

Barry J. Lewis, Madeleine Gray, David Ceri Jones and D. Densil Morgan, *A History of Christianity in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2022), pp. 384. ISBN: 978-1-78683-821-6.

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To write a book about the history of Christianity in Wales, from Roman times to the present, in just over 300 pages, with just four contributors, is a huge undertaking. It is obvious from almost 40 pages of bibliography, that the authors have examined both original sources and secondary materials. Books have been written on particular denominations before, but there has been nothing as comprehensive and wide-ranging as this volume. It is both scholarly and accessible.

Barry Lewis, in four chapters, covers the period from AD 1 to AD 1070. He points out that Wales as a country or concept did not exist at the beginning of this period, nor did England or Scotland. The Christian faith did not reach these islands much before the third century with the Roman invasions, but it is wrong to think of an extensive Christianization as opposed to scattered individual believers. Little is known about the spread of Christianity into Wales and written sources are virtually non-existent. But, by 314 there was an organized church in Britain, since three bishops attended the Council of Arles.

But the conversion of Constantine did not automatically mean the conversion of every citizen of the Empire. Christians remained a small minority, restricted to landowners of South East Wales. Real conversion came between AD 400 and 600 when Christianity became the sole religion of the ruling elite, paradoxically after Roman rule had ended. Nor was there a distinct Celtic church or spirituality. There might have been particular emphases on some aspects of the faith; Easter celebrated on a different date and a married clergy but none of these things was peculiar to Wales. There was no doubting its allegiance to Rome but allegiance to Canterbury was a different matter until the coming of the Normans.

The structure of the Welsh church is a matter of guesswork before the twelfth century. Saint Davids and Bangor had bishops in the sixth century as did Llanbadarn and Llandeilo Fawr. There was a bishop in South Wales, perhaps at Llandogo or Caerwent but there is no reliable evidence for a Bishop of Llandaff before 1045. Llandaff appropriated the patronage of Teilo from Llandeilo Fawr and those of Teilo's predecessors. Nor was there a Welsh Metropolitan, in spite of his eleventh-century biographer's claim of David being acclaimed as such by his fellow bishops. Stone churches were rare before the twelfth century and church buildings were usually small and made of timber or turf and linked to either monastic communities or said to have been founded by them because they bore their saint's name, or they were founded by local chieftains and bishops.

The Normans have normally been credited with the total restructuring of the Church into parishes, archdeaconries and territorial dioceses. Madeleine Gray is of the view that this was happening already and was simply accelerated with the Conquest. Nor does she believe that Wales was anxious for Reformation type changes. On the contrary, there was a spiritual revival in fifteenth-century Wales. Yet, when the Reformation came, Wales did not resist. The population followed the lead of the gentry, who benefitted from the sale of monastic lands

and 27 new seats in Parliament. The fact that the Tudors were of Welsh descent also helped win their loyalty and there were no rebellions in Wales. The reforms, however, were accepted without real enthusiasm. To most Welsh people, worship in English was more strange than in Latin, but when both the Bible and Prayer Book were eventually translated into Welsh, it made the faith more intelligible. Yet if Wales was a Protestant nation and not a nation of Protestants, ironically it was those translations by Anglican divines that helped convert much of the population to nonconformity in the following centuries.

Much of that conversion was down to eighteenth-century Methodist societies, which meant to revive Anglicanism from within, yet bearing the seeds of secession from their inception, because they transcended parish boundaries and were not accountable to the bishops. The intransigence of the latter was to lead to separation. Disestablishment eventually followed as all nonconformist denominations experienced phenomenal growth in the nineteenth century yet their members still had to pay tithes to the Established Church. The latter's response both pastorally and spiritually came too late to avoid the break.

Wales can hardly be called a Christian country today, when less than one per cent of its population regularly attend worship. The nonconformist revival was short lived and by now the disestablished Anglican church has also declined drastically in membership. The Roman Catholic Church has seen some small growth as a result of the influx of Roman Catholics from Eastern Europe. Yet, as this book demonstrates, the Christian faith has ebbed and flowed over the centuries. Rowan Williams reminds us in the preface, quoting the poet R.S. Thomas, that although we may be 'living in the last quarter of the moon of Jesus', it was that same poet who went on to say 'people are becoming pilgrims again' and 'prayer too has its phases'. Who can therefore predict what the future might hold, if the history of the Christian faith over the last millennia is anything to go by?

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Ann Loades, *The Serendipity of Life's Encounters* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2021), pp. 96. ISBN 978913657574.
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This book is a contribution to the above publisher's 'My Theology' series and is effectively an account of an academic journey, forged by an unwavering determination to engage with higher education and supported by mentors who throughout her career encouraged and facilitated her progress. Here lies the essential characteristic of her journey. It is scholarship in community. Fortuitous encounters with a succession of inspirational figures at school and university sparked, then consolidated, her interests, and Loades is generous in her appreciation of their support. These influential encounters occurred from her formative years at school, where she