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**The Spiritual Vision and Mission of E. Stanley Jones, Evangelist**

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**Overview**

It is widely agreed that E. Stanley Jones was one of the greatest Methodist missionaries to India, North America, and indeed to the world. In addition to his work in and with churches and structures, he also won the attention and respect of the academic, business and political communities of his day; including a deep personal friendship with Mahatma Gandhi. This paper will briefly examine the theology, spirituality and practice that made Brother Stanley so effective in relating to people of other faiths and cultures; with special attention given to his Round Table Conversations as a tool for sharing faith experiences with people of other religious traditions.

**The Man and His Impact**

E. Stanley Jones mission to India began in 1907 at the age of 23 as a missionary with the Methodist Episcopal Church. While his life and ministry centered in India and the United States from that point on, his reach was truly global. He began his ministry in India by serving as the English-speaking pastor of the Methodist Church in Lucknow. By the end of the 1930s his preaching ministry expanded to Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, other areas in the Middle East, Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, China, and Singapore. By the end of his life, he had published twenty-eight books, two of which sold over one million copies. In 1938 *Time* magazine in the USA referred to him as “the world’s greatest missionary.” In their 1964 edition they stated that Jones only peer in international Christian ministry was the Rev. Billy Graham.

Reinhold Niebuhr described E. Stanley Jones as one of the great saints of his time.<sup>1</sup> In 1962 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1963 Dr. Jones received the Gandhi Peace Prize.

Another measure of Jones’ influence is reflected his periodic meetings and correspondence with such important figures as Presidents Roosevelt and Eisenhower, General Douglas MacArthur, John Foster Dulles, and Japanese Emperor Hirohito. His work as a liaison between Roosevelt and Japanese diplomats in October and November of 1941 is seen by

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen A. Graham, *Ordinary Man Extraordinary Mission: The Life and Work of E. Stanley Jones* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), p. 397.

some as almost avoiding (if only postponing) the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Methodist Episcopal Church, E. Stanley Jones was elected Bishop in 1928 but withdrew his name the morning after his election. He was regularly consulted by mission boards and the leaders of the National Council of Churches.

Jones early and unwavering support of the Indian Independence movement led to his banishment from India for a period of years. His visits to Russia and his public reflections on communism brought unwanted attention from the FBI.<sup>3</sup>

E. Stanley Jones was a passionate in his love for India, the nation and its people. He was a friend of Mahatma Gandhi and referred to his murder as the greatest tragedy since the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>4</sup> And India loved Brother Stanley back, many leaders came to refer to him as an adopted son. On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, over 75,000 persons gathered from the Mar Thoma Syrian Church to celebrate his life and ministry in India.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Man and His Spiritual Journey**

Born in Clarksville, Maryland, in 1884, Stanley Jones had an unremarkable life until the preaching of an evangelist awakened him to the need and the possibility of becoming a Christian *altogether* (to use Charles Wesley's words). In his spiritual autobiography, *Song of Ascents* published at the age of 83, he tells us that he was 15 years old when he responded to the invitation to Christian commitment. However,

I wanted the Kingdom of God, wanted reconciliation with my heavenly Father, but took church membership as a substitute.... I felt religious for a few weeks, and then it faded out and I was back again exactly where I was before....<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, "the real thing came" through the evangelist, Robert J. Bateman at the Memorial Church; although the real catalyst and spiritual guide was Miss Nellie Logan, his Sunday School teacher. In Stanley's own words, "I had him—Jesus—and he had me. We had each other. I belonged."<sup>7</sup> Jones mature reflection was that his conversion experience, although somewhat typical for this period in North America, was in no way normative for any other person because conversion experiences are personal and particular—as unique as human beings are unique. The time, place and manner are not what is significant, the inner reality of spiritual transformation is.

After an initial period of admiration of the evangelist, Robert Bateman, Jones became aware of human deficiencies in this man and learned to not be distracted by the messenger and stay focused on the message—the living Word. Stanley learned to "make everything serve" and to follow Christ alone. "I learned to glance at men and gaze at Jesus."<sup>8</sup>

Having been born again, Stanley found his desire for God was not satisfied, but rather

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 335-6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1963), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Graham, *Ordinary Man*, p. 367.

<sup>6</sup> *Song of Ascents*, Abingdon Press, 1968, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> p. 37.

enhanced; in the same way a growing child requires more of the mother, not less. His mature reflection on this early experience confirmed his longstanding belief that this desire for more of God is human reality, present in all people in all cultures. Therefore, it is universally true and essential to the message of every evangelist.

I was satisfied to my depths with what I had, but I wanted more. ... “Not dissatisfied, but forever unsatisfied” became my basic attitude.... I saw that conversion was a once-and-for-all and yet an expanding experience to be applied to larger and larger areas of life. I was on the quest for more, not different, but more. I would be a Christian in the making.<sup>9</sup>

After formative experiences in his local class meeting, Stanley was shaken and distressed because he came very close to falling into sin. He asked for prayer and the entire group fell on their knees,

and they lifted me back to the bosom of God by faith and love....My destiny was in the hands of that group....That germ of experience became, I believe, the idea and impulse back of the Christian Ashram movement.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the transforming power of the class meeting, the young Mr. Jones enjoyed the company of a spiritual guide that proved so beneficial that he concluded: “nothing can take the place of a personal friendship.” In Stanley’s case, it was Miss Nellie Logan, a beloved Sunday School teacher and family friend. As Stanley’s mother was dying, she called Miss Nellie and told her, “I am turning him over to you, for you to take up my vigil of prayer for him.”<sup>11</sup>

At the time young Stanley was ready for college, his father lost his job, the family home the beds they slept on. Poverty was his lived reality. After selling insurance for a year, he had enough money to answer the call to become a preacher and attend one year at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky. Here, in 1903, he found the vocabulary and experience of the second blessing or work of the Holy Spirit with the holiness tradition.

The Bible and *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*<sup>12</sup> guided the young Jones to even deeper experience of the Holy Spirit and surrender.

The doubts began to close in on me....When suddenly I was filled—filled with the Holy Spirit. Wave after wave of the Spirit seemed to be going through me as a cleansing fire. I could only walk the floor with tears of joy flowing down my cheeks. I could do nothing but praise him—and did. I knew this was no passing emotion; the Holy Spirit had come to abide with me forever.<sup>13</sup>

However, the mature Jones acknowledges that this new level of conversion did not erase the reality of the human desires related to “self, sex and the herd.” These desires were not eliminated; they were cleansed, consecrated and coordinated—all good gifts of God intended

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<sup>9</sup> p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> p. 42f.

<sup>11</sup> p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Whitehall Smith is a Quaker writer.

<sup>13</sup> p. 53.

for good in the created order.

Following graduation, he was assigned to be a missionary to India. “My inner voice had said, “It’s India”—not “Its Indians.” He realized that all human beings are one, their needs are one and the same, every one needs conversion.<sup>14</sup>

After preparing himself to be an evangelist, in 1907 Jones was assigned to the Lal Bahg English speaking church in Lucknow. For four years he served the church, aware that “I was on the edges, the dying edges of an imperialistic, privileged, receding group.”<sup>15</sup> in 1910 he married Mabel Lossing, a missionary teacher at the women’s college in Lucknow. They moved fifty miles to Sitapur where they would reside for the next 40 years.

In 1914, Stanley and Mabel had their first child, Eunice. The following year Jones suffered a ruptured appendix that proved to be inoperable. The pain of his illness was compounded to the expanding responsibilities; Stanley was assigned one district with more than one million people, the another and another until he was responsible for four districts and the Methodist Publishing House in Lucknow.

The stress and the physical illness was too much: “As a consequence, at the end of eight and a half years I was ordered to go to America on furlough.”<sup>16</sup> However, Jones found a way to use his physical, emotional and spiritual failure. Through prayer and reflection

I thought my task was more complex than I now see it to be, not less difficult, but less complex. When I first went to India, I was trying to hold a very long line--- a line that stretched clear across Genesis to Revelation, on to Western Civilization and to the Western Christian Church. I found myself bobbing up and down that line fighting behind Moses and David and Paul and Western Civilization and the Christian Church. I was worried. There was no well defined issue. I found the battle almost invariably being pitched at one of these three places: The Old Testament, Western Civilization or the Christian Church. I had the ill-defined, but distinctive, feeling that the **heart of the matter** was being left out. Then I saw that I could shorten my line, that I could take my stand at Christ and, before that non-Christian world, refuse to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified. The sheer storm and stress of things had driven me to a place that I could hold. Then I saw that there is where I should have been all the time. I saw that the gospel lies in the Person of Jesus, that he himself is the Good News; that my one task was to live and present him. My task was simplified---but it was not only **simplified---it was vitalized.**<sup>17</sup>

When the year furlough, Jones was still not ready to return to the mission field. He did, but his health and spirit failed and twice he went to the mountains to recuperate. He tells his own story well:

In that dark hour I was in the Central Methodist Church in Lucknow. The Rev. Tamil

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<sup>14</sup> p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, pp. 11-12.

David was in charge of the evangelistic services. I was at the back of the church kneeling in prayer, not for myself but for others, when God said to me: “Are you yourself ready for the work to which I have called you?” My reply: “No, Lord, I’m done for. I’ve reached the end of my resources and I can’t go on.” “If you’ll turn that problem over to me and not worry about it, I’ll take care of it.” My eager reply: “Lord, I close the bargain right here.” I arose from me knees knowing I was a well man.<sup>18</sup>

This spiritual encounter was beyond the second blessing of the holiness tradition and represented an experience of self surrender that transformed E. Stanley Jones theology and practice. I was integrated in a manner that produces a “whole” gospel, rather than a “personal” gospel, or a “social” gospel. From this point on he had the courage and assurance needed to answer God’s call to go to the strongest member of the Indian society to engage them in conversation through public lectures, round table conversations and Ashram experiences. Honest to a fault, Jones was never the same and if he had fallen into a similar place of exhaustion or despair, he would have told us.

### **Public Lectures and Question and Answer Sessions<sup>19</sup>**

Following the spiritual transformation described above, the focus of E. Stanley Jones work during the 1920s and 1930s was India. The first point of contact between Jones and most Indians was large evangelistic lectures. Jones’s public lectures followed a standard pattern. Events centered on a specific city for a week or weekend. Jones preached each morning in gatherings that were specifically designed for local Christian communities. Evening lectures focused on topics of interest to local intellectuals from other religious traditions. While the topics in the evening varied, they always included Jones sharing his experience of how faith in Christ affected his life. The entire week or weekend was facilitated or chaired by local persons, many of whom were not Christian. Lectures usually took place in public halls, open spaces, Hindu temples, or schools and almost never in churches.<sup>20</sup> The goal was to encourage persons from other religious traditions to come and listen to the evening lectures.

These public meetings were different from other large evangelistic gatherings of the day, both in India and around the world. Jones did not refer to them as “crusades” but rather as “lectures.” First, Jones believed the term “crusade” was highly problematic, being so associated with Western imperialism that the negative connotations could not be overcome.

Normally, E. Stanley Jones would speak for 45-60 minutes, he rarely concluded with a traditional evangelistic “call” to Christian faith, as did the mass meetings of the day. Rather, he closed with a time of question and answer, which was then followed by an invitation for anyone interested in hearing more about Christ to join him and others for further conversation. Questions were either submitted ahead of time or voiced in the public session. While Jones would not critique other traditions in these question and answer sessions, many in the audience frequently critiqued his Christian faith. He welcomed this challenge because his goal was to express his experience of Christ in the public lectures and then provide a

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<sup>18</sup> Jones, *Song of Ascents*, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Jack Jackson for the following sections on Public Lectures, Round Table Conversation and Ashram Experiences. These are primarily his words and not for publication.

<sup>20</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon, 1925), p. 83.

venue for others to “break” it if they could.<sup>21</sup> These “grilling” sessions as he called them usually lasted from 1-2 hours.<sup>22</sup>

Jones believed that his primary target was educated Indians, in stark contrast to the Indian mass Christian meetings of the day, which focused on poorer populations. The educated tended to be people, usually men, of influence in the community. Jones thought that engaging community leaders was critical to efforts to overcome barriers to conversion that often kept entire communities from making public faith commitments for Christ. Overcoming ingrained barriers to conversion was one reason Jones came to believe that public baptism, for instance, was not mandatory to Christian commitment.<sup>23</sup>

From the time he returned to India, Brother Stanley was clear that his calling was to the educated populations. His aim was to engage his hearers on an intellectual instead of emotional level. He believed that a true conversion, which includes both emotion and intellect, takes time. Therefore it is not surprising that Jones concluded these lectures with an invitation to further conversation about Christ, similar to John Wesley’s practice in field preaching where he concluded not with an invitation to conversion as Whitefield did, but rather with an invitation to Methodist society and class meetings.

Following the public lecture, interested parties were invited to stay for deeper conversation,, often in a different room. The immediacy of the question and answer sessions provided a depth encounter and authentic vulnerability.

As we consider how Methodism today might converse with the world’s non-Christian communities, another important aspect of these public lectures and question and answer sessions is Jones’ refusal to critique other religious traditions.<sup>24</sup> He realized that debates focus on winning arguments instead of discovering truth.<sup>25</sup> Instead, he presented what he had discovered in Christ, and left others to form their own conclusions.

These large lectures were critical to gathering groups of people from other faith traditions who wanted to engage persons from the Christian faith. They became the first point of contact between Jones and people interested in Christ, providing a venue for initial conversations. But they did not offer the personal, long-term conversations that Jones thought that most people require for true, life-long conversion. More intimate conversations took place in the next two elements of his evangelistic ministry, round table conversations and Christian Ashrams.

### **Round Table Conferences**

The second key practice of Jones’ evangelistic ministry, which also included significant conversations with non-Christian communities, is his round table conversations. Jones describes the first round table conference as an accidental creation. After a public lecture and question and answer session sometime in 1923, a Hindu chairperson of a public lecture asked

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 88-89. Jones left the issue of Christian baptism to one’s conscience and the New Testament.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>25</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *Along the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon, 1939), p. 36.

Jones if they could schedule a more private session with a small group of the city's "leading figures."<sup>26</sup> The chairperson suggested a tea party for a smaller group of people, which would allow for a more personal conversation than even a question and answer session afforded.<sup>27</sup> Jones agreed and by 1925 these smaller gatherings became integral to his ministry and a regular part of his public lectureships.<sup>28</sup>

A regular format for round table conferences soon developed. The gathering usually consisted of between 15 and 40 people. Jones tried to ensure that approximately two thirds of the participants were non-Christians, with the remainder being primarily Indian Christians. Everyone was asked to share only their religious experience and specifically "how religion was working, what it was doing for us, and how we could find deeper reality."<sup>29</sup> The focus was on the practical effect of faith in a person's life. The goal was to discover other people's actual experience, not their understanding of dogma or doctrine. The focus must be "deeply experimental. What does religious bring in experience? What is its value for life?"<sup>30</sup> The focus of conversations was not theology but the experiential benefits of faith. The round table conferences provided a venue for pointed conversations about different faiths, conversations where Jones believed an "untrammelled" Christ eventually stood at the center.<sup>31</sup> Round tables were conversations among people from various religious traditions, secular philosophies, and ethical systems, who gathered as equals to share about their experience of religion.

Jones wanted to know if the gospel he knew as a citizen of the United States would sound like a gospel in India. He writes:

When we had stripped our [Christian] life of overgrown verbiage, how much fact would we have left? Would our gospel ring true to reality? Would it move amid these problems of life with assured poise and conscious power? Would it face life and answer it? Was our gospel a broken light from God illuminating patches and portions of life, but leaving unilluminated life as a whole? Or was it God's adequate answer to man's need-intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social?<sup>32</sup> And Indian communities were perhaps the best one's in which to ask these difficult questions of the gospel, for in it lived:

The most religiously inclined race of the world [containing] a people who have persistently searched for God and Reality as no other people on earth have searched...What answer would they bring from that hoary past and this heaving present? Would it be an adequate one?"<sup>33</sup>

The goal of the conversations was two fold. The first was to bring together people from

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<sup>26</sup> These "leading" figures are almost always educated men. I could find no reference to a woman participating in, much less leading, either public lectures or round table conversations. Ashrams, however, always included both genders and in this way "modeled" the Kingdom of God according to Jones.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, *Round Table*, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Graham, *Ordinary Man*, p. 181.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, *Round Table*, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

India's various religious traditions.<sup>34</sup> The second was to create a space for educated Indians to specifically contemplate Christianity. In this way the gatherings were both interreligious and evangelistic. Every person was invited to share around the table and evidently only in a handful of cases throughout the years did someone choose not to share.<sup>35</sup> The conception of a round table was intentional, since nobody was head of the meeting. Jones himself never started the sharing and resisted attempts to summarize or comment on other people's sharing. He usually was the last to speak. The goal was to have true conversation sharing each person's experience. The result was that people from each tradition were challenged, even Christians, regarding the source and substance of their faith. The result was an "attitude of appreciation with appraisal" of all religious traditions.<sup>36</sup> Jones came to believe that these round table conferences provided the greatest venue for true conversation between people of different faiths.

It is true that Brother Stanley intended Christ to be presented in the lives of the Christian laity around the table. Participants certainly recognized that a Christian, Jones or someone from his ministry, initiated the round table conversation, even though people from other traditions often hosted the gatherings.

Nevertheless, these round table conferences do seem to have had a remarkably hospitable and inclusive tone. Jones did seem to truly want conversation, not monologue, and the only way to really encourage such dialogue was to give, at least as much as possible, everyone an equal seat at the table.

### **Christian Ashrams**

While public lectures and round table conferences were the two primary places for conversations between people of multiple religious and non-religious communities in Jones's ministry, Christian Ashrams also provided an important venue for further and more intimate conversation. Jones's Christian Ashrams developed out of the Indian model of ashrams (good evidence that he was indeed willing to learn from other religious traditions and to indigenize the Christian faith). Ashrams literally mean "apart from hard work" and are part of the Indian religious landscape.

Jones's ashrams were retreats, often lasting a week at a time. Jones eventually purchased multiple Ashram locations, the first and most significant being at Sat Tal in 1930. While Hindu Ashrams typically center on a religious guru, Jones tried not to be the center of the retreat, though he was clearly the guiding figure. This retreat setting allowed participants to have multiday conversations about Christianity in settings that included prayer, fasting, work, and worship. The Ashrams intentionally included people from various religious traditions, yet all participants were to have a "willingness to search sincerely for God's truth with other members of the Ashram on a basis of complete equality."<sup>37</sup> They became the place where people who had encountered Jones first in lectures and engaged him and Christ more deeply

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<sup>34</sup> Richard W. Taylor, *The Contribution of E. Stanley Jones* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1973), pp. 10-11. Taylor argues that the round table conferences were at the time the only true place of interreligious conversation in India.

<sup>35</sup> Jones, *Round Table*, p. 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Graham, *Ordinary Man*, p. 13.

in round table conversations, could actually engage the practices of a Christian life in a more concentrated and personal way.<sup>38</sup> These practices included worship, preaching, prayer, bible study, Sabbath, and work. Discipleship and sanctification of believers were certainly central to the Ashram movement, but Ashrams also provided an important venue for conversations with non-Christian communities to continue beyond public lectures and round table conversations.

### **Jones's Theological Foundations for Conversation with Non-Christian Communities**

A number of theological foundations undergird the practices associated with public lectures, round table conferences, and ashrams that are pertinent to Wesleyan conversations with other religious traditions today. First, Jones believed in humanity's oneness. "The human heart and the human mind," he wrote, "are the same throughout the world...there are no permanently inferior or permanently superior races."<sup>39</sup> Today this may seem to be an unremarkable claim, but in India in the 1920s and 30s, when the caste system was still entrenched, it was quite remarkable. Out of this foundation of equality, Jones insisted that we are all children of God with the ability to live in community with God through Christ. Jones took this claim seriously, refusing to speak in segregated churches and colleges in the United States. He even resigned as a trustee of Asbury College when it refused to integrate. In the Christian Ashrams the sign on meeting room walls was "Leave behind all race and class distinction ye that enter here," a clear challenge to the ever present caste system.<sup>40</sup>

Jones's use of the words "brother" and "sister" was also a direct challenge to the caste system, not a reflection of Southern evangelicalism in the United States.<sup>41</sup> Second, Jones believed that God was at work in other religious traditions.<sup>42</sup> Christian traditions and the Church were some of what he called Christ's "regular" channels. But for Jones, the Spirit also operates through "irregular" channels. Irregular channels are particular activities and people who don't claim a Christian tradition, but who act in ways Jones believed are fundamentally in line with the person of Christ. The most notable "irregular" channel was perhaps Gandhi.<sup>43</sup> To Jones, Gandhi caught the principles of Christ. And yet Gandhi is an example of a third important principle in Jones' thought, namely the idea that all religions are in the end not the same; they point to very different understandings of God. For Jones, Gandhi understood the principles of Christ, but not the person of Christ.<sup>44</sup> Jones is frequently critical of the idea that all religious traditions are fundamentally the same, calling this "mental abdication."<sup>45</sup> The belief that all faith traditions have the "same underlying truths", and that the "differences are in the details", tends to "wipe out distinctions, tone down superiorities, and have everything end in a diffused kindly feeling, or as someone has put it, 'in a mush of amiability.' All these things put together are disconcerting and disturbing."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> E. Stanley Jones, 7 December 1929 Circular letter. Unpublished. (1929), cited in Graham, p. 395.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>41</sup> Graham, *Ordinary Man*, p. 144.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, p. 67ff.

<sup>44</sup> Graham, *Ordinary Man*, pp. 178-9.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, p. 116.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, *Round Table*, p. 13.

The differences among religions are one of the reasons Jones encouraged round table participants not to iron out differences between their beliefs.<sup>47</sup> He thought it important, in his writings, to identify differences. He wanted people to look at the “outlook, tendencies, and goals” of different faiths and this would be difficult if not impossible if people focused on identifying “overlapping moral precepts and spiritual ideas.”<sup>48</sup> Critique wasn’t part of the round table because he believed witnessing to what Christ has done in a person’s life both built bridges with people from other communities and created a space where Christ would be revealed. And yet in his writings, Jones was critical. He believed that round table experiences demonstrated that non-Christian faiths were “bankrupt” and that only Christianity offered a “vital” experience of God.<sup>49</sup> But the focus of public lectures, ashrams, and especially round table conferences was not critique, but experience.

Fourth, the round tables and Ashrams demonstrate that for Jones, the task of evangelism is dialogical. It includes not only a witnessing to our own faith but also a willingness to truly listen to others as they share their experience of other faiths. His emphasis on listening to others share their faith experience seems to be two fold. First, when we listen to others, they are more likely to listen to us. Second, Jones believed that there was much to learn from different religion’s stories. Many other religious traditions offer some truth and life that Christians might need to hear and incorporate into their own life and faith. Even in the case of religious or secular communities that might not offer any truth, their representatives who speak for them are children of God and deserve respect. For Jones, Christians cannot expect people of other religious traditions to listen to the Christian message if they are not willing themselves to listen to the message of those other religious traditions.

### **E. Stanley Jones Enduring Theology of Mission and Evangelism**

Perhaps the most enduring contribution of E. Stanley Jones to the theology of mission and evangelism was his honest self disclosure, his love for all people and the love that radiated what Brian McClaren has recently called a generous orthodoxy rooted in Jesus Christ alone and committed to living today in the Kingdom of God—on earth as it is in heaven. His message was a two-pronged: the Person of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

“I find myself with an inner compulsion, bolstered by the fact that the best and most influential man who ever lived, Jesus Christ, made the Kingdom of God his central emphasis. If I fail, I fail in the right direction. I would rather fail with Him than succeed with anyone else. If Jesus made the Kingdom of God the center of his message and the center of his endeavor, the greatest need of man, as I see it, is to rediscover the Kingdom of God. Man needs nothing so much as he needs something to bring life together into total meaning and total goal. Life for modern man in East or West needs something to give total meaning to an otherwise fragmented life.”<sup>50</sup>

In the introduction to *The Word Became Flesh*, Brother Stanley writes about the reaction of India to the Christian Gospel. He says the reaction went through three stages. First, “It isn’t

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Graham, *Ordinary Man*, pp. 181-2.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, *Unshakable Kingdom*, p. 11.

true.” That, he says, was a short lived stage in that the gospel is so self verifying to the human mind that it could not be waved out as untrue.

Then I got hold of the difference. In all other religions it is the word become word, but only in Jesus Christ did the Word become flesh. Then everything else fell into its place. I had the Key, and this Key fitted everything in East and West.

The Word became flesh---this brought a difference not only in degree but in Kind. The Christian Faith is not just a little better than other faiths, a little more moral, more free of contradictory elements, more lofty in its conceptions. It is that, but it is more--- it is different in kind. Religions are our search for God. The gospel is God’s search for us. Therefore there are many religions, but only one gospel. Religions are the Word become word. The Gospel is the Word became flesh. This verse, ‘And the Word became flesh’, sets the Gospel off in a class by itself, *a sui generis*.<sup>51</sup>

Another way to articulate the message is in this manner:

The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person belong together. If we present the Person without the Kingdom, then the person may have individual relationships but would lack social relationships. Or, if we present the Kingdom without the Person, then the Kingdom would have social relationships but would lack personal relationships. But, if you put them together, you have a complete and total relevance and meet man’s total need.<sup>52</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this paper is to articulate E. Stanley Jones contribution to the church universal and ask the question, is it possible that we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should prayerful consider a dynamic equivalent for inter-religious conversation and faithful Christian witness?

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<sup>51</sup> Jones, *The Word Become Flesh*, p. 10f.

<sup>52</sup> *Unshakeable Kingdom*. 37.

## **Appendix I. Twelve Life Convictions**

In his book, *Growing Spiritually*, Brother Stanley defines his twelve convictions.<sup>53</sup>

1. There is a moral universe which always has the last word.
2. The revelation of God to man is progressive, appearing in varying degrees among all races and culminating in the final and perfect revelation in Jesus Christ.
3. The deepest place of that revelation is the Cross.
4. The Kingdom of God is written, not only into the Bible, but into the nature of reality and into us.
5. The Christian Way is the natural way to live.
6. The Kingdom of God is God's total answer to man's total need.
7. The way to meet unmerited suffering and injustice is not to bear them, but to use them. (Luke 21:13)
8. The Holy Spirit is the birthright of believers.
9. The way to live is by grace and receptivity.
10. Jesus Christ will have the last word in human events.
11. Love is the strongest force in the universe and will finally prevail.
12. The Christian Way works. It will work to the degree that we work it. I know of no other way that does work.

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<sup>53</sup> *Growing Spiritually*, pp. 352f

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