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## *Charles Simeon and My Evangelical Days*

**An article in the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

When I went off to college in California, way back in 1974, I was a Christian believer of the fervent and emotional variety. Oh, I liked using my head, too. But I especially enjoyed worship in what was becoming known as the charismatic style. Maybe my jazz piano had something to do with it.

It was there, in California, that I became aware of the word, "evangelical." "Evangelicals" were new to me. They were not always charismatic sorts of believers, and sometimes I found their spirit lacking; but they did seem to hold some of the same biblical values that I did; I was attracted to them. I fell happily into leading Bible study groups and prayer groups.

God has led me on quite a journey since then! I am thankful not just for charismatic and evangelical expressions of the faith, but also for rational and Anglo-Catholic expressions, for artistic and social justice expressions of faith, for the Christian faith in all its beautiful diversity.

But, this week, I was reminded of those good old California evangelical days. Because, this week, we observed the Feast of Charles Simeon.

It was a California buddy of mine, good old Wes Balda (where are you, Wes?), who introduced me to Charles Simeon. During my fourth year in California, I had finished college, and I was attending Fuller Seminary, in Pasadena. In so doing, I had also decided to live in the intentional Christian community that Wes and his wife, Janis, had set up in their home, which was in a rather rough section of town. Most of the seven of us in the house were students at Fuller, and we were learning great things about Christian witness. Well, Wes was a fan of Charles Simeon; and, thus, I became one, too.

Today, I credit the ministry of Charles Simeon (1759-1836) for renewing the Anglican Church in the nineteenth century. After his conversion at Cambridge, Simeon became a refreshing evangelical alternative to the rather tired and often lazy church life of the day, but his zeal also antagonized people. When he was appointed at Trinity Church, Cambridge, the wardens of the church locked it up against him, and some pew owners shut up their pews. Only gradually did his devotion and his learning overcome his opposition.

After those early days, Simeon served 54 years in the same church, Trinity Church, Cambridge. He was an outstanding preacher, for sure; but he also set up a series of trusts, so that evangelical preachers could be appointed, with income, at other parishes as incumbents (instead of having to be itinerant preachers). These trusts became The Simeon Trusts.

As a true biblical preacher, he did not care if certain passages of scripture contradicted each other. He was against "systems," and any attempt to systematize, or smooth out inconsistent passages. "Be Bible Christians, not System Christians!" he said. He hoped that his sermons would be able to reflect the very spirit of each individual biblical passage. "Seize the sense, seize the character, and then seize the spirit of the text," he said.

On November 12, I gave thanks for Charles Simeon. Today, I pray that Episcopal/Anglican preachers can learn again from his truly biblical preaching spirit. Preach the Bible, and from that text, deliver something of God's eternally broad Spirit. Sometimes that Spirit is charismatic or evangelical. Sometimes it is rational; sometimes that Spirit is Anglo-Catholic. Sometimes that Spirit is social justice. Sometimes it is artistic. But it is the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God that leads us into all truth.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip