

Evangelist Robert P. Evans Dies at 93

At 10 p.m. on July 28, at his home in Shell Point Retirement Community, Ft. Myers, Fla., Robert Philip Evans died at the age of 93. Just hours before, his daughter, Alyce, read to him passages from *Angels, God's Secret Agents*, a book written by Billy Graham, where he describes how the angels would soon come and carry him away in their arms to be with his heavenly Father.

Longtime friend and colleague Billy Graham said of Evans, "Our close friendship goes way back to our days at Wheaton, and I am grateful for all our meetings throughout Europe that Bob organized. He was one of the greatest Christians I ever knew."

Born in Baltimore on Feb. 21, 1918, Evans grew up in the jungles of Cameroon, West Africa, where his father, Roland Evans, served for decades with his wife as one of the great pioneer missionaries of his time. Evans graduated from Wheaton College in Illinois, in 1939, where he met and married Jeanette Gruner. After completing his studies at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (now Palmer Theological Seminary), Philadelphia, Evans joined the Navy as a chaplain and traveled with U.S. combat troops in North Africa, Italy and France.

Notably, he was the first chaplain in the history of the Navy to be allowed, at his own insistence, to accompany the landing of assault forces under combat conditions. While riding his motorcycle along the beach to minister to troops, Evans ran over a land mine, ended up in a French field hospital and soon returned to the USA.

In the years following the war Evans served with Torrey Johnson and Billy Graham in the newly founded movement, Youth for Christ. After conducting evangelistic rallies throughout the USA and Canada, the YFC team travelled to Europe, a continent still reeling from the devastation of war, to bring a message of hope. There they conducted scores of highly successful evangelistic campaigns from Finland in the north to Italy in the south.

Having been deeply moved by the spiritual needs of the vast continent of Europe during the war, and the YFC campaigns, Evans was convinced of the need to train and equip Europeans for the ongoing work of evangelism. Consequently he and his family returned to France in 1949, to establish the European Bible Institute in the suburbs of Paris. Soon opportunities opened for missionary work in many other European countries, giving rise to the establishment of Greater Europe Mission in 1950.

After founding GEM, Evans served for more than three decades as its Europe Director. Under his field leadership the mission established Bible institutes in France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Italy, Greece and Austria. Graduate level seminaries were set up in Germany, Belgium and Holland. Most of these institutions continue to this day. Church plants and evangelistic ministries were initiated in many areas of Europe, including camps in Spain and the French Alps.

In 1962, Evans wrote *Let Europe Hear*, a widely-read and influential book exploring the spiritual needs of Europe. Later Evans served as one of the key organizers of the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin, Germany. This congress was the first of the great post-war gatherings of evangelical leaders followed by subsequent congresses in Lausanne and Manila.

In 1972 Evans was awarded a Ph.D. in history from Manchester University, England, for his research on the contribution of

foreigners to the spiritual revival that occurred in France during the post-Napoleonic years of 1815–1850. Evans also served for years as a member of the board of *Christianity Today*.

In 1986 Evans retired from Greater Europe Mission but remained in Europe for several years serving as the special Europe representative of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. In 1991, they returned to the USA to reside in Southwest Florida.

Navy chaplain, pioneer missionary, mission leader, journalist, author, scholar and educator, Robert Evans never lost his first love as an evangelist. At the age of 83 he and his wife joined a team to travel for two weeks down the Volga River in Russia conducting evangelistic campaigns. Then three years later, in the immediate aftermath of the second Iraq war, they participated in a two-week campaign in Baghdad to witness, encourage the beleaguered Christians and distribute Bibles.

Evans is survived by his wife, Jeanette, and daughter, Alyce (Evans) Johnson and granddaughter, Jennifer (Johnson) Rowan. A private family memorial is planned.

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