
How Did The Welsh Revival of 1904-5 Start?

Part 1 of a series examining the 1904/5 Welsh revival in the light of the limited enthusiasm model of church growth

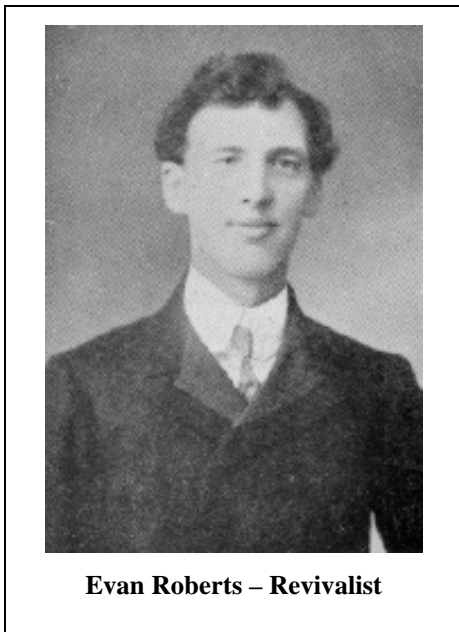
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Revivals and their Beginnings

Fundamentally, a revival is a work of the Holy Spirit not a work of man, something that God does to a believer in Jesus Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles it is called a “pouring out of the Spirit” on people (Acts 2:17). Thus a revival starts when God does a work in people.



Evan Roberts – Revivalist

The purpose of this work of revival is to bring glory to God by growing his church through saving unbelievers. Those on whom the Holy Spirit is poured out make contact with unbelievers, some of whom become believers and have the Holy Spirit poured out on them. Thus this work of the Holy Spirit is usually passed on by contact between a revived believer and an unbeliever. Although

revival is a work of God, he uses people as agents. This essentially is the “conversion model” referred to in the Church Growth Modelling project, and is the central thesis of the limited enthusiasm model of church growth. The revived Christians are good candidates for the enthusiasts used in the model.

Because the Holy Spirit is often passed on by contact, be it preaching, witness, laying-on of hands etc., then wherever you see a person who has been converted, or received the Holy Spirit, you can usually find a revived Christian who was used as an agent. This makes it very difficult to say when a revival starts!

However when people refer to a revival’s beginning they often mean the point when it started to affect a church, or community. Duncan Campbell refers to revival in this sense, calling it a “community saturated with God” [Edwards, p.26]. Thus the revival in Samaria started when Philip preached there, and many were converted (Acts 8:5-6). The Methodist revival in England started when George Whitfield, John Wesley and others started preaching in the late 1730’s.

The Start of the 1904/5 Welsh Revival

Following the previous examples, it is generally taken that the Welsh revival of 1904-5 started through the preaching of one man on the last day of October 1904. It was this day, a Monday, that Evan Roberts, who

was training for ministry, returned to his home church in Loughor near Swansea to lead a series of meetings. His purpose was to attempt to awaken people to salvation in Christ by persuading them to openly profess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour in his meetings. Within two weeks large parts of Wales were affected, and the national press were giving the revival coverage. The Welsh revival started because a revived man, Evan Roberts, took the revival to people who were willing to listen and act on his preaching. Thus he was the “initial” enthusiast used to start the revival. How did he become an enthusiast?

Evan Roberts and Enthusiasm

Evan Roberts worked in a colliery near Loughor, first as a miner, then as an apprentice blacksmith. However, having been convinced of the call to preach, he set about preparing himself for ministry by reading spiritual books and seeking to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. This baptism happened in the spring of 1904, an experience that brought him into close communion with God. “I was taken up into divine fellowship for about four hours” [Evans, p.66]. This continued nightly for three months. He was a revived Christian.

In September Roberts went away to ministry school at Newcastle Emlyn in Carmarthenshire. He was still putting aside at least half an hour every day for communion with God; the spiritual result of his “baptism” continuing in him. He very quickly realised that a revival was taking place nearby in Cardiganshire, and that many young people had received spiritual experiences similar to his own. However, they also had a passion to share the experience with others. This had a powerful effect on him: “We have come into contact with the young men and women of New Quay and the fire has taken hold of us” [Evans, p.73].

Influenced by these revived Christians, Roberts again experienced the baptism of the Spirit, especially receiving the assurance of sins forgiven. He now came to believe that

he and the others in this Cardiganshire revival were to take this message to the whole of Wales, and, following some visions, was convinced that God had promised 100,000 converts as a result. He was now an “enthusiast”, on fire and in the position to influence others.

Late in October he set aside his studies to return to his home church in Loughor, concerned for the souls of the young people there. With the minister’s permission he was allowed to speak after the Monday prayer meeting on 31st October, the “start” of the Welsh revival, mentioned above. However it could equally be claimed that the revival started when Evan Roberts went to Cardiganshire in the September and received this passion to take the blessing out. It could even be argued that it started when Roberts was first baptised with the Spirit the previous spring! However it can certainly be said that the Welsh revival of 1904-5 was the Cardiganshire revival made national.

The Start of the Cardiganshire Revival

By the time Roberts had arrived at Newcastle Emlyn in September 1904 the revival just over the county border was well under way. A minister named Seth Joshua who arrived in New Quay, Cardiganshire on 18th September said “there was a remarkable



Seth Joshua
Calvinistic Methodist Evangelist

Spirit of revival there... I have never seen the power of the Holy Spirit so powerfully manifested among people". [Evans, p.58]. When had this work started?

During 1903 two Cardiganshire Calvinistic Methodist ministers, Joseph Jenkins (New Quay) and John Thickers (Aberaeron) became burdened for the spiritual life of their churches. After Jenkins was baptised with the Spirit late in 1903, he and Thickers decided to hold a series of conventions in West Wales to deepen the spiritual life. The first two-day meeting started on the last day of 1903. However nothing remarkable happened except that in the one public meeting a young girl from Jenkins congregation, Florrie Evans, was quite affected.

Just over a month later Florrie Evans followed Jenkins home after an evening service in New Quay, asking for spiritual counsel. Jenkins advised her to acknowledge the lordship of Christ and submit to the leading of the Spirit. Sometime time during that week Florrie was converted and gave her testimony after the following morning service, announcing to the young people's congregation "I love the Lord Jesus with all my heart". The effect on the other young people was electric, with many being converted, and set on fire, over the following weeks.

The converted and revived young people of Jenkins' church held missions in other churches in the region to share the blessing. The impact was such that the Cardiganshire revival came to the attention of the national press. Further conventions and prayer meetings deepened the revival work up to the time that Evan Roberts arrived in September 1904. However the Cardiganshire revival started when Florrie Evans gave her testimony in February 1904 and thus became an enthusiast. As it was Florrie and her friends who influenced Evan Roberts, existing en-

thusiasts passing the Spirit on to a new enthusiast, it could even be said that the Welsh revival started with her.

Tracing the Revival Back Further

The central thesis of the limited enthusiasm model of church growth is that existing enthusiasts make new enthusiasts. As such the start of the Welsh revival can be traced back to the enthusiasts who influenced Evan Roberts, the young people of New Quay, notably Florrie Evans. In turn Evans and her friends were influenced by Jenkins and Thickers, the local ministers, one of whom was certainly baptised with the Holy Spirit. Who influenced them?

At that time in Wales the teaching of the

Keswick convention was beginning to have an influence due to a number of ministers sensing the lack of power in their ministry. Jenkins and Thickers came under the influence of such men, notably RB Jones and WW Lewis. Both Jones and Lewis were used as enthusiasts in the Welsh revival quite apart from Evan Roberts. It took more than one initial enthusiast to spread the revival!

In turn the "Keswick" ministers, who became enthu-

siaists, were influenced by a Welsh minister, WS Jones, who received the baptism with the Spirit, while serving a congregation in Scranton Pennsylvania. He brought the fire back when he returned to minister in Carmarthen late in the 1890's. Thus the Welsh revival can be traced back to the USA!

WS Jones received this baptism at the hands of people influenced by DL Moody. Likewise the British minister FB Meyer, also influenced by Moody, was active in urging people to seek the deeper life, and he was instrumental in the work of Keswick. Thus the Welsh revival can trace its line back to the work of Moody. Indeed no beginning can



WS Jones – Baptist Minister

be found as each person was made an enthusiast through another enthusiast.

Despite all these lines of influence, it will be shown that what took place after 31st October 1904 was on a completely different scale from the events in Cardiganshire de-

scribed here. The effectiveness of the enthusiasts increased dramatically. As such this date is the best starting date for the national revival that has become so well known throughout the world.

References

Edwards, Brian.

Revival! A People Saturated with God. Evangelical Press, 1990.

Evans, Eifion.

The Welsh Revival of 1904, Evangelical Press of Wales, 1974.

Details behind this article are referenced in the timeline of the background to the revival.
