

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Evangelicals in Wales

Bala Ministers' Conference

1955–2014

D Eryl Davies



© Author 2014

First published 2014

ISBN: 978-1-78397-056-8

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Past issues of EMW magazines and sermons preached at our conferences are available on our web site: www.emw.org.uk

Published by Bryntirion Press, Bryntirion, Bridgend CF31 4DX, Wales, in association with EP BOOKS, Faverdale North, Darlington, DL3 0PH, UK.

EP BOOKS are distributed in the USA by:

JPL Fulfillment, 3741 Linden Avenue Southeast, Grand Rapids, MI 49548.

E-mail: sales@jplfulfillment.com

Tel: 877.683.6935

“Although small, the town of Bala has played a key role in the religious life of Wales. Indeed, one has only to mention Bala’s strategic part in the establishment of the Bible Society to realize that its contribution to the history of evangelical Christianity has extended far beyond the Welsh border. For over twenty years, between the 1950s and 1970s, one of the annual highlights in the life and ministry of Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the Ministers’ Conference which was held for much of that period in Bala. It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of that Ministers’ Conference in the recent history of evangelicalism in Wales, and its influence has also been felt much further afield. We are indebted to Dr Eryl Davies for this pioneer overview and analysis of the Conference’s context, development and significance, which draws not only on his extensive research, but also on his first-hand experience of this crucial—if controversial—Conference.”

Professor E. Wyn James, School of Welsh, Cardiff University

Dr Eryl Davies has made a major contribution to the history of Evangelical Christianity in Britain with his clearly written, interesting, and scholarly book on Dr Lloyd-Jones and the yearly ministerial conference in Bala (from 1955 to 2014). I was there in the mid nineties, and took away with me a sense of profound Christian earnestness of the ministers, of unction of the Holy Spirit upon the meetings, of loving fellowship, along with academic honesty and biblical fidelity. It gave me hope for the Church in the future, and it still does. Dr Davies honestly and bravely addresses the major issues still faced by evangelicals in our secularized West; that is why this book will have relevance and influence far beyond Wales, and even into China and Africa. I delight in his emphasis upon the need for revival in our churches, but appreciate his realism and balance, and his call for sound theology, biblical preaching and fervent prayer. I shall recommend it to my classes.

Douglas F. Kelly, Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina

In this absorbing study, Dr Eryl Davies has provided us with a vivid insight into the role played by the great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones in developing evangelical thought

and practice in post-War Wales. Although its focus is specialized, the impact of the Bala ministers' conference was wide and for many has been profound. This volume affords a fascinating glimpse into the stresses as well as the achievements of twentieth and twenty first century Welsh evangelicalism. It is an admirable contribution to our understanding of recent Christian history in our land.

**D. Densil Morgan, Professor of Theology,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

Dr Eryl Davies has written an excellent summary of the influence of the ministers' conference run by the Evangelical Movement of Wales, tracing how it has encouraged and developed evangelical leaders in Wales and beyond. He gives a fascinating insight into the leading personalities of the period and what they have contributed to the church. The chapters are very readable, making it ideal for dipping into when reading time is limited. The book gives an inspiring overview of the work of God during the period it covers and will encourage all who read it.

**Dr Tom Holland, New Testament Research Supervisor,
Wales Evangelical School of Theology (WEST)**

Ministers who are no longer able to attend the Bala Conference shake their heads, smile and sigh, "Ah, the Bala Conference" full of regret and the happiest memories of the three days spent there. The fellowship after the meetings, on the lawn, around the meal tables, the prayer times, the ministry of the Word of God. It is an egalitarian conference with no big personalities strutting their stuff. Unassuming, with usually less than a hundred attending, spiritual, with a subterranean longing for God to awaken the dying testimony in Wales, a place of encouragement and refreshment and laughter and books of course. "What are you preaching on now?" we ask. "How are things in the church?" We begin, "Did you have a good Sunday yesterday?" Dr Eryl Davies' brilliant book captures in detail the blessed ethos of Bala.

Geoff Thomas, Pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales.

As we wind our way into the 21st century interest in the preaching ministry of the late

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones is unabated. Now comes one with unquestioned scholarly and personal credentials whose relationship to Dr Lloyd-Jones and the Welsh Church will be welcomed by all. Dr Eryl Davies' new book provides a faithful guide to the ministry of the Doctor in his native land and gives not only an eyewitness account of the glory years of Lloyd-Jones' preaching in Wales, but now bequeaths to the Church a pastoral theological gold mine of insights, illustrations, applications, and Biblical diagnosis and treatment from the Doctor. As I read through Dr Davies' work I was carried away to times of revival, but rather than creating nostalgia to go back, the book cultivated prayer for God to come down.

I commend my former professor's work to the Church with an appeal to set other books aside. This is the first book to read as soon as you can get it. For we need revival desperately. Dr Davies' book is a wonderful blessing and a gift to the Church that I pray will be used of the Lord to stir us up to God's glory in our own generation.

**Rev. Professor Michael A. Milton, Ph.D. (University of Wales), Chancellor,
retired, Reformed Theological Seminary, USA
President, Faith for Living, Inc.**

Dr Davies's book is an excellent resource on Evangelicals in Wales, especially on the life and influence of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Dr Davies based this book on research conducted over 20 years, having lived in Wales his entire life and being personally acquainted with Dr Lloyd-Jones. In today's constantly evolving era of biblical preaching, this book will become an outstanding guide and encouragement for preachers, missionaries, and serious disciples of Christ who are seeking to know God and the power of the Gospel.

Won Sang Lee, Ph.D.

**Senior Pastor Emeritus of the Korean Central Presbyterian Church,
Centreville, Virginia, U.S.A.
President of SEED International**

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PREFACE

Two books on this subject! That was the plan until recently. One was intended as a brief, popular outline of the Conference's history and influence. The second book was to be more academic in nature. However, for several reasons, I decided to write only one book, namely, this semi-popular history and evaluation of the Conference and Lloyd-Jones's ministry in it.

Readable

I have endeavoured to ensure that readers will not feel discouraged by the book's length or contents. I am influenced by my doctoral supervisor in Cardiff University (1968–1971), Professor Humphrey Palmer, who insisted that academic research should be written for 'ordinary' people to read and appreciate.

Thanks

My thanks are due to pastors with whom I have enjoyed fellowship in the Conference, including contributors to this book. The Rev. Iain H. Murray, Edinburgh, provided valuable

information on the 1956 and 1969 Conferences for which I am grateful.

I appreciated John Emyr's kindness in loaning me notes of early Conference addresses written by his late father, Emyr Roberts. Conference members esteemed him highly for his knowledge of Welsh church history, theology and culture; they also enjoyed his delightful sense of humour. His notes on some of Lloyd-Jones's addresses appear as appendices. I am also indebted to Philip and Jennifer Eveson for their editing work.

I am deeply grateful to those who have prayed for me, especially over recent months, while I was completing this book.

New information

A considerable amount of new information and primary sources are published here for the first time. I hope this book, therefore, contributes significantly to Welsh church history and will also be an encouragement for people to pray for the ministry of the Word. The final two chapters are more theological and demanding as the Conference theme of Word-Spirit is discussed in the light of contemporary writings and criticism.

I assume full responsibility for the views expressed here, including the critical evaluation of the Conference. I am not in any way expressing a formal Evangelical Movement of Wales (EMW) response nor am I representing the views of any group or other organisation.

Longing

I long that Conference and churches will enjoy the favour of

our Triune God so that prayers for the widespread success of the gospel and for revival will be answered soon in Wales and in other countries as well.

Eryl Davies

Cardiff

April 2014

Questions and answers about this book

Why this book

To tell the story of what pastors/churches learned and experienced through the Conference between 1955 and 2014.

- To encourage more prayer for the preaching of the Word.
- To fill a gap in Welsh church history for this period.
- To make available previously unpublished details and primary sources relating to the Conference and Dr Lloyd-Jones's ministry there between 1955 and 1978.

What is its message?

- God's Word is true and should be believed and preached; His love in Christ is amazing and lies at the heart of the Bible; God keeps His promises and answers prayer.
- The Holy Spirit makes the preaching of the Word effective.
- The Lord breaks into people's lives and into difficult church situations. He is active TODAY.
- Relevant and important application of pastoral theology.

Who is this book for?

- For ALL Christians, irrespective of background, location, position or church.
- For pastors and church officers as a contemporary case study.

Will I be able to read it?

- The book is intended as an interesting and easy read.
- It is user-friendly. Many chapters are brief and challenging.
- It is ideal for use with a friend/family or group. The choice is yours.
- Each chapter includes study questions to assist readers.
- Chapters 29 and 30 are more theological and demanding but very important.

PART ONE

THE BACKGROUND STORY

Chapters 1–3 Evangelism in Wales

Chapter 4 Dr Lloyd-Jones's Early Relationship with Evangelicals in Wales

Chapter 5 Evangelical Presbyterian Ministers' Fellowship in Wales

1

An Exciting Story: Evangelism in Wales

This book is a story, a true story,¹ covering an important yet turbulent period of church life and Christian witness in Wales from 1955–2014.

Lloyd-Jones

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones's ministry and influence in the annual pastors' Conference in Wales figure prominently. Originally from West Wales, he was a medical consultant in London who reached the top of his profession by the age of twenty six.² Feeling an irresistible call to preach, he became a church pastor and an outstanding preacher. Some influential leaders regarded him as the greatest preacher in Christendom in the twentieth century.

Between the years 1955 and 1978, Dr Lloyd-Jones normally attended the annual Evangelical Ministers' Conference in Wales. He was usually one of the speakers and many details concerning his contributions to the Conference are published here for the first time. The book majors on this formative period³ but before assessing his influence, it is important that the story is brought up to date.

Exciting

This is an exciting story relating how some pastors became Christians and how God worked in their lives and churches, especially through this pastors' Conference over a period of nearly sixty years. It is impossible to recapture in print the excitement felt in the earlier years while God was working, creating a deep sense of interdenominational unity in the gospel. It was unexpected but thrilling.

Warning

One warning, however! We should not idolise anyone named in this book. They were all, including Lloyd-Jones, fallible people and sinful like ourselves. There were occasions when division and sin were apparent. Some examples are included in the story; and this is a challenge to us because fractured relationships within and between churches still occur.

Our story begins in the 1930s when one teenager was converted and later became a powerful preacher—another thrilling part of the story!

A newspaper reporter turned preacher

Glyn Owen was born (1919) in Woodstock, rural Pembrokeshire,

South West Wales. After leaving school he worked in nearby Carmarthenshire as a local newspaper reporter. His editor, a Christian, prayed that Glyn would be converted and his prayers were answered. When Idris Davies, an Ammanford teacher, was preaching at evangelistic meetings in Carmarthenshire, the editor sent Glyn to report on what was happening. During one meeting, he stopped taking notes as he came under conviction of sin. Hearing of the Lord Jesus dying to bear the punishment of our sin, he trusted in the Lord.

Soon afterwards in 1940, Glyn enrolled at Cardiff University where he met other Christian students.

Sitting on a plate of jam tarts!

Another new student, Gwyn Walters,⁴ from Llanelli in South West Wales, had been impressed at his grammar school by Tom Jones, a former school prefect and a keen Christian. When Tom heard that Gwyn was going to Cardiff University, he urged him to attend the IVF Christian Union. As a result Gwyn went to the opening meeting. It was held in a small crowded room with no empty chairs or spaces, so Gwyn sat on top of a piano. Later he realised he had been sitting on a plate of jam tarts!

The speaker was a local Presbyterian minister, Rheinallt Williams⁵ who spoke on John 3:7: 'You must be born again.' Students listened intently as they heard that being born again 'formed the only foundation of the Christian life. Without ... regeneration, Christian living was impossible.'⁶ There was an encouraging response with some identifying themselves with the gospel witness in the University. Slowly, as he joined in Christian

Union prayer meetings and Bible studies, Gwyn became assured that he was a Christian.

Prominent

Both Glyn Owen and Gwyn Walters were to become prominent early members of the Ministers' Conference. As students they became part of a group who longed to tell others about Christ in the University as well as in the towns and villages. Consequently, Cardiff students, with students from other colleges in Wales, held evangelistic meetings—referred to as 'campaigns' or 'missions'—during the Easter or summer vacations. Glyn and Gwyn usually preached at these meetings.

Glyn Owen became a powerful preacher, pastoring churches in Cardiff, Wrexham, Belfast, London and Toronto. After completing doctoral research in Edinburgh, Gwyn Walters was ordained, like Glyn Owen, as a Presbyterian minister and served in Cardiff before going to the United States in 1956 to teach theology. By 1962 he was Professor of Homiletics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts.

It was an exciting period. Meetings were held by students in various parts of South and North Wales; their aim was to share the gospel with unbelievers.

Important background

This is important background to the main story, so in the next two chapters I refer to more missions to illustrate what was happening in the 1940s and 1950s in Wales, before the Conference was established in 1955.

But even in 1937 in the Llanpumpsaint, Cynwyl, Llangeler and Carmarthen districts of West Wales, as well as in other areas, God was powerfully at work. Many people came to faith in Christ. But that is another story.

Questions for reflection and discussion

How can we avoid 'idolising' preachers and others?

What do you find challenging in the conversions of Glyn Owen and Gwyn Walters?

2

Exciting Background

The background to the establishment of the Ministers' Conference in 1955 was evangelism and the need for fellowship and co-operation. Examples are now provided.

Effective

This gospel-centred evangelism saw significant numbers of conversions in colleges and churches over several years. By the late 1940s and 1950s some converts had become church ministers with a passion to evangelise.

Remarkable period

Before describing the beginnings of the Conference, we pause to provide examples of such evangelism. Conversions were prayed for and expected.

Glyn Owen with other students like Gwyn Walters were involved in evangelistic campaigns during summer vacations in the Rhondda Valley (1941), Carmarthen (1944) and Llanelli (1945). In the Rhondda campaign, three churches worked with forty students from three different University Christian Unions. People were converted and local Christians encouraged. The 1944 Carmarthen campaign was staffed mostly by Cardiff students and Leith Samuel came from England to preach.

Llanelli 1945

The Llanelli campaign in 1945 impacted the town and churches. Many became Christians, some of whom became useful preachers like John B. E. Thomas and Hugh D. Morgan. Their girl friends, Eluned and Mari, were converted a day or so later and eventually married John and Hugh respectively.¹ The students preached, except for one evening when a consultant surgeon from Cardiff, Arnold Aldis, preached powerfully, leaving the entire congregation overawed by the gospel message. 'The local church ... holding up to fifteen hundred people ... was packed every night.'

The Llanelli campaign is known also for effective open-air meetings which students conducted. Crowds standing in the streets listened to the students and men flocked out of the pubs to hear their testimonies and preaching. It was reported that 'well over a hundred young people were converted that week' in Llanelli.

The Rev. W. M. George, pastor of Caersalem Welsh Baptist Church, held a monthly prayer meeting to seek the Lord's blessing on the town. Christians were earnestly praying for God

to save young people, including students. Their prayers were answered in astonishing ways.

‘All one can honestly record’, writes Mari Morgan, ‘is that it was a very special time ... Dare one say it was a mini-revival? ...’

International rugby players

Pastor W. M. George’s daughter, Pegi, was a student in Cambridge. Her boyfriend, later her husband, John Gwilliam, often visited her home and supported student evangelism in Wales. A strong Christian, he had the distinction of captaining the Welsh senior rugby side to two Triple Crown successes within a three year period.

Another outstanding rugby player was Wynford Davies who played scrum half for Newport and Wales. He entered Cardiff University in 1945. Converted through his father, I. B. Davies, he influenced the developing Christian witness in Cardiff University and the wider Christian scene. Wynford was ordained as a Presbyterian minister, and helped to establish the Ministers’ Conference.

Other Campaigns

News of the Llanelli meetings spread, so another campaign was arranged for the summer of 1946 in the villages around Llanelli followed two weeks later by a campaign in nearby Ammanford. Here the local Presbyterian minister, Rev. J. D. Williams, was converted which became a turning point in his ministry. Others were converted, including Kit Mullett who later married Dr James Packer.

Student-led campaigns continued. In Pontarddulais (1947) there were more conversions and remarkable open-air meetings with many listening avidly to the gospel. Other campaigns were held in Llwynhendy (1948), Abertillery (1951) and Ogmere Vale (1954). Crowds attended the meetings in Abertillery so the cinema was hired for the final meeting.

The Cross Hands meetings in 1952 were also remarkable. God's presence was so real in some meetings that, after the preaching, many people sat on the gravestones outside the church building to ask questions and a good number trusted in Christ.

Idris Davies, the Ammanford teacher and evangelist, reported in 1949:

‘... I can say ... that the Lord is blessing generously with men and women coming to the Saviour in several places, especially in Swansea, Tondre, Ystalyfera, Kilgetty—where many came together and numbers gave themselves to Christ.’²

North Wales

Some young people in the North felt led to hold a campaign in Bala but first decided to prepare themselves, partly by means of a weekend of fellowship, teaching and prayer.

That weekend, referred to in Welsh as an ‘Encil’ (Retreat), was held at Dolgellau in early January 1948 and twenty-six attended, mainly students. Most of them were converted that weekend! The final meetings were marked by spiritual reality and power as they were humbled but also overwhelmed with joy in the Lord. Later in January, the Betws Garmon Conference was held for students

from Bangor. More students were converted there and also in the Bangor Colleges over the following months.

Bala 1948

Some Bangor students and local young people were involved in the Bala campaign held over Easter 1948 and which was originally intended to last for only four days. The team of students was led initially by the Rev. I. D. E. Thomas,³ a former Bangor student and minister of a Welsh Baptist church in Glanamman, Carmarthenshire. Other students involved included Elwyn Davies, Arthur Pritchard and Glyndwr Jenkins.

The first two days were hard but on the third evening several became Christians and many more on the fourth evening:

‘That evening we can never forget and it was midnight before it was possible for us to go home. We saw that it was necessary to have more meetings and so the campaign was extended for a further week. We saw more also coming to the Saviour. And the work continues too ...’⁴

These meetings vividly reminded the older folk of the 1904–05 revival.

It was in this Bala campaign that the Welsh Evangelical Magazine (*Y Cylchgrawn*) was born because young people requested ‘sound’ but easy to read Christian literature explaining the Christian faith and suitable for their friends.⁵ The decision was made to produce the Magazine, though they had no funds.

Hearing of the Bala campaign, young Christians in Caernarfon

agreed to meet for prayer each Saturday evening. Others joined them over the following weeks and several young people trusted in Christ in subsequent months.⁶

Elwyn Davies

But God was working apart from campaigns. For example, Elwyn Davies, a Bangor student was a morally-minded young man who was training to be a pastor. God dealt with him unexpectedly.

Elwyn was concerned to relieve poverty in post-war Germany by collecting second-hand clothing from homes in Penygroes, some four miles outside his home in Caernarfon. Cycling home, and with no one near him, Elwyn heard a clear, unusual voice saying: 'Why are you doing this work here?' It was an unfamiliar voice and more 'penetrating' and 'inescapable' than human voices.⁷

He needed no explanation. He understood God had spoken to him and he began to recognise his own sinfulness before a holy God; he saw the emptiness of his religion. A few months later, Easter 1947, he experienced forgiveness after seeing that Christ had died for his sin. We will meet Elwyn again later in the story.

In the next chapter we refer to other locations where there was significant blessing.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Are there lessons to learn from the Llanelli and Bala campaigns? Were the Llanelli meetings (1945) 'a mini-revival'? Suggest reasons for your answer.