

## DAVIES, DAVID RICHARD (1889-1958), theologian, journalist and cleric

**Name:** David Richard Davies  
**Date of birth:** 1889  
**Date of death:** 1958  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** theologian, journalist and cleric  
**Area of activity:** Literature and Writing; Religion

D. R. Davies was born 9 February, 1889, in Pontycymer, Glamorganshire, the third of the four children, two boys and two daughters, of Richard and Hannah Davies (née Bedlington Kirkhouse). His younger sister was Annie Davies who was one of the three young women singers who accompanied **Evan Roberts** during the 1904-05 religious revival in Wales. His father was a coal miner, but when David was aged 8 the family moved to Clydach in the Swansea valley where his father had been appointed part-time choirmaster in a small Welsh Independent chapel. Around 1901 the colliery closed and the family moved again, to Nantyffyllon, Maesteg, where the father, who had suffered injury following a serious accident and was unable to undertake heavy work, became a lampman at the colliery. D. R. Davies was himself a miner for a while before becoming a student, when he was 16, at Old College School, Carmarthen, and then the United College, Bradford and Edinburgh University.

He began his career in 1919 as a Congregational minister at Ravensthorpe. He moved to Hawkeshead Street Congregational Church, Southport, in 1922, where he became a political agitator during the miners' strike of 1926 and embraced Socialism as a substitute for Christianity. He became, in his own words, 'a slave to the social gospel', and he was elected as the only Socialist councillor in the municipality. His church became, in effect, a branch of the Labour party, and he resigned as minister in 1928. Full of anticipation, he moved to London but he was soon disillusioned about any job prospects. He endured penury and he was forced to sell his library of 3,000 books.

Eventually he gained employment addressing envelopes but found more appropriate work lecturing on music on behalf of HMV record company, until he was employed by the compulsive and magnetic Serbian, Dimitrije Mitrinovic (1887-1953) who was the founder of the New Britain movement. He travelled the country widely to address public meetings and contributed regularly to its weekly journal of the same name; he was appointed its editor. He remained with the movement for seven years.

However, Davies became sceptical about the promises of a new world and increasingly aware of the foreboding growth of Nazism. He became a leading member of the Socialist League and of the People's Front and associated with leading Marxists. He was appointed a member of a delegation to visit Spain which was in the throes of the Civil War. The horror and carnage that he experienced there divested him of any remaining faith in politics as a solution to human misery. He had his idealistic hopes crushed. In total despair, he attempted to commit suicide by drowning at Southerndown on the south Wales coast, but into his mind came a picture of his mother, whom he deeply respected, reading from the popular children's catechism, *Rhodd Mam*, and asking him 'Who is Jesus Christ?', to which he answered, 'Jesus Christ is my Saviour'. A deep peace fell on him.

From this point onwards Richard Davies undertook a thorough study of the *Bible* and rediscovered the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr. He became minister of Richmond Road Congregational Church, Cardiff in 1939 and he took up preaching and writing again. His book *On to Orthodoxy*, which had appeared in 1939, had been widely acclaimed for its intellectual honesty and its convincing *confessio fidei*, and for its vivid and pungent style. But he found that normal church work within Congregationalism could not provide him with a livelihood that would enable him to concentrate on serious study and research. He turned to the Anglican Church for succour and he was eventually accepted as a candidate for ordination.

Following a course of study at St. Deiniol's Library in Hawarden, Flintshire, he was ordained deacon in 1941 and priest in 1942. He was curate of St. John's, Newland, Hull from 1941 to 1943 and vicar of Emmanuel, West Dulwich from 1943 to 1947, of Holy Trinity, Brighton from 1947 to 1949, and of St. Mary Magdalen, St. Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex, from 1949 to 1958 when he moved to the country parishes of Parham, Wiggonholt and Greatham in West Sussex. During these years he regained credence as a popular broadcaster.

D. R. Davies was married to Edith Firth, from 1921 until her death in 1934, and then to Ruth McCormick from 1935 until his death. There were three children from the second marriage.

D. R. Davies has been described as a British counterpart of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth and as a leading neo-orthodox theologian. He published *Reinhold Niebuhr, a prophet from America* in 1945. He had a tempestuous life. By his oratory and high intelligence he had supported many radical and left-wing movements and causes. He became, however, disillusioned with his own idealism, which reflected also the mood of Europe at the time, and he found a new direction for his life in orthodox Christianity. He encapsulates the journey of many Welshmen of the period from dire poverty to eminence.

He was well-read in philosophy, psychology, politics, literature and theology. He loved music and art. He was a lecturer and preacher of distinction and a journalist of considerable status - among many other achievements he was joint editor of the *Church of England Newspaper* for ten years.

He died 1 November 1958 and was buried in Parham, West Sussex, 5 November 1958.

His publications include *The Two Humanities* (1940); *The Church and the peace* (1940); *Down Peacock's Feathers: Studies in the contemporary significance of the General Confession* (1942); *Divine Judgement in Human History* (1943); *Religion and Nationality* (1944); *On to Orthodoxy* (1939, 1948); *Secular Illusion or Christian Realism* (1942, 1948); *The world we have forgotten* (1946); *The Sin of Our Age* (1947); *Theology and the Atomic Age* (1947); *Thirty minutes to raise the dead: sermons* (1949); *The Art of Dodging Repentance* (1952); *Communism and God* (1954); *Communism and the Christian* (1954); *In Search of Myself* (his autobiography, with a photograph, edited by his widow, Ruth Davies, was published posthumously in 1961.

### Author

### Sources

*Cristion*, October 2009

Alec R. Vidler, *Twentieth-Century Defenders of the Faith* (1965), 95-100

D. R. Davies, *In Search of Myself* (1961)

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