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Jones, John Derek and Joan Ann

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Christianity at the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He was director and administrator at the Lutheran House of Studies and since 2003-2008 at the Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI). Since its inception in 1994, he has been on the KZNCC (KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council Executive). He is retired, living in Howick since early 2014.

Jones, John Derek and Joan Ann

1927-2013

Methodist , Congregational

Botswana

John Derek Jones (JDJ) is remembered as one of the missionaries in Botswana who had a heart for ecumenism. He was born on April 12, 1927 at Wallasey, Cheshire, England, the other side of the River Mersey from Liverpool. His father was a shipping clerk and later a departmental manager in the Liverpool office of the Cunard White Star Line. His mother took care of the home. He did his primary and secondary schooling in Wallasey. His entire family was Methodist—parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. His parents taught him to pray. He attended Methodist Sunday school. In his early years, he was oblivious of the Great Depression, which devastated so many families and threatened his father's job. He began to be aware of world events as World War 2 loomed that eventually broke out when he was twelve.

For three years they lived in Llanferres, North Wales, where they had been evacuated during the war. While there, he worshipped at the Anglican Parish Church, the only English-speaking congregation in the village. Upon returning to Wallasey for Upper Sixth (A-Level) studies, he began attending Marlowe Road Congregational Church at the invitation of a friend. This decision may have been due to an incipient Congregationalist feeling for the principle of all-in-one-place. Why walk past the nearest church to go two miles to another when both are Christian? However, it was not irrelevant that this church had an active tennis club with some attractive young lady members. JDJ was welcomed into the warm fellowship of the church, became a Sunday school teacher, and was received into church membership.

Just after the war, he did national service for two and a half years in the Royal Air Force as an accounts clerk in Egypt. While in Cairo and the Suez Canal Zone, he enjoyed Christian fellowship in interdenominational groups. Jones enjoyed swimming in the Suez Canal (across, not lengthways!) and wandering in the Sinai Desert. JDJ experienced a call to discipleship as part of an intense realization of the presence of Christ as the risen and living Lord and friend. After demobilization in 1948, he became a candidate for the ministry. He was accepted for theological training at Mansfield College, Oxford. As Mansfield was a postgraduate college, Jones took a prior degree in philosophy, politics, and economics (PPE) at St. Catherine's College, Oxford. He was accepted for service abroad by the London Missionary Society (LMS) and sent to

St. Andrew's Missionary College, Selly Oak, Birmingham. JDJ was ordained to the Christian ministry at Marlowe Road Congregational Church, Wallasey, in April 1954.

In carrying out his missionary work, Jones was not alone. His wife Joan Ann Talbert was his closest and faithful companion. She was born on June 30, 1922 in London. She attended Catholic schools, but stopped church attendance when she left school. During the bombardment of London, the family moved to Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire. Joan was trained as a physical education teacher at Loughborough College. During the war, she served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service as a signaller and a Physical Training Instructor. She married Edward Groom in 1944. They had a daughter Gillian who was born in 1946. She was divorced in 1948. She experienced Christian conversion through the ministry of Donald Soper, a Methodist preacher and apologist. In 1950, she went to Newcastle on an evangelistic campaign of the Order of Christian Witness (founder and leader Donald Soper). At the same time, JDJ was recruited from Oxford for the same campaign, and was allocated to the same team as Joan; they did some witnessing together. Love at first sight! They had an extended courtship while JDJ completed his studies. They got married at Leighton Buzzard on April 17, 1954.

JDJ, Joan, and Gillian sailed for Africa on 27th May 1954. His first appointment was as Superintendent of the LMS Ngamiland District, based at Maun. It consisted of thirty local churches plus outstations throughout Ngamiland, Chobe, and Ghanzi. As the gospel had come to Bechuanaland tribe by tribe, the LMS work had become established in a tribal pattern, with districts based on Kanye, Molepolole, Shoshong/Serowe and Tonota/Francistown. The work in Ngamiland had originated in Shoshong, and was the youngest LMS district in the country. It was staffed by an ordained missionary, an ordained Motswana minister, Jani Tebape, trained at the Tiger Kloof Bible School, three young evangelists, recently trained at the Kanye Bible School, and three old evangelists who were formerly deacons, trained in the school of church life. All were good pastors and worked well as a team. There was life and excitement there, and the district almost doubled in membership during JDJ's six years as superintendent.

In 1960, the manager of the LMS publishing house and school supply operation, the Bechuanaland Book Centre in Lobatse, retired. While another manager was being sought, JDJ was sent to stand in, expecting to return to Maun after a short spell there. However, when a new manager came in 1961 the mission conducted one of its periodic general posts. All the missionaries were transferred around the southern Africa mission field. JDJ was sent to Kanye.

The Kanye district reached west into the Kalahari and east through Lobatse into the Transvaal. Apart from Jones, the district had three ordained Batswana ministers, namely Morutwana Mogwe, Mogotsi Pelekekae and Meshack Serema, four trained evangelists, and two untrained. Minimum supervision was needed in this long-established district, and JDJ was appointed Setswana Literature Officer, a post he held until his retirement.

A writing center was formed, first with Jennings Leshona, later with Moabi

Kitchin and Morulaganyi Kgasa. Devotional and educational materials were produced, and all the mission's Setswana books were revised orthographically and in content.

By this time, the country was moving towards independence, with the formation of political parties, the drawing up of a constitution and the preparation of the administration for an independent republic. As part of this process, Gaborone was chosen as the new capital, and the town planners made a design that included twelve sites for churches. In 1964, the churches represented in the Protectorate were invited to a meeting in the Imperial Reserve, Mafikeng to share the twelve church sites allocated in the Gaborone town plan. JDJ represented the LMS at that meeting, and chose a plot.

Driving home to Kanye after the meeting, and in subsequent reflection, JDJ became increasingly uncomfortable about the pattern that was being proposed for the churches in Gaborone. The LMS was the church of the Bangwaketse, Bakwena, Bangwato, and Batawana, while the Dutch Reformed Mission served the Bakgatla, the Hermansburg Mission (Lutheran) the Bamalete, and the Methodist Church the Barolong. The different missions respected their boundaries in what was termed "mission comity." There were exceptions, of course, notably the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, and the Seventh-Day Adventists. The Protectorate period also saw the formation of a number of prophet movements and independent churches, which came into prominence after independence, encouraged by the constitutional principle of freedom of religion.

Jones could see that the capital to be built at Gaborone introduced a new situation in the country. Its population would be drawn from the whole country. This meant that members of different tribes would be living next to each other in a situation where national unity would be important. Twelve sites had been allocated where the denominations would worship the one God separately. He detested the slogan: "One Botswana, one nation," "One Church, many denominations"! The Christian Church was going to advertise its divisions in the new Botswana. JDJ was not altogether clear what could be done about this. Nevertheless, he wrote to the LMS Field Secretary and aired his disquiet.

It will be clear from the above discussion why JDJ should have had these feelings. Brought up a Methodist, he became a Congregationalist as a light decision, not a repudiation of his family allegiance. That he came to understand and respect Congregational principles did not make him an exclusive denominationalist, not least because Congregationalism itself cherishes an ecumenical spirit. His participation in the worship of the parish church in Wales opened a window on the Anglican Church, and the warm fellowship experienced in the interdenominational groups in Egypt contributed to his ecumenical stance. In any case, the London Missionary Society was an ecumenical mission. Its fundamental aim was not to export any particular form of church structure, but "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

After consideration, the LMS invited the churches that observed comity in the Bechuanaland Protectorate to consider united fellowship and worship in Gaborone. All denominations initially responded sympathetically, though the Evangelical Lutheran Church and Dutch Reformed Church missions eventually withdrew from the

discussions. On the other hand, the Anglican Church asked to be included and, as a result, a local ecumenical project was formed involving the LMS, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Quakers. The Rev. Allan Butler was appointed by the Anglican Church and JDJ by the LMS to minister ecumenically to the united congregation. A church was built with help from the World Council of Churches, and adopted the name “Trinity.”

Many of the members of Trinity Church were happy with the ecumenical experience it provided. Ecumenically speaking, the ministers and the congregation exercised a significant influence in the nascent state of Botswana. Its membership included national and local leaders, and its members were prominent in service and charitable organizations. However, some felt uncomfortable without the denominational structures to which they were accustomed, while some went further, and regarded the scheme as a betrayal of their church heritage. Thus for a variety of reasons the Trinity scheme was dismantled step by step, as its members moved out to worship and work on their own, eventually in their own buildings, leaving Trinity in the hands of the Congregationalists.

The move to Gaborone in 1965 opened up new opportunities for Jones. Not only was he a pastor of the leading church in the new capital, but he was also involved in local government. As offices and residences were erected, and a town emerged from the bush between the old village and the railway line, an interim authority was needed to administer the growing community. For this a “township authority” was formed by the central government, which was itself in the process of formation. A town clerk was appointed, and a group of residents were needed to work with him.

At this stage, most of the inhabitants of Gaborone were civil servants, so the choice of non-governmental residents was limited. However, a group was appointed, and JDJ was elected chairman. In 1966, general and local elections were held, and JDJ stood as an independent candidate in the ward where he lived, becoming a councilor and serving as the first mayor. He was awarded the OBE in 1968.

The coming of independence to Botswana was marked by a severe drought, and people in the north of the country were in danger of starvation. In the hopes of securing food through the World Council of Churches, two ministers in Francistown, Rev. Peter Bloomfield and Rev. Brian Bailey, sought out Dr. Z. K. Matthews when he was on a visit to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Dr. Matthews explained that he could organize relief, but would need an ecumenical body on the ground to arrange the distribution. Peter Bloomfield and Brian Bailey immediately called together the churches of the Francistown area, and formed the Northern Bechuanaland Christian Council. The food came. Allan Butler and JDJ were in touch with their colleagues in Francistown, and it was agreed that a countrywide Christian council was needed, so the following year the Botswana Christian Council was formed, with the Trinity ministers among its leaders.

In 1967, the LMS joined other missions on the sub-continent to form the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). By the second Botswana election, party politics had come strongly on the scene, and JDJ did not stand for the

town council again. Throughout this period, he had continued as the LMS Setswana Literature Officer, though his duties as pastor and Councilor had not left him much time for writing and editing. In 1972, the church decided that he was needed back on literature work, and freed him for that, appointing Brian Bailey in his stead at Trinity.

From 1967, JDJ had also been the coordinator of the UCCSA Literature and Publications Committee that conducted the church's publishing program and administered its five bookshops in southern Africa. One of these was the Botswana Book Centre in Gaborone. In 1974, the Anglican Church and the UCCSA formed the Ecumenical Literature Distribution Trust (ELDT) to look after the publishing and sale of books for both churches. The BBC was not included at first, but the ELDT took it over in 1976 on condition that JDJ be part of the deal. The heavy job of managing the BBC allowed Jones little time for pastoral or ecumenical work, though he continued to preach. In 1982, the Botswana Book Centre left the ELDT and a Botswana-based trust was formed to hold the business. JDJ continued as manager until retirement in 1993, after which he was still involved with some of the publishing. For some time he continued to serve as editor of the Botswana Society, producing its journal Botswana Notes and Records. As it has been noted above, throughout their married life Joan was a faithful and discerning supporter of JDJ, and also made her own very significant contribution to church and community. She was awarded the MBE in 2000 for her service to the community. She died in September 2002, aged 80.

James Amanze

Source:

Personal communication with Rev. John Derek Jones, Gaborone, October 2003.

This biography, received in 2018, was written by Dr. James Amanze, General Secretary of the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA), Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana (Gaborone), and DACB Advisory Council member. These stories were written as part of a collection documenting the history of the ecumenical movement in Botswana, an unpublished manuscript entitled "Heroes and Heroines of the Ecumenical Movement in Botswana: Celebrating Great Lives, Celebrating Past Leadership."

Butler, Alan
1930- 2011
Anglican Communion