

# Missions in Wales

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Toward the end of the three months that my wife and I recently spent in Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, we had the opportunity to accompany Rev. Ron Hanko on one of his missionary trips to Wales. As most of you know, Rev. Hanko has been making regular visits to Wales in order to pursue contacts with various individuals who are interested in the truths of God's Word as we have come to understand them in our Protestant Reformed Churches. These visits involve preaching, lecturing, leading Bible studies, and visiting with the interested individuals and families.

In writing about our recent visit to Wales, it is my hope that all of you will be able, first of all, to understand more clearly the nature of the work that is being done in Wales. This is important. Since the missionary labors being done in Wales are a work which we are doing as churches, it is good for each of us to be aware of and to show an interest in what is being done. Then, too, we can pray more meaningfully for God's blessing on His people and on the work there.

Secondly, I hope that you all will appreciate more what God has given us as churches. While God's people in lands such as Wales are starving to receive sound, Reformed preaching and teaching, it seems at times that we can easily take for granted the heritage of the truth that God has given us and preserved for us.

The country of Wales is a part of what is known as Great Britain. Located to the west of England, Wales borders England on its north, south and east. The west coast of Wales borders the Irish Sea. It is a land which has a beauty of its own — being rugged and mountainous, and receiving a good quantity of rain which keeps things beautifully green.

Concerning our mission work there, there are especially two small groups of saints with whom Rev. Hanko has contact. The one group is in the north of Wales, near the city of Bangor. This group consists of one or two families, and a few individuals. Recently a few others have also shown interest and have attended the worship services, lectures, and Bible studies when Rev. Hanko is there. This group worships together every Sunday in the home of one of the families.

One interesting aspect of the work in North Wales is that the people, in many ways, have retained their Welsh identity and culture. They have done so especially through keeping the Welsh language. In fact, in many schools the children are educated in Welsh. Most people, however, are able to speak both Welsh and English, but this is not always the case. Because of this it may be profitable for a missionary to know this language.

The other group with whom Rev. Hanko has been working is in South Wales, in the area of the city of Swansea. There are in this area especially two families with whom Rev. Hanko has had contact for a number of years. During the recent visits of Rev. Hanko, others have also been coming along and showing interest in the truth. An example of this interest is the fact that one man, who recently attended one of the lectures, took with him close to half of the pamphlets and literature that Rev. Hanko had brought along for distribution. This man lived in one of the valleys just north of Swansea and was eager to pass the literature around to other members of the church of which he is a member.

Perhaps you are wondering whether these two groups, the one in the north and the other in the south of Wales, could get together, or at least meet together. What makes this difficult is

that it takes around six to seven hours to cover this distance on the small and often overcrowded roads.

It is important for us to remember a few things about the character of the work in Wales. One thing we must note is that the saints there feel rather isolated. The reason for this is not only the distances in miles from each other, but also the fact that religion (and especially a love for the Reformed faith) is all but dead and gone in Wales. There is barely any concern shown for the truth. This means that those with whom we have contact find it extremely difficult to find others who are of like faith— even within the few "conservative" churches of which they are members. Our work, therefore, involves bringing the Word, not to large groups of people, but to various individuals and families who are unhappy (and understandably so) with the state of things within the churches in Wales and are seriously considering leaving these churches. In many cases these people feel "cheated," for now that they hear the faithful exposition of the truths of Scripture, they sense that in all their years they have been taught very little.

This has to be taken into account in the preaching and teaching that is done there. While we ourselves have been privileged to be taught the truths of the Reformed faith from childhood up, many of the saints within Wales have just begun, in the last few years, to hear of and to come to grips with these truths. And yet they show a keen interest which we often lack. It is obvious that they love the truth and have grown in their knowledge, not only through the preaching and teaching they have received through the missionary work we have been doing, but also through their own diligent study of the Word of God, and their own interest in reading Reformed literature.

One must not forget either the work that has been done in Wales (as also in other parts of the British Isles, including Northern Ireland) by the British Reformed Fellowship. This organization, not only through its publishing "The British Reformed Journal," but also through its organizing conferences and lectures, has helped much in the spread of the Reformed faith in the British Isles. It has often been through the work of this organization that individuals have initially heard of the Protestant Reformed Churches and their labors in the British Isles.

It seems clear that the Lord has a work for us to do in both these areas of Wales. Although at this point the numbers in each area are still small, there is definitely a hunger after the truth by those with whom we have had contact. It is certainly a great privilege to have this opportunity to bring the blessed gospel to God's people in this part of the world.

Through our contacts with and knowledge of such scattered saints in the British Isles, let us learn to appreciate more the fact that from week to week God has given and continues to give us the sound preaching of His Word and the blessing of fellowship with like-minded believers. May we thank Him for His faithfulness as we see that in the work of the seminary and in the blessings that we have in our churches. And may we never forget to pray for, and to help as much as the Lord enables us, those who do not have such blessings.

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