

JOHN, EWART STANLEY (1924-2007), theologian, Welsh Congregationalist minister, college professor and principal

Name: Ewart Stanley John
Date of birth: 1924
Date of death: 2007
Gender: Male
Occupation: theologian, Welsh Congregationalist minister, college professor and principal
Area of activity: Education; Religion
Author: Desmond Davies

Stanley John was born on the outskirts of Goodwick, Fishguard, in the parish of Llanwnda, on 20 May 1924, the sixth of the seven children of Dafydd (a deacon and precentor in the church at Rhosycaerau) and Mary Ann John, Bwlch y Rhos (his birthplace), and later Ffynnon Clun and Brynhyfryd. He was educated at Goodwick elementary school and Fishguard County School, where his English master, **D. J. Williams**, instilled in him a profound love for Wales and the Welsh language. However, as he himself acknowledged, no-one exerted greater influence upon him in these formative years than his minister at Ebenezer, Goodwick, the Reverend Irfon Samuel, who invited him to commence preaching and to consider ordination into the Christian ministry, work for which he was subsequently trained at the Presbyterian College, Carmarthen and the University College of Wales, Cardiff.

He ministered in four churches: Sardis, Trimsaran (1950-1954) - a church to which he returned to assume pastoral oversight following his retirement from college duties; Hebron, Clydach, in the Swansea Valley (1954-1970); Soar, Lampeter (1970-1973); and the church at Harrow, London (1973-1977). The year 1977 proved a turning-point in his career, as it was then, following the untimely death of his close friend, **Professor J. Alwyn Charles**, that he was appointed Professor of Christian Doctrine at Bala-Bangor Theological College. Having already graduated in the Arts (B.A. in Welsh and Philosophy, 1947) and in Theology (B.D., 1950; principal subjects: Christian Doctrine and Church History) from the University of Wales, and having gained, in the early sixties, a Master of Theology (S.T.M.) degree from the University of Yale for a dissertation entitled 'Puritan Worship', his academic armory was already finely whetted for the task in hand, to which, during his tenure in Bangor, he added a Ph.D. (Wales), 1987 for research into two of the pioneers of Welsh Puritanism, viz., Richard Blinman and Marmaduke Matthews - his doctoral thesis was acclaimed by **Principal R. Tudur Jones** as "a notable essay". He derived immense satisfaction from his academic role, enjoying a happy rapport with staff and students alike, and teaching a subject which was close to his heart and in which he was totally immersed. He made a significant contribution to the work of the Faculty of Theology, serving as Dean of Faculty for the allotted period of three years. With the move from Bangor to Aberystwyth in 1988 he became the first Principal of the College of Welsh Independents, his new appointment proving as gratifying as his former position.

A gifted writer, he contributed a considerable number of articles (and series of articles) to denominational and inter-denominational publications, e.g. *Y Dysgedydd*, *Porfeydd*, *Y Tyst*, *Diwinyddiaeth* and *Cristion*, often discussing and elucidating matters relevant to faith and belief, such as 'Knowing about God', 'Knowing about Jesus Christ', 'Knowing about the Holy Spirit', 'Knowing about the Church', 'Knowing about the Sacraments' (see editions of *Cristion*, 1987). It was he who prepared the April-June 1973 issue of *O Ddydd i Ddydd* on a number of Old Testament characters, and issue 2, *Beth yw Addoli?* in the *Wales for Christ* series of study booklets. Jointly with Professor Harri Williams he compiled the section on the various articles of the Nicene Creed in the 1981 edition of *Gweddïo*, an annual devotional handbook published by the Union of Welsh Independents. He served as a member of the editorial panel of the Welsh Congregationalist service handbook (*Llyfr Gwasanaeth*) of 1962, and edited the *Festschrift* to **Principal R. Tudur Jones**, *Y Gair a'r Genedl* (1986), to which he himself contributed an article entitled, 'Richard Blinman (1608-1681), Welsh Puritan: Infant Baptism'.

His invaluable contribution to both ministerial and academic circles did not pass without due recognition. In 1985 he was invited to address the International Congregational Fellowship at Endicott College, Massachusetts on 'Joy in Revelation' (the lecture was subsequently published in *The Beverly Chronicle*, 1985), and in 1992 he was honoured with the presidency of the Welsh Union of Independents, electing to deliver his presidential address on the subject of 'Radical Christianity'. Arguably, no one address exemplifies more clearly the extent of his capacity as a theologian, and his ability to develop his particular standpoint lucidly and logically, than that which he delivered to the theological branch of the University of Wales Guild of Graduates in 1989 on 'Athrawiaeth yr Iawn' (see *Diwinyddiaeth*, 1990, pp. 5-23), in which he deals critically with the main classical interpretations of the doctrine before summarizing his own view of the subject which sought to emphasise that the Cross not only reveals the depths of human depravity but also the unfathomable and irrepressible love of God which enables man to repent for his sinfulness. In 2001 he addressed the Annual Assembly of the Welsh Baptist Union on 'The Nonconformist Tradition', in which, typically, he drew attention to the centrality of preaching, by which Nonconformity lives, and has lived from the very outset, and which will secure its future influence. For him, the tragedy of the hour lay in Welsh Nonconformity's degeneration, to a large extent, into a static and inflexible institution, whereas it is called to raise a prophetic, radical voice.

Stanley John had an extremely high regard for the nature and purpose of Christian ministry, and on the need to lead meaningful and dignified worship. He frowned on any sign of lack of preparation or heedlessness, and paid particular attention to correctness of speech and grammar. As was his preparation for Sunday worship so also was his provision for the lecture room both thorough and comprehensive. As an indication of their appreciation of his ability to simplify and unravel the intricacies of his subject matter, his lecture would often close to the sound of his students' spontaneous applause. However, in view of the seriousness with which he approached both his work and his calling, it would be totally misleading to conclude that as a person he was unduly sombre; on the contrary, he was particularly friendly and congenial, a compelling raconteur with an often mischievous sense of humour, who delighted in discussion and debate. Above all else he will be remembered as a gifted and accomplished preacher of the Word of God who, on occasions, in spite of his disciplined and controlled approach, would be utterly overwhelmed by the nature of the faith to which he dedicated his whole life to proclaim and elucidate.

His latter years were spent at Y Gilfach Glyd, Heol Emrys, Fishguard. He died at Withybush Hospital, Haverfordwest on Friday, 24 August 2007, and his funeral service was held at Parc Gwyn Cremtorium chapel, Narberth on the following Friday.

Author

Desmond Davies

Sources

Personal knowledge, together with the sources noted in the text

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