

The Great Reformation

From Wyclif to Knox – two centuries
that changed the course of history

R. Tudur Jones

Inter-Varsity Press

INTER-VARSITY PRESS

38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP, England

© R. Tudur Jones 1985

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Inter-Varsity Press.

Unless otherwise stated, quotations from the Bible are from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, copyright © 1978 by the International Bible Society, New York, and published in Great Britain by Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.

First published 1985

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Jones, R. Tudur

The Great Reformation: from Wyclif to Knox:
two centuries that changed the course of history.

1. Reformation

I. Title

274' 05 BR305.2

ISBN 0-85110-468-1

Set in Palatino

Typeset in Great Britain by Parker Typesetting Service,
Leicester

Printed in Great Britain by Cox and Wymann Ltd



Inter-Varsity Press is the publishing division of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (formerly the Inter-Varsity Fellowship), a student movement linking Christian Unions in universities and colleges throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. For information about local and national activities write to UCCF, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP.

Contents

Preface	7
1 Roman Catholicism in crisis	9
2 Pioneers of reform	15
3 Signs of renewal	21
4 The gate of paradise	27
5 True forgiveness	34
6 The unforgettable stand	40
7 Zwingly's call to action	47
8 From loneliness to social tumult	53
9 The Word of God remains for ever	59
10 Advance and dissent at Zurich	65
11 Militant Protestantism	71
12 New evangelical strongholds	77
13 A challenge to Christendom	83
14 Restoration, revolution and reason	93
15 Reform in Denmark, Norway and Iceland	99
16 Reform in Sweden and Finland	105
17 A glorious and sweet society	110
18 A royal dissenter	116
19 A reluctant reformer	123
20 The Christian's service	128
21 A school of Christ	134
22 War and peace in Germany	141
23 The struggle for reformation in France	147
24 A young Josiah	157
25 Reaction and settlement	162
26 Anglican reformation in Wales	169
27 Conflict in Ireland	178
28 Blasts on the trumpet	185
29 Water and blood	193
30 Militant Calvinism	199
31 Dissent in Italy	207
32 Brief harvest in a golden age	215
33 The clash of convictions in Poland	220
34 Argument and liberty in Hungary	227
35 In the steps of John Hus	232
36 The revival of Roman Catholicism	238
37 The heart of the Reformation	248
38 Life is religion	253

1563 and issued as the Thirty-nine Articles in 1571. They rejected such Roman Catholic doctrines as purgatory and the validity of indulgences. The veneration of images and relics is rejected. Scripture is the sole basis of faith. There are but two sacraments, baptism and Communion. Infant baptism is held to be in accordance with the teaching of Christ. Holy Communion, which is not to be considered a sacrifice, is understood in the light of Calvin's teaching. In a word, the Articles were positively Protestant and Calvinistic as to the main points of theology, but too moderate in the view of the more radical reformers.

The intellectual vindication of the settlement was provided by Bishop John Jewel (1522-71) in his *Apologia* (1562) which argued that the reformed Church of England was not a new church but the ancient Church of Christ purged of the innovations introduced by the papacy. And another apologetic work, as has already been mentioned, was John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.

It was one thing to pass laws making Protestantism the state religion, but it was a very different thing to ensure the flowering of spirituality. The more learned and enthusiastic Protestants were given positions of responsibility in the new order but the great difficulty was finding men of similar calibre to work in the parishes. The vast majority of parish priests had accepted the changes with little or no enthusiasm and their spiritual condition was low. As Fuller tartly put it, 'A rush-candle seemed a torch where no brighter light was seen before', but even rush candles were hard to come by. And yet there was a growing demand for preaching, especially in those areas where Lollardy had been tilling the soil for generations. Thus Thomas Lever (1521-77), friend of Bullinger and Calvin and one of the most powerful preachers of his generation says of Coventry, 'that vast numbers in this place (are) in the habit of frequenting the preaching of the gospel'. Town and city 'lectureships' were springing up in London, and places like Colchester, Yarmouth, Ipswich, Warwick and elsewhere. They were evidences of a burgeoning spirituality. After all, the state by its legislation could only provide the opportunity for Protestantism to flourish. The spiritual vitality that could take advantage of that opportunity could only come from sources beyond the command of the state.

26 Anglican reformation in Wales

Inasmuch as I know well . . . that every country from here to Rome, such as great Germany, Poland, England, France . . . and other places are eagerly and warmly welcoming the word of God through the second blossoming of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . wake up, good Welshman, my dear and loving brother in Christ . . . and receive the heavenly gift that the Lord's grace sends you today.

Bishop Richard Davies (1501?-1581) in his 'Epistle at y Cemburu' (Epistle to the Welsh People), prefaced to the 1567 Welsh translation of the New Testament.

By 1530 the Roman Catholic Church in Wales was in a critical condition. Roman Catholicism had degenerated into a collection of superstitious beliefs and magical practices while the prophetic call for reform was scarcely heard. Monasticism was in decline and there was bitterness and dissatisfaction among the clergy. Since the age of Glyn Dŵr, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Welshmen were excluded from the highest offices in the church. No Welshman was bishop of Bangor from 1408 to 1500, nor of St David's from 1389 to 1496, nor of Llandaff from 1323 to 1566. And the foreigners who held these offices were bureaucrats and diplomats who had earned the gratitude of the Crown. They were absentees and not resident pastors. This meant, of course, that the everyday business of the diocese was discharged mainly by local Welsh officials. But these again were little concerned with spiritual matters. They enjoyed the comfortable style of life characteristic of the gentry to whom they were closely related.

HINTS OF AWAKENING

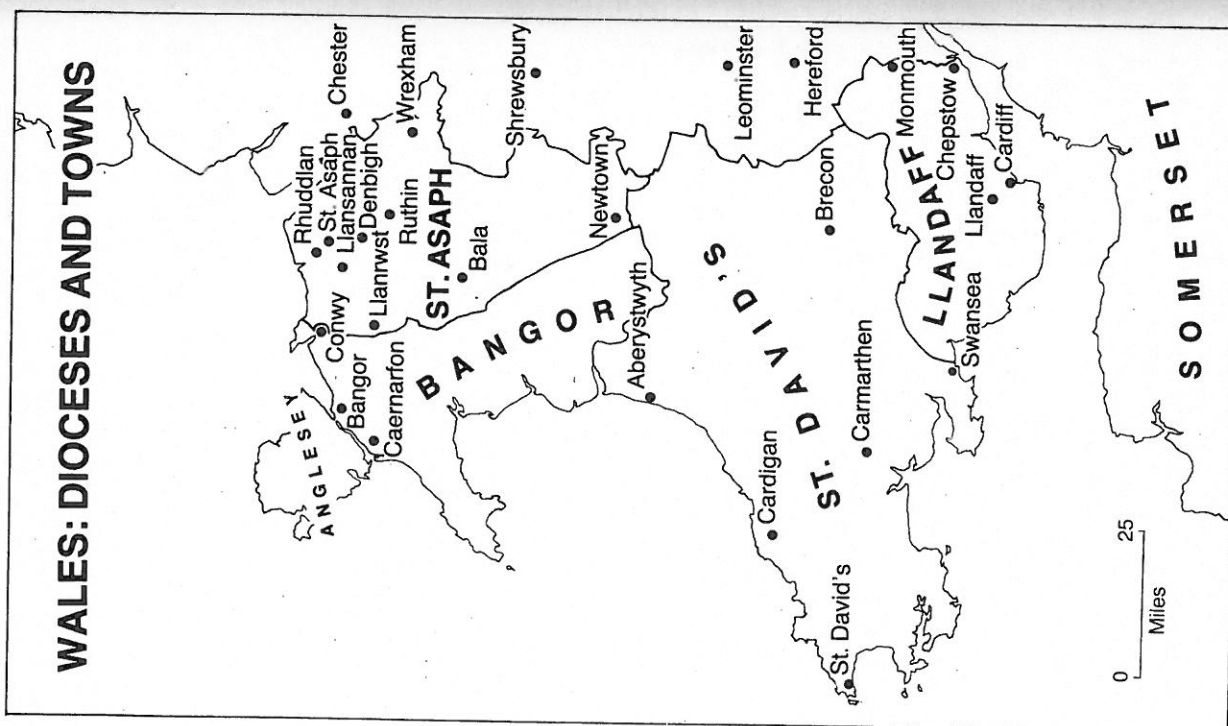
The lower clergy were, for the most part, poor and uneducated. Even when it is recalled that the learning associated with Welsh culture was very largely transmitted orally, the lack of education among clergymen was widespread. And even those who were educated were not trained in theology with the result that they had only a vague appreciation of the significance of the Protestant Reformation when it came. There had been signs of revival from about 1450 onwards. One artistic sign of this was the fine work done on the rood lofts erected at that time in churches like Llaneleu and Llanfili. And another, and more significant proof, was the composing of religious texts, especially in Glamorgan, to meet the devotional needs of the period. But this revival was not in any way strengthened by the accession of Henry VII to the throne of England. His interest in the church in Wales was fitful and motivated by political considerations rather than religious concern.

All in all, the Roman Catholic Church in Wales on the threshold of the Reformation was in need of a thorough awakening.

ROYAL CHANGES

The legislation passed by the Reformation Parliament from 1529 to 1534 was applied to Wales before the Act of Union (1536) brought Welsh members into the House of Commons. Both the religious legislation and the incorporation of Wales into England stemmed from the Tudor policy of seeking to create a united, uniform and centralized kingdom that would at some future time include the whole of the British Isles.

Nevertheless, Wales accepted the religious changes without protest. It is true that William ap Llywelyn, a Caernarfonshire priest, expressed his disgust at the king's divorce proceedings by saying on 4 July 1533 that he would like to have Henry VIII on Snowdon to 'souse the King about the ears till he had made his head soft enough.' He was not only a bold protester but a lonely one. Certainly the bishop of Llandaff refused to accept the royal divorce and the



Royal Supremacy, but then he was George de Athequa, the Spanish confessor of Queen Catherine of Aragon and he remained utterly faithful to her until her death on 7 January 1536. And in the following December he left for Spain. There were individual Welsh Roman Catholic martyrs outside Wales, like John Davies, the Carthusian, and John Eynon, the secular priest executed at Reading in 1538. But in Wales itself there were none.

THE END OF THE MONASTERIES

There were 47 religious houses in Wales, and they were occupied by some 246 inmates. Their combined value in 1535 was no more than £3,178. In order to facilitate the process of dissolving them, visitors were appointed to inspect them and produce reports on their condition. The men appointed to visit the Welsh monasteries were Dr Adam Becansaw, canon of St Asaph, Dr John Vaughan, and the notorious 'Red Doctor', Ellis Price (Ellis Prys, ?1512-95?), whose grandfather had been standard-bearer to Henry VII at Bosworth.

Their visitation lasted from 6 August 1535 until April 1536. The reports of this have disappeared but some of their letters have survived. By the time they had finished their inspection, the law to dissolve houses with an income of less than £200 a year had been passed and since all the houses in Wales came into that class, they were all due to disappear. Three of them, however, were able to prolong their existence for a couple of years, namely Strata Florida, Neath and Whitland. Tintern also prolonged its existence until 1539. The friaries were treated separately. Between 17 August and 6 September 1538 they were visited by Richard Ingworth, bishop of Dover, and he accepted the submission of all ten houses. So, by 1540 all the monasteries of Wales had been dissolved. Their possessions passed to the Crown and thence into the hands of the gentry by purchase. And there was little sentimentality about the extinguishing of monasticism. A loyal Roman Catholic like Sir Edward Carne (c. 1500-61), Mary Tudor's ambassador at Rome, was as avid an acquirer of monastic lands as the devoted Protestant, Sir John Price (c. 1502-55).

LIGHT AND SHADE

The monasteries had outlived their usefulness. Most of them had too few inmates to sustain the discipline and round of duties demanded by their own rules. Hospitality was more a matter of providing a rest home for distressed gentlefolk (like the poets Guto'r and Lewis Môn at Vale Crucis) than helping the destitute. There were able heads of houses, like Leyshon Thomas, the distinguished abbot of the Cistercian Abbey at Neath and Griffin Williams, prior of the Franciscan Friary at Carmarthen. But there were rascals too like Robert Salisbury, the last abbot of Vale Crucis who was imprisoned in the Tower of London after perpetrating highway robbery in May 1535. There was immorality, but far more significant was the sloth, the carelessness, the loss of ideals which afflicted almost all the houses. Few mourned the dissolution and the monks and nuns were granted pensions that kept them above the breadline.

More bitterness was caused by Cromwell's campaign against pilgrimages, shrines and images. The destruction of the great statue of the Virgin at Pen-rhys in the Rhondda, or of the image of Derfel Gadarn which was ignominiously carted away from Llandderfel to be burned in London, touched the fondest superstitions of ordinary people and created resentment.

PROTESTANT ENTHUSIASTS

It is regrettable that we know nothing of Wales's first Protestant martyr. His name was Thomas Capper. He would not profess belief in transubstantiation as demanded by the Six Articles of 1539. Capper was brought to the stake at Cardiff in the year 1541-2 and it cost Cardiff four shillings and four pence to execute him.

The first vociferous preacher of Protestantism in Wales was William Barlow (1499?-1568), an Essex man, whose career as an Augustinian canon and diplomat brought him in 1534 to Haverfordwest priory. He was out of Wales for some months before being elected bishop of St Asaph in January 1536 and translated in April to St David's. There is no denying Barlow's Protestant enthusiasm and his persistence in proclaiming his views. But there is no denying

either the rashness which pitched him into an acrimonious quarrel with the cathedral chapter which had more to do with questions about his jurisdiction than about the nature of his theology. He did little to commend Protestantism to Welsh people before he was translated to Bath and Wells in 1548.

Barlow was succeeded by Robert Ferrar (c. 1505-55), a native of Halifax, Yorkshire, and bishop of St David's from July 1548. He seems to have inherited Barlow's quarrel with the chapter and made enemies of Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. But Ferrar is honoured for his heroic death. He was tried as a heretic by his Roman Catholic successor, Henry Morgan, and suffered death by burning in Carmarthen market square on 30 March 1555.

Two other martyrs of Mary's reign were William Nichol of Haverfordwest, of whom nothing further is known, and Rawlins White, an illiterate Cardiff fisherman who had been preaching for five years before the accession of Mary. These were the only martyrdoms in Wales during the Roman Catholic reaction. Many were disappointed because of their Protestant sympathies or because they were married priests, but in the main the change to Roman Catholicism was accepted with little incident, and possibly with a sense of relief, in Wales.

MEN OF THE FUTURE

By the Act of Union (1536) the Welsh language had been banned from legal and official use. The 'one nation policy' that was being pursued by Henry VIII and his successors was a serious threat to Wales and its national culture. Would the religious change to Protestantism be part of the process of weaning the people from their language and traditional values? One of the most remarkable aspects of these years was the emergence of a succession of scholars and literary patrons who appreciated the danger and made bold to meet it. And in so doing they gave to Anglicanism in Wales a flavour that distinguishes it from Anglicanism in England or Ireland.

In the basins of the two rivers, Clwyd and Conwy, within the area bounded by the four ancient towns of Conwy, Llanrwst, Ruthin and Rhuddlan, the Renaissance fused

with the classical culture of Wales to produce a splendid flowering in the sixteenth century. In the numerous mansions that dotted this neighbourhood there was a highly civilized gentry ready to patronize poets and craftsmen. And there emerged in this same area a flock of superb poets. Here, where people were sensitive to the value of their historic culture and conscious of the achievements of both commercial and Renaissance Europe, there emerged men who were to combine an ardent Protestantism with their Welsh Humanism.

Two of them demand particular attention. William Salesbury (c. 1520-c. 1594), born at Llansannan, scion of one of the most influential of Denbighshire families, educated at Oxford and the Inns of Court, was possibly the most learned Welshman of the age. He had understood the crisis, both moral and cultural, that faced Wales. In the preface to his book, *Oll Synnwyr pen Kembro ygyd* (All the Welshman's wisdom, 1547), he had warned his compatriots:-

Unless you desire to be worse than animals . . . get scholarship in your language; unless you wish to be less natural than any nation under the sun, love your language and those who love it . . . With unshod feet make pilgrimage to his grace the King and his Council and beseech him to grant you the Scriptures in your language.

And Salesbury devoted his energies for twenty years to providing Wales with the Bible in Welsh. He translated the lessons of the Book of Common Prayer in *Kynnyver lliith a ban* (1551) - 'All the lessons and articles' - while he demonstrated his humanism and his wide erudition, as well as his glowing Protestant faith, in other books. Nothing could be done in the reign of Mary. But with the accession of Elizabeth a new opportunity came. The new bishop of St. Asaph was a native of the Conwy Valley, - Richard Davies (?1506-81), son of Dafydd ap Gronw, Roman Catholic curate of Gyffin, educated at Oxford and an exile at Frankfurt during the Marian persecution. He and Salesbury now began their epoch-making co-operation.

Salesbury addressed a petition to the Privy Council begging them to order 'learned men to translate the book of the Lord's Testament into the vulgar Welsh tongue'. Meanwhile, Thomas Davies, who followed Richard Davies at St Asaph, had commanded his clergy in November 1561 to read the epistle and the gospel in Welsh as well as English in their services. Although we know nothing of the details, it is obvious that a considerable amount of work was being done behind the scenes to persuade Parliament to legislate in this matter. The result was the Act of 1563 commanding the four Welsh bishops, together with the bishop of Hereford, to produce Welsh translations of the Book of Common Prayer and the whole Bible for use in the churches by 1 March 1567. It is likely that the measure was steered through the Lords by Bishop Richard Davies and through the Commons by Humphrey Llwyd (1527-68), physician and antiquary and a native of Denbigh, - again the Vale of Clwyd. The Book of Common Prayer was published in May 1567, the work mainly of Salesbury but revised by Richard Davies.

THE 1567 NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament, the first instalment of the Welsh Bible, appeared 7 October 1567. The bulk of the translating was done by Salesbury with Richard Davies doing I Timothy, Hebrews, James and I and II Peter and Thomas Huet (d.1591), the precentor of St David's, translating Revelation. It was a first-rate piece of work, unswervingly faithful to the original but showing on every page how conversant Salesbury was with the methods and materials of the best biblical scholarship of the day.

Not only so, but Bishop Richard Davies prefaced the Testament with an 'Epistle to the Welsh people' in which he elaborated carefully the Protestant and Anglican understanding of the history of Britain. Christianity was brought here by Joseph of Arimathea and the purity of the early church was preserved by the British until the monk Augustine brought the errors of Rome to sully the beauty of the Celtic church. But now those errors have been rejected

and so the Anglican Reformation is to be seen as the resurrection of the Celtic church. And for Welsh people, so Davies implies, the Church of England is no foreign imposition but the reappearance of the church of their own forefathers. The history is hardly convincing but the legend commended Anglicanism to the Welsh people and gave them a dramatic historical role. So despite the churlish treatment of the Welsh language by the Act of Union, parliament had quite surprisingly ordered the church to adopt a bilingual policy in Wales. The influence of Richard Davies and William Salesbury (not to mention their successors as Bible translators) upon the future of Welsh Christianity was immense, but despite good intentions, the Welsh Elizabethan bishops found it a daunting task to provide the parishes with an effective and learned ministry. Nevertheless, the process of transforming Wales into a Protestant country had been set in motion.