

Topic 5: The Progress of the Revival in Wales, 1738-62

i. The development of structure and organization, 1738-43

The meeting between Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland at Defynnog in August 1737 (Topic 3, p.15) would prove highly significant for the future development of the revival movement in Wales. Despite their differences in ecclesiastical status, the one being a lay exhorter and the other a clergyman in full priest's orders, each affirmed the similarities between the activities which had flourished in their respective localities during the previous two years, and realized their significance. They felt a ready bond with one another and agreed that, as far as possible, they should work together to advance the spread of popular godliness and ensure that fellowship and pastoral oversight should be provided in society meetings. In fact 'the Defynnog meeting turned two embryonic religious awakenings into a more concerted movement with some semblance of centralized organization' (Jones, Schlenther and White, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.13). Soon Harris was visiting Llangeitho while Rowland was emboldened to leave his parochial responsibilities in the hands of his brother John, and take the gospel to the people even if it meant crossing parish boundaries and preaching in the open air. He would, nevertheless, remain staunchly loyal to his home area of Llangeitho while Harris evangelized ever further afield always visiting the societies which had already been established and forming new ones as well. By late 1738, in response to a letter from George Whitefield, he reported of the progress of 'the great revival' in Cardiganshire, 'a sweet prospect' in his native Breconshire and neighbouring Monmouthshire, and many 'well-wishers to the cause of God' in Montgomeryshire and Glamorgan. What was especially significant was the warm cooperation between the revivalists and Dissenting ministers, especially in Monmouthshire and Glamorgan. Hearing of his missionary success, from mid-1737 onwards sympathetic Dissenters such as the Independents Rees Davies Abergavenny, Edmund Jones Pontypool, James Davies Merthyr, and the Baptists Miles Harry, also from Pontypool, and James Roberts, Ross in Herefordshire, had invited Harris to their localities in order to itinerate, and throughout 1738 the impact of his evangelisation had been considerable. 'The two day service with us has been attended with marvellous success', wrote David Williams, Independent minister at Caerphilly, sometime in 1738:

The churches and meetings are crowded, Sabbath-breaking goes down ... I cannot but forbear thinking (without any partiality) but that your coming here was from God, and that God himself, in the might and power of the Spirit, was pleased to come with you

(quoted in Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p.43).

This paralleled the sympathy which Philip Pugh had shown to Daniel Rowland in Cardiganshire, and it boded well for the promotion of the Revival in Wales as a cross-denominational phenomenon, bridging the divide between Dissent and Church. Just as a striking element of unity prevailed among Wesley, Whitefield and the Moravians in London's Fetter Lane in 1739 (see Topic 4, pp. 1-2), so harmony and concord abounded among the proponents and supporters of renewal in Wales. But as in England (but for different reasons), it was not to last.

It was at that juncture that George Whitefield, in December 1738 fresh from his first American journey, contacted Howell Harris:

Though I am unbeknown to you in person, yet I have long been united to you in spirit, and have been rejoiced to hear how the good pleasure of the Lord prospered in your hands. Go on, my dear brother, go on, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and the spirit of Christ and of glory shall rest upon you more effectually which has, and still is, opening doors before you, for preaching the everlasting gospel (Benjamin LaTrobe (ed.), *Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harris Esq* (1791), p.112).

Just as Harris had been thrilled to hear of the progress of the gospel under Rowland a year earlier, he was not only encouraged that another ordained Anglican cleric had affirmed his still irregular itinerancy in such glowing terms, but that a key leader of the Revival in England with such strong links with the Great Awakening in America saw fit to contact him. The international dimension of the Revival was being noted even in Wales (see Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, pp.26-30, and David Ceri Jones, '*A Glorious Work in the World*': *Welsh Methodism and the International Evangelical Revival, 1735-1750*, *passim*). Harris replied immediately and by March 1739 Whitefield had visited Wales twice where he met with the societies of the south-east and took the opportunity to preach, often to very large crowds, where he could. The Englishman's admiration for Harris – both were 25 years old – was unstinting. Harris was, he claimed,

a burning and shining light ... in those parts, a barrier against profaneness and immorality and an indefatigable promoter of the true gospel of Jesus Christ ... he has been, I think, in seven counties, and has made it his business to go to wakes etc. to turn people from such lying vanities. Many alehouse people, fiddlers, harpers etc., Demetrius like, sadly cry out against him for spoiling their business ... But God has blessed him with inflexible courage .. and he still continues to go on from conquering to conquer ... His discourses [occur] generally in a field, but at other times from a well,

a table or anything else. He has established nearly thirty societies in south Wales and still his sphere of action is enlarged daily (Whitefield's *Journal*; quoted in Gomer M. Roberts (ed.), *Hanes Methodistiaeth Galfinaidd Cymru*, Vol 1, *Y Deffroad Mawr*, pp. 110-11).

Mightily flattered by Whitefield's praise, Harris responded in kind and accompanied him back to London where, between April and June 1739, he would spend an awe-inspiring six weeks. The Fetter Lane society was a cauldron of incipient enthusiasms: Moravian, Arminian, Calvinist, with stillness teaching, antinomianism and other aberrations ever threatening to boil over. Making the acquaintance of such luminaries as John and Charles Wesley, John Cennick, Count Zinzendorf, James Hutton and others impressed Harris highly, though in the midst of such a dizzying range of potentially conflicting spiritualities, he was in danger of losing his bearings. He became particularly perturbed as to whether assurance of salvation was an essential aspect of saving faith, and just as his confidence had been bruised following his discussions with Edward Dalton at Llanddowror three years earlier, now he began to doubt whether he possessed saving faith at all. He soon regained his balance however, especially after being grounded more soundly by Whitefield in the concept of justification by faith alone, and he came home affirmed in the Calvinistic faith: 'The Harris who returned to Wales in June 1739 was in some important respects very different from the Harris who had gone to London six weeks earlier' (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.26). He was better connected, vastly more confident, doctrinally more stable and energized in the knowledge that the Revival was becoming an exceedingly powerful spiritual phenomenon in England and America as well as in Wales.

Up until 1740 the movement remained under the informal control of Harris and Rowland, each taking responsibility for the societies that he himself had established, but such was the dynamic of the Revival that a more efficient organization was now deemed essential. As it was the individual societies met weekly for prayer, teaching and mutual edification. Now Harris grouped them together in specific areas – and it is worth remembering that it was *he* who took the initiative: 'Though it is generally recognized that Harris made a considerable contribution to the organization of Welsh Methodism, the extent to which the task of structuring the movement was accomplished almost single-handed has not been sufficiently emphasised' (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p.63). – while the leaders were called together to meet on a monthly basis under his supervision. This 'Monthly Meeting' was first convened in January 1740 at Eglwysilan, Glamorganshire, from which a series of rules governing the movement – now called specifically the Methodist movement – were

circulated. It was clear that throughout 1740 its identity was consolidated by this and subsequent meetings. By now Methodist presence had extended to south Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire, its doctrinal complexion was Calvinistic, it possessed some 32 exhorters who were involved in evangelism and pastoral work, while sixteen ordained ministers, eight of whom were particularly prominent, had consented to share in its fellowship. By the end of the year Harris along with Rowland called together a key meeting aimed at consolidating the movement further. This so called 'Society of Ministers' occurred at Glyn, Defynnog, in October 1740, and as well as being attended by ten lay exhorters who had come to prominence as leaders of individual societies, it attracted four Dissenting pastors, the Independents Edmund Jones and David Williams and the Baptists John Oulton from Leominster and James Roberts from Ross, and three clergymen: David Lewis, John Powell from Monmouthshire, William Williams (of Pantycelyn, of whom more will be said below) as well as Rowland himself. It was decided that the 70 or so societies which were extant in the counties of Brecon, Glamorgan, Monmouth, Cardigan, Pembrokeshire (with a few in the border areas of Radnorshire and Hereford) should be overseen by the lay exhorters, clergy and ministers who were present. Societies had also been established in south Cardiganshire, far from Llangeitho, and into Pembrokeshire, ensuring that Methodism was being perpetuated throughout south Wales.

All, however, did not go well. Some were apprehensive of Harris' emphasis on the need for assurance as an essential aspect of the converts' experience, while the Dissenting ministers especially, were wary of his increasingly domineering ways. Despite the ostensible unity, there were also two different ecclesiologies represented, one which regarded Methodism as a renewal movement within the Established Church and another which saw the societies as potentially self-governing, autonomous Dissenting congregations. Although this did not come to the surface at the time, it would soon become highly contentious. A second meeting was called for November, attended this time by the Baptist ministers Miles Harry and Philip Morgan and the Independent Lewis Rees from Llanbryn-mair among others, in which some doctrinal and ecclesiological tensions emerged. (The Baptists, for instance, demanded that the matter of believer's baptism should be allowed to be discussed in the societies whereas others saw this as being potentially divisive). Despite the fact that by late 1740 much had been achieved, the vision for a coherent and unified body of Welsh Calvinistic Methodists had not been wholly fulfilled. Harris, for his part, was very keen that the Welsh Methodists should become one with their English neighbours. Given the strain between Whitefield, the Wesleys and the Moravians which had become unbearable in London at the time, there was very little prospect of this

occurring, though Whitefield was equally eager for the Calvinistic Methodists on both sides of the border to merge together as a single body. In order to create a unified structure, a key meeting was convened at Llandovery, Carmarthenshire, on 13 February 1741. Although Whitefield could not attend, it reasserted the by now tightly supervised organization that had been agreed, that a similar design should be instituted in England, while provision was made for the leaders to meet quarterly along with an annual conference between England and Wales: 'From this point on, all the leaders of the Welsh Revival were committed to strategic meetings every two months. The new body, now known as the Public Society, effectively became the executive arm of the Welsh revival' (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.57).

By now, however, other problems were manifesting themselves. Harris, plagued by an inferiority complex, overcompensated by being overbearing and authoritarian. Although deferential to Rowland, he was often vexed by his colleague's light-hearted demeanour which he interpreted as being frivolous and unspiritual. Rowland, for his part, often found Harris arrogant and egotistical. He had little patience with his doctrinal variability or with what was becoming an obsession with the idea of assurance. The Dissenting ministers were also offended by his abrasive personality, while his dogmatic insistence that Methodism was essentially an Anglican body rather than a more broad-based movement which would allow societies, if they wished, to form themselves into Dissenting congregations, made cooperation increasingly impossible. In fact, fundamental differences in ecclesiology were coming to the fore. When Edmund Jones instituted the Defynnog society as a formal Independent church, at Brychoed, in 1742, Methodism and Dissent would go their separate ways. Yet Whitefield was still keen to forge a closer union. In what would later be regarded as the first 'association' of the movement at Dugoedydd, in Carmarthenshire, in January 1742, Whitefield's detailed blueprint for the Calvinistic Methodist movement was approved (for its content see Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, pp. 82-4). Ostensibly called to bring together the Welsh and the English strands of the movement, it remained, despite Whitefield's written contribution, exclusively a Welsh affair. The publication of the document *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r Societies* ('The Foundation, Aims and Rules of the Societies') a month later reiterated the fact that Methodism was a spiritual movement, in no way inimical to the Established Church but desirous for its renewal, which nevertheless possessed its own values, discipline and standards. Its theology was Calvinistic and it existed in order to ensure that the gospel was preached and that converts should be taught the principles of godliness and

obedience. The mutual desire to unify the two movements occurred in January 1743 when the first 'joint association' met at Watford, Caerphilly. Whitefield was elected moderator and among those from the Welsh wing who attended were Harris, Rowland, William Williams and the Anglican clergyman John Powell (another John Powell, a Baptist, had been involved in the Revival movement but had by now withdrawn for doctrinal and ecclesiological reasons). Whitefield was accompanied by John Cennick and two leading laymen, Joseph Humphries and Thomas Adams. Organization was consolidated: 24 exhorters were commissioned and appointed to specific area roles, while none was allowed to contravene the functions and responsibilities to which they had been appointed. In other words, a strict discipline was imposed and what had been a much looser body now became much more centralized and authoritarian.

With the formation of this joint Anglo-Welsh Association, the organizational framework of the Welsh Methodist movement finally solidified. Order had been brought into the ranks, and the authoritative voice of a regulative body could be clearly heard. Exhorters were appointed and given their tasks; they could also be dismissed, suspended or restricted. Those wishing to be involved in Methodist activities had now to be sanctioned by the Association, and society reports were to be prepared, thus establishing a system through which the progress of the whole movement could be supervised (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, pp. 89).

In fact, although this was far from its creators' intention, an alternative ecclesiastical body in competition with, rather than subservient to, the Established Church, had now evolved. Nevertheless it would take sixty-eight years, when in 1811 the Calvinistic Methodists would secede from the mother church and create their own, independent, Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Connexion.

In the meantime, a new generation of leaders was emerging who would assist Rowland and Harris with the oversight of what was a prospering and ever-expanding movement. Among their number were Howell Davies, William Williams and Peter Williams.

ii. A new cohort of leaders

a. Howell Davies (?1717-70)

A Monmouthshire man, Davies first appears at Talgarth in 1737, having set up a school in competition with Howell Harris' during the revivalist's increasingly frequent absences on preaching missions. He soon came under his competitor's sway and was duly converted. Being struck by Davies' zeal for the gospel and realizing his abilities, Harris urged him to seek holy orders, and on his mentor's advice he proceeded to Llanddowror to prepare for ministry under

the tutelage of Griffith Jones. Following ordination by the Bishop of St David's as deacon in 1739 and priest a year later, he was licenced to the cure of Llandeilo Abercywyn, Carmarthenshire, and despite Jones' disapproval, began itinerating after the Methodist way. 'It is the cry of the crowd which he will be governed by', Jones complained to Madam Bridget Bevan, 'which grieves me very much for his own sake'. In 1741 he was appointed to the parish of Llys-y-frân, near Haverfordwest, which became the focus for the Revival in Pembrokeshire. His marriage to Katherine, the daughter of John Poyer, the scion of a notable Carmarthenshire family, in 1744, afforded him social status and financial stability, though his wife died in childbirth a year later. A daughter from his second marriage, to Elizabeth White of Prengergast, Haverfordwest (they were wed in 1747), would become the wife of Nathaniel Rowland, the leading clerical Methodist of the latter years of the century and son of Daniel Rowland. His links with Howell Harris and latterly with Rowland, his social standing and financial independence along with his status as a priest in full orders, gave him exceptional footing within the movement.

From 1743 until his death, aged 53 in 1770, Davies would remain the undisputed leader of the Pembrokeshire Methodists. According to contemporaries, he was tender-hearted and considerate, diffident even, though his reputation as 'the Apostle of Pembrokeshire' reflected the power, influence and spiritual tenacity that characterized so many of the early Methodist leaders. By warding off the encroachments of both the Moravians and the Wesleyans, groups who were active in south Pembrokeshire during his ministry, he consolidated Calvinistic Methodist witness in the county. His single published sermon, *Llais y Priodfab* ('The Voice of the Bridegroom') (1768), gives little indication of the effect that his preaching had. Equally effective in both languages, he worked assiduously in the English speaking south as well as the Welsh speaking north of the county. In 1755 he opened, at Woodstock, the first chapel built especially for a Welsh Methodist society. His staunch Calvinism allied him to George Whitefield, whose pulpits in London and the West Country he sometimes filled; he was said to be 'violent against John Wesley'. Through Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, he became chaplain to the Countess of Walsingham, one of Selina's associates. By committing himself to adopted county, Davies never gained the prominence of either Harris or Rowland, yet he was revered by his contemporaries and ensured that by the 1760s the Methodist message would be rooted soundly in the most distant parts of south-west Wales.

b. William Williams (1717-91)

If Howell Davies' renown would remain local, William Williams ('of Pantycelyn') became the best known of all of the Welsh Methodist leaders, his fame eventually eclipsing that of both Harris and Rowland. Born at Cefncoed in the parish of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, Carmarthenshire, the only surviving son of the six children born to John Williams, farmer, and his wife, Dorothy, as a boy William wanted to be a doctor. All that is known about his formal education is that he spent a brief period at the Dissenting academy of Llwyn-llwyd near Hay-on-Wye, or possibly at the branch established at Chancefield not far from Howell Harris Trefecca home. It was in Talgarth churchyard, sometime in 1737 or 1738, that he heard Harris exhorting and, as he reminisced in his elegy to the revivalist, it was a turning point in his life:

*Dyna fore fyth mi gofiaf, Clywais innau lais y nef,
Daliwyd fi gan wŷs oddi uchod, Gan ei sŵn dychrynlyd ef*
(‘On that unforgettable morning, I heard the voice of heaven,
I was apprehended by a divine summons, by his awesome sound’)

A Dissenter by upbringing, William soon sought confirmation in the Established Church, and his medical ambition was transformed into a calling to take holy orders. He was ordained deacon by the bishop of St David's in August 1740 and licensed curate at Llanwrtyd and Llanddewi Abergwesyn, two Brecknockshire parishes a significant distance from his Carmarthenshire home. The fact that no permanent provision for lodging in the parishes had been made, along with complaints concerning his Methodistical ways, militated against the effectiveness of his ministry there, and the summer of 1743 he was accused of absenting himself regularly from his parish duties and neglecting the service of his cures. The upshot was that he was refused ordination as priest.

As a clergyman in deacon's orders, he was already heavily involved in assisting both Harris and Rowland. Having shown himself to be gifted in pastoral counselling, Harris had appointed him in January 1743 superintendent of the Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire societies, a gargantuan task in itself. He was also called frequently to assist Rowland in administering the chalice at Llangeithio, serving the hundreds if not thousands who would flock to the communion services to partake of the sacrament. (Not having being priested, he was prohibited from celebrating the sacrament himself, something which he came deeply to regret as it curtailed his usefulness within the Methodist movement). The Methodist association that met at Watford near Caerphilly in April 1743 resolved ‘that the Revd Mr Williams leave his

curacies, and be an assistant to the Revd Mr Rowlands' thus formalizing the arrangement. Following John Williams's death a year earlier, Dorothy and her daughters moved from Cefncoed to Pantycelyn, her family home, some five miles from Llandovery. William, the only surviving son, came to inherit both farms which constituted a small if comparatively prosperous estate. Financially independent, and free, by then, of parochial responsibilities, he could lead the kind of unfettered life that his Methodist calling required. He undertook regular preaching tours in south Wales and as the movement expanded northwards, in 1742, 1744, and again in 1748, went on extended tours of the northern counties.

His letters from this period and his reports on the societies richly testify to the sensitivity and analytic maturity with which he approached the delicate task of caring for converts, the majority of whom were youngsters like himself, at once excited and traumatized by their religious experiences. One of his hearers in 1744 described him as 'a very warm, serious, and devout young man, intent upon doing good', but a young man who 'wants to give himself to read and study'. A year later Williams discovered Jonathan Edwards's book 'on the work of God in New England the best book I have seen to that purpose'. He was already turning his mind towards literature. His missionary zeal, his pastoral concern for his flocks, his interest in understanding their needs, and his obvious desire to enlighten and comfort them through literary descriptions of their conditions marked him as the most special of Harris's and Rowland's lieutenants (Derec Llwyd Morgan, article in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*).

During the rift between the two leaders, like most of his colleagues Williams instinctively took Rowland's side. Yet it was during these years, when the Methodist movement had lost its most dynamic if exasperating leader, that he would come into his own. By now married, blissfully happily, to Mary ('Mali') Francis, the sole daughter of a prosperous farmer from Llansawel, Carmarthenshire, he commenced his career as an author, primarily as a poet and hymnist but also as a prose writer of consummate ability. His first volume of hymns, *Aleluia*, appeared in 1744, with two other collections following culminating in *Caniadau y Rhai sydd ar y Mor o Wydr* ('Songs of Those who are on the Sea of Glass') which would inspire the remarkable religious revival of 1762. (Four more collections would appear during the 1770s and 1780s). It is in his two epic poems, *Golwg ar Deyrnas Crist* ('A View of Christ's Kingdom') (1756) and *Bywyd a Marwolaeth Theomempus* ('The Life and Death of Theomemphus') (1764), a wholly brilliant dramatic treatment of the sinner's conversion and subsequent life in Christ, that his artistic genius manifested itself. His prose works, which are also unique in the history of Welsh letters, mostly appeared after 1762 (Excellent literary analyses in English are to be found in Glyn Tegai Hughes, *Willaims Pantycelyn*, and Derec

Llwyd Morgan, *The Great Awakening in Wales*, and in Welsh in *idem*, *Y Diwygiad Mawr* and *William Williams Pantycelyn*).

The maturing hymnist from 1750 onwards acquired through study a working knowledge of religious history that gave perspective to the awakening with which he was involved and a theological framework for his thoughts and imaginings. Perhaps the key to his substantial literary achievement is that he was a curious, in some ways rapacious, scholar, a thoroughly conscientious and (again) curious carer of souls, and that he was at the same time, artistically, a poet with a genius for adapting scriptural imagery and defining theological concepts in verse that encapsulated the real and ideal experiences of a readership that he knew intimately. Williams was in so many ways a pioneering artist (D. Ll. Morgan, *art. cit.*)

Following Harris's death in 1773 (and Howell Davies's demise three years earlier), Williams, along with Rowland (who would predecease him by three months in 1790), would share the leadership of the Methodist movement in Wales and fulfil the function of eminently revered elder statesmen. An activist as well as a preacher, counsellor and massively prolific author to the end, he showed his promise and prowess as a leader three decades earlier. In all he would remain among the most compelling of all who came to prominence in any country during the Evangelical Revival.

c. Peter Williams (1723-96)

The third member of this triumvirate of post-1740 leaders of the Welsh Methodist movement was born on 7 January 1723 at West Marsh, near Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, the son of Owen William, farmer, and his wife, Elizabeth. In 1741 he became a pupil at the Carmarthen Grammar School, which provided him with a firm grounding in the classics. On 14 April 1743 he went to hear George Whitefield preaching in the town, and his sermon, on Isaiah 54: 5, brought about his evangelical conversion. He left school in 1744 and became a schoolmaster at nearby Cynwyl Elfed, where he prepared himself for holy orders. Following his ordination as deacon by John Gilbert, the bishop of St David's, he was licensed as curate in the parish of Eglwys Gymun, bordering on Griffith Jones' Llanddowror. Williams's evangelical zeal soon brought him into conflict with his rector, the notorious anti-Methodist John Evans, and he was dismissed, the same happening in his two subsequent curacies at Swansea and Llangrannog, Cardiganshire. On 7 January 1747 Williams was formally received into the ranks of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. By this time the movement was venturing beyond its south Wales heartland into the north, and his preaching journeys in 1747 and 1748 took him to Anglesey and Denbighshire. He suffered much petty persecution, and his preaching in Denbighshire, provoked the magnate Sir Watkin Williams Wynn to issue a warrant summoning Williams and some of his auditors to be examined by him in his capacity as a

magistrate. He fined Williams £20 and the others 5s. a piece. But, when appeal was made to the courts, Williams Wynn was found to have acted illegally and was ordered to refund the fines and pay the costs. If popular with many, Methodism would remain contentious throughout these decades, and it was only by the end of the century that persecution would cease. In August 1748, following his marriage to Mary Jenkins, he settled at Llandyfaelog, to the south of Carmarthen town, which would remain the family home throughout his long career.

About 1759 Williams began to utilize the press as an instrument for evangelical work, and he thereafter became the chief contributor to the religious literature of Wales during the eighteenth century. His greatest undertaking was the publication of a family edition of the Welsh Bible with annotations of his own at the end of each chapter, this being the first Welsh commentary on the whole Bible ever issued (see Eryn M. White, *The Welsh Bible*, Chapter 4). This was also the first time that a Bible was printed in Wales rather than in London or Oxford. The work was issued in shilling parts, the first appearing in 1767. The ‘Peter Williams’ Bible’ (*Beibl Peter Williams*) proved to be greatly popular, and many thousands of copies were issued. In May 1770, when the final part was published, there were immediate criticisms. The comments on John 1 raised misgivings because Williams, by writing such words as ‘the Man Jesus is the everlasting Father’, seemed to suggest that he was ‘confounding the Persons’ of the Trinity and so departing from the Athanasian Creed. Daniel Rowland, who would always remain his close friend, had drawn his attention to this possibility, but no changes were introduced in the second edition of 1779–81. The outcome of this controversy which cost him his place within the Welsh Methodist movement and its effect on the Evangelical Revival in Wales, will be assessed in Topic 8. His primary contribution to the Methodist movement, however, was his tireless evangelistic labours and his literary work:

Williams was a man of strong character. He was an attractive and, at times, a powerful preacher. No other Methodist leader suffered more persecution than he did. A lack of clarity in his thinking still makes it difficult to ascertain the precise nature of the heresy for which he was excommunicated. But of his large contribution to Welsh Methodism there can be no doubt (R. Tudur Jones, article in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*).

Along with Howell Davies and Williams Williams, by 1762 he shared the leadership of the Welsh Methodist movement with Daniel Rowland. In the meantime its witness had been sorely effected by the grievous rift between Harris and Rowland.

iii. The rift between Harris and Rowland, 1742-50

Since their first meeting at Defynnog in August 1737, the two principal revivalists had worked together harmoniously and effectively. The fact that their circles of activity were different,

Rowland principally in Cardiganshire and west Wales and Harris in Breconshire, mid-Wales and the south-east, prevented tensions from arising between two ambitious and headstrong young men. (Although we lack the abundant documentary evidence that exists for Harris, Rowland too had a reputation for wilfulness and obstinacy). The first sign of what would become a constant trend occurred in the association meeting at Glanyrafon-ddu, Carmarthenshire, in March 1742 when they clashed publicly over a point of doctrine, that the covenant of grace, for Harris, had been between God and his Son, whereas in Rowland's opinion, it had been between God and humankind. It was the belligerent tone of the protagonists and the public nature of their disagreement rather than the doctrinal point as such, which had caused consternation at the time. A month later, at the Llwyn-y-berllan association, Harris contended vocally that assurance was essential to saving faith – his own experience in the past had suggested that this was not the case – whereas Rowland was equally insistent that although assurance was preferable, personal faith was valid even without it. Again, the worrying aspect of this debate was not its content but its vehement, public nature: 'What I was afraid in him', wrote Harris, 'was his feeding hypocrites and what he feared in me was my overthrowing the little ones' (Diary, 18 March 1742). It is clear from his diary that thereafter, Harris became much more critical of Rowland, suspecting him of levity and lacking in the spirit of devotion, while others began rebuking Harris for his apparent failings: 'Since I left you I was grieved much concerning your conduct towards Mr Rowlands', wrote the Glamorganshire exhorter Thomas Price in April 1742; '... There is another thing which appears to me as an error in you that your spirit is a little too imperious' (G. M. Roberts (ed.), *Selected Trefecca Letters 1742-7*, p.10). Although harmony was restored and cooperation continued throughout 1743, by 1744 darker clouds were beginning to fill the sky.

For much of 1743 Harris had been in London, deputizing for Whitefield at the Tabernacle, and on his return he was much more insistent on the significance of his status as a leader within the joint movement, indeed 'by the end of 1744 he was becoming obsessed with the idea' (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p. 160). Along with this, he began emphasising concepts which the Welsh Methodists found alien and disturbing. The phrases 'the blood of Christ', 'the wounds of Christ', 'the blood of the Lamb', although ostensibly biblical, were used by the Moravians (in whose company Harris had been) in an obsessive, unbalanced way, and on his return these phrases became more prevalent in his preaching. He even began talking of 'the blood of God', suggestive of the Patripassian heresy, that on the cross God the Father had suffered and not just the human nature of Christ, the divine Son. Although he protested that he was not under Moravian influence and that he remained loyal to Trinitarian orthodoxy, the suspicion was that he was becoming heretical, a wariness shared by Rowland whose doctrinal rectitude was second to none. These fears were

exacerbated by Harris' insistence that God was blessing profusely his preaching on this theme: 'I had more power than ever to show the Blood of Christ ... I never had such liberty to preach Blood – Wounds – the Blood of God – Blood, Blood and Blood again' (Diary, 26 February 1745). The grotesque nature of his preaching had now come well to the fore. What is more, he now came to espouse the idea that those who had not felt 'the power of the blood' were in a backslidden state and the only way for the movement to prosper was by emphasising even more pointedly the theology of Christ's wounds. By mid-1745 he saw the evidence for declension everywhere, and felt led to 'purify' the societies by disciplining members harshly. There are repeated diary entries throughout that year and the next of his preaching in a 'cutting' way, and of his turning members out of the societies, mostly for a spirit of worldliness and lack of commitment. He hardly realized how unpopular he was becoming, especially as he was convinced that he had been led to imposing heightened discipline by the direct impulse of the Holy Spirit. In effect, to oppose him was to oppose God, and all the while he was preaching on the divine blood: 'I'll go out as far as I can to declare this fountain, this blood, crying Blood, Blood, Blood, Blood', he wrote at Llandinam in 1747, 'and the Spirit came down like a mighty shower' (Diary, 15 May 1747).

Rowland, who lacked totally the quality of enthusiasm and was by far the better theologian of the two, had been surprisingly indulgent to Harris' speculations, but at the Watford association in April 1746, and again at the Trefecca association in June, he took his colleague to task openly. Moravianism had become a problem for the Welsh Methodist movement, especially in Pembrokeshire, while one of Harris' most trusted supporters, the powerful preacher James Beaumont, was espousing a mystical theology heavily influenced by Moravian ideas. Rowland was unsparing in his criticism of Harris accusing him of being tainted with Moravianism on the one hand and by Beaumont's antinomianism on the other. By now the breach was public, and thereafter, in each association meeting, criticisms would abound. The fact that Harris was even more truculent in claiming divine sanction for his opinions: 'I had this [the theology of the divine blood] from God and not from man', served to worsen the situation, as did his accusation that Rowland was overly dependent on book learning rather than the direct inspiration of the Lord. Harris' absence from Wales in London during the autumn improved the situation for a while, as it did when he deputized for Whitefield during 1747, but the underlying problems remained the same: unbalanced preaching on the divine blood, an imperious, condemnatory and harsh spirit, a conviction of his special status as a leader within the movement, and the idea that he was being directly led by God. By 1748 an even

more disturbing element became apparent, namely Harris' claim to be able to discern the inward state of an individual's heart whatever the nature of his or her moral conduct. Objective criteria were now yielding to extreme subjectivism. It was then that Madam Sidney Griffith arrived on the scene.

While itinerating in north Wales in October 1748, Harris first met Mrs Sidney Griffith, the daughter of a gentry family from Denbighshire and wife of William Griffith, squire of Cefnamwlch, Caernarfonshire (see Eryn M. White, article in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). One of the few members of the Welsh landed class to be drawn to Methodism, she had been converted by Peter Williams a year earlier and was zealous in her new found faith. February 1749 found her, along with her maid, at Llangeitho, far to the south of her Caernarfonshire home, where she conversed with Daniel Rowland and progressed, unannounced, to Trefecca and accepted the invitation to stay for two nights. Following her return home, the two met again in July, this time at Pwllheli on another of Harris' preaching tours of the north. There had been nothing at all untoward in their relationship; he treated her as he would any other keen convert though he was flattered at having a spiritual admirer from among the gentry. Eager to attend the Llangeitho association in August, she accompanied Harris to south Wales: 'This was to be a journey that [he] would never forget' (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p. 199). By now his relations with Rowland had soured markedly. The two men had clashed spectacularly at Carmarthen during the preceding May while the Trefecca revivalist's unpopularity even among his own converts had become acute. He had been virtually ostracized by the so-called 'clerical party' though he retained his status within the movement due to his incessant pastoral labours, his itinerancy and the undoubted effectiveness of his evangelistic preaching. Having spent time at the Llangeitho association, Mrs Griffith joined Harris for a further journey through Carmarthenshire; in all, duly chaperoned by her maid, they spent three weeks in one another's company. Anne Harris, whom the revivalist had married in 1744, was deeply uncomfortable with her husband's behaviour though he seemed oblivious to its effect either on her or on the reputation of the Methodist movement as a whole. People were being scandalized, and though his diaries emphasise the platonic nature of their association, it was clear that he had become infatuated by his new companion: 'We had but one soul, one heart, one will, one judgment, one affection and that here I could open up my whole heart and nowhere else' (Diary, 28 July 1749).

Although even his most implacable opponents within the Methodist leadership, or even the majority of the rank and file, never suspected the relationship of being adulterous – for

those outside the movement it was a different matter –, the tensions between Anne, her husband and Sidney Griffith, became intolerable. Between the considerable time late in 1749 that Mrs Griffith spent as a houseguest at Trefecca as well as ever more journeys taken together, it had become obvious by early 1750 that the situation could not continue: ‘By now, Harris was showing clear signs of a serious personality disorder; his megalomania, though clothed in spiritual terms, ... suggested a loss of mental balance’ (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p. 216; chapter 8, ‘The Prophetess’, presents a uniquely insightful analysis of the whole affair). With Madam Griffith exercising the gift of prophecy, and Harris, ever the enthusiast, heeding her every word, the whole movement was in danger of imploding: to quote Geraint Tudur again: ‘while it could be said that the burden of Revival work had very nearly destroyed the man, it can also be said that the man came very near to destroying the Revival’ (*ibid.*, p. 223). By now the societies and the lay exhorters, even in Breconshire, were abandoning Harris in their droves. Although he tried desperately to retain his power, it was in vain. The final breach came at the Llanidloes association in May 1750. He was challenged directly by Rowland and William Williams, and thereafter leadership of the Revival in Wales passed to the former. Their complaint was never the mystical influence of Madam Griffith as such; rather that Harris had caused inordinate contention among the brethren, that he had lost his balance doctrinally, and through an overbearing harshness, had forfeited his authority over the movement at large. Rowland’s tract *Ymddiddan rhwng Methodist Uniongred ac Un Camsyniol* (‘A Conversation between an Orthodox Methodist and One in Error’) (1750) which was aimed at Harris, is wholly theological in content. Even had it not been for Madam Griffith, a division within the movement’s ranks would have occurred. Beleaguered and realizing that the fate of the Methodist movement was at stake, he called his supporters together at Trefecca in June: ‘All seemed to see we must separate before we can be united’ (Diary, 7 June 1750). Thereafter, and despite some forlorn attempts at reconciliation during 1751-2 brokered by Peter Williams, ‘Harris’s people’ (*Pobl Harris*), vastly outnumbered by ‘Rowland’s people’ (*Pobl Rowland*), would go their separate ways. A final blow (felt more by Harris than his supporters) was the death of Mrs Griffith, in London, in May 1752. Her mentor, then in very poor health, renounced his itinerancy and retired to Trefecca. It seemed an ignominious end to what had been a dramatic and vigorous phase in the history of the Revival in Wales.

iv. The progress of the Revival in Wales, 1750-62

Though tinged with sadness, it was in a spirit of relief that the work progressed during the next decade. With Harris having confined himself to Trefecca, William Williams came into his own

not only as an author and evangelist but as the principal superintendent of the societies and a doctor of souls. His classic on the art of soul culture *Drws y Socceity Profiad* ('The Door to the Fellowship Meeting'), though published in 1777, was forged on the extensive experience he gleaned building up new converts during the 1750s and 1760s. The movement had by now spread into north Wales – not least due to Harris's evangelistic journeys during the preceding decade – and though Harris' labours were missed, there was no lack of spirited and able exhorters willing to take his place. Peter Williams remained similarly tireless in taking the evangelical message to the counties of the north. George Whitefield, back from America, also contributed to the progress of the Revival in Wales by conducting preaching tours of his own, principally in the larger towns, the anglicized parts of Pembrokeshire and the border country. 'In about three weeks I rode perhaps 500 miles', he recounted in 1751, 'and preached generally twice a day. Congregations were large as usual, and I trust an unusual power accompanied the Word' (quoted in Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, pp. 286-7). He would return for a fortnight's tour in 1752 and again in 1753 as well as in 1756, 1757, 1758 and 1760. John Cennick, who also visited Wales in 1753, noted that, despite the successes of Rowland's party, the foundation for much of the current Methodist advance had been laid by Harris during the decade before: '[I] observed everywhere the fruits of the indefatigable labours of Howell Harris, which have been wonderful, though now he has but few with him, and those chiefly in north Wales' (*ibid.*, p. 287). This was certainly the case, but the people still came in their hundreds to Llangeitho, especially for the monthly sacrament Sunday when Rowland would not only preach but administer Holy Communion according to the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer. Although recorded a generation later, Thomas Charles captures the effect that Rowland's ministry had during this decade:

From Llangeitho the fructifying streams flowed all over the country in those blessed days. The sermons heard there, being repeated by many persons on their return, to the country people, and being related to them again by to their neighbours, were wonderfully blessed. Divine truth was gaining ground and spreading through all the country. Many were consequently stirred up and induced to go to hear the extraordinary preacher at Llangeitho for themselves ... the multitude, having hears a sermon or two from him, would go their various long and tedious journeys with great gladness, praising God for his unspeakable gifts received at Llangeitho (*ibid.*, pp. 294-5).

Harris, nonetheless, was far from being idle during these years. It had been his dream since as early as 1737 to establish a Christian community, on the Halle model, in Wales while the Moravian venture at Fulneck in Yorkshire, established in 1742, showed how it could be done. Since confining himself to Trefecca, he made plans to expand the house and buildings to

accommodate those who chose to stay loyal to his ministrations. The expansion began in April 1752. Although the plan had been for Madam Griffith to fulfil the role of ‘house mother’ to the incipient community or ‘Family’, following her death he succeeded in drawing Sarah Bowen, a member of a keen Methodist household at Llandinam in mid-Wales, to take on the task. Both she and her sister, Hannah, not only joined Harris but invested all of their capital in what they obviously regarded as a worthwhile and exciting experiment in corporate Christian discipleship. Sarah soon left in order to marry, and following her withdrawal, Hannah (who was much more feisty and headstrong than her sister) took her place as ‘matron’ or organizer of the commune’s women and children. Evan Moses, a Glamorganshire tailor, who had been converted through Harris’ preaching in 1751, joined the Family as his assistant. Two other converts, James Pritchard and Evan Roberts would also join, the one taking charge of the community’s building plans and the other its business affairs. The Family was divided on gender lines and between married and unmarried people, much on the pattern of the Fulneck experiment, while its aim was to become a self-sufficient community of craftsmen and skilled workers worshipping together under a bracing Christian discipline. Prayers would be held three times a day; Harris, along with Evan Moses, would preach or exhort, also daily, while the whole community would join in parish worship at Talgarth on the Sundays. Holy Communion was held once a month rather than quarterly, while the Family members would lead in the worship, especially the singing. The fact that by 1755 there were a hundred people in residence, most of whom were from north Wales, along with 50 or so as boarders in local farmsteads, speaks eloquently of Harris’ magnetic power even then as a charismatic leader of extraordinary influence.

Although content to develop the community’s life, by mid-decade Harris was taking more of an interest in the Revival which was now progressing without his input. Gingerly at first, but later with more confidence, his former colleagues visited Trefecca: Rowland and Williams Pantycelyn in mid-1754 and Peter Williams later in the year, Howell Davies and Peter Williams again in 1755 and John Wesley in 1756. Wesley, especially, was surprised that Harris had ceased itinerating, but the Welshman was insistent that he had work to do in building up a Christian community at home. Wesley’s description of a later visit, in August 1763, is memorable:

Howell Harris’ home is one of the most elegant places which I have seen in Wales. The little chapel, and all things round it are finished in an uncommon taste and the gardens, orchards, fishponds, and the mount adjoining make the place a little paradise ... About

six score persons are now in the Family; all diligent, all constantly employed, all fearing God and working righteousness (Wesley's *Journals*, Vol. 5, p. 25).

The Yorkshire evangelical Henry Venn would visit in October 1766:

From Bath we arrived at Trevecka ... Howell Harris is the father of that settlement ... near 120 men, women and children ... We were there three days, of all the people I ever saw, this society seems to be the most advanced in grace (quoted in Gomer M. Roberts (ed.), *Hanes Methodistiaeth Galfinaidd Cymru*, Vol 1, *Y Deffroad Mawr*, p. 375).

Although apart from the mainstream of the Revival, Harris was still cultivating piety in a novel way. He was also making a favourable impression on his neighbours, the gentry and the clergy, as a respectable, highly innovative and conscientious landowner, whose artisan workforce was revered for their skills and their honesty, and whose contribution to the local economy was as significant as it was unexpected. Equally unexpected (and revered) was his service as captain in the Breconshire Militia during the Seven Years War (1756-63) which took him for extended periods to Yarmouth and Devon in the company of his troops. It was there that he began public preaching once more, and experienced a rejuvenation of his former powers. It would not be long before he would return to the mainstream of the Revival in Wales.

The structure and organization that Harris had built between c. 1738 and 1752 had proved sturdy enough to withstand the Madam Griffith debacle, the disruption between the two leaders, and the resultant division in Methodist ranks. By providing converts with strong discipline and close pastoral supervision within the society meetings, the movement did not suffer inordinately following Harris' absences. Clerical leadership was enhanced by the recruitment of David Jones, later vicar of Llan-gan, and William Davies, afterwards curate at Neath, both in Glamorganshire, who though in holy orders, would take positions of responsibility within the Methodist movement in the latter part of the century; both were ordained to the diaconate in 1757. Along with Rowland, Howell Davies, Williams Pantycelyn and Peter Williams, there was also a cadre of able lay exhorters who could supervise local societies and take the gospel to the people: 'Indeed, the movement owed much in this period to the steadfast commitment of the earnest, literate farmers and craftsmen who formed the majority of its lay preachers' (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.109). Proof of its advance was the proliferation of 'society houses' or chapels during these years: Woodstock in Pembrokeshire was the first, in 1755, 'the New Chapel' (*Capel Newydd*) at Llangeitho in 1756 (it was expanded in 1760 and expanded yet again in 1764), and by 1762 fifteen more, some of which were in north Wales. By then the

disruption seemed more and more to belong to the past, and despite everything, there was a recognition that Harris' contribution to the Revival had been vital to its success:

The fact that Rowland and his supporters gained the support of the bulk of the membership enabled Welsh Calvinistic Methodism to survive as a viable movement. The truth was that many members had been inspired by Harris and ... felt great affection for him, but they seemed to place greater trust and dependence on Daniel Rowland and his fellows to lead the movement into the future (*ibid.* p.111).

Nevertheless, there was by now a yearning for the spirit of unity that had characterized the Revival in its early years. There was also a feeling that one chapter in the religious history of Wales was closing and a new one was about to begin. Of the pre-Revival generation, Philip Pugh, Daniel Rowland's sympathetic Dissenting mentor, passed away in 1760 and Griffith Jones died a year later. Despite his ambivalent attitude towards Methodism, Jones remained, for the revivalists, the most revered clergyman in Wales and a shining example of how faithful preaching, catechising and inculcating biblical literacy could transform the parish structures of the Established Church. News then reached the leaders that Harris was seeking reconciliation, and was keen to resume his itinerancy once more. In May 1762 Rowland and Williams Pantycelyn wrote to him: 'We unanimously conclude that your inclination to visit our several counties again is the voice of heaven, and we doubt not but all animosities will and must subside, and a spirit of love take its place. Amen' (quoted in Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, p.306). In other words, Howell Harris was back in harness. Almost immediately a powerful awakening, the 'Llangeitho Revival of 1762', would confirm that a new phase in the Welsh Evangelical Revival was about to begin.

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