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Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England & Ireland, 1690–1850

John Coffey

The ‘Evangelical’ Heart of Pietist Anthony William Boehm

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Abstract and Keywords

German Lutheran Pietism, as represented by Philipp J. Spener and August H. Francke’s institutions at Halle, is one noteworthy outworking of the ‘spiritual’ revival during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The foremost proponent of Halle Pietism in England was Anthony William Boehm (1673–1722), whose literary activity became significant in English religious life. This chapter evaluates the ‘evangelical’ nature of Boehm’s Pietist voice in the ‘tunnel period’ between the Restoration and the Evangelical Revival. Using the lens of David Bebbington’s quadrilateral—conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism—the article explores the similarities and dissimilarities between Pietism and evangelicalism at the nexus of Boehm’s publications.

Keywords: Boehm, Pietism, Bebbington quadrilateral, evangelicalism, Halle, conversionism, activism, biblicism, crucicentrism

John Wesley felt his 'heart strangely warmed' in Aldersgate Street while listening to Moravians read from Martin Luther's 'Preface to Romans'. Over twenty-five years earlier Susanna Wesley had experienced a similar warming after hearing her daughter, Emily, read printed correspondence from German Lutheran Pietist missionaries to India. 'I was never, I think, more affected with anything', and, 'for several days I could think or speak of little else', she testified to her husband.¹ This particular exchange of letters between Susanna and Samuel is best known because of the controversy over Susanna's leadership of Sunday evening prayers in the Epworth rectory while her husband was attending Convocation in London.²

What is often lost in the discussion surrounding Susanna's self-defence is the precipitating cause of the affair and the affective and behavioural changes that resulted from it. The missionary letters were published under the title, *Propagation of the Gospel in the East*. Anthony William Boehm (1673-1722), who translated and edited the volume, also penned a lengthy preface on the character of a missionary.³ Boehm was a German Pietist from Halle, chaplain at the German Lutheran Royal Chapel, and a subscribing member of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), which at his suggestion had distributed the missionary letters through its corresponding members, including Samuel Wesley.⁴ Initially, after hearing about the missionaries' (p.73) work, Susanna spent the evening praising God 'for inspiring those good men with such ardent zeal for his glory, that they were willing to hazard their lives and all that is esteemed dear to men in this world, to advance the honour of their Master Jesus'. Upon further reflection, she decided, 'I might do somewhat more than I do.' To that end, she provided pastoral leadership to the conventicle in her home,⁵ spoke 'with more warmth' to members of the parish (with whom she had found herself at odds), prayed for the missionaries themselves, and began a process of weekly conversations with her children for the formation of their character.⁶ Within her sphere of influence—family, neighbours, and church members—Susanna gave evidence of a renewed life. What in those letters so stirred Susanna?

Propagation of the Gospel in the East was just one of many works that Boehm brought before the English-speaking public from 1705 to 1721.⁷ Our intent here is not to revisit the extent to which diverse evangelical leaders read and recommended those works.⁸ In this chapter we will evaluate the content of those writings. We have chosen Boehm's particular vantage point because of his unique position as a German Lutheran Pietist with influence in and connections with the Church of England. Specifically, we will evaluate the 'evangelical' nature of Boehm's Pietism in the 'tunnel period' between the Restoration and the Evangelical Revival. In so doing, we will demonstrate that Boehm anglicized Pietistic theology and praxis, giving it his own unique flavour, and thereby presents us with a pre-1730s 'evangelical' account of heart religion in England.

Pietism and Evangelicalism

To appraise the evangelical character of Boehm's Pietist voice requires that we delineate the confines of Pietism and evangelicalism. F. Ernest Stoeffler, the **(p. 74)** first English-speaking scholar of Pietism, wrote in 1965 that Pietism is 'one of the least understood movements in the history of Christianity'.⁹ Defining Pietism and establishing the scope of what is included within its historical, theological, and geographical boundaries have stirred considerable scholarly debate.¹⁰ Broadly speaking, Pietist scholarship falls into two categories.¹¹ The first, represented by Johannes Wallmann, demarcates Pietism more strictly, as 'a *religious renewal movement* in continental European Protestantism', beginning with Philipp Jakob Spener and coming to full bloom in the eighteenth century.¹² Wallmann limits Pietism to a particular period in history and roots it in Spener's *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, hopeful eschatology, and the curricula set forth in *Pia Desideria*. In contrast, Martin Brecht envisions Pietism—'the most significant devotional movement of Protestantism after the Reformation'¹³—more inclusively, as a 'crisis of piety' that drew analogous reactions in England via Puritanism, in the Netherlands through the *Nadere Reformatie*, and in Germany with the *Arndtsche Frömmigkeitsbewegung*. Continuations of this movement can be observed in Moravianism and in the English-speaking Evangelical Revivals. Brecht's inclusive concept of Pietism parallels R. A. Knox's 'enthusiasm', Ted Campbell's 'religion of the heart', and even W. R. Ward's portrayal of the widespread revival that blew through Protestantism in the eighteenth century.¹⁴

Identifying the theological, geographical, and confessional borders of evangelicalism has proven no less contentious. Ward has observed: 'Evangelicals, in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word, seem generally to have found it easier to recognise each other than others have found it to categorise them'.¹⁵ Like Pietism, the scope of what scholars recognize as evangelical falls into two broad categories. Those who understand evangelicalism more narrowly see it arising in the English-speaking world in the 1730s and include within its sweep the English and Welsh Evangelical Revivals, the Great Awakening in **(p. 75)** the American colonies, and the Scottish Cambuslang Wark.¹⁶ On the other end of the spectrum are those who emphasize the centrality of 'gospel succession' to any explanation of evangelical.¹⁷ Such a gospel successionism is perhaps best summarized by J. I. Packer who defines 'evangelical' historically: 'it signifies the Christianity, both convictional and behavioural, which we inherit from the New Testament via the Reformers, the Puritans, and the revival and missionary leaders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.¹⁸ Much is at stake for those who hold this position; to limit one's understanding of 'evangelical' to any particular historical period, states Kenneth Stewart, is to accept a 'reconstruction of its own lineage' and 'its own extensive disconnectedness from seminal events and persons in earlier Christian history'.¹⁹

Mark Noll provides a way of moving forward.²⁰ On the one hand, Noll states that 'evangelicalism was constituted by the individuals, associations, books, practices, perceptions and networks of influence shared by the promoters of the eighteenth-century revivals and their descendants'. He refers to this sociological or relational understanding as 'genealogical connections'. At the same time, 'evangelicalism was always also constituted by the convictions that emerged in those revivals and that drove its adherents in their lives as Christians'. One of the most recognized ways of identifying these 'principled convictions' has been proposed by David Bebbington.²¹ Although the 'Bebbington quadrilateral' of conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism is by no means unchallenged,²² it remains, in the eyes of one historian, 'among the most well-known definitions in the study of religion'.²³

For our purposes, Bebbington's delineation, in Noll's words, can serve as 'a very useful touchstone for discussing other groups in the world that are **(p.76)** linked to British evangelicalism or that possess characteristics resembling groups Bebbington describes'.²⁴ Because of its usefulness as a 'touchstone', we will employ Bebbington's quadrilateral as a lens by which we will analyse the 'evangelical' quality of Boehm's publications. It is illuminating to compare Bebbington's principled convictions with Stoeffler's characteristics of Pietism—experiential, perfectionistic, biblical, and opposite.²⁵ In spite of certain distinct emphases—Bebbington draws attention to the 'crucicentrism' of evangelicalism while Stoeffler highlights the 'opposite' element in Pietism²⁶—similarities between Bebbington and Stoeffler reinforce Noll's observation that the 'convictions, practices, habits and oppositions' of evangelicalism 'resemble what Europeans describe as "pietism"'.²⁷

At the end of his summary of the state of Pietist research, Jonathan Strom offers recommendations for further scholarship: 'The question whether Puritanism, Methodism, or Quietism are fundamentally "Pietist" movements is ultimately less interesting than exploring the parallels of these movements, how they influenced each other, their similarities and dissimilarities theologically, as well as the social and cultural contexts that gave rise to them.'²⁸ Our goal is not to demonstrate that Pietism and evangelicalism are somehow the same movement or that either should be included within the scope of the other; rather, we will explore their 'parallels' and their theological 'similarities and dissimilarities' at the nexus of Boehm's publications in the first decades of the eighteenth century.

The 'Evangelical' Character of Boehm's Publications

The first work Boehm brought before an English audience in 1705 was his own translation of August H. Francke's *Pietas Hallensis*, to which he prefaced a **(p. 77)** twenty-five-page history of Pietism; the last in 1721 was a letter from an English chaplain in Madras appealing for English missionaries.²⁹ In the intervening years Boehm brought scores of publications to the English-speaking world, works that included his own writing and his editions and translations of other authors. In what follows we will sift through much of that literature using Bebbington's quadrilateral. Our analysis of this material will make up the section that follows.

Conversionism

In describing conversionism, Bebbington stresses the conversion experience itself, coming out of the pathos of agony, guilt, and repentance.³⁰ At the heart of conversion is the proclamation of the gospel, a gospel distinguished by the doctrine of justification by faith. Although it is problematic to draw a stark dichotomy between the agonized conversions of Puritanism and the idyllic instant assurance of evangelical conversions,³¹ the doctrine of the assurance of salvation is a pivotal aspect of the 'novelty' of evangelicalism. Stoeffler, by comparison, lays stress on the inward, personal nature of one's relationship to God.³² Rejecting scholastic, doctrinal definitions and any tinge of religious formalism, Pietists insisted on 'a radical inward renewal of the individual'.³³

By training and conviction, Boehm was a *Lutheran* Pietist, who incorporated into his sermons and publications references to law-gospel, justification by faith, and other characteristically Lutheran tenets; however, Boehm did not use these theological terms or categories with precision. 'Conversion' was his preferred portrayal of the process of salvation. It occurs frequently in his sermons and writings, and was on the title page of most editions of the missionary reports. Boehm's mentor at Halle, Francke, maintained a rigid *ordo salutis*: preliminary divine stirrings [*göttliche Rührung*], the struggle of repentance [*Bußkampf*], and breakthrough [*Durchbruch*].³⁴ With Boehm, the **(p.78)** first two categories melded together, without strict separation. On multiple occasions he spoke to the necessity of remaining in the struggle of repentance and not seeking relief from it too quickly. For those who would lead others to salvation, to fail to use spiritual discernment can have detrimental effects:

He will be apt to dispense the Comforts of the Gospel, before he hath applied a just Correction to a Sinner, by making him mourn for his past Life. He will proclaim Liberty, before People thoroughly feel their spiritual Thralldom, and preach Sets of Duties to those that are yet dead in Sins, and were never brought over to a spiritual Life by Faith and Repentance. The Promises of the Gospel, which should be confined to the broken in Heart, he doth promiscuously throw about.³⁵

The *Bußkampf* was vital groundwork performed by the law to make a person ready for the gospel. No one should strive to escape the struggle of mortification and repentance before it had done its work. 'Alas! How many a Conversion proves abortive, for Want of holding out under this *preparatory* Stroke!'³⁶

To be sure, *Bußkampf* was not the final goal, but only an indispensable foundation. Its function was simply to point the sinner to Christ, like the star of Epiphany: 'In all these Motions are some Glimmerings of a divine Star, which, if readily followed and attended to, will bring us at last to an *experimental* and saving Knowledge of *Christ*. For as the Star was not *Christ* himself, but pointed at him; so a Sinner's Conviction must never be taken for his Conversion, since it is but an Invitation to the same.'³⁷ This breakthrough [*Durchbruch*] to faith, in true Lutheran fashion, was not an accomplishment by the individual but a working of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of Christ, people would never overcome their natural lethargy or see the truth of Christ. 'Truly, one that can't discover in all this, a sublime and *supernatural* Operation, must needs be little acquainted with the Slothfulness of his own Nature, and the Power of the Spirit which alone is able, to overcome it.'³⁸ Conversion for this Lutheran Pietist, then, involved both *Bußkampf* and the empowerment that comes from the Spirit of God, a *Durchbruch* that was in the end the result of grace.

In these writings there was no clear timetable for the conversion process. When a person genuinely repented, but did not experience a breakthrough, **(p.79)** Boehm advised perseverance: 'But as for those that truly repent, but do not taste the peaceable Fruit of their Labour as yet, they ought not to express any Unwillingness on Account of that Delay, nor to break loose before it is Time from the *Preparatory* Work design'd to qualify them for a more agreeable Dispensation.'³⁹ For Boehm, the journey to Christ could be deliberate—'But this is a gradual Work: And as the rising of the Sun is not in an Instant, but by Degrees, so is this'⁴⁰—or, it could take place more precipitously—'All the Mists of Doubts and Perplexities, together with all the cold and offensive Moistures of Fear and Temptation,... are now dispell'd and dried up all on a sudden.'⁴¹ Whatever the timing, this conversion process is regularly represented not only in Boehm's works and but also in the reports of the missionaries. In a letter from 1709, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, the most gifted of the early missionaries, describes the conversion of one of the native 'poets', with whom the missionaries had been in conversation for three years:

Hereupon he asked our further Advice, and we heartily rejoiced at so noble a Conviction, which, after having work'd a while within, now vented it self by such a free and uncompelled Confession. We then unfolded unto him the Duty of *Prayer*, of *Repentance*, of a *living Faith*, and of other Points more nearly relating to his present Circumstances. After this, he gave plainer Proofs every Day of a *Principle of Grace*, acting within, and quickening him into a full Resolution at last.⁴²

As prevalent as conversion is in Boehm's writings, it was by no means his only way of describing the transformation wrought by faith in Christ. Luther, in his 'Preface to Romans', the 'Magna Carta' of Lutheran Pietists and the work that spoke so captivantly to Wesley during his sojourn in the Fetter Lane Society, depicts faith as 'a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God.... O it is a living, busy, active, might thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly.'⁴³ Echoes of such an experiential, inward heart faith resound throughout Boehm's writings. He dedicated his English translation of Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* to Queen Anne, stating, '*True Christianity*, according to its intrinsic Constitution, is an active, lively, strong, vigorous Principle, seated in the most interior Center of the Soul.'⁴⁴ **(p.80)** In the preface of his translation of Francke's *Nicodemus* he denounced the current age, 'wherein inward Religion is cried down for a sottish Piece of *Enthusiasm*'.⁴⁵ In language that carries overtones of medieval mysticism or of 'theosis' in the Greek Fathers and Eastern Orthodoxy, he wrote that the transformation of the heart 'amounts to no less than the Participation of a *divine Nature*.... There is a marvelous *Eccho*, a sweet Intercourse, a familiar Converse betwixt the divine Spirit that begets, and that Spirit which is begotten by him.'⁴⁶ But, besides conversion, the most common language that Boehm uses to describe a religion of the heart is the 'recovery', 'renewal', or 'restoration' of the image of God in the human person: 'As now the Design of Christianity is undoubtedly the *Recovery of the Image of God* forfeited by the first Transgression';⁴⁷ 'this is the Renewal of the Image of God in our Souls';⁴⁸ the truth found in Scripture 'signifieth no less than the *Restoration of the divine Image* in Man's Soul'.⁴⁹ This emphasis on the creation of humankind in the image of the Trinity, on the fall and transgression of humanity, and on the restoration of the divine nature through the work of Christ, Boehm adopted from Johann Arndt.⁵⁰

Activism

Within evangelicalism, to be converted resulted in evangelism and the desire to see the conversion of others.⁵¹ The expectations arising from conversion, notes Bebbington, led to 'a transformation in the role' of the evangelical pastor; ministry leaders—lay and clergy—spent the whole of their lives in service to Christ. Into this category fall missionary and evangelistic outreach and the numerous other ways Christians extended their ethical principles and compassion to their worlds. For Stoeffler, Pietists were religious idealists who disliked any accommodation to the religious status quo.⁵² Justification by faith had to bring about praxis. While Pietism has been misrepresented as interior and subjective, at the very least it was also missional, especially as evidenced in the wide-ranging enterprises of Francke and Halle. The same missional diaspora was true of evangelicalism and was indeed often inspired by Francke himself.

(p.81) Boehm consistently grounded his activism in two things: regeneration and love. In his sermon on 'The Doctrine of Regeneration' he proclaimed, 'Regeneration is the very Source whence the whole Practice of Piety doth depend, and from whence the succeeding Holiness of Life draws a constant Supply for its daily Increase.'⁵³ Any activism or holiness not rooted in a regenerate heart was ersatz. It was Boehm's characteristically Pietist conviction around new birth that caused him to critique the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. In his mind, those efforts would accomplish little apart from a genuine renewal of heart: 'Therefore all such Endeavours as tend to the Suppression of Vice, and are carried on by the Laws of Men, ought to be made subservient to the Principle of *Regeneration*, and are to be *resolved* at last into a true *Gospel-Spirit*.... When the Law reforms the *Manners*, then *Regeneration* reforms the *Temper*.'⁵⁴

Alongside rebirth Boehm forwards love, 'the very *Badge* and *Character* of Christianity'.⁵⁵ This virtue was so vital that he included both a sermon and a letter on the subject in his collection of tracts and discourses. Like rebirth, love provides the only true motivation for the practice of piety, because love 'entirely changeth the natural Bent of the Mind', and once love is seeded within the heart, 'it then swayeth all the outward Actions, and maketh 'em conformable to it self, and thereby acceptable to God, who rather looks upon the Principle from whence an Action springs, than upon the Action it self'.⁵⁶ To reform manners apart from regeneration was to frame 'a Religion without *Love*, without *Charity*, without *Bowels* of *Compassion*, and so consequently without one of its *eternal* and *essential* Ingredients'.⁵⁷

Throughout his publications, Boehm advocated for his distinctive version of a universal Christianity, for 'that blessed Time... when all the Walls of Sect and Party, together with all the Inventions, Impositions, and Superstitions of Men, shall totter and fall, and a new Fabrick be rais'd on the Ruins thereof'.⁵⁸ In his letter on 'Universal Love', Boehm lashed out at the divisiveness within Protestantism: 'Nothing carrieth so great a Contagion with it, than a Spirit of *Party*, particularly if it be governed by the Dictates of worldly Ends, masked with a Pretence to Church and Religion.'⁵⁹ And, in what could be a headline in many of today's newspapers: 'Never a War is more fierce and bloody, than what is raised on a Foot of Religion.'⁶⁰ For Boehm, the only recourse for such an **(p.82)** embattled religion was a unity established in conversion, rebirth, and love: 'if a Man's Love was fixed on Jesus Christ, and through him on God himself, it would prove a blessed Means to establish a Union betwixt God and Man; and this again would greatly facilitate the Settlement of an *Evangelical* Union among Men themselves.'⁶¹ The East India missionaries made sure they conveyed Boehm's transconfessional spirit in their correspondence with the SPCK: 'As to what relates to *Party-Names*, or *Distinctions*, the divine Wisdom, which is *without Partiality*, has taught us to abhor them. Our Scholars know not so much as the bare Name of *Luther* or *Calvin*.'⁶²

Boehm provided prime exemplars of social and missionary outreach through his publications of Francke's *Pietas Hallensis* and of *Propagation of the Gospel in the East*. The aspect of *Pietas Hallensis* that drew the most attention from English divines, both favourable and unfavourable, was its recurring references to the uncommon providence of God at work in Halle. What should not be overlooked, however, is the unparalleled benevolent nature of work itself, especially in the lives of children and widows, and the impact its publication had on the fledgling charity school movement in Britain.⁶³ To inspire and 'provoke' similar outreach efforts was indeed part of the purpose Francke (and Boehm) had in publishing the account: 'Wherefore being well assured that many Persons have been already excited by the report of this Work, more industriously to provide for the Poor and Afflicted, it gives us a better ground to hope, that this full Narrative... will produce a still happier Effect, and revive in many Souls a true Sense of Christian Charity.'⁶⁴ Also to be noted is the fact that 'the *main scope* of the whole Undertaking... is nothing else but the Salvation of Souls and their Conversion to life everlasting'.⁶⁵ The orphanage at Halle was more than a work of essential charity; at its core it was also an evangelistic undertaking.⁶⁶

A further model of evangelistic and missional outreach was the work of Pietist missionaries on the southeastern coast of India, the reports of which had made such an impression on Susanna Wesley. Boehm inspired the interest of the SPCK in this enterprise, and the Society gave itself wholeheartedly to the work.⁶⁷ Boehm reminded readers, in his prologue on the character of a missionary, that nothing less than the salvation of souls is at stake: 'Truly, any one that is himself a true Member of Christ... will feel a yearning of his Bowels for **(p.83)** so many Millions of Souls remaining still under the Power of Satan, unto whom the Light of the gracious Gospel hath not yet appeared.'⁶⁸ In a Christmastide speech before members of the SPCK, Ziegenbalg, home on furlough, reiterated Boehm's sentiments and called fellow Christians to follow his example:

For my own Part, I must acknowledge, from a lively Experience and an inward Conviction founded on the Promises of God, that to me there is an Appearance of a mighty Harvest amongst these Pagans, and that great Numbers of them might, even in our Days, be gained over to a true Conversion by the Ministry of the Word, if Christians, who have the Means of Salvation put into their Hands, would use their best Endeavours, and exert that Diligence, that Zeal and Vigour that is necessary for bringing about so glorious, so desirable an End. I have wholly devoted my self to this Work, and will, by the Divine Grace strengthening me, go on still to devote my self.⁶⁹

The Scriptures were fundamental to both evangelicalism and Pietism. While evangelicals 'revered the Bible' and universally acknowledged its divine inspiration, there was nevertheless, asserts Bebbington, among early evangelicals 'remarkable fluidity' in how inspiration was to be understood and applied.⁷⁰ Their 'overriding aim' was on the centrality of the gospel message and on the devotional use of the Bible. Only later, and with little to no unanimity, did the doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility come to the fore within evangelicalism, eventually leading 'to something approaching schism in their ranks'.⁷¹ Stoeffler emphasizes that the Pietist use of the Bible stood in contrast to that of Protestant orthodox theologians, who had defined the essence of Christianity more in terms of the 'rational' than the biblical.⁷²

Three features mark Boehm's biblicism. First, he lifted up the centrality of Christ for grasping the meaning of Scripture: 'Since therefore *Jesus Christ* is the *End* and *Scope* of the divine Scriptures, all our Reading ought to be resolved into him, and into those Effects that proceed from a just Application of his Death and Merits.'⁷³ In order for the Word of the Gospel to have its desired effects in its hearer it had to become 'an *ingrafted* Word; a Word **(p.84)** mixed with Faith in the Hearer; that so it may be able to save the Soul'.⁷⁴ In true Lutheran style Boehm contended that the purpose of the Word was to reveal Christ and that the end of encountering Christ was salvation through faith. The necessity of the Word for converting people to Christ explains why the missionaries in India placed such importance on translating the Bible into the language of the indigenous people. 'It must be acknowledged to be a very great Blessing to the *Malabar* Heathen, to have the Gospel laid before them in the Native Tongue, whereby they have an opportunity to learn and embrace the Counsel of God, and Offers of his Grace, for their Eternal Happiness.'⁷⁵ In just over three years the missionaries translated the four Gospels into Tamil, a remarkable achievement spearheaded by the brilliant Ziegenbalg and dutifully reported by Boehm in his reports to the English public.⁷⁶

A second feature of Boehm's biblicism is his rejection of reason and empty theologizing, of 'the bare searching of the Letter, without ever coming to Christ'.⁷⁷ This is one focal area in which he exhibits the 'opposite' element Stoeffler sees in Pietism; some of Boehm's sharpest criticism is aimed at any kind of scholarly or philosophical approach to Scripture that stops short of faith and its fruits. 'This Way of Reading the Scripture, doth much prevail among such Men as love to be called *great Scholars, hard Students, and Criticks* in Divinity. It is generally attended with *Self-love, Ambition, Ostentation*, and other Pharisaical Vices that lurk under the fair Pretence of *Searching the Scriptures*.'⁷⁸ On more than one occasion he aims his pen at reason, reflecting Luther's own celebrated statement that 'reason is the devil's whore': 'No sooner doth the *Principle of Grace* hide itself, but *Humane Reason* will step in, and set up for a Guide in Affairs of Religion. *Reason* is an imperious Mistress, whenever she gets the leading Hand in Religion.'⁷⁹ The missionaries in India reflect the 'evangelical' perspective that Scripture is fundamentally plain, simple, and intelligible, especially under the direction of the Spirit. For them, the 'true Sense of God's Word is not to be found in the perplex and crabbed Commentaries of the *Schoolmen* and *Philosophers*; but by a diligent comparing of Scripture with Scripture, endeavouring to follow in all Things, and above all, the Spirit of God himself, who by his divine illumination teaches what ought to be avoided, and what ought to be embraced; what is profitable, and what is to be rejected'.⁸⁰

(p.85) Lastly, in Boehm's purview the Word serves a devotional and behavioural function. In *Plain Directions for Reading the Holy Bible*, which would be brought out in eight editions from 1708–71 and was his most enduring personal publication, Boehm emphasized that by reading the Word a person 'may become *truly good, pious, regenerate, and heavenly minded*, or that he may have his whole Mind, *Understanding, and Will*, possessed with an unfeigned Sense of Religion'.⁸¹ *Plain Directions*, as one would expect, contains detailed practical advice.⁸² To begin the study of sacred Scripture, Boehm lifted up simplicity of heart, or 'a sincere and unfeigned Desire to be *made wise unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Christ Jesus*'. Prayer and meditation form a vital foundation when approaching the Bible. Boehm recognized that some passages are difficult: 'if some *Mysteries* contained in Scripture be beyond his present Capacity, he is then to content himself with such as come within Reach, and leave the Rest to another more proper Enquiry'. Above all, Boehm recommended that the reader of the Word 'be sincere and impartial in a constant *Examination of thy self* after the Reading of Scripture'. This duty of self-examination, especially in response to Scripture, is an essential part of Boehm's praxis both before and after conversion.

Crucicentrism

As his fourth distinguishing characteristic of evangelicalism Bebbington names crucicentrism, the conviction that the doctrine of the cross is the focus of the gospel.⁸³ He cites Gladstone, who wrote that the evangelical school ‘aimed at bringing back, and by an aggressive movement, the Cross, and all that the Cross essentially implies’.⁸⁴ The cross, and the doctrine of the atonement associated with it, eclipsed all other doctrines in evangelicalism, including the incarnation. The substitutionary nature of the atonement, that Christ died *for us* and in our place, ‘was not uniform in the Evangelical tradition, but it was normal’. The crucicentric nature of evangelicalism is also revealed in the importance of the cross for ethics and living the Christian life. Although crucicentrism led rapidly to a critical rift between Arminians and Calvinists, Bebbington maintains that ‘their pre-eminent ground of agreement was the cruciality of the cross’.

The correlation of Boehm’s published beliefs with the crucicentrism of evangelicalism is complex. While his theology is genuinely Christocentric, significantly absent is any *recurring* presentation of a substitutionary view of **(p. 86)** the atonement. In his funeral sermon for Prince George of Denmark Boehm described how St Paul brought together dying *with* Christ in order to live *in* Christ: ‘And in this Coherence he also lays hold on his Merits, assuring himself that Christ, who now liveth *in* him by Faith, hath also made Atonement *for* him by his Death.’⁸⁵ Later, in a published sermon on the doctrine of justification by faith, Boehm wrote: ‘The Justice of God is entirely satisfied, after Christ himself is made an Offering for Sin, and a Ransom for all Men.’⁸⁶ In the same sermon—and it should be remembered that Prince George was a Lutheran—Boehm reveals his Lutheran theological heritage, stating that:

the Doctrine of *Imputative* Righteousness ... is one of the greatest *Quickners* of the Practice of unfeigned Religion. No sooner is the Righteousness of Christ applied to a Soul, but she is also at the same Time ingrafted into Christ, as a Branch into a Vine, to bear Fruit in him: And the same Christ, who died *for* her, in order to justify her, now also liveth *in* her, in order to sanctify her.⁸⁷

Perhaps surprisingly, though, this discussion of Christ’s death *for us*—in spite of its importance for Luther—is relatively uncommon in Boehm’s writings. His Pietist faith did not emphasize substitutionary atonement, at least not in the ways later evangelicals would. Much more common are his references to Arndt’s schema: ‘Consider therefore, that *the Knowledge of our Fall in Adam, and of our Recovery in Christ*, are the Two grand Hinges, whereon the whole Structure of the Christian Religion moves, and which go link’d together, as it were, Hand in Hand.’⁸⁸

Instead of a developed theology of atonement Boehm focused much more on a version of *theologia crucis* that accentuated patience in suffering under the providence of God. In his funeral sermon, he reminded his listeners that a true Christian 'doth not offer to dispute about the abstruse Workings of Providence, but strives to be resigned to their Appointment'.⁸⁹ His own unique depiction of a theology of the cross can be observed in a 1711 sermon:

And tho' the Way of the *Cross* be troublesome for the present, yet doth it at last lead the Soul to many a sweet and comfortable *Epiphany* of divine Love and Mercy. The most mysterious Depths of the whole Oeconomy of Restauration, are best learned, felt and tasted, under Crosses, Trials, and Probations. And truly, there is a *Mystery of the Cross*, which no vulgar Eye is able to dive into. The Lord has marked the most precious Jewels of his House with a *Cross*.⁹⁰

(p.87) By no means did Boehm avoid the language of the cross. It was his opinion that 'our modern Christians have cleverly dropt the harsher Doctrines', which included self-denial, taking up the cross, mortification, compunction, imitation of Christ, and inward sorrow.⁹¹ In fact, Boehm considered the cross a sign of spiritual maturity: 'The *Cross of Christ* is properly the Pledge and Character of a more advanced Christian, who thereby is made conformable both to the inward and outward Sufferings of his Master.'⁹²

Analysis

Geoffrey Nuttall asserts that dissenters in the tunnel period 'were Evangelicals before the Revival'.⁹³ In a similar vein, W. R. Ward has written, 'The fact crucial to the comprehension of the origins of the revival in England is understanding that there was a British Methodism which was a movement, not a denomination, and which never became a denomination.'⁹⁴ Boehm was no dissenter, but through his publishing activity he advocated a movement of transconfessional Christianity that transcended labels, Anglican, Lutheran, or Pietist. From the overview above, we are now in a position to analyse his works.

Boehm fittingly represents Bebbington's category of *conversion*, including the agony of *Bußkampf* and the doctrinal focus on justification by faith. His writings reveal an experiential, inward relationship with the Divine through the work of Christ. Boehm melded Arndt's emphasis on regeneration and renewal with the *Bußkampf* and *Durchbruch* in Francke's *ordo salutis*. Throughout Boehm's publications one uncovers indications of the 'crisis' that was such a feature of both Pietism and evangelicalism.⁹⁵ The history of the English-speaking revival, writes John Walsh, demonstrates that people 'faced by similar intellectual or spiritual crises can, in isolation from each other, pass through a strikingly similar odyssey towards similar conclusion'.⁹⁶ **(p.88)** That 'strikingly similar odyssey' or 'crisis' existed in Boehm's writings before the 1730s, and is reflected in the preparatory *Bußkampf* that would also become a frequent trait of the evangelical conversion narrative.

It must be noted, significantly, that Boehm does not presage the doctrine of assurance that would distinguish the Evangelical Revival—or at least the Wesleyan-Arminian stream—that absolute assurance of forgiveness evidenced in Wesley: 'an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death'.⁹⁷ Bebbington asserts that Wesley inherited his doctrine of assurance from the Moravians.⁹⁸ That connection—and Wesley would later discover the dissension over assurance among Moravian leaders—points to one of the disparities between the Pietisms of Halle and Herrnhut.⁹⁹ While Boehm championed the necessity of *Durchbruch* for the conversion process, it stopped short of Peter Böhler's immediate, full assurance. It would appear that the Halle Pietist in Boehm, tinctured by his perception of the detrimental effects of 'passive' faith within scholastic orthodoxy, hesitated at any doctrine of assurance that might undermine an ongoing, post-*Durchbruch* life of self-examination and holiness.

Surveying Boehm's publications gives evidence of a missional *activism*, rooted in a *praxis pietatis* motivated by rebirth and love. Holiness and a genuine moral reformation would also be of primary concern for evangelicals like Wesley and Whitefield; and, similar to Boehm, that reformation would only be effective if it transcended 'mere morality' through a conversion that transformed the will and heart.¹⁰⁰ While the prominence of personal evangelism, so prevalent in the Evangelical Revival, is understated in Boehm's own tracts and sermons, the whole endeavour of evangelism and mission remained at the forefront of his publishing. It began with *Pietas Hallensis* in 1705, in which the education and conversion of children were intermingled; and then, from 1709 to 1721 there was scarcely a year in which Boehm did not publish a report on 'the Conversion of the Heathens' in India. These reports and letters were clear precursors to the widespread narratives of later evangelicalism. Increasingly scholars like Susan O'Brien are drawing our attention to the 'transatlantic evangelical consciousness' associated with the revivalism of the **(p.89)** mid-eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ Nuttall describes 'how interwoven the Revival was: its leaders knew one another, read one another's books, wrote to and visited one another'.¹⁰² Ward claims that Boehm's translations of Francke's writings and of his enterprises were 'formative reading of all the early evangelicals', while Ernest Benz has reminded us that that reading took place on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁰³ Accounts of the outbreak of the Northampton revival in Connecticut were translated into German and distributed among two distinct groups of German Pietists.¹⁰⁴ The publication of letters to and from German missionaries in India—a connection mediated by Boehm decades before the outbreak of the Anglo-revival—shows that the correspondence was not just transatlantic but global.

Another prominent aspect of Boehm's activism was his vision of universal Christianity. His transconfessionalism was an amalgam of conversionism (regeneration)—from the inside out—and activism (universal love)—from the outside in. While transconfessionalism is not essential to either activism or conversionism, John G. Stackhouse, Jr, contends that 'evangelicalism is *marked* by cooperation, by transdenominational partnerships to further the mission of God and the church in the world'.¹⁰⁵ Even though Boehm was opposed to any official efforts at Church union, he promoted a unity in Christ based on conversion and manifest in common mission. Scholars have reminded us that Protestantism in Europe was tottering during this period; the wars of religion and the Counter-Reformation had wreaked havoc and brought a sense of insecurity and ineffectiveness within Protestantism. Frustration and even desperation following the Thirty Years War and the Peace of Westphalia made Protestant unity enticing.¹⁰⁶ Boehm's transconfessionalism prefigures the fact that early evangelicalism manifested itself transconfessionally—in Calvinism and Arminianism, in the diverse denominations of the Great **(p.90)** Awakening, in the denominational inclusivity of Wesley's societies—and continued to do so.¹⁰⁷ The East Indian missionaries—along with both Francke and Boehm—were foreign Protestants and not Dissenters, a fact, given the threatened state of Protestantism, that would help establish the authenticity of their reports of revival.¹⁰⁸

Boehm's *biblicism* falls in line with a later evangelical outlook. The primary purpose of Scripture revolved around the gospel of salvation by leading individuals to faith in Christ, although it also served a vital function in motivating a life of holiness and praxis. His resistance to scholarly and theological logomachy foreshadowed certain aspects of evangelicalism, although the relationship of Wesley's Anglican evangelicalism to the 'reason' of the Enlightenment is more nuanced than that of Boehm's Lutheranism.¹⁰⁹ For Pietists like Boehm, as for many later evangelicals, the authority of Scripture was closely connected with experiential knowledge.¹¹⁰ Walsh writes of early evangelicalism, 'To some of those perplexed by doubts about the authority of the Bible, the interior evidence of personal acceptance by Christ offered the relief that learned argument about Christian "evidences" did not give.'¹¹¹ Ultimately authority lay in each person's convinced perception of the Bible, which was not without reason yet not subject to the mandates of philosophical and theological reason: '*Reason leads to Jerusalem, but Grace to Bethlehem.... Humane Learning, if it be unsanctified, will often prove an Obstacle to a spiritual Pilgrim.*'¹¹² The biblicism of both Boehm and evangelicalism exhibits an epistemological shift toward experience as the foundation of knowledge.¹¹³

Coupled closely with the primacy of experiential knowledge is the laicization of preaching and teaching. Stoeffler emphasizes that Pietist distrust in human 'words about the Word' resulted in a tendency toward anti-professionalism and putting the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to full effect.¹¹⁴ Boehm himself was never ordained, and his *Plain Directions* for reading the Bible were directed at the average layperson, something the SPCK recognized because for decades it continued to publish that tract. Moreover, one of his main purposes in publishing was to stir up the laity to an active love. In concluding his preface on the character of a missionary, Boehm sought to awaken the average lay person: 'Verily, whosoever brings a *willing* Offering, **(p.91)** towards the Release of these Captives, be it either by hearty *Prayer*, or by good *Advice*, or by outward *Supplies*, or by any other *Means*, tending to the Enlargement of the Church, will not lose his Reward in that Day, wherein even a Cup of *cold Water* shall not be forgotten.'¹¹⁵ The laicization of preaching and teaching was a distinct feature of much of English-speaking evangelicalism as well. Walsh directs our attention to the levelling power of conversion and of an experience-based knowledge: 'The direct evidence of God's Spirit possessed a compelling power that transcended barriers of class and culture.'¹¹⁶

Lastly, if *crucicentrism* is defined primarily by a doctrine of substitutionary atonement that supersedes all other dogmas, including the incarnation, then Boehm falls short of that mark. Although he firmly believed that Christ died *for us*—his Lutheran blood could not confess otherwise—he was more likely to champion an Arndtian interpretation in which humans are created in the *imago Dei*, fallen through their transgressions, and restored through the work of Christ. At the same time, Boehm's theology of the cross had weighty implications for living the Christian life and imitating Christ's suffering. The consequence of the cross for sanctification had parallels in early evangelicalism, in which gratitude for Christ's atoning work on the cross was the prime motivation for a life of holiness.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

This study has sought to affirm W. R. Ward's statement that in the first decades of the eighteenth century Anthony W. Boehm would, 'by great personal qualities and incessant literary activity, become important in English religious life'.¹¹⁸ As the primary mediator of Halle Pietism and Francke's ventures to the English-speaking world, Boehm provided a major tributary to the confluence of streams that would result in the Anglo-revival in both the American colonies and Britain. His anglicized Pietism, in which he distinctively mingled the theology and practice of Arndt and Francke, shows wide-ranging parallels to later evangelicalism, with only a few, though important, differences. Boehm's publications in the tunnel period demonstrate that as much as anyone he can claim the moniker of 'an evangelical before the revival'. **(p.92)**

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