

Present-Day Pietism

by E.H. Wendland

It is impossible to present and to evaluate properly “Present-Day Pietism” without first of all attempting an evaluation of the original pietistic movement of the 17th century in Germany.

Unfortunately that is where the first difficulty arises. Even present-day Lutheran students in our own circles are not entirely agreed in this evaluation. A study of Lutheran Pietism involves a study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, since Pietism is said to have been a reaction against the failure of the Church under Orthodox leadership to present undernourished souls with the vital Bread of Life. Those who champion the cause of the Orthodox leaders of that time protest against the epithet “dead Orthodoxy,” and rise to the defense of the 16th century dogmaticians who were “devoted to the assiduous task of securing and systematizing the pure doctrine”¹ of the Lutheran Church. Those, on the other hand, who are inclined to be more kindly disposed towards the Pietistic movement state that “Pietism was by no means the sterile movement it is sometimes painted to be,” and paint a dismal picture of the “techniques of theological exposition and disputation” of Orthodoxy as being “often more rationalistic than Christian.”² Pietism is furthermore difficult to evaluate because even its founders, constantly on the defensive theologically, never got around to the composition of a theological system. Although its influence is still alive to the present day, it never reached a point where it controlled theological thought completely. Even Neve’s thorough “History of Christian Thought” passes over from the period of Orthodoxy to the period of Rationalism, with very little reference to Pietism at all. Since the Fathers of Pietism, notably Spener (d. 1705) and Francke (d. 1727) never wished to be classified as outside of the pale of the Lutheran Church, and unquestionably did point an accusing finger at many sore spots which are admitted by all to have been present in the church at that time, one cannot, perhaps, sweepingly denounce everything in the Pietistic movement as heretical. Neither can one simply say, however, that the so-called Orthodoxy which prevailed was in itself responsible for the deterioration in the religious life of that time. Anyone who probes the Pietistic movement comes to the inevitable conclusion that this is one field which still is in need of intensive study, not only as far as Pietism is concerned, but also as far as Orthodoxy is concerned.

Any movement, whether religious or political, with an “ism” appended to its name, is usually the result of a reaction over against a state of affairs which has become intolerable, and therefore its inception is understandable. Because it is a reactionary movement, however, it almost inevitably goes to extremes. Thus no matter how justified its causes may be, or how sincere the zeal of its proponents, we have come to regard any “ism” with great suspicion. Pietism was a reaction to the spiritual indifference, worldliness, and general lack of true piety which had infected the Lutheran Church of Germany in the 17th century. Just what was the greatest contributing factor in bringing about these conditions against which the fathers of Pietism, particularly Spener and Francke, protested, is difficult to say. Three leading causes may be mentioned: the Thirty Years’ War, State religion, and Orthodoxy. We shall consider each of these briefly, since they may prove helpful to us later in analyzing present-day conditions.

It is difficult for us to imagine the chaos prevailing in 17th century Germany in the wake of the *Thirty Years’ War*. Prof. M. Lehninger gives us a concise, yet vivid description of conditions: “Germany had been the broad battlefield upon which Germans, Swedes, Frenchmen, Spaniards, and other nationalities had rendezvoused and waged war for more than a quarter of a century. As an aftermath, Germany lay prostrate, bleeding from a thousand wounds. Many of its cities, towns, and villages were in ruins. The communal life of the nation was disorganized. Many people had been killed, soldiers and civilians alike, while villages lay desolate, its inhabitants having either fled or having died in the plagues which were ravaging the country. Orphaned children roamed through the countryside, begging and robbing to still their growing hunger. They had never known what peace was, and many had forgotten what the love of a father and mother meant. Ragged and

¹ Cf. M. Lehninger, Essay: “History of Pietism.”

² Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, “From Luther to Kierkegaard.”

unkempt they fled from other humans as they fled from wild beasts, distrusting everybody and being distrusted by everybody. Forests were their hiding places and caves and ruins their dwellings. Murdering bands of former soldiers, bereft of their livelihood by peace, pillaged the open country. No wonder that the fields and gardens grew up in weeds, and commerce and industry should be at a standstill.”³ It isn’t perhaps even necessary to comment on the fact that such situations of complete demoralization and disorganization as a result of war and destruction are always fertile soil for new movements.

Another contributing factor towards the spiritual poverty which gave rise to Pietism was the fact that the Church was controlled by the State. Not that this was anything new, since we know that the Lutheran Church of the Reformation was a State-Church. Evangelically-minded rulers at first did very much to help support and establish a church which had severed connections with Rome. In the course of time, however, the weaknesses of this system became all too apparent. The Church was subject to governmental agencies, and transgressors of church laws were liable to punishment by secular courts. The religion of the prince was of necessity the religion of the pauper. Obviously many adhered to the Lutheran Church not out of deep spiritual conviction, but for reasons of expediency. Under these conditions nominal Christianity, always one of the chief targets of pietistic reform efforts, was certainly widespread.

To these factors we must carefully add what we shall refer to as Orthodoxy. By this we mean the fact that many pastors and parishioners often mistook a mere intellectual knowledge of carefully systematized doctrine for faith. A personal conviction of sin was lacking, as also a faith which rested on the assurance of forgiveness and had as a natural result a consecrated life of sanctification. A religious intellectualism began to control many Lutheran classrooms and pulpits, which consumed practically all of its energy in proving the validity of an orthodox position by means of every possible dialectical definition and distinction. “The humbler duties of preaching the Gospel and ministering to the spiritual needs of the people were often shunned,” writes Pelikan, “in favor of the more glamorous field of theological debate.... The people had grown weary of the endless and useless theological disputes in which their pastors and professors engaged.... Leaders of Lutheranism found time, opportunity, and funds for extensive theological debate and publication, but none for missions.”⁴ We certainly cannot dispute the fact that these “excesses of Orthodoxy” described by Pelikan existed and became very widespread among leaders of Lutheran theology towards the end of the 17th century. We cannot, however, agree that this was the inevitable and necessary result of the work of the earlier orthodox dogmatists, nor can we sweepingly denounce all later orthodox leaders as being guilty of Orthodoxy. The devotional writings of Johann Arndt (d. 1621), the scholarly writings of Johann Gerhard, the hymns of Valerius Herberger (d. 1627), Johann Heerman (d. 1647), Martin Rinkart (d. 1649), Paul Gerhardt (d. 1676), George Neumark (d. 1681), and others which stem from this period have proved a deep source of comfort and edification to devout Christians up to the present day. The fact that Orthodoxy was far from dead is also evidenced in the theology of Valentin Ernst Loescher (d. 1749), who lived at the height of the Pietistic Movement, and who waged a bitter controversy against this movement through a thorough defense of Lutheran doctrine and a correct exposition of the Word of God against all pietistic heresy. These men were not unaware of the spiritual lethargy of their day, and raised their voices against it. Unfortunately, however, there were too many others among the “Orthodox brethren” who presented Lutheran doctrine with parrot-like correctness and too little conviction, content to do their professional duty, while losing sight of the souls of men. Although Orthodoxy may not have been quite so accountable for the widespread spiritual indifference of that time as many church historians would have us believe, we must admit that its efforts to change matters were often more negative than positive, and that its cold intellectualism estranged, rather than promoted the Gospel among the common people.

In this soil Pietism was nurtured and for a time even flourished within the scope of the Lutheran Church of Germany. Who will deny that Philip Jakob Spener, the recognized “Father of Pietism,” had just cause for complaining about the spiritual conditions of his time? Who will doubt his sincerity and zeal in attempting to

³ M. Lehninger, Essay: “History of Pietism.”

⁴ Pelikan, “From Luther to Kierkegaard.”

“do something” about correcting these conditions? His early writing “*Pia desideria*” (1675) found ready accord even in orthodox Lutheran circles. These are some of its propositions: 1. The Word of God must be more widely studied by the people. To this end he proposed discussions under the pastor’s guidance. 2. The universal priesthood of believers needs new emphasis. All Christians should exercise this privilege by testifying, instructing, and exhorting each other. 3. Mere head knowledge is not Christianity, but such knowledge must be translated into action. 4. More love and gentleness between the Christian denominations is needed in polemics. 5. The schooling of the clergy in the universities must include training for personal piety as well as intellectual knowledge. 6. Sermons should be prepared with less emphasis on rhetorical art and more on the edification of the hearers.⁵ Spener, however, led a stormy life. His frank denunciation of intemperate conduct wherever he found it, particularly among the clergy, antagonized many with whom he came into contact. His departure from conventional methods, coupled with his doctrinal aberrations and unionistic tendencies, soon brought about his disavowal by orthodox leaders of Church and State. At one time he lost his position as court preacher because he rebuked the Elector of Saxony for his drunkenness. His successor, however, August Herman Francke, enjoyed more outward success. As head of the recently founded University of Halle he exerted a wider influence and seemed to have a greater aptitude for working in harmony with others in carrying out his pet projects, such as the establishment of the famous Halle Orphanage, various private schools, homes for the aged, a publishing house for the dissemination of pietistic literature, and the Danish Halle mission in India.

Neither Spener nor Francke claimed to be aware of any deviation from Lutheran doctrine. The fact that their reactionary tendencies gradually led them to an improper doctrinal emphasis, to aberrations from an objectively sound Lutheran position, becomes evident when we view the *theological structure* which developed under their leadership. First of all—and this is of basic importance if we wish to understand Pietism—we notice in their sermonizing an improper presentation of Law and Gospel, of Justification and Sanctification. Let us remember that their purpose was to stir the hearts of their hearers out of their spiritual lethargy. In preaching Law, however, they contented themselves more with sweeping denunciations of worldly-mindedness. A clear presentation of God’s Law to awaken within the individual hearer a deep, personal conviction of sin is conspicuously absent already with Spener. They rather used the Gospel in a legalistic manner, raising pointed questions to keep their hearers in constant suspense as to whether or not they could actually lay claim to a true and living faith.⁶ It was denied that those who were weak in faith were truly converted.⁷ True conversion in their opinion was rather something that the individual sinner had to achieve through a prolonged period of tearful contrition and the agonizing struggle of prayer.⁸ As a matter of fact, in order to know whether or not you are truly converted, you had to be able to point to the exact hour of your *Gnadendurchbruch*, an emotional experience in which you became personally convinced of the “breaking through” of God’s grace. Francke dated his conversion to a time when he was preparing a sermon on John 20, 31, when praying fervently in a moment of anxiety, the sun of Grace suddenly burst upon him with violence. This experience of ictic conversion was considered the normal pattern of faith, and one’s Christianity was gauged according to the intensity of his experience. Naturally the Christianity of those who couldn’t point to a similar experience was considered of dubious quality and origin. The importance of the true Means of Grace was shunted into the background, since Pietists argued that the complacent merely used these as an *opus operatum*. In their stead prayer was substituted as a means of achieving the grace of God, although this was not openly taught as a doctrine by the early pietists.⁹ The assurance of salvation was no longer objectively based upon God’s Word, but was to be subjectively experienced in the individual’s emotional life and in the fruits of faith. A life of perfect sanctification was considered possible. Thus although Pietism in Germany protested again and again its adherence to the Lutheran Confessions, it betrayed itself through its insistence on experiential conversion or

⁵ Summary according to J.P. Koehler’s “Kirchengeschichte.”

⁶ Cf. Walther, “Gesetz und Evangelium,” 2, 360.

⁷ Cf. Walther, “Gesetz und Evangelium,” 2, 136.

⁸ Cf. Walther, “Gesetz und Evangelium,” 2, 243.

⁹ *Idem*, 2, 134-140.

regeneration and its obscuring of objective justification based upon the Means of Grace to be more akin to Calvinism than anything else.

This is apparent also in its effect upon practically every field of religious activity. The Lutheran Order of Service began to be regarded as an ossified relic of Pre-Reformation times, a legalistic strait jacket which through its prescribed prayers impeded the free outpouring of a devout heart. The ex-corde prayer took precedence over the liturgical prayer. Sentimental Gospel-hymns replaced the confessional Lutheran hymn. Private confession and particularly the pronouncement of absolution by the pastor was bitterly opposed, since it was claimed to presuppose a judgment as to the true repentance of an individual. “The confessional chair is the devil’s chair,” it was declared. Meetings of smaller Bible study and prayer meeting groups were encouraged as a leaven of the truly sanctified and a means of gaining more ‘truly converted’ souls, which resulted in a neglect of the importance of the regular service of worship. Adiaphora or indifferent things were not recognized as existent at all, since anything that did not contribute towards spiritual edification was classed as directly harmful. Card-playing, dancing, theater-going, etc., was vigorously condemned as inherently sinful, and even all humor, fiction, and play was frowned upon as unbecoming to a pious soul. The acquiring of secular knowledge was despised, and the daily parochial school-curriculum consisted of as many as six hours of religion in varied forms and doses.¹⁰ In the rite of confirmation the renewal of the baptismal vow by the confirmed was stressed to the extent that 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.¹¹ Finally, indifferentism, unionism, and enthusiasm flourished as a result and soon became apparent everywhere. For if personal piety was of utmost importance, doctrinal differences were of secondary consequence.

Perhaps the reader might criticize this presentation of early Pietism’s structure as the one-sided analysis of one who feels called upon to defend the religious structure of orthodoxy, and therefore in characteristic fashion proceeds to pick at doctrinal extravagances in a smug spirit of self-justification, with complete disregard for anything good which Pietism may have accomplished. What about the 187 children in Francke’s orphanage? What about the two thousand or more students enrolled at the University of Halle at the time of his death? What about the many charitable and educational institutions which he founded and for which he refused any state support? Yes, what about the revival of missionary spirit, which caused men to go out from Halle into all parts of the world with a zeal for missions—not only ministers of the Gospel, but men of all professions? What about the consecrated example of Count Zinzendorf, a later pietistic leader, who gave his estates, his titles, his efforts in one of the noblest examples of sacrifice? Spener, Francke, and Zinzendorf at least tried to be godly men. This is more than can be said of many of their contemporary critics. Did not the Lord seem to be accomplishing His purpose more through these men than through the defenders of orthodoxy?

It may be true that as far as many practical aspects of Christianity are concerned, we owe more to the Pietistic movement than we often wish to admit. We shall endeavor to call attention to some of these things as we speak of present-day conditions. In passing we would like to mention, however, that all Pietism did not result in noble efforts of sacrificial devotion. As Pietism spread to the early Seceders of Holland, we find among them the same fundamental principles of pietistic thought, yet a notable lack of mission zeal, a negative, quietistic type of Christianity, with little charity, ascetic in the extreme, pessimistic, and violently and abusively critical of all other Christians.

As we summarize early Pietism and attempt to place our finger upon its fundamental error, it is simply this: the difference between Lutheranism and Pietism is religious objectivism in distinction from religious subjectivism. Spener believed that the reformation of Luther in the field of doctrine needed completion in a reformation in the field of Christian life. In his zeal to achieve that goal, however, he lost sight of a basic Lutheran Principle, i.e., the fact that man finds not in himself, but outside of himself in the Gospel and the Sacraments the basic assurance that he is a child of God and an heir of eternal salvation. Of primary importance

¹⁰ *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 53, 388-395.

¹¹ Cf. Schaller, “Pastorale,” p.50.

to faith, according to Pietistic thinking, was not the unshakable foundation of the objective Means of Grace, but the shifting sand of a subjective emotional experience. This unnatural and anti-Scriptural emphasis upon the individual's inward life did not lead to the inward rest for the soul which Pietism hoped to achieve, but to anxiety and depression, and souls were cankered with introspection. It also developed finally into a peculiar religious dualism which perhaps involuntarily found a conflict between Christian doctrine and Christian life.

II

Having thus presented a survey of the contributing factors, the early development, and the resultant theological aberrations of the original Pietistic movement, we can evaluate more easily, perhaps, and more quickly, similar tendencies of the present day. Here we must confine ourselves primarily again to the dangers which confront our own Lutheran Church, since a general study of present-day Pietism would carry us altogether too far afield. The fact that modern Protestantism today is saturated with a theology that is basically pietistic goes without saying. We refer simply to the emotional appeals of present-day revivalists, the sentimentalism and unionism of Protestantism in general, the stress upon emotional experience in conversion and a standard of super-holiness which finds its goal in legalistic observances, as demonstrated in the Pentecostal churches, and the wholesale relegation of the true Means of Grace to a secondary position—a religion, in sum and substance, which is the product of man's subjective experience. Our Lutheran Church, particularly of the Synodical Conference, is under more or less constant fire by these as the modern epitome of "dead orthodoxy." Yet, rather than that we should therefore consider ourselves immunized from the dangers of Pietism, it is well for us to purge whatever of this dangerous leaven may also be threatening us in our midst.

Certainly, the factors which gave rise to early Pietism in the very strongholds of orthodoxy have their modern parallel. We mentioned the *Thirty Years' War* as the contributing factor, with its disorganizing, demoralizing effect upon human society, providing fertile soil for new religious movements. The fact that our present civilization has not escaped the ravages of war is all too apparent. Any pastor who deals with the complex family problems of today has felt war's devastating effect upon family life in general, not alone among those without the church, but right in the congregation itself. Even some of the staunchest Christian families seem to be disintegrating. Teen-agers are being subjected to temptations which make one shudder, and parents complain that they are powerless to do anything about it. Many parents themselves are far more interested in achieving financial success than in raising a family, even going so far as to delegate the rearing of their children to others while they seek their materialistic ends. Teachers in our parochial schools complain of discipline problems and a lack of parental interest which would have been unheard of just a decade ago. Mixed marriages are becoming the rule, rather than the exception, and marriage itself is considered more from the human standpoint than the Biblical one. As always, war has left a wake of growing immorality, hysteria, and insecurity, which has eaten deeply into the vitals of congregational and family life. Naturally the question arises in the minds of many: "Hasn't the Church failed? Hasn't it become incapable of coping with the problems of modern living? Isn't there something new, more vital, more life-giving which can stem the tide?" Not that these questions are new. History is merely repeating itself.

A second factor which gave rise to early Pietism, as pointed out before, was the fact that the *State-Church concept*, with its more or less obligatory form of church membership, led to a widespread type of nominal Christianity, always a target of pietistic reform. We may not be laboring under this difficulty to the same extent in our country, but the thought of a nominal Christianity cannot be avoided. Although governmental pressure does not as yet lead our people to find Christianity expedient, other things have contributed with possibly equal strength. Especially in older, more established congregations one is apt to find that the "first love" of the first generation becomes gradually dissipated in the second, third, and fourth. Children grow up in the church, as expected of them, become confirmed, and hold nominal membership at least while their elders keep an eye on them. As the church expands numerically, it becomes increasingly difficult to exercise proper discipline in cases of backsliders. Conditions of membership become more lax. Outward growth and success breed a desire for that which is even greater, and you can only be successful, humanly speaking, if

you're big. The distinction between true spirituality and worldly-mindedness becomes less and less distinct, until the average life and habit of a family holding church membership is ever more identical with that of the unchurched neighbor. In fact, the clamor of the unchurched individual, that "he is leading a far better and happier life than his neighbor, who is a good church member," grows with the years. Eventually people who are possibly quite sincere about the matter feel that a revival is necessary somewhere along the line, lest the church lose its pristine life.

The final factor which we referred to as a contribution to early pietistic trends was carefully called *Orthodoxism*, or a religious intellectualism, devoid of spiritual strength, and coldly intellectual in its presentation of doctrine and in the dispatch of its duty. Here particularly we must exercise care in attempting to picture any present-day parallel within the Lutheran Church, since any reference to similarities in our day would immediately be stamped as a vicious insinuation and a judging of hearts. Our Synod particularly has been generally labeled as guilty of "proving the validity of its orthodox position by means of every possible dialectical definition and distinction" so that the "people grow weary of the endless and useless theological disputes in which their pastors and professors engaged."¹² Although the contributing influence of orthodoxism as a factor in the development of early pietism has been greatly overplayed, it is admitted by all to have been, nevertheless, a contributing factor, and it also remains such to the present day. The danger of a clergy and a laity which is more intent upon being professionally correct than on saving souls is always present in any established church. A coldly intellectual approach to Christianity, coupled with a lack of zeal for doing mission work, is a danger of the Old Adam which we all must face. And the fact that such an attitude, when permitted to grow, can estrange the common people and nurture the desire for something more vital, no matter where it may be found, also cannot be questioned.

Thus we find that we in our day, threatened by times of moral disintegration, endangered by a growth of nominal Christianity peculiar to our times, and just as prone to Orthodoxism as anyone else, are living in an age which is strikingly parallel to the one in which early Pietism gradually developed and flourished. In addition to that we have, no doubt, people in our own congregations who still bear the characteristics of the original Pietistic movement, having come to this country as "good Lutherans," but having actually been trained in pietistic settlements in Europe. We do not wish to condemn those people for this weakness, nor do we wish to imply that they are insincere. We may even secretly wish that many of our Lutherans who come from more orthodox backgrounds would be as sincere and devout in their convictions as those of pietistic inclinations. But the fact that we as an orthodox church are literally surrounded by a form of Protestantism which is unionistic and pietistic to the core should arouse no little concern in us.

The fact that we are ripe for pietistic movements in our midst should thus cause us to ask seriously if such trends have not already made themselves apparent, to a greater or lesser degree. Here again we need but turn to the original Pietistic movement to draw our parallel. As the Fathers of Pietism, Spener and Francke, with undoubted zeal raised their voices in protest against spiritual laxity, and proposed certain methods of correcting this condition, similar voices have been and are being raised in increasing numbers against the same kind of spiritual indifference. And similar methods have been put into play to combat this lukewarmness. A wider study of the Word of God among our laity through the organization of Bible Study Groups is being more commonly urged and practiced in our churches, if for no other reason than to supply a need which was formerly taken care of more adequately right in the family circle. More emphasis is being placed all the time upon personal testimony and exhortation, both in sermons and through special campaigns, in an effort to get more of our people actively engaged in doing personal mission work. Whether or not it is a good and wholesome thing that we have to depend upon special evangelistic slogans and campaigns to get our people to see the need of winning the unchurched is not the point under discussion here. In any event, there seems to be a growing awareness of this responsibility among our people. An attempt to get our people to translate their Christian principles into greater love and action is also showing an upward trend, and is immediately apparent when we compare present-day sermon books with those of twenty and thirty years ago. Our sermons are generally not

¹² We do not imply that Dr. Pelikan, who thus typed the early Orthodoxists, was pointing a finger at the Wisconsin Synod.

quite so polemical as they were in years gone by, caused largely no doubt by an effort not to antagonize the unchurched who have come to us through mixed marriages and more intensified home mission efforts among people of other religious backgrounds. Radio preaching, which is becoming more widespread, is for obvious reasons of a more positive than negative approach. More voices are being raised constantly to have our theological students trained along more practical lines, including practical experience in the field before being sent out on their own, so that they might be better prepared to deal with the complex problems and situations which confront the ministry today. Certainly our preachers are becoming more conscious of the fact that rhetorical skill in the pulpit is not nearly as effective with the average individual of today as the simple, direct sermon. And charitable endeavors, such as the establishment of orphanages, homes for the aged, deaf, and mentally handicapped, hospitals for the sick and tubercular, relief agencies and organized mission undertakings both at home and abroad are certainly increasing in their scope in the Synodical Conference. Publishing houses for the dissemination of our literature have always been a 'must' in our circles, and more tracts and books of a devotional and evangelizing nature for use among the laity are being made available. We cannot say that our Lutheran Church in this country has ever been fossilized to the extent that it lost sight of these things, and it is possible that early Pietism had much to do with opening our eyes to the need of these things and influencing the Lutheran Church in this direction. That our church would have taken steps in this direction with or without the impulse of Pietism is a historical question which cannot be fully answered one way or the other, but we certainly do not wish to discredit any wholesome impetus for which Pietism may have been responsible.

If early Pietism had stopped there, however, it would never have developed into the reactionary movement that it eventually became. And if our effort today towards arousing our people from a natural spiritual indifference would content itself with these things, there wouldn't be too much cause for alarm. Even the evangelical zeal displayed by the sects should cause us to ask ourselves at times whether or not our orthodoxy isn't a bit prone to fall into the danger of orthodoxism. Let us remember, however, that Pietism in its development was basically an attempt to reform conditions in the church through a subjective appeal to the emotions, and that in this attempt the entire structure of sound Lutheran doctrine was presented not only in a distorted way, but eventually in a thoroughly false way. In drawing a parallel between later pietistic aberrations and conditions of the present day in our own circles, it behooves us not to point an accusing finger at other brethren in the ministry, but rather to ask ourselves first of all whether or not we have been guilty to some extent of the same tendencies. We are certainly confronted almost every day with spiritual lethargy and indifference in our own membership. We, too, are no doubt anxious to "do something" about correcting these conditions. There are temptations in every man's ministry to "improve on" the Scriptural presentation of the Gospel of Christ, particularly when we view the visible "success" of some of the surrounding sects, and begin to doubt because of adverse experience that the Gospel alone is the power of God unto salvation. We would like to arouse our people a little more, and stir their hearts unto greater zeal and action. In such moments is our presentation of Law and Gospel, of Justification and Sanctification, always in harmony with Scripture? Does our preaching of God's Law sometimes degenerate into nothing more than sweeping denunciations of world conditions, which is always popular in arousing at least some little emotion? Do we attempt, through emotional appeals to a bleeding Christ, to use the vicarious atonement of Christ in a legalistic manner? Are we prone to condemn those who are weak in faith as being not truly converted, and by asking all sorts of pointed questions do we bring anxious souls to even greater depths of despair, simply because we do not see the proper amount, so to speak, of tearful contrition and agonizing power? Does a rich Gospel text become just another "springboard" with which we condemn the hearts of our listeners to the terrors of hell, simply because we are personally irked by a failure to find visible fruits of repentance in the congregation? We doubt, of course, that anyone in our circles has ever been tempted to teach istic conversion or *Gnadendurchbruch*, but do we ever create the impression, perhaps involuntarily, that a state of grace is something which our parishioners must of themselves achieve through constant prayer and inward struggle? Is our approach to the Means of Grace soundly objective, or over-emotionalized to such an extent that the power of God is secondary in importance to the religious experience of the individual? If any of these things are cropping out in us, then our inborn pietistic traits are leading us on the road to Calvinism.

No doubt there come times in the life of every liturgist, when his Lutheran Order of Service appears as an “ossified relic” of Catholic ritual, which he must either arbitrarily amend to put a little more life into it, or inject into it greater appeal through giving it its proper Catholic setting. The early Pietists, of course, were iconoclasts, because they saw little sentimental appeal in the Lutheran liturgy. Many of us may protest vigorously against any iconoclastic bent, and at the same time conduct our order of service as though we have to apologize for it, or eliminate some of its dullness by injecting our own “vibrant” personality whenever and however possible. Or we possibly feel that a flair for more pomp and ritual will restore a little effectiveness at least, even though our people may not understand what it is all about. The fact that the pietistic hymn with its melodic sentimentalism has greater appeal, generally speaking, than the confessional hymn of the Reformation and post-Reformation era can hardly be disputed. A more serious cause for alarm, however, is the fact that Pietism has left its mark upon our present-day attitude towards the sacraments, which seems extremely difficult to overcome. The deplorable fact that our orthodox church has not succeeded in raising its average communion attendance to more than slightly over twice annually per communicant (cf. 1948 Statistical Report, Wisconsin Synod) is a definite throwback to Pietism, and a far cry from that which Luther preached. A further study will show that many of our customs regarding the Sacrament which serve to discourage rather than encourage frequent communion attendance (quarterly celebrations, special confessional services, personal announcement, departure from the regular communion liturgy, etc.) are of Pietistic, rather than Reformation origin. And, finally, many of the arguments used in attempting to bring about a unification of Lutherans in America show pronounced traces of pietistic unionism and emotionalism. The thought, e.g., that practical reasons alone compel us to disregard “inconsequential” doctrinal differences which can only be understood by hair-splitting theological professors anyway; that lay organizations, churches within the church, ought to take hold where the clergy has failed; that selective fellowship offers opportunities for more sincere brotherliness than that which is experienced in our own fellowship; that personal sincerity counts more than theological correctness, etc.

There is just one thought which should not be left unstated in conclusion. Pietism failed utterly to stem the tide of Rationalism, because it was the next thing to Rationalism itself. Satan prepared the ground for the onslaughts of reason by weakening the church through puny emotionalism. And it all began when Spener assumed that the Reformation of Luther needed completion in a reformation in the field of Christian life. The Neo-Orthodoxy of Reinhold Niebuhr, the so-called leading exponent of Protestantism today, is guilty of the same false assumption. Because many of Luther’s successors had the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. Lutheranism and Orthodoxism are often mistakenly identified. We need to restudy Luther, not only in biographical surveys, but by actually digging into his writings. His sermons, his expositions, his isagogical and exegetical studies, his essays, his hymns reveal a living Gospel, soundly based on Word and Sacrament throughout. There was nothing “canned” about his sermons, nothing perfunctory about his practice, nothing ossified about his liturgies, nothing negative, defeatist, and timid about his clear presentation of Scripture as the only norm of Truth and Life, which would remain steadfast though assailed by the Devil and all his hosts. To him theology was truly a *habitus practicus*, as the later dogmatists defined it, a practical way of life for the wretched sinner before his God. If we can but present our Scripture with just a little of that force and conviction of Luther, the extremes of Orthodoxism and Pietism will not be able to devour us.