‘Et Incarnatus Est’: The Christology of Thomas Charles Edwards (1837–1900)

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The first half of the nineteenth century has been referred to as ‘the age of atonement’.[1] Following the natural religion of the eighteenth century, when even orthodox theologians believed that the intelligent design of an ordered universe could be discerned by enlightened human reason on the evidence of creation itself, after the French Revolution a much darker, starker vision of reality had developed in which men’s and women’s alienation from God was emphasized rather than their ability to comprehend, unaided, any harmony between the laws of creation and the workings of a benign providence within the world. The stress was now upon redemption, not upon the divine image within, upon human sinfulness, corruption and guilt, rather than individuals’ aptitude for living the moral life as such. With social unrest abroad and economic dislocation ever more prevalent at home, ‘cosmic optimism seemed inappropriate to the times’.[2]

The religious background, 1735–1820

It is difficult to judge to what extent this analysis can be applied to the evidence of religion in Wales. The French Revolution, the eccentricities of Iolo Morganwg, and the social radicalism of Morgan John Rhys apart, made little impression in our land, while all earlier eighteenth-century piety, whether Anglican or Dissenting, was founded upon the classic biblical themes of ruin, regeneration, and redemption.[3] The Welsh, there is no doubt, were well used to a theology of the cross. What is incontrovertible is that by the 1790s, the Evangelical Revival which had begun more than fifty years earlier through the preaching of Daniel Rowland, curate of Llangeitho, Cardiganshire, and the exhorting of Howell Harris, an Anglican layman from Trefecca, Breconshire, had not only produced a religious body of its own, namely the Calvinistic Methodist movement, but was so animating the Older Dissent, the Congregationalists, and the Baptists, as wholly to transform the religious landscape of Wales.[4] The old truths were taking on a new life, and what had been sometimes theoretical creeds enshrined in the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, were now being electrified through the popular preaching of a generation of orators – John Elias, Christmas Evans, William Williams ‘o’r Wern’ – the like of which the country had never seen before. By this time ‘heart religion’, the religion of the saved soul, had come into its own, and its only theme

1 Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1986).
2 Ibid., p.4.
3 Geraint H. Jenkins, *Literature, Religion and Society in Wales, 1660–1730* (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 1–32.
4 D. Densil Morgan, *Christmas Evans a’r Ymneilltuaeth Newydd* (Llandysul, 1991).

was the salvation of humankind through the atoning blood of Christ. 'The age of atonement', in its popular (and populist) sense, had indeed arrived.

Although the religion of these decades may have been popular rather than elitist, attractive to the masses and not now merely to the few, it was not devoid of intellectual substance and appealed to the head as well as to the heart. A perusal of Thomas Charles's catechism, *Yr Hyfforddwr* (1807), or his supremely scholarly though eminently readable biblical dictionary, *Y Geirlyfr Ysgrythurol* (1805–11), shows that the people were enlightened through their worship, and that scriptural truth was inculcated not only through the pulpit but even more so in the thousands of all-age Sunday school classes which were burgeoning throughout the land. Wales, of course, was poor. It had no cities or even populous towns, its ruling class was anglicized and small, its middle class negligible and the bulk of its people had been drawn either towards Methodism or a renewed Dissent. Following the great schism of 1811, when Thomas Charles, a clergyman of the Church of England, ordained twenty-one Calvinistic Methodist preachers to administer the sacraments as well as to preach the Word, the blow to the established church was severe. Now even Methodism – formerly a renewal movement within the Anglican Church – had turned nonconformist and chapel religion had become the norm.

The way in which tens of thousands of converts exercised their minds on knotty theological problems and profound scriptural truths was remarkable. The works of Thomas Jones of Denbigh, *Y Drych Athrawiaethol* ('The Doctrinal Mirror') (1806), *Ymddiddanion Crefyddol* ('Religious Discourses') (1807), *Ymddidanion ar Brynedigaeth* ('Discourses on Redemption') (1816) and the like, shows how erudite the intellectual discourse could be. Along with Thomas Charles, Jones, the first to be ordained into the Calvinistic Methodist ministry in 1811, was Wales's premier theologian of the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Calvinism and Arminianism; the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the human will; the doctrine of election and the free offer of the gospel to all who would come to Christ; these are problems which have exercised the greatest minds of the Christian church: Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century, Gottschalk of Orbais in the ninth century, Luther and Erasmus during the Reformation, John Calvin in the sixteenth century, and Jacob Arminius in the seventeenth. It is all there in the works of Thomas Jones, and not for nothing has Owen Thomas's great chapters on Jones's doctrinal contribution in his classic biography of the Methodist preacher John Jones Tal-y-sarn, been translated as *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate*.[5] Between 1790 and 1860 it was the nature of Christ's sacrificial and redemptive death, reconciling sinful humankind with a holy God, which exercised the mind as well as stirred the soul of the nation of Wales.

Lewis Edwards of Bala

The one person whose life spanned the mature decades of 'the age of atonement',

5 Owen Thomas, *The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate, 1707–1841* (Edinburgh, 2002); translated by John Aaron from Owen Thomas, *Cofiant y Parchedig John Jones o Dal-y-sarn* (Wrexham, 1874).

and whose contribution to the religious and intellectual development of Wales would be immense, was Lewis Edwards (1809–87), principal of the Bala College and founding editor of that powerhouse of learned opinion, the post-1845 quarterly journal *Y Traethodydd* ('The Essayist').[6] His desire for betterment, in the teeth of philistine opposition from the chapel elders, took him from a tenant farmer's cottage in Cardiganshire to a glittering career in the universities of London and Edinburgh, and his return to Wales to establish what became the most flourishing of all the nonconformist colleges and a benchmark for theological learning, the Calvinistic Methodist college at Bala, was little short of heroic: 'This is my devoutest aspiration,' he wrote as a young man, 'this is one of my inmost wishes of my heart of hearts, to see my beloved Wales restored to her proper place among the nations of the earth as the land of intellect and virtue.'[7] By the 1860s he had turned the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Connexion, which, after the death of Thomas Charles in 1814 and Thomas Jones in 1820, was in danger of withering into a narrow pietistic sect, into a flourishing branch of the Reformed or Presbyterian family of churches, had provided it with a sound ecclesial identity, had taught it to take pride in itself over and against the older Dissenting bodies and had seen nonconformist Wales cultivate a nascent political identity of its own.

Yet it was first and foremost as a theologian that he saw himself. His series of essays 'Cysondeb y Ffydd' ('The Consistency of the Faith'), beginning in the first issue of the *Traethodydd* in January 1845, was a landmark: 'The correct opinion on all subjects,' he claimed, 'includes two opposite truths and the contrary between them only appears to be irreconcilable.'[8] Gone were the sterile theological dualities of *either* the divine sovereignty *or* the freedom of the human will. Doctrinally both were true, and both were true *at the same time*. This was not Aristotle's golden *mien* or Hegel's synthesis but a way of doing justice to the apparent logical inconsistencies of plain biblical truth. In the subsequent essays he worked out the theory in the context of specific themes: the freedom of the will; the nature of the atonement; the extent of the atonement; the concept of election; and the idea of sin. This way of doing theology was revolutionary at the time: 'Nothing appeared in Welsh theological literature that created such a deep impression on the nation's most reflective readers,' one commentator wrote, 'than this series of articles ... It created a *novum organum*, a new way, a new method for theology.'[9]

For those who experienced them, the changes which occurred between 1835 and 1875 were momentous, not least within the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion itself. In 1835 the generation of leaders who had been ordained in 1811 were nearing the end of their careers. David Charles of Carmarthen had passed away in 1834, Ebenezer Richard, Tregaron would die in 1837, John Elias in 1841, John Evans, Llwynffortun in 1847, and with them the memory of the old 'Church Methodism'

6 See D. Densil Morgan, 'Lewis Edwards (1809-87) and Theology in Wales', *The Welsh Journal of Religious History,* 3 (2008), 15–28; Ibid., *Lewis Edwards* (Caerdydd, 2009).

7 *Bywyd a Llythyrau y Parchg Lewis Edwards DD,* ed. by Thomas Charles Edwards (Liverpool, 1901), p. 212.

8 Lewis Edwards, 'Cysondeb y ffydd 1: sylwadau rhagarweiniol', *Y Traethodydd*, 1 (1845), 15–25 (p. 17); also idem, *Traethodau Duwinyddol* (Wrexham, 1871), pp. 124–36 (p. 126).

9 Griffith Parry, 'Y diweddar Barchedig Lewis Edwards, Y Bala', *Y Dysorfa,* 57 (1887), 321–27 (pp. 326–27).

when the movement still functioned, however tenuously, within the bounds of the Established Church. If the old polemical dualities of election and the divine decrees *or* the freedom of the human will which had characterized the preaching of these men had, by the 1850s, become a thing of the past, the new instruments which had established Methodist identity as a mature institution, namely the Bala college of 1837, its south Wales sister college in Trefecca in 1842, the establishment of the *Traethodydd* in 1845, the General Assembly – modelled on the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland – in 1864 and, more contentiously, the 'English Cause' or the movement to preach the Methodist message through the medium of the English language in 1870, were proving their inestimable value and worth. 'When we recall the attitudes and the mores of the Methodists forty years ago,' remarked Edward Matthews of Ewenni in 1886, 'one can hardly believe that the movement is the same one as that which exists today.'[10]

And Wales too was changing irrevocably. Industrialisation was marching on apace not only in Glamorgan and Gwent, but in the slate valleys of Arfon and Merionethshire as well. Urbanization was occurring, while the population was not only expanding rapaciously but finding a new focus in the iron, steel, and coal fields of the south. Anglicization went hand in hand with this development, while the Education Act of 1870 made elementary education compulsory for all children up to fourteen years of age. Soon a national university would emerge with the college at Aberystwyth, in 1872, leading the way. Nonconformity, according to the results of the religious census of 1851, had far outstripped Anglicanism as being the religion of the people with some 80 per cent of the worshipping population being affiliated to the chapels rather than to the ancient parish churches. 'You must consider that the changes in world and church during this period have been gigantic,' mused Edward Matthews. 'People neither think the same way, nor eat the same way, nor dress the same way ... In looking back and comparing the present with the past, it is as though the earth has become a new planet.'[11]

Problems with the doctrine

And that new planet demanded a new theology. If Lewis Edwards's most innovative contribution to the history of Welsh theology was his groundbreaking series, 'The Consistency of the Faith', his most celebrated volume was *Athrawiaeth yr Iawn* ('The Doctrine of the Atonement'), published in 1860 when its author was fifty-one years old. It was issued a year after the great religious revival of 1859 but also, and more ominously, the year following Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. As well as celebrating the 'age of atonement' it was also fearful of its demise. The continuity between this book and the preaching of Daniel Rowland, the hymns of Williams Pantycelyn, the biblical scholarship of Thomas Charles, and the dogmatic scheme of Thomas Jones was patent. For Edwards, the gospel centred on the costly sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of humankind. Christ, by fulfilling the divine law, had

10 Edward Matthews and J. Cynddylan Jones, *Cofiant y Parchg J. Harris Jones MA PhD* (Llanelli, 1886), p. 74.

11 Ibid., *Cofiant y Parchg J. Harris Jones*, p. 73.

placed himself under the curse and been punished in man's stead. Righteousness demanded reparation. Sin could not be forgiven outside of and apart from the upholding of the divine law. 'The atonement,' he claimed, 'could not display love had not righteousness made it essential.'[12] The cross, therefore, was a matter of God's righteousness being upheld by Christ, the sinless One, who vicariously took upon himself the punishment of us all and by so doing opened up a way for those who believed in him to be saved.

> In the whole of creation [he wrote] power can never be revealed apart from the apposite laws ... The power revealed in man's salvation is love, but we have no choice but to believe that such power is operative through the demands of the eternal righteousness.[13]

The operative categories here are righteousness, law and necessity. The divine love – which is far from being absent from this account – is bound by the demands of a legal framework which was punitive in its essence. Sin demands to be punished. What Christ, through his costly sacrifice did, was to take this punishment upon himself and allow others to go free. The fact, however, as Lewis Edwards readily accepted, was that more and more people, including hordes of those young people who had been swept into the chapels following the great revival of 1859, were openly questioning the doctrinal scheme which underpinned this understanding of the gospel. Should not righteousness be subject to love rather than love having to bow to the demands of a forensic, legalistic scheme? Was not God our holy *Father* and not the One who demanded the sacrifice of an innocent victim *before* being able to shed the divine love abroad?

In his study of the 'age of atonement', the historian Boyd Hilton quotes the trend which was active in both England and Scotland even as Lewis Edwards was publishing his most popular work: 'In all schools of theological thought, Christology rather than soteriology, the incarnation rather than the atonement, now occupies the central position. In place of the *Christus Redemptor* stands the *Christus Consummator*.'[14] In other words, theology was moving away from the concept of the atonement to the centrality of the incarnation as a means of doing a fuller justice to the coming of Christ into the world. Theologians, especially those of a younger generation, were beginning to question the assumptions of the traditional scheme. It was not so much the righteous demands of the Father according to an unbending and impersonal legalistic system which should be central, they assumed, but the selfless and unstinting divine love as seen in the life and example of the Person of Jesus Christ the Son. 'It is clear,' writes Hilton,

> that moral revulsion did play an important part in the softening of evangelical Christianity ... Along with hellfire, liberal theologians of the 1850s and 1860s surrendered the idea that a loving God would

12 Lewis Edwards, *Athrawiaeth yr Iawn* (Wrexham, 1860), p. 17.
13 Ibid., p. 25.
14 V. F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800–60* (London, 1913), quoted in Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p. 5.

> inflict excruciating suffering on his Son as a vicarious sacrifice for other men's sins. Such an action now seemed both unjust and ... inefficious.[15]

Lewis Edwards was never a liberal theologian, and liberalism would not register within Wales until the end of the century at least. But changes were afoot, and the one who was as conscious of the need for change as Edwards Snr was keen to preserve continuity with the past was the Bala theologian's eldest son. This takes us from Lewis Edwards, the father, to Thomas Charles Edwards, the son.

Thomas Charles Edwards and the Christological turn

Thomas Charles Edwards (1837–1900) was Lewis Edwards's eldest child and the scion of a family which included, following Edwards Snr's marriage to Jane Charles of Bala, the bloodline of the great Thomas Charles himself. Whereas the father had to fight to follow his dream of pursing a higher education, the son progressed effortlessly from the Bala college to the University of London, thence to Lincoln College, Oxford, and finally to Benjamin Jowett's Balliol where he graduated with a brilliant first in *literae humaniores* or 'Greats'. Methodism was not only his family's inheritance, but he was deeply affected by the 1859 revival where he was converted through the ministrations of his uncle, Thomas Edwards, Pen-llwyn. He was, according to J. E. Caerwyn Williams, '*yn ddwys, yn ddwfn ac yn ddilys dduwiol'* ('seriously, deeply and sincerely godly').[16] He had felt a calling to ministry early and spent eight years as pastor of the Windsor Street Calvinistic Methodist church in Liverpool before being invited in 1872 to become the founding principal of Wales's first university college at Aberystwyth. He was indubitably the man for the job, and there is something quite as heroic in the national context as his father's ambition, thirty-five years earlier, had been in founding the Bala college in the context of his denomination.

> There is no doubt that the Principal was a complex man, curiously withdrawn, perhaps because he had grown up in the shadow of a famous father and lived, himself, from an early age in the fierce light of public life. For all that, he had a striking personality that impressed itself unforgettably on his students; his nickname 'the Prince', suitably expressed their unbounded admiration for him; they readily forgave him his quick temper, and realized that they were in the presence of something like greatness.[17]

The fact that he could produce works of profound scholarship while dealing

15 Ibid., p. 273.
16 J. E. Caerwyn Williams, 'T. C. Edwards a'i gyfraniad i ddiwinyddiaeth Cymru', *Diwinyddiaeth*, 25 (1974), 3–28 (p. 15).
17 E. L. Ellis, *The University College of Wales Aberystwyth, 1872–1972* (Cardiff, 1972), pp. 57–58.

with the day to day running of a fledgling institution – his commentary on 1 Corinthians published in 1885 remains a deeply impressive tome while his two smaller commentaries on Hebrews, one in English (1888) and the other in Welsh (1890), are highly accomplished[18] – shows that, like his father, he could combine scholarship with piety in a way which compels admiration still. He did this while retaining his popularity as a preacher *par excellence*. 'The one central fact about him,' remarked his student J. Puleston Jones, 'was that he was a great preacher.'[19] In order to express the gospel in terms that the new generation could comprehend, he felt that a radical recasting of the doctrine needed to be achieved. There were grave problems with the penal aspect of the Saviour's sacrificial death and whether that should be given the sort of prominence that it had been afforded within the popular scheme. But even more pressing was the need to bring to the fore the centrality of Christ's incarnate *life*. Between 1870 and the publication of his *magnum opus*, *The God-Man*, in 1895, he would ponder creatively on Christology, the doctrine of the Person of Christ.

In an address at the cathedral of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church, Prince's Road, Liverpool, in 1870, the thirty-three-year-old Edwards described the intellectual challenge which the Christian message faced. 'Some of us thought that he over-estimated the significance of the doubts that were in the air,' commented Puleston Jones. 'A fuller acquaintance with our age has shown us that we were wrong and he was right.'[20] He wondered whether the Methodist Fathers, indeed the whole body of Nonconformists and Churchmen in Wales, had been wise in so centring their thought upon Christ's redemptive work on the cross and the problems of individual salvation. By so doing, Christ's Person was in danger of being eclipsed, as was any wider understanding of the corporate nature of redemption. 'According to this theology,' he opined, 'the Trinity exists in order to fulfil the needs of man, verily, even sinful man himself.'[21]

Part of Christ's mission unquestionably was to die for the sins of men, but did his saving purpose include a true understanding of the significance of his teaching, ministry and life? The atonement, which was a vital scriptural truth, needed to be rooted much more soundly in Christ's total incarnate existence from Bethlehem on. The doctrine of the atonement presupposed the reality of the incarnation which had not been afforded its full theological due. According to the old theory: 'His incarnation occurred only in order for Christ to die, and the only value of his life was in the sufferings of his human state.'[22] These categories were no longer resonating with the most thoughtful hearers of the Christian message, and what is more, did they fully do justice to the New Testament revelation itself? The need of the day was for a sound understanding of Christ's incarnate life, that He had shared humanity to the depths with the whole of the human race. The movement was away

18 Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London, 1885); Ibid., *The Expositor's Bible: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1888); Ibid., *Yr Epistol at yr Hebreaid* (Caernarfon, 1890).

19 J. Puleston Jones, 'Principal Thomas Charles Edwards MA, DD', in *Welsh Religious Leaders of the Victorian Era,* ed. by J. Vyrnwy Morgan (London, 1905), pp. 356–77 (p. 356).

20 Jones, 'Principal Thomas Charles Edwards MA, DD', p. 373.

21 Quoted in D. D. Williams, *Thomas Charles Edwards* (Liverpool, 1921), p. 73.

22 Williams, *Thomas Charles Edwards*, p. 73.

from Christ's vicarious death in place of the elect, forensically understood, to a deep life-giving union with the whole of humankind but activated in the believer through the specific ministrations of the Holy Spirit. 'It would not be amiss to suggest that the essence of the ministry of the Calvinistic Methodists these days [should be] the incarnation of Christ as the revelation of God to the human soul.'[23]

As the decades passed, T. C. Edwards made known his conviction that a vast social and intellectual change was occurring all about. 'In our fathers' days,' he told the General Assembly meeting in Merthyr Tydfil in 1888,

> it could be taken for granted that theology was the abiding concern of a huge swath of the Welsh lay folk, but can that be said of today? Now it is politics or scientific theory, and is it not a fact that our young men not only have no theology but have no appetite for it at all?[24]

These were not the pessimistic musings of a grumpy old man. When he wrote these words he had been at Aberystwyth for sixteen years, and had an intimate knowledge of the lay of the land. 'The pick and cream of the nation,' wrote Puleston Jones, 'in Church and State, in business and the profession passed through Aberystwyth in the seventies and early eighties.'[25] It included young men of huge distinction such as O. M. Edwards and T. E. Ellis, as well as Puleston Jones himself. The Principal knew that the world was changing all around. 'In the present condition of things in Wales,' he informed the Pan-Presbyterian Council in London in that same year, 'you have a people actually weary of contending systems, keenly alive at the same time to the fascination of new ideas, political and scientific, and, for this reason, in danger of drifting away from theological truth altogether.'[26]

Neither was it that the gospel was not being preached. The basic soundness of the evangelical pulpit could not be faulted. What was new was that the listeners, still active in their chapels, were becoming more and more sceptical as to the reality of divine truth. 'In our age agnosticism has come to the front as a conscious phase of the human intellect and teaches our young men [he says nothing of the young women] not that this or that solution to the problem is fallacious ... but that the problem itself need not be solved either way.'[27] If the Methodist Fathers had debated at length and passionately about the extent of the atonement, the present generation hardly believed in any sort of atonement and thought that it was all a waste of time: 'The greatest danger that besets religion in Wales today is plain. The sense of sin is not keen.'[28]

What, therefore, was to be done? To preach Christ, certainly, but not Christ as the linchpin of a sacrificial theory, but Christ in the glory of his incarnate person,

23 Williams, *Thomas Charles Edwards*, p. 74.
24 Thomas Charles Edwards, 'Prif nodwedd yr adeg bresennol ar grefydd yn y Cyfundeb', *Y Drysorfa*, 58 (1888), 280–90 (p. 282).
25 Jones, 'Principal Thomas Charles Edwards MA, DD', p. 359.
26 T. C. Edwards, 'Religious thought in Wales', in *Thomas Charles Edwards*, pp. 103–112 (pp.110–111).
27 Ibid., p.111.
28 Ibid., p.109.

come into the world to share the joys and sufferings of an increasingly inquisitive and sceptical generation: 'Theology will come afterwards, and it will come with a greater force ... [Then] comes the preacher's golden opportunity to proclaim the infinite atonement through the infinite sacrifice of the God-Man.'[29] This was the context for the publication of his *magnum opus*, *The God-Man*, in 1895.

The God-Man

Whereas Methodist theology had traditionally been centred upon the felt spiritual needs of man and the salvation of the human soul, the immediate interest of Edwards's volume is in the nature and reality of God. God existed in and of himself and only derivatively did the doctrine include the divine condescension and only then in the context of Christology, that God as Trinity encompassed the human nature of Christ. 'The doctrine of the incarnation had no value or meaning [to the Methodist Fathers],' he had stated in his London address of 1888, 'except as ... a necessary condition of Christ's atoning death, and the idea of any connection between Christ and the race ... had not occurred to them.'[30] By now, however, thoughtful people were asking whether God was at all interested in the *world*, the secular sphere of the whole of human kind. The current volume was Edwards's response to their question.

The first chapter describes the Trinitarian nature of God and the reality of the incarnation. The categories he uses are not the familiar Puritan ones of imputed righteousness and forensic justification but the patristic themes shared by orthodox and catholic theology both east and west. God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of God's eternal Trinity is presupposed. Within the eternal fellowship of God, the Father exists as the fount of godhead, *fons trinitatis*, while the Son, or divine *logos*, both shares the essence of the divine and remains eternally submissive to the Father's will. This, as it happens, had been explicitly stated in Thomas Charles's biblical dictionary and in the Calvinistic Methodists' 1823 Confession of Faith. What is novel is Edwards's concept of the compatibility between the human and the divine; 'In Him [Christ] ... we recognize ideally what is highest and divinest (*sic*) in man.'[31] Whereas the older theology had majored on God's transcendent sovereignty, in common with current idealist thought, Edwards – who had resigned his Aberystwyth post in 1890 to succeed his father as principal at the theological college in Bala – was keen to express God's immanence or immersion, through Christ, in the life of the world: 'The incarnation,' he claimed, 'is a special form of God's immanence.'[32]

The second chapter is taken up with scriptural exegesis, John's Gospel, the passages in the Letter to the Hebrews which emphasize Christ's suffering in sympathy with humankind, and the portions of Paul's epistles which speak of

29 Ibid., p.111.
30 Ibid., p.105.
31 Thomas Charles Edwards, *The God-Man, being the 'Davies Lecture' for 1895* (London, 1895), p. 17.
32 Ibid., p. 26.

Christ as the second Adam, namely humanity itself renewed and redeemed through Christ having shared in our human flesh. This theology was more reminiscent of the orthodoxy of the undivided church, its eastern branch especially, than the penal substitution theory of the Protestant west.

> While the present writer would firmly maintain the doctrine of the redemptive death on the cross, the truth of the self-revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ is prior in order and idea, not only to redemption, but to sin itself.[33]

In other words, the incarnation was not an after-thought in order to remedy the fall, but it would have occurred had man never sinned in the first place: 'The Son of God *must* become man, even if sin had not been permitted to enter the world.'[34] This was a fairly radical departure from Methodist orthodoxy, but Edwards was convinced that it was basically sound.

The final chapter contains the classic expression in Welsh theology of the idea of the *kenosis*, the idea championed by the Anglican Charles Gore, bishop of Oxford, and others during the Victorian era, that Christ had divested himself of his metaphysical attributes such as omnipotence and omniscience when he became flesh, but preserved his moral attributes of love and grace:

> His incarnation involved his divesting himself for a time of the form of God, and taking upon Him, instead of the form of a servant ... In the Trinity the Second Person is, in idea, human, but through incarnation He assumed a human personality and the humanlike condition, though He continued to be God.[35]

'According to this argument,' he assured the Bala students in 1893, 'I do not believe that the idea of the *kenosis* or self-emptying of God's Son is in opposition to the older creeds, but it is an extension of them.'[36]

Conclusion

We will forgo an evaluation of Edwards's ideas. They were controversial at the time and are not beyond criticism.[37] The basic orthodoxy of his faith was never in doubt: he held to the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's person, the doctrine of trinity and the New Testament vision of Christ being born of the virgin and objectively raised from the dead. This was far from the liberal idea of Jesus of Nazareth as a good

33 Ibid., p. 78.
34 Ibid., p. 79 (my italics).
35 Ibid., pp. 125–26, 127–28.
36 Thomas Charles Edwards, 'Sylwadau diwinyddol: athrawiaeth yr ymwacâd', *Y Drysorfa*, 63 (1893), 210–12, 254–56 (p. 255).
37 See R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation: Wales 1890-1914*, ed. by R. Pope and translated by Sylvia Prys Jones (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 227–30, who over estimates the influence of Hegel on T. C. Edwards.

man who had become divine; rather Christ was the second person of the Trinity who had taken flesh: 'The Logos fashioned His own humanity ... from the materials given by the faith of the Virgin.'[38] What was absent was the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man that Kierkegaard had so fiercely championed in Denmark decades before, and an over-optimism concerning individuals' potential for good. The doctrinal discussion which followed was as significant as that which had occurred with Lewis Edwards's series on 'the Consistency of Faith' forty years before. 'This,' according to R. Tudur Jones, 'was one of the most important theological debates in Welsh history ... There was not much wrong with the verve, vitality and the scholarship of churches who could produce theological disputants such as these.'[39] Both debates, alas, seem very far from the concerns of the twentieth century, to say nothing of the twenty-first.

Just as Lewis Edwards encapsulated 'the age of atonement', Thomas Charles Edwards represented the genius of 'the age of incarnation'. Despite the distance between them and us, it would be remiss of us all not to pay homage to these two giants of the past.

38 Edwards, *The God-Man,* p. 58.
39 Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation,* p. 57.