

Anatomy of a Revival (3)

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A Discerning Look at Revival as an Evangelical Tradition especially as in Wales in 1904-05

PART 3

It is now one hundred years since Wales last experienced what evangelical theologians are wont to call “revival.” As may be expected, fervent hearts and minds across the principality have turned their thoughts back through the ensuing century, and with a nostalgic longing they have yearned again for a repeat of those “great days,” another “divine visitation from on high” which will turn the nation back to God and overcome the deep-seated apostasy that has characterised the Welsh scene throughout the twentieth century.

Special meetings, lectures, prayer-meetings, publications, and even a special company, “1904 Ltd.,” have all emerged with this avowed intent, to remind the Welsh of their Christian heritage in that last great “revival,” and hopefully to inspire another such phenomenon.¹

An examination of the Revival of 1904-05 is a fascinating exercise on various counts. At the outset it must be said that people who live outside Wales seem to be more affected by the pro-revival propaganda than those who live within the principality itself.² And this goes for the religious people as much as for the non-religious. The fact is that the various phenomena endemic to the 1904-05 outburst include events that quite clearly fall outside the ambit of Scripture, and many

¹We again draw the reader's attention to the plethora of printed literature generated in Wales recently on this topic. The Evangelical Movement of Wales (hereafter EMW) has played a significant part in this via its publications on revival, and also by special services preaching about revival. Notable is the recent inauguration of a new private limited company, the aim of which is to propagandize widely their notions of revival. The company is called 1904 Ltd. To date they have produced three salient items, one a large landscape format volume entitled, *A Pictorial History of Revival*, compiled and authored by Kevin Adams and Emyr Jones (hardback, 120 pages plus), which majors on Wales and especially the 1904-05 Revival; then the paperback entitled *A Diary of Revival* by Kevin Adams, of some 170 pages, which contains principally eye-witness recollections and diary entries from the 1904-05 Revival; and then a video programme which covers the same ground, but replete with actors portraying the various salient characters of 1904-05. I watched the video with Prof. Herman Hanko some time in October 2004. We found it soporific, and had to fight to stay awake.

Welsh evangelicals of the period 1904-05 and afterwards were concerned to point out these anomalies.³ Such information seems not to have passed generally into the mainstream of evangelical thought outside Wales itself over the intervening years, indeed, these factors became suppressed even amongst Welsh evangelicals of the post-war period. Today, in a religious world long permeated by Charismaticism, both within and without Wales, these unscriptural perversions and idiosyncrasies have been brought to light again, not as an exercise in anti-revival polemics by those who are opposed to revivals, but by the pro-revival faction, who actually glory in the accounts of such wayward and unscriptural phenomena, and pray for further manifestations of the same, apparently oblivious to and unconcerned about the fact that much of what they are heralding cannot be supported by the Word of God.⁴

An excessive preoccupation with “revival” seems to have gradually evolved amongst the stalwarts of the Evangelical Movement of Wales (EMW). In 1959 Dr. Eifion Evans, then minister of the Calvinistic Methodist Forward Movement Hall at Canton, Cardiff, published the well-received book, *When He is Come*, subtitled “An Account of the 1858-60 Revival in Wales.”⁵ Dr. Evans followed this up in 1969 with a more substantial book on the 1904-05 Revival.⁶

²This however, would except those principally of the EMW and the various Pentecostal type of churches in Wales. Amongst many Welsh people, skepticism prevails concerning the whole revival business. Significantly, in December 2004, at the Westminster Conference in London, a Welsh evangelical minister, Rev. Stephen Clark of Bridgend in South Wales delivered a lecture entitled *The 1904 Revival—Was It?* Publication of this lecture is due later in 2005, but an early report in the *British Church Newspaper* (24 December, 2004), indicated that “some of our Welsh brethren have had more than their fill of the Welsh revival this year ...” and noted that Rev. Clark discriminated between TWO revivals which appeared to be running in Wales in 1904-05.

³During the revival itself Rev. Peter Price of Dowlais, near Merthyr Tydfil, wrote scathingly of Evan Roberts in the *Western Mail*, the national Welsh daily morning newspaper, in his letter dated 31 January, 1905. Price’s criticism was reserved in the main for Evan Roberts and his entourage, claiming that the “real revival” was distinct from the ecclesiastical fireworks that broke out in October and November of 1904 at Loughor. Similar criticisms of the “Roberts movement” were to emerge in Dr. Vyrnwy Morgan’s book, *The Welsh Religious Revival 1904-05. A Retrospect and Criticism*, published in 1909, and again similar criticisms are found in *Rent Heavens*, an account of the 1904-05 revival written in 1931 by Rev. R. B. Jones, a Welsh baptist minister prominent for his association with the Keswick Convention.

⁴Cf. the post-war writings of such prominent Welsh evangelicals as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Dr. Eifion Evans, and Dr. Brynmor P. Jones.

⁵Published at Bala, by the EMW in November 1959, and subsequently reprinted by, I believe, the Evangelical Press under the title *Revival Comes To Wales*.

⁶Entitled *The Welsh Revival of 1904* and published by the EMW.

Well-written, both volumes gained enormous popularity and have since gone to several reprints, building up an pervasively popular image of “revivals” and “revivalism” that has captured the imagination of thousands both in and beyond Wales. Dr. Evans, though describing certain of the idiosyncratic factors emergent in these revivals, did not submit them to critical analysis in the light of Scripture. As a result fanciful phenomena (such as angelic choirs singing in the air),⁷ and baleful inconsistencies like Calvinists and Arminians uniting in “revival” co-operation⁸ and the subsequent mental/nervous breakdown of one of the two most prominent “Spirit-filled” men⁹ seem not to pull the reader up with a halt to ask the questions here that ought to be asked.

By the 1990s, nobody was left alive who could remember intelligently the experiences of the last great Welsh revival. And with the rising tide of Charismaticism sweeping over the EMW and its leaders from the early and mid 1960s onward,¹⁰ the idiosyncratic perversions endemic to the 1904-05 phenomenon were more and more admitted and advanced into the front rank of their literature. Several more tomes about that last revival were printed during this ensuing period up to the 1990s authored by the former college lecturer and EMW personality, Dr. Brynmor P. Jones. Jones published four works,¹¹ all of which went into a detail that was not present in any of the previous literature of that revival, not even from the early days. It is to Dr. Jones’ valuable records we must now turn, for they supply us with notable and vital information *in detail*.

⁷Eifion Evans, *When He is Come*, p. 16. A similar phenomenon occurred in France among the later Huguenots in the south of France in about 1685-86, when those poor folk were persecuted and tortured virtually out of their minds immediately after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. See Charles Taylor, *The Huguenots in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1892), pp. 148ff.

⁸Cf. Evans, *Op. cit.*, p. 16, n. 7.

⁹Even Eifion Evans admits that the behaviour of this revivalist (the Wesleyan Humphrey Rowland Jones) turned into a “tragic mental process” which culminated in “a total departure from the authoritative Word of God” (*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50).

¹⁰Noel Gibbard outlines the Pentecostalist input into EMW thinking right up to the level of Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones right from the early 60s (*The First 50 Years—The History of the Evangelical Movement of Wales 1948-1998* [Bryntirion Press: EMW], pp. 121-122).

¹¹*The King’s Champions* (1968, 1986), *The Spiritual History of Keswick in Wales* (1989), *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05* (EMW, 1995), and *An Instrument of Revival: The Complete Life of Evan Roberts 1878-1951* (South Plainfield, New Jersey: Bridge Publishing, 1995). Significantly Dr. Jones indicated in *Voices from the Welsh Revival* that he intended to write a fifth volume tracing “the linkage between the [1904-05] revival and the hundred gospel halls and missions scattered around Wales, including those where *pentecostalist influences and trends first appeared five years after the revival*” (italics HLW).

Indeed, it could be said that the mass of detail he delivers reaches the level of being tedious. Most importantly, Dr. Jones advances, with details, a long concatenation of “spiritual phenomena” without a corresponding critical evaluation from a scriptural standpoint. The lack of such evaluation soon becomes evident on reading what is possibly the most important of his series of books on this topic, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-1905*. What is also soon apparent is the reason for this lack of evaluation. Dr. Jones seems fully convinced that such an evaluation is unnecessary. The phenomena he presents us are evidently to his mind fully and authentically Christian. What is also interesting is the fact that the publisher is the Evangelical Press of Wales, the publishing arm of the EMW, thus indicating that the EMW express their approval with the contents of the volume. The “Introduction” at the front of the book is written by none other than Dr. Hywel R. Jones, and written when he was the then principal at the London Theological Seminary. It also has to be pointed out that this same Hywel Jones has been associated with the Banner of Truth Trust and Westminster Theological Seminary.

So we have a kind of double imprimatur on Brynmor Jones’ volume, from the leading authorities of Evangelicalism in Wales, and from the leading centres of Protestant and Evangelical leadership in Britain. That people with such “high standing” lend their imprimaturs to the contents of this volume is in our view shocking, and indicative of the atrocious degree to which “revivalism” has downgraded biblical orthodoxy in the minds of even those who rejoice in and even facilitate the reprinting of massive Puritan tomes. The shocking nature of all this will become apparent hereafter as we allow Brynmor Jones’ detailed researches to speak for themselves, and simply refer such findings to Scripture for critical evaluation.¹²

We have, in two previous articles, indicated that eye-witness analyses of the events of 1904-05 show that *two* separate “revivals” were spreading across Wales in the early years of the twentieth century.¹³ In Wales itself this factor became somewhat obscured in the years following, and hence two disparate accounts of how the revival began circulated among preachers and writers, and in popular parlance. Most prominent was the tradition that the revival started with the 28

¹²We appeal to Scripture as the sole arbitrator in the adjudication of spiritual material. This is in accordance with the apostolic injunction to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (I John 4:1) and the example of the Bereans who even checked out the Apostle Paul’s preaching by reference to the Scriptures, and were commended in Holy Writ for so doing (cf. Acts 17:10-12).

¹³In *British Reformed Journals* 40 and 41 respectively.

year-old trainee Calvinistic Methodist minister, Evan Roberts, when he spoke to the youth at his home chapel in Loughor in November, 1904.¹⁴ A more romanticised account tells that the revival “broke out” some 10 months earlier in February, 1904, at the Tabernacle Calvinistic Methodist Chapel at New Quay, on the Cardiganshire coast some 40 miles north of Loughor, when “a little girl” stood up in the meeting and blurted out, “I love Jesus with all my heart,” at which the congregation all broke down in tears and great waves of emotion spread through them and subsequently through the surrounding district.¹⁵

The disparity between these two accounts is immediately resolved, however, when one observes that both are actually true, but refer to two different “revivals” which during late 1904 and much of 1905 were to run concurrently. The interactions of the one with the other are most revealing. In following the train of these events, therefore, and the outline of the same in Brynmor Jones’ important book, we must first trace the beginnings of the Welsh Revival of 1904 back not only to February, 1904, but well beyond, indeed to the late 1890s. And there we see a picture of a tree rooted in the late nineteenth century, which in the early years of the twentieth divided into two main branches, each branch manifesting itself as one or the other of the two “revivals” of 1904-05, and the one single “trunk” of the tree being the “Keswick” theology which had been sown in Wales during the 1890s. Both these “revivals” therefore can be traced back to a Keswick parentage.

By this late nineteenth century era the Welsh pulpit had largely become the habitat of unconverted preachers who had drunk deeply at the wells of Darwinism and higher criticism of the Bible, which they further infused with copious doses of socialism.¹⁶ Such a state of affairs seemed to pass off without protest

¹⁴Loughor is located approximately 10 miles due west of Swansea and on the estuary mouth of the River Loughor as it debouches toward the Bristol Channel north of the north coast of the Gower Peninsula.

¹⁵The popular account of this is of course exaggerated and embellished. See below for corrective details.

¹⁶For a useful account of the decline of orthodox Calvinism in Wales, see the translator’s “Introduction” to Owen Thomas’, *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Literature and Theological Debate* (Great Britain: Banner, 2002) especially pages xxxiv-xxxix. Here John Aaron informs us that even the great theological leaders of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists had, under the influences of modern philosophy, uncritically hitched humanistic and modernistic principles to their theology and biblical interpretation. Ironically, it was the Calvinistic Methodist leaders who ultimately killed off biblical Calvinism in Wales during the period from about 1837 onwards. They mingled it with Arminianism and Amyraldianism, and by the turn of the century nobody seemed to notice that anything serious had happened, so pervasive was the apostasy.

from the rank and file of church membership, who seemed unaware of the massive epistemological and theological changes which were sweeping the religious ground out from under their feet.¹⁷ Even the few “evangelical” leaders such as Dr. Cynddylan Jones seemed to accommodate themselves to the “new thinking,” and unconverted ministry and (so-say) converted ministry existed side by side and in apparent brotherly harmony. Doubtless, underlying this horrendous disparity, the evangelicals were unable to discern danger in that the basic aspirations of the “modernist” majority were still articulated in evangelical terms, that is, that religion is first and foremost an “experience in the heart” which in itself was to them an authentication of the Christian standing of the individual, irrespective of his views on the Bible and orthodox doctrine.¹⁸

In such conditions, the masses of chapel-goers became starved in their knowledge and understanding of Scripture, and the discerning eye of a historian tuned to search for detail will find that the spiritual and cultural condition of the chapel-goers in those days encompassed a range that spanned from a pharisaical parade of self-righteousness on the one hand, to outright antinomianism on the other. Indeed, the pharisaism was all too often, as in the case of its biblical predecessor, a cloak that camouflaged a subterranean immorality. In the 1960s, reminiscing in his old age about his experiences growing up amongst the Wesleyan Methodists in the South Wales valleys in the 1880s and 90s, Willie Paget could graphically describe chapel-life and the general moral atmosphere of the communities.¹⁹ He could recount lucidly how one chapel “always had a bun-fight on Good Friday” for the youth from miles around, after which “it was under-

¹⁷Notably this period marks about the third or fourth generation which had been raised in the churches without catechising. Ministers and elders and deacons had all by now been raised in churches which never gave them formal grounding in biblical orthodoxy. Naturally enough, such officers and rank and file members couldn’t recognise heresy even when they looked it in the eyes, so to speak.

¹⁸One sees in this the subtle influences of the German modernist theology of Schleiermacher, who had reduced Christianity to the psychological notion of dependence worked out as a spiritual experience, which did not need an infallible Word of God as its basis.

¹⁹Willie Paget was born in 1870 and died in 1969. His reminiscences were published by one of his descendants in 1985 under the title *Man of the Valleys* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton). The quality of his recollections is borne out in the fact that he was able to remember accurately key names, dates, and statistics that could be verified as either absolutely correct, or nearly so. I grew up in the same valley community myself, and knew the same families, often attended the same group of Wesleyan chapels when a boy, and then worked in the same mining industry. Also my grandmother’s sister was married to Willie Paget’s elder brother. Thus I can vouch for the authenticity of most of his accounts.

stood by them at least that the afternoon's games would end with love-making." Similarly, Paget could remember being ridiculed by his peers when they found out that he had actually, after a Sunday evening service, walked a certain "Edith Davies" back home, without ever "trying to make love to her." Apparently the young lady in question, who was herself just returning from singing in a chapel service when she met Paget, was herself so disappointed over Paget's self-discipline that she actually openly derided him afterwards amongst her peers. "It was generally accepted among the boys," Paget went on, "that very few girls were virgins."²⁰ Lay-preachers, like Paget, could proclaim the gospel on Sundays, and swear and frolic like worldlings on weekdays, interspersing cuss-words with snatches of Sankey songs. "Chapel" was in fact the community centre for all sorts, the relay station for all the local gossip, the propagating engine of all manner of social intrigues,²¹ with the ever-present sexual skeletons-in-the-cupboards that always lurk not far away from the mainstream of any human life not deeply infused with the Word of God. In short, religion in those days was largely a hollow sham, the chapels were "community clubs" more than spiritual homes for the Lord's people, and even the few evangelicals left around seemed overtaken by this state of affairs. Yet, apostate or not, these people were still attending their chapels regularly, and copiously filling many of them, building extensions and even new chapels, and even filling many of them too.²² It is at this

²⁰Cf. Paget's chapter "Growing up in the Valley" (*Ibid.*, pp.103-104). Interestingly, one of the chief deriders of Paget over the matter with Edith Davies was his big friend and fellow-coal-miner Vernon Hartshorne, later to become a Member of Parliament and a Cabinet minister in Ramsey Macdonald's first Labour Government in the 1920s. The chapel that organised the annual Good Friday "bunfights" for the local youth was none other than the historic Babel Calvinistic Methodist chapel at Cwmfelinfach. Babel Chapel was well named!

²¹Cf. *Ibid.*, *passim*. Paget himself became a Wesleyan lay-preacher, read Darwin and apparently exulted in it, and seemed to have no difficulty in combining worldliness with what at times seems a touching piety.

²²It should be noted that, particularly in South Wales at this time, there had been a surge of population due to the incursion of English immigrants into the valleys to supply labour for the burgeoning coal-mining industry. Whereas in about the 1790s the total population of Wales had been just 400,000, by the 1890s it had risen to about two million. It now stands just under 3 million. This burgeoning immigrant population, chapel-trained in large numbers back in their old English habitats, required new chapels, as well as houses and schools, etc. The resultant explosion of chapel-building in the late 1800s in South Wales in particular is to be attributed to this, and not to any surge of religion due to any "revivals." Testimony to this factor is the salient demise of Welsh-speaking chapels all over South Wales from about 1890 onwards, more and more of them abandoning Welsh as the medium of preaching, and turning to English under the pressure of the large numbers of English immigrants to whom Welsh was incomprehensible.

time that the architecture of Welsh Chapels rose to its peak with regard to style and magnificence, the old work-a-day Spartan meeting houses now being replaced by monuments to the glory of various alumni of the Royal Institute of British Architects.²³

Various minorities of folk in different denominations who had some kind of evangelical tradition still clinging to them seemed to sense somehow that something was wrong. Their remedy for the problem varied from one denominational milieu to another. Amongst the Calvinistic Methodists arose the "Forward Movement," an essentially evangelistic arm designed to reach the unchurched masses in various industrial areas of South Wales.²⁴ Amongst the Baptists, little organisations known as "Christian Endeavour" groups began to crystallize here and there in various individual churches.²⁵ Over-arching all this was the influence of the "Higher-Life" movement emanating from the Keswick Convention.²⁶ What seems notable about all these evangelical endeavours is a lack of riposte against the corrupters of orthodox doctrine in the churches. One would find, for instance, a Christian Endeavour group happily meeting week by week under the aegis of a congregation whose minister was a modernist and whose office-bearers were worldlings. No voice of rebuke issued forth, no call to reform went out to the ministry or to the apostate theological colleges. Among the Calvinistic Methodists, the Forward Movement made no confrontation with the higher critics who were ruining the denomination, and poisoning the minds

²³Anthony Jones' *Welsh Chapels* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1984) ably portrays the development from the "barn" to the "grandiose."

²⁴Cf. Howell Williams, *The Romance of the Forward Movement* (1946). The Forward Movement was inaugurated by the Calvinistic Methodist evangelist Dr. John Pugh some time about the 1880s with a view to reaching the vast unchurched masses of immigrants into South Wales. It was able via "Moody-Sankey" type methodology to gather some large congregations and build some huge chapels to hold them, some of them 2000-seater edifices as at Newport and Neath. Prominent among Dr. Pugh's evangelists were the brothers Seth and Frank Joshua, converted ex-miners and prize-fighters. Both of these adopted a Moody-Sankey style. Notwithstanding the fact that Seth had read a bit of John Owen, he eschewed the doctrine of limited atonement. Bethlehem Chapel, the Forward Movement Hall at Sandfields, Aberavon, was to become in 1927 the first pastorate of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. On the Joshua brothers, see T. Mardy Rees, *Seth and Frank Joshua* (Wrexham: Principality Press, 1926), and Geraint D. Fielder, *Grace, Grit, and Gumption* (Christian Focus-EMW, 2000).

²⁵Cf. B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05* (Evangelical Press of Wales, 1995), p. 13.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13. See also Kevin Adams, *A Diary of Revival 1904-05* (Surrey: CWR, 2004), pp. 18, 63ff. Similar data can be found in R. B. Jones, *Rent Heavens* (1931). The Keswick influence touched people in all the major denominations in Wales.

of the new “converts” made by the Movement almost as fast as they could be won. As to the Keswick influence, again no standing rebuke issued forth against the surrounding apostasy. The line taken was of course conditioned by this one factor: “experience.” Keswickism majored on this feature, that Christianity was a “two-level” religion. At basic level one, you had folk who had accepted Christ as Saviour only. These were denominated “carnal” Christians. The remedy for all the ills of the churches was to exhort these “carnal” church members to graduate up to level two, when you took Jesus to be your Lord as well as your Saviour. Graduation to level two was via the “experience” of the “baptism of the Holy Ghost” which led you into “sanctification” in one giant step. Given this theology, it is understandable of course, that evangelicals in those days looked and prayed for a “revival” of spiritual phenomena that would bring the “carnal Christians” up to this level, and reach out also to the unchurched masses out with the chapels, and that doctrinal preaching and reformation never really entered their consideration. Hence no riposte was given to the wicked and deadly heresy that had ruined the chapels over the previous 40 years or more.

In accordance with the aims of the evangelicals of those days, and the aegis of the above mentioned movements, we find that by 1903 a small group of Welsh ministers from the Calvinistic Methodists, Congregationalists, and Baptists in South West Wales “felt prompted by the Holy Spirit” to organize special “conventions to deepen the spiritual life of the church.”²⁷ They ought to have been conventions to “initiate the reformation of apostate churches and propagation of true scriptural spiritual life in church and society,” but as we have seen their theological stance would have precluded them from thinking in those terms. Despite these masses of modernists around them, they still seemed to conceive of them as being Christians in some way. The evangelicals thought that they merely needed “spiritual deepening.” In contrast, the apostolic dictates of Scripture would demand the “disciplining” of such apostate folk, to the point of excommunication if necessary.²⁸ But of course, this remedy was impossible when

²⁷Cf. B.P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, especially the Prologue, “The First Voices of the Awakening” (pp. 13-22); and also Kevin Adams, *A Diary of Revival*, especially page 18 where he refers to the “first Welsh Keswick Convention held at Llandrindod in 1903 as being a turning point in the lives of several Welsh preachers.” More information can be found in the early chapters of R. B. Jones, *Rent Heavens*.

²⁸“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Titus 3:10-11). “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God ... If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed ...”

such people were the vast majority of chapel-goers, and effectively controlled the whole ecclesiastical scene by sheer weight of numbers. And, it might be added, sheer weight of money as well.

Of course, "spiritual deepening" as a concept was no rebuke to a non-evangelical or to a modernist. Modernists believed in "spiritual deepening" anyway, a perusal of modernist theologians like Schleiermacher yields eloquent testimony to that.²⁹ And so such conventions and "revival" movements were tolerated in modernist controlled establishments. As long as an exposure of the sins of modernism and higher criticism was carefully precluded, there would be no offence rendered, no consequent upheavals, heresy trials, excommunications, and no reformation either!

And so it was, in the closing months of 1903, then on into the following 1904, this small group of non-conformist ministers in South West Wales, now evidently under the Keswick influence, began to experience privately certain spiritual phenomena that evidently lifted them to level 2 on the "Keswick scale." Brynmor Jones' researches can tell us of such.³⁰ Let us examine the evidence pertaining to the most salient of these spiritual leaders.

1) Rev. W. S. Jones, minister of Peniel Baptist Chapel, Carmarthen.

Suddenly there came to me an indelible consciousness of the amazing holiness of God like a purifying fire—like a fiery river flowing out from the throne and I in the midst as if reclining on it. I do not know whether it were in the body or out of it, but the fire percolated through my whole nature. I remember the thoughts which gripped me. "The Holiness of God, and I still alive in the midst of the stream. One cannot die here." When I recovered consciousness of my earthly surroundings, I was amazed ...³¹

(II John 9-10). "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17).

²⁹Brought up in the evangelical wing of the German Reformed Church, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is considered in theological circles to be the effective founder of modernistic theology. He majored on analysis of the conditions of piety as a psychological phenomenon in individuals, and viewed the knowledge of God as being something other than a body of doctrine propositionally revealed. Hence the Bible dropped away from central focus in theology, and "experience" became the central emphasis. Notably, Schleiermacher's upbringing was in a devout family influenced deeply by the Moravians, a branch of German pietism.

³⁰Cf. B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, especially the first chapter (pp. 13ff).

³¹*Op. cit.*, p. 14.

Critique

Everything above could have been experienced by a Jesuit; in fact it has an uncanny resemblance to the “spiritual exercises” of Ignatius Loyola. Notable is all absence of reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Technically, and theologically, it differs little from some of the experiences of Hindu mystics. The phrase “whether in the body or out of it” is pretentious in that it parallels Jones’ experience with the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 12:2ff., thereby gaining for the subject a quasi-apostolic, if not an outright para-apostolic standing amongst his peers.

The fire “percolating through my whole nature” out-Isaiahs Isaiah (Isaiah 6) ... another pretentious device enhancing the standing of the subject to quasi-prophetic, if not outright prophetic, status.

In that the ministry of the Holy Ghost is to reveal Christ and to glorify Him (cf. John 16:8-14), the absence of this note in the above testimony invalidates it as Christian, and would categorize it as being no more than some form of somnambulist mysticism ... the end-result of seeking an “experience” instead of seeking Christ through the medium of His revealed word, i.e., Scripture.

2) R. B. Jones, minister of Porth Baptist Tabernacle, Rhondda Valley.

Dr. Meyer [a prominent Keswick leader] ... came to us ... He said to each one of us, “What is it that *you* want?” I told him, “I don’t know for certain but one thing I do know—I want the Holy Spirit.” [Then he said] “You want the Spirit; well then, take hold of Him. I see you are like the Jews waiting for a sign. Yet all you need to do is to take hold of the Spirit whom He has given to you.” A new world opened up for me. Now I saw it ... Next Sunday ... they somehow knew that there was a new man in the pulpit.³²

Critique

Again, there is no reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. And this too, in the testimony of one of the big names in the “Keswick” stream of ministry. In fact, this testimony is totally vacuous. Underlying the structure of the assertions made here is pure Finneyism, that the Holy Spirit is somehow available to be “taken hold of” and utilized and that as and when the subject so desires.

³²B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, p. 15.

3) Rev. Keri Evans, minister of Priory Street Congregational Church, Carmarthen.

In an afternoon meeting, which was addressed by Mrs. Penn-Lewis, God's train filled the temple, and when she asked us at the close to bow our heads, and for everyone who accepted Christ as Lord to say, "yes, Lord," after a hard struggle I was helped to do so ... I was baptised with streams of life-giving, cleansing, transforming power for about half an hour, that made me feel clean and healthy and joyous to the very depths of my being.

Critique

Evans is referring here to the activities of a woman preacher, Mrs. Jesse Penn Lewis, another big name on the "Keswick" circuit of those days. For all their earnest desire for "deepening" the spiritual life of the churches, here they fly in the face of Scripture. Claiming the influences of the Holy Spirit they yet deny the injunctions laid down by that same Spirit against women preachers. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: *for it is a shame for women to speak in the church*" (I Cor. 14:34-35), and "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim. 2:11-12).

Again, the subject is totally misinformed about "accepting Christ as Lord," portraying it as something arrived at after a "hard struggle" presumably lasting only the duration of part of the meeting he was attending. Bowing to the lordship of Christ is scripturally conversion, and the struggle to maintain that submission is a life-long activity thenceforth, punctuated by much trial and tribulation. But here we see Keswick mysticism in the raw, with its mistaken notion that conversion is "believing that Jesus died for you" and that you can believe this as the first step of faith, and yet still not accept Christ as Lord. The whole thing is a damnable heresy of the first order. It makes no sense to "accept Jesus as your Saviour" unless first of all, you are under a dreadful, overwhelming conviction, that the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in and through Scripture (and not from any other source) is Lord, and your Lord, Lord over you, and that by the infinite dignity of His person alone can you truly comprehend what sin is, what *your* sin is, and what can be the only possible remedy for that sin ... the

very blood of the Lord Christ. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” says John (I John 5:1). It requires the supernatural activity of the Holy Ghost to effectuate this in the heart of any sinner (John 16:8-14). And this is the crux of saving faith, revolving around the identity of the biblical Jesus. This is clearly evinced in the question the Lord put to his disciples, “Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” (Matt. 16:13-17). After the disciples had summarised the various opinions about the identity of the Lord, he then turned the question on them “whom say ye that I am?” “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” responded Peter, to which the Lord exclaimed: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, *but my Father in heaven.*”³³ Until one has come to a settled conviction that the biblical Jesus is the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God, it makes no sense to talk about going to this Christ for forgiveness of sins, for unless this biblical Jesus *is the Christ*, then who is He to forgive anybody anything?

Again, in recounting the “spiritual experience” of the “baptism” the subject is totally caught up with various phenomena, and apparently oblivious to the glory and beauty of the Lord Christ. Manifestly this again is an experience duplicable in the testimony of Jesuitism or Hinduism. Keri Evans was quite renowned and characterised as a “bit of a mystic” in Wales, yet nobody appears to have seen anything dangerous in this, then nor since.

4) Rev. Joseph Jenkins, minister of the Tabernacle Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Newquay, Cardiganshire. Reported testimony:

[On his knees that memorable night, he refused] to loose his grip on his Lord until He had blessed him, and indeed he was blessed for he was clothed with strength from above, and he knew it ... when he rose up to take his seat a strange blue flame took hold of him until he was almost completely covered. It rose, as far as he could gather, from the floor of the room and billowed up, encircling him. It retreated and returned a second time, and then retreated and returned again, but he did not know its meaning then any more than he did a quarter of a century afterwards, but he

³³Cf. John Owen: “... as though the first thing which any one living under the means of grace is exhorted to believe were, that Christ died for him in particular;—both which are notoriously false ...” (*Works*, vol. 10, page 314). The idiosyncratic testimony of Keri Evans on this point is found in B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival*, p. 15.

connected its outward manifestation with the pure communion that had existed between him and his God.³⁴

Critique

First, one notes Rev. Jenkins was “clothed with strength from above, and he knew it.” How did he “know it?” And is it not the case that those biblical men of God who witnessed in the power of the Holy Spirit were empowered to confront the theological errors of their day unflinchingly? And did not their “power” always operate in association with the Word of God?

We find nothing in the Bible paralleling the above report concerning the “blue flame.” This fact, and the fact that the subject himself “did not know its meaning” at the time nor even 25 years later both indicate that the whole thing is somehow redundant as to real spiritual value, and would be so even to a Jesuit or a Hindu. And in all this, the subject makes no reference to the glory and beauty of the Lord Christ. What is a blue flame compared to the Son of God? How much better the earnest plaint of those “certain Greeks” who came to Philip asking “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:20-21).

These four testimonies have been selected here from a range of examples as being representative of what was happening to a whole group of ministers. One further testimony as given by B. P. Jones is the only one that carries a semblance of orthodoxy, that by the little known Rev. J. T. Job. He speaks at least of the Lord Christ, the only one to do so. But his testimony to Christ is wrapped up in the mysticism of how he “felt the Holy Spirit like a deluge of light causing my whole nature to tremble,” and “I saw Jesus Christ—my nature became as a small drop at his feet: and I saw myself—and I despised it!” At least his perspective vis a vis his own nature in the light of Christ is orthodox as far as it goes, but his claim to have seen the Lord Christ is fanaticism. It is evident that in the New Testament there are hardly any Scripture testimonies of anyone outside of Judaea actually “seeing the risen Christ,” and one remembers Scriptures like I Peter 1:8: “Whom having *not seen*, ye love; in whom, though now *ye see him not*, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” It is not necessary therefore, in order to the full joy of believing, to actually see a vision of the Lord Christ. Experience amongst Pentecostals has taught us that experiences of “visions of Jesus” can be combined with a worldly and materialistic disposition.

Now it is not suggested here that in their whole continuing ministry in the churches all these men had nothing at all to say about Christ. Neither is it

³⁴B. P. Jones, *Voices from the Welsh Revival 1904-05*, p. 17.

suggested here that religious “experience” is a bad thing. What is advanced here, however, is that according to these testimonies the “high point” of spiritual experience in these men’s pilgrimages was, excepting the one dubious instance adumbrated immediately above, totally devoid of any reference to the Son of God. This immediately betrays the origin and scope of their “experiences.” Indeed, deviation at this point is to be expected in all those who “seek after the Spirit” himself, instead of seeking after Christ, and engaging in that search prayerfully through the means of studying and applying God’s Word. One looks in vain amongst these “revivalists” for the kind of testimony evident in the first volume of John Owen’s *Works*, for instance, where he centres on the “glory of Christ.” Prolix and difficult as the Puritan may be, he is nevertheless infinitely more edifying and sure-footedly scriptural than the kaleidoscopic mysticism advanced by the Welsh revivalist school of 1904.

The last named minister in the above quartet, Rev. Joseph Jenkins of the “blue flame” experience, subsequently went on to exhort his congregation at Newquay to advance to the same spiritual level as he had recently experienced. It was thus, on the second Sunday in February 1904, in a youth meeting following the morning service at Jenkin’s church, that the “little girl” stood up to testify that she “loved the Lord Jesus with all her heart.” Romanticism has embellished the story, she was not so little. Photographs of her indicate an age of at least 15, and the young Florrie Evans was certainly old enough to understand the advice given her by her minister when she responded to his exhortations for “deepening” the spiritual life. What she actually did was to stand up in the youth meeting and *not* the main chapel service. And what she actually said was:

I am unable to say very much today but I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart—he died for me.

These seem more the words of a thinking young woman, rather than a “little girl,” and from a letter (recently discovered) written by her minister, it appears she was actually 20 years of age at the time. Whatever the young Florrie had experienced, it evidently engaged her deeply in spiritual matters. Whether the “Lord Jesus” that she believed in and loved with all her heart was a the scriptural Lord Christ we have no way of knowing.³⁵ But true, her words certainly did spark a wave of emotional response that began to spread throughout that chapel and surrounding districts. A general quickening of some sort seemed to be at hand in churches long under the dead hand of modernist unbelief. Also, the

ministers involved in this movement, being under the influence of Keswickism, did make some efforts at preaching sometimes, at least. What concerns us here however is the tendency of Keswickism to an heretical understanding of the Redeemer and His work. Fundamental to the "experience" focus in all this is the notion that the individual can deduce from the "experience" the reality of God in his/her life, be the experience one of seeing a "blue flame" or "fire percolating through my whole being." In short, the "experience" becomes the epistemological "archimedian point" in the subject's life, resulting in a quickened sense of assurance about God and personal salvation. Subsequent to such an experience, ministers, who had previously been dry and boring, suddenly manifested a lively conviction about their preaching and their beliefs. It is however, all of the essence of mysticism. Non-Christians can and do experience similar phenomena in their spiritual searching, and make the same deductions from it, their conscious faith however being invested with the information of Scriptures or teachings vastly different to and disparate from the Christian Bible. From the same "blue flame," as it were, one could argue that one could be "quickened" with assurance of the truth of Islam, of Buddhism, of Hinduism, or as we saw in an earlier article, of the animist faith of the Eskimos. In short, there is no logical axiom intrinsic to a "blue flame experience" for inducing assurance in one particular God any more than another, or indeed in any God at all. It depends on the predilections of the person experiencing the phenomena. Doubtless, a Freudian psychoanalyst experiencing a "blue flame" vision would simply deduce that he was hallucinating, and that back of it all was some sublimated sexual repression.

To be continued (DV) .

³⁵This is important. How many converts are made who love a *false* Jesus? How many have a conception of Jesus which is unscriptural? To say that such "converts" have been "reconciled" to God and "love the Saviour" is gratuitous, since the "Jesus" they adore is a projection of either false doctrine or their own imaginations, or both. The ramifications of this are frightening. How dare ministers and office-bearers neglect the absolute necessity of proper expository preaching?