

# WILLIAM A. FETLER AND THE WELSH REVIVAL\*

## Уильям А. Фетлер и валлийское возрождение

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**Abstract:** Among the factors that affected the rapid growth of the Russian evangelical movement between 1905 and 1914 was the inspired preaching and energetic ministry of Wilhelm (William) Andreevich Fetler (1883-1957). Fetler was already committed to a preaching ministry when he enrolled at Pastors' College in London in 1903, but his spiritual life was noticeably "quickened" when he traveled to Wales to witness the revival of 1904-1905. This article describes what would Fetler have seen in Wales, and suggests ways that the revival influenced his ministry in St. Petersburg from 1907 to 1914.

**Keywords:** William A. Fetler, Welsh Revival, Russian evangelicals.

**Аннотация:** Среди факторов, оказавших влияние на стремительный рост русского евангельского движения между 1905 и 1914 годами, следует упомянуть вдохновенную проповедь и энергичное служение Вильгельма (Уильяма) Андреевича Фетлера (1883-1957). Фетлер уже был посвящен служению проповеди, когда поступил в пасторский колледж Сперджена в Лондоне в 1903, однако его духовная жизнь заметно «оживилась» после того, как он побывал в Уэльсе и стал свидетелем возрождения 1904-1905 гг. эта статья описывает, что Фетлер мог видеть в Уэльсе, и предполагает, каким образом пробуждение повлияло на его служение в Санкт-Петербурге с 1907 по 1914.

**Ключевые слова:** Уильям А. Фетлер, валлийское возрождение, русские евангельские верующие.

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Many years after the fact, an eyewitness of the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905 recalled being present at one of the many meetings that went on during those days in churches and chapels. In general, the revival was characterized by a lack of structure. Services might assemble several times a day and last several hours, as people, led by the Holy Spirit, spontaneously prayed, testified, and sang. At one such gathering, it was reported, a young student from Russia, with tears in his eyes, suddenly cried out, "Oh, pray for me to be baptized with power! Pray that I would be God's chosen instrument to labor in the darkness of Russia!"<sup>1</sup> Although unidentified by the man who recorded the incident,<sup>2</sup> there is little doubt that the student was Wilhelm (William)<sup>3</sup> Andreevich Fetler (1883-1957), who had recently come to London and enrolled at Pastors' College.

### William A. Fetler

It was correctly noted in Wales that Fetler was from Russia, but he was not Russian. Specifically, he was from Kurland, in Latvia, then part of the Russian Empire. His father was Latvian and his mother was a Baltic German. William Fetler had been working at a series of clerical jobs in Riga when he experienced a direct call from God to become a preacher. Recalling that C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), whose sermons his mother had often read aloud to him as a child, had founded a training school for preachers in England, he resolved to study there, although at the time he knew no English. With the help of a dictionary consulted in the city library, he managed to write out a postcard expressing his wish, addressed simply to "College of Spurgeon, London, England." He was not aware that Spurgeon had died in 1892. The great preacher's fame was such, however, that the postcard reached its destination and Spurgeon's son, Thomas, who was then the college president. On the basis of correspondence that followed, the required interview was waived and Fetler was admitted to Pastors' College in 1903.<sup>4</sup>

He was warmly welcomed, and his English swiftly improved. Within a year or so after he arrived in England, Fetler visited Wales, specifically to experience the revival as its fame spread. Others from the Pastors' College community did the same.<sup>5</sup> The revival affected Fetler profoundly. Archibald McCaig, the college principal, later recalled that the young Latvian "... experienced a great quickening of his spiritual life in connection with the Welsh Revival..."<sup>6</sup>

Fetler returned to Russia in 1907 and, until his exile from Russia in 1914, served as a Baptist preacher and pastor in St. Petersburg. Those seven years coincided with a fruitful

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<sup>1</sup> John Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai: Istoriia dukhovnogo probuzhdeniia v Rossii i Latvii*, trans. by Andrei Radchenko (Ashville, N.C.: Russian Bible Society and Revival Literature, 2016), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> According to John Fetler, the incident was recorded by Sidney Evans, brother-in-law of the Welsh revival preacher Evan Roberts; however, Fetler does not reference the source.

<sup>3</sup> Fetler's given name was Wilhelm, but he is known as William in English-language sources.

<sup>4</sup> J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai*, pp. 27-28; Dr. A. McCaig, *Wonders of Grace in Russia* (Riga: Revival, 1926), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> See Ian M. Randall, "The Breath of Revival": The Welsh Revival and Spurgeon's College," *Baptist Quarterly* 41 (2005): 196-205.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Archibald McCaig, *Wonders of Grace in Russia* (Riga: Revival Press, 1926), p. 12.

period of relative freedom that Russian evangelicals<sup>7</sup> enjoyed following the declaration of religious toleration in 1905. Gradually increasing restrictions were placed on them beginning in about 1909, culminating in an almost total shutdown in 1914 with the onset of World War I.<sup>8</sup> However, according to a survey of sectarians conducted by the Russian government in 1912, between 1905 and 1912 evangelicals increased their numbers by one-third, for a total evangelical population of about 100,000.<sup>9</sup> The number is not large, but the rate of growth concerned the authorities. Many factors were at work in the growth of the movement at this time, but the purpose of this paper is to call attention to a spiritual aspect that has been mentioned only in passing in studies of the spread of evangelicalism in Russia, namely the Welsh Revival as experienced by one person, William Fetler, during his studies in London. I will briefly define and analyze revival and outline a history of the Welsh Revival. Finally, I will suggest some ways that the Welsh Revival continued to influence William Fetler and, through him, the growth of the evangelical movement in Russia.

It is impossible to determine what percentage of Russian evangelical church growth is directly related to Fetler's preaching in St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, his commitment to revival as a means of religious renewal, his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, the worship style he promoted, and his interest in social transformation, all have some connection to his experiences in Wales.

### What is a revival?

Revivals have long been a part of evangelical growth and renewal. Richard Carwardine names revival as "...a primary distinguishing characteristic of all properly evangelical churches,"<sup>10</sup> yet it is a difficult phenomenon to define precisely. It is beyond the scope of this article to outline all the possible factors that may contribute to a revival. While social and economic circumstances are, indeed, often identified as playing a role, I concur with Carwardine's assertion that the "only stable factor among the whole complex set of influences on revival has been 'a climate of opinion that regarded revivals as desirable.'"<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In this article, the term "evangelical" is used for convenience to refer to a movement that took shape in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century among people of various religious backgrounds and levels of social standing in three major locations—South Russia (Ukraine), the Caucasus, and St. Petersburg. Inspired by the availability of the Russian New Testament (1862) and German Pietist and English evangelical preaching, they began to read the Bible and pray together. David W. Bebbington's well-known list of evangelical emphases—conversion, the cross, the Bible, and activism (see *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989], pp. 2-17)—usefully underlines the main characteristics that distinguished the Russian evangelicals from their neighbors in the state-recognized churches, especially the Russian Orthodox Church. By the early twentieth century, most evangelicals in Russia would identify themselves with one of two major church unions, the Russian Baptist Union (1884), of which W. A. Fetler was a part, and the Evangelical Christian Union (1909).

<sup>8</sup> Albert J. Wardin, Jr., *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2013), pp. 334-342.

<sup>9</sup> Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978, reprinted by Paternoster, 2006), p. viii.

<sup>11</sup> Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. 56, quoted by Ian M. Randall, *Rhythms of Revival: The Spiritual Awakening of 1857-1863* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2010), p. 2.

Thus, from within that favorable “climate of opinion,” one anonymous author states that, a revival is, “An outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which has consisted of deep conviction, followed by sound conversion, upon many souls at about the same time and under the same religious instructors.”<sup>12</sup> Mark Noll defines revivals as “...intense periods of unusual response to gospel preaching linked with unusual efforts at godly living.”<sup>13</sup> John Wolffe, states that “[A revival] implies an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit and prayerful expectation of numerous and intense conversions.”<sup>14</sup> R. E. Davies adds that “... an immediate, or, at other times, a more long-term effect will be efforts to extend the Kingdom of God both intensively in the society in which the Church is placed, and extensively in the spread of the gospel in more remote parts of the world.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, from an evangelical point of view, revival is an act of the Holy Spirit that evokes an intense response among many people over the same period of time, some of whom have been anticipating and praying for just such an event. Their response is characterized by expressions of emotion, a deeper commitment to Christ and the church, new efforts to lead a holy life, and increased outreach to others. Revivals are special renewal movements that bring those outside the church to Christian conversion and new life to those within: new energy, fresh conviction, and urgency. The very word “revival,” of course, suggests a return to life, like the Russian *vozhzhdenie*. Some older English- language sources prefer the term “awakening,”<sup>16</sup> which corresponds to the Russian word *probuzhdenie* (“awakening”). Both terms imply a movement of the Holy Spirit away from what is old, sleeping, or dead, to something newly aware, life-giving, and lively.

Much scholarly attention has been given to revivals, both to the phenomenon itself and to its history. Of particular interest to evangelical scholars is the question of whether revivals are something that can be manipulated by human agents. In other words, do revivals always “come down” as a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, or are they something that can be “worked up” by human beings? Thus, another subject of study is “revivalism,” or the practice of conducting revivals, and whether that is possible, or even desirable.

The preacher most closely associated with revivalism, as the activity of structuring a revival, is Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) whose *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* was a study of particular interest to the young Fetler.<sup>17</sup> It is because of Finney’s “new measures” that still today we are able to recognize certain features of an evangelization meeting, such as direct, specific preaching at a series of meetings held over several days; long periods of vocal prayer, with the expectation that women will also pray aloud; and an

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, *History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles, Especially in Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant & Son, 1863), p. 3, cited by John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 15, cited by Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, p. 46

<sup>15</sup> R. E. Davies, *I Will Pour Out My Spirit: A History and Theology of Revivals and Evangelical Awakenings* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Monarch, 1992), p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Jessie Penn-Lewis, for example, titled her history *The Awakening in Wales*.

<sup>17</sup> McCaig, *Wonders of Grace*, p. 12.

invitation to come forward to repent at what was sometimes called the “anxious seat” or “anxious bench.”<sup>18</sup>

Fetler mastered Finney’s program, and also, while in England, observed the preaching and evangelistic methods of such figures as G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), Rodney “Gypsy” Smith (1860-1947),<sup>19</sup> and William Booth (1829-1912).<sup>20</sup> I would suggest, however, that although he studied Finney and others, he experienced Wales with long-lasting effect. The writer<sup>21</sup> of the “Prologue” to John Fetler’s biography of his father remarked that the theme of revival figured in all of William Fetler’s subsequent ministry following the powerful impression of Wales. For example, Fetler founded the church “Dom Probuzhdeniia” (House of revival/awakening) in Riga. In addition, the hymnal Fetler preferred was titled *Pesn’ vozrozhdeniia* (Song of revival); and throughout his life, Fetler emphasized in his preaching that the church must be constantly in a state of revival.<sup>22</sup>

What happened to Fetler in Wales?

## The Welsh Revival

Religious revivals in Wales were noted as early as the 1640s, when it was reported that, without the organizational help of ministers, perhaps eight-hundred “godly” people were “...filled with good news, and they tell it to others.”<sup>23</sup> Methodism spread in Wales during the eighteenth century through the preaching of John Wesley (1703-1791) and especially George Whitefield (1714-1770), whose ministry led to the founding of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism.<sup>24</sup> Numerous other revivals followed, especially throughout the nineteenth century, with high points identified in 1807-1809, 1815-1820, 1828-1832, and especially 1859-1860.<sup>25</sup> However, during the decade before the turn of the century, a period of spiritual “depression” reportedly set in.<sup>26</sup>

“To expect revival, one had to experience despair...” according to one historian,<sup>27</sup> meaning that revival begins with an awareness that all is not well in the life of the church,

<sup>18</sup> Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 8, quoted by Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Stewart, *A Man in a Hurry: The Story of the Life and Work of Pastor Basil A. Malof* (Orebrö, Sweden: Evangelipress, 1968), pp. 36-37.

<sup>20</sup> J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai*, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> The writer’s name is transliterated as Др. Янис Шмит, which in the original could be Dr. Janis Schmidt, although that is uncertain.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Janis Schmidt, “Prologue” in J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>23</sup> T. Charles and P. Oliver, eds., *The Works of the Late Rev. Walter Craddock* (Chester: W. C. Jones, 1800), pp. 380-381, quoted by D. Dansil Morgan, “Continuity, Novelty and Evangelicalism in Wales, c. 1640-1850” in Michael G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds., *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), pp. 90-91.

<sup>24</sup> David Ceri Jones, “Calvinistic Methodism and the Origin of Evangelicalism in England” in Haykin and Stewart, *The Advent of Evangelicalism*, pp. 106-107; see also D. Dansil Morgan, “Continuity, Novelty, and Evangelicalism in Wales,” pp. 97-98, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>26</sup> J. Cynddylan Jones, “Introduction” in Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales and Some of the Hidden Springs* (Fort Washington, Penn.: CLC Publications, 1993), pp. 17-18, 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 1.

nor, indeed, in one's own life. Another way to express it is in terms of a growing "thirst" for the presence of God to relieve the spiritual drought. Accordingly, in Wales the revival of 1904-1905 was preceded by an extensive season of prayer.

Jessie Penn-Lewis (1861-1927), a popular Welsh speaker and spiritual writer, kept a careful record of events leading up to the revival.<sup>28</sup> She was active in the Keswick "Deeper Life" conferences, and noted that at least since 1896, groups of people had been praying for a similar spiritual conference to be organized in Wales. For example, in 1903, a group of eighteen-year-old men went up on a mountain every night for several months to pray for revival in Wales. Although at first they were mocked by their community, gradually others joined them. There were numerous similar cases of people meeting regularly for prayer. Finally, the Llandrindod Wells Convention was organized in 1903, and served as a powerful catalyst to involve many more people in praying for Wales, increasing their spiritual vision, and strengthening their desire for the Holy Spirit's action in their lives.<sup>29</sup> By some estimations, there may have been 30-40,000 people praying quite spontaneously during the years preceding the Welsh Revival, in small groups that gathered daily.<sup>30</sup>

One of these was a preacher in New Quay, Cardiganshire, Joseph Jenkins, who began to call together unstructured meetings of young people, in particular. The participants were encouraged to speak, pray, sing, or read on the inspiration of the moment. At one of the meetings in February 1904, Jenkins spoke about submitting to the Holy Spirit and asked those in attendance for testimonies about what God had done for their own souls, personally. At first, no one responded to the preacher's request. Then a young woman, Florrie Evans, spoke up: "If no one else will, then I must say that I do love Jesus Christ with all my heart!" Suddenly, everyone wanted to speak, many were in tears, and the meeting went on for hours. In the weeks that followed, the young people and Jenkins testified to their experience in other towns. But even that was before the revival really began.<sup>31</sup>

A key figure of the Welsh Revival was a 26-year-old former coal miner named Evan Roberts (1878-1951). He was just a few years older than Fetler. It is not known whether the two men ever met, but the preacher Oswald Smith is supposed to have called Fetler "the Evan Roberts of Russia."<sup>32</sup> Roberts was not an evangelistic preacher in the usual sense of the word, but instead traveled from town to town during the revival, offering encouragement, and attending meetings with the gathered people, sometimes unrecognized. According to eyewitnesses, his very presence carried power, although his manner was merely quiet, humble, and friendly. He spoke little, but simply and sincerely, regularly emphasizing a

<sup>28</sup> It is interesting that Penn-Lewis visited Russia in 1897 and again in 1898 and 1899 at the invitation of "a Russian lady," probably one of the elderly "Pashkovites" (see Mary N. Garrard, *Mrs. Penn-Lewis: A Memoir* [Shoals, Ind.: Kingsley Press, 2014; first published by Overcomer Book Room, 1930], Kindle loc. 1218-2399).

<sup>29</sup> Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales and Some of the Hidden Springs* (Fort Washington, Penn.: CLC Publications, 1993), pp. 41-50.

<sup>30</sup> Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, pp. 42-50; William T. Stead, *The Welsh Revival: A Narrative of Facts* (Trumpet Press: 2015), p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, pp. 54-55; Stead, *The Welsh Revival*, p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> "Fetler is the Finney, Wesley, and Evan Roberts of Russia," quoted without reference by J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai*, p. 16.



few points on the necessity of confessing sin, submitting to the Holy Spirit, and confessing Christ publicly.<sup>33</sup>

Roberts was one of those who had prayed for revival for years. In the spring of 1904, he experienced God's presence in a remarkable way, when, every night for three months, the Lord would awaken him at about 1:00 in the morning for "divine fellowship" that lasted for several hours. By fall 1904, Roberts was enrolled in preparatory studies to become a minister. In prayer, he had the impression he was to return home and tell what was happening to him, but he was reluctant to take that step. Eventually, however, he submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit and began to speak publicly. As a result, more and more people began to repent, and the revival truly began.<sup>34</sup>

By November, people felt a change in churches throughout the country. Worship, prayer, and praise went on continually. There was no advertising, but meetings assembled in various towns and villages for two to three hours at a time, sometimes several times a day.<sup>35</sup> All denominations were involved—Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians.<sup>36</sup> The proceedings were at once chaotic and orderly. G. Campbell Morgan stated, "I have never seen anything like it in my life; while a man praying is disturbed [that is, interrupted] by the breaking out of song, there is no sense of disorder, and the prayer merges into song, and back into testimony, and back again into song for hour after hour, without guidance."<sup>37</sup>

Morgan was one of many visitors who came from far away to experience the revival. Other famous evangelical figures, such as William Booth of the Salvation Army, came to observe. All were moved, but to their credit, they refrained from taking active part or preaching, lest they draw attention away from the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

The effects of the revival were far-reaching. Unbelievers repented of their sins. Passive church members turned into bold witnesses. People forgave one another. They paid their debts and returned stolen goods. The taverns stood empty because nearly everyone had given up drink. Multiple sources report that the very horses in the mines stopped working because they no longer understood the miners' commands. Accustomed to swearing and kicks, when the miners stopped abusing them, the horses did not respond!<sup>39</sup> According to one report, 20,000 people became church members during the first five weeks of the revival, while the number of people converted was even greater. By March 1905, lists of converts published in the newspapers surpassed 85,000 names.<sup>40</sup>

It was also a singing revival. Familiar hymns were struck up repeatedly in meetings, blending easily with prayer and testimony. In the revival atmosphere, their meaning was more deeply felt and they were sung with particular fervor. Perhaps Fetler appreciated the singing in a similar way to the influential British journalist William T. Stead

<sup>33</sup> Stead, *The Welsh Revival*, p. 42; Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, pp. 67-69.

<sup>34</sup> Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, pp. 63-67.

<sup>35</sup> Stead, *The Welsh Revival*, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>37</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *Lessons of the Welsh Revival* (Melbourne: Sunday School Union Depot, n.d.) p. 14; see also Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> Morgan, *Lessons of the Welsh Revival*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Morgan, *Lessons of the Welsh Revival*, p. 24; Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, pp. 70-72.

<sup>40</sup> Morgan, *Lessons of the Welsh Revival*, p. 21; Penn-Lewis, *The Awakening in Wales*, p. 72.

(1849-1912), who wrote that the singing he heard in Wales during the revival reminded him of the singing at the cathedral of St. Isaac in St. Petersburg on Easter morning, or the pilgrims at Sergeev Posad.<sup>41</sup>

### Influence of the Welsh Revival in Russia

Evangelicals in Russia were aware of the revival in Wales, although perhaps somewhat belatedly. Religious tolerance was only declared in the Russian Empire in April 1905, and the first legal Russian-language evangelical publication, *Khristianin* [The Christian], did not appear until 1906. An article about the revival was published in that journal in February of that year.<sup>42</sup>

It is not known exactly when Fetler visited Wales, in which places he encountered the revival, or how long he stayed. He shared a room at Pastors' College with a student from Wales, Caradoc Jones,<sup>43</sup> and could have been a guest in his home. Jones wrote his own report of the Welsh Revival, describing the full churches and empty pubs from Christmas 1904 to New Year's 1905, so perhaps Fetler was also present during the holiday week.<sup>44</sup> Others from Pastors' College visited the revival in January 1905, including the principal, Archibald McCaig, so it is possible that Fetler did not travel alone.<sup>45</sup> College president Thomas Spurgeon joined McCaig on another visit later on, suggesting that Fetler may have visited more than once as well.<sup>46</sup>

The college endorsed the revival, and it had a definite effect on the spiritual life of the college community in general. During the revival, the Metropolitan Tabernacle (where C. H. Spurgeon had been pastor) held special meetings and evangelistic outreach in the Elephant and Castle area of London. Pastors' College students—including, we may assume, William Fetler—took an active part in organizing the meetings, preaching, and praying. Processions were held; sometimes as many as 500 people at a time, including college students, staff, and members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, marched through the streets of London, singing.<sup>47</sup>

All of these experiences would have had an immediate effect on Fetler. How did the Welsh Revival influence his later ministry?

First of all, throughout his life, Fetler had a great desire to evangelize. As his heart-cry in Wales indicated, he wanted to come to the aid of "dark Russia." Like other evangelicals, he saw his ministry in terms of leading a nation away from what was old and dead into new light and life, and because of the revival, he had a particular vision of how that could be accomplished.

According to his son, William Fetler credited the Welsh Revival with his appreciation for the power of the Holy Spirit: "I understood the difference between an ordinary

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<sup>41</sup> Stead, *The Welsh Revival*, p 41.

<sup>42</sup> *Khristianin* 2 (February 1906): 53.

<sup>43</sup> Caradoc Jones, "William Fetler," typewritten mss.

<sup>44</sup> Jones' article appeared in *The Sword and the Trowel* in February 1905, according to Ian M. Randall, "The Breath of Revival: The Welsh Revival and Spurgeon's College," *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 41 (October 2005): 199.

<sup>45</sup> Randall, "The Breath of Revival," p. 200.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.



evangelical worship service and one where the free movement of the Holy Spirit takes place.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, when he visited Russia in 1910, Archibald McCaig reported that Fetler’s preaching was characterized by “a wonderful sense of power.”<sup>49</sup> Conversions were always expected at every service Fetler conducted. As in Wales, at least some of the meetings in Russia were not restricted to a schedule—they lasted as long as the Holy Spirit wanted, sometimes as long as six hours.<sup>50</sup> The parallels between St. Petersburg and Wales were not lost on Caradoc Jones during a visit. He saw the central Baptist church, Dom Evangeliia (House of the Gospel), crowded with praying people on a Saturday night and again on Sunday morning, “... like a scene in the Welsh Revival... and conversions every time!”<sup>51</sup>

Music had always been an important part of worship in Russia, and through Fetler, at least for a time, Welsh hymns became part of the evangelical repertoire. Fetler loved the Welsh singing. When he returned to Russia in 1907, Caradoc Jones saw him off. The boat was late in departing. Finally, at midnight, the captain gave orders to cast off and Fetler cried from the deck to his friend on shore, “Jones, sing to me one of those beautiful Welsh hymns.”<sup>52</sup> More than just a matter of personal taste, Fetler encouraged spontaneous singing during worship in the Welsh revival style. In 1910, Dr. Archibald McCaig visited Russia at Fetler’s invitation. Among other Welsh refrains, McCaig observed the spontaneous singing of the Russian version of “Diolch iddo” on several occasions:<sup>53</sup> “Praise be to Him...forever remembering the dust of the earth.”

During Fetler’s years in St. Petersburg, there were many conversions. To be sure, the years 1905 to 1914 were characterized by rapid growth among evangelicals everywhere in Russia, as a result of the lifting of restrictions on religious life and persistent efforts at evangelization. Fetler returned to Russia in 1907 and at first served as pastor in the Latvian Baptist church in St. Petersburg. However, he energetically developed other preaching venues, until there were about twelve meeting places—lecture halls and auditoriums—around St. Petersburg. The impact was considerable, reaching two- to three thousand people every week.<sup>54</sup> Soon it was deemed necessary to build a large Baptist church in the capital. It was dedicated in 1912 as Dom Evangeliia (House of the Gospel). Other substantial church buildings were built elsewhere in Russia at about the same time, but it would appear that the spirit of the Welsh Revival was a factor contributing to accommodating the growing crowds in St. Petersburg.

Like Evan Roberts, Fetler taught “full submission” to the Holy Spirit. His emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the fervor of worship at Dom Evangeliia led some of his contemporaries to criticize Fetler for being a Pentecostal, although he denied that he was.<sup>55</sup> In 1910 Fetler organized the Acts of the Apostles Brotherhood for the purpose of encouraging Christians to shake off their torpor and indifference and live a more devoted life of faith. To join, it was

<sup>48</sup> J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai*, p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> McCaig, *Wonders of Grace*, p.29.

<sup>50</sup> J. Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai*, p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Caradoc Jones, typewritten mss., n.d.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> McCaig, *Wonders of Grace in Russia*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>54</sup> Viŕgel'm Andreevich Fetler, “Molitvennyi dom v Sankt-Peterburge,” *Baptist 1* (January 1908): 26-27.

<sup>55</sup> Wardin., *On the Edge*, pp. 470-471.

necessary to submit a written statement explaining one's reasons for wanting to join and detailing one's original conversion. Those accepted were given a biblical pseudonym.<sup>56</sup> For a time, Fetler's journal *Gost'* [The visitor] featured reports from Brotherhood members who recounted their experiences of living a life totally devoted to Christ. Frequently, the reports detailed their attempts to minister to the poor.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, Fetler's ministry in St. Petersburg consistently emphasized holy living, temperance, and active evangelization among the urban poor. The Welsh Revival was certainly not the only inspiration for this activity, because Fetler had also come into contact with the Salvation Army and other outreach ministries in London, but it is possible that the revival gave him a particular energy for this kind of involvement. He certainly would have been aware of the many testimonies of people in Wales whose lives had been transformed because of the revival, particularly those who had given up drink. Probably beginning in about 1909, Fetler began to organize special night meetings for prostitutes and alcoholics,<sup>58</sup> and during the winter of 1913-1914 Dom Evangeliiia opened a "night shelter"—actually, a rehabilitation center—for about fifty men from the streets, with a program of job training.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

Like the term "revival" itself, the significance of a single individual's spiritual experience is difficult to define. We know that Russian evangelicalism experienced numerical growth during the years following the declaration of religious tolerance in 1905.<sup>60</sup> It is not possible to ascertain exactly how much of that growth was due to the ministry of William Fetler, yet we do know that he was an important figure in Russia during those years. We also know that he experienced a spiritual "quickening" in Wales during the revival there while he was a student in London.

Wales changed Fetler. The revival deepened his commitment to preaching. It affected the spontaneous style of worship in his meetings (including music), his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, and to social outreach in St. Petersburg. All of these things touched the lives of thousands of people. Fetler's ministry had a profound effect on the growth of the evangelical movement in Russia, and the Welsh Revival certainly played a significant part.

<sup>56</sup> See *Gost'* No. 2 (December 1910): 12.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, *Gost'* No. 3 (January 1911), 26-27; No. 4 (February 1911): 61; No. 6 (April 1911): 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Baptist* No. 4 (20 January 1910): 29-30; No. 15 (7 April 1910): 118-119

<sup>59</sup> E. N. K[uteinikova], "Iz nochlezhki v Dome Evangeliiia," *Gost'* No. 12 (December 1914): 303-304.

<sup>60</sup> Between 1905 and 1912 evangelicals in Russia increased their numbers by one-third, for a total evangelical population of about 100,000 (Coleman, *Russian Baptists*, p. 27).

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