

# Pietism's Teaching on Church and Ministry

## As Evidenced in its Pastoral Practice

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[This is the third in a series of four essays on Pietism.\*]

Lutheran Pietism as represented by Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) was an ideology and a movement which sought to change the status quo in the lives of seventeenth and eighteenth century German Lutherans. These two men and their adherents judged the prevailing level of sanctification in the churches and found it wanting. They called for a higher Christian piety; they proposed and implemented measures to cultivate it.

Although historians who are inimical to Lutheran Orthodoxy have sought to blame it for conditions among the German Lutherans of the seventeenth century, neither Spener or Francke ever suggested that ethical sterility, nominal Christianity or worldliness sprang from the orthodox teaching. What they contended against in particular was the apparently widespread perversion of justification by faith alone which concludes, “It doesn't matter how you live as long as you believe right.” There is always the danger that knowledge of the right teaching will be confused with faith and that adherence to an orthodox system of doctrine will breed a self-righteous complacency that precludes personal conviction of sin and trust in the Savior of sinners.

Apart from the fact that even the purest and clearest evangelical teaching does not always fall on good ground, there were other factors which contributed to the conditions which Spener decried in his *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Desires*) of 1675. At the end of the Thirty Years War the German people were a race that had, to a considerable extent, grown up without the benefit of pastors and teachers. Many men knew no trade but fighting and many people disregarded any authority that was not backed by the sword. In dealing with such people the pastors were sometimes ready to look to secular authority to help enforce church discipline. This did not teach people to love God and his Word and his house. People might conform by attending services, but their compliance did not grow out of and would not necessarily result in a living Christianity.

A kind of Caesaropapism had replaced the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Germany after the Reformation. The German princes, as “the chief members of the church,” were asked to take the place of Catholic bishops as chief ecclesiastical administrators. This arrangement continued even when some of the princes were only nominally Christian and lived manifestly impenitent lives. Some of them were unionists, indifferent to doctrinal differences with Reformed Christians. Some of the princes who were Christian and wanted to be loyal to the Lutheran Confessions were inept meddlers in church affairs.

Princes and town councils appointed the ministers of the church and the appointments often were based on political considerations. Not all appointees were apt to teach, not all had a love for souls, not all lived in a manner consistent with their office. Pastors were not supported by their superiors in matters of church discipline, especially when trying to deal with those of noble birth or high station.

Every subject of a realm or citizen of a free city was counted as a parishioner. Imagine a parish today in which every inhabitant was regarded as a church member. Would not such a “congregation” include coarse sinners and despisers of God's grace? Could such a situation be blamed on orthodox teaching?

Granted that conditions in the churches were bad, it would be a mistake to assume, as some Pietists did assume, that there were no faithful pastors who worked in a practical way to edify God's people. Before Spener set out to “complete the Reformation,” men like the dogmatician Johann Gerhard, the hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt, and the author of *True Christianity*, Johannes Arndt, had labored to inculcate a living Christianity while they adhered to the biblical truth as it is confessed in the *Book of Concord*. They did not work alone either.

Spener was committed to the Lutheran Church but believed that the Reformation had not been completed in it. He provided a bill of particulars in *Pia Desideria*. One remedy, which he had already proposed

in a sermon of 1669, was to organize *collegia pietatis*, “gatherings in the interest of piety.” It is from these gatherings that the term Pietist derived, although its connotations came to include much more than the meeting of conventicles. As is often the case, a term used pejoratively was eventually accepted as an honorable label by those who were so designated.

What Spener proposed in 1669 sounds somewhat like a private Bible class:

How much good it would do if good friends would come together on a Sunday and instead of getting out glasses, cards, or dice would take up a book and read from it for the edification of all or would review something from sermons that were heard! If they would speak with one another about the divine mysteries, and the one who received most from God would try to instruct his weaker brethren! If, should they be not quite able to find their way through, they would ask a preacher to clarify the matter! If this should happen, how much evil would be held in abeyance, and how the blessed Sunday would be sanctified for the great edification and marked benefit of all! It is certain, in any case, that we preachers cannot instruct the people from our pulpits as much as is needful unless other persons in the congregation, who by God’s grace have a superior knowledge of Christianity, take the pains, by virtue of their universal Christian priesthood, to work with and under us to correct and reform as much in their neighbors as they are able according to the measure of their gifts and their simplicity.<sup>1</sup>

The potential for both blessing and mischief lay in these *collegia pietatis*. Mutual edification, instruction of weaker brethren, discussion of difficult passages with the pastor, relieving the pastor of some of his work and the exercise of the universal priesthood. These were and are worthy aims to pursue. But the depreciation of other forms of social relaxation and the suggestion that lay members purpose to correct and reform their neighbors suggest that some of the less evangelical aspects of Pietism were present from the beginning.

At Frankfurt-am-Main Spener implemented his plan with Sunday and Wednesday gatherings in his own residence. The Sunday sermon was discussed along with biblical texts and devotional literature. A further goal of the meetings was the establishment and cultivation of friendships among those with a “Christian disposition” who would encourage Christian piety in one another. Spener hoped that if a smaller group experienced a religious renewal they would serve as a leaven to improve the lump and create a “living Christianity.”

Quite deliberately he followed the stratagem of fostering “little churches within the church,” *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. This naturally raised the issues of proper church order and the integrity of the ministry. The aims and methods also made theologians wonder about Spener’s understanding of church and ministry. Although he and those who imbibed his spirit and used his methods did not develop new dogmas of church and ministry, in part because they were in reaction against dogmatics, their views did work themselves out in their practical ministry. Their real teaching must be surmised from their practice and we may venture some generalizations on the basis of what they said and did.

Spener wanted to uphold the Lutheran view of what the church is. He had no desire to undercut the effectiveness of the public ministry. Formally, he and Francke both adhered to the teaching of Augustana VII on the church and Augustana VIII on the ministry. Neither wanted to equate the true invisible church with a visible community.

But in making doctrine secondary and assigning priority to Christian living their “marks of the Church” tended to shift from “the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments” (A. C. VII) to “chastity, patience, the fear of God, love to one’s neighbor and the works of love” (Apology VII and VIII). Practically, there was a shift from thinking of the church as the communion of those who are righteous by faith to those who are ethically righteous, who have a “living Christianity.”

It was not Spener’s intention to separate “true” Christians from others. The conventicle was to be *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, not *ecclesiola extra ecclesiam*. The *collegia pietatis* were not to replace regular church attendance and there was to be no celebration of the Lord’s Supper in small groups apart from the public services.

Separations did, however, occur. In some Pietists the impulse to separate from the church was stronger than the impulse to serve it. As early as 1676 one of Spener's friends and supporters began to absent himself from the Lord's Supper, a course of action that seemed logical and necessary to him and to others if the institutional church was really as bad as Spener said it was. In 1685 the latter published *Der Klagen ueber das verdorbene Christenthum Missbrauch und rechter Gebrauch (Misuse and Correct Use of Complaints about the Sad State of Christianity)* to argue that separation from the institutional church, even with its faults and imperfections, was not justified. When further tendencies toward elitism and separatism appeared, Spener grew cautious and did not introduce the *collegium* at his later charges in Dresden and Berlin.

A generation later Francke operated with the concept of a three-way division of the congregation. The largest group, to his way of thinking, was constituted of those who had the form of godliness but lacked its substance. It is difficult to avoid the impression that he was denying the faith of those who did not meet his standards of how the Christian *lives*. Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673–1749), the most irenic of Pietism's contemporary critics, seemed to gain that impression, too. One of the points of contention between him and Francke's Halle faculty was whether ethical holiness is a mark of the church's authenticity.

The second group in Francke's three-way division consisted of those who had made a beginning but were not yet fully committed. In modern parlance they had not yet made a "decision for Christ," a phrase which Francke would not have found offensive.

The smallest group, fully committed according to Francke's norms, constituted the "true" church. He strove to enlarge and extend this inner circle. Whether he realized it or not, he was trying to make the invisible Church visible. It may not be an overstatement to say that he believed he could identify "the true people of God, regenerated by the Holy Ghost" (Apology VII and VIII, Trigl. 231).

Another of Loescher's charges against the Pietism of Halle was that it undervalued the means of grace. That was not formally true of Spener. In *Pia Desideria* he wrote: "If there is to be any good in us, it must be brought about by God. To this end the Word of God is the powerful means, since faith must be enkindled through the gospel."<sup>iii</sup> Both he and Francke sought to retain the teaching that Holy Baptism is objectively efficacious. Both expressed the conviction that fellowship with God is effected by means of the Word.

But it is a fact that one of the peculiarities of Francke's pastoral work was that he urged people to pray for the kind of conversion experience he had undergone. In this he was not directing them to the objective truth of Christ's vicarious sacrifice and to his righteousness for us. His son-in-law Fresenius, who helped to continue the educational and charitable work at Halle after Francke's death, was not far removed from his mentor when he gave instruction for a "thorough" conversion "in a short time." In his *Book on Confession and Communion* he wrote: "Pray for grace ...! This prayer you should offer, not once or twice, but you must continue offering it daily with sighs and strong crying until you obtain grace, which assures you from your own experience that your heart has been truly changed."<sup>iii</sup> Thus the troubled soul or urgent seeker was directed to prayer and personal experience rather than to the timeless and universal truth of justification in Christ.

The neglect of objective preaching of universal reconciliation and justification was bound to lead to that legalism which characterized Halle under Francke's successors. The anthropocentrism which directed men to self, feeling and experience instead of to the Word, could easily become the anthropocentrism which enthroned reason in theology. It did. Historians are agreed that Pietism paved the way for Rationalism at Halle, especially at Halle.

Pietism stressed that churchly authority really belongs to the gathering of Christians. Spener and Francke both believed that congregations should have a voice in calling their pastors and that there should be lay representation at synods. Princes and consistories were only exercising a delegated authority, the Pietists believed, and when they misused it the authority should revert to the congregations.

As we have noted, some of the princes were unionists, indifferent to the confessional distinctions between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Much theological effort on the part of Lutherans was directed toward making those differences plain and to validate the Lutheran position. Spener and Francke were not entirely unappreciative of that position and those efforts. They both, however, had read and learned from Johannes Arndt's *True Christianity* and they shared the latter's "moderate" approach to confessional questions.

Late in life Arndt recounted why he had written his great devotional classic and included among the reasons that he had “wished to withdraw the minds of students and preachers from an inordinately controversial and polemical theology which has well-nigh assumed the form of an earlier scholastic theology.”<sup>iv</sup>

In *Pia Desideria* Spener advocated a practice of heartfelt love toward all unbelievers and heretics. While we should indicate to them that we take no pleasure in their unbelief or false belief or the practice and propagation of these, but rather are vigorously opposed to them, yet in other things which pertain to human life we should demonstrate that we consider these people to be our neighbors . . . , regard them as our brothers according to the right of common creation and the divine love that is extended to all (though not according to regeneration), and therefore are so disposed in our hearts toward them as the command to love all others as we love ourselves demands....<sup>v</sup>

This was not liberalism or unionism but wholesome counsel for confessional Lutherans in any age.

Halle nurtured the notion that the doctrines which really matter are the basic truths, that is biblical truths which have been verified in the experience of the Christian community. There was that appeal to experience again and that setting of human criteria. It made for a looser view of confessional Lutheranism than either Arndt or Spener had advocated and a more liberal attitude toward other “evangelicals.” It also helped to prepare the climate for Rationalism’s easy triumph at Halle when Christian Wolff, deposed in 1723, returned in triumph in 1740.

Francke did not advocate union with the Reformed. He did, however, urge unified efforts in missions, education and charitable work. When nineteenth century Pietists turned from rationalism to a more confessional and ecclesiastical mindset, many Lutherans continued their participation in various unionistic enterprises and institutions.

The literary opponent of Pietism, a younger contemporary of Francke, was the aforementioned Valentin Ernst Loescher. In his *Unschuldige Nachrichten von alten und neuen theologischen Sachen (Guileless Reports on Theological Matters Both Old and New)* and in a colloquy with the Halle faculty, he charged that Pietism was depriving the ministry of its authority. The charge had been leveled by others earlier against Spener.

Spener’s second proposal for renewal in *Pia Desideria* had been “the establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood.” He hoped, through the *collegia pietatis* and through his writing, to encourage and equip Christians for the discharge of this priesthood.<sup>vi</sup> It is a fact that his views on the spiritual priesthood of all believers were subject to misinterpretation and misuse. He himself recognized this and warned against it, proposing safeguards to prevent it.

He elaborated his teaching with seventy questions and answers in *The Spiritual Priesthood* in 1677.<sup>vii</sup> Here he taught that Christ has purchased this priesthood, that it is bestowed by the Holy Spirit and that it is acquired in Holy Baptism. It is active in three ways. The first is in spiritual sacrifice, the office of yielding all to the Redeemer. The second is in praying and blessing, the office of intercession. The third is in exhorting and consoling one’s fellow Christians, the office of the divine Word.

It was especially in connection with the third office that Spener had to warn against abuses. In Question 26 he asks, “Are then all Christians preachers and are they to exercise the preaching office?” He answers: “No. To exercise the office publicly in the congregation before all and over all requires a *special call*.” He might have added “on behalf of all” to further clarify what public ministry is. In Questions 46 to 51 he speaks of the responsibility of all Christians to care for the salvation and edification of others and warns that this is to be done “without hindrance to the public office of the regular ministry.” In answer to the question (68) what the called pastors should do to prevent disorder, he concludes that “they should keep the supervision and Christian direction of the work in their hands.” Question 69 asks how spiritual priests should conduct themselves so as to prevent disorder. The answer is, “They should associate faithfully with godly ministers.... They should willingly give them an account of their doings and follow their Christian counsel, and especially refrain from all disparagement of them, picking flaws in them and injuring their office with anyone.”

Spener did not want to be a Donatist, but he had described in *Pia Desideria* how a “godly minister” lives. He wrote of clergy who “do not actually possess the true marks of a new birth.”<sup>viii</sup> He placed a higher value on godly living than on orthodox teaching. It is a fact that some of his followers and many later Pietists separated themselves from the church when they determined that their ministers were not “godly,” that their personal character flaws were not compensated for by their orthodoxy.

One of Spener’s complaints regarding the training of pastors was that it was possible to complete university training without having had a single course in exegesis. Another was that many graduates of the theological faculties had no idea how to preach in the language of the people. He proposed that *collegia pietatis* be initiated both to remedy these shortcomings and to deepen the devotional life and ethical sensibilities of students of theology. He wrote:

Surely students of theology ought to lay this foundation, that during their early years of study they realize that they must die unto the world and live as individuals who are to become examples to the flock, and that this is not merely an ornament but a very necessary work, without which they may indeed be students of what may be called a philosophy of sacred things but not students of theology who are instructed and will be preserved only in light of the Holy Spirit.... If at the beginning of their study of theology all this were told to students and impressed upon them, I should hope that it would bear much fruit throughout the entire time of their study and, indeed, the rest of their lives.<sup>ix</sup>

*Pia Desideria* also suggests that students read *Theologia Germanica* and Tauler “which, next to Scriptures, probably made our dear Luther what he was. Such was the advice of Luther himself.”<sup>x</sup> Here Spener was directing students to German mystics who did influence the early Luther. Regrettably, many Pietists followed through on this advice which Luther wrote to Spalatin in 1516, before he had won through to theological clarity and evangelical freedom. A theological student who was directed toward subjective and anthropocentric sources for inspiration and guidance was being led away from the objective truth of objective justification and would mislead souls accordingly.

Francke at Halle, and earlier at Leipzig, acted on Spener’s suggestion regarding *collegia pietatis* for students of theology, but not in a direct way and not under that name. He began with a *collegium philobiblicum* which met on Sunday afternoons to read the Bible in the original languages. Initially the sessions were given to linguistic matters, but later became practical and devotional.

Then he instituted *collegia biblica*, lectures in German on the New Testament. These attracted up to 300 students who were thus learning to speak of spiritual things in everyday language, to the advantage of their future parishioners. As time went on the theological curriculum at Halle became increasingly practical and students were expected to teach in the various catechetical schools which Francke had established for children and adults who had never received thorough instruction. The emphasis on practical training and experience was accompanied by an ever-increasing emphasis on exegesis. Halle, in Francke’s time, had the world’s best scholars of biblical languages; systematics diminished in importance and philosophy went begging. Dale W. Brown’s description of Halle’s dogmatics sounds somewhat familiar to graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: “an ordered summary of biblical theology.”<sup>xi</sup>

By improving the training of pastors and especially in emphasizing the spiritual priesthood of believers, Pietism helped to remove the wide gulf that had existed between clergy and laity. There was a more active lay involvement in congregational life, a close cooperation between pastors and flocks. Following Francke’s lead, institutions of learning, charity and missions both involved and depended upon lay people.

Loescher realized that much of Pietism’s criticism of the Lutheran Church in Germany had been justified. He himself adopted the “pietistic” practices of catechetical examination, the lay diaconate, church visitation and personal contact with candidates for the ministry in order to evaluate their character. He even spoke in favor of conventicles if these were used in the church’s interest and did not result in separatism or elitism.

Spener and Francke emphasized that public preaching must be accompanied by private pastoral care. Private conversation and personal instruction can accomplish some things that sermons cannot. We are told that Francke gave the impression of being personally concerned about everyone's problems without seeming to be a busybody in other men's affairs. Starck's good counsel was not characteristic of all pietistic pastoral dealing but it bespeaks an understanding care for souls: "The fact that a believer does not at all times feel the same degree of happiness in prayer is no evidence that he has no faith, no more than coals concealed beneath the ashes prove the fire to be extinguished."<sup>xii</sup>

The early Lutheran Pietists placed great emphasis on the instruction of children. Spener promoted the Sunday school. Francke preached a series of sermons on the training of children and stressed cooperation between home and church in Christian training. Children preparing for confirmation were welcome at Francke's parsonage for daily Bible study from 11:00 a.m. to noon. Catechism instruction was directed to the children's development and maturation as Christians.

Aids for private meditation and prayer as well as family devotions were provided. Most notable of these was Johann Friedrich Starck's *Daily Handbook for Days of Joy and Sorrow* (1728), which was more popularly known as *Starck's Gebetbuch*.

A hymnody which stressed regeneration, commitment and Christian living came into existence and to a considerable extent displaced the Reformation chorale. The fact that a very small percentage of Lutheran Pietism's hymns are included in *The Lutheran Hymnal* suggests that there was little wheat and much chaff. Benjamin Schmolck (1672–1737) wrote 1183 hymns, of which four appear, but it should be noted that he was more contemporary than an advocate of Pietism. Johann Jacob Rambach (1693–1735) wrote more than 180 hymns and four are included. Only one of Johann Andreas Rothe's (1688–1758) 40 hymns is sung in our churches today.

Some people say that Pietism leads to legalism. We are more inclined to say that Pietism *is* legalism, that Pietism's counter to Orthodoxy's "ethical sterility" finally developed into a "sterile legalism." This is not to discount its many positive contributions or to deny that the gospel did its work in the Pietists and through them. Nor does it imply that Pietists departed from the *solo Christo, sola gratia, sola fide* in their formal teaching. In what follows, however, we shall see that there was a real departure from the gospel-centeredness of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

Spener tried consciously not to be a legalist, but in later life he exhibited a tendency to systematize, prescribe and methodize Christian living. He and others thus did in the area of Christian life what they deprecated in the area of Christian doctrine. Pietists tended to judge the Christianity of others by the often subjective and arbitrary standards of their own conduct. It is no wonder that for some of them adherence to a set of rules—mostly negative—came to be the identifying mark of the Christian.

Legalism must result from the confusion of law and gospel, justification and sanctification. Loescher explicitly accused Francke and the Halle Pietists of commingling justification by faith with works. It is a fact that they were preaching the gospel, not so much for the consolation of sinners, but so as to stimulate Christian living. Even in Spener there was more emphasis on Christ *in* us than on Christ *for* us. Francke's emphasis in treating the Lord's Supper was not on the forgiveness of sins but on the desired effect which partaking would have on the Christian's life. Proclamation of God's saving acts for the assurance of troubled souls often gave way to instruction on how to attain assurance by prayer, introspection and the experience of joy. To say that Spener did not divide law and gospel as sharply as Luther did but tried to operate with "an organic combination" of the two is really to say he confused them.

Loescher formally accused the Pietists of a false position on adiaphora. Actually, they did not really have a position on adiaphora because for them nothing was "indifferent." It has been said in defense of both Spener and Francke that they were reacting in a legitimate way against extremes in dress and entertainment, against license and drunkenness, against a general misuse of time and treasure. Spener did not oppose pleasure, play, dancing and the theater as sinful in themselves. But he assumed that they cannot be engaged in to the glory of God and are therefore not suitable activities for the truly regenerate. He regarded the reading of the classics as a sinful waste of time.

Francke held that dancing is intrinsically sinful since it is not motivated by the Holy Spirit. He opposed the reading of fiction as a waste of time and also because it is not true. Children in his institutions really *were* forbidden to play. Enjoyment militates against self-denial and the flesh can be crucified only by abstinence from what is enjoyed. In Rule 20 of *Rules for the Protection of Conscience and for Good Order in Conversation or in Society* (1689) he wrote:

Games and other pastimes such as dancing, jumping, and so forth, arise from an improper and empty manner of life, and common and unchaste postures in speech are associated with them.... They provide an opportunity for you to become enmeshed in a disorderly way of life, or at least make it very difficult for you to preserve the peace of God in your soul.

Rule 24 commands:

Guard yourself from unnecessary laughter. All laughter is not forbidden. It is fitting that the most pious person rejoices inwardly not over earthly but rather over divine things.... How frivolous (laughter) is becomes clear when a person wishes to draw near to the everpresent God once again in deep humility.... Joking does not please God; why then should it please you? If it does not please you, why do you laugh over it? If you laugh, you have sinned as well.<sup>xiii</sup>

What is enjoyed and natural does not come from the Spirit. What is serious and sacrificial does.

One of the charges laid at the door of Lutheran Pietism is that it really derived from Reformed sources. It is true that personal contact with Calvinists and personal reading of Reformed literature did play a role in the shaping of Spener and, to a lesser degree, Francke. It is true that Starck regarded Sunday as the Sabbath, set apart by God as a day of rest, not to be desecrated by labor or business of any kind, to be observed not for an hour but all day long.

Orthodox teachers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries accused Pietists of teaching that a converted Christian can attain to perfection. Loescher made a formal accusation of perfectionism against Francke and the Halle faculty. It can be said that both Spener and Francke formally disavowed perfectionism.

Spener anticipated and deflected the charge in *Pia Desideria*: "We are not forbidden to seek perfection, but we are urged on toward it. And how desirable it would be if we were to achieve it! [But] I cheerfully concede that here in this life we shall not manage that, for the farther a godly Christian advances, the more he will see that he lacks, and so he will never be farther removed from the illusion of perfection than when he tries hardest to reach it."<sup>xiv</sup>

Francke wrote a brief treatise *On Christian Perfection* in 1690, in which he wrote:

Both of the following statements are true in a certain sense: We are perfect, and we are not perfect. Namely, we are perfect through Christ and in Christ through our justification and according to the righteousness of Jesus Christ ascribed to us. However, we are not and will not be completely perfect in the sense that we will nevermore be able to grow, to set aside evil and to take on good toward sanctification. The one who does not wish to err in this matter must distinguish well the article concerning justification and that concerning renovation or sanctification.<sup>xv</sup>

Whatever aberrations may have appeared among their followers and successors, both Spener and Francke recognized the danger of perfectionism and disavowed it. Both affirmed the doctrine of imputed righteousness and the perfection that is ours by faith in Christ. Both strove for perfection and encouraged others to do so. Both knew and admitted that it is not to be attained this side of heaven.

Whatever positive things may be said of Pietism and whatever defenses may be raised against specific charges of false teaching, its shift in emphasis from objective justification to regeneration cannot be ignored.

The insistence on introspection, subjective experience and the external signs of “living Christianity” profoundly affected its pastoral theology. We can observe this in Pietism’s attitude toward baptism and in its teaching on regeneration and conversion.

Francke and his Halle co-workers and successors were especially culpable in this regard. Formally, as ministers pledged to the Lutheran Confessions, they held to baptismal regeneration. Actually, their emphasis was on a later “renewal” of the baptismal covenant, a conscious commitment, actually a conversion. “At some point in the maturation of the individual personal faith must be added to baptism.”<sup>xvi</sup> This is what made confirmation so important in their thinking. “Every baptized child was looked upon as having fallen from the state of baptismal grace, necessitating this conscious pledge on the part of the individual as a completion of the efficacy of this covenant.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Francke’s *Autobiography* recounts the conversion experience which he held to be normative for all.<sup>xviii</sup> In the fall of 1687, after completing his theological studies, he went to Lueneburg where he hoped “to become a justified Christian.” He was asked to preach and “was not only concerned with the mere preaching of a sermon but chiefly with the upbuilding of the congregation.” His text was John 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Here, surely, was a text that would direct him and his hearers to rely on the objective truth of God’s written Word. But that was not what Francke saw in it. “With this text I had a particular opportunity to discuss true faith, and how this faith is distinguished from a mere human and imaginary foolish faith.” As he meditated further he concluded, “I did not find the faith in myself that I was to demand in the sermon.”

He agonized in prayer, asking God to give him the assurance of a living faith. “When I knelt down I did not believe that there was a God but when I stood up I believed it to the point of giving up my blood without fear or doubt.” If anyone ever pointed out to him the inconsistency of calling on a God in whose existence he did not believe, Francke would not have been disturbed. *He had had the experience.* “This is the period to which I can point as that of my true conversion. From this time on my Christianity had a place to stand.”

Awareness of one’s sinful condition, doubt as to one’s faith, prayerful struggle, conversion experience. These were the ingredients of the *Buszkampf* which became normative in Francke’s care of souls. There should be such an experience to recall, recount and fix in time. Without this a person has not been reborn. The resultant damage has been cataloged and documented in an insightful and practical way by various fathers of the Synodical Conference, particularly Walther and Francis Pieper. The latter quotes Schneckenburger’s evaluation:

The individual’s assurance of his sonship with God and salvation, a primary need of the Reformed, could not come into question at all for a Lutheran while orthodoxy was in bloom in his Church. In penitential faith he took the assurance of forgiveness out of absolution, which was for him the absolute truth and the consolation of the Holy Spirit, and where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. Only when Pietism arrived, there was introduced a reflection on one’s inner status. Unrestrained subjectivity operated entirely apart from the objective acts of the Church, which no longer gave full satisfaction. Thus gradually an approach to the Reformed way of viewing things begins to appear even among the orthodox.<sup>xix</sup>

Francke and others could insist that the experience must not be striven for in an artificial way, but they were establishing counterfeit norms for the assurance of the believer and counterfeit means of attaining to it.

In the sermon *If and How One May Be Certain That One Is a Child of God* (1707)<sup>xx</sup> Francke avers that a true child of God cannot be disturbed and concludes that those who are disturbed have no true certainty. He directs them to pray and assures them that “God [will] give you his adoption so that you will find the proper indicators of this.” These indicators are prayer, experience, signs in one’s life. “Thereafter you will have joy and pleasure from it when your certainty has a firm basis.” The gospel of Christ’s vicarious atonement and of universal objective justification sealed by his resurrection is not there. Or, it is not made explicit when it most needs to be made explicit.

In the same sermon there is also the warning not to confuse the “beginning of conversion” with conversion, which is equated with a “full victory of the faith.” One must still always be uncertain and insecure until one meets the pastor’s criterion of victorious living, of true conversion. If Francke and his imitators cannot be formally convicted of false doctrine they certainly stand convicted of false teaching in the sense that they tormented souls which needed comforting.

In *A Letter to a Friend Concerning the Most Useful Way of Preaching* (1725) Francke advised his friend “to lay down in his sermons the distinguishing marks and characters both of the converted and of the unconverted ... so that every one of (his) hearers may be able to judge his own state, and may know to which of these two classes he belongs.”<sup>xxi</sup> He warns against an unskilled confusing of the two classes but offers the reassurance that “a prudent minister, who has experienced a work of grace upon his own heart, will have no difficulty in describing it to others, so as to guard sufficiently against the mistakes on both sides.” Again, personal experience is the touchstone and the objective truth of law and gospel is not a sufficient means. It is no wonder that Pietism was not satisfied with the general absolution: the Word of forgiveness must be protected against those who have not yet attained to the Pietists’ standard of readiness to hear it. Or, as they saw it, such people must be protected from hearing it.

We conclude that Lutheran Pietism, as represented by Spener and Francke, adhered to the formal definitions of church and ministry as set forth in the *Augsburg Confession*. Where it went astray was in its understanding of the church’s mission and of the ministry’s function. The essential proclamation that sins are forgiven was relegated to the ancillary role of getting people to feel and behave like “true Christians” as defined by their pastors. All the good work in education of children and adults, all the mission activity and works of mercy, all the involvement of the laity in church life and government was finally tainted by the tyranny over souls that resulted from Pietism’s fundamental legalism.

### Endnotes

\* The following foreword, “The Legacy of Pietism,” was written for the series by Edward C. Fredrich.

Volume 82 of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* will present four articles that will give special attention to the theological movement called Pietism. The first, appearing in this Winter issue, will be of a bibliographical nature, treating some of the major writings produced by the Lutheran Pietists of Germany [written by Martin O. Westerhaus].

Subsequent articles will center on specific aspects. There will be a study of the Pietist influence in the area of church and ministry [by Richard D. Balge]. Then the great Halle mission enterprises will be highlighted [by Ernst H. Wendland]. A final study will have the title, “Pietism Comes to America” [by Edward C. Fredrich].

Why all this attention to Pietism in 1985? It isn’t even an anniversary year. That was 1975, three hundred years after the appearance of Spener’s *Pia Desideria*, the book generally credited or blamed for inaugurating German Lutheran Pietism. But in 1975, readers will recall, the anniversary that absorbed our attention was “Grace—125.”

If Pietism had to wait for its turn while that anniversary and those of the birthdays of our country, our Confessions and our Reformer were being celebrated, then the year 1985 may not be as inappropriate as might seem for catching up.

Just 300 years ago in 1685, Pietism was getting into high gear. After ten troubled years of controversy and strife at Frankfurt-on-Main where he was located, Spener sought to rescue the infant movement from some of its worst excesses. He broke with the Frankfurt separatists, who would provide Pennsylvania with some of its colorful immigrant groups. The repudiation of the separatists was signaled by Spener’s 1685 writing, *Der Klagen ueber das verdorbene Christentum Misbrauch und rechter Gebrauch* (“Misuse and Correct Use of Complaints About the Sad State of Christianity”).

In 1685 the other outstanding Pietist leader, August Hermann Francke, was taking the first steps that would soon bring him to his leadership role at Halle. He received an advanced degree at Leipzig that year and then began the Bible lectures that attracted such attention and gave Pietism one of its important characteristics.

Whether this year’s concentration on Pietism in the *Quarterly* is timely or tardy can be debated. What is hardly debatable, however, is the value of such concentration on our part any time and any place. There are good reasons for the *Quarterly* and its readers to review periodically “The Legacy of Pietism.”

The legacy is long. It reaches across the centuries into our own time. It involves such basic and enduring theological issues as the proper relation of sanctification and justification and of law and gospel. It touches on such relevant issues as lay involvement, Bible study and theological education.

There is a danger that the average Wisconsin Synod pastor will give the whole subject the quick and easy brush-off here and elsewhere. If there is one characteristic Wisconsin Synod pastors have in common, it is a profound and congenial

distaste for Pietism. The easiest way to win a debate on our conference floors is to charge the opponent with being a Pietist. On the enemies' list of most of us Pietism stands high in third place, just behind Satan and Antichrist. Such an attitude is understandable. A church body heartily committed to the truth of objective justification cannot help being turned off by the worst vagaries of Pietism.

The antipathy can, however, overextend itself. It can lead to a closed mind that does not reflect and an open mouth that pronounces slogans. These are not assets in our work. We should not throw out the baby with the bath water. We dare not let our dislike for Pietism lead us to a personal or professional neglect of piety. A reconsideration of the flaws and faults in Pietism may help us refrain from recommitting the same blunders and errors. It need not blind us to whatever commendable uses and pluses the movement underscores. Hence, the studies in this year's *Quarterly*.

There is a special reason why a consideration of Pietism is especially in place in 1985. The big new Lutheran Church is in the process of forming. By 1988 it is to be a reality. Many things about this church body are not yet known. But this we do know: the church body that will dominate theologically is the Lutheran Church in America and among its theological emphases Pietism has an honored place. The ancestor ministerium of the LCA was founded by Muhlenberg, an emissary of Halle. Its oldest seminary was founded by S.S. Schmucker on the proposition, "Without piety, no man can be a faithful minister."

Even if these short-range prophecies of a larger lease on life in Lutheranism for Pietism prove false or inconclusive in the years ahead, the movement will always have its place in our concerns. The four *Quarterly* articles in Volume 82 will not by any means satiate those concerns or exhaust the subject. They may arouse a measure of interest and promote personal study.

To that end they are being presented in the 1985 *Quarterly*.

<sup>i</sup> Spener, Philip Jacob, *Pia Desideria*; translated, edited with an Introduction by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p 13.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, p 87.

<sup>iii</sup> Quoted in Volume III, p 218 of Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–57).

<sup>iv</sup> Quoted in Tappert's Introduction to *Pia Desideria*, p 8.

<sup>v</sup> *Pia Desideria*, p 98f.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, p 92.

<sup>vii</sup> In Peter C. Erb, ed, *Pietists: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984). The quotations are from p 54ff.

<sup>viii</sup> *Pia Desideria*, p 46.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, p 106ff.

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, p 110.

<sup>xi</sup> Brown, Dale W., *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p 65.

<sup>xii</sup> In "The Afflicted One Complains of the Weakness of His Faith," a selection from *Daily Handbook for Days of Joy and Sorrow* (1728), in Erb, p 203.

<sup>xiii</sup> Erb, p 111f.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Pia Desideria*, p 80.

<sup>xv</sup> Erb, p 111f.

<sup>xvi</sup> Stoeffler, F. Ernst, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p 17.

<sup>xvii</sup> Wendland, Ernst H., "Present-Day Pietism," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 49:1, January 1952, p 26. The article is mistakenly ascribed to E. W. Wendland.

<sup>xviii</sup> The quotations are from Erb, p 110f.

<sup>xix</sup> Pieper, Volume III, p 173.

<sup>xx</sup> The quotations are from Erb, p 147f.

<sup>xxi</sup> The quotations are from Erb p 117f.

In addition to the works cited two more books are rich in information and analysis concerning Pietism. They are: Stoeffler, F. Ernst, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971). Stoeffler, F. Ernst, ed., *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976).