

# Literary Landmarks of Pietism

By Martin O. Westerhaus

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

Of the extensive theological literature produced by Pietism only a relatively small number of works have proven to possess lasting interest and value. This bibliographic study of the movement will limit itself to works that can fairly claim to have established a position for themselves among the true masterpieces of Christian theological literature.

While several different criteria might legitimately be used to determine which of the works of the Pietists deserve recognition as classics or landmarks of their age, we have chosen to use the practical, concrete criterion of whether a given work is still in print after some 200 years, and, in order to provide the greatest practical value for the largest number of *Quarterly* readers, whether it is available in English translation. Only three works meet these criteria: Spener's *Pia Desideria*, Starck's *Gebetbuch*, and Bengel's *Gnomon*. To make this survey somewhat broader and more representative we will also include an anthology entitled, *Pietists: Selected Writings*.

After some brief biographical information on the authors the contents of the works will be surveyed. A few brief notes on additional significant works available in German will be added.

## Spener's *Pia Desideria*

Philipp Jacob Spener is justly called the father of Pietism. He was born on January 13, 1635, in Rappoltstein, an Alsatian village some 30 miles southwest of Strassburg. His father was a counselor to one of the dukes of Rappoltstein. From earliest childhood Spener was influenced by parents and a home of greater than average piety and devotion. Spener himself in later life commented favorably more than once on the strong religious influence of his mother.

A gifted child, Spener became an omnivorous reader at an early age. His favorite reading matter, next to the Bible, was Johann Arndt's devotional classic *Sechs Buecher vom Wahren Christentum*.<sup>1</sup> He also read German translations of a number of the devotional works of leading English Puritans, such as Emanuel Sontham's *Golden Treasure of the Children of God*, Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Piety* and Richard Baxter's *The Necessary Teaching of the Denial of Self*, which he found in his father's library.

At sixteen Spener enrolled at the University of Strassburg. Faculty members who exercised considerable influence on him were the noted orthodox Lutheran theologians Johann Conrad Dannhauer and Sebastian Schmidt.

As a student Spener led a rather ascetic life. He associated only with a small number of like-minded friends. He studiously avoided the customary student involvements in drinking, dancing, fencing and similar secular pastimes. He avoided the company of the fairer sex. In 1659, having completed his theological studies, he entered upon two years of travel and brief study at various other universities as was the custom in his day. Not only did he visit the nearby German universities at Freiburg and Tuebingen, but also the Swiss cities and universities of Basel, Bern, Lausanne and Geneva, and the French cities of Lyon and Montbeliard as well. In Switzerland and France he came into contact with Reformed theologians and Reformed church life.

In 1661 he was appointed as an assistant pastor in Strassburg. While there he earned his doctorate and married a young lady his mother had picked out for him. His goal at the time apparently was to pursue a teaching career in theology at one or the other Lutheran university. Then in 1666, at the age of 31, he received a call to become a preacher and the *Senior Ministerii*, the supervisor of all the pastors of the prosperous city of Frankfurt-on-Main.

Spener spent twenty fruitful years in Frankfurt, followed by five rather frustrating years in the prestigious position of Court Chaplain to the Elector of Saxony at Dresden. The final fourteen years of his life were spent in Berlin as pastor of St. Nicholas church, and as a member of the consistory of Brandenburg.

Spener's ministry in Frankfurt was for the most part effective. He brought about a strengthening of the religious instruction program for children in the Sunday afternoon *Kinderlehre*. By 1669 he was suggesting that something more than just the church services be employed to help lay people grow in Christian understanding and sanctification. And the following year the first *collegia pietatis* ("piety societies"), meetings of small groups of lay people in private homes, were held. These, of course, became one of the distinguishing features of the Pietists and their work. Spener felt that it was important that lay people have an opportunity to ask questions about the sermons they had heard and to discuss religious questions of the day, something that was not possible in the formal worship services. Early in his ministry in Dresden Spener found it necessary to admonish the Saxon prince, whom he had been called to serve as chaplain, with regard to drunkenness. Relations between the two deteriorated rapidly thereafter. Spener did, however, manage to again effect an improvement of the work being done in instructing the young. And he learned to know August Hermann Francke. The final years at Berlin were marked by a singular triumph. When the new University of Halle was opened in 1690, Francke and two other Spener adherents were appointed to the theological faculty through Spener's influence. Under Francke Halle became the most influential university in Lutheran Germany. On the negative side, the last years of Spener's life saw controversy, often of the most vehement kind, arise between men seeking to inaugurate the reforms proposed by Spener and his "pietist" adherents and some of the most unyielding defenders of the status quo in Lutheran Orthodoxy.

In the spring of 1675 a Frankfurt printer came to Spener with the request that he write a preface for a new edition of a then popular sermon book, Johann Arndt's *Gospel Postils*, which the printer hoped to have out in time for the approaching book fair. Spener used this forum to set down some of his concerns about the spiritual state of the Lutheran church of that day. Before the document was printed Spener presented it to and obtained the approval of his fellow pastors in Frankfurt. Spener's "Preface" met with general approval and proved to be so popular that by fall of 1675 it was reprinted separately as a book in its own right. It bore the title: *Pia Desideria, or Heartfelt Desire for a God-pleasing Reform of the True Evangelical Church, Together with Several Simple Christian Proposals Looking Toward This End*. It was enthusiastically received on all sides even by so stalwart an orthodox theologian as Abraham Calov. Spener published a Latin translation. The German original was reprinted already in 1676 and three more editions appeared by 1712.

*Pia Desideria* is arranged in two main parts. The first offers an "overview of the corrupt conditions of the Evangelical (i.e. Lutheran) Church." Of the six chapters in this part the first offers a "general lament regarding the corruption of the whole of Christendom." Chapter two discusses the spiritual failings of the ruling class; chapter three, those of the clergy; and chapter four, those of the common people. Chapter five points to the offense that had arisen through the church's corruption, while the sixth and last chapter discusses the hope or possibility of improving the status of the church.

In the general lament in chapter one Spener points to the fact that the Roman Catholic Church, which he calls the "anti-christian Babel," had in recent years taken over whole kingdoms and provinces where formerly the truth of the Gospel had been proclaimed. Spener sees this as divine chastisement and evidence of God's strong displeasure with the Lutheran Church.

Of the ruling class Spener laments that regrettably few use their authority and power in the interest of advancing God's kingdom. Most indulge in excesses and debaucheries. Many are indifferent to spiritual concerns. Where there is apparent zeal for the church the real motive all too often is political advantage.

Turning to the clergy, Spener describes their condition as thoroughly corrupt. Most of the deterioration in the church has its source in the two higher estates (i.e. rulers and clergy). Too many pastors are controlled by a worldly spirit and the desire for carnal pleasure. Few still know anything of self-denial. Many simply do not possess the true marks of spiritual rebirth.

"We would soon have an altogether different church if most of us ministers...could unblushingly say to our congregations with Paul: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,' " Spener argued. The spiritual state of

affairs is made evident when he goes on: “Those who cultivate godliness can hardly escape being suspected as secret papists, Weigelians, and Quakers.”<sup>ii</sup> Spener charged that there was too much emphasis on theological disputation and polemics in the training of theological students with the result that the doctrines in contention between the Lutherans and Catholics, Lutherans and the Reformed and the Lutherans and the Anabaptists were treated at great length while doctrines in which there was agreement were ignored. Too often, he felt, theological writings were full of showy erudition, slander of opponents and unnecessary wrangling. Quotations from such noted orthodox Lutheran theologians as Johann Gerhard, Nickolaus Selnecker, David Chytraeus and others demonstrated that Spener was not the first, nor alone, in making these charges. In Spener’s opinion the reintroduction of scholastic theology was a major source of the theological problems in the church.

In discussing the spiritual failings of the *Hausstand*, i.e. the laity, Spener charges them as well as the nobility and clergy with drunkenness. Here, however, he goes beyond Scripture in equating any consumption of alcohol with drunkenness and damnable sin. He faults lay people for transgressing against Christian love in their propensity to enter into lawsuits, often out of vindictiveness or greed. Shrewd but questionable business practices which seek personal gain at the expense of one’s neighbor are carried out without scruples by even those reputed to be the best of Christians.

The laity are also faulted for failing to share of their earthly goods to relieve the needs of their fellow men. Spener felt there should be no need for the poor actually to have to beg where Christian love prevailed. Spener scores the laity for the frequency with which they profess to believe in Christ, hope to be saved through faith in him while continuing without repentance in sinful, unchristian conduct, thus in Spener’s view, living in false security and an illusory faith.

Related to all of the above errors is the viewpoint which considers being baptized, hearing the Word, receiving absolution, partaking of the Sacrament and leading an outwardly law-abiding life as constituting a true and adequate service of God without regard to the status and attitude of the heart.

In the fifth chapter Spener expands on the thought that the unchristian conduct which he had previously described was a cause of offence to the Jews and Papists and prevented many of them from being converted to the Evangelical Church.

The sixth chapter constitutes a transition to the second major part of the work. The topic of discussion is the possibility of better conditions in the church. Spener begins by stating that on the basis of Holy Scripture “we can have no doubt that God promised his church here on earth a better state than this.” This opinion is based on interpretations of several Bible passages which, at best, can only be called questionable. While conceding that Luther and others disagree, Spener states that he understands Romans 11:25,26 to foretell a conversion of all of Israel to the Christian faith. He interprets Revelation 18 and 19 as prophesying a great decline for the papacy, a decline which the Reformation does not adequately fulfill. Hence he looks for a future conversion of large numbers of Catholics to the Evangelical Church.

In the previous chapter Spener had expressed the view that it was the wretched spiritual condition of the Lutheran church which prevented many Jews and Catholics from being converted to Lutheranism. He now draws the conclusion that Scripture (in his understanding) foretells a large scale, if not total, conversion of Jews and Catholics. If it is the present poor spiritual state of the Lutheran Christianity which prevents such a conversion, then it follows that the state of the church must improve in the future to facilitate the foretold conversion.

As an additional argument for the possibility of improvement in the spiritual state of the church, Spener points to the early church and, on the basis of several quotations from the church fathers, finds that conditions were indeed better in the early church. Since they were better once, he argues, they can again become better in the future.

The second major portion of *Pia Desideria* contains proposals by Spener intended to correct the corrupt conditions of the church. Six proposals are offered: 1) more abundant use of the Word; 2) establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood; 3) diligent inculcation of the truth that Christianity consists not merely of knowledge but of deeds; 4) altered conduct of religious controversies; 5) improved training of preachers in schools and universities; and 6) the preparation of sermons for the purpose of spiritual edification.

First Spener called for more extensive use of the Word of God by Christians, even though daily services were being held in many churches at the time. He emphasized that Christians should use and be familiar with all of Scripture, whereas the pericopes which formed the sermon texts for the services used only a small portion of the Bible. As a remedy Spener proposed diligent Bible reading in family devotions. He suggested a continuous reading through whole books of the Bible in church services, instead of using only the pericopes. He further proposed that church meetings be held in which members might read and discuss portions of Scripture, ask questions and reflect on the practical application of what had been read. All Christians would certainly agree with these words of Spener:

This much is certain: the diligent use of the Word of God, which consists not only of listening to sermons, but also of reading, meditating, and discussing (Ps 1:2), must be the chief means for reforming something....The Word of God remains the seed from which all that is good in us must grow.<sup>iii</sup>

Spener's second proposal for improving the spiritual condition of the church was that the spiritual priesthood be established and diligently exercised. He pointed out that Luther had strongly emphasized that all Christians are anointed to be priests by the Holy Spirit and are to perform spiritual-priestly acts such as studying the Word, admonishing, chastising and comforting their neighbors. The Catholic Church had made all priestly functions the monopoly of the clergy. While the principle of the priesthood of all believers was clearly stated and established from Scripture by Luther, the matter was not pursued much after his departure. According to Scripture, said Spener, every Christian is bound to study in the Word of the Lord, and with the grace given him is to teach others, especially those under his own roof. He is to chastise, exhort, convert and edify them, to observe their life, pray for all and, insofar as possible, is to be concerned about their salvation. Much spiritual complacency and sloth in the past had derived from the fact that so many lay people thought the minister alone was called to be concerned with these matters and others need not trouble themselves with them.

Spener's third proposal for the spiritual improvement of the church was that all members have impressed on them that Christianity consists of practice, not only a knowledge of the Christian faith. He pointed to the emphasis of the aged Apostle John: "Children, love one another." If St. John's admonition were generally heeded by believers, all that Spener desired by way of the reform of the life of the church would be accomplished, since all the commandments are summed up and fulfilled in love.

Proposal four called for a more enlightened conduct in religious controversies with unbelievers and heretics. Spener affirmed that it is necessary for evangelical Christians to strengthen and confirm themselves and their fellow believers in the truth. They needed to be able to protect themselves from seductive falsehoods and false teachers. But Christians also owe it to the erring to pray for their enlightenment and ultimate salvation. If we truly seek to win them for the truth, it is important that we avoid offense and provide a good Christian example. All of our dealings should be carried on in such a way that the erring are aware that we are dealing with them out of love. Therefore excessive vehemence in debate, invectives and insinuations of evil motives should be avoided in theological controversies. In contacts with unbelievers we should indicate that we have no pleasure in unbelief or false belief, or in their practice or propagation. Like the Good Samaritan, however, we are to regard them as fellow creatures of God, neighbors, whom we are to love as we love ourselves.

Spener's fifth proposal called for better training of pastors in schools and universities. He called on the professors first of all to set a good example at all times, to seek not their own glory, gain or pleasure, but the glory of God and the salvation of their students and all whom their students would in turn teach. For this reason all of the professors' studies, lessons, lectures and writings should be directed to that end. There should be good discipline and edifying conversation at table. Mischief, unseemly talk, parodies and other misuse of Bible texts and hymn verses should be averted and rebuked.

Students should have it constantly impressed on them that a holy life is not of less consequence than diligent study. Already during their youth students of theology ought to realize that they must die to the world and live as people who are to be examples to the flock. It is not enough that they study diligently and become

learned men. Faculty members should show their displeasure toward those who distinguish themselves in riotous living, tipping and bragging of academic pre-eminence. Spener considered a man with limited gifts who loved God fervently to be more useful to the church than a vain and worldly fool with double doctor's degrees who was clever but not taught by God. Spener also thought it would not be a bad idea if theological graduates were required to have testimonials as to their piety as well as to their academic diligence and achievements. He suggested that the curriculum of individual students be adjusted according to their gifts. Only a limited number, he felt, ought to be trained in and engage in polemics, something Nikolaus Hunnius (1585–1643) had previously suggested. Spener further thought the disputations which were held should be conducted in German rather than in Latin as was then customary, so that students develop proper German terminology. The sermons of many of the pastors of the day bristled with Latin and Greek terms.

All students should be urged to read such devotional works as the *Theologia Germanica* and the works of John Tauler, Thomas a Kempis and Johann Arndt. Instruction ought to be given on Christian living and suggestions given for growth in depth of self-examination and in conducting pious meditations. Students should be encouraged to admonish one another, to keep an eye on one another and give an account to one another as to how they have conducted themselves according to God's Word.

The sixth and final proposal presented by Spener dealt with the practical training received for the ministry. He said it would be useful if provisions were made for practicing the skills the students would need when they entered the ministry. Practice should be given in instructing the unlearned, for example, in comforting the sick and especially in preaching.

Everything in the sermon ought to have edification as its goal. Faith and the fruits of faith are the objectives, the lasting results the preacher should wish to have realized in the hearer. Too often, he thought, preachers sought to demonstrate only their own learning, quoting foreign languages at length which none of the hearers could understand. Too often, he also found, preachers were more concerned with mere mechanics—what kind of introduction, effective transitions, artful outlines and oratorical perfection—than with the strengthening of their hearers in faith and love. The pulpit, he emphasized, was no place for ostentatious displays of a preacher's skills, but rather the place to preach the Word simply and powerfully. Spener emphasized that the preacher should not fear or be ashamed to review the simple, basic truths of the Catechism in his sermons. And the gracious, saving acts of God should be so presented that faith and the inner man are strengthened more and more. The preacher should not be content merely to have people refrain from vice and practice the customary Christian virtues and be concerned only with the outward. Rather he should seek to lay the right foundation in the heart and accustom the people to be concerned also with the inward, awakening love of God and neighbor through suitable means, and only then to act accordingly.

Spener concludes *Pia Desideria* with the actual introduction to Arndt's book of sermons the printer had requested, commending the work as a good example of the kind of sermon directed toward edification which he had just recommended for students of theology.

In summary, *Pia Desideria* is a work of abiding value on two counts. It is a work of major historical significance in the history of the Lutheran Church, marking the first major expression and appearance of the movement we call Pietism. The work describes both the faults and failings of the church of the day which, the Pietists were convinced, cried out for remedy and sets forth major means they would use to attempt to achieve their objectives. Spener faulted all the major classes or groupings within the church equally and as a result the work itself was given a positive reception almost without exception. The same cannot be said of the actual efforts of the Pietists to remedy the noted weaknesses and failings.

The work also has ongoing value and ideas that the church should take to heart in every age. Spener spoke to a Lutheran church which had possessed the central gospel truths for some 150 years, a church which had had a generation to recover from the traumas of the Thirty Years War, a church in which worldliness or secularization and formalism and externalism were growing problems. The Lutheran Church in the U.S. Middle West also has enjoyed the matchless blessing passed down to us from Luther by the likes of a Walther, a Hoenecke and numerous others for nearly a century and a half. And we must certainly acknowledge that the attraction and influence of the secular world around us are having a growing effect on clergy and laity. While

we will not agree with everything Spener says nor want to adopt all of his remedial suggestions, *Pia Desideria* retains significance for the church of our day. For those with a scholarly bent of mind the work is available in a critical edition in its original German prepared by Kurt Aland.<sup>iv</sup> And those who are reluctant to give their German skills that extensive a workout will be pleased to learn that an excellent English version, translated and edited by the late Theodore G. Tappert, is available at a reasonable price indeed.<sup>v</sup>

It is also worthy of mention that the German publisher Georg Olms has undertaken the publication of the complete works of Spener in thirteen volumes, five of which have appeared.

### **Starck's Gebetbuch**

The next piece of religious literature from the age of Pietism to be reviewed is the *Taegliches Handbuch in guten und boesen Tagen* by Johann Friedrich Starck. The author was born in 1680 in Hildesheim. He attended the gymnasium in his home town and, in due time, took up the study of theology at the university at Giessen. After some years as a teacher he became pastor at Sachsenhausen in 1715. In 1723 he was called as a pastor to a congregation in Frankfurt-on-Main. Here he labored for the rest of his life, carrying on the pastoral work in the manner of Spener's moderate and practical pietism. From 1742 until his death in 1756 he served on the consistory. He became widely noted as a gifted preacher, *Seelsorger* and author. He wrote numerous books of sermons and other works of a spiritually edifying nature which in their time had a considerable influence on the Protestant population of Germany.

Only one work, however, stood the test of time. That is the *Taegliches Handbuch* under consideration here, which for obvious reasons is also frequently referred to as his *Gebetbuch*. The book appeared in 1727 in Frankfurt. In its first edition the work consisted of four sections, one containing devotional materials intended for the healthy, a second section intended for the troubled, a third for the sick and a final section for the dying. Later editions included a fifth section containing prayers for a variety of special occasions and an appendix with devotional materials for women in pregnancy and childbirth.

The first section, intended for healthy Christians, includes a set of devotions for each day of a week, another set for each of the seasons of the church year and a set of prayers for various gifts and Christian virtues. The devotions generally consist of a Scripture passage of one or two verses, a meditation on the passage, a fairly lengthy prayer in prose, at times verses of a familiar chorale and, concluding each devotion, an original hymn by Starck on the subject of the devotion.

It cannot be claimed that Starck's devotions are particularly original or imaginative in a literary sense. Their language is simple, yet with a certain nobility, often echoing the language of the Bible. His purpose is to encourage practical piety. The book was intended for the common people of Germany, whose learning and spiritual understanding for the most part was elementary. Starck plumbs no profound theological depths. At times there is a hint of legalism. There is an almost complete lack of literary adornment. One will find few original illustrative examples or anecdotes. Instead Starck turns again and again to appropriate words and illustrations from Scripture. Nevertheless the work was used and loved by many thousands of German Christians. It went through countless editions in Germany. It is thought that Starck's *Gebetbuch* had a greater and wider influence on the evangelical population of Germany than any other devotional work, surpassing even Arndt's *Wahres Christentum*.

Many a German immigrant to America brought along a copy of Starck. In 1900 Concordia Publishing House in this country brought out an edition of the *Gebetbuch* edited and foreworded by Francis Pieper. Pieper reports that Concordia was bringing out its edition of the *Gebetbuch* because it was constantly requested by large numbers of people within Missouri Synod circles. Pieper points out that some statements had been altered or eliminated because they did not reflect the pure biblical doctrine of the Reformation, but reflected pietistic aberrations on the doctrine of Sunday and at times confused divine and human ordinances, nature and grace, justification and sanctification. Nevertheless, Pieper assures the reader, the work at hand was not a new book, but the "old Starck." Pieper concludes his foreword with the remark that it could not be denied that the gift of prayer had been poured out on Johann Friedrich Starck more than on most other Christians, and he adds the

wish that through this new edition Starck's *Gebetbuch* might continue to teach, rebuke, admonish, improve and comfort with the Word of God as it had for so long in the past in good days and in bad.

In recent years the trend in devotional literature has been not to publish bound volumes of materials intended for reuse year after year, but to put out new booklets for a specific time period, to be used and then discarded. This has the advantage of presenting fresh and timely devotions at low initial cost and should reach a larger audience. Yet one experiences a twinge of regret that as a result devotional classics such as the *Gebetbuch*, which have served Christians well for centuries, are unknown to most of our people.

Hence we feel commendation is due Concordia Publishing House for including the English translation of Starck in its Concordia Heritage Series book program. The English version of the *Gebetbuch* is available to members of that program for \$13.50 and to non-members for \$14.95. We hope at least a few readers of these lines will be moved to acquire a copy.

### **Bengel's *Gnomon***

The third literary classic of Pietism to be considered is Bengel's *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*. Johann Albrecht Bengel, son of a Lutheran pastor and descendant of Johannes Brenz, the Reformer of Wuerttemberg, was born June 24, 1687, in Winnenden. He studied at Tuebingen, already then occupying himself with problems of textual criticism. In 1713, after a year of study and travel, he began 28 years of teaching at the Cloister School of Denkendorf, a pre-theological school. The last part of his life from 1741 to 1752 he was a superintendent of churches, ducal counsellor and member of the diet, the last three years also member of the consistorial council.

His studies of textual criticism of the New Testament resulted in his publication in 1734 of an edition of the Greek New Testament with critical apparatus. In the face of the growing skepticism and unbelief over against the teaching of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, Bengel clung with a simple, childlike faith to the conviction that in the Bible God had condescended to man to reveal his plan of salvation. Bengel developed principles of hermeneutics still largely valid. One stated: "Import nothing into Scripture, but draw everything out of it, and overlook nothing." His motto: "Te totum applica ad textum; rem totam applica ad te," printed at the head of the introduction to the Nestle Greek text merits our attention whenever we take up our study of the biblical text. Unfortunately Bengel, with other Pietists, was fascinated by millennialistic interpretations of the book of Revelation and he published a commentary on it. He published several works dealing specifically with the time of Christ's return. Bengel also predicted it would occur in 1837.

Bengel's most significant work was and is his *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, published in Latin in 1742. It has been translated into a number of other languages. In an age noted for extremely wordy and dull commentaries Bengel's work was concise, meaty. Noting words or phrases in the biblical text that he considers needing an explanation, Bengel with a phrase or brief sentence points at the essential thought rather than burying it in a paragraph or page of verbiage. The Latin term *gnomon* refers to the hand or pointer of a sun dial. With his brief comments Bengel sought to point the reader to the thought and intent of the text and to send him back to and keep him primarily in the biblical text rather than leading him away from it or keeping him away from it. Of all the theological literature produced by the Pietists, Bengel's *Gnomon* merits consideration as the best. Frederick Danker classes Bengel with Chrysostom, Luther and Calvin as among the most perceptive commentators of all time. The *Gnomon* can be recommended as a practical work worthy of a place in every Lutheran pastor's library. We owe a debt of gratitude to Kregel Publications for making an English translation available to present day students under the title *New Testament Commentary*.<sup>vi</sup>

### ***Pietists: Selected Writings***

Recent years have witnessed a flowering of research and publication on the Pietists. It would go beyond the scope of this study merely to list the extensive literature available. We should, however, call attention to one recent publication which, while not a landmark, offers excerpts from a number of significant writings of the Pietists. The work can provide the present-day student of church history with a flavor of a number of the most

significant of the Pietists. This is the anthology: *Pietists: Selected Writings*, published as a part of the interesting series: *Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters*.<sup>vii</sup> This anthology offers excerpts from the three masterpieces reviewed above. In addition it contains excerpts from two other theological articles and four sermons by Spener. Here one finds the only currently available English translations of any of the writings of August Hermann Francke. Offered here are excerpts from his autobiography, his essay on “Rules for the Protection of Conscience and for Good Order in Conversation or in Society,” from *On Christian Perfection*, and from *Letter to a Friend Concerning the Most Useful Way of Preaching*, as well as five sermons. (It should be noted in passing that DeGruyter is publishing the complete works of Francke.) The hymnody of Pietism is represented by the preface and five hymns from Freylinghausen’s *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*.

In addition to the works of the familiar, “moderate” Pietists cited to this point, the anthology offers samples of the work of some of the more radical products of the movement. There are excerpts from three theological treatises of Gottfried Arnold as well as six of his religious poems. Arnold (1666–1714) for some time became involved in mysticism and spiritualism. He is best known for his *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzer Historie* (Impartial History of the Church and of Heresy), published 1699. There are also six religious poems by Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769), another mystic who had considerable influence on John Wesley. Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), who attempted to combine the thinking of such disparate theologians and philosophers as Jacob Boehme, J.A. Bengel, Emmanuel Swedenborg and Christian Wolff in his theosophy, but also apparently was an effective pietistic preacher in his native Wuerttemberg, is represented by four excerpts. Oetinger, little known in this country, surprisingly has more of his works in print in Germany than Spener or Francke. Finally, a variety of writings by Nicolas Ludwig, Count von Zinzendorf (1700–1760), including a *Litany of the Life, Suffering, and Death of Jesus Christ*, several of his hymns and the rules of conduct for his Herrnhut colony, round out the selections. All in all the volume offers a representative sample of Pietist literature.

In summary it must be said that Pietism, while it did produce a considerable body of theological literature, was directed primarily toward practical concerns. It produced little literature that could compare with the best of a Luther, a Chemnitz or a Johann Gerhard. But the movement did not set out to produce a new or better or more profound theology. Rather it sought to provide needed correctives primarily in practical matters to the Reformation begun by Luther. For many, both among the clergy and the laity, the terms *pietist* and *pietism* bear largely negative images. But the movement sought to address and correct real and serious problems in the church of its day. While some corrective proposals and practices were extreme or inappropriate, others have long since been incorporated into the life and work of the church and we no longer are particularly aware of their origins. Still others, for instance, practice in various practical skills needed in the parish ministry, such as faculty guided practice teaching in an actual classroom and faculty given training in making evangelism calls, have only recently been added to our theological training program. We do well to recall, too, that C.F.W. Walther, among others, was influenced to some extent by Pietism. So were the *Missionsbrueder*, the trainees of the German mission societies, who made up a large part of the early WELS clergy. Pietism is indeed a part of our heritage. The movement and its best theological literature merit more study on our part.

### 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 congenital 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> Available in a condensed English version: *Johann Arndt: True Christianity*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979. \$11.95; \$7.95 pb.

<sup>ii</sup> P.J. Spener, *Pia Desideria*; translated, edited, and with an Introduction by Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964. p 47.

<sup>iii</sup> *Op. cit.* p 91.

<sup>iv</sup> *Philipp Jakob Spener's Pia Desideria*, 3rd ed., Kurt Aland, ed. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964. DM 19, 80.

<sup>v</sup> \$4.95.

<sup>vi</sup> Johann A. Bengel, *New Testament Commentary*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982. \$45.00/set.

<sup>vii</sup> *Pietists: Selected Writings*, edited with an introduction by Peter C. Erb. New York: Paulist Press, 1983. \$12.95; \$9.95 pb.