

DAVIES, EMLYN (1907-1974), Baptist minister and college professor

Name: Emlyn Davies
Date of birth: 1907
Date of death: 1974
Spouse: Elizabeth Fretwell (née Bowden)
Spouse: Elsie Davies (née Ockendon)
Child: Mary Emlyn Davies
Child: Robert Meurig Davies
Parent: Mary Jane Davies
Parent: Edwin Davies
Gender: Male
Occupation: Baptist minister and college professor
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Author: D. Hugh Matthews

Emlyn Davies was the youngest of six children born to Edwin and Mary Jane Davies, in Froncysylltau, Denbighshire, on 23 April 1907. He had a brother, John, and four sisters, Annie, Nellie, Sarah, and Alice. His father was a foreman in Trefynant bricks and tiles works in Ruabon. He received his early education in Froncysyllte Council School before progressing to the County School in Llangollen. In 1925 he was accepted as a ministerial student in the Baptist College in Cardiff. Three years later (1928) he graduated in Welsh from the University College of Cardiff, gaining a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1931, with excellence in Church History and the Philosophy of Religion. He was not called to pastor a church at the end of his course and he paid to go to University College, Oxford, where, in 1934 he was awarded a B. Litt. for a thesis entitled, 'The Keltic Church in Wales prior to A.D. 664, together with its Relationship to the Western Church'. In March he was ordained minister of High St. English Baptist Church in Merthyr, and a year later, in September 1935, he married a school-teacher, Elsie Ockendon, in Perry Rise, Forest Hill, London. In the winter of 1939-40, soon after the outbreak of World War II, Elsie was struck down with a respiratory ailment and her doctor told her that the best way of clearing the condition was to take a sea-voyage. The only way of meeting such a requirement was to respond to an advertisement by the Children's Overseas Reception Board for volunteers to accompany children who were being sent overseas for safety from the bombing. By then, Emlyn Davies had accepted a call to pastor North Finchley Baptist Church on the outskirts of London. The Induction Services were arranged for September 1940 but a few months before then Elsie had been chosen to accompany a group of children who were being evacuated to Australia and had sailed out of Liverpool at the beginning of August. Her husband never saw her again. She was killed when the Japanese attacked and sank the ship on which she was returning from Australia.

After barely two years in North Finchley, Emlyn Davies accepted an invitation to become the National Secretary of the Student Christian Movement in Wales. He moved to Wales in August 1942 and in September married a widow, Elizabeth Fretwell (née Bowden) from North Finchley. The wedding took place in Llandaff Road English Baptist church, Cardiff. Two children were born to them: Mary Emlyn on 20 November 1943 and Robert Meurig on 7 March 1947.

On the retirement of [T.W. Chance](#) as Principal of the Baptist College in Cardiff in 1944, Emlyn Davies was elected as tutor in Church history. Since his student days, Emlyn Davies had been interested in inter-church movements. This continued, and toward the end of the War he was appointed to serve on a Baptist World Alliance commission considering racial and religious prejudice. As a member of that commission, he was invited to speak in the Alliance's Congress meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, in July 1950. While in North America, he preached in a number of large Baptist churches including Yorkminster in Toronto. He returned to Wales in August while he considered an invitation to allow his name to stand in the election of the next pastor of Yorkminster. Having considered the prospect of emigrating with his wife, he agreed to the church's request and a fortnight later he received a call from the church and tendered his resignation as Church History tutor of the Baptist College in Cardiff.

Emlyn Davies was inducted as pastor of Yorkminster on 4 January 1951 and during the next ten years as minister of the Toronto church he became well-known as a preacher throughout Canada and North America. In addition to his membership of the Canada Council of Christians and Jews and the Executive Committee of the Baptist World Alliance, he was elected a member of the Canadian Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order and represented Canadian Baptists in the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Conference in Lund, Sweden (1952). Having been a delegate and speaker in a W.C.C. Faith and Order Conference in Montreal in 1957, he was elected Vice-Chairman of the First North American Faith and Order Conference at Oberlin College, Ohio, (1957). Between 1956 and 1958 he was President of the Canadian Council of Churches, and served as President of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec in 1961-2.

During his ten years in Yorkminster Emlyn Davies spent much time lecturing in various institutions. He lectured in theological colleges in Chicago, Philadelphia and Massachusetts, and in West Ontario, McMaster, Acadia and Toronto Universities. He regularly lectured to the chaplains of the Canadian Armed Forces. McMaster University (1952) and Acadia University (1957) both awarded him honorary Doctorates in Divinity. He also became well-known in Canadian broadcasting, both radio and television. Between 1955 and 1962 a service from Yorkminster was broadcast fortnightly by a local radio station; and in November 1958, John Diefenbaker, a Baptist and Prime Minister of Canada, nominated him to be a part-time, unsalaried, member of the Board of Broadcast Governors regulating broadcasting in Canada. The appointment was for a term of five years. Emlyn Davies was also actively engaged with the press, and when a local paper, *The Toronto Evening Telegram*, began to publish a Sunday edition, he accepted an invitation to write a weekly column extending to 2000 words, entitled 'Christian Living'.

In March 1961 fire destroyed a large section of Park Road Baptist Church, Toronto, and the minister and members of Yorkminster responded by inviting Park Road in May 1961 to unite with them and form a new church which would be named Yorkminster Park. Since Park Road had a minister of its own, the intention was to form a team of ministers who would, eventually, work under the direction of one pastor. The invitation was accepted and in September 1961 the churches joined together as one new church in special commencement services of worship. However, under the surface there was already tension between the two uniting congregations. At first, both existing ministers shared responsibility for the services, but it was then arranged that they (and the assistant who had been appointed to help in the new enterprise) should resign in March 1962 in order to give the joint membership the opportunity of choosing the new pastor who would lead the church. A week after he had presided in the Annual Assembly of the Baptist Convention of Quebec and Ontario in Yorkminster Park chapel in June 1962, the members of the united church refused to confirm Emlyn Davies as pastor and leader of the new cause. He was without a pastorate; and although he continued to preach widely and received several calls, he was never again the pastor of a church.

Following the disappointment of being rejected by the new Yorkminster Park church, he spent two months on a pre-arranged visit to Australia, lecturing and preaching in the centenary services of Victoria Baptist Union. On his return a number of invitations to vacant academic posts awaited him. He spent six months assisting as Dean of Studies in a college formed in Toronto when the Canada School of Missions and the Ecumenical Centre amalgamated. He then went on to lecture on 'Our Western Culture' in Toronto University Extramural Department. In 1964-65 he spent a year as Visiting Professor in St Andrew's, the United Church of Canada's Theological College in Saskatoon. He lectured on Christian Doctrine, Systematic Theology, Christian Ethica and Preaching. At the end of his term in Saskatoon, Emlyn Davies continued to supply a number of colleges and educational establishments in the Toronto area before being appointed the third Principal/President of Huntington College in the Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario (1968-72). Huntington College had been formed in 1960 by the United Church of Canada in order to train theological students in the north of the state but it soon became a federal, non-denominational, bilingual college in the Laurentian University. Emlyn Davies's three and a half years there were fraught with difficulties involving staff and students who had questioned his appointment from the very beginning. In 1969 financial difficulties forced the closure of the Philosophy Department in Huntington and its transfer to another of the colleges. There was also an attempt to transfer the Department of Biblical Studies to another of the federal colleges and Huntington had to resign from the university's unified Department of Religious Studies, with Emlyn Davies, himself, undertaking much of the burden of teaching the subject. Difficulties continued to colour much of his time as Principal, although he did secure a substantial endowment for the college which enabled him to fund the J. W. Tate Memorial Library which opened its doors in April 1972.

He retired in 1972 and moved to live in Port Hope, 65 miles from Toronto. He was taken ill while on a preaching and lecturing tour in the United Kingdom in 1972 and was diagnosed with heart trouble. He returned to Canada without fulfilling all of his engagements. After a period of rest, he again began lecturing and preaching. In January 1974 he accepted an invitation to pastor Calvary Church, Coburg, while it awaited the appointment of a new minister, but a month later he was admitted to a Toronto Hospital where it was discovered that his condition was incurable. There he died peacefully on 20 March 1974.

His funeral service was held on 22 March in Yorkminster Park chapel and he was later cremated in Mount Pleasant, Toronto; his ashes were buried in Port Hope. In his honour a plaque was unveiled in Carmel, Froncysylltau, in March 1975 and a memorial window placed in First Baptist Church, Port Hope, Ontario, in April 1975.

Author

D. Hugh Matthews, (1936 - 2020)

Sources

South Wales Baptist College Records

Alfreda Hall, *Emlyn Davies, Man of God*, Toronto, 1979. The book contains a number of photographs of him

Emlyn Davies did not publish any books, but an extensive collection of his papers - manuscripts and letters - is kept in the Canadian Baptist archives in McMaster Theological College, Hamilton, Ontario

Additional Links

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