

FOCUS ON WALES



The principality of Wales lies on the west of Britain across the sea from the Republic of Ireland. Wales is part of the United Kingdom. Its land area measures 8,000 square miles, and its population is around three million (five percent of the UK's total population), two-thirds of which live in the industrialized south. The capital city is Cardiff. Cardigan Bay gives the west-facing Welsh coastline its distinctive horseshoe shape. To the north and west of the valley areas, Wales is a land of rolling hills, mountains, and rugged coastline. Wales has more castles per mile than any other country in Europe.

History

The Welsh are descended from many peoples. Celtic tribes from mainland Europe came to settle the whole of the British

Isles between 500 and 100 B.C. Roman and Saxon invasions pushed the original Britons into the land of Wales.

Incidentally, the red dragon flag of Wales could date back to the Roman period, when Roman military cohorts used the symbol of a dragon. The Romans

came, they saw, but they never quite conquered. After they left, the red dragon remained a key emblem and the Tudors adopted the symbol. Wales came into existence as a country in its own right when Henry VIII's Act of Union in 1536 "incorporated, united and annexed the Dominion, Principality and Country of Wales" to England. The name Wales comes from the Anglo-Saxon term *waleas*, meaning "foreigner." In contrast, the Welsh name for Wales is *Cymru*, meaning "friend."

The Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a major impact in South Wales, where the iron and steel factories and the coal mines were concentrated. The need for labour brought an influx of English into this area, which resulted in an erosion of

the use of the Welsh language. But dramatic changes in labour-intensive industry resulted in the valleys' heavyweight role being consigned to history. As a consequence, unemployment in Wales is higher than in both Scotland and England, and wages are generally lower.

A referendum in 1997 produced a tiny majority (just 0.6 percent) in favour of setting up a democratically elected assembly to look after regional affairs. The one thing that marks Wales out from the rest of Britain is the continuing survival of its own living language. About twenty-seven percent of the population speaks Welsh, with the highest concentration of speakers in the west and northwest.

Revivals

Conventional images of Wales abound: rolling moors, mountain passes, male-voice choirs, tongue-twisting place names. But Wales is more than this. For believers the year 2004 reminds us that it has been a land of revivals. Between 1762 and 1904 sixteen revivals took place in Wales.

The evidences of Christian influence are everywhere

along the roads of Wales. Signs point to towns and villages with names such as Bethel, Nebo, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Hebron. Many other place names contain the Welsh terms for church or chapel. Roads meander past numerous square non-conformist meeting houses. Sadly, these chapels also provide evidence of the spiritual decline of Wales: many are dilapidated, lying vacant, or have been converted to some secular use. In recent years, on average, one has closed every week.

The Methodist movement in Wales was led initially by three towering figures: Howel Harris (1714–73), Daniel Rowland (1713–90), and William Williams (1717–91). The last is best known for his hymns. "The Sweet Singer" was unrivalled for his ability to combine profound experience and sound theology. Believers today are still stirred as they sing the English translation of his hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" to the powerful Welsh tune "Cwm Rhondda" (Rhondda Valley).

Methodist revivals resulted in the formation of the denomination known as the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, which became the largest non-conformist group in Wales (the renowned preacher, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones began his ministry



with this group). These revivals also resulted in a great Christian school movement and a burning desire to take the gospel to foreign lands. Missionaries from Wales pioneered works in India, Africa, China, Korea, and

other countries.

The revival in 1859 spread from America. It had such an effect on society in Wales that the country became known as “The Land of the White Gloves”—a reference to the custom of presenting white gloves to a judge if there were no criminal cases to be tried. The 1959 revival restored the preaching of the gospel, produced many conversions (in one county of 80,000 inhabitants 15,000 were added to the churches), and thus changed a nation and brought glory to God.

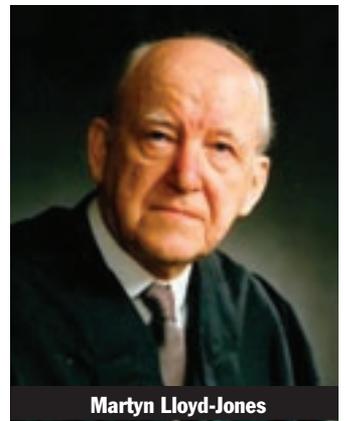
Exactly one hundred years ago, Wales experienced its last great revival. The prominent personality of that revival was a coal miner called Evan Roberts. Revival broke out in place after place, and swept through towns and valleys in a manner that defied human explanation and confounded sceptics of all kinds. There is good reason to believe that in Wales alone 100,000 souls were added to Christ’s kingdom. The effects of the revival spread to many other parts of Britain as well. “The 1904” influenced Wales for at least two generations, even though many of its children perished in the trenches of the First World War, prepared for that horrific conflict by a God of sovereign grace.

Today

The tragedy of Wales is that within a century the land of revivals has again become a mission field. Some describe

today as a “post-Christian period” in Wales. Society has ceased to acknowledge God in any meaningful way. Christian standards are forgotten. Church attendance has plummeted to seven percent, the lowest of any country in the United Kingdom. About two percent attend evangelical churches. In 1851, eighty percent of the population was nonconformist; today, less than ten percent claim to have nonconformist connections.

Yet God still has His people in the principality of Wales. In the 1950s Martyn Lloyd-Jones (a fluent preacher in Welsh) and others began the annual conference of the Evangelical Movement of Wales. Each year around 1300 conservative evangelicals meet in Aberystwyth (a seaside town on the west coast of Wales) for a week of Bible teaching and fellowship. One of the striking features of this conference is the high proportion of young



Martyn Lloyd-Jones

people attending. These conference meetings are devoted to preaching without any supporting gimmicks. Undoubtedly, the conference is a great encouragement to believers from the many small Reformed and evangelical churches.

The Free Presbyterian Church has commenced witnesses in South Wales in Burryport, Bryn, Loughor, Rhidwerin, and Merthyr Tydfil. Currently Rev. Dynes Uprichard, Rev. Richard Monteith, and Rev. Nigel Smyth labour in these still small gospel outreaches. Pray for them and for those who stand with them.

To read of the revivals in Wales is to say, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:23), and, “Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save” (Isaiah 59:1). It is also to realise that God’s blessing cannot be inherited; it must be sought after by every new generation. May our cry to God be, “Wilt Thou not revive Wales again?” ■



Old College in Aberystwyth, the town where the Evangelical Movement of Wales meets



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