RELIGION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Wales and Scotland c.1700–2000

edited by

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'The Essence of Welshness'?: Some Aspects of Christian Faith and National Identity in Wales, c.*1900–2000*[1]

D. DENSIL MORGAN

The Historical Background

It may be too sweeping a generalization, but it could be said (and I would venture to do so) that Wales emerged from its Romano-Celtic past during a religious revival. If the birth of the nation is dated during the fifth century, that too was the time of the vast missionary surge which we still delight in calling the 'age of the saints'. It was then, in *c.* AD 450–600 that Dyfrig, Illtud, David and their companions fulfilled a ministry which blended monasticism with evangelization in a uniquely potent fusion. In the short time between that juncture and the dawn of the seventh century, Christianity and the life of the emerging nation had become so tightly interlaced as to be virtually indistinguishable, and for nearly a millennium-and-a-half Welsh identity and religious affiliation became totally intertwined. Not for nothing has it been claimed that: 'Of all the associations between religion and social values in Wales the most intriguing and longest lasting has been that between religion and nationality. From the outset the Christian religion seemed to be part of the essence of Welshness.'[2]

What was true of early and high medieval Wales was also true of modern Wales where the native pattern developed differently from that prevalent in other lands. Whereas the onset of modernism and later the presuppositions of the Enlightenment threatened to sever the unity between religious affiliation and citizenship, in Wales that unity was preserved. Modern Wales no less than Celtic and medieval Wales remained openly Christian.

Even more remarkable was the fact that industrialism, far from being a harbinger of secularization, *strengthened* the hold which Christianity held on the mass of the people. The lead which Wales took in the industrial revolution first with the production of iron then of coal, steel and slate, did nothing to lessen the influence and appeal of faith, by now in its Nonconformist guise. If Victorian Christianity in England was a bourgeois and a minority affair, in Wales it remained sturdy, proletarian and popular. Such was the degree of interpenetration between faith, life and national consciousness that 'by 1890 being a Welshman and being a Christian were virtually synonymous'.[3] Even in industrial and increasingly urban Wales, for the majority of the people being Welsh still meant being Christian.

During the Edwardian era, Welsh Christianity was at its most ebullient. 'There is good reason to believe that the sun will yet shine brighter on our land, and its religious life will show forth even more glory during the twentieth century than ever it did during the nineteenth,' wrote one Nonconformist minister in 1900. 'Thus we can look forward with utter confidence to the even greater success of the Kingdom of God in tomorrow's Wales'.[4] The naïveté of this prognosis only struck subsequent generations as being foolish. To many at the time it must have seemed quite reasonable. Institutional religion was massively influential. The 'four great Nonconformist denominations', the Calvinistic Methodists, the Congregationalists, the Baptists and the Wesleyans, had a shared communicant membership of some 535,000 to say nothing of the huge phalanx of 'listeners' (*gwrandawyr*) or adherents, as many as 950,000, who though not members were officially attached to the chapels and regularly attended services. Along with 500,000 children in Sunday schools, Nonconformity commanded the loyalty of nearly 1.5 million Welsh adults in a population of 2.5 million. Two out of every five Welsh people were Protestant Dissenters. Anglicanism was also growing in confidence and numbers at the time. During 1914, 24,500 infants and adults were baptized in the four Welsh dioceses of Bangor, St Asaph, St Davids and Llandaff; 17,000 candidates were confirmed by their bishops; 155,500 worshippers attended Easter communion and 169,000 children were taught in the Church's Sunday schools. In all, 13.78 per cent of

the population belonged to the Established Church. If this was less than the total number of Nonconformists, it represented considerably more than any other single denomination. Whatever separated the different religious traditions during these years, the presence and influence of mainstream Christianity, whether Dissenting or Established,[5] was taken as a fact. 'We think that from the evidence advanced before us', wrote the authors of the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (1910), 'that the people of Wales show a marked tendency to avail themselves of the provision made by the churches of all denominations for their spiritual welfare.'[6] Between the turn of the century and the onset of the Great War, Wales remained a remarkably Christian country.

The Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales, 1890–1914

Despite the impression current at the time, there was nothing specifically Welsh about the chapel religion of Protestant Nonconformity. Three of the larger Nonconformist bodies, the Congregationalists, the Baptists and the Wesleyans, had come into Wales from England, the first two during the seventeenth century and the third at the beginning of the nineteenth. Only the Calvinistic Methodists, who had seceded from the Established Church in 1811, had explicitly Welsh roots. The specifically Welsh character of Protestant Dissent was unselfconscious and pragmatic rather than being a matter of principle. For most of the nineteenth century preaching, worship and spiritual fellowship were conducted through the medium of Welsh for the simple reason that that was the language of the people and the only language which many of them could understand. Yet by the l870s it was clear that a genuine Welsh national consciousness was growing and that questions concerning the relationship between religion and national identity were being asked.

Although by the mid-century Nonconformity had displaced Anglicanism as the principal form of Welsh Christianity, it was certain representatives of the Established Church who had

shown themselves to be most theologically sensitive to the particular claims of Welsh nationality. For Dean H. T. Edwards of Bangor a commitment to Welsh nationality was not a matter of pragmatism but of deep principle. The episcopal church in Wales was the linear descendant of the early church of David, Teilo, Seiriol, Beuno, Cybi and all the Celtic saints whose existence long predated the see of Canterbury and the political union between England and Wales which was sealed in 1536.[7] For centuries it was this church, Celtic, Catholic and Reformed, which had been the *one church* of the Welsh nation and it would have remained so had it not been for the erastianism of the Tudor, Stuart and especially Hanoverian state. 'The policy which arrayed all the forces of nationality against the Church was not adopted in Wales until the eighteenth century', he claimed. 'At that point its effect was to make the Welsh people not Romanist, but Nonconformist.'[8] The alienation of the mass of the Welsh people from their ancient church had occurred not because of their spiritual apostasy but due to the politically motivated policy of appointing English clergy to principal Welsh benefices. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries not a single Welshman had been appointed bishop in the Welsh Church.[9] It was no wonder, claimed Edwards, that the ordinary men and women whose forefathers and mothers had been so staunchly loyal to their national church had forsaken what they had come to regard as an alien institution. 'The regeneration of the Church of the Cymry, by the restoration of the masses to her fold, can assuredly be effected by none other than native bishops and native clergy.'[10] With verve, erudition and a sincere patriotism, Dean Edwards staked his claim that, despite everything, it was the Established Church which was the true church of the Welsh people and still best placed to renew the nation's spiritual and national life.

The elegant logic of H. T. Edwards cut little ice either with the majority of Welsh Nonconformists or with those of the greatest influence among his own communion. His death in 1884 coincided both with the increasing politicization of Welsh Dissent and with the deepening intransigence of the Anglican hierarchy against the current spirit of national resurgence. Even before the widening of the franchise in 1868 to include tenant

farmers and workers as well as landowners, Welsh Nonconformity had become a political force. Thereafter its radicalization was apparent to all. Toryism collapsed to be superseded by the ideologies of the Liberal Party with which virtually all of the newly enfranchised Nonconformist Welshmen were identified. By the mid-1880s land reform, tithe abolition, the plea for a non-sectarian scheme of general education and the disestablishment of the Church of England had become the issues of the day. Whereas the first generation of Nonconformist politicians, exemplified by Henry Richard MP, had entered politics for religious reasons, the spiritual sincerity of their successors was more suspect. David Lloyd George who had been returned for the Caernarvon Boroughs in 1889, although nominally a Baptist, was in fact totally secular in outlook and by the later Victorian period his values were becoming commonplace. By then the policy of the Welsh parliamentary party was to play the nationalist card. Trading on the grievances of their overwhelmingly Nonconformist constituency, Lloyd George focused on the intertwined questions of national and religious identity. As the party of privilege and the landed élite, the Tories, they claimed, had always been inimical to the needs and aspirations of ordinary Welsh people, while the Established Church, far from being the guarantor of the nation's spirituality, was in fact nothing but the Church of *England* in Wales. By its long subservience to its 'alien' masters, the Anglican Church had forfeited its claim to be the one authentic church of the people. It was a politicized Nonconformity, therefore, which seized upon the glaring ecclesiastical weaknesses which patriotic Churchmen had revealed with such candour to forward its own aims. In short it suited Lloyd George to reinforce the claim that Christianity (in its Nonconformist guise) and Welsh national identity were one.

Though many of the lower clergy were in substantial agreement with Dean Edwards's thesis (and appalled by the rabble-rousing of Lloyd George's radical Dissent), there were significant elements within Victorian Anglicanism which gave credence to the Nonconformist claim that the Church was an alien body. By a bitter irony it was Dean Edwards's younger brother, A. G. Edwards, who did more than anyone to perpetuate the view that episcopalianism was inimical to the national aspirations of the

rising generation. Appointed bishop of St Asaph in 1889, A. G. Edwards made an immediate impression as the leading 'Church Defender' of the day. His strategy for preventing the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales was to emphasize its superior social status and links with the Anglicized ruling class. Unlike his brother, Bishop Edwards's attitude to his own Welshness and that of the common people was deeply ambiguous: 'I am half an Englishman and half a Welshman and have been labouring between the two all my life'.[11] His identity problem became the basis of the Welsh Anglican campaign to preserve the Church's established rights.[12] Under his leadership 'Church Defence' became an out-and-out war against popular Nonconformity and the voluntary, democratic and proletarian Welsh-speaking culture from which it had grown. Nonconformist reaction was to emphasize further its own character as being unambiguously Welsh (which in fact it was not) while patriotic Churchmen were put in the invidious position of appearing to endorse the Anglicizing policies of the hierarchy.

The disestablishment campaign resulted in victory for Nonconformity when, in August 1914, the Liberal government finally passed the bill declaring an independent Anglican church in Wales shorn of many of its ancient endowments, privileges and all of its links with the state. Yet it was a hollow victory. Public concern had moved away from narrowly ecclesiastical matters, and the mutual vilification in which the most zealous of the protagonists had indulged had only served to cause popular disenchantment with Christianity generally. By 1914 it had become clear that the burning issues would be material rather than spiritual: housing, poverty, unemployment and the like. The battle lines would no longer be drawn simply between patrician and hierarchical Tories supported by the Anglican Church, and chapel-going, Welsh-speaking common folk (*gwerin*), but instead a class-based political culture would rapidly evolve. If, during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, Nonconformist Wales had been overwhelmingly Liberal, after the Great War the major political influence would be that of the Labour Party. By then, a specifically Welsh identity would be less bound up with religion and more with an increasingly secularized scheme of socialist politics.

Religion, Identity and Labour, 1920–1939

As was true elsewhere, the First World War had an adverse effect on religious faith and affiliation in Wales, though its nature and extent would not become explicit for some time.[13] Following the trauma of war came the pain of depression. The two decades which divided the Great War from the conflict of 1939–45 were quite excruciating for the Welsh people. Social dislocation and economic collapse were catastrophic in their effects, and hunger, hardship and suffering became widespread. During the 1920s the heavy industry which had been south Wales's mainstay for a century-and-a-quarter went into steep decline. With changes in shipping technology and developments in transport generally, the previously insatiable foreign demand for Welsh steam coal ceased virtually overnight. European markets began to be serviced by coal mined more cheaply in Italy, Spain and Poland, while France and Belgium, which had formerly been among Wales's best customers, began to be supplied (ironically) with German coal as war reparations in accordance with the stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles. Former South American markets were also importing United States coal at a cheaper rate. Just as the coal industry, which employed 271,000 colliers or 35 per cent of the total Welsh population, was collapsing, south Wales's second largest industry, steel, was also being destroyed. Wales's oldest industrial heartland, on the north-eastern rim of the coalfield between Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypool, was being made desolate. The closure of the iron and steel works at Cyfarthfa in 1921, Blaenafon in 1922, Ebbw Vale in 1929 and Dowlais in 1930 – all names redolent of the industrial past – was a knockout blow to an area which was already reeling. Ancillary industries such as railways and shipping, even clothing and house-building, also suffered, while those which avoided the worst effects of the slump, anthracite mining and tinplate manufacture in the south-west, slate quarrying in north Wales, and agriculture, hardly flourished. The national situation was exacerbated by a world-wide recession, while the lessons of low investment, an inability to respond quickly to changing markets and a vast over-dependence on a single industry economy, were bitter ones to learn.

By December 1925 unemployment in Wales was 13.4 per cent of the insured population; two years later it was 23.3 per cent and in 1930 27.2 per cent. (The comparable percentage in England for 1930 was 15.8.) If the 1920s were dire, the 1930s were even worse. In December 1930 the eastern valleys of Rhymney and Tredegar registered unemployment at the rate of 27.5 per cent of the adult population, Pontypridd and Rhondda at 30 per cent, while the proportion in Newport was as high as 35 per cent. By August 1932 when the depression reached its lowest point, 42.8 per cent of all Welsh insured working men were idle. The cost of maintaining the unemployed was in itself crippling. In September 1931 state benefit was cut and all prospective claimants were means-tested. Those who were in a position to leave Wales did so, in their thousands and tens of thousands, to find work elsewhere. The rest had no alternative but to stay. The trauma which this left on the national psyche was immense and its recollection would remain emotively bitter for years to come:

> Do you remember 1926? That summer of soups and speeches,
> The sunlight and the idle wheels and the deserted crossings,
> And the laughter and the cursing in the moonlit streets? . . .
> . . . 'Ay, ay, we remember 1926', said Dai and Shinkin,
> As they stood on the kerb in Charing Cross Road,
> 'And we shall remember 1926 until our blood is dry'.[14]

The switch of allegiance from the Liberal Party to Labour was swift. For the twenty-one Welsh Liberals returned in Lloyd George's 'coupon election' in 1918, Labour gained ten seats and the party won nearly 31 per cent of the Welsh vote. Before the war its active support in Wales had been desultory. Following the collapse of the coalition government in 1922, the Liberals' popularity began to decline; only eleven members were returned for Welsh seats during the 1922 election, twelve in the election a year later, eleven in 1924, ten in 1929 and only nine in 1931. Even these were split between the different factions of Liberal, Independent Liberal and National Liberal. By 1935, Labour controlled every single seat in the industrial south, polling 400,000 votes or over 45 per cent of the Welsh total. By the 1930s

most of Wales had rejected the individualism of its Liberal past in favour of a collectivist and more class-based Labour future. This would have profound effects on the way in which Welsh people perceived their own identity and the way in which that identity was linked with the Christian faith.

Long before the deep dislocation of the 1930s, Christianity and the Labour movement had striven to accommodate one another.[15] Early socialists such as Keir Hardie, founder of the Independent Labour Party, had used biblical language and a religiously inspired idealism in order to convince Welsh chapelgoers of socialism's compatibility with their faith. For Hardie socialism was Christianity at work, the practical application of the Sermon on the Mount in order to usher in God's kingdom on earth. It was above else a moral code rather than an economic dogma and was commended as such not least by the Revd T. E. Nicholas of Glais in the Swansea valley, the ILP's most effective propagandist among the workers of south Wales before the Great War. If Nicholas, a neo-Marxist poet-preacher in the romantic style, was a skilled populist, there were other young Nonconformist leaders like the Baptist, the Revd Herbert Morgan, and the Presbyterian, the Revd Silyn Roberts, whose apologia for the socialist creed was much more intellectually astute. James Griffiths, leader of the west Wales anthracite miners, later MP for Llanelli and a minister in successive Labour governments, recalled Silyn's immense influence on young men who were keen to reconcile Nonconformity with socialism during the early years of the century.

> He preached God and Evolution. He was a minister and a Socialist . . . he became our inspirer and our justification. We could tell our parents, who feared this new gospel we talked of, 'but Silyn Roberts believes as we do'. How many devout but dubious fathers became reconciled to Socialist sons by that assurance? He linked the South Wales of Evan Roberts [the religious revivalist] to the South Wales of Keir Hardie.[16]

Even into the 1920s there were Welshmen and their families whose national identity was bound as closely with Nonconformist Christianity as with the socialism of the Labour

movement. 'It is rather late in the day to utter this nonsense [concerning the incompatibility of Labour with the chapels]', wrote one observer in 1923, 'for there are thousands of Welshmen today who can find no inconsistency in singing *Diolch iddo* and *Ar ei ben bo'r goron*, with the Welsh hwyl at one meeting, and then proceeding to another meeting to sing *The Red Flag* with the same enthusiasm.'[17]

Late in the day or not, by then the problems implicit in this assumed reconciliation had come well to the fore. Those who were keenest to forge the combination tended to see Christianity in terms of socialist ideology or a humanitarian faith. T. E. Nicholas had claimed that 'true Christianity recognizes the divinity of man . . . not as a fallen being but one who is continually advancing to higher levels and who is endowed with unlimited possibilities'.[18] Even less radical Nonconformist socialists sat very loosely to orthodox formulations of the creed. Whereas the outward trappings of chapel culture were being preserved in the guise of attendance at worship, hymn-singing and often an appreciation of a well delivered sermon, specifically religious convictions were weakening daily. Basic theological truths concerning the holiness of God, the reality of human sinfulness, the deity of Christ and the unique nature of his birth, death and resurrection were being refashioned according to the canons of humanitarian socialism. Rather than devising a doctrinally robust Christian socialism which was faithful to the gospel, the tendency in Wales was to spiritualize a basically materialist ideology according to Nonconformist *mores*.[19] In every compromise it was traditional Christianity and not the Labour movement which lost out.

Even more threatening to the link between religion and national identity was the fact that chapel-going itself was in decline. Chapel statistics reached their high point in 1926 when the four major Nonconformist denominations recorded a joint membership of 536,000.[20] Yet this still huge number representing baptized communicants masked the fact that the previously extensive class of 'listeners', and even more ominously, many children formerly present in Sunday schools, were no longer attending. There was a growing conviction that Protestant Dissent was losing its grip on the hearts, minds and imagination

of the people.[21] During each succeeding year the chapels lost more members than they gained, and for every Welsh worker who succeeded in combining a Christian commitment with Labour politics, there was another for whom religion and socialism were wholly inimical and still more who simply drifted away. Despite the earlier attempt to yoke the Labour movement to Welsh language and Nonconformist culture, socialism came to be associated increasingly with progress and the English language whilst Welsh, especially in the valleys of the industrial south, became identified with Puritanism and the Liberal past. For proponents of the class struggle, of course, the perpetuation of national identity was detrimental to the solidarity of the workers' international for which English was deemed to be a much more appropriate means of expression. By the 1930s, Welsh identity was perhaps more popularly represented not by the moderate chapel-going James Griffiths, but by Aneurin Bevan, the openly atheistic, non-Welsh-speaking Member for Ebbw Vale.[22] Welshness, the language and religious affiliation were going their separate ways.

A Catholic National Identity, 1920–1939?

However large the chapel loomed in the popular mind, Christianity was not commensurate with Protestant Nonconformity. On 1 April 1920 the newly disestablished and autonomous Welsh Anglican Church, soon to be entitled the Church in Wales, became a fact. The mean-spirited political *imbroglio* which had been the disestablishment campaign came to an end in 1914, but the creation of the new church had to be postponed until after the war. Having been cushioned from the worst effects of disendowment by the government's financial guarantee, Welsh Anglicans began to accustom themselves to their new status. Though disestablished, the new church was still hierarchical in nature, in many places gentrified and ambivalent about its status. The old hostility to the Welsh language persisted; many of its senior clergy and middle-class laity despised Welsh as an uncouth throwback to the past, 'the last refuge of the uneducated' according to A. G. Edwards[23] who had been unanimously elected its first archbishop. Yet confidence was steadily

growing and Churchmen began to appreciate, if not to relish, their new-found independence. The Church soon created two new dioceses, Monmouth in 1921 and Swansea and Brecon in 1923. If the senior clergy remained for the most part Anglicized and still establishment-minded Tories, there were many among the parish ministers for whom Anglicanism was no bar to being wholly Welsh. Their cause was strengthened by two totally unexpected occurrences: the appointment, in 1923, of Dr Maurice Jones as principal of St David's College, the Church's seminary-university at Lampeter, and the even more surprising election, in 1931, of Timothy Rees, a monk of the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield, Yorkshire, as bishop of Llandaff. Jones, a native of rural Meirionnydd and former military chaplain, was impervious to the social snobbery, the anti-Welsh bias and anti-Dissenting antipathy of the hierarchy. His influence on successive generations of prospective clergy throughout the inter-war years did a significant amount to restore respect for the Welsh-language culture of the common people within the Church in Wales.[24] Like Jones, Rees's career in England led his sponsors to think of him as an appropriate choice for a senior position in the Church in Wales. It became apparent from the outset, however, that this most unassuming of men was less a prelate and autocrat than an evangelist and pastor whose Anglo-Catholic social radicalism blended perfectly with an evangelical piety to which Nonconformists warmed. He was, in fact, H. T. Edwards reincarnate, a keen Welsh-speaking patriot with a social conscience to boot.[25] His death aged sixty-five in 1939 deprived the bench of bishops of its most attractive personality, one who had made a specifically Welsh Anglican identity a possibility once more.

These years also witnessed the consolidation of Roman Catholicism within the land.[26] In 1916 Pope Benedict XV had announced that henceforth Wales's two dioceses of Cardiff and Menevia be afforded the status of a separate ecclesiastical province with its own archbishop. The appointment in 1921 of Francis Mostyn, bishop of Menevia and fourth son of Sir Piers Mostyn, baron of Talacre in Flint, as archbishop betokened the beginnings of a rapprochement between the see of Rome and the Welsh people. Bereft of any indigenous working-class tradition

such as that of Lancashire and other parts of the north of England, and possessing only three landed, recusant families (of which the Mostyns of Talacre were one), Catholicism was viewed in Wales with hostility and fear. Its *mores* were strange, its rituals mystifying and the presence among its faithful of thousands of virtually peasant Irishmen and their rough families put the church well beyond the pale. For most Welsh Christians it was a foreign and vaguely sinister institution. Mostyn, however, was keen to convince his fellow countrymen that Roman Christianity represented the continuation of the classic Welsh tradition of which the poets of the princes and medieval noblemen, and the Welsh Catholic humanists of the Renaissance, had embodied with such distinction. This was part of the appeal which the church had for a number of exceedingly gifted Welsh converts of whom Saunders Lewis was the most brilliant. In 1925 Lewis, the son and grandson of Calvinistic Methodist ministers of renown and fast gaining the reputation of being the *enfant terrible* of Welsh literature, helped form Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, the Welsh Nationalist Party. Its political manifesto which diverged radically from the *laissez-faire* individualism of contemporary Liberalism and what Lewis and his colleagues saw as the rootless collectivist materialism of the socialist movement, reflected the social teaching of the Catholic Church.[27] Although small and unrepentantly élitist, the Nationalist Party had an influence well beyond its numbers especially in the flourishing intellectual life of inter-war Wales. Accusations of (among other things) fascism, anti-Semitism and a blind subservience to ultramontanist Rome did nothing to prevent the stimulation which its ideals provided for the younger Welsh-speaking generation at least. Whereas Labour-dominated industrial Wales was being progressively Anglicized, and the still predominantly Liberal rural areas were stagnating, nationalism presented a radical political alternative. For many young members of Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru, the renewal of Christianity, often in a fairly dogmatic and catholicized form, would be essential if Welsh identity was going to survive.

Nonconformity and the Crisis of Identity, 1920–1962

Despite its Romanist hue, the Nationalist Party attracted many more Nonconformists and even Welsh Churchmen than Catholics. If Nonconformity, whose institutional presence was still hugely influential in inter-war Wales, was in decline, there were signs that its theological base was at least being strengthened. The doctrinal liberalism which had become almost a prerequisite for denominational leadership after the war (especially but by no means exclusively, among the Congregationalists), was being challenged by a renewal of confessional orthodoxy inspired chiefly by the thought of Karl Barth. By the 1930s more and more Nonconformist ministers were rejecting the theology of morals and experience for that of revelation and the Word of God. Preaching began to be thought of again more in terms of proclamation and not moral uplift, while a new urgency gripped Welsh evangelical Dissent generally.[28]

For Welsh Christians who had long accepted the mutual interpenetration of faith and national identity, there was much in this confessional renaissance which could be condoned. In the light of the extreme hardship and deprivation which were currently being experienced, especially in the industrial south, the need for national renewal was patent. Despite everything, neither political nor religious idealism had been extinguished, and it was equally apposite for the Welsh to see their dilemma in religio-national terms as in socio-economic ones. For liberal-minded, Labour-supporting Nonconformist clergy such as Morgan Watcyn-Williams, an English-speaking Presbyterian, in Merthyr Tydfil, and the Barthian Baptist Lewis Valentine, a Welsh-speaking leader of the Nationalist Party in the north, the redemption of the Welsh nation would only come about on the basis of a shared commitment to the Christian faith.[29] It was left to J. E. Daniel, a leading nationalist and professor of Christian doctrine at the Bala-Bangor Congregational College, to provide a specifically Barthian combination of revelational theology and Christian nationalism. His highly perceptive wartime essays including 'The secular idea of man' and the influential '*Gwaed y Teulu*' (The family's blood) constitute a sturdy and original contribution to our understanding of the nature of the relationship

between Christianity and national identity in twentieth-century Wales.[30]

From the standpoint of the Christian faith, the post-war era was at best mixed. The 1939–45 conflict was much less traumatic than the Great War had been, and consequently there was less idealism about the need or the ability to build 'a land fit for heroes to live in'. Having been disappointed once, both Christian and secular confidence was much more chastened than it had been a quarter of a century before. Following the austerity of the late 1940s, the 1950s formed a period of social and economic stability and growing affluence. Having been restored, the traditional heavy industries of south Wales were by now working to full capacity, unemployment was low and social dislocation seemed to have been checked. A healthy economy allowed people to purchase luxuries which soon became essentials for modern life: washing machines, televisions and their own small family cars. Huge local council projects provided post-war Wales with cheap but adequate rented housing, while the extension of mortgage facilities allowed more and more families to purchase their own homes. The standard of public health improved, especially following the establishment of the National Health Service in 1945, while by 1947 the popular measures to nationalize coalmining and steel manufacture allowed the people what they believed to be a stake in their own future. Though weaker than of old, institutional Christianity still played a significant role in Welsh national life. In 1955, for instance, the chief Nonconformist denominations could still boast a joint membership of 370,000 baptized communicants, representing as many as one in seven of the total Welsh population.[31] In some areas, especially those in which the Welsh language was the general means of expression, chapel culture was still strong, while even in the more Anglicized districts Protestant Dissent was yet a living force. As part of the Festival of Britain activities of 1951, W. J. Gruffydd could still state with little incongruity that 'by the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Wales had become what it substantially is today, a nation of Evangelical Christians'.[32]

Yet all was not well within this purported nation of believers. Anglicization and secularization were marching on apace. The Census Returns for 1951 noted the sharp downward trend in the

people's ability to speak Welsh. In the short span of ten years the total number of Welsh speakers had declined by nearly 100,000 to 715,000. Native speakers tended to be in the older age group while there was little vision as to how 'the language question' might be addressed. The received wisdom was that Welsh could be preserved on the hearth rather than by any official or political measures. Inevitably, appeals to preserve the language were often thoroughly pessimistic and forlorn. It would not be until after 1962, with Saunders Lewis's famous radio broadcast 'The fate of the language' and the opening of the first Welsh-medium secondary school in south-eastern Wales, that radical measures for linguistic renewal would begin to be implemented and made effective. Before then there was a feeling of inevitability about the demise of Welsh and the chapel culture and Nonconformist value system which it was perceived to embody. The tercentenary of the ejection of the Puritan ministers from the Established Church in 1662, the event which had created Protestant Nonconformity, was celebrated in Wales not with jubilation but with a sense of foreboding. Post-war Dissent saw itself to be in a state of perpetual 'crisis',[33] and denominational leaders felt that there was little they could do to allay its effects. In the most perceptive analysis of contemporary chapel life published at the time, R. Ifor Parry showed how Nonconformity was suffering due to its cultural captivity to 'the Welsh way of life' which was currently in decline; that it was tied to 'the Nonconformist Conscience', the Puritanism of which was everywhere regarded as being antiquated and hypocritical; that the plainness of its worship had bred a manichean negativity towards beauty and the senses; and that growing economic affluence had led to a materialism which dissolved the moral seriousness on which Dissenting conviction was built: 'This is the atmosphere in which Nonconformity is having to exist and today it is fighting for its very existence.'[34]

Christian Faith and the Renewal of National Identity, 1950–1979

The gloominess which characterized Welsh Nonconformity stood in contrast to the sense of rejuvenation which permeated

Welsh Anglicanism during these years. After having experienced its first quarter-century of disestablished independence, the Church in Wales was at ease with itself and confident about its future. By the 1950s a world-affirming catholicism, in tune with the tenor of the times, had come to represent 'central' Welsh churchmanship while the Church was becoming increasingly sensitive to the national aspirations of the Welsh people. Whereas chapel religion was seen to be oppressive and Puritanical, Anglicanism, with its Prayer Book liturgy, sacramentalism and rounded doctrines of creation and incarnation, provided a very appealing version of Christian faith. Unencumbered by the negativities of sabbatarianism and teetotalism, it presented a viable spiritual alternative for those who were offended by Nonconformity but chose not to succumb to secularism and irreligion. Not a few of its most distinguished lay members and senior clerics were former Nonconformists. Yet perhaps the most interesting contemporary development involved the change of attitude within the Church to Welsh nationality and identity.

With the appointment of J. C. Jones to the see of Bangor in 1949, Glyn Simon to Swansea and Brecon in 1953 and thence to Llandaff four years later, and G. O. Williams as J. C. Jones's successor in 1957, much of the ambiguity which had coloured the bishops' attitude to Welshness was repudiated. If Jones was a popular and warm-hearted patriot and Williams, an exceedingly able former warden of Llandovery College, was virtually a Welsh nationalist, the most unexpectedly zealous advocate of a pro-Welsh policy was Glyn Simon. A cradle Churchman (unlike the other two who had been brought up as Calvinistic Methodists) whose first language was English, Simon made his patriotic credentials plain in 1957 by sharply criticizing the election of Edwin Morris, an Englishman who had served the Church in Wales as bishop of Monmouth, as archbishop. 'The recent elections,' he claimed, 'have revealed an anti-Welsh and pro-English trend, and in some cases a bigotry as narrow . . . as any to be found in the tightest and most remote of Welsh communities.'[35] Given the historical ambivalence which the Church expressed towards its own Welshness, the continued existence of a pro-English trend was hardly exceptional. What was extraordinary was the virulent and public way in which a senior

member of the hierarchy chose to express his disapproval of the status quo. Simon's own tenure as archbishop between 1968 and 1971 coincided with a renewed sense of national consciousness throughout Wales. Cardiff had been proclaimed the Welsh capital in 1958, the central government's Welsh Office had been established in the capital in l964, while the campaign to prevent the Tryweryn valley from being drowned to provide water for the English Midlands had been fought throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1966 Gwynfor Evans was returned as Plaid Cymru's first MP, for Carmarthen, while the investiture of the Prince of Wales at Caernarfon Castle in July 1969 had provided a focus for significant anti-establishment dissension. When Dafydd Iwan, president of the radical Welsh Language Society, was imprisoned for the non-payment of fines imposed for his part in the campaign for bilingual road signs, Simon ruffled not a few establishment feathers by visiting him in prison. 'There is nothing unscriptural or un-Christian in nationalism as such', he claimed.[36] Simon's policies were continued by his successor, G. O. Williams, and by the 1970s the perception of the Church in Wales as being an alien body had changed dramatically. The old dichotomy between an Anglicized Church and a thoroughly Welsh Nonconformity was ringing increasingly untrue. In the popular mind the contention that 'the Anglican church is the proper spiritual home for a patriotic Welshman'[37] had much to commend it.

The theological ferment which affected Western Christianity generally during the 1960s did not bypass the Welsh churches. The Second Vatican Council, John Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963), the 'Death of God' movement and various secular theologies had their devotees within the land. A particularly vigorous theological discussion took place in the influential monthly *Barn* (Opinion) between J. R. Jones, a Calvinistic Methodist layman and professor of philosophy at the University of Wales, Swansea, and H. D. Lewis, also a Calvinistic Methodist and professor of the philosophy of religion at King's College, London. Heavily influenced by Tillich's 'Protestant Principle' and some of the most enigmatic sections of Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Jones championed a highly idiosyncratic existential humanism which was openly

antagonistic to Christian orthodoxy. As well as reflecting faithfully each of the religious predilections of the 'secular sixties', this altercation was intensified by being linked to the concurrent crisis of nationhood and that within Welsh Dissent.[38] Despite its apparent malaise, Nonconformity was sufficiently healthy to fuel such an intellectually distinguished discussion and to provide work for renewal movements of both evangelical and ecumenical hues. It was still common for Welsh Nonconformists to link the renewal of nationhood with spiritual revival and a rediscovery of Christian faith. The most weighty contributions to a Christian theology of nationhood during these years were produced not by Churchmen but by Nonconformist scholars of the calibre of Pennar Davies, R. M. (Bobi) Jones and most notably R. Tudur Jones.[39]

Pluralism and Multiple Identities: 1979 to the Millennium

The confidence which accompanied the renewal of national consciousness during the 1960s and 1970s and which led to the establishment of an effective system of Welsh-medium primary, secondary and higher education, a much higher public profile for the language and eventually a Welsh-language television channel in S4C, evaporated somewhat with the rejection of the Labour Party's plans for devolution in the 1979 referendum and the advent of Thatcherism soon after. Yet even under a Tory regime it was obvious that at least some of the previous gains were being consolidated rather than lost. The cultural pessimism which had characterized the 1950s was not repeated and an undercurrent of hope was still perceptible in Welsh life despite the wholesale transformation which the nation was forced to face. The most obvious change was in Wales's industrial base. By the mid-1980s the heavy industries of coal and steel which had fuelled Welsh life for a century-and-a-half had been dismantled. The formerly bustling steel centres of Port Talbot and Shotton became strangely silent, and following the defeat of the miners after the stoppage of 1984–5, production ceased in virtually every Welsh pit. The Rhondda valleys would soon return to their pre-industrial shades of green. Religiously it was completely obvious

that traditional Christianity, whatever its complexion, was losing ground and that Anglicanism as well as Nonconformity was in decline. Even Roman Catholicism was only holding its own rather than advancing.[40] The anxiety, gloom and dejection which denominational leaders felt was replicated even among some historians. 'Humanly speaking, at this rate of decline . . . it seems as if the end of distinctively Welsh expressions of Christianity may be in sight,' wrote Glanmor Williams, 'as those religious values dearest to earlier generations are being more and more abandoned in a lingering but painfully inexorable process.'[41]

Yet if mainstream, denominational Christianity was declining, even in post-industrial and post-modern Wales other forms of Christianity, religion and religiosity were flourishing: pentecostalism, house fellowships (in the larger towns and cities), evangelical groups of different types and worship styles as well as some individual congregations in each of the older churches.[42] However bad the situation seemed all round, shafts of light were still visible through the gloom.

What had become incontrovertible by the 1980s, even if it was covertly true long before, was that there was not one single and specific Welsh identity but many, the validity of which did not depend on stereotypes concerning social class, locality, language or religious affiliation but on a shared experience of life in a late twentieth-century pluralist Wales. It was, admittedly, a novel situation which caused some consternation: apart from a shared popular interest in rugby football, what were the ties which bound the Welsh together as a single people? The semblance of an answer was provided, unintentionally it seems, by the central government's progressive devolution of power to the Welsh Office. The Secretary of State found himself responsible for a wide variety of powers such as primary, secondary, further and some higher education, industrial planning and agricultural policy which had previously been the prerogative of Westminster alone. Wales was being afforded powers which set it apart from the other regions of the United Kingdom: it now had the wherewithal to begin developing a civic culture of its own. The creation of such bodies as the Welsh Land Authority, the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural

Wales, as well as the passing of specific legislation on broadcasting, the National Curriculum and the status of the Welsh language, underscored a separateness which, in turn, fortified the nation's rapidly evolving identity. Following the narrowly won devolution referendum of 1997, this process culminated in June 1999 with the establishment of the Welsh Assembly. This new brand of Welsh citizenship seems destined to provide a shared basis for the nation's identity well into the twenty-first century. Whereas in the past Welshness had been a social and cultural phenomenon, it is now a civic and political reality within the context of a devolved and perhaps ultimately federal British state.

Just as there is no longer a single Welsh cultural identity, pluralism has become an undoubted characteristic of the religious life of the new Wales. Rastafarianism, Hari Krishna, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, much Islam to say nothing of the run-of-the-mill secularism of everyday life, are all to be found in a contemporary and spiritually diverse Wales.[43] The Christian verities may still abide, but they are now compelled to do so in competion with the faith claims of many other sects and religions. This may be an unprecedented situation. 'For the first time since the sixth or seventh centuries AD, when the Welsh could he said to have come into existence as a separate people, being Christian is not, for the majority of them, an essential part of being Welsh.'[44] It does, though, present as much a challenge as a threat. Whereas in the past Welsh Christians liked to think that they enjoyed a privileged position due to the intertwining of Christianity and culture within their history,

> Duw a'th wnaeth yn forwyn iddo,
> Galwodd di yn dyst,
> Ac argraffodd Ei gyfamod
> Ar dy byrth a'th byst.[45]

> God made you his maidservant,
> He called you to be his witness,
> And He impressed his covenant
> On your posts and gates.

they now realize that they are being called to forgo this special status and live by faith alone:

> There is no point in pretending that in the divine economy, Wales has a special place not given to other nations. On the contrary, we must take the political economy of our nation seriously enough to want to make a new Wales in which the divine economy can hold sway.[46]

The challenge of the new millennium has to do with mission and evangelism, spirituality, politics and culture, in fact the renewal of all things under the sovereign grace of God. However the relationship between nation and identity will be formulated in the years to come, the long history of Wales's Christian past will still provide inspiration and hope.[47]

Notes

1. A fuller version of this chapter has appeared as 'Christianity and national identity in twentieth century Wales', in *Religion, State and Society*, 27 (1999), 327–42.
2. Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh and their Religion* (Cardiff, 1991), p. 14; idem, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff, 1979); Pennar Davies, 'The fire in the thatch: religion in Wales', in R. Brinley Jones (ed.), *Anatomy of Wales* (Peterston-super-Ely, 1972), pp. 105–16.
3. R. Tudur Jones, *Ffydd ac Argyfwng Cenedl: Hanes Crefydd yng Nghymru, 1890–1914*, I (Swansea, 1981), p. 15.
4. David Powell, *Y Greal* (July 1900), 170.
5. There were some 90,000 Welsh Roman Catholic communicants at the time, while the smaller Protestant bodies had a membership of some 20,000; cf. D. Densil Morgan, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914–2000* (Cardiff, 1999), ch. 1.
6. *Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and Other Religious Bodies in Wales and Monmmouthshire*, I (London, 1910), p. 19.
7. For a discussion of the way in which the early Celtic Church was appropriated by the Roman Catholic and the Anglican Churches see Trystan Owain Hughes's contribution to this volume.
8. H. T. Edwards, *Wales and the Welsh Church* (London, 1889), pp. 318–19.

9 For a discussion on the development of a Welsh-speaking episcopal bench, see Roger L. Brown's contribution to this volume.

10 Edwards, *Wales and the Welsh Church*, p. 162.

11 George Lerry, *Alfred George Edwards: Archbishop of Wales* (Oswestry, n.d.), p. 54.

12 See Roger L. Brown, 'Traitors and compromisers: the shadow side of the Church's fight against disestablishment', *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, III (1995), 34–53.

13 See Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, ch. 2.

14 Idris Davies, 'Gwalia Deserta', in Dafydd Johnson (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Idris Davies* (Cardiff, 1994), p. 6.

15 See Robert Pope, *Building Jerusalem: Nonconformity, Labour and the Social Question in Wales, 1906–1939* (Cardiff, 1998), *passim*.

16 Quoted in David Thomas, *Silyn (Cofiant Silyn Roberts*) (Liverpool, 1957), p. 77.

17 *The Labour Voice* (14 April 1923).

18 Quoted in David Howell, *Nicholas of Glais: The People's Champion* (Clydach, 1991), p. 29.

19 Cf. Robert Pope, *Seeking God's Kingdom: The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales, 1906–1939* (Cardiff, 1999), *passim*.

20 John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics*, II (Cardiff, 1985).

21 See Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, chs. 4 and 5.

22 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Modern Wales: Politics, Places and People* (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 443–53.

23 Quoted in Owain W. Jones, *Glyn Simon: His Life and Opinions* (Llandysul, 1981), p. 55.

24 William Price, *A History of St David's University College, Lampeter*, II (Cardiff, 1990), pp. 68–104.

25 See J. Lambert Rees, *Timothy* Rees *of Mirfield and Llandaff: A Biography* (London and Oxford, 1945).

26 Trystan Owain Hughes, *Winds of Change: The Roman Catholic Church and Society in Wales, 1916–1962* (Cardiff, 1999), *passim*.

27 See esp. Dafydd Glyn Jones, in Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas (eds.), *Presenting Saunders Lewis* (Cardiff, 1973), pp. 23–78.

28 Cf. Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years, 1899–1939* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 57–225.

29 Morgan Watcyn-Williams, *From Khaki to Cloth: The Autobiography of Morgan Watcyn-Williams MC* (Caernarfon, 1949); D. Densil Morgan, 'Y Proffwyd ymhlith y Praidd: Lewis Valentine (1893–1936)', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, new series IV (1998), 188–215.

30 See D. Densil Morgan, Introduction to *Torri'r Seiliau Sicr: Detholiad o Ysgrifau J. E. Daniel* (Llandysul, 1993); and idem,

'Basel, Bangor a Dyffryn Clwyd: mater y genedl yng ngwaith Karl Barth ac eraill', in Gareth Lloyd Jones (ed.), *Cenadwri a Chyfamod: Cyfrol Deyrnged i Gwilym H Jones* (Denbigh, 1995), pp. 149–72.

[31] Williams, *Digest of Welsh Statistics,* I and II.

[32] 'A portrait of south Wales', in Geoffrey Grigson (ed.), *South Wales and the Marches* (London, 1951), p. 57.

[33] Cf. Ambrose Bebb, *Yr Argyfwng* (Llandybïe, 1955).

[34] R. Ifor Parry, *Ymneilltuaeth* (Llandysul, 1962), p. 175.

[35] Quoted in John S. Peart-Binns, *Edwin Morris: Archbishop of Wales* (Llandysul, 1990), p. 119.

[36] Owain Jones, *Glyn Simon,* p. 58.

[37] John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 539.

[38] See Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, ch. 7.

[39] Pennar Davies, 'Y Genedl yn y Testament Newydd', in D. Eirug Davies (ed.), *Gwinllan a Roddwyd* (Llandybïe, 1972); and idem, 'Towards a theology of language', in Paul Ballard and D. Huw Jones (eds.), *This Land and People* (Cardiff, 1979); R. Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations* (Llandybïe, 1974); idem, 'Crist: Gobaith Cenedl', in Davies (ed.), *Gwinllan*; and idem, 'Christian nationalism', in Ballard and Jones (eds.), *Land and People*; Bobi Jones, *Crist a Chenedlaetholdeb* (Bridgend, 1994).

[40] See Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, ch. 8.

[41] Williams, *The Welsh and their Religion*, p. 72.

[42] Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, p. 272.

[43] See D. P. Davies, 'A time of paradox among the faiths', in David Cole (ed.), *The New Wales* (Cardiff, 1990), pp. 206–18.

[44] Williams, *The Welsh and their Religion,* p. 69.

[45] D. Gwenallt Jones, *Ysgubau'r Awen* (Llandysul, 1939), p. 27.

[46] Gethin Rhys, 'The divine economy and political economy: the theology of Welsh nationalism', in Roger Hooker and John Sergant (eds.), *Belonging to Britain: Christian Perspectives on a Plural Society* (London, 1990), p. 71.

[47] For some stimulating assessments of this subject, ibid., pp. 55–74; D. P. Davies, *Against the Tide: Christianity in Wales on the Threshold of a New Millennium* (Llandysul, 1995), and Noel Davies, *Wales: Language, Nation, Faith and Witness* (Geneva, 1996).