



## THOMAS, JOSEPH MORGAN (LLOYD) (1868 - 1955), minister (U) and Free Catholic, councillor and public figure

**Name:** Joseph Morgan Thomas  
**Date of birth:** 1868  
**Date of death:** 1955  
**Spouse:** Alice Thomas (née Evans)  
**Parent:** Elizabeth Thomas (née Lloyd)  
**Parent:** John Thomas  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** minister (U) and Free Catholic, councillor and public figure  
**Area of activity:** Public and Social Service, Civil Administration; Religion  
**Author:** David Elwyn James Davies

Born 30 June 1868, one of the eight children of John and Elizabeth Thomas, Blaen-wern, Llannarth, Cardiganshire. He took the name ' Lloyd ', his mother's maiden name, when his brother of that name died. He was educated at New Quay grammar school and Christ College, Brecon and completed his articles with Messrs. Walter H. Morgan and Rhys, solicitors, Pontypridd. He began to take an interest in religion and propagating Unitarian concepts, being one of the three who instituted the Unitarian cause at Pontypridd in 1892, where he served as its first secretary. He decided to enter the ministry and attended a course for that purpose at Manchester College (Unitarian), Oxford (1894-98); he received a call to Liscard Memorial Church (Free Christian), Chester, in 1898. He married in 1899, Alice (headmistress of Pontypridd girls' school), daughter of David Evans, Bodringallt, Rhondda. They had a son and two daughters. He was minister of High Pavement Unitarian Church, Nottingham, 1900-12, and played a prominent part in establishing the Union of Social Service of the Unitarian movement, and was elected one of its first presidents. He spent the remainder of his years in the ministry in charge of the Old Meeting House, Birmingham, 1912-32. This was a successful yet turbulent period of his life when he was influenced both by the rationalism of L.P. Jacks, on the one hand, and the catholicism of W.S. Orchard on the other, two of his bosom friends. He continued to be a liberal Unitarian, but he had already published a pamphlet on *A Free Catholic Church* (1907), containing ideas which were developed in a sermon which he delivered at Pontypridd the year he was inducted at Birmingham.

In 1916 he began publishing and editing the periodical, *The Free Catholic*, expounding and defending his catholic ideas. He was influenced by the 'new theology', and that same year he published his pamphlet, *Free Catholic? A comment on R.J. Campbell's 'Spiritual Pilgrimage'*. His church was also influenced by his theology, and in 1918 he published a pamphlet, *Tradition and outlook of the Old Meeting Church*, and another in 1921, *What the Old Meeting Church stands for*. No doubt it was his work on Richard Baxter's autobiography during these years that gave rise to his dream of establishing a catholic church to include 'every true Christian in the world'. He published an abridged version of *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, his major life's work, in 1925, with an introductory essay, notes and appendix; and in 1928, when the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was established, he and his church seized the opportunity to dissociate themselves from Unitarianism, which he considered to be too denominational, and establish a new denomination of an ecclesiastic and priestly spirit; he called himself a free Catholic priest, and adopted ecclesiastical usages, and compiled a comprehensive book of offices, *A Free Church Book of Common Prayer* (1929), with its contents ranging from the Nicene Creed to Martineau's prayers, as well as the Psalms and canticles (from the Authorised English Version) with complete notation, for the first time, for intoning them. For a short period Lloyd Thomas was not without his admirers and followers, including some ministers, and his high-church leanings became evident in some of the adornments of some Unitarian chapels (e.g. at Bromwich and Oldbury), but the new movement languished in its infancy, and in 1932 Lloyd Thomas retired from the ministry.

Although his dream of unifying the denominations did not materialise, he deserves to be called a pioneer in the field. He returned to his native heath and lived thereafter at ' Y Bwthyn ', Llannarth, continuing to preach occasionally, lecture and expand his catholic ideas, as in his Dr. Williams Lecture at Carmarthen Presbyterian College (1941) on *Toleration and church-unity*. As a public figure, at this time, he served on Cardiganshire county council and as chairman of its highways committee; he promoted the success of the county's travelling library and was one of the chief founders of Ceredigion Library, and its first chairman. He served on the county's education committee, and as a member and chairman of the board of governors of Aberaeron county school. He supported Pauline Taylor, Blaen-wern, who had assisted him in editing the book of offices, to pioneer musical education in the county's schools, to establish pony-trekking activities, and ensure the continuation of Welsh breeds of stallions and cattle.

He was a perceptive prophet and visionary; conscientious and not afraid of espousing minority and unpopular movements. He supported the suffragette movement, publishing a pamphlet in its support and he chaired the fiery meetings of Chrystabel Pankhurst; he ventured to express some sympathy with the enemy during the Boer War; and during World War I he published a pamphlet, *The immortality of non-resistance and other sermons on the war*.

Although he was a modernist he warned against a narrow superficial modernism; his concept of education was to learn to think honestly, and he warned the authorities against glorifying scholarship at the expense of neglecting the crafts and manual work (cf. *What is education for?*, 1949). In his memorandum on religious education, which was written at the request of Cardiganshire education authority (1941), he recommended greater Christian influence, in an honest and tolerant spirit, predicting that a third World War (a war of ideas and ideals) could result in the decline of religion and the self-extinction of world civilisation. In his pamphlet, *The humanising of industry* (1919) he foresaw the problems of industry, and warned against mechanizing men, producing degrading matter, and excluding workers' representatives from boards of managers and directors; in a sermon which he published in 1944, *God and the land*, he foresaw social problems and warned against urbanising the country and destroying the roots of rural culture and Christianity.

He contributed regularly to periodicals, such as the *Hibbert Journal* and the *Free Catholic*, and to newspapers such as the *Welsh Gazette* and *Western Mail*. Towards the end of his life he became interested in the works of Kierkegaard. His published works include: *The autobiography of Richard Baxter*, abridged with notes, introductory essay and appendix (1925); *A Free Church Book of Common Prayer* (1929). His pamphlets include: *Dogma or doctrine?* (1906); *A Free Catholic Church* (1907); *The emancipation of womanhood* (1913); *Administration of the Lords Supper or The Holy Communion* (1914); *The immortality of non-resistance and other sermons on the war* (1915); *Free Catholic? A comment of the Rev. R.J. Campbell's 'Spiritual Pilgrimage'* (1916); *Tradition and outlook of the (Birmingham) Old Meeting Church* (1918); *The crucifix - a sermon* (1918); *The humanising of industry* (1919); *A comprehensive Church. What the Old Meeting Church stands for* (1921); *Religious instruction in schools* (1941); *Toleration and church-unity* (Dr. Williams Lecture, 1941); *What is education for?* (1949); he edited *The Free Catholic* (1916-27).

He died 2 July 1955 and his body was cremated at Glyn-taff on July 6. His wife died in 1945. He was survived by his son and his two daughters. They presented calligraphic copies of his book of offices to the N.L.W.

### Author

Dr David Elwyn James Davies, (1926 - 1997)

### Sources

Yr Ymfynnydd, August 1955

### Additional Links

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