
Language in God's Economy: A Welsh and International Perspective

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Introduction

The topic we have to deal with is in some respects no longer very controversial. Most people would agree that diversity within unity is an internationally worthy and biblical ideal, and erstwhile attempts to destroy languages and cultures simply because they were minorities are not usually deliberately defended nowadays. Granted, it is a delicate balance. A singular emphasis on diversity leads to anarchy and divisiveness; too much unity leads to uniformity and monotony. Yet in Britain, for example, there has grown up a fair consensus that the old thrust against variety in our national cultures was mistaken. Even within Wales there is now a greater realization of the value of our individual civilization. Some 30 years ago there remained a fair amount of destructive animosity towards the Welsh language. Thirty years ago there still persisted opposition to the devolution of government to Wales. During these 30 years there has grown up, right across the political spectrum, support for the fostering of the Welsh language and culture, and even general agreement on the devolving of government to Wales, be that democratic or undemocratic or administrative, according to the field of activity.

So some principles now are rarely at issue except amongst a very small number of people. What Christians are required to do today is to consider how this present situation fits in with God's purposes, and in what way we should consider our responsibility for the future. There is no need for me therefore to waste your time going over old territory, and I hope we shall be

able to move forward to enrich our thoughts about these topics, which have actually been of immense importance in the social development of the world in general in this century.

I am not anxious to present any agreed strategy for evangelicals. For my own part, I do not think it desirable for evangelicals to seek detailed agreement amongst themselves on matters such as this; nor is settled policy about language restoration or nationalism a matter for the local church or for an evangelical organization. What, however, is healthy and important is that as Christians we should think about these matters under God, indeed that all issues and particularly those that are relevant and influential and contemporary be faced up to honestly and openly and intelligently, and seen within the scope of God's sovereign grace. Indeed, to ignore such matters, and restrict God's sovereignty to a personal and private religion, is to insult God and to be negligent in our duties as stewards.

Let me give one warning. I shall not be using the terms 'nationalist' or 'imperialist' with any emotive connotation. 'Nationalist' in this paper will simply refer to a sense of reality regarding the nation as an entity, and a desire to defend its identity and effectiveness as a cultural instrument. 'Imperialist' refers to the phenomenon of interfering authoritatively in the affairs of another nation. The distinction is basically a technical but a key one, as journalism has found their confusion profitable and useful. From the spiritual point of view, it is essential to be more precise.

Neither shall I try to confuse nationalism with racism. There is again a frequent journalistic confusion between racism and defensive, fruitful national culturalism. Racism is inevitably a force against diversity and in favour of uniformity. Occasionally, misuse of terminology in this way may be adopted in order to destroy or bring into disrepute a particular national identity or culture. Such usage, however, is mischievous and should not trouble us here. I have heard a less than lighthearted comparison made between the imperialism of the Nazis and the defensive culturalism of Wales. This is just simply the slick topsy-turvy transfer of imperialist bad habits to the colonials themselves. Actually, Nazism was anti-nationalist for more reasons than one, and not only because it was imperialist. The great Calvinist philosopher, Dooyeweerd, has noted another most significant point:

It was an unmistakable proof of the reactionary character of the myth of blood and soil propagated by German Nazism that it tried to undermine the national consciousness of the Germanic peoples by reviving the primitive ethnic idea of *Volkstum*. Similarly, it is an unmistakable proof of the retrograde tendency of all modern totalitarian political systems that they attempt to annihilate the process of cultural differentiation and individualization by a methodical mental equalizing of all cultural spheres.¹

In other words, Nazism and racism confused the sphere of race, blood groups, skin colour and so on with genuine cultural pluralism. As a result, their view of human society was poisoned.

One further distinction I feel is necessary at this juncture, regarding my main concrete example of language in God's economy, namely Welsh. Of the various nations that exist in the world, there are several distinctive linguistic models. To simplify: Japan follows the one nation/one language model; Switzerland (with Romansh) and Wales the multi-lingual territorial model; Libya/Egypt or England/Falkland Islands a non-territorial monolingual model, *i.e.* a general language pattern that does not limit the language used to a particular territory; and so on. As far as I can see, the Welsh model, for which I naturally have some affection in that it links the people to a warm and original traditional culture of their own, as well as linking them to an international sensitivity to diversity, is likely to continue for at least the next 200 years if the world continues that long. And we have enough on our plate with that situation on which to base our present discussion.

Language in the divine economy

The first question I wish to raise is the very general one. What is the purpose or function of human language in the economy of God? What does it do? There are three aspects of language I would like to stress.

1. It orders and names phenomena. Naming is where it begins. In the days of man's free will, independence of naming and the potential to do this – quite apart from the language of the Deity – was bestowed on Adam. This naming is the anchor for the whole of language. Naming is an analysis, and therefore a means to understanding. It recognizes the diversity within the unity of creation:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field. (Gn. 2:19-20)

This was a major step for humanity, considerably more so than the one on the moon, and a means for Adam to organize his thoughts in order to accomplish his office on earth as set down by God in Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 9:1; and Psalm 8: to be fruitful and have dominion. This language was activated within human limits, just as language remains limited – in tandem with Adam's humanity – as contrasted with the attributes of God who has no limits, is all-powerful, all-knowing, and whose language must not only include all human languages but also much more beyond this necessary scope.

This naming may indeed be related to the Logos, the Word himself. Through the Word all things were created, and thus he himself provided the objects for words. He is the one who sets order and logic on the chaos. Following the *cry* in the wilderness

comes the *Word*, a remarkable parallel, I would say, to the development of language itself in the history of the child.²

So, my explanation of why language names is that it is a means of realizing, recognizing, expressing and celebrating God's order. We do not for the moment know exactly the value of the variety of ways in which languages now analyse reality; why they accomplish this in God's economy in particular ways. For instance, we know that exactly the same phenomenon can be analysed in the grammar of different languages in different ways, all of which may be equally valid. Take the morphemic analysis of time within the Indo-European verb-system. In English, there are two morphemic divisions of time in the indicative, and only two, past and non-past; all other expressions or divisions are resolved or constructed by auxiliary verbs and other structural devices. In French, there are five morphemic divisions in the indicative; in Welsh, six. In other words, within language itself, God's order of time is recognized in different ways.

Perhaps we have a suggestion of this holy presence in the fact that there are always three persons in the pronoun system (although some languages combine these in different ways), there are three increasing grades in the comparison of adjectives, three predicative parts of speech, three time epochs for verbs in most languages – past, present and future.³ There seems to be a reflection of the diversity within unity of the Creator himself. But dual systems (*e.g.* singular, plural) in language also remind us of the two natures in one Person, so central to the Christian faith. These are technical matters on which it would be improper to dwell here.

2. Secondly, and only secondly, language is a means of communication, the word uttered. Sometimes, glib people say about language, 'Oh, it's only a medium of communication.' But before it communicates, it must be a means of analysis. It must have something to communicate, it must have analysed reality. And strangely, as we noticed, that analysis possesses binary and trinary systems. Then, and only then, does it communicate. And I would claim, although this would take up a complete discussion, that the central thing it communicates, perhaps the only thing that really counts, is praise. It is a means of praising. When we say that language is a means of communication, I would prefer to suggest, rather, that for Christians obviously (and eventually for all) it is a means of praise. This is the second major characteristic of language: communication. Such communication includes everyday activities as well as the wonders of literature.

Just as we noted a difference of method of analysing order within languages, so languages have different ways within literatures of incorporating their cultural traditions. The great Welsh tradition of praise has been commented upon by civilized outside observers like A.M. Allchin. And certainly, the uniqueness of the Christian witness within Welsh literature, and its unbroken presence from the sixth century to the present day within a Christian literature that includes consecutively so-called secular work by the same writers, has a character that should prove of interest to all cultured Christians whatever their language.

I note just one simple point, to which Professor Donald MacLeod referred in the *Free Church Record*, February 1989. He referred to the relationship between Christian literature and so-called secular literature in Gaelic, or even the alienation between Highland religion and Highland literature:

It is quite remarkable, for example, that no outstanding writer of Gaelic secular verse ever wrote hymns . . . If the secular poets had any religious beliefs at all they gave them no expression in their verse.

The same was true of the hymn-writers. Men like John Morrison and Dugald Buchanan confined themselves strictly to religious themes. Not a single epic or nature-poem or love-sonnet ever sullied their pens . . .

Some of the secular poets were humble, practising Christians . . . They felt 'unworthy'. Such themes should be left to the professionals, the clergy.

It is not so easy to excuse the hymn-writers. They seem to have divided the world rigidly into *sacred* and *secular* and to have believed that it was wrong in principle for Christian writers to waste their time on anything but the directly religious. Secular verse, creative fiction and political journalism were out. The only valid Christian literature was the hymn and the sermon. Sadly, this attitude is still with us.

In Welsh, on the other hand, so-called secular works, nature verse and political comment, stories, social protest and love poetry have all been interwoven closely with hymns and religious verse and sermons throughout the ages, by the same writers and for the same audience. There has been a certain amount of occasional pietistic complaint about this, and sometimes an inevitable division of labour. But, generally speaking, we have been fortunate in that the main thrust of our literature has been more holistic than Gaelic and remarkably comprehensive and versatile, while maintaining the central faith.

Of course, it is understandable that a hymn-writer should specialize. One can empathize with any poet whose heart has been won by Jesus so much that his whole being must celebrate every day the wonder of knowing his Lord; and practical things may even be neglected. He has been dazzled. The beauty of salvation has taken hold of him. This is the greatest subject in his life: the Person of his Saviour, the Lordship of his Shepherd. Even the Creation of the Creator has to be secondary to the source of it all. Our great hymn-writer, William Williams Pontycelyn, can talk about little else. (Well, once or twice perhaps he wrote a comic verse or two.) But day in and day out he would sing the praise untiringly of the one and only God. This can hardly be accounted a shortcoming. Yet, somehow, it would be a shortcoming to neglect his farm, to ignore his wife and children, not to take responsibilities as a citizen, to be careless in verbal craftsmanship, to ignore the sick and needy. And, as a Christian, it would be a shortcoming not to recognize these other activities as matters to be taken notice of in praise of God, to dedicate everything – not just the hymns – to the glorification of God.

3. After language as an ordering and language as communication, we have language as a mark of the diversity of identities in the world. It is related to a society and tradition. It is possessed by people and used by them with affection. They become involved in the wholeness of life expressed in a particular place at a particular time. This is a part of their warm humanity. Language is not simply an abstract analysis, nor just a channel for communication. It is a human, local attachment, related to people in a special way. We have already drawn attention to the great and holy principle of diversity within unity, found in the Godhead and providentially for culture. Now, we may think of language as a badge of that wonderful diversity, a symbol of national identity, the word incorporated in culture. When man in his pride tries to centralize his power and raise up his might through uniformity, the will of God is expressed through the pluralization of languages and traditions: yet still within unity. Languages express this unity in diverse traditions or different tunes, with a multitude of words, in the one truth of the glory of God. And so, thirdly, language is an intellectual sign of the way the cultural mandate, to be fruitful, is expressed. It is not, perhaps, always necessary to reflect that national diversity, but it is certainly common, and delightfully interesting.

When we consider diversity, Genesis 11 is a crucial portion of text. There is no direct link with the fall, although it is well to parallel the two phenomena. The consequences of the fall on language, one would suppose, are related to the ephemeral qualities within languages. No language on earth has a divine right to survive within temporal confines. The fall would seem to be related to the 'decay', or more properly the 'development', within languages themselves. Yet one must be careful here, as 'development' within time is what we already see in Genesis 1–2. The development from the fall would, however, naturally involve falling away or decay of usages, as well as the misuse of expression. Language even before the fall adapted itself to changing circumstances; but now, its inadequacies occasionally prove more demanding.

The judgmental element at Babel can be recognized. But here, as with the central fact of the cross, the paradoxical truth of Genesis 50:2 is far-reaching. Diversity and scattering were envisaged as the desired and correct order. The judgmental element bears on mutual misunderstanding and using language as a medium for pride, rather than on diversity as such. Diversity seems to be a favourable factor, and, indeed, as an inner aspect is central to all language formation. The impediment lies in mutual 'confounding'. Babel does not prohibit mutual learning of languages. Moreover, it also allows

for the development of translation. By the moderating limitation of cultures within units, it encourages the local extension of talent, responsibility, and fruition rather than depending on mass processes. Each culture may develop its own character that enriches the mosaic of mankind.

The linguistic crux at Pentecost is that diversity is not reversed in the world of the Spirit. It is indeed, in its own way, repeated. What is reversed is mutual incomprehension. Language therefore remains quite happily a factor in the variety of peoples.

In those three functions it seems to me we have the fullness of language: language as analysis, language as communication, and language as a badge of diversity. I think it is important to keep the three in balance. As the variety of culture reflects fruitfulness, and as our human duty on God's earth is to be fruitful, the third is not a matter to be swept under the carpet. In the following remarks, I shall concentrate my reflections on this third aspect although my own primary interest, academically and practically speaking, is in the first two.

Language and the divine mandate

In thinking of the third aspect, we naturally proceed to consider the affectionate and positive attachment that people frequently develop towards their own territory and traditions. This is their particular responsibility, and as Paul himself realized, it is good and humanly healthy to feel a warmth towards one's own nation. Paul was not coy about loving his own people (Rom. 9:3), nor should the contemporary Welsh man or woman be ashamed of patriotism. In Wales, however, owing to our particular circumstances, the providence of God leads us to reflect on another strange but related characteristic in this situation, one that is of wider interest.

We are witnesses in our time of the apparent resurrection of words, the renewal of language, even its restoration or revival. The word once killed and trampled in certain areas, the word of which some felt shame and towards which others felt psychological indifference or animosity due to historical conditioning, is now reappearing in some places, and, what is more, being kindled in the hearts of people once dead to it. Formerly, the opposition to the existence of Welsh, even amongst Christians, stemmed either from pietistic malevolence to all cultural identity and fruitful diversity and from an unpreparedness to adapt Christian experience to everyday living, or from the old colonialist attempt to suppress any language differing from the tongue of Empire. Conformity, however, to the centralist cultural pattern no longer prevails to the same extent. The language itself is being reborn. It is a parable, but a parable to be taken seriously. And so I mention it as a matter to be thought about and thought through in the future. We are talking about a renewal of nationhood and of words after their imperialist downgrading. Response to this is not an easy task anywhere. Imperialism has left a labyrinth of problems everywhere in the world. These are basically psychological, though they are cultural as well. Along with psychological problems of inferiority for the former conquered people, there are just as urgent problems of superiority for the former majority conquerors. But imperialism has left good problems, too. And linguistic renewal is one of them. It is good because it defines some purpose – even at a secular level – in an age of nihilism.

In this third aspect of language, we naturally have to consider the link with nationalism, a phenomenon known to us in Wales for over a thousand years and – in the sense I use it here – almost inevitably a defence mechanism against imperialist destruction. The variety of languages, although not corresponding in any mechanical way, has a relevant parallel in the variety of nations. Just as God ordained nations (Dt. 32:8; Jb. 12:23; Acts 17:26) and ordained them for eternity (Rev. 21:26), so he was responsible, subsequent to Babel (Gn. 11:1–9, esp. 4, 9) for the diversity of languages, also (on an unstrained interpretation) for eternity (Rev. 7:9–10). This is God's doing, whatever may have been the occasion; it is therefore good. Woe to the person who works against it. Power politics, the centralization and uniformity of the Big Brother attitude, seems to be anathema to him as it is to Christians. Just as the Godhead himself is diversity within unity, just as the church too has many members and a multitude of gifts within one body, so God's first good and holy act was to divide (Gn. 1:4, 7). The act

of division is sometimes emotionally and sentimentally claimed to be negative. But in God's economy and manifold grace it is necessary, and always seen as complementary to unity.

What of the eventual fate of language before the Throne? Does one need to postulate a further change of language, indeed a reversal to uniformity? I would agree, certainly, that not too much should be made of the references in Revelation 7:9; 15:4; 21:26, other than noting that plurality is emphasized. But certainly, the proposition that a new language is necessary, a sort of heavenly Esperanto, is not introduced. That diversity should be undone at that point seems to me to be not only unnecessary, but uncharacteristic, as any impediment to mutual understanding may obviously be removed. Whatever tongues were at Pentecost (and my own supposition is that they were real languages), the relevant point is that they were comprehended by all in that place. Suggestions of new revolutionary developments of what we understand as language before the Throne are matters to be wary of, if they are not revealed. Certainly there is no suggestion that diversity is to be reversed in order to guarantee mutual comprehension. *Diversity* in certain aspects, it seems to me, is eternal: *divisiveness* is temporal. Diversity as a principle is built in to the whole structure of language, as into the whole of creation itself. It is a characteristic of God himself.

Allow me to quote a fine paragraph by H. Henry Meeter, from his book *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*.

Although all nations form a racial unity, there is also, according to Scripture, a definite place for such natural group formations as distinct nations. This important fact must not be overlooked. Had the human race remained sinless, there would have arisen in the organic life of men larger and lesser groups, each with its own cultural task and sovereignty in its own sphere commensurate with the task assigned to it. Sin, which has disrupted human life generally, has also worked havoc with the cultural demand of God to each of these groups, that they subdue the earth and accomplish the special task assigned to each of them. Instead of the unity which God had intended that organic groups should attain through diversity, each developing its own distinctive task, *there arose an attempt at uniformity without distinctiveness*. The classical biblical example of such godless uniformity is given to us in the story of the erection of the tower of Babel on the plains of Shinar. Had this project been executed, there would have arisen a godless world-empire, in which the subjugation of the earth and the development of the diversified talents of men and cultural tasks generally would have been retarded greatly, not to say defeated.⁵ (emphasis mine)

The nation is a cultural unit, suitable for developing civilized traditions and establishing cultural institutions. The motive for these is found in the cultural mandate set down for humans on earth, a command that was renewed subsequently on several occasions: 'And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth' (Gn. 1:28). This is what we do to the glory of God. In so far as we fail in this, we disobey. We fail to submit to God's will. And I take it that when God refers to being fruitful, he means in all things – ever fruitful according to our gifts, agriculturally, industrially, procreatively, culturally. In all things, fructify. This includes the small things, be they small acts, by small people, in small countries, with small languages. Indeed, we have reason to suppose that God does not favour the big battalions: human immensity does not impress him (Lk. 9:46-48; 14:11; Is. 5:8-9).

It is also to be done within a framework of justice or righteousness. In recent years, we have witnessed a growing emphasis on the relationship between justice and the Welsh language. According to Proverbs 14:34, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation'. Justice or righteousness is a major biblical topic, and I have no doubt it is comprehensive and penetrating. Its primary relevance is of course to do with the relationship between the individual and God, how one can be justified. But there is no reason to think that this great principle of justice or righteousness is confined and does not relate to unemployment and living conditions, the relationship between the sexes or the position of the Welsh language. Virtue is not a private matter. In recent years some of the injustice perpetuated on the Welsh language has been repealed by law, and we shall no doubt see further moves in this direction. This brings me to some remarks on Wales in particular.

For example: Wales

The Christian religion is inclusive: it includes all culture. It is not one thread in our culture. Culture is subsumed under Christianity, just as Christianity has to do both with our eternal destiny and with every single detail of our earthly existence. Justice is related to cultural fruition. Injustice, consequently, is a handicap in the development of society and culture. And this should be of paramount importance to us. Susan E. Schreiner noted:

Students of Calvin's theology must never lose sight of that argument against Sadoletto that the primary concern of the Christian is not the salvation of his individual soul but the glory of God. Without minimising the importance of sin, justification by faith, or the certainty of salvation in Calvin's thought, we must remember that he knew the glory of God extended beyond the individual and encompassed all aspects of creation . . . To refuse participation in this earthly realm or to neglect to contemplate nature is a failure to understand God's commitment, purpose and governance of his created order. And finally to limit Calvin's vision to the total depravity of human nature, justification by faith, and the condemning function of nature is to impose on him a mentality that he resisted throughout his writings.⁶

It is within such a perspective that I remark on Wales in particular. The structure of relationships between the English and Welsh languages was established by the so-called Act of Union in 1536. This made the language a political matter. It also set up the psychological framework for the groups who were to discuss the issue right up to the twentieth century, and afterwards. One single sentence, albeit slightly verbose, proclaims the official imperial attitude to Welsh:

Also be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that all justices, Commissioners, sheriffs, coroners, escheators, stewards and their lieutenants, and all other officers and ministers of the law, shall proclaim and keep the sessions, courts, hundreds, leets, sheriffs' courts and all other courts in the English tongue; and all oaths of officers, juries and inquests, and all other affidavits, verdicts and wagers of law to be given and done in the English tongue; and also that from henceforth no person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy any manner office or fees within this realm of England, Wales or other the King's Dominion upon pain of forfeiting the same offices or fees, unless he or they use and exercise the English speech or language.

Now, at long last, in 1994, this clause is finally repealed. But its wording is no longer important. What are effective and relevant are the deeply ingrained attitudes that have been firmly established in its shadow. The psychological structure is the thing that matters. The patronizing and superior stance expresses itself at a popular level in the London newspapers, even the so-called 'quality newspapers', as for instance Craig Brown's comments on the fact that the Welsh soap-opera *Pobl y Cwm* was being shown for a while throughout Britain on BBC 2 with subtitles.⁷ Says Brown: 'The Welsh language sounds exactly like a tape of everyday English played backwards, but subtitles are provided for those without reversal facilities . . . The first week started promisingly with sufficient rows, deaths, swindles, tears and betrayals to keep us all happy for years to come, or, to be more accurate, *emoc of sraey rof yppah*.'

This bold London attempt at hilarity seems innocent enough and has only become sinister with the wanton destruction of the language in vast areas of our country. The patronizing and superior stance from outside has been responded to by an inferiority complex regarding the language and identity from inside the country, a complex only too often reflected nowadays as a complex amongst those who consider themselves incomplete or inadequate in their knowledge of some of the main facets of Welsh culture. The one has bred the other. And this double inferiority complex is penetrating and prevalent. The extraordinary situation of having Welsh people who are anti-Welsh is unfortunately more common than one would like to admit.

Inevitably there are those of all political persuasions who work towards normalization or resuscitation. In recent years they have begun to organize themselves and work more systematically than hitherto. Perhaps their main hope of success lies in the fact that it is easier to be honest and open about one's love for the language than to disguise one's animosity. Camou-

flaging antagonism under the guise of sweet reasonableness and protestations of innocence is no longer as easy as it used to be.

Amongst evangelicals, as I have suggested, response to the situation varies. Unexpectedly, I have found the most typical response to be the put-it-off rationale: 'This is a genuine issue. We must develop an official line on this. But not yet.' The second response is the old and well-worn pietistic escape: 'The gospel is only about saving souls. All else counts for nothing.' This is basically a limitation of vision regarding sanctification and lordship: 'Everyday life is not important. All these deeds and duties we perform are not part of what the Christian God is interested in because other people besides Christians deal with those.' Lip-service may be paid to Christ's kingship in all of life; but then an awkward question such as the Welsh language crops up, and suddenly we discover that we are really not concerned with the whole of life. Retreat is immediate. We have not been thinking about every territory as something to be claimed – just simply devotions, a limited number of good deeds, and perhaps one or two protests about abortion and pornography. Often we hear people who have narrowed the gospel to the moment of salvation complaining at the same time that youth culture is aimless, adultery rampant, drugs and raves taking over, and yet little attention has been paid to the Christian concept of culture.

I am not simply talking about the responsibility of pastors in this task, nor just about sermons. I am talking about the testimony of the Church as a whole. The Church must let the unbeliever and the new Christian know that one of the first tasks he/she has is to think about how every section of life fits into this faith. How do we carry out all everyday life as Christians? How should we think, speak and act – fallibly of course but prayerfully – 24 hours a day, as servants of God? Some may say that this is not the function of the pulpit. But I am not talking about method. What I am talking about is what the Church should convey as the fulness of God's sovereignty and as the work of the Christian, what is his/her scope of praise in thought, word and deed. We need to know not just how to become a Christian, but how to be Christian in the practical aspects of life. We are dealing not simply with the duties of a certain office, such as that of the preacher, nor one means of presenting the message. We are dealing with the Church witnessing to the world and conveying that the whole of life is involved.

Running from the whole of life and concentrating on the moment of conversion is related to the unpreparedness to respect the Welsh language. We hear the wacry: 'The gospel is more important than the language', which has now led to a lack of evangelizing amongst Welsh speakers in Wales, even in Welsh-speaking areas. What is often implied is: 'If he's not prepared to worship in English, he doesn't deserve to be a Christian. He comes to us, we don't go to him. We will only evangelize if he turns to English. Language is not as important as the gospel, therefore we do not work in Welsh. All things being equal, we stick with the majority, and all things are always equal... Sudan is all right, not Welsh Wales.' I know an educated Welsh person within this context who, after becoming a Christian, felt an obligation to read his Bible in English. In English one has 'life': there's no life in Welsh nowadays. This secret must be kept from the Welsh. I'm as good a Welshman as the next, BUT ...

In a recent essay on this point in the periodical *Gorwelion* [Horizons], produced by the Welsh Evangelical Church in Llangefni, Ieuan W. Evans reminds us of the way in which Welsh speakers during the years of strength set up English causes to propagate the gospel. He suggests that it is now time for the English to reciprocate. In surveying the situation, it would be interesting to count how many Pentecostal or charismatic Welsh-language churches are in existence at the moment. Would you need one hand? Would you need one finger?

The contemporary Welsh person can sometimes become a Christian and decide: 'Now I abandon my people.' This extraordinary situation has developed amongst Apostolics, and many fervent, even Welsh-speaking, evangelicals, to excuse neglect of evangelizing or establishing churches in Welsh. The gospel is now not only more important than the language: it is exiled from the language.

On the whole, I don't think the so-called division amongst Christians regarding the Welsh language is particularly to do with the language itself: it is much broader. There may be some who are rather anti-Welsh in the old imperial mould or those who suffer in a rather old Welsh way from an inferiority complex regarding identity. I have met very few. At the other extreme, there may be patriotic Christians rather obsessive about language, on whom some of the idolatry of language and nation that some secular people possess has rubbed off. We are warned about these. I have met none of them. When language or nation or any cultural phenomenon becomes an idol, then, as Professor K. Schilder says, man has fallen in love with the tools and has lost the ideal of doing the work demanded, namely being servants and stewards glorifying God. This arises from the divorce of religion and culture, or rather from viewing culture as an end rather than as a means. *Self-expression* becomes a main delight, and the perspective of a whole life, spiritual and material, temporal and eternal, natural and supernatural, is shrivelled.

These positions are not held openly. I think the problem is more to do with breadth of vision and with sovereignty. The division I suspect is to do with a Christianity that mainly concentrates on the point of change and Christianity as a whole life: evangelizing that presents a message about one single happening (and neglects most of the rest) and evangelizing that insists on lordship in every domain.

Christ must, for a live Christian, be at the centre of all things, and it is an insult and betrayal to shunt off his claims restrictedly into devotional exercises or into the initial salvation from which henceforth the Christian is expected to find his/her own way. Christ has established the Church, a people with a local institution – a church. The Church is all-inclusive as regards territory. As a local institution the sphere of a church does not include politics as such, no more than it need formulate a detailed policy on language revival. But as the central part of the Church in general, that is the Christian people themselves as they exist in their daily tasks and duties, seven days a week, the local church can certainly proclaim the rights of God in all matters and the absolute necessity to think through and eventually to act through faithfully family responsibilities, civic, occupational or recreative living. Although I tend to see the office of the local church primarily at work in the proclamation of the Word (particularly in the call to justification and sanctification), in the ordinances, and in praise and prayer, it is good for Christians together, even in groups connected to the local church, under the Word, to think through the problems and opportunities that confront them in practical life. Such groups are a preparation for sanctification within a context of brotherhood and sisterhood, and in modern times are a way of expressing the relevance of Christ's sovereignty in everyday actions. To fluff responsibility because such and such a subject is controversial is to that extent an abandonment of our pilgrimage as Christians.

Conclusion

Imperialism has a lot to answer for. It seems to me sad that evangelical Christians, often immigrants, should be living in areas where the wonderful hymns of Pantycelyn and Robert ap Iwan Ddu, Eben Fardd and Ann Griffiths were written, and are yet unable to understand them, that evangelical ministers should be unable to comprehend the majestic *Geiriadur* [Dictionary] by Thomas Charles or anything of the beautiful devotional tradition of the country they inhabit, that the sermons of John Elias and John Jones Tal-sarn lie beyond their reach. And sometimes, sadly, this is not just an inability but a deep-down resistance to the now much easier task of obtaining the key to this background. This, of course, is not at all to criticize them, so much as to regret the powerful negative force that caused such an alienation. Nor is this to denigrate the by now fine and real Anglo-Welsh culture that has developed particularly in this century. But, on the other hand, there is a new generation of Christians arising for whom the Welsh-language heritage of praise, unbroken from the sixth to the twentieth centuries, need no longer be a closed book. For them, this is not just one solo but a multitude, a chorus, a social creation which they may present as a people to God, the expression of the heart of a nation or a community. This was perhaps the most single-minded consistent though versatile praise tradition in Europe,

celebrating nature and female beauty, places and people, as a channel to perceive God's beauty itself, as well, of course, above all, as exalting the saving grace of the King. Richness of culture is like beauty itself, a shining forth of the glory of the Creator-Redeemer. Now, perhaps, this new generation, hopefully, under grace, because of a bilingual education that is now accepted by more or less all political colours in Wales, should at least have some opportunity to develop a broad and rich, healthy and vital knowledge of this fine inheritance for which no other people in the world is primarily and directly responsible.

I have talked about Wales, but not just for the sake of Wales. It is for the sake of trying to understand and to obey God's will for the nations in God's world.

¹H. Dooyweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (New Jersey: Craig Press, 1972), pp. 105ff.

²'Word' came to mean many things in Hebrew. Primarily, in the religious context, it meant the message of God, but also it referred to the inspiration of the prophet or, metaphorically, the creative omnipotence of God (Ps. 32:6); or it could refer to the divine law.

³In Welsh, we also have an equative degree in adjectival comparison that 'marks time' or notes the non-increase in grade, as it were, in one particular position.

⁴I emphasise 'in the sense I use it here'. I am not presently concerned with the broad relationships of nationalism and empiricism.

⁵See the fifth (revised) edition (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960), p. 183.

⁶See her study, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1991).

⁷'Pobl y Cwm' means 'Valley People'.