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Pietism on the American Landscape

Martin E. Conkling

Introduction

The history of the movement called Pietism provides more proof that life as the church, while not always good, is always interesting. Consider a group of Lutheran Christians that consciously attempts to honor Article VI of the Augsburg Confession, which states, “It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God’s sake.” They were also aware of the words of Luther in the introduction to his *Commentary on Romans*. Extolling faith, Luther asserts, “O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly.”¹ Additionally, in the Smalcald Articles, Luther addresses the relation between saving faith and good works, “If good works do not follow then faith is false and not true.”² These words inspired those we today call Pietists and the irony here is: if one is labelled a Pietist, it is not considered a compliment.

This paper seeks to examine the Pietist movement in light of scholarship performed within the last generation. Scholars in both America and Germany in recent years have shed new light on this spiritual movement. The task includes an examination both of the religious and social factors giving rise to Pietism, the movement in Europe, and then Pietism as it manifested itself in America and asserted itself as the most common form of Lutheran theology and practice from colonial times until the decade before the Civil War. The movement left its mark in many areas, and leaves historians to answer that most difficult question, “What does this mean?”

For example, writing in the 1960s, in an account many of us accessed in seminary training, Bergt Hägglund presents us with a movement that replaced an orthodoxy

that had proceeded on the basis of objective reality and ground the certainty of theological knowledge on the Scriptural principle. . . . Pietism, on the other hand, proceeded on the ground of experience; it looked upon the experience of the individual as being fundamental to religious knowledge or insight. Pietistic theological exposition came to deal primarily with empirical religious events, just as it was assumed that theological knowl-

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edge could not be acquired apart from the experience of regeneration (the new birth). . . . Pietism bore within itself tendencies which came into full bloom in the thought world of the Enlightenment, in the secular area as well as in the theological sphere.³

August R. Sueflow extended a similar assessment:

Pietism broke the hold of orthodoxy, but in so doing left the intellectual field in Germany and Scandinavia open to the inroads of English Deism and French skepticism. The resulting Enlightenment had the overall effect of promoting among intellectuals both a critical-literary approach to Scripture and the view that biblical truths are essentially the same as those of natural religion and morality.⁴

More recently, historian Paul Kuennig maintains in a work primarily addressing the history of American Pietism, that since American Pietism did not prevail on the American landscape and was overwhelmed by more orthodox Lutheranism the histories produced by the winners did not fail to do what winners typically do: they write the histories; they assess the defeated negatively.

One result of the defeat of American Lutheran Pietism was predictable, for losers rarely fare well in the eyes of history. Pietism has remained one of the “most misunderstood and maligned movements within the Church of the Reformation,” especially North America. It became the whipping boy, upon which Lutheran theologians and historians of every persuasion heaped uninhibited diatribes. It was occasionally paid the compliment of having contributed a warmth and feeling, depth of devotion and charitable concern to the Lutheran heritage.⁵

And if we excavate through these heaped diatribes, Kuenning asserts, we discover that

Pietism was accused of having been not only anticonfessional, but anti-intellectual, antisacramental, legalistic, subjective, and otherworldly. In a word it was condemned as an aberration from authentic Lutheranism and as a deviation from historic Lutheran traditions. Obviously this view was exaggerated, and it is gradually being questioned, reexamined, and reevaluated.⁶

He then continues with a positive assessment: “Other scholars have [more recently] discovered in what has been called the classic form of German Pietism a Lutheranism that was nonseparatist, churchly, and reforming in nature.”⁷

An assessment of the movement and the reaction against Lutheran orthodoxy would profit by the now-classic appraisal of doctrine provided by George Lindbeck. Though Pietism developed over the centuries, it is fair to classify it throughout with

Lindbeck's term, "experiential-expressive," to signify a religion that considers "doctrines to be noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations."⁸ Though Lindbeck identifies this attitude as conducive to the kind of Christianity promoted by Friedrich Schleiermacher, a theology appearing long after the advent of Pietism nevertheless, Pietism has been identified by historians as a precursor to this brand of modern liberal theology.⁹

Lutheran Origins

German historian Martin Schmidt defines Pietism [in Europe] as "the far-reaching spiritual movement of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries which set for itself the goal of a new Reformation because the first Reformation had become stuck in the Old Protestant Orthodoxy, in the institutional and dogmatic."¹⁰ In this regard, Lindbeck again proves useful by presenting us with a category to describe this kind of traditional orthodoxy, "with cognitive or informational meaningfulness" where doctrines "function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities."¹¹

Whatever its deviations from Lutheranism, it certainly emerged from Lutheranism despite antecedents extending back to Middle Ages mysticism and the influence of Reformed Protestant groups. We can see that Pietism in its vital concerns was inconceivable without Luther in three respects: the Bible, personal faith, and the activity of faith in love.

The Pietist Bible was of course Luther's translation that he put into the hands of the German people. They emphasized, as had Luther, that the Bible was what made theology, theology.

The Pietist emphasis upon personal faith as a living faith reflects Luther's saying, "What help is it to you that God is God if he is not God to you?"¹²

Pietists promoted education and schools, just as Luther exhorted the German princes to undertake, and also established orphanages; their passion for missions, both domestic and foreign, was also in agreement with Luther's emphasis on the unity of faith and love.¹³

Additionally, three features belong to a narrow definition of Pietism. The first is religious edification in small circles known as *collegia pietatis* or conventicles, regarded by the participants as more important than formal worship and the teaching of church doctrine. Along with the individual emphasis, membership in the conventicle was essential. The members supported on another and contrasted themselves with the world and "children of the world." Sometimes when individual Pietists doubted their salvation they turned for encouragement to those in their conventicle whom they addressed as "brothers."¹⁴

Along with its emphasis on individual renewal or rebirth, it surprisingly remained a clergy-dominated movement. The clerical elements offered the accepted understanding of both church history and the Bible. Later a type of naïve Biblicism emerged where the Bible was considered the source of guidance for every area of life.

This movement is usually described as an affective religion, calling for a different tone in religious discourse and practice. Instead of polemical theology it called for a

practical, living faith. While not dismissing doctrines such as the Lutheran Confessions, it nevertheless emphasized the ethical and affective in seeking union with Christ. This effort was not confined to the individual but sought manifestation in social reforms. While inheriting some aspects from earlier Christian movements such as moral rigorism, mysticism, and creation of ascetic communities, it appeared in the seventeenth century after a period of Christian bloodshed in the Thirty Years War on continental Europe and in religious and political strife in Britain. These struggles were accompanied by frustration, uncertainty, and a sense of futility.¹⁵ Rather than a rejection of Lutheran symbols from the start, it is likely more accurate to say that the movement sought a different emphasis and over time, the symbols had little meaning for them.

German Beginnings

We can trace the development of this movement by the leaders who stepped forward to bring the church to a new desired holiness. They are initially all, of course, Germans. Johann Arndt became the spiritual inspiration for those who followed; Philip Jakob Spener provided the form for commonly accepted practices and goals; August Hermann Francke founded many of the institutions typical of later Pietism, and then the exegetical scholar, Johann Albrecht Bengel.

Arndt

It is commonly recognized that the roots of Lutheran Pietism lie with Johann Arndt (1555–1621), and especially with his published work, *Vier Bücher von wahren Christentum* or *True Christianity*, appearing in the spring of 1606. Speaking of Arndt, Heiko Oberman maintains that far from rejecting Luther and the Confessions found in the Book of Concord,

Arndt discerned behind the theological conclusions of Luther the function of true doctrine as the perimeter around the experience of penance and salvation; in short, he brought to light again the spontaneity of Christian service as the true fruit of a living faith. Arndt is entitled to the honor of being the first “Luther scholar” to see, underscore, and apply Luther’s vision that justification by faith alone does not preclude but, to the contrary, unleashes good works in the terms of the whole Christian, his actions in the Church and the world.¹⁶

And though they acknowledged Luther as deserving first place, Pietists recognized an historical progression, “At the time of [Jan] Hus in the year 1415 the tree of life took root; at the time of Luther in 1517, this tree started to flower; in the year 1618 the harvesters went out to gather in its fruits.”¹⁷

This spiritual forebear of Pietism had been a student of Philip Melancthon and was an admired colleague of such luminaries of the Orthodox period of European Lutheranism as John Gerhard (1582–1637), Johann V. Andreae (1586–1656), George Calixtus (1586–1656), and Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676).¹⁸ Arndt’s *True Christianity* became immediately popular, and outside of the Bible and the Small Catechism, no book

was more widely read by Lutherans. He summed up his purpose as an effort to “lead Christians away from a dead . . . to a living faith, and to wean [them] from a bare intellectual understanding to the real practice of faith and godliness.”¹⁹ Throughout, *True Christianity* emphasizes that love for Christ can only be expressed in tangible love for one’s neighbor. Thus a new chapter on practical piety entered the Lutheran tradition. “Where one does not follow Christ in his life through faith, there is neither faith nor Christ.”²⁰

Deploring doctrinal, internecine polemics dominating much of the discourse following Luther’s death, Arndt advocated a true witness to Christianity in service to one’s neighbor. Various orthodox theologians opposed him for placing too much emphasis on sanctification. He defended himself, successfully, through his knowledge of Luther and his teaching. He pointed to numerous passages of Luther’s writings to support his own writings. He especially referred to the Smalcald Articles where Luther wrote “if good works do not follow [justifying grace], our faith is false and not true” (Article 13). Johann Valentin Andreae attributed to him the honor of being the “first Luther scholar [to] apply Luther’s vision that justification by faith alone does not preclude, but to the contrary, unleashes good works.”²¹

His tone is clearly moralistic. He emphasizes that Christ has set an example and we should follow in his footsteps (1 Pt 2:21).

God has given us his beloved Son as a prophet, doctor, and teacher. . . . The Son of God fulfilled his teaching capacity not only with words but also with actions and with the beautiful examples of his most holy life as was fitting for a righteous teacher. Saint Luke speaks of this in Acts 1:1, “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up.” In this verse, the evangelist puts the word “do” before the word “teach” to point out that doing and teaching belong together. Indeed a perfect teacher must first do and then teach. Thus, Christ’s life is the true teaching and the true Book of Life.²²

Spener

If Arndt was the inspiration, then Philip Jakob Spener (1635–1705) earned the title “Father of Pietism.” He indeed assumed the role of its foremost theologian, and accordingly became the most influential figure in the rise of Pietism and its early development. In fact historian Martin Schmidt said Spener “remains only a little behind Martin Luther himself.”²³

Spener grew up in Alsace where Lutheran faith had given way to Pietism. In his father’s library were well-worn copies of *True Christianity* and the Reformed *Praxis Pietatis*. He studied Hebrew in Basel and French in Geneva. He studied at Tübingen and completed doctoral studies at Strasbourg in 1663. He became senior pastor in Frankfurt am Main in 1666. There he made an immediate impact through his preaching and his use of catechesis as an aid to spiritual life and learning.

While in Basel, Spener imbibed the piety of Jean de Labadie (1610–1674). Labadie converted from Catholicism to the Reformed faith in 1652 and preached in various churches in France, the United Provinces, and Switzerland. In *The Reform of the*

Church through the Pastorate (1667), Labadie sought a better trained pastorate and catechized laity, and took such measures as forming conventicles in his church. He marked a confluence of the various traditions in his life, from Jansenism to Quakerism, into a form more easily identified as Pietism. Labadie died a year before Spener's seminal work, *Pia Desideria* (*Holy Desires*), was published in Frankfurt am Main in 1675.

Next Spener introduced the *collegia pietatis*, or conventicles, often described as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*. Now Lutheran Pietism took form. Spener's contributions to Pietism include:

- Expanding the reading of the whole Bible, not just the pericopes, and not just by pastors, but by lay people in private meetings.
- A renewed emphasis on the priesthood of believers and their responsibilities including Bible study, teaching, consoling, and leading a holy life.
- Exhortation to move people from a mere knowledge of doctrine to the pious praxis of a living faith, by both laity and clergy.
- Establishment of true doctrine by repentance and a holy life and not by controversy and confessional polemics.
- And sermons that emphasized rhetoric less, as he described it, and edification more.

For as Spener wrote:

Let us remember that in the last judgment we shall not be asked how learned we were and whether we displayed our learning before the world; to what extent we enjoyed the favor of men and knew how to keep it; with what honors we were exalted and how great a reputation in the world we left behind us; or how many treasures of earthly goods we amassed for our children and thereby drew a curse on ourselves. Instead, we shall be asked how faithfully and with how childlike a heart we sought to further the kingdom of God; with how pure a godly teaching and how worthy an example we tried to edify our hearers amid the scorn of the world, denial of self, taking up the cross, and imitation of our Savior.²⁴

Spener's reforms in catechesis, confirmation and church discipline were accepted in many German cities but also caused much controversy. Because of this hostility from orthodox theologians who accused him of enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) and separatism, he left Frankfurt. He accepted a call as court chaplain in Saxony in 1686 and left in 1691 after attacking the morals—probably excessive drinking—of the Elector. He accepted a call to St. Nicholas Church in Berlin where he spent his last years in favor with Friedrich I of Prussia. One other achievement was to bring influence to bear in order to establish the University of Halle as a Pietist center.²⁵

Francke

August Herrmann Francke (1663–1727) lent institutional stability to the new movement, and under his leadership at the University of Halle, Pietism reached its

highest achievements in Germany. Francke excelled at languages and went to Leipzig in 1684 to teach Hebrew. In reflecting on 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,” he sought to distinguish between a true living faith and one born only of authority and custom. An existential crisis resulted and he felt himself reborn. “He had personally experienced the central point of all Pietist thinking and aspiration—rebirth.”²⁶

At this point he cultivated a close, spiritual friendship with Spener who was instrumental in Francke’s move to Halle in 1691. Francke became professor of oriental languages and then professor of theology in 1696. In 1695 Francke invited some beggar children into his home and began teaching them with regular periods of instruction. (Many of the social and educational institutions promoted by Luther and other reformers had broken down in the course of the Thirty Years War that ravaged much of Germany.)

Pietism sought in its origins an alternative to the polemical nature of theological discourse, orthodoxy’s scholastic method using Aristotelian concepts and methods of argument, and the resulting vast *Summae* of men like Johann Gerhard’s *Loci Theologici* (1610–1621) running to nine volumes and culminating in David Holzasius’s *Examen theologicum* (1707). And against the backdrop of failed social institutions, we also find broader social needs for which Pietism sought to provide. The economy of German lands had been wrecked; educational institutions had not recovered in many places. Many churches and schools had been destroyed; many left standing had no leaders. The state of care for the sick and poor was not the vision that Luther had pictured when he said no one should have to beg in a Christian land. The bureaucracy of the church appeared remote from most people; orthodox pastors used scholastic arguments distant from the concerns of the majority. Addressing these matters, Francke established at Halle what are generally known as the “Francke Institutions.”²⁷

Within a few years of Francke taking in these beggar children, a number of institutions had sprung up at Halle, including its famous orphanage and several preparatory schools with over 2200 children enrolled at the time of Francke’s death. Another 250 indigent children received a free daily meal. These initiatives were funded almost completely with private donations. (Later, several business enterprises helped support these initiatives.) The pioneer achievement of the orphanage served as a model for similar institutions around the world. With Francke, Pietism’s influence over the entire German church reached a high point and began a gradual decline only after his death.²⁸

A Biblical Hermeneutic

For all Pietist leaders, the programmatic call was for biblical theology as the means of growth and renewal in place of dogmatic scholastic theology. In Pietism’s teaching, the Bible was the word of God, but ironically, their teaching shook and loosened “Luther’s bond between Scripture and the Holy Spirit.” The Scriptures endured among the Pietists to the end as psychologizing and historicizing personal edification and guidance to the validation of rebirth.²⁹ Francke’s teaching, commonly followed

throughout these circles, was the distinction between the kernel and the husk. Only a regenerate person could understand the truth of the Bible; the unregenerate could grasp the message superficially but could not attain it spiritually.

Bible study played an important role both academically and practically. Pietism is credited with providing significant studies on the history, grammar, and languages of the Bible. They pursued studies in philology and produced new translations from critical study of Greek texts of the New Testament.

One of the most significant of these scholars was Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), a leader in Pietism in Württemberg Pietism. He produced a scholarly Greek New Testament (1734) and an influential book of biblical annotations, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (1742) where he emphasized the total application of the person to the text and the text to the person (“*Te totum applica ad textum; rem totam applica ad te*”). Thus the reading and encounter with God form a circle. As Martin Brecht observed, “Faith believes the authority of Scripture and the reality of God, and experience confirms faith.”³⁰

Like other Pietists, Bengel emphasized the exposition of Scripture in contrast to orthodoxy’s stress on systematic theology. Through his exegesis of passages such as 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and Revelation 18–20 he lent an exegetical basis to the chiliastic hopes of Spener. Spener in his *Pia Desideria* was very concerned about the hope and the possibility of earthly renovation. “If we consult the Holy Scriptures we can have no doubt that God promised his church here on earth a better state than this.”³¹ Spener, Bengel, and others believed that God would use humanity to introduce the millennium that had not already arrived. Today we label this kind of theology postmillennialism.

Bengel thought that one directly encountered God in something resembling a mystical union through his word in the Bible. Yet Scripture was the mediated means of encounter with God and also the place where God spoke directly into the most profound recesses of the heart. Thus, emerging from this view of the role of Scripture came a new piety: the direct relationship of the heart to the words of the Bible. In this scheme, prayer, exegesis, and meditation merge.

Bengel’s mysticism led to an interpretation of the book of Revelation that identified the end of the world as taking place in 1836. Thus Bengel carried Spener’s eschatology further by predicting the precise time when the millennium would arrive. Bengel’s view of the book of Revelation confined its descriptions to the future. Expectations were optimistic since God would bring the millennium as promised, and he would use human hands to do it. Traditional “last things” in Lutheran theology were left in the background with little attention.

Transplanted to America: Invasive Species or Exotic Growth?

The fate of Pietism in America in the nineteenth century, rejected by more orthodox Lutheran bodies such as the Missourians, the Buffalo Lutherans, and the synods we identify with the orthodox Henkels, often overshadows its long history on this continent. In the eyes of some historians, Pietism remains one of the “most misunderstood and maligned movements within the Church of the Reformation.”³²

The origins of Pietism in the New World can be located in Halle where Lutheran leaders received their education and theological orientation. The first Lutheran pastor ordained in the colonies, Justus Flackner, trained under Francke and served in the Philadelphia area for two decades before his death in 1723. Halle-trained pastors, Martin Bolzius and Israel Christian Gronau came with Salzburg and Palatinate refugees to New Ebenezer, Georgia in 1734. Four years later they built an orphanage there, the first Protestant institution of its kind in North America, completed even before the settlers built their first church. But the man most responsible for diffusing Pietism as the principle Lutheran practice in North America was Henry M. Muhlenberg (1711–1787).

Muhlenberg

Muhlenberg's considerable talents and achievements established him as the founder and organizer of the Lutheran Church in North America. As Henry E. Jacobs maintained, "the history of [the Lutheran Church in America] from his landing in 1742 to his death . . . is scarcely more than his biography."³³ Some historians have portrayed him as an amalgamation of orthodoxy and Pietism. Born in Einbeck in Hannover, he attended the University of Göttingen where he was influenced by a Pietist professor and several students who had studied at Halle. He underwent a gradual conversion experience according to the Pietist understanding of rebirth. While at Göttingen he helped to establish a school for poor children. In 1738 he was at Halle studying under Gotthilf Francke, son of Herman.

While there he instructed children in the orphan school, taught languages in the seminary, and, in the businesses he established there, learned about medicine and pharmaceuticals. He accepted a call to a congregation near Herrnhut, Saxony but with no connection to Count von Zinzendorf's restored Church of the United Brethren. While there he defended Pietist practices including the *pietatis collegia*, upheld the doctrine of sanctification as the fruit of justification, and embraced the importance of awakening or rebirth. He supported the proper call of pastors to churches, avoiding the charge of separatism. Yet he made it clear he was more concerned about teaching the spirit rather than the letter of the symbols of the church.³⁴

In 1741 he received a call from Francke to pastor several churches in Pennsylvania. Mission work was always an emphasis of the Pietist movement, and Muhlenberg was no exception. These congregations had requested a pastor for years from Halle, but the matter became urgent when Moravians under Count Zinzendorf had made serious inroads among American Lutherans. Muhlenberg did not hesitate to seek out Zinzendorf when he arrived and confronted him in a stormy session. Two days later the Moravian leader departed for London.

In August 1748 came the climax of Muhlenberg's early labors. When he ordained a minister, coinciding with the consecration of Saint Michael's Church in Philadelphia, he brought together six Swedish and German pastors and twenty-four lay delegates. This gathering marks the beginning of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, "the most important single event in American Lutheran History."³⁵ His great formative

actions came not a moment too soon. The main lines of Lutheran development were manifest just as the rate of immigration increased sharply. Twelve thousand Germans landed in Philadelphia in 1749 alone. By 1771 there were eighty-one congregations in Pennsylvania and adjacent colonies. Thirty more existed in other American regions. At this juncture the idea of a purely missionary effort from Europe found itself replaced with “an American church with an American ministry and an American future.”³⁶

A practical way to establish Lutheran identity remained with liturgy and allegiance to the Augsburg Confession, both matters Pietism did not renounce. Though embracing both of these, Muhlenberg remained opposed to anyone who embraced correct doctrine at the expense of Christian conduct. The “Unaltered Augsburg Confession” did not excuse one from an unaltered life. A favorite motto was *ubi vita fulgur, ubi doctrina tonitru* (“true doctrine is proclaimed where godly life is manifest”). His evangelical concerns transcended denominational and doctrinal differences. On one occasion he invited George Whitfield to preach in his Philadelphia church and did not hesitate to preach in the pulpits of Reformed and Episcopal congregations. His preaching accented repentance and conversion. “He embraced revivalism but insisted it be kept in a framework of liturgy. His synthesis of expressed emotion and liturgical order is recognized as one of his great achievements.”³⁷

Schmucker

The most famous or notorious Pietist, depending on one’s point of view, was Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799–1873). The son of a Pietist minister, he was present at the organization of the General Synod in Hagerstown, Maryland on October 22, 1820. He was then a young pastor, and though not a voting delegate, he was to assume the leading role in its polity, organization, and confessional position for nearly forty years. He served as president of the organization from 1828 until 1845. He is recognized in this period as “the most capable and qualified leader of the majority of Lutherans in the United States. Under his leadership, promoting the Spener-Francke style of Pietism, the movement reached its pinnacle of power and influence.”³⁸

Graduating from the new Princeton Presbyterian Seminary in 1820, he claimed three *pia desideria* of his own: an English translation of an important Lutheran dogmatic work, a Lutheran seminary, and a Lutheran college. Within ten years these desires had become realities.

His translation, *Biblical Theology of Storr and Flatt*, was published in Andover in 1826. He was the prime mover of overtures to the General Synod for a seminary to be founded under its auspices; in 1826 the Gettysburg Seminary was founded and Schmucker became the first professor there, taking an oath under the organization’s constitution that he had largely written, affirming the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism as “summary and just exhibitions of the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God,” and promising to “vindicate and inculcate these doctrines in opposition to all errorists.”³⁹ These words may surprise those who know about the Definite Platform he later proposed.⁴⁰ So within fifty years of the Declaration of Independence, Lutherans had established their second seminary in America. Finally, recognizing the

need for better preparation of students planning to attend the Gettysburg institution, he established a small classical school that later became Pennsylvania College, and today is known as Gettysburg College. It was chiefly through his teaching at this college that the traditions of German Pietism were adapted to the cultural and political environment of the United States.

Another development was his book *Elements of a Popular Theology* (1834) in which he denounced slavery, basing his position primarily on Acts 17:26, that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,” as well as the Golden Rule. Further, he quoted AC XVI stating that Christians are to “yield obedience to civil officers and laws of the land, unless they should command something sinful.” From this he held that the Augsburg Confession upheld the justice of revolution. So, long after the American Revolution, an act justified in the AC, he pointed out that slavery was a violation of the same basic human rights that were the Spirit of ’76. His activism was confined largely to the African colonization movement that sought to return former slaves to the African coast. His belief that slavery’s days were numbered prevented him from supporting more radical groups calling for immediate abolition.

The Frankean Synod

This sentiment found substantial support in the Frankean Synod of New York, formed in May 1837 by twenty-one congregations with a total of 1650 communicants, in the Western District of the New York Ministerium. These congregations had left the Hartwick Synod to pursue more aggressively the new methods of popular revivals, home missions, and moral reforms such as temperance and Sabbath observances. Also the Hartwick Synod did not provide pastors at a satisfactory rate and the founders were disenchanted with the slow, time-consuming education required for the pastoral ministry.

One officer of the Hartwick Synod, Philip Wieting, a pastor in Sharon, Schoharie County, NY, became a primary of those who broke away from the Hartwick Synod in order to form the Frankean Synod. While still at the Hartwick seminary, Wieting “was converted” by Charles G. Finney. A graduate of the Hartwick seminary, [Wieting] later dismissed the seven years he spent there as a “waste of time.”⁴¹

Another leader of the Synod identified a need “‘to call and induct into the ministry pious men, endowed with talents, sound in faith and alive to work, willing and ready to supply the destitute, and save souls.’ This task overshadowed the importance of a well-educated clergy.”⁴²

The new synod’s constitution specifically forbade any slave holder, or one “who trafficked in human beings, or who advocated the system of slavery as it existed in the United States to a seat in its conventions as a delegate.” The first convention passed four resolutions labeling slavery an outrage and a sin. With these actions in regard to slavery, the Frankean Synod gained immediate censure of the General Synod and, among many historians of succeeding generations, the reputation of being radical.⁴³

The subscription of this new synod to the Augsburg Confession was *quatenus*. At its second convention, the Synod's first president, John D. Lawyer, "asserted that their 'declaration of faith contains doctrines plainly revealed in the Bible, and so far as the Augsburg Confession agrees with the Bible, so far it agrees with our declaration.'"⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the General Synod simultaneously condemned the Frankean Synod for its abolitionism and condemned the Tennessee Synod for its *quia* subscription to the Augsburg Confession.

In 1842 the Frankeans issued a *Fraternal Appeal* to all other Lutheran Synods. There was little response. The Maryland Synod advised them that abolition was not appropriate synodical business to which the Frankeans replied how then could temperance be considered the business of the Maryland Synod since it had already advocated that issue. In 1844 the Synod dissolved altar and pulpit fellowship with any Lutherans whose views on slavery did not match their own. By this time only three other synods, the Pittsburg, Allegheny, and East Ohio Synods, had denounced slavery.⁴⁵

The Dred Scott decision of 1857 earned the Synod's official condemnation of the US Supreme Court. The Eilsen Synod had condemned slavery in 1850. The Wittenberg Synod followed suit in 1852. The Synod of Northern Indiana denounced slavery along with the evil of alcohol in 1859.

The growth of the Frankean Synod was remarkable. "Beginning in 1837 with twenty-one congregations and 1,650 communicant members, by 1851 it would be able to count fifty congregations with a total of 3,213 members. It had extended the borders of its Synod beyond the borders of the 'Burned-over District' of western New York into regions as far west as Illinois and Wisconsin, and it had some supervised parishes in Canada. In 1864 with the absence of its members from the South, the Frankean Synod became a member of the General Synod."⁴⁶

The Definite Platform

A renewed confessionalism in Europe resulted in many Lutheran immigrants who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession and even to all the Lutheran symbols. Also in America, without the influence of immigration, there was a sharpening of denominational distinctions. Churches attempted to find a unique sense of identity to distinguish it from others. Sometimes this effort grew into an assertive spirit that wanted doctrinal distinction at the expense of the more liberal tendency for widespread agreement on certain fundamental principles.

Schmucker had always sought to define confessional allegiance in broad terms, believing that Protestants could agree on the fundamental doctrines; the flaw in this approach was determining just what constituted a fundamental doctrine. Schmucker believed that the Augsburg Confession was substantially correct. He was challenged by his more conservative colleagues to define what "substantially" actually meant. In 1850 Charles Porterfield Kraut delivered the opening sermon for the Convention of the General Synod. He had already identified the Lutheran teaching on the sacrament of the altar in his book, *The Conservative Reformation*, as the doctrine that was "the most fundamental of all fundamentals." Now in his sermon he appealed to the General

Synod to make the Synod's doctrinal position with regard to the Augsburg Confession more firm. He maintained that to say that the Confession was "substantially" correct, as Schmucker had, was to imply that it contained doctrines that were not correct. In light of this a committee was formed, with Schmucker as the chair, to frame "a clear and concise view of the doctrines and practices of the American Lutheran Church."⁴⁷ The committee report reflecting the views of Schmucker's American Lutheran party was rejected by the convention.

In an article published in October 1850 in the *Evangelical Review*, Schmucker sought to answer the question of confessional subscription with a procedure that called for pastors to "enumerate the doctrines . . . which we regard as fundamental."⁴⁸ His opponents such as Krauth and especially Charles F. Schaeffer rejected the proposal for agreement on fundamental doctrines as "an impossible dream."

In 1853 Schaeffer brought a proposal to the Pennsylvania Ministerium that all clergy subscribe to all confessional symbols. The Convention rejected his proposal but did require subscription to the Augsburg Confession, a move that reflected a growing orthodoxy in their ranks since their constitution did not mention the Augsburg Confession until the middle of the century. That same convention voted to rejoin the General Synod which they had left thirty years before. Their deliberations had great import for the General Synod and for Schmucker. Pennsylvania was the oldest ministerium and by far the largest of all district groups, constituting about one-third of all clergy and nearly half of the entire General Synod membership. Clearly things were not moving in Schmucker's direction. Schmucker published an irenic commentary on the Augsburg Confession, *Lutheran Manual on Scriptural Principles*. There he sought to appease the growing severity of his critics, agreeing with the Symbol only reserving a primary allegiance to Scripture. His critics became even more passionate in their criticism of this defense of a *quatenus* subscription.

These attacks provoked a response. In the summer of 1858, Schmucker, assisted by Samuel Sprecher and Benjamin Kurtz, published a forty-two page document that he sent to all the pastors of the General Synod. Its title, *The American Recension of the Augsburg Confession*, was later known as the *Definite Synodical Platform*. Not since the days of Philip Melancthon, who considered the document a private possession, had anyone so tampered with the text of the Confession. Five errors in the Confession were identified:

1. The approval of the ceremonies of the mass.
2. Private confession and absolution.
3. Denial of divine obligation on the Sabbath.
4. Baptismal regeneration.
5. The real presence of the body and blood of the Savior in the Eucharist.

Not only was his proposal received with derision, but a further negative response was elicited when he proposed that all pastors consent to the recension or be denied membership in the Synod. Further it was mailed out without a signature, a measure that added to the suspicion surrounding Schmucker. Schmucker later owned up as

author, but only three small synods in Ohio, influenced by Sprecher, agreed with it. The rest rejected it as a reckless attempt to change the doctrine of the General Synod. Their unqualified disapproval, according to historian Abdel Ross Wentz, marked the end of “American Lutheranism,” and revealed the conservatism and orthodoxy that characterized many Lutherans in the nation and specifically the General Synod at that period.⁴⁹

On July 1, 1863, forces of the Confederacy overran Federal Army positions around Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary where the well-known Pietist president, Samuel Schmucker, resided. He had been responsible for training over five hundred Lutheran pastors who had been taught that slavery was a moral evil. Therefore the Southerners knew his reputation as an abolitionist. Schmucker’s house was sacked and his library destroyed. His immediate departure from town might have been the only move that saved his life. During the battle, federal artillery from Cemetery Ridge further damaged the house, leading one to wonder in retrospect if anyone on the North American continent would any longer support Pietism.⁵⁰ Vergilius Ferm concluded, “Conservative Lutheranism had won, and ‘American Lutheranism [of the Definite Platform]’ was buried in the debris of outworn and outgrown vestures of an earlier day.”⁵¹

Conclusion: Effects and Contributions of Pietism

According to Carter Lindberg, the Pietist movement’s “dissolution of the Orthodoxy’s confessional consciousness is directly related to its own self-understanding as an international and interconfessional movement.” It was a decisive preparation for the modern, ecumenical movement. It sought to lead the church out of dogmatic rigidity, replacing an ecclesial-confessional tradition with “a strong new community consciousness formed by the reborn individuals’ consciousness of a personal relationship to God and brotherhood with those of similar experiences.”⁵²

The movement also introduced significant changes to hymnody and preaching. Content appealing to the individual soul and encouragement in pious living began replacing the doctrinal. The image of the pastor as the minister of the word of God shifted to that of a witness of godliness in the course of life. The sermon was supplemented by Bible study and small group discussion. This interest resulted in increased and intensive work in exegesis, the appearance of annotated editions, revisions, and historical and biographic studies. The locus for this activity was the conventicle or *collegia pietatis*, known as “Stunde” among its German speaking members. This practice certainly helped individuals gain support for strength and edification. This concern for individuals also constituted a weakness. The practice drove a wedge between those who attended the Stunde and those in the church within the church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*), that is, the “better Christians” and the regular churchgoers. Though Spener did not intend it, the conventicle became a place of escape from the church for devout Christians.⁵³

Lindberg also argues that Pietism enriched dogmatics with a renewed emphasis on topics such as love and sin as concrete phenomena. It sought to change the world by changing the hearts of individuals. However, in spite of its hospitals, orphanages, and educational and other charitable efforts, it never produced a social ethic, confining the

emphasis on the individual. It sought to emulate early Christianity by recognizing communities of faith and fellowship.

As noted earlier, the word as a means of grace became separated from the Holy Spirit. “As a consequence, radical doubt is to be overcome in Pietism, not by hearing the Word of God as an address of promise (the authority of the Word) but by experientially verified faith. Thus it is Pietism that introduces modifiers to faith: ‘weak faith, dead faith, living faith, powerful faith, etc.’” According to Martin Schmidt this understanding allows the Bible to become a manual for the pattern of life. And Pietists viewed Scripture as the confirmation and legitimation of their own experience. Thus it replaced Luther’s emphasis on *pro nobis*, thereby the paradoxical *simul justus et peccator*. A new emphasis emerges on the visible formation of a person born anew, verified by the fruits of faith, thus signifying a higher nature and quality of being. Luther’s understanding of the new man engaged in a battle with the old man is never transformed into visible victory on earth. Rather the victory is left to God and not to the individual. So for Pietism the dynamic was not “Luther’s dialectic of law and gospel, sin and grace, damnation and faith, but the development of the power of faith in renewal and good works.”⁵⁴

Endnotes

¹ Martin Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt und Neuer Mensch: Gesammelte Studien zur Geschichte des Pietismus* (Wittenberg: Luter Verlag, 1969), 299–330, quoted in Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 140.

² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed. *The Book of Concord*, Part 3, Art. 13 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 325.

³ Bergt Hägglund, *History of Theology*, 4th ed., trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 329–330.

⁴ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 149.

⁵ Paul P. Kuenning, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism: The Rejection of an Activist Heritage* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988), 2–3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 16.

⁹ Ronald Feuerhahn, “The Roots and Fruits of Pietism,” paper presented at the Pieper Lectures, September 17–18, 1998, 9.

¹⁰ Martin Schmidt, “Pietism,” *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Dritte Auflage* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1957), quoted in Carter Lindberg, *Third Reformation*, 133.

¹¹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

¹² WA, 2, 137, 6.

¹³ Lindberg, *Third Reformation*, 139.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵ Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 14.

¹⁶ Jakob Arndt, *True Christianity, Classics of Western Spirituality*, preface by Heiko Oberman, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), xv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁸ Kuenning, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism*, 9.

¹⁹ John Arndt, *True Christianity: A Treatise on Sincere Repentance, True Faith, the Holy Walk of the True Christian*, trans. A. W. Boehm (London: 1712), revised, corrected, and furnished with additional material from the original German by Charles F. Schaeffer (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1868), 176, quoted in Kuenning, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

- ²¹ Johann Valentin Andreae, *Christianopolis: An Ideal State of the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Felix Emil Held (New York: Oxford Press, 1916), dedication page, quoted in Kuenning, 9.
- ²² Arndt, *True Christianity*, 64.
- ²³ Martin Schmidt, "Spener and Luther," *Luther Jahrbuch* 24 (1957), 102 (Berlin: Lutherische Verlagshaus), quoted in Kunneing.
- ²⁴ Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 36.
- ²⁵ Lindberg, *Third Reformation*, 150.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 135-139.
- ²⁸ Kuenning, *American Lutheran Pietism*, 12.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.
- ³⁰ Martin Brecht, "Johann Albrecht Bengel und der schwäbische Biblizismus," in *Pietismus und Bibel*, Kurt Aland, ed. (Wittenburg: Luther Verlag, 1980), 194, quoted in Lindberg, *Third Reformation*, 167.
- ³¹ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 76.
- ³² Trygve R. Skarsten, "The Doctrine of Justification in Classical Lutheran Pietism: A Revisionist Perspective," *Trinity Seminary Review* 2 (Fall 1981): 20, quoted in Paul P. Kuenning, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism: The Rejection of an Activist Heritage* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 2.
- ³³ Henry E. Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (New York, 1893), quoted in Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 255.
- ³⁴ Kuenning, *American Lutheran Pietism*, 36.
- ³⁵ Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 258.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 259.
- ³⁷ Kuenning, *American Lutheran Pietism*, 38.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.
- ³⁹ Kuenning, *American Lutheran Pietism*, 67-68.
- ⁴⁰ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16-17.
- ⁴¹ Martin E. Conkling, "The Frankean Synod: A Voice in the Silence," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* LXXII, 4 (Winter 1999): 212.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 213.
- ⁴⁴ Minutes, Frankean Synod Oct., 1837, 29-30; quoted in Harry J. Kreider, *History of the United Lutheran Synod of New York and New England*, vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), 110.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 223. It is then ironic that the Tennessee Synod in 1822 answered the question, "Is slavery to be considered as evil?" The Synod resolved unanimously that it is to be "regarded as a great evil in our land and it desires the government, if it be possible, to devise some way by which this evil can be removed. Synod also advised every minister to admonish every master to treat his slaves properly, and to exercise his Christian duties." This resolution may have been the first of its kind in the South.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.
- ⁴⁷ Kuenning, *American Lutheran Pietism*, 164-167.
- ⁴⁸ Paul P. Kuenning, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988), 168.
- ⁴⁹ Ross, *Lutheranism in America*, 137.
- ⁵⁰ Abdul Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, Rev. Ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 167.
- ⁵¹ Vergilias Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology: A Study of the Issue between American Lutheranism and Old Lutheranism* (New York: Century Co., 1927), 344.
- ⁵² Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 17.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.