

The Kingdom-Minded Apostle

E. Stanley Jones and the Integration of Kingdom, Church and Mission

by Brad Gill, IJFM Senior Editor

It was years ago that an Arab believer first acquainted me with the writings of E. Stanley Jones. He mingled his name in with Gandhi and Tolstoy and effectively bent my evangelical expectations on how people come to Christ. All three of these figures had apparently pointed my friend to Christ at a time when his Arab friends were lost in bitter revolt against the West. But it was especially Jones' Kingdom view that magnetically drew him to Christ.¹

E. Stanley Jones spoke the language of the Kingdom when I only spoke the language of the Church. Although he confronted a very different religious frontier than mine, and at such a different time in history, his writings have continually drawn-and-quartered my mission assumptions over the years. It was the way he personally integrated such a wide range of missiological themes that fascinated me. At least four dimensions characterize this Kingdom-minded apostle.

He was an early proponent of contextualization in a post-WWI era of anti-colonial feelings. While on furlough in 1925, he penned his now classic *Christ of the Indian Road*.² One catches the seminal idea of indigenization in the title. Jones grew and extended his contextual sensitivity by his use of the Ashram communal model, first as a means to draw men and women to Christ. But he eventually reconstituted the Ashram with ecclesial principles for the indigenous expression of the church.³

Secondly, a Kingdom orientation allowed this "Billy Graham of India" to better transcend the walls of religious division. He understood that a Hindu would accept Christ but would reject Christianity. He established the "Round Table" as a means to dialogue about spiritual concerns with higher caste Brahmins, Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims.⁴ Conflict of religion was neither the atmosphere of Jones' ministry, nor his point of departure for those Indians who were drawn to Christ.

Jones was no Mother Teresa by any means, but he shared her call to the overwhelming needs of India. He just took a different road in how he wove a concern for social and political transformation into the fabric of his ministry. He knew Mahatma Gandhi personally as a friend, and spent hours in dialogue with him on both matters of state and the things of Christ. (I've even heard recently that it was Jones' interpretive biography of Gandhi that would profoundly impact the convictions of Martin Luther King, Jr.⁵) But all throughout Jones' thirty books was a consistent sensitivity to the power-

ful drive for self-determination among this colonized people. His Kingdom-mindedness had a scope that would not permit him to reduce the power of the gospel. His was a gospel of transformation for the peoples of India.

Finally, the Bible was the key to his Kingdom paradigm. He could not be one-dimensional. He would not narrow down to one cause or one organization. He was biblical in proportion. In a day when the American modernist-fundamentalist debate had virtually made "Kingdom" a theological curse word among many, Jones dared to use it. But he was no liberal. He had authored too many wonderful devotional books and preached too many powerful evangelistic sermons to be pigeonholed as just a liberal do-gooder. Any hope for peace was birthed out of his study of Jesus and his Kingdom in the pages of Scripture.

The Kingdom-minded apostleship of E. Stanley Jones offers us just one model of integration of Kingdom, Church and Mission on the great religious frontiers. This journal, and its sister society, the ISFM, will do well to examine what that integration might look like across today's remaining frontiers. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, Rowman and Littlefield Pub, 2007.

² E Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, Abington Press, NY, 1925.

³ <http://www.christianashram.org/Pages2/ESJones2.html>

⁴ E Stanley Jones, *Christ at the Round Table*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1928.

⁵ E Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (1948).

The Int'l Society for Frontier Missiology presents:
"Kingdom" and "Church" in Frontier Mission

Date: September 27–29, 2011

Venue: DoubleTree Hotel, Scottsdale, AZ

Cost: Registration: \$50 (Students: \$25)

Speakers include: Sam Kamaleson, Martin Accad, Rick Brown, David Hamilton, and Darren Duerksen

More info: ijfm.org/isfm/annual.htm or brad.gill@ijfm.org

ISFM 2011 is being held, at the same venue, immediately prior to the joint meeting of The Mission Exchange, CrossGlobal Link and the Evangelical Missiological Society.