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Walker, Oswald Carlyle (1902–1971)

PEDRO L. V. WELCH

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Oswald Carlyle Walker was among the earliest pioneering pastors of Afro-Caribbean descent to work in the English speaking Caribbean sphere of Seventh-day Adventist missionary work. He contributed to the consolidation of the Adventist work in Barbados and the wider Caribbean.

Oswald Carlyle Walker was born to Maude Etheline King of Mile and a Quarter, St. Peter, Barbados, on August 10,

1902. On September 7, that same year, his mother and father, Henry Walker were joined in wedlock at the All Saints Anglican Church by the rector, Rev Olton. They were of solid Afro-Barbadian stock, with the groom's father, William Walker, being an agricultural laborer, and the bride's father, Isaac King, a carpenter. Just a few weeks later, on September 27, 1902 at the same church, Oswald was christened and, thus, received the right to carry his father's surname, Walker. As a young man, Oswald attended the All Saints Church and would probably have continued to do so, if it were not for the intervention of a friend, Wrensford Greaves.

Wrensford had converted to the Seventh-day Adventist faith and proceeded to share with his friend Oswald his new found theology, inviting him to the newly established Checker Hall Adventist Church. Within a short time, Oswald became convinced of the truth of the message shared with him. He felt the need to share these truths with his wider family, with the result that many of them also joined the new faith. Thereafter, Oswald became a very active layman, giving Bible studies and preaching the Adventist message. In this, he was a contemporary of other Adventist pioneers in Barbados such as Wrensford Greaves, Fitz Willoughby, Christopher M. Greenidge, and Dr. Charles Cave.

Walker began his work as a preacher and evangelist very early after his conversion, becoming well known as a conscientious layman, active in the administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Caribbean island of Barbados. His status as a church leader in the 1930s is attested to in the fact that he was one of six signatories to a petition to the Barbados House of Assembly in 1933, which sought to legalize the presence of the Seventh -day Adventist Church under the name "Leeward Islands Mission of Seventh-day Adventists." The political leaders of the island debated the petition and eventually voted unanimously to incorporate the church as requested.

Walker's prodigious efforts as a lay evangelist are captured in a report of 1932 which stated ... "At a place called Carlton (in Barbados), Brother Walker is holding meetings and the last word ... from there [is that] he had thirty-three covenant signers and there are good prospects that he will raise up a church in that place." After yeoman service as a layman, Walker was persuaded to consider entering full-time pastoral work and served both in Barbados and in neighboring English speaking Caribbean territories before being ordained on January 11, 1936² Thereafter, he served as pastor in Montserrat and later in the Dutch islands of Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten, as well as in the English-speaking islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, and Antigua before ending his service as a pastor in 1953.

Frequent reports carried in the various organs of the church in the wider Inter-American Division region and locally in the Caribbean Union Conference reveal that his service as an evangelist was exemplary. By the time of the Leeward Islands Conference Workers' Meeting and Convention in the island of Antigua in 1939, Walker had become one of the most influential preachers in the northern Caribbean.³

By 1944, Walker's familiarity with the various territories, and with the government officials and other administrators was clearly becoming an asset to the work of the Seventh -day Adventist Church in this region. In September of that year, R. E. Cash, then secretary of the Home Missionary and Sabbath School Department of the Caribbean Union Conference, in planning visits to the region, placed his full trust in Walker's organizing abilities. On one of the visits to the Dutch islands, the visitors took along a government official who sought Walker's permission to accompany the group. He had never visited the island of St. Eustatius (also known as Statia). As Cash reported, this government official was greatly impressed by the arrangements made by Elder Walker and his team.⁴

Apart from his administrative skills, Walker excelled as a preacher and evangelist. The following extract is from a report that he made in June 1948, about the evangelistic efforts in Antigua during that period: "From the start the Lord blessed by His Holy Spirit, and each night hundreds crowded into the church; and after the third month of the effort the interest is still good. We have baptized 52 persons, and have 54 more in the baptismal class, and a large number of other interested ones."⁵ His exploits were not confined to that area of the Caribbean. In 1949, he conducted an evangelistic crusade in Barbados which was expected to yield a bountiful harvest⁶ In addition to his church expansion and church building efforts, Elder Walker found time to engage in charitable works. It is noted that in 1940, he was involved in relieving cases of hardship in the islands of Montserrat and Dominica.⁷

From the late 1940s and into the 1950s, Walker continued to build a reputation as one of the leading evangelists in the northern Caribbean, contributing to the baptism of hundreds and possibly many more of new adherents to the Adventist cause. In the various Year Books of the General Conference, under the section devoted to the Inter-American Division and its unions, from 1949-1953, the name O. C. Walker appears as an ordained minister. Listed as a pastor working in Antigua in 1949 and 1950 and then in British Guiana from 1951-1953, his name and pastoral designation suddenly disappeared from official church records sometime in 1954. The only official mention was in the minutes of the Leeward Islands Mission for January 10, 1954 which listed Mr. and Mrs. O. C. Walker among those present. The omission of his status as pastor or elder created a deafening silence that needed some resolution.

The required resolution came in interviews carried out with family members. They reported that Elder Walker had a major disagreement with the administration of the Leeward Islands Mission, perhaps of the type Paul had with Barnabas on the recruitment of John Mark. The disagreement was with Elder S. E. White, then president of the Leeward Islands Mission and it was so sharp that it led to Walker's voluntary withdrawal from the full-time ministry of the church. However, he and his family remained committed to the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Elder Walker died in the faith on April 23, 1971.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. W. R. Elliott, "News from Leeward Islands," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, August 1932, 10.?
2. H. E. Beddoe, "The Leeward Islands Conference Session," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, April 1936, 5.?
3. G. A. Roberts, "Advance in Inter-America," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, May 1939, 2.?
4. R. E. Cash, "St. Eustatius and the Northern Dutch Islands," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, September 1944, 7.?
5. "In June of 1948, ..." *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, April 1949, 8.?
6. E. T. Gackenheimer, "Bridgetown, Barbados, B. W. I, April 21," *The Inter-American Division Messenger*, July 1949, 7.?
7. *The Columbian Visitor*, February 8, 1940.?

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