
JONES, ROBERT TUDUR (1921-1998), theologian, church historian and public figure

Name: Robert Tudur Jones

Date of birth: 1921

Date of death: 1998

Spouse: Gwenllian Jones (née Edwards)

Parent: Elizabeth Jane Jones (née Williams)

Parent: John Thomas Jones

Gender: Male

Occupation: theologian, church historian and public figure

Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing; Religion; Scholarship and Languages

Author: D. Densil Morgan

Tudur Jones, the son of Thomas Jones, a railway worker, and Elizabeth Jane (née Williams), a nurse, was born in Tyddyn Gwyn, Llanystumdwy, Eifionydd, Caernarfonshire on June 28 1921. Along with his brother and sister, he was raised in Rhyl, Flintshire. The family were zealous Independents, worshipping regularly at Carmel chapel, under the ministry of Rev T. Ogwen Griffith. The 1904-5 Revival deeply influenced the parents' devotion and piety.

Robert Tudur had an excellent education at Rhyl Secondary School under teachers such as Lewis Angell in Welsh, [T. I. Ellis](#) (the Headmaster) in classics and A. M. Houghton in history. Houghton was an Evangelical Calvinist (and father of physicist Sir John Houghton FRS) who combined respect for academic discipline with steadfast religious dedication.

Even though he gained a scholarship to Jesus College, Oxford, Tudur bowed to family pressure and entered the University of Wales, Bangor, and followed courses in Welsh, under [Professor Sir Ifor Williams](#), and philosophy. He graduated with First-Class Honours in Philosophy in 1942. He went on to train for the Independent ministry in Bala Bangor College in Bangor and was steeped in church history by [John Morgan Jones](#), a prominent radical theologian, and in Christian doctrine by [J. E. Daniel](#). [Daniel](#) was a nationalist and advocate of the neo-Calvinism of Karl Barth, and Tudur empathised with his ideas.

After graduating with the highest marks ever recorded in the University of Wales Theology Faculty in 1945, he registered at Mansfield College, Oxford, for advanced studies. His subject was the history of Puritanism in Wales, under the supervision of Claude Jenkins, Regius Professor and Canon of Christchurch College, and he completed his doctorate by 1947. In addition to laying the foundations of his detailed knowledge of the subject, the period bore fruit in his study *Vavasor Powell* (1970). Tudur Jones then spent two semesters as a student in the Protestant Faculty of Strasbourg University. While at Bangor he was Student President, as he was at Mansfield College. He was ordained minister of Seion Chapel, Baker St, Aberystwyth in 1948.

It was evident that Tudur could serve his denomination best as an educator and scholar, and he was appointed professor

of Church History in Bala-Bangor College, Bangor, in 1950, as successor to [Pennar Davies](#). He remained in Bangor for the rest of his career succeeding [Gwilym Bowyer](#) as Principal of Bala-Bangor College in 1966 and an Honorary Professor in the university's Theology Department in 1989. In addition to his involvement in political matters - as editor of *Y Ddraig Goch* and parliamentary candidate for Plaid Cymru in Anglesey in 1955 and 1959 - the 1950s and 1960s were a time of great academic activity for him. His earliest substantial works, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962* (1962) and *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (1966, English translation, *Congregationalism in Wales*, 2004), though dealing with his own religious tradition, the Independents, succeeded in laying new foundations for the understanding of popular Protestantism in both countries, but especially so in Wales. His mastery of his material, his analytical acumen and clarity of expression, together with clear doctrinal principles, were signs that Tudur Jones was an exceptional church historian. During this time he was busy applying his socio-religious vision to public affairs through his journalism in particular as a monthly columnist in *Barn*, and from 1967 onwards, a weekly columnist in *Y Cymro*, he was one of those who guided public opinion when Wales and the Welsh language were becoming burning issues. For him, Christianity, especially the Calvinistic aspect, was not about nurturing piety, but about declaring God's sovereignty in the face of the increasing secularity of the time.

By the mid-1970s his historical interests had moved from his early involvement with Puritanism and the Evangelical Revival to the nineteenth century and the roots of the modern religious crisis in Wales. The first fruits of his work appeared in *Yr Undeb* (1976), a volume tracing the history of the Union of Welsh Independents but in reality analysing the anguish of Welsh Nonconformity at its Victorian zenith. His main work on this subject was his two-volume *Ffydd ac Argyfwng Cenedl: Crefydd a Chymdeithas yng Nghymru, 1890-1914* (1981-2; English translation, *Faith and the crisis of a nation*, 2004) which is a masterly analysis of the fall and demise of the Calvinistic Wales, to which he was himself heir. He was no impartial commentator, and throughout the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, he applied himself as energetically as ever to protect his inheritance by encouraging evangelical religion in general. He was elected President of the International Congregationalist Federation 1981-5, President of the Free Church Council of England and Wales in 1985-6 and President of the Union of Welsh Independents in 1986-7. He was awarded an Honorary D.Litt degree by the University of Wales in 1986 (he had gained his D.D. for his published works in 1968) and when Bala-Bangor College and Aberystwyth Memorial College merged in 1988, to create the College of Welsh Independents, he remained in Bangor, working from the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in the University. It is commonly acknowledged that Tudur Jones was the most eminent historian of religion in Wales in the twentieth century. He was an important religious figure and one of her foremost scholars.

Tudur Jones married Gwenllian Edwards from Porthmadog in 1948 and they had three sons and two daughters. The sons followed in their father's footsteps as Independent ministers and scholars. He died very suddenly on July 23, 1998. The funeral was on July 28 and he was buried in Bangor.

Author

D. Densil Morgan

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Further Reading

NLW Archives: [Cymry Ydym Ni... R. Tudur Jones, Darpar-Ymgeisydd Plaid Cymru yn Etholaeth Môn](#)

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Wikipedia Article: [R. Tudur Jones](#)

Additional Links

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