

## DODD, CHARLES HAROLD (1884-1973), biblical scholar

**Name:** Charles Harold Dodd  
**Date of birth:** 1884  
**Date of death:** 1973  
**Spouse:** Phyllis Mary Terry (née Stockings)  
**Parent:** Sarah Dodd (née Parsonage)  
**Parent:** Charles Dodd  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** biblical scholar  
**Area of activity:** Religion; Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** John Tudno Williams

Born in Wrexham, 7 April 1884, the eldest of four sons of Charles Dodd, the headmaster of the local British Victoria elementary school, and his wife, Sarah (née Parsonage). One brother, Arthur Herbert, became Professor of History at UCNW Bangor, and another, Percy William, was a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, 1919-31. He was educated at his father's school and went on to Grove Park School, Wrexham, where he won a scholarship in Classics at University College, Oxford. He entered the college in 1902, and by 1906 he had gained first-class honours in Classical Moderations and in Litterae Humaniores ('Greats'). For a short time he lectured in Classics at Leeds University and also pursued research in Roman Imperial Numismatics at Berlin University. In the meantime he had been elected Senior Demy at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he carried out research in early Christian epigraphy in Italy, but his work on this subject was not published. Thus, his academic interests in this period of his life were in the fields of archaeology and numismatics, and his first publications in learned journals were in these subjects. It was at this time, too, that he started to study theology at Mansfield College, Oxford, although he never in fact took a theological degree, and he was ordained as Congregational Minister at Warwick in 1912.

In 1915 he returned to Mansfield as Yates Lecturer, and later Professor, in New Testament Greek and Exegesis, although his first intention on his return was to pursue the study of Church History. In 1927 he was appointed a University Lecturer in New Testament at Oxford and Grinfield Lecturer in the Septuagint. Three years later he was elected to fill the Rylands Chair of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University, and then in 1935 he became the first non-Anglican scholar to occupy a chair of divinity at either of the ancient universities of England when he was elected to the Norris-Hulse Chair at Cambridge, which he held until his retirement in 1949. He was also a Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge.

His first major publication was *The Authority of the Bible* (1928) in which he inquired wherein lay the source of that authority. He concluded that authority resides in the truth alone, namely that which is revealed of the mind and will of God and which is mediated to us in the *Bible* as 'the Word of God'. A prominent emphasis in his publications is his search for unity in the teaching of the New Testament writings and it has been claimed that this provided a major impetus to the growth of biblical theology immediately after the second World War. In *The Apostolic Preaching and its developments* (1936) he set out the main elements in the proclamation (kerygma) of the early church as he found them in Paul's epistles and in the Book of Acts. Later in *Gospel and Law* (1951) he discovered in the epistles of the New Testament a common pattern of ethical teaching (didache) which went back, as did the kerygma, to an early period in the early church.

He is especially remembered for his pioneering work in relation to the eschatology of the New Testament. He coined the term 'realized eschatology' in his book *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935) which has been called 'the most important single contribution made to the Anglo-American discussion of 'Kingdom of God' in the teaching of Jesus'. He insisted that Jesus's most characteristic sayings about the Kingdom were those which declared that it had arrived and was not only about to come. He also believed that any sayings which implied that the Kingdom would come in the future referred to a coming in a world beyond time and space. Later, in *The Coming of Christ* (1951), in discussing the second coming he states that it is an event beyond history. Yet, there is little doubt that he modified his earlier position and was obliged to concede that there remained something to be hoped for. The Johannine phrase 'the time is coming and now is' has been suggested as summing up his mature view on the matter. In the first of his important volumes on John's Gospel, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953), he expressed himself satisfied with a German expression which may be rendered 'eschatology that is in process of realization', which suggests that there will be eschatological expectations after the coming of the Kingdom. He also insisted that eschatological beliefs had influenced the ethical ideas of the early Church. The sense that everything in this world seemed temporary and provisional led the early Christians to concentrate on the eternal values which would survive the present order.

Another important feature of Dodd's contribution to the study of the parables is his insistence that they should be situated in a particular context within the ministry of Jesus, namely a situation of conflict in which he was the principal figure and

which in fact his appearance brought about. This standpoint is consistent with his concern to emphasize the historical element in the gospels. This is clearly seen in *History and the Gospel* (1938). Whilst recognizing that the gospels were composed 'from faith to faith', he believed it was possible to get behind the faith of the early Church to the real Jesus of history. His belief in the fundamental trustworthiness of the historical traditions found in the gospels is demonstrated in his last published work, *The Founder of Christianity* (1970), which was based on his Sir D.Owen Evans Lectures delivered at UCW Aberystwyth sixteen years previously. Dodd's influence was great also in relation to the attempt by a number of scholars from the sixties of the twentieth century onwards to give serious consideration to the contribution of John's Gospel in constructing a portrait of the Jesus of history. The main conclusion of his second important volume on that gospel, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (1963), is that there lies behind it an ancient tradition independent of those found in the synoptic gospels which supplies us with historical knowledge about Jesus.

Indeed, for many it was in the study of this Fourth Gospel that Dodd made his greatest contribution. In his volume interpreting the gospel he began by discussing in detail what he considered to be its diverse religious background, concluding that its purpose was to seek to communicate the Christian message to the Hellenistic world. In the second part of the work he presented the leading ideas of the Gospel before going on in the final section to its interpretation. However, the emphasis in his second major volume on John's Gospel on the presence of early Palestinian traditions behind it does not easily concur with his standpoint in the first volume.

Dodd also paid a great deal of attention to the contribution of the Apostle Paul to our understanding of early Christianity in influential articles and in his standard commentary, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (1932) in *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary series*. He also contributed another commentary, *The Johannine Epistles* (1946), to the same series. He was indeed called in his Festschrift, *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (1954), 'a prince among exegetes'.

However, Dodd will be remembered mainly for his outstanding contribution to the project which produced the modern translation of the *Bible* into English, *The New English Bible*, which sought to convey the expressions of the *Bible* in a modern idiom by departing from the tendency of earlier translations to translate the scriptures word-for-word. He was appointed General Director of this project in 1947 and saw the task through from its inception to its completion when the complete translation was published in 1970. In acknowledgement of his contribution to it he was made a Companion of Honour in 1963. This enterprise was undertaken at the behest of the churches of Britain as a whole, and, indeed, Dodd was throughout his life an ardent supporter of the ecumenical movement and made substantial contributions to the discussions of the World Council Churches on Faith and Order.

He was the recipient of honorary doctorates from ten universities in the countries of Britain, the USA, France and Norway, and he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1946. He received the freedom of the town of Wrexham in 1964. Although English was the language of his home and chapel in that town, there is ample evidence to demonstrate his lively interest in the Welsh language and his knowledge of it. Doubtless this benefitted him in his work of translating the scriptures.

In June 1925 he married Phyllis Mary, the widow of John Elliott Terry, and a son and a daughter were born to them. He died 22 September 1973. A service of thanksgiving for his life was held in Westminster Abbey on 25 January 1974. This was the first time a Free Church minister had been honoured in this way.

## Author

John Tudno Williams

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## Further Reading


Wikipedia Article: [C. H. Dodd](#)

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