

Recovering Evangelical Spirituality

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur offre ici quelques perspectives historiques sur la spiritualité évangélique et des réflexions sur ce que cela peut apporter à l'Église d'aujourd'hui. Lorsqu'on parle de retrouver une spiritualité évangélique, on présuppose qu'une perte est intervenue. Les études sur la spiritualité évangélique abondent ces dernières années. L'auteur soutient que, pour retrouver la spiritualité évangélique, il faut réaffirmer et se réapproprier les quatre caractéristiques mises en avant par David Bebbington. Il pense que le mouvement évangélique est un courant spécifique de la spiritualité chrétienne et que « l'expérience vécue » lui est essentielle. Le premier aspect est la conversion par laquelle, pour reprendre une expression des Frères moraves, Christ « touche le cœur avec puissance » : il s'agit de redécouvrir ce qu'est une vie affectée en profondeur par une rencontre avec Christ puis une relation continue avec lui. Vient ensuite le rapport à la Bible : « connaître Sa Parole » comme on disait dans l'Unité des Frères. La foi évangélique insiste sur la mise en pratique de l'enseignement biblique et sur l'obéissance. Il est besoin ici aussi d'y revenir. Troisièmement, la croix : « unis au Sauveur » comme disait Spurgeon. Pour bon nombre d'évangéliques, cela impliquait de s'attendre à

rencontrer Christ lors de la participation à la cène. Les frères Wesley ont publié des *Hymnes pour le repas du Seigneur*, comprenant des cantiques mettant en valeur la signification profonde de la cène et destinés à nourrir l'expérience spirituelle. Enfin, l'engagement missionnaire a aussi été un point crucial pour les évangéliques. Les Frères moraves ont exercé une grande influence sur William Carey et sur bien des chrétiens, avec pour résultat la création de la Société Missionnaire Baptiste en 1792. Par la suite, un responsable baptiste, John Rippon, parlait de la mission en termes « œcuméniques » réservant ses mots les plus enthousiastes pour son appréciation des Frères moraves, dont le ministère visait à « humaniser et christianiser le monde ». L'œuvre missionnaire demeure aujourd'hui indissociable du message de la croix et d'une vie, à la fois individuelle et communautaire, qui découle de la communion avec le Seigneur crucifié et ressuscité. En dernier lieu, l'auteur aborde la question du culte. Derek Tidball a montré que les chants des années 70 véhiculaient de manière excessive une théologie triomphaliste de la gloire et de la victoire, mais qu'on est ensuite revenu à « un meilleur équilibre tenant compte du thème néotestamentaire de la mort et de la résurrection avec Christ ». L'auteur plaide ici pour un retour à un culte bien plus riche.

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SUMMARY

This study offers some historical reflections on evangelical spirituality and how this relates to the situation of the contemporary Church. In speaking about a 'recovery' of evangelical spirituality, the implication is that something has been lost. Significant work on evangelical spirituality has been done in recent years. This study argues that the recovery of evangelical spirituality requires re-assessment and re-appropriation of the four distinctive set out by David Bebbington. The view taken here is that evangelicalism is a specific stream of Christian spirituality, to do with 'lived experience'. The first aspect examined is conversion, in which – to quote from the Moravians – Christ 'approaches the heart with his power'. The study suggests that there is a need in much of the Church for recovery of a deeper experience of Christ: the recovery of the concept of a life deeply impacted by the encounter

– and ongoing encounters – with Christ. The next section looks at the Bible – 'to know His word', as the Unity of the Brethren said. The evangelical faith has been marked by a stress on practical application of Bible teaching and on obedience. Here again, recovery is needed. The third aspect is the cross, 'united to the Saviour', as C.H. Spurgeon put it. This emphasis has meant that a number of evangelicals have had an expectation of encountering Christ in the Lord's Supper. The Wesleys published *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* which includes hymns that convey the depths of the eucharist and are intended to nourish spiritual experience. Active involvement in mission has also been crucial for evangelicals. The Moravians had a powerful influence on William Carey and on thinking that led to the formation in 1792 of the Baptist Missionary Society. Mission today cannot be separated from the message of the cross and a life – both individual and communal – marked by fellowship with the crucified

and risen Lord. Finally this study looks at the recovery of worship. Derek Tidball argues that the new hymnody of the 1970s saw an 'excessive preoccupation with a theology of glory, victory and triumphalism' but that this gave

way to 'a better balance that mirrors the dying-and-rising motifs of New Testament Christianity'. This study calls for the recovery of full-orbed worship.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Untersuchung bietet einige historische Überlegungen zur evangelikalen Spiritualität und in welcher Beziehung diese zur Situation der zeitgenössischen Kirche steht. Mit der Rede von der „Wiedergewinnung“ der evangelikalen Spiritualität wird impliziert, dass etwas verloren gegangen ist. Die letzten Jahre haben zunehmend bedeutende Arbeiten zur evangelikalen Spiritualität gesehen. Die Untersuchung argumentiert, dass die Wiedergewinnung der evangelikalen Spiritualität eine Neubewertung und Neuaneignung der vier Charakteristika erfordert, die David Bebbington dargelegt hat. Die hier vertretene Sicht lautet, dass der Evangelikalismus ein spezifischer Strang christlicher Spiritualität ist, der mit „gelebter Erfahrung“ zu tun hat. Der erste untersuchte Aspekt ist die Bekehrung, in der – um die Herrnhuter zu zitieren – Christus „mit seiner Macht das Herz erreicht“. Die Untersuchung zeigt an, dass in einem Großteil der Kirche Bedarf für die Wiedergewinnung einer tieferen Erfahrung Christi besteht: die Wiedergewinnung des Konzeptes eines Lebens, das zutiefst von der Begegnung – und wiederholten Begegnungen – mit Christus beeinflusst ist. Der nächste Abschnitt widmet sich der Bibel – „um sein Wort zu kennen“, wie die Böhmisches Brüder sagten. Der evangelikale Glaube ist von einer Betonung auf die praktische Anwendung der biblischen Lehre und auf Gehorsam geprägt. Auch hier ist eine Wiedergewinnung vonnöten. Der dritte Aspekt ist das Kreuz,

„vereint mit dem Retter“, wie es C. H. Spurgeon ausdrückte. Diese Betonung hat bedeutet, dass ein Teil der Evangelikalen die Erwartung hatte, Christus im Abendmahl zu begegnen. Die Wesley-Brüder veröffentlichten *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (Choräle zum Abendmahl), mit Chorälen, die die Tiefen der Eucharistie ausdrücken und dazu gedacht sind, spiritueller Erfahrung Nahrung zu geben. Aktive Teilnahme an der Mission war ebenfalls entscheidend wichtig für Evangelikale. Die Herrnhuter hatten großen Einfluss auf William Carey und auf das Denken, das zur Gründung der Baptist Missionary Society im Jahre 1792 führte. Später reservierte John Rippon, ein führender Baptist, der im „ökumenischen“ Sinne von Mission sprach, seine überschwänglichsten Worte für die Herrnhuter, deren Dienst konzipiert war, „die Welt zu humanisieren und zu christianisieren“. Mission kann heute nicht von der Botschaft vom Kreuz und von einem individuellen und gemeinschaftlichen Leben der Gemeinschaft mit dem gekreuzigten und auferstandenen Herrn getrennt werden. Abschließend widmet sich diese Untersuchung der Wiedergewinnung der Anbetung. Derek Tidball argumentiert, dass sich die neuen Lieder der 1970er Jahre „übermäßig mit einer Theologie der Herrlichkeit, des Sieges und des Triumphalismus befassen“, doch dass dies „einer größeren Ausgeglichenheit“ die Vorfahrt gewährte, „die die Motive des Sterbens und Auferstehens der neutestamentlichen Christenheit widerspiegeln“. Die Untersuchung fordert die Wiedergewinnung einer umfassenden Anbetung.

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In this study I want to offer some historical reflections on evangelical spirituality which I hope relate to the contemporary Church. The world-wide evangelical movement was shaped in the eighteenth century by European Continental Pietism, by the Evangelical Revival in Britain and by the Great Awakening in America. David Bebbington describes how the decade beginning in 1734 'witnessed in the English-speaking world a more important development than any other, before or after, in the history of Protestant Christianity: the emergence of the movement that became Evangelicalism'.¹ This movement had strong links with earlier English Puritanism. Bebbington argues, however, that the most Puritans tended to take the view that assurance of personal salvation was the

fruit of spiritual struggle, whereas the evangelicals, by contrast, 'believed it to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God'.²

The transnational nature of the evangelical movement from the eighteenth century onwards has been increasingly recognised. 'I look upon all the world', John Wesley famously stated, 'as my parish'.³ In this Wesley drew from the thinking of a gifted German nobleman, Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who became the creative leader of the Renewed Unity of the Brethren (more commonly known later as the Moravians or the Moravian Church) and who wrote in 1738 about the task of going out 'to all the peoples of the world'.⁴ The writings of Jonathan Edwards, America's most notable

theologian,⁵ helped to spread carefully enunciated evangelical views in the eighteenth century and beyond.⁶ In the twentieth century the international growth of evangelicalism continued. There has also been a significant re-shaping of aspects of evangelical experience in the period since the early twentieth century, due to the massive influence of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, with their emphasis on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. The international Pentecostal community, to a large extent a sub-set of evangelicalism, has seen phenomenal numerical growth since its beginnings about a century ago.⁷

Studies of evangelicalism over the past few years have generally aligned themselves with the argument advanced by Bebbington that evangelicalism can be seen as a movement comprising all those who stress conversion, the Bible, the cross, and activism.⁸ I will follow this approach, although I will also add an examination of worship. In my exploration of the recovery of this strand of spirituality I am also using an analytical framework in which spirituality is seen as concerned with the conjunction of theology, communion with God and practical Christianity.⁹ Another way of thinking about this is to speak of a holistic spirituality involving head, heart and hands.¹⁰ In speaking about ‘recovery’, the implication is that something has been lost. I am not going to analyse in detail what might have been lost but I will rather explore the evangelical tradition in a way that could indicate ways in which the contemporary Church can draw more fully from the best of the tradition.

Significant work on evangelical spirituality has been increasing in recent years. From North America the writings of Richard Foster, Dallas Willard and Eugene Peterson have been widely read, and Alistair McGrath’s contribution to this area, as a British evangelical, has been important.¹¹ By 2000, McGrath could write that although resistance still remained within sections of evangelicalism to the word ‘spirituality’, it had ‘gained virtually universal acceptance as the best means of designating the group of spiritual disciplines that focus on deepening the believer’s relationship with God and enhancing the life of the Spirit’.¹² McGrath has spoken in a very personal way of how his own faith became ‘far too academic’. He has described painful lessons he learned.¹³ Timothy George, in *For all the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality* (2003), talks about a ‘deadly divorce’ between theology and spirituality that has arisen in part because two realities, justification by faith

alone and union with Christ, have not been seen as indissolubly bound together. They are bound together, he insists, in the cross.¹⁴

I want to argue that the recovery of evangelical spirituality requires a re-assessment and re-appropriation of the four distinctives. My position is that evangelicalism is a specific stream of Christian spirituality, since Bebbington’s four aspects are not doctrinal formulations but have to do with ‘lived experience’, and I consider that ‘recovery’ is not, therefore, primarily about achieving more orthodox expressions of theology within the life of the Church – although such convictions are crucially important. Bebbington emphasises the significance for evangelical spiritual identity of ‘assurance’ – which is clearly experiential.¹⁵ The heart of evangelical spirituality, I have argued, is a personal relationship with Christ.¹⁶ However, this is worked out within a theological framework and in concrete ways. Eugene Peterson suggests that the spirituality that Jesus offers is ‘difficult, obedient and self-sacrificing’.¹⁷ If so, attempts at serious engagement are not going to be easy.

Conversion: Christ ‘approaches the heart with his power’

The outworking of this kind of evangelical spirituality means, firstly, the experience of conversion to Christ. John Wesley, who shaped much early evangelical thinking in the English-speaking world, recorded in his diary for 24 May 1738 the following words, which were to become among the most famous in the story of Christian experience:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street [in the city of London], where one was reading Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death...I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.¹⁸

This account, describing as it does how John Wesley came to a point of personal reliance on God’s grace and Christ’s work on the cross for salvation, later came to be seen as a description of a typical experience of evangelical conversion, although I see it rather as an expression of assurance of salvation.¹⁹

Wesley had previously, when challenged by a question from the Moravian Bishop, August Spangenberg (Professor at Jena University in Germany), ‘Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?’, found himself unprepared to give a definite answer.²⁰ It is significant that following his experience Wesley ‘testified’ – and in evangelical spirituality the element of sharing experience has been an important practice.

There were a number of prior spiritual influences on John Wesley and on his brother Charles, both Anglican clergymen. The seventeenth-century English Puritan movement, mediated through the Wesley family, was one. Catholic devotion, which set out rigorous demands to be met by those taking up the spiritual life, was another. In 1726 John Wesley read the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, which directed him to ‘the religion of the heart’. He was also affected by the Anglican high churchman, William Law, *On Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728), which helped to create within him deeper spiritual longings. Wesley corresponded with Law. The Wesleys and Whitefield were part of the ‘Holy Club’ of serious Christians in Oxford before they had any contact with the Moravians. There was, too, the (somewhat ambiguous) influence on John Wesley of the more mystical streams of spirituality, notably that expressed by German mystics or in books like *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, by Henry Scougal of Aberdeen, a Scottish Episcopalian.²¹ All these different influences contributed in some way to the Aldersgate Street experience. Evangelical spirituality has drawn from a variety of traditions.

The story of the English Evangelical Revival has strong links to Central Europe.²² The Moravians were highly influential in forging the evangelical concept of conversion. In 1722 Zinzendorf, a twenty-two year old Count who had been educated in a German Pietist environment at Halle, opened his estate in south-east Saxony to a group of Protestant refugees from Bohemia and Moravia.²³ Members of this group, who were escaping from persecution by the Roman Catholic Habsburgs, were part of the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*), a movement that had its origins in the reformation in Bohemia under the remarkable leadership of Jan Hus.²⁴ The community that was established with Zinzendorf’s help was called Herrnhut (‘under the Lord’s Protection’). In 1727, when it numbered at least 220 people, the community became the scene of a profound spiritual

renewal. Four girls came to a powerful spiritual assurance. The intensity of these experiences spread to the whole community. Zinzendorf taught a conscious conversion, suggesting that ‘Our Saviour... will do all by His Spirit...when He comes and approaches the Heart with His Power’.²⁵ Christ ‘coming to the heart’ expressed the essence of the spiritual experience of this community, both theologically and practically.²⁶

In thinking about the recovery of evangelical spirituality, I want to suggest that there is a need in much of the Church for a recovery of a deeper experience of Christ. In a great deal of evangelicalism from the nineteenth century onwards the moment of conversion became a moment of decision – of signing a card or praying the ‘sinner’s prayer’. Instead I want to argue for a more profound concept of conversion. The early evangelicals also saw the whole of life as a process of change. John Wesley, although well known for his belief in ‘instantaneous’ experience, also believed in a ‘gradual’ work of God in the believer.²⁷ He spoke of what Christ did on the cross ‘for us’ and what God does ‘in us’.²⁸ The recovery of conversion means the recovery of the concept of a life deeply impacted by the encounter – and the ongoing encounters – with Christ. It is not enough to know the facts of the gospel. These realities have to be expressed in a life both committed to and conformed to Jesus Christ.

The Bible: ‘to know His word’

A second evangelical commitment is to Bible reading. For the early eighteenth-century evangelicals, personal experience of Christ was nourished by disciplined Bible reading, and so evangelical leaders constantly encouraged people to read the Scriptures.²⁹ John Wesley often referred to himself as a ‘*homo unius libri*’, a man of one book. In the preface to his sermons, where he used this phrase, he spoke of the way of salvation as being ‘written down in a book’, and he continued: ‘O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me.’³⁰ This high view of biblical inspiration was not an unusual perspective among Protestants in that period, but Wesley and other evangelicals also believed in the power of the Bible’s message to change lives. The Bible has been prominent in evangelicalism as the authority to which all other authorities must submit.³¹ The evangelical faith has been marked by a stress on the practical application of Bible teaching and on obe-

dience. The Unity of the Brethren, representing a radical tradition that fed into Pietism, had a catechism. ‘What is faith in the Lord God?’ was one question. The answer was: ‘It is to know God, to know His word; above all to love Him, to do His commandments, and to submit to His will.’ Particular emphasis was placed on the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount.³² Richard Lovelace has argued for a renewed emphasis among evangelicals on obedience, on faith worked out – on what he calls the ascetic model of spirituality.³³

As well as getting to know the Bible personally, the Moravians from the 1720s encouraged people to come together in small groups to study and apply the Bible. Lutheran Pietism, too, which shaped eighteenth-century Moravian life, saw ‘earnest and thorough study of the Bible in private meetings’ as crucial to the renewal of the church.³⁴ Although the slogan *sola scriptura* was widely used during the Reformation period, it was the radicals (largely the Anabaptists) who gave most attention to studying the Bible together. Balthasar Hubmaier, the leading Anabaptist theologian, asked people to ‘Christianly instruct one another on the grounds of the written divine Word’.³⁵ Pietism developed Bible study groups which emphasised the right of the people to interpret Scripture.³⁶ Spirituality that took the Bible seriously was nurtured communally as well as individually. There has been a tendency to be too individualistic in some sections of evangelicalism. Part of the recovery of evangelical spirituality may involve a greater stress on reading the Bible together. Zinzendorf organized his small groups according to needs and circumstances.³⁷ Christian David, a carpenter who was one of the refugees from Moravia who became a leader in the Herrnhut community, spoke of the small ‘bands’ as contributing to making a community that was *proper Evangelio*, ‘appropriate to the gospel’.³⁸

A third aspect of the use of the Bible which has been distinctive within evangelicalism has been the role of preaching. In the Bible hours at Herrnhut and elsewhere the Bible was read, and the official ‘Preaching’ part of the liturgy involved a sermon, to which can be added the ‘quarter-hours’ when brief, heart-felt homilies were given.³⁹ Manuscript copies of large numbers of sermons were circulated from Herrnhut to the widely-scattered Moravian groups.⁴⁰ What the Moravian community managed to avoid, at least in the early period, was the biblical teaching being restricted to one minister. In 1725 seven men and seven women who were seen to be appropriately gifted were appointed as

‘Helpers’ – a term which for the Moravians was equivalent to Pastor.⁴¹ There is a need, I suggest, for a recovery of preaching, but not in a way which restricts this only to the ordained clergy: there are ways in which more people in congregations can be involved. This reading and hearing of the Bible always has an orientation towards practice.

The cross – ‘united to the Saviour’

Although the whole Bible has been important to evangelicals, there has been a particular focus on the person of Jesus Christ and on his sacrifice on the cross.⁴² Charles Wesley set this out in his classic hymn, ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing’ – the first hymn in the later Wesley hymnbooks and one intended ‘for the anniversary day of one’s conversion’. After the initial verses expressing general praise and prayer, there is a focus on Christ and his redemption:⁴³

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer’s praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace!
He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.

A focus on Christ and his ‘wounded heart’ produced intense devotion among Moravian believers.⁴⁴ Bruce Hindmarsh shows how many testimonies by members of the Moravian movement contained vivid descriptions of an apprehension of the atonement.⁴⁵ There is a continuing challenge to find ways to engage with this kind of experience more fully today.

The emphasis on authentic experience is also found in Jonathan Edwards. He wrote that ‘holy affections’ constituted a great part of true religion. ‘The Holy Scriptures’, he asserted, ‘do everywhere place religion very much in the affections; such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, zeal.’⁴⁶ He also insisted that

there must be light in the understanding, as well as an *affected* fervent heart... on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things.⁴⁷

It becomes clear what is central to ‘spiritual knowl-

edge' – the cross. Edwards asked how anyone could

hear of the infinite height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of God in Christ Jesus, of His giving His infinitely dear Son, to be offered up a sacrifice for the sins of men, and of the unparalleled love of the innocent, and holy, and tender Lamb of God, manifested in His dying agonies, His bloody sweat, His loud and bitter cries, and bleeding heart, and all this for enemies, to redeem them from deserved, eternal burnings, and to bring to unspeakable and everlasting joy and glory – and yet be cold and heavy, insensible and regardless!

The cross is the focus. 'Where', enquired Edwards, 'are the exercises of our affections proper, if not here?'⁴⁸

Connection with the cross has been made through the concrete practice of celebrating Holy Communion. It is a common misconception that evangelicals took a low view of the eucharist. In 1745 the Wesleys published *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, which contained 166 items. These are Communion hymns which convey the depths and mystery of the eucharist and which are intended to nourish spiritual experience.⁴⁹ This collection has a complete section entitled 'The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice'. The theological significance is clear.⁵⁰ There are several major emphases: Christ in his passion standing with and for believers; Christ as source of forgiveness and freedom; the atonement for all; Christ and his cross exhibiting divine love; the atoning work continued in Christ's present intercession; the atonement completed as Christ's people live and die in him; the work of redemption culminating in a believer's life of purity; and Christ dying as the object of divine wrath and judgment.⁵¹ John Wesley advocated frequent ('constant') communion.⁵²

The Moravians of the eighteenth century felt that at Communion services they were – as they expressed it – gathered into the Passion of Christ, into the whole community of the faithful and into heavenly reality.⁵³ At the conclusion of a service the whole congregation might prostrate themselves in worship.⁵⁴ In much Moravian worship the most important service was the Lord's Supper. Zinzendorf's conviction was that there was 'no congregation without communion'. This no doubt reflected his Lutheran background. The services of Holy Communion might also include the laying on of hands and foot-washing. Those assisting at com-

munion wore a white alb tied with a red girdle, intended as a reminder that, like those 'robed in white' in the Book of Revelation, at Communion Moravians were in touch with heavenly reality.⁵⁵ There was a powerful solemnity in these celebrations. Several Roman Catholics, who watched the celebration of a Moravian Communion at Fetter Lane, London (a Moravian meeting), it seems, 'liked it very well'.⁵⁶

In the nineteenth century C.H. Spurgeon, the Victorian 'Prince of Preachers', spoke highly of Eucharistic celebration and advocated and practised weekly Communion. 'We believe', he said, in a sermon on the theology of Communion, 'that Jesus Christ spiritually comes to us and refreshes us, and in that sense we eat his flesh and drink his blood.'⁵⁷ In 1877, in one of his many Communion addresses, Spurgeon referred back to the movement in Bohemia that produced the Unity of the Brethren. He spoke in romantic vein of the 'breaking of bread and the pouring out of wine' being observed by persecuted believers, for example 'in the mountains of Bohemia'. His point was that Communion, pointing as it did to the cross, was a mark that there had always been (and would always be) a Church of Christ, united to the Saviour.⁵⁸ 'The Lord's Supper', he pronounced, 'is no funeral meal, but a festival...the 'Eucharist', or the giving of thanks: it is not a fast, but a feast. My happiest moments are spent with the King at his table, when his banner over me is love.'⁵⁹ He was willing to speak of the 'real presence' of Christ at the Table.⁶⁰ The experience is of both the crucified and risen Lord.⁶¹ I suggest that a greater emphasis on the Eucharist will help in recovering a more profound evangelical spirituality.

In *The Message of the Cross* (2001) the British evangelical Derek Tidball comments: 'At the heart of evangelical spirituality lies the atoning work of Christ. The Christian life is viewed primarily as a life that finds its origin in the cross and is lived in grateful response to it and humble imitation of it.'⁶² Tidball's major study of the cross is unique in that it begins with spirituality, rather than with the doctrine of the atonement. Yet this is true to the way in which evangelicals have understood the gospel. To embrace the saving gospel has not been seen primarily as an exercise in intellectual comprehension. At the same time, explanation is crucial. David Gillett places evangelical devotion to Jesus as the Lamb of God, coupled with the daily awareness of forgiveness, alongside Roman Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.⁶³ Here we

can see similar channels of renewal in other strands of Christian spirituality.

Activism: ‘to humanise and christianise the world’

Active involvement in mission has also been crucial for evangelicals. There had been some wider mission by Protestants before the Moravians became active. But it was the remarkable movement of intrepid Moravian missionaries out from Herrnhut from 1732 onwards that caught the Protestant imagination. Here a missional evangelical spirituality took shape.⁶⁴ In 1732 Moravians were sent out to work with slaves in the West Indies, and within ten years Moravian missionaries had gone to North America, Greenland, Surinam, South Africa, the Gold Coast, Algeria, Arctic Russia and Ceylon.⁶⁵ The mission was backed by constant prayer at Herrnhut. More than 200 Moravians had entered mission service by the end of 1760 and there were about 4000 converts, many of them being drawn together in Moravian congregations that used Herrnhut as an example of how to create transformational communities. Philip Doddridge, one of the leading English Congregational figures of the eighteenth century, had contact with the Moravians and in 1742 called for overseas mission to take place.⁶⁶

Although Anglican figures took an interest in Moravian initiatives,⁶⁷ in the later eighteenth century it was among some Methodists and Baptists that the greatest impact was felt. Thomas Coke, a Methodist who helped to place missionaries in the West Indies in 1786, had contact with the Moravians.⁶⁸ The Moravians also had a crucial influence on the young Baptist minister, William Carey, and on the thinking that led to the formation in October 1792 of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).⁶⁹ William Carey’s spiritual vision was set out in a book published in 1792, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. Carey argued that Roman Catholic missionaries had surmounted great obstacles in their missionary endeavours, and he then moved on to talk about the example of the Moravians. ‘Have not the missionaries of the *Unitas Fratrum*, or Moravian Brethren’, he asked, ‘encountered the scorching heat of Abyssinia, and the frozen climes of Greenland and Labrador...?’ He then spent some time looking at efforts in world mission over the centuries up to the time he was writing, and concluded: ‘But none of the moderns have equalled

the Moravian Brethren in this good work.’⁷⁰ Here we have a clear instance of the impact of example on evangelical practice.

William Carey’s interest in the Moravians continued. A crucial step in mission for the Moravians was planting a *Gemeinde* (Zinzendorf’s usual word for a church community) where the life of Christ was expressed, and sometimes this meant people living together in communities that resembled the arrangements at Herrnhut. In 1796, writing from Mudnabati, India, to Andrew Fuller, the Secretary of the BMS, William Carey proposed just such an arrangement. He suggested seven or eight Christian families living together, ‘similar to what the Moravians do’.⁷¹ Although it is sometimes thought that evangelical spirituality is fundamentally individualistic, the Moravian vision, which resonated with Baptist ecclesiology, was for a corporate expression of Christian living. In an address delivered in 1803, a leading Baptist minister, John Rippon spoke in ‘ecumenical’ terms of the progress of evangelical faith, noting advance in the Church of England and among the Dissenters and the Methodists, but he reserved his most effusive words for ‘these eminent *Missionaries*, the MORAVIANS’, whose ministry was designed ‘to humanise and christianise the world’.⁷² This was truly transformational mission and among evangelicals this has been expressed as social action as well as verbal witness.

The way of transformation was promoted by Christian lives that were themselves transformed. This has been the theme of much evangelical writing. In his great study, *The Work of Christ*, produced in the early twentieth century, P.T. Forsyth, the outstanding Congregational theologian, deals with spiritual experience lived in the light of the cross. Having argued that ‘Christ entered voluntarily into the pain and horror which is sin’s penalty from God’ he explored the realm of experience. Christ, he suggested, as he took the curse and judgment, ‘felt sin and its horror as only the holy could, as God did’ and believers, as they ‘come under His Cross and near His heart’ find that they are able to ‘rise to holiness’.⁷³ This led Forsyth to a consideration of the on-going effect of the finished work of the cross. He writes:

It is not enough to have in the Cross a great demonstration of God’s love, a forgiveness of the past which leaves us to fend for ourselves in the future. Is my moral power so great after all, then, that, supposing I believe past things

were settled in Christ's Cross, I may now feel I can run in my own strength?...Nay, we must depend daily upon the continued energy of the crucified and risen One.⁷⁴

The holy love of God in Christ is seen by Forsyth as transformative. This is true for the individual and the community. Surely Forsyth is right that if there is no cross there is no Christ.⁷⁵ Thus mission today cannot be separated from the message of the cross and a life – both individual and communal – marked by fellowship with the crucified and risen Lord.

Worship: 'come up to his gates with praise'

The recovery of worship is the final topic that I want to explore. Clearly the Bible and the message of Christ crucified and risen have shaped evangelical worship. I have already noted the place of preaching and of the Eucharist. However, there are other distinctive aspects of evangelical worship. Derek Tidball has been one of those drawing attention to the place of hymns in evangelical worship, and the relationship to spirituality.⁷⁶ In the eighteenth century there were debates, sometimes bitter debates, between Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals. But Calvinists nonetheless used Charles Wesley's hymns, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing' with its focus on Christ's redemption as that which can break the power of cancelled sin, set the prisoner free, and make the foulest clean.⁷⁷ Augustus Toplady's 'Rock of Ages' became one of the most popular hymns among evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic. Toplady was virulently anti-Arminian, but Methodists soon incorporated his hymn in their hymnbook, happy to sing of Christ's sacrifice as that which was 'of Sin the double Cure', with cleansing from 'guilt and power'.⁷⁸ The death of Christ, Spurgeon said, 'ought to inspire you till you sing'.⁷⁹ Mark Noll summarizes the message of evangelical hymns as 'Jesus Christ Saves Sinners'.⁸⁰ Noll states: 'For the early generations [of evangelicals], hymn-singing was almost sacramental'.⁸¹ Here again the Moravian influence was crucial. A visitor to a Moravian service in Fulneck, Yorkshire, confessed that the singing 'made a deeper impression upon his Heart than the Preaching'.⁸²

Moravian worship included a strong stress on the Holy Spirit, and – controversially – the Spirit in early Moravian liturgy was 'Mother'. The *Tē Matrem*, a prayer to the Holy Spirit, which was for

nearly thirty years (when Moravianism was at its most creative) a regular part of Moravian worship, says: 'O Mother! Whoever knows you and the Saviour glorifies you because you bring the gospel to all the world'. This aspect of Moravian theology has been played down by historians over the past two hundred years.⁸³ Having come to a convinced position, Zinzendorf developed his arguments, suggesting in 1746-7 that the Spirit was the Mother of all believers in that she brought them to new birth. He saw his teaching as grounded in Scripture, and drew together the idea of God the comforting Mother (Isaiah 66:14) and the Spirit as Comforter in the teaching of Jesus (John 14:26).⁸⁴ This was linked with the Cross, since the Spirit, according to Zinzendorf, came out of the 'side-wound' of Christ (the water and the blood), and in turn that was related to the energising of the community for mission, a mission that was fully trinitarian – shaped by God the Father, the Spirit as Mother, and Jesus as Son/Brother/Husband.⁸⁵

It is in the area of worship that the role of the Holy Spirit in evangelical worship is clearly seen. This is not a new discovery that has come with the charismatic movement, although that movement has made an important contribution.⁸⁶ Jonathan Edwards, in his work, opened up reflection on the gift of the Holy Spirit flowing from the atonement. Stephen Holmes suggests in *God of Grace and God of Glory* that Edwards' earlier discussions (as seen in his *Miscellanies*) of the benefits coming to believers focussed on the giving of the Spirit, whereas his later focus was on incorporation into Christ. In Edwards' vision, Holmes argues, both this gift and this incorporation are possible only because of 'the dynamism of God's life' – which is a 'Trinitarian overflow'.⁸⁷ It is this overflow which is known in worship. For Edwards, believers were being drawn into the life of the Triune God. Pneumatologically speaking, the Christian community was a community of the Spirit, but at its heart was the atonement. Robert Jenson makes Edwards' point in this way: 'the atonement worked by Jesus' life and death is achieved by such a community of him and us that if the Father loves the Son he must love us also'.⁸⁸ These are important conjunctions, I consider, for recovering evangelical spirituality – the cross and the Spirit in a worshipping community. Without this, active mission does not have a substantial centre.

The same note is found in C.H. Spurgeon. One of his early London sermons, preached in 1856 (when he was twenty-two years old and when he

was pioneering new ways of operating in church life), concludes in this way, as he appeals to Christians: 'And even you, Christians, when you think that your Saviour died, should afflict your souls: you should say,

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed?
And did my Sov'reign die?
Would he devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?⁸⁹

Much of the sermon had an evangelistic note, as was common with Spurgeon, but at the end he is concerned – and this was typical of Spurgeon – to stimulate believers to enter with exuberance into the blessings of the atonement:

Beloved, let us go to our houses with joy; let us go into our gates with praise... let us clap our hands with joy, for he lives, he lives; the atonement is accepted, and we are accepted too; the scapegoat is gone, our sins are gone with it. Let us... come up to his gates with praise, for he has loved his people, he has blessed his children, and given us a day of atonement, and a day of acceptance... Praise the Lord!⁹⁰

The emphasis on spiritual joy in worship is securely based, for Spurgeon, because it is an authentic response to believers being accepted in Christ.

Derek Tidball argues that the burgeoning new hymnody of the 1970s within the charismatic movement, which affected many evangelical churches, saw an 'excessive preoccupation with a theology of glory, victory and triumphalism' but that by the end of the twentieth century this had given way to 'a better balance that mirrors the dying-and-rising motifs of New Testament Christianity' and he cites songs by Graham Kendrick and Matt Redman which stand in the classic evangelical tradition.⁹¹ Along with his call for the cultivation and outworking of a crucicentric evangelical spirituality, Tidball recognises the danger of 'leaving Christ on the cross', thus failing to appreciate the significance of the incarnation, the resurrection and the day of Pentecost.⁹² I want to argue for the recovery of full-orbed worship which engages with this drama.

Conclusion

Today there is much more willingness than in the past among evangelicals to explore other Christian spiritual traditions. David Gillett has spoken of 'a sea change' within evangelicalism, with evangelicals exhibiting a new openness to varieties of Christian

spirituality.⁹³ Derek Tidball has highlighted some of the dangers that we face at this point and also the new opportunities for evangelical spirituality:

It is easy in today's world to come up with a hybrid spirituality which is no longer evangelical or to transform the evangelical tradition so much that it ceases to be evangelical.

He calls for breathing life into the tradition so that it does, as it can, answer the deepest inner searches of the contemporary seeker.⁹⁴ The tradition is one that stresses conversion, the Bible, the cross, active service and also, I have suggested, focussed worship. For evangelicals, as J.I. Packer put it, theology must always be related to the activity of 'trusting, loving, worshipping, obeying, serving and glorifying God'.⁹⁵

C.H. Spurgeon focused on life transformed by conversion, by the Bible and the cross. The passage below highlights what can be said to be at the heart of evangelical spirituality: what God has done in Christ and how that becomes transformational:

Live much under the shadow of the cross... Feel that Christ's blood was shed for you, even for you. Never be satisfied till you have learned the mystery of the five wounds; never be content till you are 'able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge'.⁹⁶

The challenge for the Church today, evangelicals and the wider Church, is to recover the sense of the radical transformation that is captured in these words and also the sense of awe and praise that is part of the response to God's love in Christ.

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