



Dorland family, 1938.

Photo courtesy of Nathalie Johansson.

Dorland, Oscar Milton (1892–1964)

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Oscar Milton Dorland served the church as president for the South England Conference, North England Conference, and the Irish Mission, and as vice-president of the South British Conference.

Early Life

Dorland was born into a farming family November 20, 1892, in Lafayette, Chippewa County, Wisconsin, USA. The son of George Washington Dorland and Rosetta Dorland, he had three brothers and two sisters.¹ They grew up on the farm, even attending school at the one-room schoolhouse located on the farm grounds before attending the high school in town.² A keen interest in ancient history encouraged him to attend an Adventist tent meeting in town. Convinced by what they learned, Dorland and his mother were baptized and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was 16 years old at the time.³

In 1911 Dorland arrived in England an exchange student from Maplewood Academy to study at the newly established Stanborough Missionary College.⁴ The General Conference had chosen him for the opportunity, because of his perseverance the previous summer in endeavoring to sell Adventist books in an area where the tobacco crop had failed.⁵

"I ... came to England in the year 1911 at the invitation of the General Conference," Dorland stated in his BUC Sustentation Fund application.⁶ "They paid my fare from New York to the school in England. This was done to increase the enrollment of the English school and to help out the colporteur work during summer vacations in England."

He had intended to serve as a missionary in Africa following his graduation, but his plans changed with the outbreak of World War 1. Instead, he accepted a position as an intern for the Union district of London in 1914.⁷ His first role was working with evangelist A. Douglas Armstrong in Gray's, Essex, but within a year he received his first charge as pastor of what would later become the Chiswick church.⁸

The group did not own a building at the time, and he had no budget to construct one. Despite that, he was not discouraged, and by the end of 1915 he had led eight people to baptism through Bible studies.⁹ In 1920 *The Missionary Worker* reported that Dorland's efforts in North West London were "progressing favourably and the outlook is most encouraging for a large addition to the church in that part of the city."¹⁰ Through hard work and years of raising the necessary money, the Chiswick church was finally built and dedicated in January 1922.¹¹

Evangelism happened even "at home." Dorland gave Bible studies to his landlady and her daughter, Mary.¹² After baptism, the studies turned toward romance, resulting in his marriage to Mary on June 17, 1917.¹³ Three years later saw the birth of the first of their five children, a daughter, Myrtle.¹⁴

The next year, 1921, the conference appointed Dorland as its Sabbath School and young people's secretary. The following year he received an invitation to serve the same function at the union level.¹⁵ Many remembered him as a man who loved young people and who endeavored to encourage their development.

Wales

On Sunday October 5, 1922, the British Union Conference Committee voted to release Dorland to do evangelism work.¹⁶ Leaving London, he went to Wales. In 1925, having worked several years as a pastor in the Cardiff area, Dorland reported that 800 people attended the first night of his second evangelistic campaign in the Cory Hall, Cardiff, and he was able to sign up 65 people to receive literature.¹⁷

In 1926 leadership asked Dorland to serve as a vice-president of the South British Conference with responsibility for Wales, a role he continued until 1929.¹⁸ His main emphasis as vice-president was soul-winning, and he actively engaged in speaking appointments and conducting evangelistic campaigns.¹⁹

He also worked in the Welsh valleys, traveling by motorbike rather than car so as not to offend the coal miners during those difficult years of the Great Depression.²⁰ Life in the valleys was difficult, and the poverty and hardship of the people in Wales could not be ignored. Despite such problems, evangelism in Wales had some success. In 1926 Dorland spoke at an event where, despite the rain, 230 people attended his presentation on "Waymarks to the Kingdom. Can we expect the Jews to return to Jerusalem?"²¹ proving that an interest in the Advent message did exist.

In May 1928, Dorland sent out a plea for donations to the *Present Truth* Relief Fund in order to help people in Wales. Mines, long the only source of employment, were now closing, leaving whole communities without any income. Famine often resulted. That same year, three children fell asleep at one school, never to wake up again. The doctor said the children died from malnourishment.²²

South England Conference

The British Union Session held August 2-7, 1928, passed a resolution to reorganize the British Union into two conferences and three missions beginning January 1, 1929.²³ The south British session met in the North London Church building on Holloway Road, August 30 to September 3, 1928. It accepted the reorganization and voted to ask Dorland to be the president of the South England Conference.²⁴ By January 1, 1929, Dorland was settled in his work as the president of the "new" South England Conference.²⁵

Dorland started out his presidency by declaring that he wanted to rapidly extend the mission work in the conference: "We plead with those who have done little or nothing to show their faith and love for the cause by their works. You who have done so well, may I ask you to stay by the task until it is brought to a successful finish."²⁶ He especially emphasized personal evangelism and Bible studies.²⁷

North England Conference

Despite his being re-elected as president of the South England Conference at the session held July 13-17, 1932,²⁸ church leadership later that same year appointed him to take over as president of the North England Conference after F.A. Spearing had to step down for health reasons.²⁹ Dorland was re-elected in August 1933³⁰

and again in 1935.³¹ At the 1935 session he addressed the problem of membership loss and decreasing offerings, saying that it was impossible to explain the situation. Something had to be done to prevent it from continuing. His opinion was that it was important to have Adventist church buildings in larger cities in order to stabilize the work. Despite the problems facing the North England Conference, book sales had increased during 1934, offering a glimmer of hope.³² Throughout his tenure in the North England Conference he continued his stress on personal evangelism and Bible studies. For much of that time, one would usually find him visiting people in their homes, rather than being in his office.³³

Back to pastoring, a return to the North England Conference, and the Irish Mission

Dorland returned to pastoring in 1939, just at the outbreak of World War II.³⁴ He served in the Bristol District throughout the war years during which he became known for effectively representing Adventist men called to appear before military tribunals as conscientious objectors.³⁵ The war also highlighted the effectiveness of his caring nature which resulted in a substantial number of baptisms. The Jessops became members in 1945 and remembered him as a counselor and friend:

He had the personal friendly, father touch. He treated everyone the same. You could go and tell him anything and it would be confidential. Your problem was his problem. You could have complete confidence and trust in him. He loved people ... He got right down to the needs of people. He gave the human touch before the spiritual touch.³⁶

The Jessops also recounted the practical help that might come with his visits: doing the ironing for an older woman with rheumatism, or shelling peas with a housewife in the kitchen. Such care led to a growth rate of 150 percent during the war years and paved the way for planting a second church in the city.³⁷

The war years also revealed the adventurous nature that he had exploited since childhood. On one occasion an unexploded bomb crashed through the church roof and embedded itself in the organ, Dorland defused it himself and then used the explosive material to light the bonfires in his other passion, gardening.³⁸

At the end of 1946, the British Union executive committee delegated him to return to the North England Conference as president,³⁹ a position he continued until the conference session on August 2-6, 1951.⁴⁰ Dorland then moved to Belfast to oversee the work in Ireland.⁴¹ At the time there existed both an Eire Mission and a Northern Ireland Mission.⁴² The following year, in June 27-29, 1952, a joint constituency session united the two as one Irish Mission. It also voted Dorland as its president.⁴³ During his tenure new church buildings were built in Dublin in 1956⁴⁴ and Belfast in 1957.⁴⁵ Dorland would remain as president of the Irish Mission until his retirement in 1958.

Final Years

In 1957 Dorland had his first heart attack from which he made a full recovery. In 1958 he decided to retire and move back to England.⁴⁶ However, when Dorland decided to retire, he did not intend to stop working. He looked after the Reading, Slough, and High Wycombe churches.⁴⁷ His name is engraved on the foundation stone of the Reading Central church.

In 1964 he served as a teacher at the Adventist Lay Instructors' Training school in London,⁴⁸ lecturing in denominational history,⁴⁹ He also taught in the department of practical theology at Newbold College.⁵⁰

On Monday December 7, 1964, Dorland attended his regular lecture at Newbold College, had lunch with his students, and conducted a Bible study with an interested person. Returning home later in the day, he decided to mow the lawn. As he did so, he collapsed and died from a heart attack.⁵¹ He left behind a wife and five adult children.

Dorland's funeral was held on December 12, 1964, at the Reading church. A memorial service took place at Newbold College a week later on Sabbath, December 19.⁵²

Legacy

Dorland was a man who served God until the day he died. He left behind an example of service and dedication to the church and its members through Bible studies, lectures, public evangelism, administrative leadership, and pastoral work. All five of his children followed in his steps, with three of them fulfilling his dream by being missionaries in Africa, another in Denmark and Greenland, and one as a lifelong teacher in Adventist education.

Throughout his life, he showed others that it is possible to serve God and the church in many different capacities. The most important thing for him was to lead others to Christ. As former Stanborough Press editor W. L. Emmerson stated, the members that Dorland brought into the church "were well taught, and well-grounded in the faith. They tended to be leaders and very few apostatized."⁵³

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