meaningfully summarized in these lines penned by my late father:

"For this is Life:
To have and hold
Some precious love and a little gold,
To build a dream with deeds well done,

And rest an hour before the sun
Sinks down to night; then journey on
The unmapped way to Heaven's dawn."

— Frank Bateman Stanger