

Topic 3: The Beginnings of the Revival in Wales, c. 1720-38

‘The Welsh Revival was one of the most remarkable of the disparate movements of the Evangelical Revival’ (Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 454). It too had its roots in the yearning for ‘heart religion’ that had characterized late seventeenth century continental Pietism and the best of High Church Anglicanism, while the Puritan strand of piety, best preserved by a surprisingly sturdy if modestly sized Welsh Dissent, ensured that a vision of vital godliness was perpetuated among the Welsh which, for the most part, over-rode sectional divisions. Although Wales, a small, overwhelmingly rural country, sparsely populated and poor, was mostly Anglican in complexion, one of the strengths of its pre-Revival history was that both Anglicans and Dissenters worked together, through literature mostly as well as education, catechising and preaching, in order to ensure ‘the promotion of piety’ (see R. Tudur Jones, ‘Relations between Anglicans and Dissenters: the promotion of piety, 1670-1730’; Geraint H. Jenkins, *Religion, Society and Literature in Wales, 1660-1730*, *passim*). As in England and abroad, the Revival was by no means a *creatio ex nihilo*.

i. The pre-history of the Welsh Revival

a. Griffith Jones

It was through the life and witness of Griffith Jones (1673-1761), rector of Llanddowror in south-west Wales, ‘the greatest Welshman of the eighteenth century’ (Geraint H. Jenkins, “‘An old and much honoured soldier’: Griffith Jones of Llanddowror’, p.449), that the spiritual ebullience of the Pietist movement, the High Church spirituality of the SPCK and the holiness school, as well as the Articles and Homilies of the Established Church, combined to make their mark on early eighteenth century religion in Wales. Born in the parish of Pen-boyr on the border between Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, the fourth son of a moderately prosperous farmer, he lost his father at an early age and began his working life caring for the sheep on the family farm. According to tradition, it was there that he had a vision calling him to ministry. On proceeding to the Carmarthen Grammar School, he excelled in his studies. Due to the poverty of the four Welsh dioceses: St David’s and Llandaff in the south, Bangor and Saint Asaph in the north, young men would often not progress to Oxford or Cambridge, but be ordained straight from the grammar schools – this would be true of Daniel Rowland a generation later. Jones’ ordination occurred in 1708 at the hands of Bishop George Bull of St David’s; he was 25 at the time. He was priested a year later and following short curacies in south Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire, in 1710 was appointed curate of Laugharne on the

Carmarthenshire coast, at the southern tip of an area in which he would labour for the rest of his life. In 1711 he became curate of the neighbouring parish at Llandeilo Abercywyn (St Clears), and in 1716, now aged 33, rector of Llanddowror within the same few square miles. That would become his home for the remainder of his long career, and it is as ‘Griffith Jones Llanddowror’ that he is known to posterity.

From the outset, Jones’ ecclesiastical career would be guided and overseen by Sir John Philipps (c 1666-1737), benefactor, philanthropist and fourth baronet of Picton Castle, Pembrokeshire. MP for Pembroke Boroughs and later for Haverfordwest, he had made his parliamentary reputation as a proponent of ethical causes and advocate of legislation curbing vice and public immorality. Already a member of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, he eagerly supported the SPCK at its inception in 1698, and thereafter became its staunchest and most public champion. It was under his aegis (and at his expense) that as many as 22 charity schools were established in Pembrokeshire alone, the highest number outside of London and the large conurbations. His zeal for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts and for the success of the East India Mission reflected the evangelistic emphases of the High Church party, and through his connection with the Oxford Holy Club a generation later, he would fund George Whitefield’s undergraduate studies. Being informed of Griffith Jones’ religious seriousness and evangelistic passion, he lent his support even when the curate’s zeal contravened ecclesiastical propriety. He acted as mediator with the SPCK when Jones volunteered as a missionary to Tranquebar, India, in 1712, and later, in October 1714, defended him when he was accused of preaching irregularly:

Jones of Laugharne has lately undergone a sort of trial before the Bishop of St David’s at Carmarthen, where several of the clergy appeared against him, whose principal accusation was his neglecting his own cure and intruding himself into the churches of other ministers without their leave. The contrary whereof was manifestly proved, viz. that he never preached in other places without being invited ... That he had indeed preached twice or thrice without the walls of the church ... because the church was not large enough to contain the hearers, which sometimes amounted to 3 or 4,000. (Mary Clement ed., *Correspondence ... of the SPCK Relating to Wales, 1699-1740*, p. 72.)

A generation before Howell Harris began exhorting publicly, and a quarter of a century previous to Whitefield and Wesley’s ventures at field-preaching ‘without the walls of the church’, Griffith Jones was drawing enormous crowds in rural south west Wales. Although his piety, like that of Sir John, was in accord with High Church principles, he was equally insistent on the need for costly repentance, personal faith and the new birth: ‘Without this change, and without becoming a new creature, it will be impossible to you ever to enter heaven’ (quoted in

Jenkins, ‘An old and much honoured soldier’, p. 457). Totally convinced of his protégée’s sincerity and loyalty to the Established Church, Philipps afforded him support and protection: ‘That his defence was so clear and satisfying that the bishop declared he was willing [that] Mr Jones should preach anywhere, having an invitation from the minister of the place’ (Clement ed., *Correspondence*, p. 72). By this time, it had become obvious that Jones’ qualities would best be used not in East India but at home, not least by preaching to a mostly monoglot populace in the only language that they could understand. Elected member of the SPCK in 1714, indubitably through Philipps’ good offices, he was presented to the living of Llanddowror two years later, again through the baronet’s benefaction, and in 1720 became his mentor’s brother-in-law by marrying Margaret Philipps, Sir John’s sister. It was through his brother-in-law’s extensive social network and the financial support of the SPCK that Griffith Jones was enabled to fulfil his vision of establishing innumerable circulating schools in which, between 1737 and 1761, tens of thousands of his compatriots would be taught to read the Bible and be instructed in the faith. In fact ‘[h]e created a literate Welsh peasantry. Common people were now able to read their Bibles, comprehend the catechism, and give a decent account of their faith’ (Jenkins, ‘An old and much honoured soldier’, p. 457). It was a remarkable achievement though Jones’ initial labours predated the Revival in Wales by nearly two decades.

The SPCK had realised early that for religious convictions to be effective, they needed to be undergirded by a reputable educational system. As well as being a major advocate for the society’s mission, Philipps was in constant correspondence with the Halle Pietists and had been inspired by their wide range of endeavours: schools for poor children, an orphan house, the production of cheap, vernacular Bibles and accessible Christian literature, as well as overseas mission (see Topic 1, pp. 13-14). Griffith Jones, for his part, had learned by experience that even the most pointed preaching needed to be supplemented by close instruction and an accompanying understanding of the scriptures and sound doctrine. He had already complemented his pulpit labours with catechetical work: ‘How deplorably ignorant the poor people are who cannot read, even where constant preaching is not wanting, while catechising is omitted’ (quoted in Glanmor Williams, ‘Religion, language and the circulating schools of Griffith Jones, Llanddowror’, p.202). Whereas we know little about his labours during the 1720s and early 1730s, in 1737 (the year of Philipps’ death) he established the first of his own elementary schools, in Llanddowror – the earlier SPCK schools in the area had by then waned almost to extinction – and from then on he embarked on what would become ‘the most striking experiment in mass religious education’ that Britain had ever seen (cf. E. Wyn James, ‘Griffith

Jones (1684–1761) of Llanddowror and his “Striking Experiment in Mass Religious Education”). With the assistance of Madam Bridget Bevan of Laugharne, daughter of Sir John Vaughan of Derllys (1663-1722) who, like Sir John Philipps, had been a pious and philanthropic benefactor a generation earlier (Madam Bevan was dubbed by Glanmor Williams as ‘a poor man’s Countess of Huntingdon’!), he created a network of schools which, within a generation, had transformed the face of the nation.

Unlike the earlier schools which, on the English pattern, had been located in the main towns and invariably used English as a means of instruction (‘[it is as useless] to teach our Welsh people Christian knowledge in English, a language they do not understand, as it would be to teach the poor English people in French’), these schools would be peripatetic, moving from one area to the next at the convenience of the communities which requested their services. Generally held for three months in each locality, and housed in simple and cheap accommodation: a barn, a farm outhouse, a cottage or church building, the schoolmaster (who had been trained by Jones and would be paid modestly from a central fund) would then move on to his next location. Within easy reach of the scattered, rural, communities, lessons would be held mostly in the evenings and during the winter months, these being the most convenient times for farming folk. Fees would be minimal and affordable to all but the poorest, while the schools catered for adults as well as children. Despite being paid a minimal wage, Jones’ teachers seem to have volunteered readily, and in sufficient numbers, for the work, and shared his vision of creating a literate, religiously enlightened, populace. The annual reports, which yield such valuable information about the workings of the system, Jones entitled *The Welch Piety* echoing the *Pietas Hallensis*, August Herrmann Francke’s concurrent reports on the charity schools in the city and environs of Halle. By the time of Jones’s death, aged 78, in 1761, 3,325 of his schools had been held in 1,600 places, while some 200,000 of the Welsh people (from a population of some 480,000) had been taught to read their Bibles and Church Catechisms in Welsh: ‘Through these schools Wales became one of the most literate countries in the modern world’ (James, ‘Striking Experiment in Mass Religious Education’, p. 283). Although he was, undoubtedly, ‘opinionated, self-willed, domineering ... [and] liable to give way to irritability, querulousness and self-pity’ he was also fired with ‘relentless drive, unquenchable passion, and indefatigable perseverance’ (Williams, ‘Religion, language and the circulating schools’, p.215). His desire was to save his compatriots’ souls, to renew the Established Church, and to revitalize the whole of society. He did this independently of the Church which he loved and to which he was totally devoted, and without a word of support (or

a penny in subvention) from any one of the nine bishops who had served their time at St David's during the whole span of Jones' long incumbency. He never rose to any position of seniority in the Church, remaining always the rector of Llanddowror.

Although the Evangelical Revival proper in Wales is dated from the conversions of Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland in 1735, while Griffith Jones' relations with the young Methodists was ambiguous at best (see Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, pp. 139-49; Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, pp. 28-32), Jones was the most substantial precursor of that movement of the Spirit. Its influence was invariably perpetuated by the activities of the schoolmasters, all of whom were pious Anglicans and many of whom were in wholesale sympathy with the renewal which would gain such substantial ground during the 1730s, '40s and '50s. Yet the Church of England was not the only ground from which the Welsh Revival sprung. To a much greater extent than in England, Protestant Dissent made its contribution as well.

b. Protestant Dissent

On the whole, Welsh Dissent had weathered the storm of post-Restoration repression fairly well (for the wider context, see Topic 1, pp.4-6). If the revolutionary drama of Puritanism had abated in 1660 and the more pointed post-Restoration hardships had ended in 1689, the years leading up to the spectacular energies of the Evangelical Revival witnessed the consolidation and even modest expansion of the cause. It has been claimed that 'the period from 1660 to 1689 was, truly, the heroic age of Welsh Dissent' (Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales*, pp.193-4). If that is the case, heroism gave way to a sense of sobriety, doctrinal exactitude and deep seriousness of purpose. Evangelism and church expansion remained a priority but the piety of the so called Older Dissent was characterized by a restrained and measured classicism: 'As the cultured congregation sank deep into its pews in the meeting houses at Llwynrhydowen, or Pen-dref (Llanfyllin), or Rhydwylym, in order quietly to savour its worship, its members could be forgiven for thinking that their sobriety and cultivated demeanour were an aspect of the predestination in which they revelled daily' (R. Tudur Jones, 'Yr Hen Ymneilltuwyr', p.13). In other words, the gilded age of Dissent had arrived.

The Anglican ideal in 1662 had been to re-impose a fairly absolute uniformity between the Established Church and the state. Such, however, was the resolute quality of Protestant Dissent that the ideal had proved unworkable. The Toleration Act had, in fact, institutionalized Dissent and the Church of England was obliged to act accordingly. By the beginning of the

eighteenth century not even the staunchest apologists for the establishment could disabuse Protestant Dissenters of the validity of their claim to exist and indeed to prosper. Accusations of schism, undermining the social order and a disdain for legally instituted authority increasingly fell upon deaf ears, while Dissent took full advantage of the Church of England's weaknesses, its unwieldy structures, its large parishes especially in the sparsely populated uplands, and its often indifferent spiritual discipline (see William Jacob in Glanmor Williams et al, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment, 1603-1920*, pp.65-208). Seizing their opportunity, Dissenting fellowships became even sturdier and expanded their bounds. By 1715 the Baptists had some 21 congregations or fellowships within a dozen churches, while the Independents and Presbyterians – which, in Wales, had become virtually indistinguishable from one another – possessed some eighty congregations grouped together within some sixty separate churches. Baptist strength was in north Pembrokeshire and on the Carmarthen-Cardiganshire border, mid-Glamorgan, west Monmouthshire as well as parts of Radnorshire, while the Independents were also strongest in west Wales namely Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen and Cardiganshire; in Breconshire in mid-Wales; Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire in the south, as well as having a limited presence in such north Wales towns as Pwllheli, Denbigh and Wrexham. In all by 1715 the Dissenting denominations had an estimated membership of some 17,700 or nearly four per cent of the population as a whole. In fact 'Welsh Dissent was a small but influential minority' (Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales*, p. 195).

The churches of Welsh Older Dissent were populated, for the most part, by 'the middling sorts': artisans, craftsmen, tradesmen and their families and innumerable yeoman farmers. As such they were sufficiently independent to be distanced from the social hierarchy which was represented by the Church of England and were equally far from the rural poor. As for their ministers, 'these were sober, knowledgeable, well-to-do men, and most ... were landowners' (R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, p. 80). Church membership incurred a religious and moral responsibility which was not undertaken lightly. It entailed discipline and the detailed mutual supervision of member's lives. The single Sunday service, usually in the morning, included the reading of scripture, communal prayer, hymn or psalm singing and the exposition of the Word. This was complemented by catechising within families in the home on Sunday afternoons. Apart from the Quakers and, in mid-Cardiganshire, a small move towards Arianism and rational Dissent, the doctrinal underpinning of Welsh Dissent was Calvinism. The movement possessed a coherent dogmatic theology and a clear, high

churchmanship. The sacraments, both baptism and the Lord's Supper, were objective witnesses to God's sovereign grace, while both Baptists and Independents had a high concept of the ordained ministry. The minister's principal task was the preaching of the Word, while it could be said that, in Wales, the history of pre-Revival Dissent is that of its preachers (for the following, see D. D. Morgan, 'Preaching in the vernacular: the Welsh sermon, 1689-1901', *The Oxford Handbook of the Sermon*, pp. 199-214). Philip Pugh, Edmund Jones and Lewis Rees had prominence among the Independents while Enoch Francis, Miles Harry, Morgan Griffith and Timothy Thomas were most renowned among the Baptists. Each one represented a link between the pre-history and consequent development of the Evangelical Revival in Wales.

Philip Pugh (1679-1760) who did so much to preserve the doctrinal rectitude of Cardiganshire Independency in the face of the encroachment of Arianism, would become the virtual mentor of Daniel Rowland, the Anglican clergyman who became one of the mainsprings of the Evangelical Revival. Edmund Jones of Pontypool (1702-93), the so-called *Hen Broffwyd* ('Old Prophet'), functioned virtually as an archbishop with influence far beyond his Monmouthshire base, while Lewis Rees (1710-1800) pastored the notable congregation at Llanbryn-mair, Montgomeryshire, before returning to his native south Wales to oversee the significant growth of the Independent cause in the environs of Swansea. The Baptist Enoch Francis (1688-1740) fulfilled a distinguished ministry in the Teifi Valley on the Cardiganshire-Carmarthen border. Miles Harry (1700-60), the leader of the Monmouthshire Baptists and associate of the Methodist Howell Harris, would ensure that the energies of the Evangelical Revival would be channelled (at least for a while) into the Older Dissent, while Morgan Griffiths (1699-1748), a zealous evangelist, led the movement in the eastern part of Glamorganshire. Timothy Thomas (1720-68), minister at Aberduar, Carmarthenshire, combined literary and pastoral gifts with a consummate doctrinal precision.

Each of the above represented a vital link between the Older Dissent and the new evangelicalism. Early eighteenth century Welsh Dissent prized vital godliness, it was missionary minded, its Calvinism was open rather than constricted, and its ministers strove energetically for spiritual renewal among the people at large. Howell Harris especially would find Dissenting piety attractive while Rowland benefitted enormously from the encouragement and wise counsel of his Independent neighbours. During their early years, the Welsh Methodists were keen to bridge the Anglican-Dissenting divide. (Griffith Jones on the other hand, whose links with Methodism would be tenuous at best, was implacable in his opposition

to what he regarded as sectarianism and schism). Yet even then there were differences between the two movements which could not be masked and would deepen as time progressed. By the late 1730s, the Methodist clergy's instinctive loyalty to the mother church was causing contention, while the restrained, measured and sober nature of Dissenting piety was becoming increasingly irreconcilable with the exuberance and emotional excitement which accompanied the revivalists' preaching. Converts could share their new experiences much more unreservedly in the Methodist 'societies' than among the dour, more intellectualist and perhaps censorious fellowships of subdued Dissenting believers in their long-established meeting houses. By the 1740s it was among the ordinary people, notionally Anglican and beyond reach of the Dissenting congregations, that the Evangelical Revival would have its most telling successes. From the mid-1740s onwards the witness of Dissent and the energies of the Revival would occur side by side rather than the one penetrating the other. The Dissenting congregations would have to wait until the 1770s before they too would experience overt, popular revitalization. Earlier Dissent, however, represented a significant element in the pre-history of the Evangelical Revival in Wales.

ii. **Howell Harris**

On 30 March 1735, Howell Harris, a 21 year old Breconshire schoolmaster, listened to his parson exhorting his parish congregation to prepare themselves for Holy Communion the following Sunday:

And in answering objections which people make against going to it, viz. our being not fit etc., I resolved to go to the Lord's Table the following Sunday being Easter Sunday. And by his saying, 'if you are not fit to come to the Lord's Table, you are not fit to come to church, you are not fit to live, not fit to die', I was convinced, and resolved to leave my outward vanities (Benjamin LaTrobe (ed.), *Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harris Esq* (1791), p.13).

Although conventionally religious and an observant member of the Church of England, Harris's main interests were worldly, though, by heeding the exhortation of the Revd Pryce Davies, the vicar of Talgarth, he 'resolved to be more serious and thoughtful'. He began to reform his life immediately, and despite being afflicted with a deep sense of unworthiness, he partook of the sacrament, for the first time, on Easter morning, 6 April. The next few weeks were ones of introspection and sometimes despair. Avidly reading devotional manuals such as Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658) and Brian Duppa's *Holy Rules and Helps to Devotion* (1675), rather than being comforted he felt the divide between true holiness and

his own inherent sinfulness was becoming wider day by day: 'I was convinced, that in every branch of my duty to God, to myself and my neighbours, I was guilty and had fallen short'. His regime was now strict and unrelenting: prayer, fasting, public worship at every possible opportunity, and self-denial, but with no sense of comfort or relief. What struck him in reading Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety* (1610), a phenomenally popular handbook of devotion which was still being read well over a century after its first publication, was 'that if we go to the sacrament, simply believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we should receive forgiveness of all our sins'. Bayly had written in a clearer fashion than most, that the basis of the sinner's reconciliation with God was that Christ had satisfied the divine justice through his sacrifice on the cross, and that the way to salvation was by faith, a simple trust in him:

[On] the following Whit Sunday, at the sacrament, May 25th 1735, I went thither, labouring and heavy laden under the guilt and power of my sins ... I was convinced, by the Holy Ghost, that Christ died for me, and that all my sins were laid on him; I was now acquitted at the bar of justice, and in my conscience; this evidenced itself to be true faith, by the peace, joy, watchfulness, hatred to sin, and fear of offending God, that followed it (*Brief Account*, p. 14).

This occurred probably a little before George Whitefield's evangelical conversion in Gloucester in mid-1735, and three years previous to John Wesley's 'heart-warming' experience at Aldersgate Street in May 1738. Yet even now Harris felt overcome by temptations and fears that his peace of mind would fade, that he would relapse into worldliness and unbelief. The confirmation of his conversion experience occurred on 18 June in the church at Llangasty, a few miles from his Trefecca home, where he was teaching school,:

I felt suddenly my heart melting within me like wax before the fire with love to God my saviour ... then was a cry in my inmost soul, which I was totally unacquainted with before, Abba Father! I could not help calling God my Father; I knew that I was his child and that He loved me and heard me. My soul being filled and satiated, crying, 'tis enough, I am satisfied. Give me strength and I will follow Thee through fire and water (*Brief Account*, pp. 15-16).

This sealing of the Spirit or 'impartation of the spirit of adoption' freed him from all remaining doubts and emboldened him to persevere with the work on which he had already embarked, namely as an 'exhorter', or lay-evangelist, intent on sharing the gospel with others and helping save his contemporaries' souls.

The youngest of three brothers, Howell Harris was born on 23 January 1714 to Howell and Susannah Harris, at their farmstead home of Trefecca Fach, near Talgarth in the southern part of mid-Wales. Unlike his elder brother Joseph who became a senior official at the Royal

Mint and Thomas, the middle brother, who became a prosperous tailor and businessman in London, Howell remained at home and, following training at the grammar school at Llwyn-llwyd, not far away, he took up the work of school teaching. Although he harboured the vague ambition of becoming a clergyman, his conversion inspired him to persuade his family and friends to join him in reading extracts from the pious literature in which he was now immersed. Having read of his duty to visit the sick and infirm, he began calling on his neighbours to read to them as well, and soon invitations came to visit homes where groups of people would turn out to listen, enthralled by what this earnest young schoolmaster had to say. By the autumn of 1735 he had become more emboldened, and was now evangelizing openly in Talgarth and the neighbouring parishes of Llan-gors and Llangasty, warning people of the consequences of sin of their need to repent and embrace salvation: ‘Now the fire of God dis so burn in my soul, that I could not rest day nor night without doing something for my God and Saviour; nor could I go with satisfaction to sleep, if I had not done something for His glory that day’ (*Brief Account*, p. 21). Neither was he averse to criticizing immorality and worldliness, especially among the gentry and the clergy. Struck by his zeal, sincerity and effectiveness, more and more people were being convicted of their sins and experiencing the joy of forgiveness; attendance at public worship had increased dramatically, and it was obvious by now that a burning spiritual renewal was underway. Whereas many were impressed by this spirit of rejuvenation, others, especially those whose authority was being threatened, were less sanguine. By Christmas 1735 opposition was beginning to stir.

The one who voiced that opposition most pointedly was none other than Pryce Davies, Harris’ own vicar. In February 1736 he wrote:

When first I was informed that you took upon you to instruct your neighbours at Trefecca on a particular occasion – I mean, of the nature of the sacraments – and enforce their duty by reading a chapter out of that excellent book *The Whole Duty of Man*, I thought it proceeded from a pious and charitable disposition. But since you are advanced so far as to have your public lectures from house to house, and even within the limits of the Church, it is full time to let you know the sin and penalty you incur by so doing. The office you have freely undertaken belongs not to the laity any farther than privately in their own families ... it is an easy matter to seduce ignorant and illiterate people, and by cunning insinuations from house to house, induce them to embrace what tenets you please. I have yet one heavy crime to lay to your charge, which is this: that after you have expatiated ... upon *The Whole Duty of Man* to your auditors, which, in my opinion, is wrote in so plain and intelligible a manner that it is incapable of paraphrase, unless it be to obscure and confound the author’s meaning, you concluded with a long extemporary prayer, with repetitions, tautologies etc. Pray consider how odiously this savours of fanaticism and hypocrisy (quoted in Gomer M. Roberts (ed.), *Hanes Methodistiaeth Galfinaidd Cymru*, Vol 1, *Y Deffroad Mawr*, p.98).

For his High Church vicar, Harris was contravening ecclesiastical law by preaching without having been commissioned, he was undermining the authority of the ordained ministry, he could well have been spreading heretical or subversive opinions, and by practicing extemporaneous rather than liturgical prayer, was acting like a Dissenter. For the established clergy of the eighteenth century nothing was more odious than ‘enthusiasm’, while folk memories of the upheavals of the Civil War and Commonwealth a century earlier remained potent even then: ‘Harris’ gatherings of awakened souls instantly aroused the fear of seditious conventicles which was now ingrained into the clerical mind’ (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p.22). Shaken by this unexpected response, he did desist for a while, especially as Davies had threatened to inform the bishop of his irregularities, ‘which will prove an unmoveable obstruction to you ever getting into holy orders’. Harris had gone up to Oxford in the previous November, matriculated at the university intending to enrol at St Mary Hall with a view to preparing for the ministry, but no sooner had he arrived that he returned home; his heart was not in it. His call, rather, was to evangelize locally and seek ordination, possibly, some time again. He had described vividly the by then powerful and aggressive nature of his ministry, in his diary a month later:

I would raise my voice with authority, and terror and awe would be visible on the faces of all who heard. I would go to the Talgarth fairs and broach no opposition in condemning the blasphemers and vain-swearers ... A commission had been given me to cut and slash sinners in the most fearsome way ... My texts, mostly, were death and judgment, and I would say little of Christ. I was so occupied that had no time to read apart from a page or two here and there. But when I came among the people I was given freedom to declare with great seriousness though by nature I am shallow and frivolous.

There is little wonder that Pryce Davies was perturbed; this was far beyond a little private counselling. His dependence on divine provision rather than careful preparation was the mark of the enthusiast: ‘No one could mistake Harris for anything else but an enthusiast ... [and] as near a specimen of *pure* enthusiasm as we are likely to meet’ (Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Howell Harris: the Last Enthusiast*, p. 3). Yet it was through him that now, in Wales, the vitality of the Evangelical Revival was being felt

Reeling from his vicar’s rebuff, the young lay exhorter was courted by the local Dissenters, the Independents at Tredwstan and the Baptists at Trawsgoed, two local nonconformist fellowships, but although he was drawn to their warm piety, he saw himself (despite everything) as a loyal son of the Anglican Church. As it happened, when it became known that he was consorting with the Dissenters, his popularity declined sharply. He still,

however, felt impelled to continue his mission, and by late spring he was being invited to address cottage meetings further afield: at Talach-ddu, above Brecon, to the west and Grwyne Fawr in the direction of Monmouthshire to the east, and other places as well. By now he had relinquished his job as a schoolmaster. It was only then that he was told of the labours of Anglican clergy in other parts of the diocese of St David's whose ministry was more attuned to renewal and revitalization than that of his own parish priest. They were Thomas Jones (1689-1772), curate of Cwm-iou, Monmouthshire (which was then in the St David's diocese), latterly a correspondent of George Whitefield, and Griffith Jones. In a quandary as to his next step, he wrote to Griffith Jones (whom he had never met) and in May, 1736, he left for Llanddowror in order to meet the man himself. Despite not yet having reached canonical age, discussion centred on the possibility of Harris' obtaining holy orders within the Established Church. Realizing the younger man's religious seriousness and hearing of his evangelistic successes, Jones was probably keen to channel his energies into parish ministry. Following this initial meeting, the rector of Llanddowror promised to do what he could to help.

On returning to Breconshire, Harris was pleasantly surprised to find that the attitude of Pryce Davies and other local clergymen towards him had softened considerably. They, too, may have realized his potential value within the Church were his irregularities to be kerbed and his enthusiasm disciplined. In July, with their support and that of Thomas Jones and Griffith Jones, he applied to Nicholas Claggett, bishop of St David's, for ordination but was turned down, possibly due to his youth but perhaps because of untrammelled zeal. A fortnight spent at Llanddowror in August afforded an insight into the attitude of Griffith Jones (now well into middle-age) towards over-zealous and injudicious evangelism. Edward Dalton, an older man than Jones even, the member of distinguished Carmarthenshire family and faithful member of the Llanddowror congregation, urged Harris to nurture the spirit of moderation. Reflecting, though in a more blatant way, his rector's views, he considered revivalistic excesses as 'fanaticism, the work of the devil' and the result of spiritual pride. Chastened and perplexed, he returned to Trefecca and followed Griffith Jones' advice to open a school and begin teaching once more.

The most important step in the developing ministry of Howell Harris after mid-1736 was the establishing of fellowship meetings in order to nurture new converts in the faith. What the *collegia pietatis* were to the continental Pietists and the 'band meetings' and 'class meeting' were to the followers of John Wesley, the 'society meetings' would be to the expansion and consolidation of Calvinistic Methodism in Wales. Writing to Griffith Jones on 8 October, he stated: 'Private societies begin to be formed. I have not [been] six nights at home since I came

down. I hope they take root'. By the winter more societies had been planted. John Games, precentor of Talgarth parish church, was employed in going round the area instructing young people in the singing of psalms, and Harris decided to accompany him: 'I laid hold of this opportunity; when he had done teaching them to sing, I would give them a word of exhortation, and thereby many were brought under convictions, and many religious societies were by these means formed' (quoted in Eifion Evans, *Howel Harris Evangelist*, p. 21). As both Games and Harris were active Anglicans, and the purpose of their going about was to improve the worship of the parish church, this activity was readily accepted. It was through the singing classes that Harris went around Christmas to Wernos farm, between Brecon and Builth. It was there, he would claim, that the first 'permanent society' was formed. In November 1738 he wrote:

Our country seems budding now. In our county [Breconshire] two societies; three or four in Monmouthshire, some likely to be in Glamorgan and Montgomeryshire, two or more in Carmarthenshire, one in Herefordshire; vast many in Cardiganshire.

By 1740 there were as many as 50 throughout south Wales, but they all went back to Wernos, in late December, 1736: it was there, he wrote, in 1745 'all this great work that has spread itself over Wales ... began, and the first society settled' (quoted in Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p.33).

Along with the establishment of fellowship meetings, two other significant matters would occur in Harris' development during 1737-8: his espousal of Calvinism as his underlying doctrinal scheme, and a much greater level of clarity concerning his loyalty to the Established Church.

The holiness teaching that he had imbibed from his reading of the seventeenth century Anglican classics was, on the whole, Arminian in tone, emphasising obedience as well as faith. Although tainted, the human will was free to cooperate with God's grace, while both faith and obedience were essential in order to live the holy life. Little prominence was given to election, predestination or the sheer gratuity of divine grace. As a layman, untrained in theology, there was no reason for Harris to question this scheme: 'His idea of salvation during this early period was simple: repentance, faith and the accomplishment of duty towards God and man. There was little mention of the significance of Christ's death' (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p.38). In his discussion with the Dissenters, however, he had been introduced to an alternative doctrinal system. In it the will was bound, not free; sinfulness was far more deeply entrenched in the human heart, while salvation was wholly of grace (*sola gratia*) on the basis of God's eternal decree. On coming to understand it, this corresponded much more exactly with his own spiritual experience. After having been

convicted of sin, he knew that even his most vigorous moral striving brought him no closer to God. Salvation, when it came, was wholly gratuitous, not through his own obedience but on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice in which he was allowed to believe. Already moving in this Calvinistic direction, during the summer of 1737 he made the acquaintance of another revivalistically inclined Breconshire clergyman, Thomas Lewis, curate of Merthyr Cynog, who, like his father, the Radnorshire vicar David Lewis, preached the Calvinistic scheme. This was in keeping with the Reformed nature of Elizabethan Anglicanism, especially Articles XI to XV and Archbishop Cranmer's celebrated 'Homily on Salvation'. Like Thomas Jones of Cwm-iou who, in a letter to George Whitefield, had described the human predicament in stark terms: 'Man – poor, proud, bankrupt, ten thousand talents in debt and nothing to pay', Thomas Lewis was a Calvinist, and both men were totally loyal to the classical doctrinal formularies of the Established Church. On theological grounds, there was no need to question the integrity of the mother church. Thereafter, Howell Harris would remain a Calvinist. Although this would never impinge on his later friendship with John and Charles Wesley who, even after their evangelical conversions, always upheld the Arminianism of their High Church upbringing, it would ensure that Welsh Methodism, like that of Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, would run along Calvinistic lines.

During the summer of 1737 Harris relinquished once more his job as a settled schoolmaster and accepted Griffith Jones' offer to supervise the now expanding network of circulating schools in neighbouring Radnorshire. This allowed him the freedom to itinerate (something of which Jones did not approve), while his new doctrinal certitude allowed him to emphasise not election as such, but the doctrine of atonement and the central importance of Christ's sacrificial death. Consequently, the Revival became even more intense: 'It was during the latter half of 1737 that his open-air ministry, and possibly the Revival itself, began in earnest' (Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1735-50*, p.42). More and more societies were being established while converts were being counted not in scores but in hundreds and more, over ever expanding parts of the country. Notwithstanding continuing difficulties, Harris was becoming more settled in his identity as a lay exhorter within the Anglican Church.

During this time he had been clarifying his views concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the Church. He found little wanting in its doctrinal basis, its liturgical life or, apart from more the desire for more frequent celebration, its provision of the Lord's Supper. Its deficiencies, he claimed (in his diary entry for 18 March 1737), could be made up for by delivering more intimate spiritual fellowship: 'meeting together as a society to consult about

points of salvation [and] self-examination', more pointed preaching on the necessity of the new birth, more vigorous catechetical instruction ensuring that its baptized members were better instructed in the faith, and more discrimination in allowing communicants to partake of the Lord's Supper. Yet all in all, the Church was sound. As well as being the church of his upbringing, it was from among its nominal members that so many were being won to the faith; very few of the new converts showed any desire to join the Dissenters though they were being drawn to the network of fellowship meetings which were springing up: 'I was converted myself in this ruined Church, and was fed here ... [while] its principles appear to me to be sound' (Diary, 9 April 1737). It was around then that he heard of the remarkable renewal which had been occurring in neighbouring Cardiganshire quite independently of his own exertions. It too was having its deepest effects among the adherents of the Established Church, its focus being the preaching of a 25 year old clergyman named Daniel Rowland. Never having met, Harris heard him preach for the first time at Defynnog, Breconshire, on 13 August 1737: 'Upon hearing the sermon, and seeing the gifts given him and the amazing power and authority with which he spoke, and the effects it had upon the people ... my heart burned with love to God and to him'. It was these two young men who, in the subsequent years, would become the undoubted leaders of the Evangelical Revival in Wales.

iii. Daniel Rowland

Rowland, the younger son of Daniel Rowland (c.1659–1731) who, like his father before him, was a Cardiganshire clergyman, had been born in 1711 in the village of Nantcwnlle where his father was rector of the parish Llangeitho. Having received his preliminary education at the Revd John Pugh's school near Llannarth in Cardiganshire, a school which was noted for the excellence of its classical education, he proceeded to Hereford Grammar School and thereafter to ordination. Having been ordained deacon by the bishop of St David's on 10 March 1734, he was installed as curate at Llangeitho and Nantcwnlle, and in the same year married Elinor Davies (*d.* 1792) of Caerllugest, near Llangeitho. Unlike Daniel, she had been brought up a Dissenter, the grand-daughter of a Dissenting minister and member of the congregation of the distinguished Independent pastor Philip Pugh. Daniel and Elinor would have seven children, including a son, Nathaniel, who became leader of the Welsh Methodists after his father's demise. Rowland remained in these curacies for many years, serving under his brother, John Rowland, and subsequently (and somewhat ironically) under his own son, also called John.

Rowland was ordained priest in August 1735 by which time he had undergone a profound spiritual conversion. Unlike Howell Harris who was a compulsive writer and kept a detailed diary throughout his life, we know little of the minutiae concerning when or how Rowland's conversion occurred, though it was probably late in 1734 or early in 1735. (William Williams in his elegy states that he began preaching in an awakening away *before* Harris). Unfortunately papers for the official biography, which had been commissioned in 1790 by the Countess of Huntingdon, were lost, while the traditions preserved by his nineteenth century biographers, conflict with one another (For the evidence see Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, Chapter 1). The name Griffith Jones occurs in more than one tradition, and one story has it that he was convicted by hearing a sermon by the rector of Llanddowror, at Llanddewibrefi church, a few miles from his Llangeitho home. Certainly Rowland visited Llanddowror during that winter, and there is evidence that he substituted for Jones in his pulpit at the time. After this, the whole tenor of Rowland's ministry changed. He suddenly became effective and popular, and such was the vehemence of his preaching of the law in order to induce repentance in his hearers that he became known as 'the angry cleric' (*yr offeiriad crac*). In the elegy Williams hailed him as 'Boanerges, the son of thunder'. According to one account:

The excitement made on the minds of the people under his preaching from the very beginning of his conversion was most surprising. The impression on the hearts of most persons was so awful and distressing, as if they saw the end of the world drawing near, or as if they perceived hell ready to swallow them up! His fame went through all the country, and the people went from all parts to hear him. Not only were the churches filled, but also the churchyards too. It is said that people were under such deep convictions under his sermons, unable to stand, lay down on the ground... (quoted in Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, p. 40).

The dramatic effect of such preaching was with in accord with the new emphases of both the Great Awakening in America and the Evangelical Revival in England. Jonathan Edwards had induced paroxysms of fear in Northampton, Massachussetts, in 1732 having preached on 'sinners in the hands of an angry God', while the most vivid impressions would soon be wrought on Gorge Whitefield's hearers by his preaching of the divine law. From the evidence of his early published sermons, Rowland seems not to have preached on hell as such though he and his colleagues *did* emphasis the consequences of contravening the law: 'What is common to them all [viz. Methodist conversion narratives] is often a strong sense of hell, and this seems to be induced less by hell-fire preaching that the subjects' own innate belief and conscience which appear to have required little to arouse them' (Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*:

John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism, p.197). This was true of the early revival in Wales as well.

What was incontrovertible was that people in their scores were being convicted of their sins. The need was for a comparable preaching of grace and forgiveness. It was through the wise counsel of the friendly Independent Philip Pugh (see above p.7), minister of the church at Cilgwyn in the vicinity and under whose spiritual care Elinor had been raised, that Rowland was urged to apply the gospel even as he continued to propound the law:

‘Preach the gospel to the people, dear sir, and apply the balm of Gilead, the blood of Christ to their spiritual wounds, and show the necessity of faith in the crucified saviour ... If you go on preaching the law in this manner, you will kill half the people in the country, for you thunder out the curses of the law, and preach in such a terrific manner, than no-one can stand before you’ (quoted in Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, p. 43).

By late 1735, Llangeitho had become a focus for revivalist activity in west Wales while there too fellowship or society meetings were convened. Thereafter it would become a centre for pilgrimage for Methodists throughout Wales, who would journey for miles (sometimes across Cardigan Bay from north Wales) to hear him preach, to be present in his services and to receive communion from his hands. By 1736-7 Rowland was not confining himself to his curacy or parish(es) – by then John Rowland, his vicar, had responsibility for neighbouring Llanddewibrefi and Llanbadarn Odwyn as well as Nantcwnlle and Llangeitho – but was beginning to itinerate, crossing parish boundaries with the gospel message. As with Howell Harris in neighbouring Breconshire, the results were spectacular. The Welsh Evangelical Revival had arrived.

By temperament, background and doctrinal consistency, Daniel Rowland and Howell Harris were very different indeed. Whereas Harris was humourless, oversensitive, and often overbearingly imperious, Rowland possessed psychological balance, ready social skills and the ability to laugh (often at himself); he was far more comfortable in his own skin. Although he would, at times, be jealous of Rowland on account of his status as an ordained minister in the Established Church, Harris recognized the power of his ministry and realized that they were both involved in a uniquely significant religious movement. Despite their young age and relative experience, they possessed complementary gifts and would work in harness, for the most part, during the next decade or so. With Whitefield and the Wesleys, they would soon gain the reputation of being leaders of this new undertaking which would have such a lasting effect on the religious life of England and Wales.

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