

ANATOMY OF A REVIVAL

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A Discerning Look at Revival as an Evangelical Tradition especially as in Wales in 1904-05

PART 1: The Theological Roots of Revivalism

In previous issues of the *British Reformed Journal (BRJ)* we have drawn attention to the unscriptural nature of the phenomenon peculiar to modern church history known as “revival.”¹ In this year of 2004, extensive and nostalgic propaganda concerning revival has been generated nation-wide as it is the centenary of the “outbreak” of the extensive and popular 1904-05 Revival in Wales. Poignance is added to this commemoration especially by the fact that in the last 100 years the Principality of Wales has not experienced any further large-scale revivals, much to the chagrin of supporters of the notion of “revival.”

This latter factor is surprising for several reasons, the first is that revival as a theological concept and ecclesiastical experience has been firmly embedded in Welsh church history since the rise of the Calvinistic Methodist pioneer preachers some time around 1735. From that time on, revivals were a feature of Welsh church life, both in the establishment and in nonconformity, such that were one to examine Welsh church history at random for almost any time over the 170 years from 1735 to 1905, one would find a revival in progress somewhere or other in the nation, even if only local and not nation-wide. The period is punctuated indeed by several massive and nation-wide movements, notably in 1735-1745, again in about the 1790s, then in the early years of the nineteenth century, followed by the spiritual hurricane of 1859-60, and then finally, the last powerful outbreak that traversed the whole country in 1904-05. These intense and extensive revivals, coupled with the many more “visitations from on high” (as they were called) that were experienced on a limited local scale, all reinforced and solidified the notion of “revival” in its status as an ecclesiological necessity and a “not to be questioned” pre-requisite of successful Christian witness.

¹Cf. *BRJ* 19 (July-Sept., 1997) (Special Issue on Revival); and articles in *BRJ* 20 (Oct.-Dec., 1997); *BRJ* 21 (Jan.-March, 1998); *BRJ* 22 (April-June, 1998).

Second, it is observable that so deep was the theological embedding of the revival concept in the Welsh religious psyche that, with the rise of modernistic theology in the middle to late nineteenth century, one could find plenty of ministers, in fact, probably the majority of them, who though heavily tainted with modernist “God-is-lovism” and a critical view of the Bible, nevertheless still held to evangelical notions of spirituality, the new birth, and of course, that ever-necessary phenomenon for the propagation of such, the revival. Men could be found as ministers, then, in Welsh pulpits, who had doubts about Scripture, doubts about the exclusive nature of Christianity, and who scorned forensic atonement, eternal punishment, and other cardinal doctrines, yet they nevertheless could hold forth enthusiastically about “revival” and about spiritual re-birth. This seeming contradiction is explained when one examines the inner logic of the “modernist” theological stance. “Modernism” evolved from amongst the ranks of evangelicals, taking its cue from the pietistic emphasis that developed amongst them during the eighteenth century. In this a heavy premium was placed on the notion of “spiritual experience of the love of God,” and a kind of evangelical mysticism developed. That is to say, the external normative control of the Word of God in the Scriptures began to recede in favour of the “God within” notion peculiar to pietists and Romanist mystics. As skeptical criticism began to undermine faith in the veracity of Scripture, more and more evangelicals veered toward this mystical standpoint, finding the “God within” to be the epistemological “archimedian point” for their belief. An evangelical of the German Reformed churches, one Friedrich Schleiermacher, finally codified this as a system of theology, and from there its popularity soared, amongst masses of evangelicals. This emphasis on the notion of finding God by an inner mystical experience was of course the open door to allow modernist preachers to accommodate the notion of revival.

Third, it is also the case that though evangelical religion had atrophied enormously by 1904, religion of a sort was still popular. Numbers were increasing, rather than declining, prior to 1904. Indeed, by the denominational returns of 1905, the Calvinistic Methodists could number some 575,000 members and adherents, located in some 1,599 churches or preaching stations, with 1,262 ministers and preachers, 5,865 elders and deacons, and 206,000 Sunday school members. This meant that one Welshman in about every five had connection with them.² Notably, we find that in the period 1900-04 the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists were opening a new church every month, and all that *before* the 1904-05 Revival.³

The Calvinistic Methodists, doyens and leaders in most, if not all of Wales' revivals, had by 1904 completely lost touch with Calvinism. Indeed, their decline from scriptural orthodoxy can be traced in their literary remains from as far back as approximately 1835.⁴ Throughout the nineteenth century the "new thinking" emerged ever more strongly, and the robust Calvinism of old Welsh non-conformity was first modified to an Amyraldian stance on the atonement in the year 1875.⁵ The ensuing liberalisation of feeling issued in a complete declension. In September 1901, a ministers' conference was held in Merthyr to discuss Calvinism, because evidently a whole generation of pulpiteers had arisen who had never learned, in seminary or in private study, just what the Reformation faith was all about. Great limitation on their study was of course a general feature due to the lack of Welsh theological works on Reformed theology. And few of them could read, or wanted to read, English, the language of their neighbour nation under whom they had been politically subdued. In fact, throughout the full course of the 170 years from 1735 on, Wales suffered a dearth of solid Reformed literature, and so when orthodox leaders such as John Elias and Thomas Charles passed from the scene, deviations from orthodoxy began naturally enough to raise their ugly heads. Seminal in such deviations were the work of a few very scholarly Welsh theologians from whom better things might have been expected, and whose wide reading in English theological works encompassed much that contributed to the decline of orthodoxy, and the rise of rationalistic critical theology. Somehow, despite all this, they maintained their evangelical veneer. Yet, as indicated above, this denomination, by then the largest in Wales, had so lost touch with Reformation orthodoxy that it held in 1901 a conference to see what they could find out about it. It is instructive to take a peep at that conference, as

²Cf. Gilbert Evans, "The Situation in the Presbyterian (Calvinistic Methodist) Church of Wales," being a paper read at a conference in Glasgow, 3 May 1975, and printed in the booklet *Contemporary Trends in Historic Presbyterianism*, p. 9.

³Reported in *The Monthly Treasury*, the English language magazine of the Calvinistic Methodists during the years 1900-04.

⁴Cf. Owen Thomas, *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate, 1707-1841*, trans. John Aaron (Edinburgh: Banner, 2002). Owen Thomas' original work was part of his biography of John Jones of Talsarn, an important Calvinistic Methodist revivalist preacher who had compromised on the atonement. Thomas indicates how in the controversy in Wales over the extent of the atonement the Calvinist Methodists eventually veered away from limited, and therefore, forensic atonement.

⁵By 1875, the Calvinistic Methodist Confession of Faith had been modified by a rider acting as a let-out clause on the matter of limited atonement (cf. *BRJ* 20, p. 24, n. 38).

it was recorded in *The Monthly Treasury*, the English magazine of the denomination. Keir Hardie, the Scottish pioneer socialist, and first Labour Member of Parliament, was the sitting MP for Merthyr, and accordingly he was selected by the Calvinistic Methodists to chair the conference, as it was held in Merthyr. (Socialism was already making a big impact in modernistic theological circles as a signal expression of “God-is-lovism” reaching out to the masses.) The main conference speaker was none other than the Congregationalist modernist, P. T. Forsyth. His first lecture was under the title “What Calvinism Is.” His second lecture was “What Calvinism Does.” What kind of mish-mash the ministers got from Forsyth one can only guess, as the standard scholarly view of Calvinism of those days was of something processed through the modernistic minds of such men as Schleiermacher, Schweizer, and Ritschl. The writer in the *The Monthly Treasury* summed up the conference as being one of excellent fellowship, but that at the end of it all it “still was not quite clear, perhaps, what Calvinism was.”⁶

We see then, a picture of Welsh church life of 100 years ago, just prior to the great “Revival” of 1904-05. In those early years of the twentieth century, attendance at worship on Sabbath days was virtually the rule, rather than the exception it is today, so the question arises as to what has gone wrong since the Revival of 1904-05. If we have a church scene characterised by huge attendances, then a nation-wide “revival” on top of all this, how is it that 100 years later there is little left? And why no more revivals in that ensuing 100 years?⁷ It has not as though the Welsh evangelicals have given up on the idea of revival. To the contrary, during this last 100 years they have harped on incessantly about the subject, building up an extensive lore of tradition and literature concerning the topic.⁸ In these last 100 years they have preached, prayed, and worked, for another “great revival.” And nothing has happened ... only further declension and apostasy. Tragically, a close look at the evangelicals that remain in Wales today yields a picture of something little more than a tiny replication of tired old nineteenth

⁶Cf. *The Monthly Treasury* (November, 1901). The first six pages read like a sick joke. The report is a warbling without reporting anything solid about anything. As such it is probably an accurate epitomisation of what that conference actually was like.

⁷There was, indeed, an alleged “little revival” at Gorseinon and Loughor, to the immediate west of Swansea in 1928-29 which raised hopes of another major revival. But it evidently petered out, though Evan Roberts, the revival leader of 1904-05 came there with a “powerful ministry.” See Brynmor P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-1905* (Evangelical Press of Wales, 1995), p. 279.

century evangelicalism, now seemingly becoming more and more influenced by a Charismatic emphasis. Drums, guitars, and choruses have gained entrance in many quarters. Theologically they have access to far more sound literature than their forefathers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but so great is their fascination with “revival” that the ideas of “reformation” and “orthodoxy” are either ignored, or mollified by modern considerations. Endemic to this is the usual “revivalistic” belief that orthodox theology is not necessary for true Christian spirituality, and that God blesses Arminians with revivals as well as “Calvinists.” Such theological idiosyncrasy, of course, stems from the fact that historically speaking, Arminians did get the “blessing” of “revival” just as much as Calvinists. Thus, the false theology of “revival” effectively acts to blur the issues between the true gospel and the false.⁹ Orthodoxy, even if personally a modern Welsh evangelical might take to it, is not really so important. What matters is spiritual experience, and Arminians have that as assuredly as Calvinists, he would say. Hence orthodoxy gets put on the “back-burner” at best, and amongst Welsh evangelical circles one would not find such Reformation features as exclusive psalmody, catechising, Reformation church discipline, upholding of Reformation doctrinal standards, Christian schools for the children of Christians, nor a satisfactory practice of expository preaching.

One has to say that all this finds reinforcement in the kind of literature put out by the Banner of Truth on the topic of revival. Given the status of the “Banner” world-wide amongst evangelicals, it is no wonder that a general mood of laxity is evident concerning orthodoxy, and Wesleyan Arminianism is becoming more and more acceptable amongst these modern, so-say “Calvinists.”¹⁰

⁸Brynmor Jones (*Op. cit.*) lists 20 books on this revival, four of which are in the Welsh language, the rest in English. Principal titles he lists in English are:

Eifion Evans, *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (3rd edition, 1987)

David Matthews, *I saw the Welsh Revival* (1951, and in print now again)

R. B. Jones, *Rent Heavens* (1931, and later editions)

Jesse Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales* (1905)

D. M. Phillips, *Evan Roberts, The Great Revivalist and His Work* (1923)

J. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue* (1973).

Thomas Pritchard, *An After Reflection of the Late Revival in Wales* (1908)

H. Elvet Lewis, *With Christ among the Miners* (1906)

Jones also lists two of his own publications in English, which form two of a five-volume set he is publishing on the topic of this revival.

⁹On this mongrelisation of Calvinism with Arminianism, we recommend readers to study the article by Marc D. Carpenter, “A Critical Review of Iain H. Murray’s book, *Revival and Revivalism*” (*BRJ* 19, pp. 23-29).

One hundred years and no more revivals! What has happened? In previous issues of the *BRJ* the phenomenology of “revival” has been examined, and found to lack foundation in the Holy Scriptures.¹¹ This is not to say, however, that there have never been times in church history when faithful preaching of the Word of God has issued forth in a large number of converts in one place and in a short time. Such instances are found in the Acts of the Apostles. These instances are characterised principally by the proclamation of the gospel, and faithful exposition of the Scriptures by godly preachers. It is evident, however, from the New Testament itself, that the sudden influx of large numbers of converts is not the only way of God’s workings. True, one finds numerous examples of such in the Acts of the Apostles. But therein we are dealing with the initial establishment of the ancient church, being founded on the ministry, the *extraordinary* ministry, of the apostles. But even there, Luke records for us instances when small numbers, or even just individuals are manifest as the fruit of the apostolic labours.¹² Common to both the large influx, and the smaller, but more persistent stream, is that *sine qua non* of the Spirit’s work, preaching. Indeed, it is preaching that is commanded by the Most High, coupled with the teaching that ensues from it in order to facilitate the “discipling” of men of all ranks and nations.

From time to time in subsequent church history, this feature emerges. One can read of Michael Robert’s one sermon at the Calvinistic Methodist Association Meeting, in Llanidloes in 1819, for instance.¹³ When one is told that con-

¹⁰For many years the Banner has majored on this issue of revival to the extent that in their circles John Wesley is eminently eulogised (cf. n. 9 above).

¹¹Cf. the issues of the *BRJ* 19-22 (cf. n. 1 above).

¹²Note the various instances in the Acts of the Apostles in which “the Lord added daily such as should be saved.” We list some of them: 2:41; 5:14; 6:7; 8:12, 36-40; 9:41; 10:44; 11:21; 13:43; 14:1; 16:14-15, 31-34; 17:4, 34; 18:4-8, 26; 19:2, 17-20. An examination of these texts indicates a variation in the size of the gospel harvest from single individuals through small groups and families, “many,” and large multitudes.

¹³Cf. Owen Jones, *Some of the Great Preachers of Wales* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1885), pp. 8-10. It may be that Michael Roberts over-used his imagination even here in this good example, but the substance of what he said was orthodox enough and orthodox doctrine did not seem imperilled but rather illustrated and reinforced by his careful application. Jones can tell us that many in the audience were seen in great distress during the sermon, and he parallels their condition with that of the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:27-30). But significantly for a large crowd, there seems to have been no orgy of disorderly behaviour. Importantly, this sermon should be taken as one factor in the increase yielded thereon to the churches. Labouring pastors and elders in the locality completed and perfected what Roberts had initiated. And all that without any hullabaloo.

sequent to this sermon, during the next six months over 1,000 converts were added to the churches of that little town and the villages around one can readily concur that this was a true manifestation of God's Spirit. One sees the characteristic signature of divine operation. First, the orthodox gospel sermon preached with a passionate conviction. Then the ensuing conviction in the congregation—several thousand gathered in the main street—and the subsequent ministrations of godly ministers in the local congregations who shepherded those who, as a result of that sermon, began seeking the Lord. Catechising, counselling, instruction ... all spread over some six months, and the Lord added to the churches such as should be saved. Then, the final and notable "signature," in the Christian conduct of the new professors of faith. One might add something else, too, that after Michael Roberts returned to his own church at Pwllheli, some 60-70 miles away, there was no further instance of such events, either in his own church, or over in Llanidloes. By the standards of the popular theology of revival, a true revival would have had them all in the Llanidloes area gathering by the thousands every night of the week to enjoy a nightly repetition of that event, turning it all into an extended orgy of emotion. And this is at the heart a salient error of "revivalist" theology, that it sanctifies the sensational, propagandizes the emotional, and lusts for protracted orgies of mass hysteria, believing that thus, and largely thus, is the method of God's dealings with men. There is a reluctance to see Christianity as a solid and self-controlled phenomenon, capable of standing against the storms of life, of maintaining the Christ-like character throughout the ordinary, the un-exciting, the laborious, cold light of reality.

One could add to this the fact that under "revival" theology, there is a tacit presumption that the office of an "apostle" still functions. Indeed, one Welsh revivalist of the early eighteenth century, Hywel Davies, was hailed explicitly as "the Apostle of Pembrokeshire."¹⁴ As such, "revivalism" is theologically akin to "Romanism," for it is of the very essence of popery that the apostolic office is deemed to remain in existence, and functions to this day through the person of the pope, and that concomitantly, the pope, speaking *ex cathedra*, speaks with the same theopneustic inspiration as did Paul or Peter when they wrote their letters to the churches. Such a concept sets up the pope as having super-authority in the church, and one discovers this concept of "super-authority" being

¹⁴So styled in various modern revival literature, but note should be taken of the fact that he was a cause of serious worry and trouble to Griffith Jones of Llanddowror. See David Jones, *Griffith Jones of Llanddowror* (Tentmaker, repr. 1995), p. 169.

attached by evangelicals to the great “revivalists” of yore, be their theology what it may. Such leaders often openly assumed a virtual “popish” authority, the complaints of some early Methodists concerning this trait in John Wesley being symptomatic of what was going on.¹⁵ And in modern Pentecostalist and Charismatic circles, one will find that “tacit” has been replaced by “explicit,” and no wonder, given the impetus of their “revival” theology.¹⁶ Imbued with “power from on high,” revivalists moved itinerantly amongst the churches with an authoritarian “clout” that over-ruled and side-lined the ordained office-bearers in individual churches, the pronouncements of such men (and in some cases women ... often of the young and pretty sort) were regarded as having come straight from the Almighty Himself. Who would dare challenge that? More, entrained and entwined in all this, one finds that God, so say, is now inspiring men (and women) to replace biblical psalmody with new compositions commensurate with the ethos of the revival movement. One has often heard that “when God moves, He raises up His hymnists.” Tacitly, the theology underlying this feature is but a continuation of the notion of the apostolic office still functioning. The hymn-writer is actually theopneustically energised by the Holy Spirit to write his inspired lyrics, such that in the words of one modern “revivalist theologian,” these hymns are “better” and “more expressive” than the Psalms.¹⁷ One salutes his logic as impeccable, but one despises his presuppositional foundation as unscriptural. One only has to listen to a few of the sermons of a modern evangelical such as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones to see the inroads this notion made into the thinking of evangelical preachers. Where an older generation of teachers would have been quoting Scripture and psalmody, modern evangelical sermons are punctuated by quotations from famous hymns. And what authority is there in the words of a hymn? Plenty, if you tacitly, at least, believe that the words were inspired by the Holy Ghost. But that notion, tacitly if not avowedly, makes the words of hymns tantamount to being Scripture.

¹⁵Cf. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 28, 68, where Wesley’s iron control of the Methodist movement is pointed out. Bebbington notes the testimony of one of Wesley’s contemporaries to the effect that “some suggested that the love of power seems to have been the main spring of all [Wesley’s] actions.”

¹⁶One of the old pioneer Pentecostalist denominations is known to this day as the “Apostolic Churches,” but throughout the Charismatic movement there has traditionally been the elevation of certain “miracle revivalists” to apostolic status.

¹⁷Iain Murray, *The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?* (Edinburgh: Banner, 2001), pp. 24-25.

Thus a kind of psuedo-apostolic authority emerges from “revivalism” and its theology. It sets the platform for apostasy from orthodox scriptural doctrine, and from orthodox scriptural practice.

But there is a natural lust in human nature for the sensational. Today the mass media thrives on it. Who would pay money to read a novel, or see a film, about ordinary days in ordinary hum-drum lives? Thrills, excitement, passion, violence, intrigue, the miraculous even, these are the elements of the natural lusting of the human psyche. In the New Testament, we read of the multitudes that followed Christ, fascinated and elated by the sensational miracles He worked. When He tested them, by His teaching, particularly His teaching concerning the sovereignty of God, the crowds took offence, and the Lord found that almost immediately He was left in the company of just a small band of His faithful few. “Will ye also go away?” He asked them ... and Peter replied, “To whom should we go, thou hast the words of eternal life.” (John 6:64-68). Sensation, miracle, tension, emotion, all drew unprecedeted crowds. But when faced with the cold light of day in the actual teaching of Christ, they spurned it and Him with it. Tragically, we have to say that this same mentality emerges in “revivalism.” One sees the protracted meetings, the high emotion, the night after night continuation of an orgy of sensation in the name of religion. Universally such phenomena breed an indifference to, indeed a hostility towards, disciplined church life and teaching of orthodox doctrine.¹⁸ In those revivals of yore then, religion, yea, Christianity, was essentially, if not openly and avowedly, seen and used as a vehicle of entertainment. Of course, no-one would have dared to say that in those years, even if they had realized that that is what was going on.

In tracing the course of revivalism through the 170 years of its active impressions on the Christian churches of Wales, one becomes aware of an evolution in

¹⁸In Marc D. Carpenter’s review of Iain Murray’s *Revival and Revivalism*, he clearly isolates the tendency of revivals and revivalists to abandon doctrinal distinctives in order not to offend those of other denominations. Carpenter indicates how this inevitably involves Calvinists giving up their Calvinism for the sake of establishing fellowship with Arminians. Bebbington, in the work cited n. 15 above, gives further evidence of this mongrelization, and, in Wales, the same doctrinal blurring of distinctions and mongrelization eventually enabled the Calvinistic Methodists and the Welsh Wesleyan Methodists to work “in harmony” together, both in the revivals, particularly of 1859-60 where the two revivalists were respectively one from each of the two denominations, and in the matter of sung praise in that one and the same hymnal was developed for both denominations. Owen Jones too, in his *Some of the Great Preachers of Wales* notes on many occasions, with APPROVAL, the setting aside of “dogma” and the espousal of what was effectively a de-Calvinised religion. Feelings, and love, were paramount over truth, indeed those who held firmly to dogmatic theology (there weren’t many) were lampooned as being “bigots.”

its theological foundations and praxis. Beginning with the early phases of the Methodist revivals from 1735 onwards, a certain natural feature of the Celtic character came immediately to the fore, that is, a pronounced vocal capability, manifested often in beautiful singing, and religiously, in tremendous preaching. The dialect of the Welsh, with its accentual tones, is a superb vehicle of communication, capable of transmitting not only information efficiently, but also, and perhaps more so, transmitting *feeling*. Characteristic of a Welsh pulpit orator was the ability to produce what was popularly called the “hywl.” The word basically means “sail,” and in English it would hardly communicate much concerning the preaching, if you said the minister got “into his sail.” In Welsh however, “hywl” has such a deep currency of meaning that it is the perfect word to describe in that language the image of a minister totally caught up in a kind of trance, powerful emotional speech flowing from him, his voice and his message literally “sailing” along on the torrent of words. In Welsh, a preacher could and did oft-times suddenly break forth in this oratorical passion and force of delivery that would leave the audience stunned. This “hwyl” was believed to take place when the preacher was specially “anointed” by the Holy Spirit. People in the audience would be open-mouthed, sweating, one might say, hypnotized by the torrent of passion and words, some would even swoon, others fall to the floor in dread, whilst others would be in the aisles dancing.¹⁹ Now it is evident that this “hwyl” is a natural characteristic, and its emergence is not a mark of the Spirit’s presence at all. But, of course, with such dynamic effects on the audience, it was too easy to regard it all as preaching “in demonstration of the Spirit and power”(I Cor. 2:4). This mis-exegesis and mis-application of Scripture is yet another indicator of the presumptive “apostolicism” endemic to the revival tradition. Only whereas a New Testament apostle could work great wonders of miracles and signs, our erstwhile “apostle” in eighteenth century Wales under the “hywl” was devoid of such powers, but naturally enough found a substitute for them in the effects of his oratory on the audience. He was not alone in this. It was the major ethos of Whitefieldian and Methodist preaching in England, even though there it would not have been called the “hywl.” An orator, like Whitefield or like Wesley, was adept at producing these effects among the English, although perhaps to a lesser degree than their Welsh counterparts. But the

¹⁹On this “hywl,” see Rev. Alan Spencer, “Revivalist Propaganda and the Cause of Truth in Wales: Part Two: Psychology and Methodology” (*BRJ* 22, pp. 29-39), where the writer gives examples of the usage of the “hywl” as a rhetorical device that could virtually be turned on at will by those preachers who were masters of the art.

phenomenon was “theologised” in the same way in England, and since then through all the world.²⁰ Its intense and ubiquitous occurrence in Wales can be traced to the facility of the Welsh language and intonation, hence one finds where this characteristic is most naturally emergent amongst the indigenous population, there one would find the phenomena of “revival” at its most intense. Examination of Welsh church history proves this. Not for nothing was Wales called “the Land of Revivals.”²¹ Look in vain in any other nation of the world for a concatenation of “revivals” as intensive, persistent, and pervasive as you will find it in Wales. So much is this so, that the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones dared to single out the Welsh as having a natural characteristic that led to true spiritual and apostolical Christianity more so than any other people. Parallel to this he tended to regard the English as by nature backward in this regard. As to Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, Lloyd-Jones openly averred that it was, as no other segment of the church, the epitome of true apostolic Christianity, because ... it was Calvinism and Methodism blended in one.²² He declared that this was the salient signature of the Spirit’s witness amongst the Welsh ... this apostolical preaching in demonstration of the Spirit and power, all of course, with the mis-exegesis and mis-application we adverted to above.

One finds it necessary to note a further element of popular preaching that was well over-worked in the propagation of emotional passions. That is the use of the imagination. One discovers that great preachers, even the famed Jonathan Edwards, would allow imagination to run riot in some of their sermons. To a certain degree the usage of the imaginative as an illustration and reinforcement of the truth exegeted is certainly to be encouraged. A sermon should be “user friendly” not only in terms of conveying exegeted Scripture truth in clarity, but also in impressing that truth on the hearer’s mind. The problem is in the abuse of this faculty via overstretched and melodramatic usage. In his informative (and revealing) tome *Some of the Great Preachers of Wales*, Owen Jones takes time

²⁰One notes this interpretation given by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *The Puritans: their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1987), esp. p. 124. See also the critique of Lloyd-Jones by Hugh L. Williams, ‘The Last of the Calvinistic Methodists: Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and his Problematic ‘Revival’ Theology,’ (*BRJ* 19, pp. 30-46).

²¹The phrase “Wales, Land of Revivals” is actually carved in Welsh into the granite of the Memorial Stone for the 1904-05 Revival which stands in the forecourt of the Moriah Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel in Loughor, just west of Swansea.

²²Cf. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “William Williams and Welsh Calvinistic Methodism,” in *The Puritans: their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1987), pp. 209-213.

to look at this factor in Welsh preaching.²³ He lists Calvinistic Methodist pioneers such as Daniel Rowlands, Robert Roberts, John Jones of Talsarn, and John Elias of Anglesey as being specially "gifted" with this faculty. Rowlands, Roberts, and Elias we know as orthodox in their theology, Jones of Talsarn was an early compromiser with Arminians and emerged with a quasi, if not outright, Amyraldianism. But they all spiced their preaching with enormous flights of imagination and dramatic gestures. Coupled with the oratorical effects of the "hywl" this made for a most formidable natural power in the pulpit. Owen Jones also lists the baptist Christmas Evans as being "splendid" in this respect, but to those who are prepared to adjudicate these matters soberly in the light of Scripture, the imaginative excursions of such as these preachers strikes a false note. Owen Jones uncritically notes how multitudes would be "struck down," or on other occasions, borne up in raptures of delight. Examination of these events shows that these dramatic effects were not caused so much, if at all, by the forceful impression of Scripture truth on individuals, but more likely from emotional entrapment in exaggerated embellishments of the truth. Affected by such emotions initially, folk would all too easily return to a normal state after the torrent of emotion had passed. It is difficult to tell how many lasting conversions resulted, doubtless in the case of the orthodox preachers many did, but it would have been in spite of, rather than because of, their imagination-embellished oratorical flair. And it goes without saying, that when a preacher is giving latitude to his imaginative powers, he wanders away from the simplicity and straight talking of the Scriptures. Initially, his imaginative discourse might be no more than an intensified illustration of the truth he is exegeting from the Scriptures, and delivered with the passion of deep conviction. But too many run riot from this point, and their histrionics detract from the truth they are trying to communicate.

Here then, in these several principal factors, one finds the roots of "revivalism." It is found in powers of the natural faculties, feeding a natural lust of the human psyche. One need only remember, too, that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the local church and non-conformist chapel were the main centres of public meeting in most communities. And if the non-conformists had thrown out the ritualistic liturgy of the establishment, they had replaced it with

²³Cf. Owen Jones, *Op. cit.*, pp. 14-16 significantly under the heading "Imagination and Dramatic Power." Jones is uncritical of the usage of the imagination by Welsh preachers, but for our purposes his account is revealing in that it includes an example of one melodramatic delivery at Bala in 1837, the effects of which he says were "undescribable."

a dull hymn-sandwich affair. Dull that may have been, but it had the potential for an explosion of dynamic emotion if the preacher got into a "hywl." Evidence indicates that the "great revivalists" were able to get into this "hywl" to greater effect than most, hence their reputation, hence their widespread influence. Examples of Welsh preaching abound too, in which a noted "revivalist" failed to get the attention of his audience for a space of up to half an hour, and then, suddenly, he enters the "hywl" and the meeting is electrified.²⁴

Bluntly, the name of all this is entertainment. Religious services, in fact, provided common folk with the only "theatre" they could regularly gain access to, and that gratis too. The dull, laborious lives of the old-time peasantry would find little entertainment in an age before the development of mass media such as took place in the twentieth century. Outside of public houses, attendance at chapel was the only major facilitation for social meeting in the community. To have it punctuated by "revivalism" was like a bonus, a giant emotional trip. Just so long as the religion brought by the "revival" was amenable to human nature, and blended with the general superstitions and fads of the age, the orgy of sensation was welcome. One is not surprised to find that under such circumstances there was also a widespread aversion to "Calvinism." In the course of these revivals, we find there is little evidence of the gospel being preached as coming over as a "scandal" and an "offence" to the natural man. Too many got swept up with these revivals too easily. As such one can assuredly discern they had not learned the Jesus of the Gospels. Instead it was a false, sentimentalised Jesus, one whose character fitted the orgy of hyper-emotional oratory that had come to be regarded as "preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit and power." The fruit of such revivals, even in the earlier times when the sermons were much more of an orthodox theological nature, was indicative of failure. That great Welsh Calvinist preacher, John Elias for example, could lament at a time when revivals were endemic, left, right and centre:

It is a dark night on the Church, the depth of winter, when she is sleepy and ready to die, and the Lord is hiding his face in the ordinances, and when only a few are crying out for his appearance, and those scarcely audible in their call!

²⁴Cf. Alan Spencer, "Revivalist Propaganda and the Cause of Truth in Wales: Part Two: Psychology and Methodology" (*BRJ* 22, p. 30), giving this example taken from the life of John Jones of Talsarn.

It is still more awful, if while they are asleep they should think themselves (to be) awake, and imagine they see the sun at midnight.

Yet such are the circumstances of the Church generally. Yea, the darkness of night, I say, is upon her, and she is slumbering, having lost the presence of her Lord, and so unhappy as not to know the loss she has sustained!

This letter was written 28 June, 1831, after nearly 100 years of widespread revivals all across Wales! Evidence indeed of the failure of the revivals to produce godly fruit.

Tragically, right from the beginning of the “Methodist revivals,” the error concerning “sensationalist preaching” was prominent. Old heads, like the famous Griffith Jones of Llanddowror, rebuked and warned the young Methodist leaders in Wales for what they were doing and where they were heading. Being headstrong young men, they took little notice,²⁵ and hence did not appreciate that they had taken a significant step away from Scripture, with respect to the “how” of preaching. They seemed not to hold it necessary to bring conviction upon their hearers simply by clear explication of the Scripture truth, rather they tended to make their communication by means of emotion. Orthodox much of the substance of what these early Calvinistic Methodists preached might have been, its tendency to convict via apprehension of the truth was being obfuscated to greater or lesser degrees by the torrent of sensationalistic oratory. All too often, in the hearers, it was the “tune” that got them, so to speak, not so much, if at all, the “words of the song.”

Torrents of sensationalism generated by such preaching run a predictable course. Spreading from community to community via itinerant “revivalists” and travellers, a wave of mass hysteria could be worked up, and this was interpreted as the “flame of revival spreading.” As with any mass movement, it would gather a momentum of its own, rise to a crescendo after perhaps a few months, and then gradually decline as the novelty wore off, or indeed, the major participants and leaders reached exhaustion.²⁶ A period of comparative deadness would then ensue, punctuated by longings for another revival prompted in great measure by the failure of the “converts” to settle down to the laborious task of living the

²⁵Cf. David Jones, *The Life and Times of Griffith Jones of Llanddowror* (Tentmaker, repr. 1995), pp. 167-176.

Christian life in this evil world. Apostasy would be rife, and eventually, after about 20 years, a new generation who had either not been born at the time of the last revival, or had been too young at the time to appreciate it, proved to be the willing fodder for the fires of another orgy of hysterical fervour, an experience which was a novelty to them, an experience reinforced by the aura of the revivalist folk-lore from past "visitations." The cycle would then repeat itself. And so it went on, for 170 years, until the last manifestation, in 1904-05.

During this period however, it is noticeable that a further step of departure from the Scriptures emerged. Thus far, the deviation from Scripture was more a matter of method, than content, more a matter of the tune, rather than the words, so to speak. And in the first century of Calvinistic Methodism, many godly preachers faithfully preached a gospel faithful to Scripture, and their labours were blessed under God with a harvest of true converts, many on some occasions, few on others, and a steady stream at other times. But the notion of revival with all its extravaganza of sensationalism was gathering influence and popularity, and as the nineteenth century rolled on, men soon noticed that a revival could be propagated without the use of preaching at all. After all, you can set fire to a haystack with a magnifying glass as well as with a lighted match. The result is the same. With respect to revivalism, the transition from one method to another was not sudden, but evolutionary. Next time (DV), we shall consider, a number of factors in the transition.

to be continued

²⁶In the 1858-60 Revival, both revivalists eventually disappeared into obscurity, the Wesleyan Humphrey Rowland Jones finishing his course in a mentally unstable condition, probably due to a nervous breakdown or something akin to it. He thereon retreated into ecclesiastical oblivion. His Calvinistic Methodist counterpart, Dafydd Morgan just simply seemed to "lose the power" and henceforth spent the rest of his years of ministry in obscurity. In the 1904-05 Revival, the same kind of thing happened to the revival leader, Evan Roberts. It seems evident that exhaustion overtook these men, and no wonder considering the emotional hurricane they were actively generating.