
The Welsh Outpouring 2013

A Church Growth Perspective

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Summary

From April 10th 2013, a series of meetings started in Victory Church Cwmbran that has become known as the Welsh Outpouring, or even the Cwmbran Outpouring. Because my research in modelling church growth has been influenced by past Christian revivals, I have taken a keen interest in the progress of the outpouring. However, my work in church growth is not merely of academic interest, it comes from a desire to see God's kingdom grow and bring more people to Christ. As such, my work is a mixture of the analysis of a mathematician, a system dynamicist, and a person who loves Jesus and who wants to be part of the blessing. I have used my blog to analyse the outpouring, but each time I have been caught up in what God is doing. This document collects together the six blogs I have written to date, plus typos! They originally appeared on my [blog](#).

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Contagion in Cwmbran: A New "Welsh Outpouring"?

Thursday, 9 May 2013

It would be a brave person to make the claim that there is a new Welsh Revival. Wales is known as the Land of Revivals, with at least 15 revivals between 1762 and 1862 [1], plus the beginnings of Methodism in 1735 and, of course, the famous one of 1904-5. The largest revival was that of 1859, but it is the 1904-5 revival, associated with Evan Roberts that comes to most people's minds first. It is the best-documented revival, played a large part in the start of Pentecostalism, and, sadly, is the last revival to hit this land. After this period of time, and with so many to compare with, it would be a very brave person indeed to claim there is a new revival in Wales.

Perhaps because of this reputation for revivals there has developed a large amount of cynicism about revival in the contemporary Welsh church, especially in evangelical and older charismatic circles. I have preached in churches where people have assured me that revivals never really happened; it was a social phenomenon where people had to join the churches of their employers to keep their jobs. Evangelical ministers who have sought my modelling help in church growth are happy to include any management technique or church growth method in the model but shun any mention of an outpouring of the Spirit. The words of Duncan Campbell, preacher in the Hebridean revival 1949-53, are still true: "*Revival is a sign spoken against*" [2].

However, in the last few weeks that "Sign Spoken Against" has become talked about in Wales again. On April 10th, there started in Victory Church Cwmbran what has been described as the "Cwmbran Outpouring" or even the "Wales Outpouring". On that night, in a regular mid-week meeting of the church, a man who had been confined to a wheelchair for 10 years was dramatically healed. Such was the effect on the church that a considerable number of other healings followed. A key feature of this meeting had been seeking the presence of God. Since then, the church has met most evenings to experience the presence and power of God and pass it on to others. Attendance at the meetings has mushroomed as word has got out, largely by word of mouth as far as I can see. A fuller story can be found on the church's website [3] and the many online testimonies [4].

So, two questions immediately came to my mind:

1. Does the growth of the movement follow the pattern of the Limited Enthusiasm model of church growth, with enthusiasts passing the contagion one to another? This is a question with my scientist's hat on.
2. Is this a real revival/outpouring where people are being transformed by God's presence so that they, in turn, can transform others? This is a question with my believer's hat on. I wear more than one hat at the same time!

It was with the latter question largely in mind that I decided to visit Victory church in Cwmbran a week ago, on Wednesday, 1st May.

The "service" was an orthodox charismatic style meeting: A large amount of sung worship, very directed preaching, many testimonies of healings and conversions and prayer ministry. It was similar in style to the Bay of the Holy Spirit revival, except the speaker that night did not

shout as much as Nathan Morris! The worship was very enthusiastic, and the testimonies, read out second-hand, were a real blessing and an indication that God was at work. All along the emphasis was the presence of God, and that clearly affected the whole meeting.

Interestingly, there was no hype, no bringing people up to the stage to be healed. The meeting was not a show for spectators. They even tried to discourage people from falling over. There were envelopes on each chair for an offering, but they got completely forgotten and no offering was taken. That must go down as a work of the Holy Spirit, given the obsession the Christian church usually has with money! I gather that “no offering” is their normal practice.

The number attending that night was so large that they needed stewards in the car park. It needs to be remembered this is 5 nights a week, so this has attracted a considerable number of people very quickly, reminiscent of the 1904-5 revival. There was a good variety of all ages present, but a larger than average number in their 20s.

Staying around at the end I saw some very enthusiastic young people connected with the church pray together spontaneously. It was clear that there had been a work of God going on for some time in this church, with many converted, some from tough backgrounds. Lives are being changed and enthusiasts made. This 4-week-old outpouring is, I think, a specific phase of something quite profound going on between church and community. So, the whole work of this church is a sign of a revival movement.

Neither is the work at Victory Church in isolation. Their passion for church planting, discipleship and conversions from tough backgrounds is something they share with other movements, such as Destiny church in Scotland, with whom Victory Church have connections. Victory calls their churches “campuses”, a term also used by Mars Hill Seattle, who are perhaps the model for this style of church planting movement Mars Hill are themselves a candidate for a revival. Thus, the work at Victory and this current outpouring is a part of something much bigger.

So, is the “Cwmbran Outpouring” a revival? I decided to compare my experience that evening with that of the Lewis revival, as told by Duncan Campbell [2]. So I listened to the tape of his talk again. One thing is clear: the Lewis revival came across as far more serious, with a considerable amount of conviction of sin and weeping. In Victory that night, the meeting was far more informal. People could chat with each other and even share a joke. A purist could easily dismiss Victory as a candidate for genuine revival.

But this is a very unfair comparison. Christianity in the Hebrides in 1949, and even now, has a far more serious culture. People do not even speak to each other in a church building. That was the culture in which their revival occurred. However, our church culture has become very informal, for very understandable reasons. Christianity in the past developed a forced “Sunday seriousness”, which covered over a religious hypocrisy. It had a “don’t do that” mentality, but no joy. Morality without a living experience of Jesus. Evan Roberts had accused the church leaders of “*making religion too gloomy*”. Something had to give. We had to become real and allow true emotions to show. But now we are informal to the point of being casual with God; and that is the context in which any outpouring will start. It will not change overnight. Cultures take longer to change than people. Thus, we cannot expect the same degree of “seriousness” in a contemporary outpouring as in past revivals, certainly not for the time being.

Another potential criticism is the amount of publicity attached to the outpouring. It could be accused of being a fad or craze, attracting people for its novelty value rather than a spiritual contagion. Iain Murray, one of the most astute contemporary writers on revival, advises great care in the use of publicity in revival due to the dangers of premature assessment and spiritual pride [5]. I am not sure there has been that much publicity in this case. Although it is present on the Internet, most people are hearing by word of mouth, which would include Facebook and the like. As far as I can see, the media has not shown any interest. The church does not have the same significance in political and media circles compared with the Hebrides in 1949 or Wales in 1904. That is a blessing! Changed lives, not media hype, is the only advertisement for God's glory. Given the nature of the healings at the church, it is difficult to see how they could keep it quiet in Christian circles. We certainly need to pray for wisdom for the leaders as they handle this.

So, as for question 2, I have seen nothing so far to cast any doubt on the work at Victory being an outpouring of the Spirit. But I would add that the ongoing work at the church is just as much part of the revival as these meetings. And when the meetings cease, I hope and pray that work, which aims to plant 50 churches in 10 years, will continue with fresh zeal because re-populating our land with the sort of churches that seek conversions and change lives through the presence of God is the revival we need.

However, one thing threw me in the meeting a week ago, unlike other people there that night, I felt nothing! I enjoyed the meeting. I participated willingly, but compared to similar works I had experienced in the past, I had no sense of God's presence. Yet I knew this was because of me, not the meeting! But since then, I have thought about virtually nothing else but Jesus! It has taken me over a week to take all this in. That He has grabbed hold of my life and won't let go! Would I go back? Absolutely – I would go anywhere Jesus is present. But I don't need to GO anywhere – He is present where I am. I had no sense of that before I went to Victory, but I have since. Logic demands that Victory church is where I picked up this sense of His presence. I caught the divine contagion! The words of John Kilpatrick, of the Pensacola and Bay of the Holy Spirit revivals, come to mind: "*Once you get used to the presence (of God) nothing else satisfies*" [6]. I needed to go to Victory to be reminded of this and be satisfied again.

A friend of mine said last Sunday that we have been waiting for the wind to change. My experience of Victory is that this move is more than a meeting – the wind is changing. I think it has been changing for some time, and this outpouring is one step in that process. Should you go to the Cwmbran outpouring? Certainly! But if the wind is changing, I think we will find that many such outpourings will be occurring, and that God has something even bigger in store for us.

So, what about my questions? I have not really done justice to question 2. I need to go back to the Bible to really test the authenticity of any claim to revival. And as for question 1, "is it following the models?", that needs more time and data. I will defer both questions to future posts. For now, I want to enjoy Jesus and sail with the wind!

Notes and References

- [1] *Favoured with Frequent Revivals: Revivals in Wales 1762-1862*, D. Geraint Jones, The Heath Christian Trust, 2001.

- [2] He states that revival is a sign spoken against early in his talk on the events of the revival on the Isle of Lewis. Campbell also refers to it in the preface of Arthur Wallis' book on revival: *In the Day of Thy Power*, Christian Literature Crusade, 1956; who has a chapter called "A Sign Spoken Against".
- [3] Victory Church web site <http://www.victorychurch.co.uk/> The regular updates and the sermons of pastor Richard Taylor are big help in understanding the spirit of the outpouring. They are no longer available on their website (2024).
- [4] For example: [Outpouring in Cwmbran, The Welldigger](#).
- [5] *Pentecost Today?* Iain Murray, Banner of Truth, 1998, p168.
- [6] I have heard him say this in a number of sermons. However, I am quoting this from a contribution he made to the Lydia Stanley album, *Above the Heavens*. Quoted on the track: *Let your Glory Cover Me* (reprise).
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A Second Visit to the Cwmbran Outpouring

Thursday, 23 May 2013

It is now over a month since Victory Church in Cwmbran opened their doors five nights a week to share with other people the work that God has been doing in their church. After my first visit I asked two questions:

- 1) Does this outpouring fit the limited enthusiasm model of church growth?
- 2) Is this a candidate for a genuine revival?

For those not sure what the Cwmbran outpouring is, then see my previous post and visit the blog of David Pike for a series of in-depth accounts [1]. (Or you could go yourself! [2])

On Thursday, May 16th, I made another visit to one of the special church services, full of expectations after my last visit, not because of what happened there but because of what I had brought away with me. I must confess my motives were not primarily to address either of the two questions but more a desire for another “touch from the King”. However, I promised to return to both questions, so here goes.

I will address the second question first: Is this outpouring a genuine revival? This is the harder of the two questions to answer, as it is much easier to judge whether an event is a revival after some length of time has elapsed. The early stages of a revival often have too many conflicting signs. Think of the Welsh 1904-5 revival. Did the people in West Wales, at New Quay, or Blaenannerch realise they were in a revival? At New Quay, it could have been argued that it was a very lively church youth group witnessing to Christ, but no more than is expected of the church. In Blaenannerch, there was a remarkable convention, but perhaps no different to our modern-day conventions such as Keswick or Spring Harvest. What changed people’s views of these events was the 12 months that followed, the rapid growth of conversions, and their authenticity. Then, in hindsight, the work in West Wales clearly stood out as a revival to many people, rather than just being the opinion of a few writers in the local West Wales papers at that time. For anyone not familiar with the early years of the Welsh revival, I produced a timeline and analysis a few years back [3].

There are several signs of a genuine revival. One is that people’s lives are changed by God. I will only deal with this sign for now. From my visit on May 16th, I will present two pieces of evidence.

- 1) While queuing in the foyer, waiting for the doors to open, some of the young men broke out in spontaneous singing. As far as I could see, these were local people. After a few songs, in which most of those waiting participated, one of the men introduced another who had just been converted. The convert gave a brief testimony, which included deliverance from drug addiction. This testimony was a clear sign of a changed life, and this was typical of many such testimonies from the church.
- 2) After the meeting was over, two ladies, both members of the church and Christians for some years, turned to me and asked me what I thought of the events at their church. They had both been worshipping God enthusiastically throughout. They struggled to explain how much their church, and they, had changed over the last

month but knew it was of God. Then one said, “I don’t understand it, but I feel I have won the spiritual lottery!” I think only God can come up with a testimony like that!

Chatting with others in the church, their chief conversation was the change that God had worked in them and those they knew, not the meeting or its style. Now, there will be many who will criticise the style of the meetings, worship-band worship, spiritual gifts, dancing, etc. Apparently, this style is relatively new to this church, though not new to many of the visitors for whom this is business as usual. However, these aspects of the church are largely a cultural wrapper and have to be distinguished from the contents. You could go to New Wine, a modern Pentecostal church, or a charismatic Anglican church and have exactly the same style – the same wrapper, but not experience what is happening in Victory at Cwmbran – not the same content. You could strip away the charismatic wrapper at Victory and replace it with a traditional one, that indefinable something would still be there.

What is it that is different? What is that indefinable something? I must admit I have racked my brains for the last week to find words to describe it. The best I can do is 1 Peter 1:8, “*Joy unspeakable and full of glory*”. It is this I see in the lives of the people there, and that can be experienced by anyone who is genuinely seeking God. It is the only way I can explain my own experience. Ignore the cultural wrapper – look at the contents – look to God – and you will find that “indefinable something” that smacks of revival.

So, should the outpouring divest itself of its charismatic wrapper? Perhaps a period from Welsh history can help. In the Methodist revival of the 18th century, the Welsh Calvinist Methodists were distinguished from the English Wesleyan ones not only in theology but also in their behaviour in worship, notably leaping and jumping. The Welsh Methodists were known as “Welsh Jumpers”, and their worship behaviour, which came to the fore in the Llangeitho revival of 1762-4, became a bit of a tourist attraction and brought much criticism from other Christians [4]. Even John Wesley remarked on them in his journal:

“for anyone has a mind to give out a verse of a hymn. They sing over and over with all their might, perhaps over thirty, yea forty times. Meanwhile the bodies of two or three, sometimes ten or twelve are violently agitated; and they leap up and down, in all many of postures, frequently for hours. So he (Satan) serves himself of their simplicity in order to wear them out, and to bring discredit on the work of God.” [5]

The response of Daniel Rowland, the Welsh Methodist leader, serves to warn any who try to dismiss revival on the grounds of people’s cultural behaviour:

“You English blame us, the Welsh, and speak against us and say ‘Jumpers! Jumpers!’ But we, the Welsh, have something also to allege against you, and we most justly say of you ‘Sleepers! Sleepers!’” [6] (Apologies to any English people reading this!)

Now, the first question: Does this fit the limited enthusiasm model of church growth? (Hopefully, that does not come as an anti-climax after what I have just said!) Clearly, the church has grown through conversion and is still growing. From the experience that night, as discussed above, the outpouring is definitely generating enthusiastic people!

However, the enthusiasts in the model are more than enthusiastic people. Their enthusiasm must be channelled into making converts. From the incident in the foyer, there was one young man who had brought another to faith. One is hardly scientific proof, but I have heard of other cases, and there does not need to be many such cases for significant growth to result.

As it turns out, they have just had a baptismal service for over 60 people converted since the revival began [1]. So, looking good!

But we need to go further. The effectiveness of enthusiasts is not just about how many converts they make but also how many fellow enthusiasts they make out of those converts and out of existing Christians. Rapid accelerating reinforcing loop growth comes from enthusiasts reproducing themselves, making more enthusiasts. In the early stages, the renewal phase, most of the new enthusiasts come from existing Christians. It is only later that the balance tips to more enthusiasts coming from the new converts. Then, growth explodes. It is too early to tell whether this will happen in the Cwmbran outpouring, but the renewal phase seems well underway, with Christians not only getting a fresh experience of God but having their expectations raised so that they can be used in the conversion of others.

Thus, the challenge to any Christian who goes to this outpouring is: what are you going to do about this experience? Do you keep going back to get the experience again? Very understandable! Or do you turn that experience into practical steps to challenge others with the gospel? If your life is genuinely changed and you speak with the boldness that comes from the Holy Spirit, then you will see new converts, even new enthusiasts. Then, you can be confident this is a genuine revival.

If you have not been to Victory church, would you go and find out for yourself if what I am saying stands up to scrutiny? Would you ignore the cultural wrapper and look at the contents? Would you go with that thirst for Jesus Christ that is the precursor for any revival? Would you take that outpouring back to your own church? If you have ever had the slightest desire for revival in your life, church and land, then there can be no better time than now to pray for an outpouring of the Spirit where you are.

Notes and References

[1] [The Welldigger](#).

[2] [Victory Church](#).

[3] [Church Growth Modelling](#).

[4] *Revival and its Fruit*, Roberts E & Gruffydd RG. Evangelical Library of Wales, 1981.

[5] *Revival and its Fruit*, Roberts E & Gruffydd RG. Evangelical Library of Wales, 1981, p.24. Quoted from Wesley's Journal August 1763.

[6] *Revival and its Fruit*, Roberts E & Gruffydd RG. Evangelical Library of Wales, 1981, p.35. Quoted from "*A Memoir of the Rev Daniel Rowlands*", Owen J, 1840, pp. 85-86, available as a free eBook in Google Books. Both "Rowland" and "Rowlands" are used for his surname, depending on sources.

When the Presence of God Persists ...

Sunday, 16 June 2013

Models and Reality

People sometimes ask me how I can model church growth using mathematics, given that it is God who grows the church. I can answer that in two ways. Firstly, we construct mathematical models of many things in the world, e.g. in physics or economics. All are open to a quantitative understanding. Nevertheless all are under God's control and made by Him. We can model the motion of the planets, but it is God who is moving them. He is just doing it in a way we can understand – sometimes. Church growth is no different, except we understand even less!

However, and more importantly, a model is only an attempt to understand reality. It makes assumptions that make reality easier to understand. But the model is not the reality. The two are very different. *We* construct the model, but *God* constructs and controls the reality!

Cwmbran Outpouring

I must admit this was not the blog I intended to write. However, the events of the Cwmbran Outpouring are daily turning my thinking on its head. As soon as I have one idea, another replaces it. Reality has overtaken the model!

After my latest visit to Victory church something really profound struck me. Not only is there a powerful presence of God at the meetings, but it is also even more powerful in the days following. The presence of Jesus persists. It is almost impossible to do anything without thinking about Him, praying and worshipping. As if one wants to do anything without Him anyway! His “presence” persists and persists. This is the hallmark of an authentic move of God and, as I will try and explain, the hallmark of revival.

To explain how the persistence of God's presence is connected to revival and church growth, I am going to use a model. Thus, this blog is not *about* my experiences at Victory Church this time, but it comes *out of* my experience. There are now many accounts of the outpouring on the Internet. If you are unfamiliar with this outpouring, please follow up on the links [1].

What I wish to show is that when the presence of God persists, church growth is rapid and reaches high levels.

Church Growth

To the model. The central hypothesis is that growth in the church is driven by enthusiasts. These are the Christians who pass the faith on to unbelievers who then get converted. Enthusiasts are contagious Christians who spread faith in Christ a bit like a disease is spread. Some, but not all, of the new converts become contagious themselves, not just Christians but enthusiasts. This is the limited enthusiasm model of church growth [2]. The more enthusiasts, the more converts, thus the more enthusiasts – the feedback loop of growth, figure 1:

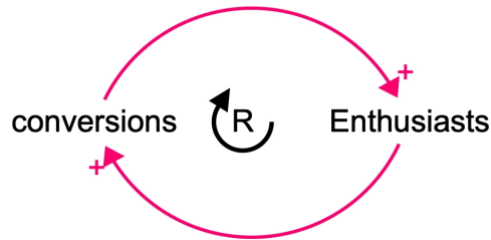


Figure 1: Church Growth Through Enthusiasts Feedback Loop

The R is for reinforcing as it accelerates growth.

Enthusiasts do not stay enthusiasts, not so much because they lose their love for the Lord, but because they exhaust their network of unbelievers or even lose them as friends as they participate more in the church, figure 2:

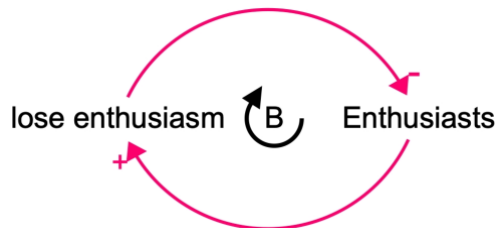


Figure 2: Loss of Enthusiasm Loop Resisting Growth

The B is for balancing as it opposes growth. The key to church growth is for enthusiasts to reproduce themselves faster than they are lost.

Revival

There are many definitions of revival. At its heart, revival is when the presence of God is revealed in the souls of people. The word is usually used when many people are so *baptised in the Spirit* at the same time [3]. It is also used when a whole community is *saturated with God* [4]. However, there is always an individual experience of God, a touch *from the King* that *changes everything* [5]. Indeed, *if we are being revived, then it is revival* [6]. When the presence of God is manifest in the soul of a person such that their life is transformed and their spiritual life renewed, then there is revival. So don't ask, "Is it revival?" But ask yourself, "Am I being revived?"

Revival Growth

The Biblical name for revival is an "Outpouring of the Spirit". The revival historian J. Edwin Orr, made the case that when man cooperates with such outpourings, rapid church growth follows [7]. This is "revival growth". Revival is the spiritual work of God in man, the manifestation of His presence in the soul; church growth is the result.

I must be clear here: we **do not** seek the presence of God to obtain church growth, we seek Him because of who He is. The church's growth is the result, a wonderful result all the same. It is a double blessing: we enjoy Jesus at a personal level, and we see people saved as the church grows.

You can have church growth without revival. Principles can be applied that enhance growth, just like any organisation. This is OK as far as it goes, but when you have *principles without the presence, you have a kingdom without a King* [8].

You can have revival without church growth. But God revives his people not just to bless them but also to save the world. Thus, the intention is that church growth results from revival.

Revival growth is remarkably rapid as enthusiasts reproduce themselves far more effectively than in “normal” times. They also make enthusiasts out of existing believers, even old-timers, and they are very effective in conversion, all the work of the Holy Spirit, of course, in believer and unbeliever alike. What I want to show is that the more the presence of God persists in the believer and His church, the more the church grows.

Presence of God and Church Growth

When the presence comes upon us, it manifests itself in our spiritual lives. Not only is our experience of Him heightened, but we pray more, read the Bible and practice it more, we witness more, we talk about Him more. Our whole life is affected, and we can't get enough of the things of God. Anyone who has been at the Cwmbran Outpouring can testify to this.

But this affects the spiritual life of a church. Its spiritual temperature goes up. In this, there is another feedback loop: the more enthusiasts, the more who gather, pray and seek God's presence, the more his presence [9], the more spiritual life in the people, the more life, the more passion for the lost and thus the more effective they are in conversion giving even more enthusiasts. The church and its people get spiritually hotter and hotter. Pray -> presence -> life -> passion. At the end of the day, *Passion for the lost is the only key to church growth* [10]. When the presence of God persists the passion for the lost persists and conversions follow.

This feedback loop is also reinforcing, figure 3:

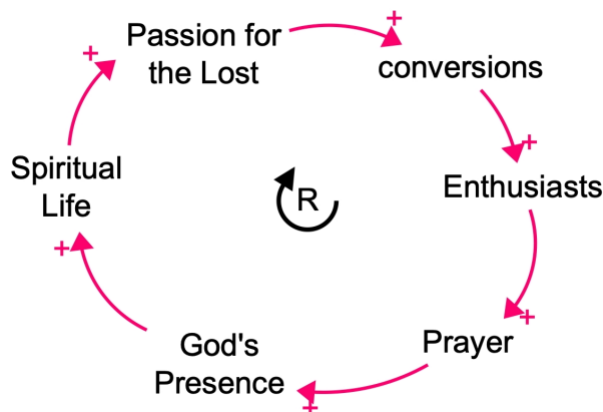


Figure 3: Enthusiasm Feedback Loop Enhancing Spiritual Life

The effectiveness of this additional feedback loop depends on how much the spiritual life persists in the enthusiasts, and that depends on how much His wonderful presence persists in us. It is this persistence of God's presence that I have noticed about Cwmbran, it persists long after the day of the meeting has gone. And when the presence of God persists?

A research student of mine built this new feedback loop into the limited enthusiasm church growth model, and the results are remarkable [11]. The limit to the church's growth depends

on several factors, but one is how long the spiritual life of a believer persists at a high level. The longer the life persists the more the growth. When the presence of God persists church growth is dramatic.

To some computer simulations of the model. The first graph is of a church in revival growth where the spiritual life of enthusiasts fades quickly. The church grows from 10% to 15% of the community over 3 years, with growth ceasing when the church's life has gone, figure 1:

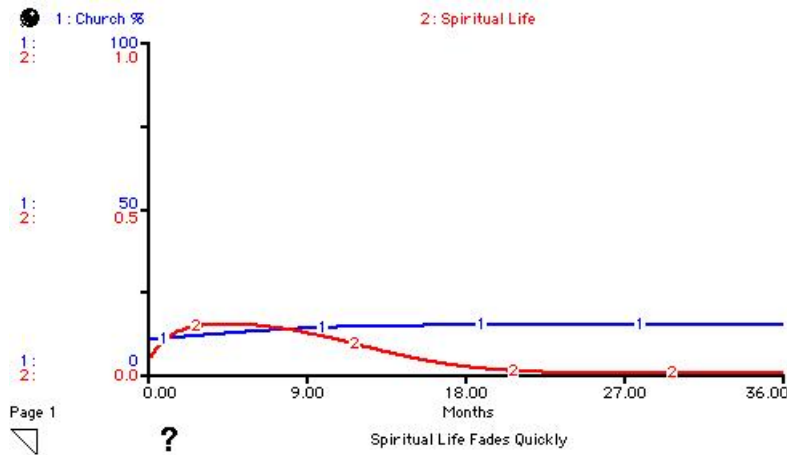


Figure 4: Spiritual Life Fades Quickly

Let the spiritual life persist in each enthusiast a little longer and fade moderately, there is little difference. Growth stops at 17% of the community:

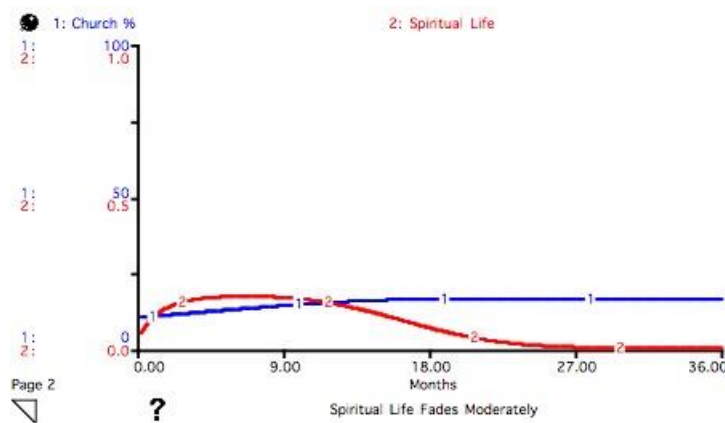


Figure 5: Spiritual Life Fades Moderately

Let the spiritual life persist a little longer again, so it now fades slowly. The change is dramatic with the church going from 10% to 75% of the community in the same time period:

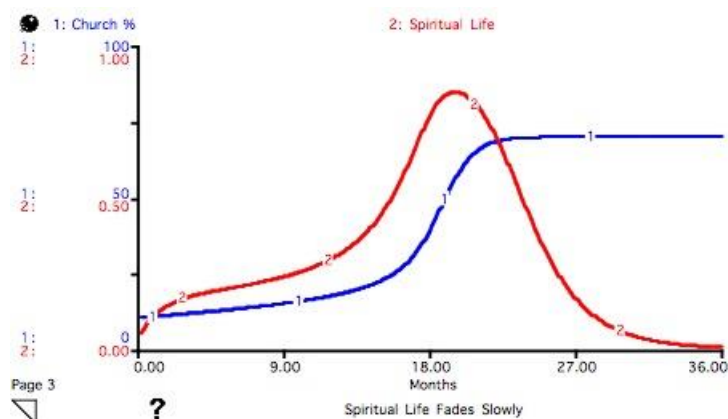


Figure 6: Spiritual Life Fades Slowly

The bulk of the community has been converted and the average spiritual life in the enthusiasts has shot through the roof about 18 months in. When the presence of God persists there is rapid growth and a church that is absolutely on fire. A dramatic tipping point [12] has occurred!

A Few Things May Puzzle You

Why does the spiritual life always disappear? **Answer:** Because over longer time periods we would need births and migration (left out of the model). In practice, there is always some level of spiritual life, and in rapid revivals, the peaks in that life end up coming in bursts. Remember activity has not ceased, just the work of God in the soul that drives people into mission. People may be doing many things, they may even feel spiritual, but it is not channelled into conversion, a passion for the lost [10] and making new enthusiasts.

Why should the presence of God fade in us? **Answer:** That is the human condition. We may spend time seeking the presence of God, have a wonderful experience and think, “That is it”, and move on! Instead, we should go on seeking His presence: *One thing I ask, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon his beauty*, Psalm 27. So do not criticise people who keep going back to centres of outpourings, like that at Cwmbran at present, this is essential for spiritual health.

70% of the community in the church seems massive. **Answer:** The trouble here is the scope of the word “community”. For many churches their community is much less than the size of their own town or neighbourhood. It is God’s responsibility to pour out of His Spirit. It is our responsibility to make sure we contact as many people as possible so they may also share in what He is doing – i.e. expand our community of influence.

Conclusion

When the presence of God persists we have revival, enthusiasts, conversions, and church growth. The presence of God persists in us when He, in his mercy, shows his favour towards us. Dare we believe that he is showing his favour to Wales again? It is so easy to be cynical and say, “No, it's not revival, just another set of meetings and hype”. And believe me, there are many “Jonahs” saying this on the Internet. But ask yourself, what do you want? Do you want His presence? Do you want it to persist? Do you want a deep spiritual life in Christ? Do you want a church on fire? Do you want to see people saved – conversions? Then get to an

outpouring meeting, whether Cwmbran or elsewhere, and let Him make you the enthusiast that He needs for His revival.

P.S. A bit of a more technical post than usual. If there are things you did not follow, post your questions, and I will answer the best I can.

Notes and References

- [1] See [Victory Church](#). [The Welldigger](#). [MrClydeT](#), [Dying to Live](#). My previous blogs
- [2] See [the publications page](#) of church growth modelling.
- [3] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Joy Unspeakable, chapter 3, “I would define a revival as a large number, a group of people, being baptised by the Holy Spirit at the same time”. Kingsway Publications.
- [4] “A community saturated by God” was Duncan Campbell’s favourite description of revival. Quoted from Brian Edwards, Revival, chapter 1, Evangelical Press.
- [5] The song “Just One Touch from the King” by Godfrey Birtill has been the anthem of the Cwmbran Outpouring.
- [6] Tweet by David Pike ([@daipike](#)). “If we are being revived, then it is revival.” 9/6/13. (No longer Available)
- [7] J. Edwin Orr, [The Outpouring of the Spirit in Revival and Awakening and its Issue in Church Growth](#), British Church Growth Association, available at Church Growth Modelling, by permission.
- [8] Tweet by MrClydeT ([@MrClydeT](#)) (a pastor at Victory Church Cwmbran. “[When you have principles without the presence, you have a kingdom without a king!](#)” 9/6/13.
- [9] Fear not we do not attempt to model the presence of God! We take the link directly from enthusiasts to spiritual life. How could one measure his presence? Having said that a former student of mine has been at the meetings 2-3 days a week since the start. When I asked her what was different about these meetings, she said they were taking the presence of God to a whole new level. So there is a sense it can be “measured” not by numbers but by comparison to past experiences.
- [10] Tweet by Richard Taylor ([@swiftaylor](#)) founding pastor of Victory Church Cwmbran. “Passion for the lost is the only key to growth. Without it, you have no one to disciple”.15/6/13. (Account no longer exists.)
- [11] J. Hayward and L. Howells. Church Growth and Spiritual Life. [Future First. April 2011](#), published by [Brierley Consultancy](#)
- [12] In mathematics, this is called a bifurcation (See [Blog](#) by Tom Fiddaman). The next comments are for mathematicians only! Epidemic models are rich with bifurcations. Most have a forward (transcritical) bifurcation between the disease-free state and the endemic state. In church growth terms, it means that for different parameter values, churches either survive or go extinct. It does not sound so profound when put that way! However, once other elements are added, the models also exhibit backward bifurcation where more than one stable endemic state can exist (subcritical), and the high states can suddenly disappear or appear (supercritical). This is a feature of the way people interact in groups, common in many epidemic models. It is a phenomenon similar to this that

happens in the church growth model with spiritual life, a small change in the persistence of that life in the believers and a high value of church “appears” and rapid growth results towards it. In system dynamics terms an extra reinforcing loop kicks in that accelerates growth. In spiritual terms the presence of God is deep, amazing and persists. Heaven on Earth!

Are We in Revival? – Wales 2013

Friday, 28 June 2013

Ever since the Cwmbran Outpouring [1] started, people have been speculating whether this is a revival, whether this is “it”, the one we have been waiting for. It has prompted much discussion as to the nature of revival. It is clear people have different understandings of the word. Only yesterday, Melanie Fields, preaching at Victory Church, felt she had to point out that the word “revival” is not in the Bible, which, of course, is true. To me, one of the most wonderful things about a work of God is that our words are inadequate to describe it, pigeonhole it, or even easily compare it to things he has done in the past. Our God always surprises, amazes and leaves us in awe as to who he is. Perish the day we think we can understand what he does! So, it is not surprising there is a big discussion about what revival is and whether we are in “it”.

As for me, I have preferred not to use the word “revival” about the current Cwmbran Outpouring because my experience there has been dominated by Jesus, his presence and his glory. Trying to give it a label adds nothing to that experience. It is more than sufficient to taste heaven on earth. However, my Church Growth Modelling project does use the word revival heavily, largely because of the way it has been used in the past 300 years, so I feel some sense of duty to unpack the word in terms of what is happening now in Wales, and of the events that have led up to this.

God does not just pour out of his Spirit for our enjoyment. They are primarily given for his glory. And his glory does not last a moment. It is being worked out over days, months, years and even centuries. I have no doubt the Cwmbran Outpouring is a phase of something else God is taking us to, and when we look back and get some glimpse of his purposes for his church and his world, it then becomes helpful to have labels, like the word “revival”. The proviso is that we must not let those labels get in the way of what he wants to do in our lives or use them to try and bring him down to our size.

Some Definitions

In my church growth modelling, I have used the three terms, renewal, revival and awakening. However, the key expression in the Bible is “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” which is an act of God where he brings powerful life into people. It is used about Pentecost: *And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh* (Acts 2:17). It is also used of later incidents such as with a group of Gentiles: *And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also* (Acts 10:45). It is clear this is something that God does to individual people, either directly, or mediated by other people such as by speaking, hand contact or baptism [2].

The definitions I use are:

Renewal. This is where God pours out his Spirit on people in the church, on believers. They become alive to spiritual things, experience the presence of God, and are set on fire, and as such, the church becomes more alive to God. Generally, this work stays in the church and does not immediately get channelled into mission and conversion, though it may bring about

church reformation. The specific example in mind was the early days of charismatic renewal in the 1960s and 1970s. There must also have been an element of renewal in the Protestant Reformation. Renewal is a “spiritual infection” inside the church. Of course, some of the church people, the believers, may well have been converted in the process of being renewed. In my models, “believers” are people who belong to the church. I make no attempt to identify their true spiritual state – too unmeasurable!

Revival. This goes further than renewal, as God pours out his Spirit on people in the church and makes them witnesses. Now, they pass the “spiritual infection” on to those outside the church, and conversions take place. God’s presence breaks out from the confines of the church. These Christians “infected by revival” are called enthusiasts in my models. The 1904-5 Welsh Revival is a classic example where the enthusiasts quickly contacted people outside the church, and the number of conversions mushroomed as many of the new converts became such enthusiasts themselves. However, from 1903 through most of 1904, there was a renewal phase where the work was largely confined to the church.

Awakening. Following J Edwin Orr [3], this is where God does a work in the people outside the church, the unbelievers and makes them open to spiritual things. That is, they are open to the witness of the enthusiasts, though some may well get converted without any human agency. A great example of this is in the Isle of Lewis revival 1949-53. Here, the churches frequently found that after church meetings were over, many of the community had been drawn to the outside of the church, under conviction of sin, without anyone having said anything to them, let alone shared the gospel with them [4]. In an awakening, the presence of God is right in the community, blurring the distinction between what is “in church” and outside it. The “revival infection” knows no boundaries.

Now, people may use some of these words differently, and some of their meanings may overlap. However, I will not get bogged down with that. What God does is bigger than the word. Indeed, “revival” is often used as a generic name for all the ideas mentioned above. In particular, the word revival is especially appropriate when the impact is so big that it makes the work a sign of how great God is. Melanie Fields made this point yesterday in the Cwmbran Outpouring, and this view was extensively taught by the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones [5]. Consequently, I will use the word “revival” as a summary of all three definitions when they act as signposts to God’s majesty and power.

The Last 50 Years

What has God been doing for the last 50 years or so? Was the Welsh revival of 1904-5 the last outpouring to hit this land, or is there continuing evidence of his revival work? Have there been signs of God’s power to bring life to his church and convert people since then? What I will attempt to do is argue that Christianity in the UK and the USA has been in various phases of revival since 1960.

The significance of 1960 is that it is the date when an American Episcopal minister, Dennis Bennett, was baptised with the Holy Spirit [6]. What was unusual was that this was a phenomenon associated only with the Pentecostal church that had crossed over into a mainstream Christian denomination. He almost certainly was not the first such person to be affected, but he became the most significant because of the attention it drew to this charismatic work among non-Pentecostals. This is a useful starting date for what became known as the Charismatic Renewal, which has moved through Christianity from the 1960s to

this day. Remember, one way of looking at a revival is a sign of God's glory, and this movement has certainly been a sign to many of who God is and what he can do.

The movement spread through all denominations of Christianity, with Anglicans such as David Harper, Michael Green and David Watson being at the forefront in the UK. There were charismatic gifts and healings in the established church! In parallel, many new churches started, notably the Restoration churches, with people like Bryn Jones, Gerald Coates and Terry Virgo. They often met in houses at that point but were having a growing impact on the church. A number of these early charismatic pioneers had been influenced by the reformed preacher Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who had preserved the older teachings on the work of the Spirit that had otherwise dropped out of fashion in the 20th century. As such, the charismatic renewal had a strong element of reviving the things that had been better known in the "days of the revivals" of the 18th and 19th centuries [7].

The work spread slowly through the 1970s, though the impact of the Jesus People in the USA drew massive attention to this move of God, even getting on the cover of Time magazine [8]. But in the 1980s, the renewal became far more visible. New churches were springing up every week, annual teaching festivals were taking place, and the worship culture of the churches was changing, with new songs appearing faster than they could be learned [9]. Even though older leaders were passing, newer ones, such as John Wimber, were replacing them. His Vineyard Movement brought many traditional evangelicals into the charismatic work of the Holy Spirit [10].

Each time the work slowed, another move took place. Revival tends to come in peaks and troughs. God does not get tired, but we do! Then, in 1994, the Toronto Blessing occurred, and the whole debate about "was this revival" opened up. But God had been renewing the church and using it to make converts since 1960. By my definitions above, it had been in revival for over 30 years! There was no shortage of places to go and get revived! If the events that came from Toronto were of God, then it was a peak in an ongoing work, not something new [10,11].

A quick pause for breath. The accusation could be made at this point: the church cannot be in revival because it has declined steadily since the war years. It is true that the church as a whole was (and still is) declining in the UK, but not the parts that were being renewed. They grew, some transfer growth, some conversions. The aggregate figures for the church are a poor measure of the work of God, and revival rarely ever affects the whole church.

Back to 1994. One of the churches affected by the Toronto Blessing was Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in London. From that point on, their Alpha Course started its phenomenal growth. Exported to churches of many denominations, this is arguably the most effective evangelistic enterprise the church has ever seen in the West. To date, over 3.3 million people have been through this course in the UK, and many conversions have taken place, as well as people brought into charismatic experience [12]. Yet again, this fits the definition of revival.

Many other events have occurred since in Pensacola, Smithton, and, most recently, Mobile, Alabama. But even more significant has been the way that charismatic renewal has fed back into the Pentecostal church it started from, making them in the USA and the UK some of the strongest and liveliest parts of the Christian church, and I suspect where much of its near future will lie.

I must admit from about 2007 onwards, I had thought charismatic renewal was really running out this time, but far from it. As the events at Cwmbarn are showing, yet another peak in a mighty 50-year work of God is occurring. It is the gathering of much that God has done over those years, intensified to a degree I think most have us have not experienced before, and it will clearly be a catalyst for what God will do next. In a few year's time, we may look back and see that Wales in 2013 was not a peak but merely the start of a much bigger awakening that God is bringing.

Impact of Past Revivals

I did not really need to start at 1960; I could go back further. How did Pentecostalism itself come about? It was the culmination of many renewal and revival movements of the 19th century, with the final spark being lit by the 1904-5 Welsh revival [13]. The same Welsh Revival sent missionaries all around the world and set off revivals in Korea, India and East Africa, to name a few places. In Korea, I was once thanked by someone for “bringing Christianity to his country” just because he knew I was Welsh! And I have had similar experiences in the rural churches of Uganda. It is humbling to see how God spreads his fire throughout the world.

So, when people ask me, “Why did the 1904-5 Welsh Revival end?” I say it just changed its phase. In reality, it brought 100 years of worldwide Holy Spirit revival, renewal, awakening and massive revival growth. God knows what He is doing! There are no mistakes and no accidents. The different phases of what we call revival are just God unfolding an amazing plan of fulfilling the great commission through his church. I am so thankful he gave this sign in 1904 that has given us such hope for the greater revivals to come.

Wales 2013

So when I am kneeling on the floor of a converted warehouse in the valley of crows[14], oblivious to all bar the presence of Jesus, I know I am part of a plan of God sweeping throughout history, a plan that is extending the Kingdom of Jesus until it “stretches from shore to shore”. If the word “revival” is a useful word for those times when God draws significant attention to this work, such as we are clearly experiencing at present, then I am happy to run with that. Revival is not just a repetition of Pentecost but also a pointer, a sign, of what it will be like when Jesus reigns throughout the earth and finally returns in glory. This is the Christian hope that the worldwide success of the gospel will be realised by such repeated outpourings of the Spirit [15]. When we look at what God has done in history, what he is doing now, especially in this corner of South Wales, and what he is about to do, it is utterly awesome and breathtaking in scope. “How great is our God, sing with me, how great is our God!”

References and Notes

- [1] See [Victory Church](#). [The Welldigger](#). [MrClydeT](#), [Dying to Live](#). My previous blogs
- [2] James Dunn, makes the case that “the Spirit poured out”, “baptised with the Spirit”, “received the Spirit”, “filled with the Spirit”, “Spirit comes upon”, “Spirit is given”, “Spirit falls upon” are synonymous in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke uses different names for the same thing. The greater the intensity, the more terms Luke throws at it. Thus, Paul’s and Peter’s preaching have just one, the incident in Ephesus has two, Samaria uses three, Cornelius and his Gentile friends are described with five, and all

seven are used for the day of Pentecost! Revival has many names. But in all the incidents, the Spirit is mediated differently; Pentecost is direct from God, but in most, He is mediated through people. JDG Dunn, (1970), *Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, SCM.

- [3] J Edwin Orr, (2000), [The Outpouring of the Spirit in Revival and Awakening and its Issue in Church Growth](#), British Church Growth Association, reproduced by Church Gr Modelling, with permission.
 - [4] A Woolsey, (1974), *Duncan Campbell*, Hodder and Stoughton.
 - [5] DM Lloyd-Jones, (1986), *Revival*, Kingsway Publications.
 - [6] Dennis Bennett, (1974) *Nine O'clock in the Morning*, Kingsway Publications.
 - [7] P Hocken (1997), *Streams of Renewal*, Paternoster. T Saunders and H Sansom, (1992), *David Watson: A Biography*, Hodder and Stoughton. T Virgo, (2001), *No Well-Worn Paths*, Kingsway Publications.
 - [8] RM Enroth, EE Ericson and CB Peters, (1972), *The Jesus People*, Eerdmans. See also [Paul Wilkinson](#) for a picture of the cover of Time magazine from 1971. The “official” period assigned to the Jesus people is 1967-1979.
 - [9] A Walker, (1989), *Restoring the Kingdom*, Hodder and Stoughton.
 - [10] B Jackson, (1999), *The Quest for the Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard*, Vineyard International Publishing.
 - [11] M Poloma, (2003), *Main Street Mystics; The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism*, Altamira Press.
 - [12] Figures on the Alpha Course (No longer available). In other parts of the world, the Jesus Film has had a massive impact, especially in church planting. I would guess the number of people reached is larger worldwide than the Alpha Course, but I am not sure how that could be measured.
 - [13] For some evangelical Christians in the USA, the 1904-5 Welsh Revival was seen as the revival to usher in the end times and Christ’s return. Some church leaders from Los Angeles visited Wales in order to take the fire back, and leaflets from the Welsh Revival were distributed in various parts of the USA. Also of significance was the correspondence between Frank Bartlemann who became an early Pentecostal pioneer and Evan Roberts. F Bartlemann, (1980) [1925], *Azusa Street*, Logos. V Synan, (1997), *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, Eerdmans.
 - [14] “Cwmbran” is Welsh for “Valley of the Crows”. Victory Church meets in a converted warehouse.
 - [15] IH Murray, (1971), *The Puritan Hope*, Banner of Truth, p.99.
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A Bad Night for Foxes: A Meeting at the Cwmbran Outpouring

Monday, 15 July 2013

The Cwmbran Outpouring, aka Wales Outpouring, has been running five nights a week since April 10th, 2013, at Victory Church, which meets in a converted warehouse in Cwmbran [1]. I have written a number of blogs on this outpouring from the perspective of church growth and revival. This time, I want to describe one of the meetings I attended recently, July 6th 2013. With the growing number of Internet testimonies of people's experiences of the services, I felt it was time to add my own [2].

The title of this blog looks confusing, but it is based on the sermon that night from Song of Songs 2:15:

*“Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards,
for our vineyards are in blossom.”*

It was indeed a bad night for foxes but a good night for everyone else!

Queue

I arrived at 6.15 pm and joined the queue. Only once have I not had to queue for a meeting, and that was early May! The queue is always interesting as I can chat with the others waiting. There was a couple from Shropshire, a lady from Devon who had driven that day and was staying overnight, and a family with young children from Stratford upon Avon. There were a number with children that night, more than I had seen before, perhaps because it was a Saturday. As ever, I met many English people here, as well as the members of Victory Church, but where are the Welsh, those from other parts of Wales?

The Start

The doors opened at 7 pm prompt. The seats were filled in an orderly way, assisted by church members. The stewards in the church and the car park are brilliant, courteous, friendly and efficient. Despite all the hard work, they are clearly enjoying this outpouring. As we entered, the first song was underway – “I Exalt Thee”. It was followed by a few recent worship songs, led by a team with a more mature than usual worship leader on keyboards. He led superbly. This night, the founding pastor, Richard Taylor, was back, and he led the meeting, occasionally coming up on stage to help lead the worship. He clearly loves worshipping.

At some point Richard started to pray as the worship quietened down. However, the prayer turned into a Gospel message as he moved from speaking to the Lord to speaking to the congregation. He then instructed people to shut their eyes and asked for a salvation response to the message. A number of hands must have gone up based on what happened next. He then asked those who responded to go to the front to receive information to help them start their Christian life, and for prayer. Quite a number went forward – well into double figures. I think some may have come through Victory's own outreach. We were all asked to pray the prayer of turning to the Lord. Recommitment does us all good!

I think there were more songs again – but it was now difficult to be sure as the presence of the Lord was so heavy, and my attention, as I expect with others, was on Jesus, not the

service. This is the chief characteristic of all the services, even though they differ in many other ways.

Sermon [3]

Richard's message was from the Song of Songs, 2:10-15. Indeed, he started by saying, "I want you to open up your Bibles tonight to...". There is an expectation that we will be preached to and that we should have a Bible. Interestingly and refreshingly, he went for an allegorical approach to the passage, which would have brought a smile to the old Puritans. Initially, the message was applied to the outpouring thus:

*2:11 behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come,*

For us, in the outpouring, the winter of waiting has passed, and the flowers of conversions and his presence are appearing. However, he majored on the "little foxes" that try to spoil this:

*2:15 Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards,
for our vineyards are in blossom."*

There are people who love to spoil other people's enjoyment of what God is doing, criticising everything that happens. I thought he was going to give a defence of the outpouring, but instead he widened the application to the effect in our heads of people who criticise us for the things we do for God. He said that they say their words and think no more about us, but their words hurt us, sink deep in the mind, and ruin our enjoyment of God. These are the "little foxes". So our lives, through our minds, become dominated by the people that hurt us. He then apologised to animal lovers and said there is only one solution to such little foxes – shoot them!

I had to take a deep breath at this point. When churches deal with issues of past hurts, the message generally majors on the need for the hurt person to forgive those who hurt them in order to obtain release. This can be quite difficult to do when the forgiveness is not linked to repentance on the part of the one who caused the hurt, nor a restoration of the relationship between the two parties. The wider church is a past master at making victims feel guilty because they can't forgive. Usually, after this type of message, the hurt person remains hurt, but it is now worse because they can't be a "proper" Christian and forgive! The message at Victory that night was so different – shoot them! That is, shoot the effect they have left in your head, not the actual people who caused it!

From the congregation's audible responses, the message was well received. This was a serious message, with a light humour delivery. Richard's humour is very disarming, and it helped drive the message home.

Visitors

He then asked where people had come from, and just under half admitted to coming over 100 miles. The furthest was a lady who had come from Australia. She came to the stage and explained she was seeking to pick up something of the spirit of the 1904 Welsh Revival. The sign for her to come was that her shed blew down, and its insurance money paid for the air ticket! You could not make this stuff up; it is so real!

Next, a family from Scotland were invited up. They were on a week's holiday that they deliberately booked so they could experience God in the outpouring. At this point, there was a major distraction as the keyboard player, who had been quietly playing throughout the sermon, collapsed over the keyboard in a fit of hysterics. Now, I know some people may say this is like the Toronto blessing of 1994, but Richard does have a very disarming style of humour, and his interview of the Scottish family was genuinely amusing. After all, these testimonies were really unusual, and I think he was finding it hard to take it all in. Another keyboard player took over.

The man and woman in the Scottish family were worship leaders, so Richard asked for all worship leaders in the room to stand to have the "little foxes" in their minds that had affected their ministry shot. As a worship leader who has come across my fair share of foxes, I appreciated them being shot, and I tried really hard not to think of the actual people who caused them hanging up bagged! The messages in this outpouring are so down to earth. This is Welsh Valleys' Christianity at its best.

The family on the stage were prayed for and quite affected. Richard felt there was a blessing to be had and invited people forward. About 80% of the packed house went forward! Richard asked for other pastors to help but none seemed to be around at that point. Some are at the church plants, which have Saturday evening meetings.

Prayer and Worship

I am a bit hazy at this point, but a little boy had come to the stage. Despite all that was happening, Richard made time for him, pointing out to us the damage the church has done by excluding children. He invited him up onto the stage to have a go at the keyboard (with parental permission), and the second keyboard player was asked to stand to one side. Richard gave his usual line to keyboard players, "Play anything you like, in the key of G!" I have seen so many slick church operations in outpourings, conventions, and fashionable modern churches, but I could not imagine any one of them ever allowing this to happen. This was so real it had to be of God, not man! Down to earth, yet full of Jesus' Glory and Grace. So, picture the scene: People being affected by the Holy Spirit, hundreds packed around the stage expectant, and a 6-year-old playing random notes on the keyboard. And, of course, a pastor who did not know what to do next! But God was in the house!

Things could have gone very wrong at this point, the sort of things that went wrong in the Toronto blessing days, and to some extent in the Welsh 1904 revival, where control by the crowd was confused with the control of the Spirit. But after some more people were prayed for, Richard started singing old-time gospel songs, such as "I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene", and the very expectant congregation joined in. The little boy had now switched to drums, looked after by the regular drummer.

There was this wonderful mixture of Jesus' presence, conviction, and yet a reality, almost a lightness, as the ways of Man were brought down to size by the boy helping out on the instruments as the pastor led worship. The worship had shifted our attention away from what was happening to people and back to Jesus. The whole meeting came alive through a worship style that could have been in Ira Sankey's days – no reliance on a modern worship culture. Eventually, the first keyboard player came back, and we moved on to some old Pensacola favourites such as "Enemy's Camp". Richard was now moving among the worshippers, praying for people – but people's eyes were now on the LORD. Eventually, some modern worship songs came, but the songs were secondary; the presence was everything.

I may well have missed things in my account and have some of the events in the wrong order, but when Jesus is so present, it is very difficult to be clear. Despite the humour and masses of unorthodoxy, God was very much the centre of attention. Despite the charismatic personality of the pastor Richard Taylor, he never distracted people away from the Lord [4]. It is God, not Man, who dominates these meetings and did so that night. At each point where things could have gone astray, the meeting was brought back on course without quenching the Spirit.

The End

Eventually, people started leaving. I tried to leave on a number of occasions but could not drag myself away. I needn't have worried. When I finally left, Jesus came as well [5]! This type of meeting is difficult to end "properly", because God does not stop working, so the church allows people to stay as long as they want.

Conclusion

I have read about amazing events in past revivals, but nothing I have read gave me any frame of reference for this meeting. I have been in churches where the presence of God was overwhelming, from the likes of the Anaheim Vineyard, California, to a free church on the Isle of Lewis, but none of them could have prepared me for that night in Cwmbran. Outpouring day 88 was unique.

There is a contagion to catch. However, if other churches start their own "outpouring" meetings as a result, I think they may have missed the point. The meat is on the street. When this contagion is caught, we will have a passion for souls, to see them saved and disciplined. The call is not so much to more meetings but more hard work in the lives of people who need to be rescued, *taking* God's presence *to* them. The "outpouring" is the outreach; the meetings are the icing on the cake – but what an icing!

References

- [1] See [Victory Church](#). [The Welldigger](#). [MrClydeT](#), [Dying to Live](#). My previous blogs
 - [2] Recently, there was a report of a Cwmbran Outpouring meeting on the [Ship of Fools website](#) from the "anonymous worshiper".
 - [3] The sermon is available from the iTunes store Outpouring Day 88. (Not available now 2024)
 - [4] The outpouring meetings are taken by different people each night; the church has a number of pastors. I have been to quite a few meetings, and this is the first one I have been to that the senior pastor led.
 - [5] See my blog, [When the Presence of God Persists](#)
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Update on the Welsh Outpouring 2013

Monday, 16 September 2013

It is now 5 months since the phenomenon that has become known as the Welsh Outpouring started in Victory Church Cwmbran, Wales. Although I and others have referred to this as the “Cwmbran Outpouring”, Welsh Outpouring is a better description as this has always been about what God intends to do in Wales, not just in Cwmbran. The weekend of 6-7th Sept was very much a watershed as the church hosted the Wales for Christ conference in the St David’s Theatre Cardiff.

Wales for Christ

What was remarkable about this conference is that the same power and presence of God experienced in the warehouse in Cwmbran was present in the St David’s Theatre Cardiff. There were different speakers, different worship bands, and very different surroundings, but it made no difference, God blessed exactly the same. Even though there were breaks between sessions, we just came back into the same presence each time. On top of that, the meeting did much to motivate and inspire people to do what is needed: take Wales for Christ, spread the gospel and see conversions in our land. It may have been a conference, but it was like back-to-back outpouring meetings!

It would be unfair of me to give a review of the talks as I may misrepresent the speakers. Hopefully, the church will make the talks available online for people to hear for themselves. There are however two things I want to pick up that connect with my church growth work.

Firstly, Andrew Parsons, a pastor at Victory church, expressed the longing to see “more going to heaven than going to hell”. I certainly can’t fault the sentiment, but it got me thinking – has this happened in the past? Of course we can’t measure how many people are going to heaven, and until recently it has been hard to measure how many attend church, but we can measure how many belong to a church.

Let’s go back to the 1904-5 revival in Wales. In 1903 the combined membership of all protestant denominations in Wales comprised some 47.4% of the Welsh adult population [1]. After the revival in 1905 the membership stood at 53.4%. In the two years of the revival the increases in membership of the churches were 5.4% and 11.5% respectively. Compared with typical increases of around 1% per year before that it is clear the 1904-5 revival had a remarkable effect on church membership. If we were cheeky and said that all church members were on the way to heaven and the rest were not, then the Andrew Parson’s comment was actually achieved by the 1904-5 revival! But I admit that is a bit cheeky. There are a whole host of reasons why that identification cannot be made. But it sets the context for a longing for more to be saved than not saved.

What should be remembered is that a church membership of 53.4% of the adult population was the largest ever achieved in Wales since records have been kept from the early 1800s. The 1700s would have been much lower still. Indeed, the current participation rates of less than 10% in the church are more typical history than a 50% membership/commitment. England did not get anywhere near that figure! To expect more in church than not in church is very unrealistic unless, like the 1905 figure for Wales, it had been preceded by outpourings of the Spirit and much hard work by the Christians in the church. The 1904-5 revival was the

pinnacle of what God had started in 1735, and a church of enthusiasts worked with God's Spirit to achieve it. Given that we are now going through an outpouring, and the Wales for Christ weekend showed how committed many people are to spreading the gospel, I would say Andrew Parson's longing for more going to heaven than hell is an achievable aim, despite the current desperate attendance figures of the church. God is moving again, he did it before, so he can do it again! It may just take a bit of time.

Secondly, one of the afternoon speakers, evangelist Mark Greenwood, was talking about the unusual and enthusiastic forms of witness among Christians, the ones who are "bonkers" for Christ. He longed that people would be bonkers for Him again and take "risks" with their witness. He then said about such people, somewhat ironically, "2 years of discipleship class will squeeze that out of them!" That is, their enthusiasm would have been diminished through the institution of the church! I have fitted my church growth models to a wide variety of denominations in the UK, USA and some other countries, and 2 years is about the typical length of the enthusiastic period that comes out of nearly all of them [2]. So, it may have been an offhand comment by Mark Greenwood, but I have plenty of data to back it up.

The reasons for enthusiasm only lasting 2 years after conversion may be much wider than the stifling influence of an institution. Often it is that people get more involved in church and lose their unconverted friends, or that those friends have got used to the way the new convert behaves. They are no longer new. But one of the effects of an outpouring is to renew existing believers, even old-timers. So, it may be after the last five months, many Christians are about to go "bonkers" for Christ!

The Future of the Welsh Outpouring

In the last week, Victory church has announced that they are reducing the number of outpouring meetings from five a week to two. Clearly, the people involved are tired. The commitment by the church has been immense, and I am very thankful for all their hard work. Some people, particularly the outpouring's detractors, may see this as a fad that has passed, but far from it. The purpose of an outpouring is to move people out into the communities, spread the gospel and make converts and disciples. The outpouring does not end because time is released to pursue the mission; it just enters a different phase. The same happened in the 1904-5 revival. The special meetings passed in 1905, but new churches with an emphasis on the work of the Spirit were started and established over the following 20 years or more. The work of the Spirit did not stop but spread, in that case, all over the world.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the church did not stay in Jerusalem, the place where the blessing was first received, they moved out into Samaria, Judea and the ends of the Earth, even if God had to give them a bit of a shove with persecution. They could not continue going to the temple and meeting in rooms each day, however powerful the blessings. Remarkably God did more wonders through them among the population than he did in their gatherings. The meat is on the street, as the late John Wimber was fond of saying. Even more remarkably, there were public outpourings of the Spirit on people, as shown in Samaria, Caesarea, and Ephesus. The outpouring moves to a different phase, no longer tied by location and worship meetings, but in the marketplace, just about anywhere.

A similar pattern of outpouring and expansion can be seen in the 1700s in Wales. Early on, the Spirit was poured out in Llangeitho through the conversion and ministry of Daniel Rowland. A similar move took place at Trevecca with Howell Harris. But the work did not stop at those centres. Slowly various groups of Methodists were established in different parts

of Wales. The centre of the outpouring remained at Llangeitho. Sometimes, people would visit for a couple of weeks at a time, but at the same time, new fellowships were being planted across Wales. The result was rapid church growth up to the mightiest revival of all in 1859. The sequence, *outpouring*, *plant*, and *build up*, was repeated for over 100 years. Certain periods where the work of the Spirit was so intense have become known as the “revivals”, but the outpouring rarely stopped in that period [3].

The vision put out by Wales for Christ at the conference is for such a church-planting initiative. This was, of course, planned before the outpouring started, but the outpouring has now given more momentum to the plans. Indeed, what outpourings do is create hunger and expectation in visitors from other parts of the country so that when the church plant takes place, there are local enthusiasts, touched by the King in the outpouring, ready to be part of the church plant. In addition, the new plant widens the pool of unbelievers the church can reach, the susceptibles in epidemiological terms. This can put the church back over the tipping point for revival growth. Outpourings generate the needed enthusiasts; church plants tip the church into revival growth. This is how the 18th and 19th century Welsh Methodists took Wales for Christ. It is how the New Frontiers and Vineyard denominations have been growing in the last 20 years, and this is the direction of Victory church now. Thus, scaling down the outpouring meetings makes perfect sense. Incidentally, church planting is not a strategy Victory Church are expecting to do alone, and they hoped that other churches in Wales would do the same [4].

Characteristics of the Welsh Outpouring

Certain characteristics of the outpouring have struck me as being typical of revival:

1. Experiencing the outpouring is like being saved again. I know you can only become a Christian once, but when the Spirit moves, even the most mature in Christ realise their sins and find refuge at the cross again. This, for me, has been a feature of every meeting I have been to at Cwmbran. I have heard people say they have felt they have been born again “again”. There are similar experiences in the Bible [5] and in past revivals [6].

2. The emphasis on the blood of the Lamb. It was the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said one of the signs of an authentic revival is that there is a renewed emphasis on the blood of Christ [7]. That is, there is a return to the cross as the only means of salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. It is fair to say this is probably one of the most unpopular doctrines in the Christian church generally and Christians of all churchmanships either dismiss it or revise it. But when the Spirit moves, back it comes. This has been the experience at Cwmbran, as shown by the types of songs and hymns that have been sung, and the constant cross-centred sermons.

3. The aftereffects of the meetings. I have referred to this in previous blogs [8], Jesus being even closer in the days and weeks following a meeting. This is the difference between a human-led meeting, which can excite for a moment, and a Spirit-led one, which makes permanent changes. Examples of this can be found in many of the revivals of the past [9].

4. The number converted. For this, we can only go on the number of reported first-time commitments, which was 1157 after outpouring meeting 157 [10]. There have been more since. This may seem small compared with the 100,000 converts in the 15 months of the 1904-5 revival, but the current “Welsh” outpouring is one church; there were hundreds of

churches involved in 1904-5. So, over 1000 first-time commitments are remarkable, even if all were not actually converted.

Final Thoughts

It should be noted that this outpouring is homegrown; that is, it is Welsh! One of the great joys of this outpouring is that it started in Wales, it was not something brought in from outside! Before you think this is a strange outburst of national pride, let me explain why this is important to me. Back in 2002 an Anglican clergyman gave a prophecy to my own church at one of our renewal days about the situation in Wales. He said, “The problem in Welsh churches is that people are always waiting for someone, like a big-name preacher, to come to Wales to bring a blessing, to light the fire. You hear it in the prayers for revival. But I say don’t wait for others, light your own fires.” We took that to heart as a church and got down to the work of renewal.

The Welsh Outpouring is an example of “lighting your own fires”, but on a much larger scale. God works through us to revive his church. We do not need to wait for a celebrity preacher to come. Indeed, the most powerful meetings in the Welsh Outpouring have been the ones led by the local pastors and worship groups, not the visiting preachers.

Perhaps the fact that Welsh Christians “lit their own fires” will help us regain our confidence that God will work powerfully in this land and banish the low self-esteem in Welsh churches [11]. I am deeply grateful for all commitment the people at Victory church have shown in this outpouring; those who have been “lighting the fires”. Outpourings are of God, but our response is hard work. I have learnt more about the work of God in revival in the last five months than in the last thirty years of Christian experience, and more than I could ever learn in a lifetime of reading books on revival! I am very much looking forward to seeing how this move of God develops.

References and Notes

- [1] See [Explanatory Notes on "Mathematical Modeling of Church Growth"](#). Church membership and Anglican electoral roles were not open to children, so they have been excluded from the figures. The Roman Catholic Church was relatively small at the time. As my data source did not have accurate figures for them they are also excluded.
- [2] The enthusiastic period in the 1904-5 revival was much shorter, a matter of weeks. This is because the actions of the enthusiasts that drove the growth, such as invites to the revival meetings, was very different to the normal measured pattern of witness in the family and workplace. The revival was about “come to tonight’s meeting”. Most people who could be invited would have been invited within a couple of weeks of the first experience.
- [3] J.C. Ryle, (1978) [1885], *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century*, Banner of Truth. E. Evans (1985), *Daniel Rowland & The Great Evangelical Awakening In Wales*, Banner of Truth. Both “Rowland” and “Rowlands” are used for his surname, depending on sources.
- [4] Victory Church has announced another church plant. They have six churches so far. Someone from another Welsh church of a different denomination told me they had a new plant in Wales coming soon, with another in the planning stage.

- [5] Psalm 51 is a classic account, and the life of the apostle Peter shows similar post conversion experiences of conversion.
- [6] David Matthews (2002) [1951], *I Saw the Welsh Revival*, Ambassador Publications, chapter 9. His personal experience of what the revival *felt* like for him is essential reading for all Christians seeking a move of God. This will let you know what to expect!
- [7] D.M. Lloyd-Jones (1986), *Revival*, Kingsway, pp.47-49.
- [8] Blog: [When the Presence of God Persists](#).
- [9] David Matthews (2002) [1951], *I Saw the Welsh Revival*, Ambassador Publications, chapter 6, pp.46-47. David Matthews was very fond of “quality” church music and viewed Sankey hymns with disdain. But the revival changed that, and he found himself leaving the “heavenly atmosphere” of a meeting at five in the morning, whistling the hymn, “Throw Out the Lifeline”. Remarkably he heard someone else that night whistling it with him. It was a policeman, also indelibly changed by the revival. The policeman asked him, “Have you caught the revival fever too?” Indeed, Matthews had caught it, and the effects of the revival persisted with him for the coming months and indeed the rest of his life, as his book illustrates.
- [10] Given out at the Wales for Christ weekend 6-7th September 2013.
- [11] I often preach on revival in churches, and I get the same message back wherever I go, “the last revival *immunised* Wales against revival, it won’t happen again”. There is a great need for people to move from reading stories of what God did in past revivals to believing what he can do now. Hopefully, the outpouring will do this.
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