

ROBERTS, BLEDDYN JONES (1906-1977), Old Testament scholar

Name: Bleddyn Jones Roberts
Date of birth: 1906
Date of death: 1977
Gender: Male
Occupation: Old Testament scholar
Area of activity: Education; Religion; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Gwilym Henry Jones

Born April 21, 1906, the eldest son of Thomas and Sophia Jones Roberts, Ty Brith farm, Penycae, near Wrexham. He attended local schools, the Penycae primary and the Ruabon secondary. He then enrolled at the University College of North Wales Bangor, to train for the ministry of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church. He graduated B.A. with first class honours in Hebrew, B.D. with double distinction, in Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, and M.A. with distinction for a dissertation on 'The Agricultural Implements of the Old Testament' He spent two years at the University of Leipzig, but before he completed his work there he was taken ill and had to undergo major surgery; the after-effects of that treatment remained with him throughout his life. In 1934 he was appointed assistant lecturer in Hebrew at the University of Manchester, but in 1936 he returned to his *alma mater* to a similar post. Within a year he had accepted an invitation to become Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature in the United Theological College, Aberystwyth. Later in 1937 he was ordained a minister in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist denomination. In 1943 he married Dr Miriam Davies, who was at the time a family doctor in Lampeter; she was the daughter of the Reverend and Mrs John Davies, Aberystwyth, her father being minister of Salem chapel in the town.

1946 saw Bleddyn Roberts back in Bangor once again, this time as a Special Lecturer in Biblical History and Literature, and mainly responsible for educating prospective secondary school teachers to meet the requirements of the 1944 Education Act. He was promoted to a Senior Lectureship in 1948, and in 1953 he became Professor and Head of the Department of Hebrew and Biblical Studies.

His major work on *The Old Testament Text and Versions* was published in 1951, only a few years after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947; he took the opportunity to assess the impact of the Scrolls on studies of the *Old Testament* in Hebrew. He was instantly recognized as a leading world authority on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, and over the next decades he was regularly invited to write on the subject in scholarly volumes on the *Bible*, such as *The Bible Today* (1951), *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1958, 1961) *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (1962), *Companion to the Bible* (1963), *Chambers's Encyclopaedia* (1966), *Cambridge History of the Bible* (1969), *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971).

It was this volume, supported by other shorter works, that he presented for examination by the University for a higher doctorate. He was awarded a D.D. in 1953, and was one of the first scholars to be awarded this degree by the University of Wales on the examination of published scholarly work. He was also elected President of the British Society for Old Testament Study.

As an acknowledged authority on the Old Testament it was inevitable that he should be invited to join the team of British Old Testament scholars engaged on a new translation of the Old Testament for the *New English Bible*, a project on which he was engaged for twenty years. It was likewise inevitable that he became the Director of a new translation of the Bible into Welsh, eventually published as *Y Beibl Cymraeg Newydd*. His experience with the English translation enabled him to decide on a different character for the Welsh translation and to borrow a *modus operandi* for the translation panels.

He also played a pioneering role in the academic study of his subject through the medium of Welsh. He published in Welsh a number of volumes on the *Bible*: *Patrymau Llenyddol y Beibl* (literary patterns of the Bible) (1950), *Sgroliau'r Môr Marw* (the Dead Sea Scrolls) (1956) *Sôn am Achub* (aspects of Old Testament theology of salvation) (his Pentyfedwen Lecture, 1965), *Proffwyd Gofidiau* (a commentary on the Book of Jeremiah) (1967); in addition he published a substantial number of essays in various volumes and periodicals. Furthermore, he established a number of honours courses in his subject through the medium of Welsh; eventually his department was the first in the whole University of Wales (with the exception of the departments of Welsh) to offer a full honours degree course taught and examined through the medium of Welsh.

He died aged 71 in Bangor hospital on August 11, 1977. The funeral service was at Bangor crematorium August 15 and the ashes were buried in the family grave in Aberystwyth 9 September 1977.

Author

Reverend Gwilym Henry Jones

Sources

Efrydiau Beiblaidd Bangor (1973, pp.xi-xvi;), 1973, pp.xi-xvi, with a bibliography of his publications and a photograph

The Times 18 August 1977

Blwyddiadur y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd 1978, 287

personal acquaintance

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