

## The Indian Heritage and Theological Foundation of the Christian Ashram



## The Beginning In India

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One of the great strengths of E. Stanley Jones was his ability to communicate the Christian gospel to people of every race and culture. He was able to do this because he studied cultures, listened to people's stories, and experienced first-hand the way they lived and thought. He once said, "Christianity will not win the soul of India unless it is more Christian and more Indian than it is at present. Up to this time the Christian Church in India has more or less faintly reflected

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the Church life of the West.”<sup>1</sup> And what could be more Indian than an Ashram? And so as Jones worked to indigenize Christianity in India, he established the Christian Ashram movement, modeled on his experiences in Gandhi’s and Tagore’s ashrams. Jones daughter, Eunice once said

If you were going to do the kind of work my father was doing, you couldn’t live in India and not be interested in Ashrams and you would want to experience the array of Ashram experiences offered. Ashrams don’t always have to be religious. Gandhi had an Ashram which had political overtones. Others held Ashrams with aesthetic overtones. However, religious Ashrams are probably the best known. Edison Amos, Excerpts from an Interview with ESJ’s daughter, EJM October 25, 1974

Jones believed that the Christian faith as a universal faith would benefit from using indigenous forms to express its message, and so he used the term *Ashram* to express this group fellowship, - but he Christianized the concept and made adaptations to the Indian Ashram that would reflect the Christian message. For example, the Indian Ashram has a Guru, or Head, around whom the Ashram revolves and from whom it takes on its characteristics. The Christian Ashram has a Guru, but it is not a human guru, rather it is Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Jones’ daughter said, “It bothered Daddy that among the Christian community so many new Indian Christians had abandoned their cultures to take on a Western veneer. My father very much wanted to bring back as much of the Indian culture into Christianity and bring the Christian community back into their own culture. In India, religion and culture are very, very closely identified. So in changing one’s religion, a new Christian tends to turn his back on Hinduism, but with that went the whole culture. For many it became difficult to discern what religion is and what culture is. In the bargain, they were becoming “foreigners” on their own country. This is one reason why my father wanted to find a vehicle that is totally Indian and one in which an Indian could be completely at home --not only the Christian but the non-Christian as well. The Ashram was an answer for him. (October 25, 1974 Interview)

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The word Ashram is from the Sanskrit: *a*=from and *shram*=hard work, or a retreat from hard work into a forest school under a Guru or Teacher. “The Ashram is an exemplary communitarian structure which allowed the values of the Kingdom of God to be lived” (Bundy, 7). Jones described the Ashram he started at Sat Tal as a kind of forest school for meditation and prayer and designed it to “produce a type of Christianity more in touch with the soul of India” (Graham 192). Jones provides an extended explanation of the purpose of the Christian Ashram in his book, *Along the Indian Road*, and explains his urge to combine the Indian Spirit and the Christian spirit.

The Indian spirit is difficult to define, but anyone who has come in contact with it knows what I mean – an inner poise, a spiritual sensitiveness, and a love of simplicity, an emphasis on the gentler virtues, a spirit of devotion, and an ascetic tinge. Just the spirit to be touched and redeemed by the Christ spirit. The adventure of putting them together was a glorious one and I believe that the Ashram was a magnificent vehicle. (189)

Jones knew that many group movements had arisen in modern times as a result of desire to put back into the Christian Church the *Koinonia*, the Fellowship, mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, which was born out of the coming of the Holy Spirit (*A Song of Ascents*, 232) Jones wished to affirm the Christian Ashram as one such effort and one which would not usurp or contribute to any dissention or concerns in the church as it would place Christ, not the Ashram as primary.

The present International Christian Ashram movement grew out of a tiny beginning in Sat Tal, India.<sup>2</sup> According to Bryan Sallee, “Before Jones bought the Sat Tal property for the first Christian Ashram, each prior owner of the property had sought to enhance the beauty of this restful region. “God’s providence was evident in the fact that for the 25 years preceding Jones securing the Sat Tal Estate, the property was being “prepared” in the best possible way to serve

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<sup>2</sup> Sat Tal means "seven lakes." This Christian Ashram in North India is still operating year around and has a comprehensive web site describing its current mission and activities.

[www.sattalchristianashram.org](http://www.sattalchristianashram.org)

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the purpose of a center for Christian activities. According to Mrs. Evans, the woman from whom Jones purchased Sat Tal, the estate, made her think of the story of the Sleeping Beauty, and added that the valley was just waiting for Prince Jesus to awaken her with the kiss of loving service. (Asbury Archives, E. Stanley Jones, Sat Tal Discipline and Practices, Box 16-Folder 8 – Asbury)

Let Brother Stanley tell the story of the origins of the Sat Tal Christian Ashram.

I decided that I need a group discipline, both for myself and for my work. So in 1930 I invited two others to join me in establishing a Christian Ashram. We had come into possession of a 350 acre estate at Sat Tal in the foothills of the Himalayas, five thousand feet high, with a lake of its own, Panna Lake (Emerald), and with two bordering government lakes. A British retired engineer had been running Sat Tal as a summer resort, renting out the eighteen cottages, mostly to missionaries. For several summers my wife and I spent our summers there, never dreaming that one day it would be ours. But Mr. and Mrs. Evans were getting old and could run the place no longer. One day, I walked the twelve miles from the hill station Naini Tal, over to Sat Tal with the Principal of Lucknow Christian College and offered the Evans' an annuity for as long as they lived in exchange for the estate. They took us up on our offer and Sat Tal was ours – unbelievable! We deeded it to the Executive Board of the Methodist Church of Southern Asia. We had the body – the Estate, but what about the soul?

I invited the Rev. Yunas Sinha, a deeply nationalistic minister and Ethel Turner, a retired London Missionary Society member to join me in creating a Christian Ashram at Sat Tal. Three nationalities came together in that humble beginning – Indian, English, and American. We had not the slightest idea that we were beginning something that would become a world movement. We went out, like Abraham, not knowing whither we were going.

Jones continues his description of how the Christian Ashram movement was conceived:

I knew that I was to be a missionary and an evangelist but saw that many evangelists after a few years of fruitfulness end up quoting themselves and using phrases of sermons that may have once been effective, but now are merely slick, like a coin from constant usage. The danger is that lacking a close-knit fellowship to discipline them, they (the

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evangelists) become dogmatic, cocksure, and wordy – they are telling others what to do but no one tells them what to do. (*A Song of Ascents*, 214)

Jones decided that, in order to counter this tendency of evangelists, he needed a group fellowship (Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 233). The Christian Ashram provided such a group and Jones lived in that fellowship for much of his life, “testing out his ideas with the Ashram group and passing on what passed muster” (*A Song of Ascents*, 233). The Ashram became Jones’ spiritual home. He would write, “It is an unbreakable fellowship that does not depend on meeting together as a group, but it depends on meeting together in Jesus (*A Song of Ascents*, 234). Graham noted that, “Jones’ ashrams not only provided a disciplined fellowship, which gave him a sense of belonging and a source of accountability, they also tested his sensitivity to the Inner Voice and his obedience to God’s direction as well as the integrity of his message” (*Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission*, 350).

Jones was convinced that the Ashram was one of his most significant contributions and profoundly impacted both his life and his message.

Without it I would have lacked a disciplined fellowship. I would have been a lone wolf howling at the pack about what they should do, an outsider. Now I am an insider, forced to live out my life in a close-knit fellowship of the spirit. They are responsible to me and I am responsible to them, at a very deep level, the level of experimental living. If I have given them anything, they have given me much more. Moreover, their transformations have been in invitation and a spur to further transformations in me. They have help make me. But the Ashram group has not only helped make me as a person; they have also helped make my message. Most of my messages and my books have had to run the gauntlet of a small disciplined group. If the response (from the Ashram group) was faint or unsatisfactory or just not what it ought to be, the message was quietly laid aside or interred. Only that which seemed to have the blessing of the Spirit upon it and was apparently productive in changing lives would live on. (*Song of Ascents*, 234).



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Brother Jim (Bishop James K. Mathews), the Christian Ashram Board President for many years, (1972-2007) attended his first Christian Ashram in 1939 and shared some of his observations from his firsthand knowledge of Ashrams.

I was intrigued with the whole shape of the Ashram idea as it was described when I heard about in 1936 while attending a lecture in New York City by E. Stanley Jones. Then to experience the Sat Tal Christian Ashram in 1939 was very meaningful to me. The Ashram program was an experience in disciplined Christian living. One would rise at a certain hour; engage in an early morning act of worship with silent prayer, Bible study and then a sharing of insights. The meals were communal. There were periods of study, lectures, discussion, and work periods. One day was given over to silence. That day, there was even silence at the mealtime. A book was chosen and someone read from it while we were eating. That same day, the servants were given the day off and the Ashram participants did the work themselves. The physical work could be anything from gathering wood or cleaning up the premises. The significance of this sort of activity would hardly be appreciated in the United States, but an Ashram participant might be assigned to do sweepers work, that is the cleaning of latrines. One cannot be very high and mighty engaged in that task.

I think the church has always known that for people to see a meaningful relationship to God, you need a supportive group. The Ashram supplies one of these possibilities. The Ashram is holistic in that it is not just an experience in devotional practice, in hearing preaching or in studying the Bible, it is all of that and more, as it addresses the totality of our lives. The Ashram is all geared to the furtherance of the gospel and undergirding persons in their spiritual search. It is more holistic than most movements of this type and I think that this is one of its key virtues. (citation, Edison Amos material)

When once asked about how one might distinguish between Indian Ashram and the Christian Ashram. Mathews responded;

The Ashram nomenclature came from Hindu ideas. It has to be said that the Hindu idea of holiness removes one further and further from the human scene. The Hindu spiritual ideal is self-cultivation. It is self-control. It is finally self-negation. The further you go into Hinduism, the more withdrawn you become from the world, and the more you

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concentrate on yourself and your identification with God. By contrast, the Christian Ashram, although it is interested in self-control and self-development, and a rich communion with God, it is all produced with the incentive of service to one's fellow men, and of course, the equipping oneself to declare the gospel to our fellowmen.

I believe that the church in India has been nurtured by the Ashram type of experience just as I would say the church through the centuries has been nurtured by the monastic movement, that is; people who were willing to spend times of intensive spiritual devotion and cultivation. In that sense these persons have carried the full burden of the church on their shoulders. Such has been the contribution of the Christian Ashram.

<sup>3</sup> (Excerpts from JKM interview, October 24, 1974 with the Rev. Edison Amos)

Stephen Graham, an outstanding historian and biographer of E. Stanley Jones further emphasizes Mathews' distinctions of the Christian Ashram from its Hindu origin.

Although the concept of an ashram has a Hindu origin, and although the members of the Sat Tal Ashram practiced an Indian life style, this does not mean that the ashram subordinated Christ to India's culture and religion. Instead, the spirit of the Ashram Jones insisted, was always that "reverence for India and her genius will only be exceeded by our reverence for Christ, and His way and His truth." It is also a mistake to assume that Jones's Christian ashrams were a syncretism or combination of Hindu and Christian ideas, or that his ashrams were eclectic, picking and choosing among Christian and non-Christian concepts. Jones said that the best word to describe Christian ashrams was assimilation. (Graham, 348) <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "I don't know where this tape will wind up. We don't have too much information in any of our libraries about the Ashram. I am hopeful that someone will write its history in a pamphlet or try to do some further work so that when one is seeking information it will be available." (JKM interview, October 24, 1974 with the Rev. Edison Amos)

<sup>4</sup> "The Christian faith, being life, assimilates. Like the plant which reaches into the soil and picks out things akin to its own nature, takes them up into the purpose of its life, but transforms them according to the laws of its own being, so the Christian faith reaches into the culture of every

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Brother Stanley was concerned that the Christian Ashram not only strive to be Indian in thinking and customs, but that it focus on discovering more deeply the mind of Christ. He recognized the danger that in becoming more sympathetic toward the East and in trying to discover the good in India's past there was the constant pressure to soften Christian distinctiveness. Syncretism and theosophy, with its belief that all religions are at bottom the same, thrive in India. There is a tendency for the sympathetic Christian to lose his/her evangelistic passion in this atmosphere. To Brother Stanley both sympathy and certainty, both appreciation and appraisal were necessary. (Sallee, Bryan, E. Stanley Jones Christology, Doctoral Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary)

The early Christian Ashram at Sat Tal attracted a large number of Indian people, Christian and non-Christians alike as well as missionaries and even government officials. As Jones served as an evangelist to the people of India, the Ashram became the contextual and incarnational bridge between the methods and forms of India and the distinct and profound character of the Christian spirit of Jesus Christ, (Sallee, 16) The Christian Ashram seemed to be the very thing the Christians were looking for, for in this indigenous mold, the Indian Christian would be at home; he would be on his own ground; could think his own thoughts and be creative.



*E. Stanley Jones at the Sat Tal Christian Ashram*

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nation and takes out things which can be assimilated into its purpose, but in so doing makes something entirely different.” (*Song of Ascents*, 221)

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Jones always intended that the Ashram would be a group fellowship focused on Jesus, and that it would operate as a miniature Kingdom of God. Jones emphasizes that the Christian Ashram is both deeply Christ-centric and deeply Church-centric:

It is not the intent of the Ashram to take people away from their churches and absorb their loyalty and love apart from the churches. We are trying to make the Christian Ashram a movement that inspires new life into persons who become refreshed and renewed and therefore better pastors and better church members (Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 226).



**Photos of Sat Tal, Main Ashram House and Roadway into the Property**

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**Sat Tal Chapel with Ashram Attendees**

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**Panna Lake, Sat Tal Christian Ashram**



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**Sat Tal Christian Ashram – Main House**

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**Sat Tal Christian Ashram View from Ashram House**



*Photographs of E. Stanley Jones at Sat Tal Christian Ashram*



# The Daily Ashram Program <sup>5</sup>

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Jones was intentionally strategic in the design of the Christian Ashram program. Unlike the typical Indian Ashrams where there is no fixed pattern other than to revolve around the guru, Jones designed the Christian Ashram focused on Jesus, which ensured that the component parts of the Ashram worked out from Christ to all of life.

Jones was often asked this question...what does it take to become a member of the Ashram Group? His answer was,

We have one qualification and only one. Do you want to be different? If you want to be different, come on. But if you don't want to be different, we can do nothing for you." The crux of the problems of being made different is in self-surrender. Only when the self is surrendered can you cultivate your spiritual life around the new Center – Christ, and Christ in control. Then everything falls into its place. (*Song of Ascents*, 231)

The first meeting at an Ashram is termed the "Open Heart."<sup>6</sup> Participants are asked, "Why have you come? What do you want? What do you really need? The expressed needs essentially provide the raw material for the teaching content of the Ashram evangelists and Bible teachers. The "answers," (to the needs expressed in the Open Heart), are offered in the subsequent Ashram addresses. According to Jones, the preaching at an Ashram is not just preaching, but prescription.

The "patients" had described their symptoms in the *Open Heart*, and now I had to give in my addresses the prescription for the cure. I could present Jesus as the remedy in every situation, but only so far as I had experienced or tested it. It must be testimony as all

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<sup>5</sup> *A Song of Ascents*, 226 ff

<sup>6</sup> See end of this decade summary for information on the Open Heart and the Overflowing Heart, the two pillars of the Christian Ashram, as well as guidance on the Open Heart and the Overflowing Heart.

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great literature is autobiographical, so all preaching must be testimony. (Song of Ascents, 235)<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the Ashram the “Overflowing Heart,” is held where many participants discover that the Ashram fellowship has become redemptive. Problems and anxieties are found to be “dissolved” in the context of the redemptive group experience. The personal transformations are remarkable. Jones delights in telling this story in his autobiography:

We try to put our finger on the central problem of life – the problem of self centeredness. To do so we insist on self-surrender. A woman said, ‘I’ve found you out. You have only one remedy – self-surrender.’ I laughed and said, ‘I am glad that you found me out, for I had found myself out. I cannot go down any road with anybody on any problem without running into the necessity of self-surrender (*A Song of Ascents*, 230).

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<sup>7</sup> The author of this Ashram History makes this comment, “I have been thinking a lot about the Ashram as an organization lately and about what we need to do to continue and to grow. We sometimes hear that we are “out of touch” or that the Ashram was more effective with a previous generation...that we don’t know quite what to do to be relevant to a new generation or to put it another way, we don’t know what our “customers” really need. And then it dawned on me that if and when we really listen to those participating in the **Open Heart** we will learn about the felt needs of our “customers.” We will learn about their current needs, not perhaps the ones that E. Stanley Jones heard about, but we will hear needs and if we really listen we will not be “out of touch” – not at all. We will hear stories of brokenness and of the anticipation (and hope) for healing and transformation. In this “**Open Heart**” process, we are provided a window into seeing the needs of our customers...the deep needs, the real needs.

The Ashram’s capacity to be in a constant state of innovation and renewal is built into the framework of the Christian Ashram through the pillar of the **Open Heart**. We simply need to use the information we hear, engage, connect and present Jesus Christ as the “answer” to the needs that were expressed in the Open Heart. The Ashram has no reason to look back or focus on yesterday or risk being outdated for all the Ashram participants are in the presence of the now – the present human need and the Holy Spirit in its full contemporariness.”

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A twenty four-hour Prayer Vigil runs throughout the Christian Ashram in hour-long shifts. Jones writes, “Some people wonder how they can pray for an hour. But they do. Prayer groups are also established in each Ashram where members pray for the needs brought to the group and then share with others how they have found release and victory” (*A Song of Ascents*, 228). Jones wrote in his autobiography that the “Prayer Vigil raises the spiritual temperature of the Ashram” (*A Song of Ascents*, 228).

Jones was adamant that leaders must follow the Ashram model with fidelity. Each element was intentional and should not be changed to suit the temperament or desires of those implementing the Ashram. <sup>8</sup>The component parts of the daily Ashram experience include the following,

The day begins with an hour of Devotions before breakfast, half spent in silence with our Bibles and half in sharing what we have found. So all participants become teachers and all become taught. We encourage each member of the group to be spiritually creative.

After breakfast there is the Bible Hour, for the Bible reveals Jesus. Movements that do not center in the book which tell us of have no Center. “He that does not gather with me scatters.” (Luke 11:23 RSV). If you do not focus on Jesus you are liable to go in any direction; a dominant person can push the group and then it “scatters.” “All things are held together in him.”

After the Bible Hour is the church at Work Hour. We step out of the Bible into the world around us to see how we can function as a church.

After those two hours we have a Work Period, where we work with our hands. This gives us both recreation and re-creation—with our muscles attached to constructive purposes. I usually end up the morning after the work period with a message on one of

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<sup>8</sup> Brother Asok Antony shared his perspective on the importance of “fidelity to the Ashram model” in an address to the Ashram Board, September 23, 2004. His presentation is s attached to this chapter.

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the main emphases of the Ashram – Jesus Christ and his uniqueness, the Kingdom of God, self- surrender, the Holy Spirit, or evangelism. (*Song of Ascents*, 227)



*Jones picking up trash during the Work Period at American Ashrams, c 1950*

After lunch we have the Family Meeting in which we meet as an Ashram family and ask the group to bring up constructive suggestions for change – what can we do better? We remind them that if they do not bring up criticism at the Family meeting, they should not bring them up anywhere else, so that there will be no secret criticism. If there is no outer criticism we know there is no inner, so there is relaxed fellowship. The family meeting is the meeting where the group decides its program and its spirit. After the Family Meeting, there is recreation until 4:30 pm, when we hold Prayer Groups. The Prayer Group is not for the discussion of prayer; that would be the Word of Prayer become word; but groups that really pray – the Word of Prayer become flesh in the prayer group. The leader does not discourse on prayer; he simply directs the praying of the group.

In the afternoon, we take up Special Interest Groups where we face social, economic, and world questions. After supper there is a vesper service, and I finish up the day with an evangelistic service at night in which we give the group a chance to affirm publicly the spiritual decisions made during the day.

One night during the Christian Ashram, the leaders preach on “Christianity and Healing” and close the sermon with a healing service. Jones comments:

The Healing Service message focuses on Christianity and health and healing and following that message, we offer a healing service. Since the Christian answer is a total

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answer, the body must be included. We ask three groups to come forward: first, those who want physical healing; second, those who want spiritual healing; third, those who want both. We explain that we are not “healers” but are lending our hands to Christ for his healing to come through; so if healing comes, the recipient must praise him, not us. In the Ashram, we take an oblique approach to disease, approaching it largely through the moral and the spiritual. Our greatest healings are by this oblique approach, through getting people to surrender to God their wrong mental and spiritual attitudes of fears, worries, resentments, hates, self centeredness, guilt, impurities, and inferiorities. When these go, the physical upsets based upon them go as well. Many of the problems and illnesses are not solved but dissolved, dissolved in the atmosphere of love.

I want to reiterate that we do not make physical healing the emphasis in the Christian Ashram. Rather, self surrender and conversion are emphasized which often results in remediation and freedom from physical disease. We are not absolutists in regard to healing...Some disease must await the final cure in the resurrection when we get our immortal bodies. So God will heal us now or give us power to use the infirmity --- not bear it but use it --until the final cure when we receive our immortal body (*A Song of Ascents*, 228).

The final session of the Christian Ashram is the overflowing heart where the personal transformations” are shared. Jones writes that the purpose of the **Overflowing Heart** is to do what one of the lepers did when, having been healed, he turned back and fell at the feet of Jesus and said: “Thank you, thank you.” It attaches the changed person to Jesus Christ and not to the movement through which the change came.

Long time Christian Ashram leader, Brother Gordon Hunter affirmed that the time of the Overflowing Heart is the most exciting hour of the Ashram.

What are these people saying? How come they are filled with new visions? Well, it happens. Over and over again, it happens. Nor is it just a momentary feeling of good will. In life after life something so vital has happened that, while the emotional overtones may disappear, the essence of the experience will remain forever and continue to bear fruit.



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Brother Stanley once described the Ashram alike a ship coming into lift locks. It is enclosed temporarily in a specialized situation. Into that situation is poured tons and tons of water, which lifts that whole ship and all of its cargo and then sends it out on a permanent higher level. It is something like that which happens to people at an Ashram.

It is a common occurrence for the generations to find each other at the Ashram. There is no generation gap. Each generation has something to contribute to the other. Each has a precious gift to give. The older generation has experience. The young generation brings their idealism. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. (*Transformation*, Fall 1974)

While there are a great variety of spiritual retreat formats available to the Christian community, the Christian Ashram is a unique form of retreat, with a specific format created by E. Stanley Jones. While there can be slight variations in the original format, the United Christian Ashram leaders believe that there are important elements (pillars) of a Christian Ashram which are necessary to remain in place in order to maintain the Ashram's unique purpose, goals, and achieve the expected (and much needed) results!

## The Theological Underpinnings of the Christian Ashram

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The theological convictions of E. Stanley Jones are exemplified in the structure and component parts of the Christian Ashram. Jones' "convictions" illustrate his "theology" and came from his experience of the risen Lord. When Jones first articulated these "convictions," he had been a Christian, in fact, for decades. However, one day, he asked himself some questions...."Stanley, you have been a Christian for 50 years; you walked with Christ for 50 years and you have faced life together. What have you learned? What has life taught you in these 50 years? What are the

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convictions which you hold, or deeper, which hold you?” (Mathews-Younes, *Living Upon the Way*, 44) Jones subsequently articulated answers to these questions in various sermons, and writings and specifically in his 1953 book, *Growing Spiritually*.<sup>9</sup> Jones’ convictions are core to the design of the Christian Ashram.

Jones’ twelve theological convictions, with the relevant New Testament verse are as follows.

### *1. We Live in a Moral Universe.*

*Luke 12:2 - Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, and nothing is secret that won’t be brought out into the open.*

The moral universe that God created is dependable. We experience results or consequences in this God-created universe.

### *2. The God who is behind this moral universe stands in relationship to us as a Father who loves us, cares for us and would redeem us.*

*John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but have eternal life.*

The creator of this universe is a God who is Love and who seeks all of humanity as the object of his love. The New Testament tells us that God revealed himself in His most perfect and loving form in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

### *3. Jesus is Incarnate God. Jesus is the “Word” become “Flesh.”*

*John 1: 1 & 14- In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.*

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Jesus is God become man. The divine word became flesh in Jesus Christ. Jesus shows us how to live in that He is our example and disposes us to live in that He is our redeemer.

### *4. The Center of the Incarnation is the Cross.*

*Galatians 6:14 – But for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through him, and I have been crucified to the world.*

The cross represents the reality of God's full identification and experience with our suffering. What fell on Jesus fell on God, what He bore, God bore; Jesus' cross was God's cross. Self surrender reflects our presence at the cross.

### *5. The Way of Christ is written into me and into the nature of reality.*

*John 1:3-4 –Everything came into being through the word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the word was life, and the life was the light for all people. (CEB)*

*John 4:6 – I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (CEB)*

The Way is written into the nature of reality and into our natures. Christian living has cosmic backing for it is the natural way to live. The message of revelation and the facts of science both end up at the feet of Christ.

### *6. The Way to Live is by Grace and Receptivity –*

*Romans 5: 1-2 – Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.*

*2 Peter 3: 18 – Instead grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

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Self-surrender enables us to take the gift of God which transforms us and enables us to walk upon the Way! We travel upon that Way by grace and receptivity.

### *7. The Gift of the Holy Spirit is the Birthright of all Christians –*

*Acts 2: 38 – Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*1 John 3: 24 – Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

The Holy Spirit makes Christ our contemporary for the Holy Spirit is Christ in us now!

### *8. The Kingdom of God is the Ultimate Order and God's Answer to Man's Total Need*

*Luke 17:20-23 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say 'Here it is,' or 'There it is, ' because the kingdom of God is within you.*

*Col. 1:12-14 May you give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the domination of darkness and bought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

The Kingdom of God is to be taken seriously as a present reality. Jesus believed in life and in its redemption. The Kingdom of God is the collective redemption of all mankind.

### *9. The Way to Meet Unmerited Suffering is to Use It.*

*Luke 21: 12-13 - They will take you into custody and harass you because of your faith. They will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will provide you with an opportunity to testify. (CEB)*

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Unmerited suffering and injustice can be used. Jesus took the cross, the symbol of death, and turned it into the symbol of redemption. All injustice and evil can be used as an occasion of a testimony to the glory of God.

### *10. Jesus is Lord and will have the last word in human events.*

*Hebrews 1: 1-3 (NRSV) Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, who he appointed heir of all things through whom he also created the world. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

*Romans 10:9 - That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Jesus is Lord, and if we have any doubt, we can simply recall the resurrection on the third day. "Put out the candles, the sun is up." Jesus is alive now and Jesus is Lord.

### *11. Love is the strongest force in the world and will ultimately win.*

*Matthew 22: 36-40 – "Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole being, and with your whole mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments."*

The love of God is the biggest thing in the universe, and when that love is incarnate in a person, we know that God's love has sought us out in the way that mankind can grasp and follow.

*12. Jesus is the one perfect gift that we have to give to the world. Matthew 28:18-20 – Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.*



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*Mark 16:15 - Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to every creature.*

Jesus is a gift to be shared with the world: “In the person of Jesus Christ the Christian church holds within itself a motive and a power that produces transformed persons.”

(Mathews-Younes, *Living Upon the Way*, 44-57 & Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 373 ff) <sup>10</sup>

As Jones found verification of his “convictions” in life he embedded his “convictions” into the design and infrastructure of the Christian Ashram experience, as Pillars and Principles. The chart below is a crosswalk of Jones’ theological convictions and illustrates how they are used as a part of the Christian Ashram infrastructure, i.e., “pillars” and “principles.”

Jones’ Life Convictions	Ashram Pillars and Principles
We live in a moral universe.	Ashram emphasis on the development of Christian maturity through prayer, Bible study, teaching and fellowship
God is behind this moral universe and is Love.	Ashram emphasis on love and breaking down barriers that divide us such as race, class, nationality, age, gender and denomination
Jesus is incarnate God.	Ashram emphasis on the Word Become Flesh & the Word Become <b>Deed</b>
The center of the incarnation is the Cross.	Ashram emphasis on the Word Become <b>Atonement</b>
The <i>Way</i> to live is by grace and receptivity.	Ashram emphasis on the Word become <b>Personal</b> and on personal transformation through self surrender

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<sup>10</sup>. This theological summary could be used as a part of the Ashram’s seminary outreach initiatives and perhaps as the theological “content” for a short course on E. Stanley Jones.

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The Way of Christ is written into me and into the nature of reality, and the Christian Way is the natural way of life.	The Ashram emphasis on the Word become <b>Teaching</b>
The gift of the Holy Spirit is the birthright of all Christians.	The Ashram emphasis on the Word become <b>Adequacy</b>
The Kingdom of God is God's total answer to man's total need.	The Ashram emphasis on the Word become <b>Authority</b> .  The Ashram as the Kingdom of God in miniature.
The Way to meet unmerited suffering and injustice is to use it.	The Ashram Healing Service  The necessity for healing of mind, soul and body
Love is the strongest force in the universe and will win.	The Ashram emphasis on fostering the Koinonia of the early church
Jesus is Lord!	The Word become <b>Victorious</b> – Ashram emphasis on the centrality of Jesus
Jesus is the one perfect gift that we have to give the world.	The Word become <b>Universal Movement and Message</b> –

During his last evangelistic trip to Japan in 1971, and just before his stroke, Jones preached a sermon entitled, “*The Divine Yes*” which builds on the text, “The divine yes has at last sounded in him, for in him is the yes that affirms the promises of God.” (2 Cor: 1:19-20) These promises which he compiled in this sermon echo the theological convictions outlined above. These promises of God include the following;

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There is a God; a Father lying behind this universe caring for all creation; this Father is manifested in the face of Jesus Christ, for ours is a Christ-like God; humankind can be different, and that life can be utterly changed; our emptiness can become fullness as every recess of our inner and outer lives is invaded and empowered by the Holy Spirit. (*The Divine Yes*, 21)

Jones had bet his life on Jesus and took every opportunity to share his reality of living in Christ. Jones often said that throughout his life he had been in search of a vocabulary to express adequately the power of his conversion. Jones designed the Christian Ashram so that all participants could experience the fullness of life in Christ Jesus and find a vocabulary to express the power (and significance) of their conversion.

## The Transfer of the Christian Ashram to North America

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The Christian Ashram movement took hold in India and when Jones was stranded in the United States during World War II he transplanted the Christian Ashram to the United States and Canada, where it has become a strong spiritual growth ministry.<sup>11</sup> (Additional information in the section on the “Decades.”)

### Organizational Structure of the Christian Ashram

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<sup>11</sup> The Christian Ashram mission statement reads, “The Christian Ashram inspires the transformation of persons to be followers of Christ and thereby discover, renew and deepen relationships with God, ourselves and others.” The Ashram has been called a healing of love to mind, body, and spirit. It is an attempt to make the word of the kingdom become flesh in a group. (Jones, *The Word Became Flesh*, 270)

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From the 1940s into the 1970s, Brother Stanley was “Mr. Ashram.” (Paul Wagner Report, Gen Secretary Report, September 29, 1986) During those years, he was the person who was the head of the United Christian Ashram movement.

Jones always described the Ashram as an “organism.” His idea for “organizing” the “organism,” was that the organizational structure be as simple as possible and that the Ashram movement be kept open theologically, spiritually and practically. The organizational structure was designed to be sufficiently flexible to be able to respond to current needs and invest in grass roots Ashrams.

Brother Stanley sought to develop the Ashram along the pattern of the Early Church, the FOUR, as well as the TWELVE as appointed by our Lord. Brother Stanley also recognized that as the development of the Church became stronger in its outreach to all the world, the TWELVE were essentially located in Jerusalem. They were leaders of the Christian Church. The church as founded by our Lord, was empowered by His Spirit at Pentecost in the ONE HUNDRED TWENTY. The United Christian Ashrams developed in the same way in the mind of Brother Stanley. He called the ONE HUNDRED TWENTY the “Family Meeting.” Beyond this, he saw the FIVE HUNDRED Brethren, as The Ashram Association. The Christian church as the home of us all and the Kingdom of God as the ultimately loyalty of us. It was essentially against this early pattern of the Christian Church that the United Christian Ashram was structured.

Today the United Christian Ashram has a Board of Directors composed of nine members. Each local Ashram is under the direction of the “Twelve,” a symbolic number of “Directors,” who like the twelve disciples of Christ are also close followers of Jesus and proclaim that Jesus is Lord! Typically the Central Office has been wherever the General Secretary has lived.

According to Graham, Jones remained actively involved in every aspect of the Christian Ashrams during his life. However, after Jones’ paralytic stroke in 1971, he was unable to continue attending Ashram Board meetings in person, but was able to convey to his daughter and son in law a memorandum for the January 1972 Christian Ashram board meeting. Jones wrote,

It is my earnest desire that the Ashram movement be kept open theologically, spiritually and practically as for my whole life I have attempted to be; evangelical and evangelistic, in the sense of being responsive to and obedient to the whole Gospel, commending it to all mankind; ecumenical, transcending all denominational and sectarian divisions; inclusive, and perpetually relevant to the times and the real needs of humankind;

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committed to Christ and his Kingdom; guided by the Holy Spirit, together with the combined wisdom of the concerned and committed fellowship. (Graham, *Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission*, 354)

The Christian Ashram movement has now been operating in the United States for the past seventy-five years. During the years when Jones was actively engaged in the Christian Ashrams, he would often spend six months a year traveling to many of the dozens of week-long Christian Ashrams that were offered across the United States and Canada. These spiritual retreats were found to be both popular and effective with sometimes hundreds of persons in attendance. Since the death of E Stanley Jones in 1973, the Christian Ashram, under indigenous leadership continues to show how Christ touches us vitally and redemptively at every point of need. This direct, very personal evangelism is the essence of the Christian Ashram experience.<sup>12</sup> The continued creative functioning of the Christian Ashram movement is a testament to the committed leadership that Jones left in place when he died, many of whom have been involved for decades and have remained committed to the Ashram experience as a powerful encounter with the risen Christ.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bill Berg wrote that E. Stanley Jones had a balanced form of evangelism....evangelism without fanaticism, urgency without frenzy, proclamation without manipulation, promotion without pressure, enthusiasm without theological naivete, and personal regeneration coupled with social concerns. (*Transformation*, XXV, No.1, Spring 1990, 11)

<sup>13</sup> A recent e mail from a friend who just attended her first Ashram, reads as follows: "It was a lovely weekend of spiritual renewal surrounded with God's love and fellowship with others. There were about 50 persons present and it was such a diverse group. Anyone interested is welcome. Ages ranged from 20's to 80's, men, women, couples, single, married, divorced, widowed, lively people and quiet people, There were missionaries, persons in business, teachers, secretaries, actors, musicians, a woman who had amazingly survived a brain tumor; some at the beginning of their adult life journey and some near the end. What melded us together was love. The love of God, our love for God, and love for Christ as our Savior all spilling over in love for each other and to be shared with the world through our daily lives. We had joyful times of praise in song, quiet times of prayer, excellent talks and during the Open Heart time, persons shared the needs they had brought with them. For example to grow in trust, to let go of fear, a need for peace, renewal, escape, to let God have more control over their lives. At the end of the weekend

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The Ashram leadership is well aware of the fact that we now live in a world that is vastly different from the one that Jones left in 1973. Our world is both fast paced and fast changing. In light of the Ashram's bedrock focus on Jesus Christ, Graham infers that the Christian Ashram movement can have a powerful (bedrock) impact in this fast changing world when he writes,

As one reads about and closely examines the spirit, the intent, and the scope of the Ashrams, one detects the rich blend of Christianity's spiritual and theological emphases down through the ages, characteristics that were so bedrock to and exemplified in Christ's life and ministry, namely: **holiness, compassion, contemplation, evangelistic zeal, and charismatic and incarnational (full dimensional) living.** (Graham, *Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission*, 355)

The Christian Ashram is engaging with this world as it offers full dimensional living -- a life-changing alternative to religious and cultural upheaval. The Christian Ashram leadership believes that as the Christian Ashram continues to focus on the characteristics that were bedrock to and exemplified in Christ's life and ministry, it will continue to have a rich future.

The Christian Ashram movement embraces the implications of this Christ-transformed world and wishes to share the promise of living in Christ with everyone. The resources of Jesus Christ are available now and our culture and church may be ready to listen with new receptivity to a message of the possibilities of a life lived in Jesus Christ. The Christian Ashram offers a model (and the experience) of Kingdom of God living. Furthermore, we now have methods of communication that can instantly address our brothers and sisters around the world. Jones would have surely used the Internet and

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during the period of the Overflowing Heart, persons share what had happened to them. Some found what they came for, some found what they needed whether it was what they asked for or not. Some were surprised at what they found and how they felt. Being surprised by love and acceptance was mentioned several times – coming hesitantly to the weekend and leaving filled and strengthened. The overall theme of the weekend was “experiencing the Spirit” For me it was a lovely, gentle, peaceful, renewing, inspiring and strengthening weekend which has carried me through the time sitting at the hospital and is with me still.” This email is testimony to the continuing and present “impact” of the Christian Ashram – an impact sorely needed in our fractured world.

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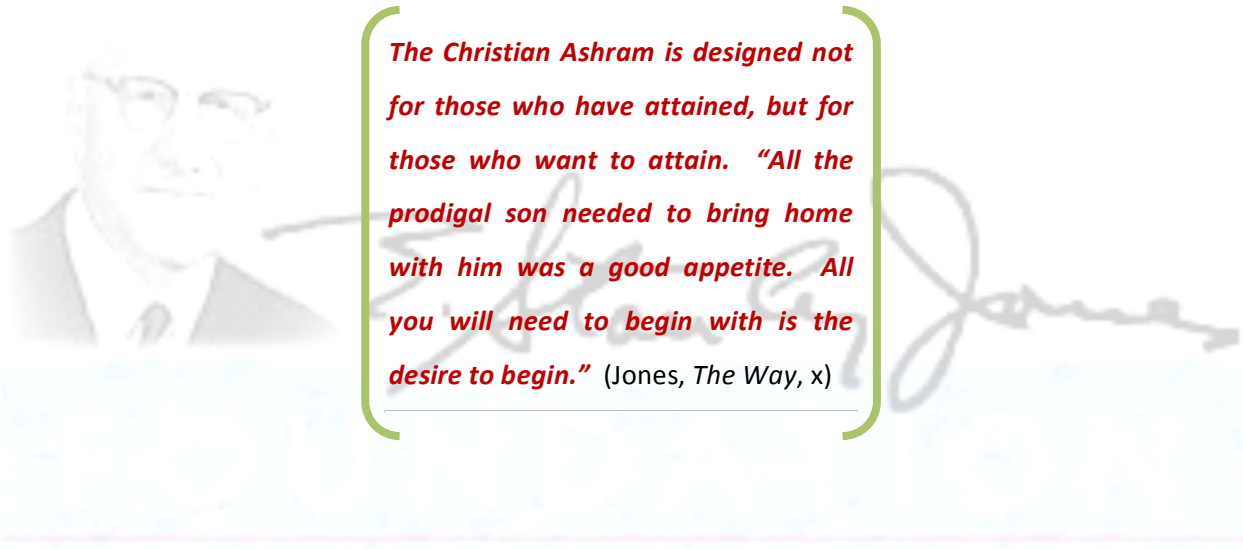
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social media, “to put his arms around the world and share Jesus with everyone.”  
(Mathews, J.K., Personal Communication)



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*The Christian Ashram is designed not for those who have attained, but for those who want to attain. "All the prodigal son needed to bring home with him was a good appetite. All you will need to begin with is the desire to begin."* (Jones, *The Way*, x)