**Religion**

The 2001 census shows that today in Wales fewer than one in ten people regularly attend a church or chapel, slightly lower than the figures for Scotland and England. However, it also shows that over 72% of Welsh people see themselves as Christian, perhaps demonstrating that while they don’t actively worship God, their lives are still strongly influenced by Christian values and principles. The most common religion in Wales after Christianity is Islam, its adherents accounting for 0.7 per cent of the population. Of other religions in Wales, 0.2 per cent are Hindu, 0.2 per cent are Buddhist, 0.1 per cent are Sikh, and 0.1 per cent are Jewish. More than 1 in 6 people, 18.5 per cent of the Welsh population, stated that they have no religion.

**St David and the Welsh Saints**

The patron saint of Wales, St David, was a sixth century member of the royal house of Ceredigion, and founder of a monastery in Pembrokeshire at the place known today as St Davids. Throughout the Middle Ages St Davids was the most important place of pilgrimage in Wales.

St David himself died towards the end of the sixth century and was canonised relatively soon thereafter. By 800 AD his feast day had been set as 1 March, the date of his death. St David was recognised as the nation’s patron saint during the twelfth century.

Of the many hundreds of other Welsh saints, the only other to be popularised is St Dwynwen, patron saint of lovers. In recent years St Dwynwen’s Day, 25 January, has been promoted as a Welsh alternative to St Valentine’s Day.

Dwynwen lived during the fifth century. Legend has it that, having fallen in love with Maelon Dafodrill but being pledged to another man by her father, she was visited by an angel who carried a potion to make her forget Maelon and turn him to ice. God then granted her three wishes: that Maelon be thawed, that God make the hopes and dreams of true lovers come true, and that she should never marry.

In gratitude for the granting of these wishes, Dwynwen devoted the rest of her life to God’s service. The remains of her church stand on the island of Llanddwyn, off the Anglesey coast.

**Nonconformity**

Nonconformists or Dissenters were small groups of worshippers who dissented from the doctrines and practices of the established Anglican Church. By the time of the religious census in 1851, nearly 80 per cent of worshippers in Wales were Nonconformists. Awareness of their numerical superiority led to demands for the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. When this was achieved in 1920 and there was no longer any established Church to dissent from, the words Dissenter and Nonconformist lost their meaning. Henceforth, denominations which had belonged to the Nonconformist tradition called themselves Free Churches. Their membership declined sharply during the 20th Century.

In the 17th Century Welsh Methodists led the so-called ‘Revival’. In particular the conversion of Howel Harris (1714—73) on Palm Sunday 1735 heralded its beginning. Others such as William Williams (Pantycelyn, 1717-91) underwent similar conversions. The main characteristics of the Revival were powerful preaching, conversions, the gathering of converts in meetings and the creation of a distinct organisation for fear of ejection from the Church of England. Eventually,
however, this lead to the establishment of a new Nonconformist denomination known as the Calvinistic Methodists.

Congregationalists – or Independents – are churches that believe themselves responsible for their own congregation, independent of any external civil or ecclesiastical authority. John Penry, born in 1563 in Llangamarch and executed in London in 1593 for his separatist Puritanism, is thought of as the first Congregationalist, although the first church was not established until 1639, at Llanvaches near Newport. The 19th Century was a period of rapid expansion for the denomination. This continued into the 20th Century until at its height in 1933, membership reached some 175,000, after which came the decline. By 2004 there were fewer than 350 Churches belonging to the Welsh Independents, with a membership of about 35,000.

Baptists, a movement of evangelical Christians, advanced into Wales from England during the 17th Century. During the 18th Century they joined with the Congregationalists, Calvinistic Methodists and Wesleyans in turning Wales into a ‘nonconformist nation’. At the movement’s height, in the early 20th Century Welsh Baptists had about 190,000 members, a number that declined to fewer than 20,000 by the early 21st Century.

Presbyterians advocate a system of church government by presbyters or lay elders. When the Calvinistic Methodists seceded from the Anglican Church in 1811, they adopted a Presbyterian form of government. In 1928 the denomination formally adopted ‘The Presbyterian Church of Wales’ as its title.

Wesleyans who emerged from the doctrine and organisation of John Wesley (1703-91), were the smallest of the mainstream Nonconformist denominations in Wales. Nonetheless, from very small beginnings they grew rapidly through the 19th Century and by 1925 had some 25,000 members. However, by the end of the century they were fewer than 10,000

Welsh Nonconformity was based upon democratic principles. Individual members were consulted on how their chapels were organised, in contrast with the more hierarchical nature of the Church. Debate was part and parcel of chapel life, aided by increasing literacy in Welsh and English. The 1884 Reform Act meant that most men now had the vote (although women had to wait until 1918), and the Nonconformists were now in a position to start flexing some political muscle. Thomas Gee, a Methodist deacon from Denbigh, used his newspaper Baner ac Amserau Cymru, to campaign for disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales. The fact that Anglicans in Wales still enjoyed legal privileges in Wales over the Nonconformist majority struck Gee and many others, as grossly unfair. The issue became particularly bitter when violence broke out over the issue of tithes, a traditional payment which entitled the Church to a tenth of people’s annual income whether or not a person went to Church. The issue was finally resolved in 1920 when the Church in Wales was established with its own Archbishop to officially represent Anglicanism in Wales.

**Church in Wales**

Although, in common with most other churches the Church in Wales has witnessed a decline in the number of clergy and communicants through much of the period since Disestablishment, it is undoubtedly the strongest of Wales’s denominations, and its national role is emphasised by its ownership of nearly all the country’s ancient ecclesiastical buildings. The Church in Wales owns 1,430 places of worship. In 2006 the average weekly attendance was recorded at 6,780 aged under 18 and 39,490 aged over 18. The highest attendance was at Easter, with 68,120 at worship (68,837 in 2007).
The Church in Wales contains six dioceses, presided over by the Archbishop of Wales and the Bishops of:

- St Asaph
- Bangor
- St Davids
- Llandaff
- Monmouth
- Swansea and Brecon

The current Archbishop of Wales is the Most Reverend Dr Barry Morgan, who is also Bishop of Llandaff. In 2003, his predecessor Rowan Williams, became the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The diocese of St Davids is centred on the cathedral city of the same name. It is the cathedral alone that has allowed St Davids to achieve city status since, with a population of just under 2000, in size it is no larger than a village. The cathedral itself is built upon the site of the 6th century monastery of St David, the patron saint of Wales. Whilst occupying the smallest city in the country, St Davids Cathedral cannot claim to be the smallest ancient cathedral, a title reputedly held by the thirteenth century St Asaph Cathedral.

**Roman Catholicism**

The religious census of 1851 revealed that there were only 20 Catholic Churches in Wales, almost half of them in rural Monmouthshire. By then, however, Wales had 20,000 Irish-born inhabitants, the vast majority of whom were Roman Catholic, and over the next half century determined efforts were made to cater for their religious and educational needs, especially following the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850. The archdiocese of Cardiff embracing the whole of Wales and Herefordshire was established in 1916. Today this is divided into three dioceses:

- Cardiff - comprising Glamorgan, Cardiff, Newport, Monmouthshire and Hereford.
- Minevia – comprising mid and west Wales and Swansea, almost the same boundaries of the diocese of St David’s, known in medieval times as Menevia or Maenor Fynyw.
- Wrexham – comprising the whole of north Wales.

By the mid 20th Century, when the membership of all Wales’s other mainstream churches was in decline, the Roman Catholic Church was enjoying considerable success and had become the strongest denomination in many Welsh urban areas. By the later 20th Century, however, Roman Catholicism had joined the other churches in suffering decline.