

**Address Given**  
**By**  
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**Upon Receiving the 2005 Distinguished Evangelist Award**  
**The Foundation for Evangelism Annual Banquet at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina**  
**October 29, 2005**

I greet you all in the powerful name of our Lord Jesus Christ. In responding to this wonderful honor you have bestowed upon me, I would like to say three things: First, I will offer a word of gratitude. Second, I wish to give a word of hope and encouragement, and finally, I dare to offer a word of challenge.

**A WORD OF GRATITUDE**

I carry on e-mail correspondence with an old high-school buddy who is a survivor of the Vietnam War. The other day he sent the following story about a jet pilot named Charles Plumb. Charles flew 75 combat missions before his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. He ejected and parachuted into enemy hands and spent six years in a communist prison. He survived the ordeal, and one day when Charles and his wife were in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Charles Plumb! You flew jet fighters off of the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. I remember you; you were shot down!" Whereupon, Plumb got to his feet and replied, "How on earth did you know that?" The man said, "I packed your parachute. I guess it must have worked." "It sure did," Plumb replied; "if it hadn't, I certainly wouldn't be here tonight!"

I stand here tonight conscious of the fact that countless people have "packed my parachute" and I would not be here tonight were it not for them. So, I wish to begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to just a few of these. It will not surprise you to learn that most of these "significant others" are on the list of evangelists previously chosen and honored by The Foundation For Evangelism.

For instance, when I was a college student, it was **E. Stanley Jones** who convinced me that I must never allow myself to become what he called "a narrow-minded parochial Christian whose vision fails to reach out and encompass the whole world". After hearing Dr. Jones preach on John 3:16-17, I entered into a covenant with God and wrote that covenant in the fly-leaf of my Bible. Just as God loved the WORLD so much that he gave His only Son, even so, I pledged that I would wrap my arms around the whole world. I was eighteen when I wrote that covenant. I am now seventy and by God's Grace I have done my best to live by that covenant. **Harry Denman** and **Joe Hale** brought me into the mainstream of evangelism ministries and to them I owe many of the principles and strategies for evangelism that eventually found their way into the books I have written. It was **Lawrence Lacour** and **Donald English** who stimulated my mind and heart and convinced me of the importance of Christian apologetics. As a result, I have endeavored to share their passion for making a case for Christianity in an unbelieving world.

**George Outen** and **Alan Walker** helped me focus my ministry, whether in the local church, in the classroom, or out in the trenches upon a "holistic Gospel", which is always personal, communal

and social. Therefore, I have sought to be true to the Wesleyan tradition which seeks the conversion of men and women personally to Jesus Christ and to make a world fit for people to live in. In my preaching, teaching, and writing I have endeavored to show the relationship between personal salvation and social redemption.

It was **Mortimer Arias** and **Emilio Castro** who gave confirmation to my conviction that Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is the central focus for evangelization and evangelizing models must grow up out of indigenous soil and must be consistent with indigenous attempts to biblically and theologically frame the Gospel message and the church's mandate.

As you can imagine, this list of those who have "packed my parachute", could go on and on, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention at least four others. I owe so much to **Bishop William R. Cannon**, **Albert Outler**, **James Logan**, and "**Ted**" **Runyon**. These scholars helped me see the biblical evangelistic imperative from a Wesleyan perspective. They helped me discover the Biblical and theological convictions that gave John and Charles Wesley their impetus and rationale for taking up the task of evangelism.

Now, as you can see, if all of these faithful servants (and there are many others) had not packed my parachute, I would not be standing before you this evening. I praise God for having known all of them and I am so deeply grateful for all they have taught me.

#### A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

Next, I would like to offer a word of encouragement and hope. Ten years after Barbara and I felt we had already completed our family with three wonderful children, God saw fit to bless our lives with a beautiful baby girl. It was an Abraham and Sarah thing! We named our new daughter Serendee, from the word "serendipity", which means a totally unexpected but nevertheless happy surprise. On the night of her birth I took all three of the older children to the hospital to visit their Mom and see the new baby. I stood beside our oldest son, David, as we looked through the nursery window and the kids saw their new sister for the very first time. Suddenly, David turned to me and said, "Dad, this is the first time I have seen that baby but somehow I love her so much."

I use this as an illustration because I am tempted to believe that all of us are standing at a window and looking through in amazement and love at one of God's new creations. Now we all know very well that every form of birth is a miracle. Well, I believe that God has been and still is in the process of birthing something beautiful and exciting, and IT IS A MIRACLE!

In 1971, Albert Outler gave the Harry Denman Lectures at the Congress on Evangelism in New Orleans. A number of us were present for that meeting. In Outler's third presentation he stunned the crowd by saying the following: "Mainstream Protestantism, in the forms we have known it, will not survive this century without a great awakening." Well, that got our attention and once he had our attention, he signaled a more positive, hopeful note by saying, "We are in the early stages of this awakening and are at the threshold of the next great Christian advance in history." I now know that Dr. Outler was right, for I have seen these signals of hope and encouragement over the course of the last thirty-five years. I have looked through the window glass, and I have seen God's miracles being born. For just a few minutes, I invite you to look through that glass with me.

The birth of the **Foundation For Evangelism** is nothing short of a miracle. We all know that the idea was born in the heart and soul of Harry Denman. Denman believed that when the Methodist Wesleyan movement is at its best it is always evangelistic. He had a **VISION**, and I mean that somewhat literally. After his retirement he had an occasion to come back to Nashville for a visit. He called and we made an appointment to have lunch together at a restaurant near the Upper Room building. He told me that he had envisioned a time when our United Methodist theological seminaries would open their doors for the teaching of evangelism. It was at that luncheon table in the late 1960s that he shared with me his dream of sending George “Chuck” Hunter to Northwestern and myself to Vanderbilt to work on PHD Degrees. As you know, eventually, “Chuck” Hunter was invited to Perkins at Southern Methodist University and, when my colleague Jimmy Buskirk became the dean of ORU Divinity School, I became the professor of evangelism at Emory University, Candler School of Theology. As you know, in those days there were not very many evangelism professors, especially in seminaries organically attached to The United Methodist Church. I’m sure that my colleagues would agree when I say that ours was a somewhat lonely task and everyday we had to be ready to give an apology, i.e., a reason, for our very presence in a university community.

But The **Foundation For Evangelism** has changed all of that. It is a miracle! Today the Foundation supports fourteen professorships. Moreover, other seminaries are submitting their requests for professors of evangelism. Today, a United Methodist student cannot be ordained either deacon or elder without first having completed at least one course in evangelism in a fully accredited theological seminary. In addition, the **Foundation** is well along in its plans to make it possible for our students to earn PHD Degrees in evangelism.

It is a miracle, and many of you seated in this banquet hall are the visionaries who have stood at the window glass. Through your financial support, your prayers, your dreams and hopes, and a whole lot of hard dedicated work, you have witnessed the birthing of something new.

Second, I know that you would want me to highlight the dynamic leadership of the **WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL**. The birthing of the **The World Methodist Evangelism Institute under the auspices of both Emory University and The World Methodist Council** is one of God’s miracles.

The leaders of the World Methodist Council, believing that the Methodist Wesleyan Movement was being summoned by the Spirit of God to undertake with renewed vision and vigor the unfinished task of world evangelization, heard the call of God and in 1971 launched their pioneering response. Upon placing its hands to the plough, the World Methodist Council has not looked back. Rather, it has gone forward from victory to victory. In the 1970s officers of the Council and leaders in World Evangelism began envisioning an institute that would raise up a new generation of faithful evangelism leaders around the world. Joe Hale, former General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, said, “We are seeking to develop an **Institute For World Evangelization** which will enable leadership from East to West, South to North, Orient to Occident to be trained and motivated in World Evangelism.” What follows is a brief outline of how that Institute developed.

Two pilot seminars were held at Candler during the summers of 1978 and 1979. The first focused mainly on Candler students pursuing Doctor of Ministry degrees. However, in 1979, the focus was broadened to include both D.Min and M.Div students, many of whom were “foreign

nationals” enrolled in theological seminaries all across the USA. The first seminar was taught by Joe Hale and myself. In 1979 Alan Walker was added to the faculty.

The idea to fashion an Evangelism Institute that would be a cooperative ministry of Emory University and the World Methodist Council, was conceived during these pilot seminars. Subsequently, a proposal was prepared and presented to the World Methodist Council meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii in July, 1981. The Council voted to establish the World Methodist Evangelism Institute. Thus, the Institute was born, and believe you me, IT WAS AND CONTINUES TO BE, A MIRACLE!

The historic First International Seminar of the World Methodist Evangelism Institute was held June 21-July 9, 1982. Sixty-six clergy and laity from twenty-three countries were in attendance. It fills my heart with joy to announce that the Institute has now completed seven International Seminars and forty-four Regional Seminars. These seminars have been held in thirty-eight countries and have involved more than five thousand delegates from one hundred twenty-five countries. Faculty members from forty-two different countries have taught in these seminars.

Seminary students are always invited to enroll in both international and regional seminars. Under the academic supervision of a professor of evangelism, they receive academic credit if they meet all the course requirements. Our records show that four hundred and sixty students have participated in Institute seminars and have received academic credit.

So, from these rather inauspicious beginnings a new vision of evangelism has taken shape; a vision of mutual worldwide evangelism rooted in indigenous churches and supported by the best in academic training. The offices of The **Foundation for Evangelism** are located at Lake Junaluska, but by God’s grace and power, the ministry of the Foundation now reaches all around the world. The offices of the **World Methodist Evangelism Institute** are located on the campus at Emory University, but God has enabled the Institute to move beyond the walls of the academy and reach out to the ends of the earth.

As a result of the ministries of both the Institute and the Foundation, a whole new evangelical leadership has been fashioned. These leaders are scholarly, balanced, and responsible. Consequently, evangelism is losing its “Cinderella” status in the arena of theological education and world mission. I would put it this way: Thanks be to God, evangelism is throwing off its soiled and threadbare garments and is gaining integrity and acceptance among those who take seriously our Lord’s command to “Go make of all disciples!”

Now, if you were to ask me, “Who are the Fairy Godmothers” of these miracles? Without hesitancy, I would respond: “The Foundation For Evangelism, and The World Methodist Evangelism Institute!” So, brothers and sisters, we can take heart. We can live more hopefully. All we have to do is step up to the window, open our eyes and heart and see these miracles of new birth!

## A WORD OF CHALLENGE

Finally, on this occasion, I dare to offer a word of challenge. I wish to challenge all of us to “stay the course” with regard to three of the most critical issues we are facing.

- I. Both my research and teaching in the field of missiology, as well as my own missionary experience on national and international levels, have taught me the following: GROWING CHURCHES, WHETHER THEY BE PROTESTANT, ROMAN CATHOLIC, OR INDEPENDENT, ORDINARILY HOLD THREE THINGS IN COMMON: (1) THEY ARE COMMITTED TO THE AUTHORITY AND PRIMACY OF HOLY SCRIPTURES; (2) THEY HAVE STRONG CHRISTOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS; (3) THEY ARE OPEN TO BOTH THE POWER AND THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. ON THE OTHER HAND -- DECLINING CHURCHES, WHETHER THEY BE PROTESTANT, ROMAN CATHOLIC, OR INDEPENDENT ARE, FOR THE MOST-PART, IN DECLINE BECAUSE THEY ARE DEFICIENT IN THESE THREE AREAS.

So, I dare to issue three challenges. First, we United Methodists must do everything possible to maintain our historic Wesleyan conviction regarding the authority and primacy of scriptures. When scriptural authority is surrendered a slow erosive process sets in. When the Bible loses its authority, secular authorities ascend the throne. Once this happens, theology is usually reduced to ideology and people are no longer profoundly committed to deep biblical/theological convictions. This is what happens when, as the late Albert Outler once said, “We sort of lose our *GIVENS!*” In other words, we lose the core or center of our message and ministry, i.e., the *GIVENS* of the faith.

This erosive process ordinarily gives birth to a benign form of universalism that robs the church of both its incentive and its sense of urgency in leading people to the Lord, Jesus Christ. As a result, a bold and confident Gospel is replaced with “polite talk about God” interspersed with various social commentaries, and it is considered impolite and a source of embarrassment to lovingly share one’s faith with those who are not yet Christian. Second:

- II. A PREDICTABLE TRAGEDY RESULTING FROM THIS LOSS OF SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY IS THE DEBUNKING OF OUR CHRIST-CENTERED FAITH. WITHOUT SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY CHRISTOLOGY SUFFERS A SLOW BUT SURE DEATH.

This matter is complicated by the fact that we are challenged to evangelize the Gospel in a world characterized by individualism, pluralism, and relativism---a world in which the popular mantra is: “There are many ways to God; the Jesus way is one amongst the many!” For the most-part, ours is a world that prefers a more liberal, magnanimous supermarket society, which exalts the autonomous individual as the supreme reality. Now, a surface look at this secular ideology does make it sound liberal and magnanimous, doesn’t it? However, liberals are quick to set the limits of their own magnanimity. As Stanley Hauerwas once put it, “Liberals are always for the inclusion of every possible point of view except those points of view that do not include every possible point of view.” (Christian Century, Feb. 24, 1993)

Well, in this kind of world, what does it mean to remain faithful to the scripture that presents Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life? How do we hold to the absoluteness and uniqueness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, on the one hand, without absolutizing our own necessarily imperfect understandings and communications of that revelation on the other?

No one is denying the seriousness of these questions and issues, but I am challenging all of us to stand our ground and not allow “pop-theology” to relegate Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God and our Sovereign Lord and Savior, to a pantheon of ways to self-enlightenment or self-improvement. When this is allowed, both the person and work of Christ fall into the background to the point that truth retreats in the face of dangerous relativism and a superficial religion encourages people to pick and choose their own terms of faith. As a result the “GIVENS” (to use Dr. Outler’s term) are deposited in the “porcelain facility”!

If we do not challenge this cultural trend at every point then we should not be surprised to discover increasing numbers of church members who fall prey to a brand of secular religion which tends to be easy, generic, convenient, and compatible, and thus, we succeed in swelling the ranks of those who believe and live almost exactly the same as those who claim no faith at all. Therefore, we must challenge these secular teachings at every point even at the risk of being labeled arrogant and imperialistic. After all, Christians who have held to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the importance of evangelistic outreach have always had to face their gallery of critics and name-callers.

But, thank God there is another side to the picture. The studies and experiences of our best missiologists have confirmed this fact: When Methodist Wesleyan Christians are armed with a powerful Christological center, i.e., a firm conviction

that Jesus Christ is God's unique and definitive revelation, they are converted from ingrown, nominal, timid bystanders into compassionate, loving evangelists.

III. FINALLY, I CHALLENGE ALL OF US, FIRST OF ALL TO OPEN OUR OWN LIVES TO MORE AND MORE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THEN, TO STAND OUR GROUND AND DO OUR BEST TO ENABLE MORE AND MORE CLERGY AND LAITY TO OPEN THEIR LIVES TO MORE AND MORE OF THE POWER AND GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

There is irrefutable evidence that a renewed emphasis on the power, ministry, and gifts of the Third Person of the Trinity is ushering in a new evangelical age amongst the people called "Methodist". Granted, a great deal of this renewal movement is happening in that region of the world we now call "The Global South". However, those of us who have had the privilege of doing ministry in many parts of this vast world, have seen manifestations of this powerful movement all around the world. As our wonderful colleague, the late Sir Alan Walker, used to love to sing: "All Over The World, The Spirit Is Moving!"

Renewed churches are once again learning that our conferences, schools, seminars, strategies, programs, and long-range plans are necessary and good but they are bound to fail without the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the "BREATH" of the "BODY". Without the Spirit the church is breathless and lifeless, in other words, to quote Wesley, "a dead sect". Moreover, we are learning the sequential lessons of Acts 1:8 --- It is after the Holy Spirit is upon us that we are empowered for witnessing in Jerusalem, Judea, throughout Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This means, no Holy Spirit – no power; no power – no witnessing; no witnessing -- no conversion; no conversion – and eventually, you have no vital church.

However, when the Holy Spirit is "upon" the church, a new power moves into the church and takes control. That POWER cleanses us of our self-centeredness and fears. That POWER gives us new "gifts" for ministry. That POWER reinforces all our natural gifts, bringing them to their maximum potential. Thus, we are transformed from timid church members into vital faith-sharers—ready to witness by word, deed and sign.

So, my brothers and sisters who are a part of this dynamic Foundation For Evangelism, I thank God for you and for all you have done, and for all you will continue to do, to advance the cause of Christ in this needy world. Moreover, I challenge all of us to remember that this is a kairos moment, filled with new

possibilities and challenges. This is not a time to glory in the laurels of the past, nor is it a time to wring our hands in anxiety. The possibilities are abundant, and they present an exciting summons for all of us to roll up our sleeves and get to work.

To be sure, because of your support of this Foundation and the blessings of God upon your work, evangelism ministry has reached a new level of maturity. But in my heart of hearts, I sense that the best is yet to come. So, I not only thank you for the honor you have bestowed upon me, I thank you for all you are doing, and will continue to do, to “lift up Christ” in a world that is “truly white and ready for harvest”.

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