
George Allen Turner: A Tribute

by Frank Bateman Stanger

This issue of *The Asbury Seminarian* is a dedicatory tribute to George Allen Turner, Ph.D., D.Litt., who will be retired at the 1979 Commencement after serving 34 years on the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary as Professor of Biblical Literature.

Early Life and Education

George Allen Turner was born in Willsboro, NY on August 28, 1908. His father, Charles Doyle Turner, who had been a carpenter in New York City, became a farmer when he moved to Essex County in the northern part of the state. He was a stalwart, hard-working, intensely moral person. George's mother, Bertha Hayes Turner, a school teacher, was active in the Methodist Church and a woman of deep faith.

When Dr. Turner was only 11 years of age, his father died. He remained on the farm until age 19 in order to help maintain the farm operations.

During his teens George was converted in a tent revival series held by a group of Free Methodists from Burlington, VT. Shortly thereafter he became a member of the Free Methodist Church.

Dr. Turner's education was thorough and extensive. He attended the A. M. Chesborough Seminary, a two-year junior college in North Chili, NY. In 1932 he received the A.B. degree from Greenville College (IL) and two years later the B.D. degree from Greenville College School of Religion.

He was graduated from the Biblical Seminary in New York with the S.T.B. degree in 1935 and the S.T.M. degree in 1936. In 1942 he entered the Harvard University Divinity School (MA) from which he received the Ph.D. degree in 1946. His doctoral thesis was entitled

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“Is Entire Sanctification Scriptural? An Appraisal of the Wesleyan Message. The Biblical Basis for the Most Distinctive Doctrine of Methodism.” He has done postdoctoral studies at New York University and Yale Divinity School (CT).

Vocational Activities

During his days in Biblical Seminary in New York, Dr. Turner pastored a Dutch Reformed Church on Long Island. Between his time in New York and his enrollment in Harvard Divinity School, he taught for six years at Wessington Springs College in Wessington Springs, SD. During four of those years, he pastored a Congregational Christian Church.

While at Harvard, he served as pastor to young people in the Harvard Congregational Church, Brookline, MA, and as the pastor of a Free Methodist Church in Clinton, MA.

After the completion of his residence work at Harvard Divinity School in 1945, with only the dissertation to be completed, Dr. Turner became a member of the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary. His thesis was completed during the following year and the Ph.D. degree was received in 1946.

During ten of his early years at Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Turner pastored a United Congregational Church in Russellville, OH. From 1956 to 1958 he served as the superintendent of the Kentucky-Tennessee conference of the Free Methodist Church.

Marriage and Family

George met Lucile McIntosh in Mitchell, SD. He was there to speak at a Free Methodist district quarterly meeting where Lucile was leading the singing. Perhaps it was “love at first sight.” A courtship soon developed and George and Lucile were united in holy matrimony on October 8, 1938.

Two children have blessed their marital union: Allen Charles, now 39, an anthropologist; and Carol, now 31, former school teacher, mother of three children, and the wife of the director of admissions at Greenville College. The Turners are the proud grandparents of five grandchildren.

At Asbury Theological Seminary

Dr. Turner has had a distinguished career as a member of the faculty at Asbury Theological Seminary. At first, he taught in the

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area of church history. Soon he became the head of the department of English Bible, and his teaching activities across the years have continued to be in this academic discipline.

In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Dr. Turner has served as acting divisional chairman and as a member of most of the important faculty committees: curriculum and instruction, professional research, admissions, library, honorary degree, and faculty retreat. Currently, as the result of an election by his colleagues, he is serving as the chairman of the important faculty concerns committee, which is the liaison between Asbury Theological Seminary faculty and trustees.

Dr. Turner's teaching has always been characterized by the pursuit of academic excellence, a passion for doctrinal purity, and a concern for the spiritual formation of his students.

Dr. G. Herbert Livingston, longtime colleague of Dr. Turner on the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary, was privileged to have Dr. Turner as a teacher, both at Wessington Springs College in 1936 and at Asbury Theological Seminary in 1945. Dr. Turner's first year on the Seminary faculty was Dr. Livingston's first year as a Seminary student.

Dr. Livingston comments concerning Dr. Turner as a teacher:

He was always a very proficient teacher. His inductive method in teaching the Bible was very impressive. He also served as proctor of the Boys' Dorm in Wessington Springs. I got well acquainted with him at the time. He always took the pranks of the students in good stride. At all times he was an extremely careful scholar. He is extremely ambitious. He tends to overwork in his academic pursuits.

Dr. Turner has had a career-long interest in the Holy Land, the Middle East, and biblical archaeology. He has led many tours to the Holy Land and has participated in many archaeological "digs." He has also been greatly concerned about theological education in mission lands and has lectured and taught in many mission schools.

Dr. Turner has been an extremely productive author. The B. L. Fisher Library at ATS lists the following publications by him:

"Is Entire Sanctification Scriptural? An Appraisal of the Wesleyan Message. The Biblical Basis for 'The Most Distinctive Doctrine of

- Methodism,”* Doctoral thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1946.
- The More Excellent Way: The Scriptural Basis of the Wesleyan Message.* Light and Life Press, 1952.
- Exploring the Bible: Studies in the Major Books of the Bible, Using the “Inductive Method” of Approach.* Asbury Theological Seminary Press, 1953.
- Portals to Bible Books: Studies in the Major Books of the Bible Using the Inductive Method of Approach.* Asbury Theological Seminary Press, 1956.
- “The Doctrine of Sanctification,” in *The Doctrinal Distinctives of Asbury Theological Seminary*, (40th Anniversary Publication). The Herald Press, 1963.
- The Gospel of John: An Evangelical Commentary*, (co-authorship with Julius R. Mantey). Eerdmans, 1964.
- The Vision Which Transforms: Is Christian Perfection Scriptural?* Beacon Hill Press, 1964.
- “Philippians and Colossians,” in *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*. Eerdmans, 1965.
- “Holiness and Social Tensions,” in *The Word and the Doctrine*. Beacon Hill Press, 1965.
- “Koinonia,” *The New Testament Church*, by members of the Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary. The Asbury Theological Seminary Press, 1969.
- Historical Geography of the Holy Land.* Baker Book House, 1973.
- “Evaluation of the Seminar” in *Perfect Love and War*. Evangel Press, 1974.
- “The New and Living Way: A Fresh Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews.* Bethany Fellowship Press, 1975.
- Christian Holiness in Scripture, in History and in Life.* Beacon Hill Press, 1977.

In addition to the above, the B. L. Fisher Library has a record of over 200 articles and reviews written by Dr. Turner.

Honors

Dr. Turner has received many well-deserved honors. He is an honorary fellow of the American School of Oriental Research. In 1966 he was voted “Man-of-the-Year” by Roberts Wesleyan College (NY), and in 1974, “Distinguished Alumnus of the Year” by Greenville College. In 1964 Greenville College conferred upon him the

honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. In 1973, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Asbury Theological Seminary, he was one of the 50 persons receiving the Distinguished Service Award.

The Man

It has been my privilege to minister with Dr. Turner at the Seminary for nearly two decades. Three words characterize him in my thinking: commitment, crusading, compassion.

George Turner is a deeply committed person. He is wholeheartedly committed to Jesus Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Wesleyan theological position, and to teaching religious truth as a divinely appointed vocation. He is ambitious, energetic, and industrious in his responses to that to which he is fully committed. He gives evidence of an intense dogmatism in his theological convictions, but at the same time he is open-minded to truth and always willing to listen.

He is a committed churchman of the Free Methodist persuasion. In a real sense he was the founder of the Free Methodist Church in Wilmore. This society actually began in meetings in the Turner home on Gillispie Street in 1949. He has fulfilled many positions of responsibility in his local church, serving as chairman of the board of trustees and as a member of the important finance and pastoral relations committees.

George Turner is well known for his relentless crusading spirit. Among my first official contacts with him was when very early in my administration at the Seminary he approached me about signing a resolution supporting full integration in the Jessamine County schools. This was at the beginning of a social reform crusade under his leadership which ultimately led to a successful court case and the establishment of a fully integrated school system locally.

He is also a crusader in relation to doctrinal purity. I am told that he played an active role at the time of the theological tensions which prevailed at the Seminary during the early 50s. During his tenure at the Seminary, he has been insistent that whenever theological tensions arise, they be resolved on the side of the Seminary's historic Wesleyan position.

George Turner has often suffered because of his crusading spirit. But he is always willing to pay the full price for wholehearted commitment to principles and policies which he considers almost "dearer than life itself."

George Turner is a person of great compassion. His heart throbs with concern and care for people everywhere. He has always striven for all to enjoy equal rights. Community to him means brotherhood and sisterhood.

In times of dialogue and conflict, George is often blunt and frank in his remarks and this sometimes gives the appearance of harshness. But always within is the heart of compassion, a truly pastoral heart. He possesses a sense of wry humor which is often his method in satirical attack. The very kind of humor which he manifests is bathed in respect and affection.

The other day during a conversation with Lucile about George's life and his teaching ministry which has spanned more than three decades at the Seminary, she remarked with a radiant confidence in her voice: "And he would do it all over again." Truly such an affirmation is the capstone of his wholehearted commitment to the Seminary and his uncompromising love for the institution he has served so long and so well.

So today we pay tribute to George Allen Turner — a dedicated Christian, committed churchman, compassionate crusader, skilled teacher, influential author, and devoted friend. ■