

A Survey of Lutheranism from 1600-1750

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**Presented at the Rocky Mountain Pastoral Conference
Wetaskiwin, Alberta
October 6-7, 1992**

ERK 1286

Introduction

As we survey 150 years of Lutheran church history, we do well to consider why we are interested in church history at all. All history is the story of "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Cor 1:23-24)." God's wisdom, Paul says, is a person, who came into our world in a certain place and time, and did astonishing, wonderful things. Christianity, by its very nature, is grounded in history. Our Scripture, our creeds, and our faith speak about what God's wisdom--Christ--did in history ("who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven . . ."), and does in history today ("He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.")

In the sense we generally think about, the revelation of God's wisdom in Christ stands complete. We await no new revelation, which will reveal God to us more completely than Christ's death and resurrection have. Nothing more needs doing--Christ has triumphed over our enemies once for all time.

Yet in another sense, God is not finished revealing his wisdom--not finished revealing Christ. For we are the church, "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph. 1:23)." Church history sketches Christ's body--his church--in faint outline. It lays before us the ongoing drama of Christ's victory over sin, death and the devil as his Word is preached and believed. In history God is displaying his elect, who conquer in Christ-like lowliness, whose road to eternal glory goes over a hill where the world can only see defeat.

So Paul wrote to the Ephesians (3:8-11), "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which in ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Spirit led Paul to see that all human history is God revealing his manifold wisdom and accomplishing his eternal purpose. In history God is revealing Christ, and is revealing those he has foreknown and called to be members of Christ's body. So deep is this wisdom, Paul says, that even the angels stand with mouths agape as they see it unfolding.

So it ought not surprise us that history displays a lowly, humble, cross-carrying church, beset and seemingly overcome by her enemies. For the church is Christ's body. God reveals his wisdom in her lowliness and apparent defeat just as he did in Christ's. For this reason Revelation, which paints pictures of the history we are living, has been so aptly called "The Distant Triumph Song." It *is* distant, even though the triumph is occurring right before our eyes. In history, with Spirit-given ears, we catch the distant melody of victory as Christ's people take up the cross of Christ's sending and win the victory as He did. We march "from victory unto victory" only by faith.

These truths are important for us to remember as we survey two centuries of Lutheran church history. For much of the story seems less than victorious. It begins soon after the Formula of Concord had been adopted and restored peace to a divided church. Then we shall see doctrine expressed more and more as abstract truth, less and less as God's Word of life and hope, spoken to those who are carrying Christ's cross in the world. Then Pietism will try to replace the church's cross with the crown of glory our reason wants to see here and now, but which God has reserved for eternity. In the years following, men threw out both cross and crown, and reduced the Gospel, in C.F.W. Walther's words, "to a heathen moral philosophy." Although reason may rebel against it, God's truth remains sure. In both heroes and villains, believers and apostates, we will be seeing God revealing his manifold wisdom as he works out his eternal purpose to save his elect--even when there seem to be less than 7000 left.

I The Age of Orthodoxy, 1600-1675

A. Social Conditions of the Day

In 1618, Spain, France, Austria, and the Holy Roman Empire--all Catholic powers--had the power to reconquer Europe for the Pope. During the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) it almost happened.

Early in the war, Emperor Ferdinand II conquered Bohemia; Lutherans, Hussites, and Anabaptists were stripped of property and banished. In 1629, when most of Germany lay at his feet, Ferdinand issued the Edict of Restitution, which decreed the return of all lands Rome had lost since the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Then Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus arrived and changed the course of the war; for this reason he is often called the "Lion of Lutheranism."¹ Through him the Lord saved German Lutheranism. But his intervention, together with French political goals, also led to two more decades of conflict and ruin in Germany.

Most soldiers on all sides were mercenaries² with little training and less discipline. They lived by sack and pillage, often inflicting horrific tortures on people for amusement. When the Catholic general Tilly took Magdeburg, his men indulged in an orgy of rape and butchery, shouting "Jesu and Mary," until finally the whole city burned to the ground. Even Gustavus' Swedish army, unmatched for tight discipline, was not above plundering Frankfurt in 1631. Germany's suffering beggars the imagination. Farms stood idle; fields reverted to untamed wilderness. In fact, by 1645 military strategy was often dictated by the troops' need for relatively undevastated countryside to live off of. The value of human life plummeted. Social order and morality, the family structure, even civilized behavior itself, broke down; self-preservation became the only law. Demoralized husbands sometimes refused to defend their families from savagery. Starving refugees roamed the countryside; they were so dangerous that the authorities often fled from them.

"Old and young," complained Pastor Heinlin of Wuerttemberg, "can no longer tell what is of God or of the Devil. Poor widows and orphans are counted for dung, like dogs they are pushed into the street, there to perish of cold and hunger."³

Epidemics swept through the weakened, malnourished population. Germany's population declined at least 50% from 1618 to 1648. The material and human losses took over 100 years to make good. And perhaps worst of all, the war was fought for nothing. The Peace of Westphalia (1648) allowed rulers to choose the Reformed faith, and allowed them to adopt a different faith than that of their people; little else changed. It would be difficult to overestimate the futility, despair, and cynicism that gripped Germany. We might try to imagine a Viet Nam war that lasted for a generation and killed 125 million Americans. For many, the response was simply, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."⁴

The war broke the emperor's power for good. Rulers in the more than 300 German states exercised absolute power. In response to the underpopulation problem, a few legalized polygamy for laymen. Some used peasants to pull their carriages, or organized them into forced labor gangs to build castles while the land lay in ruins. In Saxony, a stronghold of Lutheran orthodoxy, many nobles insisted on private baptisms and communion; they would not lower themselves to the fellowship of Christ's body and blood, or share the baptismal font with a peasant's child.

¹ It is easy to overestimate the religious motives for this war. Sweden's war effort was funded by France under Cardinal Richelieu's "France first, Pope second" policy as Prime Minister. To treat a great man gently, we might say that since Gustavus Adolphus fought for religious reasons, the Lord granted him all his political goals as well. Several German Lutheran princes actually sent troops against him.

² Only half the "Swedish" troops that won the pivotal battle of Breitenfeld in 1632 were Swedes. Two years later, a "Swedish" army had not even one Swedish regiment in it. This was the most national army of the war.

³ Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 181.

⁴ One example--out of about 200 inhabited houses in the town of Halle in 1685, 30 were brothels.

The lower classes behaved little better. Alcohol abuse, open sexual immorality, laziness, and crime were rampant. One result of the war was that education and literacy had suffered; without doubt they were worse than in Luther's time, though precise figures are difficult to come by. Intellectual and cultural life was stilted and unimaginative; not a single major work of literature or art was produced; the early decades of the Enlightenment include no German thinkers whatsoever. Life in 17th century Germany was hard and brutal; it bred hard, brutal people.

In this atmosphere orthodox Lutherans sought to do God's work. As we evaluate their place in history, let us note this very well: we, with our drearily comfortable lives, cannot comprehend the kind of conditions under which the work of the Gospel was done in these decades. We bewail and bemoan "problems" in our times and society that hamper our work for the Lord. What would we say and do had we lived in the Germany of the 1600's? To paraphrase Martin Franzmann, "Lord, preserve us from the neurotic tendency to say, 'We live in the worst of times.'"

B. The Development of Lutheran Scholasticism

To say the least, evaluations of the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians and their work vary quite widely.

With respect to its versatile comprehension of theological material and breadth of its knowledge of the Bible, Lutheran orthodoxy marks the high point in the entire history of theology. And it was not only the contemporary tradition or the next preceding tradition which provided the material for the great Lutheran doctrinal expositions of the 17th century, but to an even greater extent it was the Bible and the patristic sources.⁵

The essence of Christianity came to be regarded as consisting in a series of rationally ordered propositions . . . While it paid lip service to the authority of the Bible, the real authority was now lodged in the orthodox perspective upon the Bible . . . *Fiducia* [living faith] had become *assensus* [assent], the liberty of the Christian man had given way to the tyranny of scholastic theology, and the Bible had once again become an arsenal of proof texts.⁶

We might first ask why the dogmaticians adopted their method in the first place. Luther called Aristotle a "damned, conceited, rascally heathen . . . God has sent him as a plague upon us on account of our many sins,"⁷ and wrote, "It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle . . . indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle . . . the whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light."⁸ Why, a century later, were Lutheran dogmaticians using Aristotle's thought forms and logic?

The one-word answer is, "Melanchthon." As a peace-loving man, Melanchthon longed for reconciliation with both Calvinists and Romanists. As a renaissance scholar, he believed the best tools for finding unity and peace lay in the ancient sources. So he sought an Aristotle who had not been mangled by Roman scholastics, hoping to find the tools he needed to express truth in such a compelling way that everyone would have to believe it.

Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*, the first Lutheran dogmatics, began in the early 1520's as an exegesis of Romans which consciously avoided the Aristotelian terminology of the scholastics. But by the 1540's Melanchthon had restored the "rascally heathen's" writings to the theological curriculum; one could not read the *Loci* without knowing them. Luther always said philosophy was useful for teaching students how to think and write. But already during Luther's later years,

⁵ Hagglund, *History of Theology*, p. 303.

⁶ Stoeffler, *Rise*, pp. 183-184.

⁷ Luther, *To the Christian Nobility*, Luther's Works, Vol. 44, p. 201.

⁸ Luther, *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, Luther's Works, Vol. 31, p. 12.

Melanchthon spoke differently. "Philosophy is necessary not only for method, but the theologian can also take over much from physics [i.e. metaphysics--speculation about the nature of reality and man's place in it]."⁹ He considered logical proofs for the existence of God quite useful. Today, we might describe this tendency as a love for apologetics like those of C.S. Lewis or Josh McDowell.

Man's mind, he believed, can move toward divine truth and to some extent be receptive to the Gospel. "In conversion these three causes concur: the word of God, the Holy Spirit, who is sent by the Father and the Son, so that our hearts may be enlightened, **and our will (*voluntas*) assenting to and not resisting the word of God.**" He considered man's rational soul a part of the image of God which remained somewhat intact after the Fall. "Free will in man is the faculty for applying himself to grace, that is, it hears the promise and tries to assent to it, and abstains from sins against conscience." He saw faith as man's intellect (*voluntas*) agreeing that what the Word says is true, and then beginning to influence the heart. Man's reason taught to believe better, more than Luther's concept of the whole man transformed by the Gospel, was the goal of the Spirit's work. The Sacraments, "the visible Word," which work in man's soul through physical elements contrary to all his reason, don't fit well into this sterile, intellectual theology--perhaps one reason he sacrificed them to the Reformed.

Such a system left little room for using Luther's profoundly simple paradoxes to teach divine truth.¹⁰ Melanchthon never really did accept *Bondage of the Will*, with its thorough, Scriptural denial that natural man can have any desire at all to know the true God.¹¹ In Melanchthon's hands, the scholastic approach shows its dangerous tendency to elevate reason and mute the paradox of Law and Gospel with its many corollaries.

Scholasticism can also confuse as well as express ideas clearly. This becomes quite evident if we consider Flacius, who never did understand Aristotle very well. At a debate with the Philippists in Weimar, he pleaded:

It is contrary to the nature of inquiring truth if we try to speak on the basis of blind philosophy. What else was it that corrupted the old theologians . . . but that they sought to decide spiritual matters by philosophy, which does not understand the most secret and hidden mysteries of God? Let us therefore observe Luther's rule: Let the woman be silent in the church.¹² For how miserable it would be if we had to decide matters of the Church by the use of dialectic.¹³

No one listened. The Philippists easily maneuvered Flacius into untenable positions, and even into false teaching, while their synergism hid in a cloud of intricate, scholarly language.¹⁴ Article I of the Formula of Concord answers a

⁹ Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard*, p. 33, quoting Melanchthon's *Declamatio de philosophia* (1536).

¹⁰ For example, the statements, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all," in *The Freedom of A Christian*, Luther's Works, Vol. 31, p. 344. Usually, Luther's paradoxes beautifully and succinctly express the distinction between Law and Gospel, as this one does.

¹¹ According to Pelikan, Melanchthon's *De Anima* attempts to find middle ground between Luther and Erasmus. While he paid lip service to Luther, he also left man's natural mind with a certain amount of room to be prepared for receiving God's grace by understanding its need for God.

¹² Cf. *What Luther Says*, p. 1052: "When some form of deductive reasoning or some philosophical principle encroaches [upon theology], we should meet it with the words of Paul; 'Let your women keep silence in the churches' (I Cor. 14:34) and this one: 'Hear ye Him' (Matt. 17:5)."

¹³ Pelikan, p. 41.

¹⁴ On the other hand, Flacius' false doctrine tended to hide in his simplicity, which often did not lead him to carefully, systematically think through his beliefs.

question ("Is original sin man's substance, or an accident?") that came up because the use of rhetoric had superseded Scripture in the debate. Flacius' language was dangerous and is rightly condemned by the Formula. But he was aghast when the Philippists taught that if man uses his relatively unimpaired reason, he can desire, in some way, the God who reveals himself in Scripture, and be prepared for the Gospel, especially if the minister is trained to speak to him in the best terms reason has to offer. Who can blame him?

Finally Chemnitz, one of Melancthon's students, brilliantly turned his teacher's sword against his teacher's followers; he used the language of Aristotle to express the truths of Scripture. The careful distinctions in the Formula of Concord, which he could make because of his Aristotelian training, were altogether necessary. In *The Two Natures in Christ, The Lord's Supper, and Examination of the Council of Trent*, Chemnitz masterfully used these tools to express Scriptural truths and expose the false doctrine of the Reformed and Romanists alike.

The great difference was that Chemnitz combined the tools of logic with a thorough knowledge of the church fathers and councils, and especially with his gift for grammatical-exegetical study of the Scriptures. Placed alongside or over Scripture by Melancthon, the scholastic method was quite destructive. But in the hands of a true theologian, who was willing to abandon it when it did not serve Scripture¹⁵, the same system precisely and beautifully expressed truth to the minds and hearts of his readers. In Chemnitz' writings, one rarely gets the impression that Scripture is being distorted by the language used to expound it. This is not always true of the later dogmaticians.

Throughout the 1600's Lutherans used Aristotelian methods and terms because Chemnitz had used Melancthon's weapons to defeat the Philippists and clearly state Lutheranism's doctrine over against the Reformed and Rome. The resurrection of Aristotle in Lutheran Germany was also part of a wider trend; the Spanish Jesuits and the Reformed were also using him. So Chemnitz and the dogmaticians used him against the Romanists and the Reformed. Finally, in the impoverished intellectual climate of war-torn Germany, even university-educated nobles considered it the height of style to speak of their daily affairs in terms of form, substance, accident, and causes. This kind of language was not as foreign to the educated Germans of that century as it is to us.

We should also realize that Lutherans needed some kind of precise, thorough system to express their doctrine to the world and preserve it for generations to come. And precise, thorough, systematic expression was the dogmaticians' greatest strength. It is virtually impossible to misunderstand them--a trait most modern theologians would do well to imitate. The fact that our own theological roots go back to Hoenecke and Walther, who both became orthodox by studying the dogmaticians, demonstrates that their work was far from "dry, useless intellectualism."

C. Doctrinal Emphases and Controversies in the Age of Orthodoxy

There was, unfortunately, no lack of doctrinal controversies during these years. First, we might note the continuing challenge presented by the Reformed. The dogmaticians did a great deal of work in Christology--even in Schmid's digest of the dogmaticians, this section takes over 100 pages.¹⁶ Reformed errors regarding the communication of attributes (e.g. that Christ's body must remain in heaven, and so is not present in the Lord's Supper), the state of humiliation and the limited atonement undoubtedly motivated much of this work. The wonderful result is that anyone who would know the incarnate God, the Savior of sinners, finds a loving, detailed portrait of him here.

The Calvinists also insisted on a distinction between the "inward" and "outward" call (not everyone who hears the Gospel is "inwardly called;" the Word does not always bring the Spirit's power with it), which also had its influence in their rejection of the Sacraments. (Some Lutherans made the same distinction, which roused the mighty Gerhard to battle.) This led the dogmaticians to their unflagging emphasis on the objective power of the Means of Grace. Whenever, wherever, and for whatever reason the Word is spoken or the Sacraments administered, there the Holy Spirit is at work

¹⁵ Article XI of the Formula of Concord is a good example--it recognizes that no system is able to untie the knot of election, providence, the universal Gospel, reprobation, and human accountability. To describe election in terms of its intended effect on the hearer instead of its own nature is anathema to an Aristotelian.

¹⁶ Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, pp. 293-407.

with all his power and grace. The call of the Gospel **always** strikes home in the heart. Their careful distinctions enabled them to precisely, and Scripturally, place the minister, the Spirit, the Word, and the will and reason of both the Christian and the unbeliever in their proper relationship to one another.

Unfortunately, their hatred for Calvinism also led to their greatest failure--the doctrine of election. One weakness of their method, as we have already seen in Melancthon, is that it tended to obscure paradoxes in a cloud of language. For the most part, the dogmaticians avoided this danger. Unlike the Reformed and Romans, they vehemently refused to let their system lead them where Scripture did not go. In their hands, in fact, a great strength of scholastic method was its assumption that truth comes to man from the outside in; he does not bring truth out from within him. They would simply follow each doctrine through, and let each stand side-by-side with the others. If there was any seeming inconsistency, they would generally point it out, find language to describe the extent of the mystery, and let it stand.

However, in the doctrine of election, they first of all did not go far enough in describing the mystery:

The orthodox Lutheran doctrine of predestination adhered to what might be called an imperfect, logically incomplete theory. The question of God's omnipotence was deliberately omitted in this context, which suggests that justice was not done to the ideas which Luther set forth in his *De servo arbitrio* [Bondage of the Will].¹⁷

The article on Free Will also failed to describe any relationship to election. The dogmaticians even made God's omniscience the basis for election, which is specifically denied in the Formula. Where they might even appear to agree with the Calvinists, they avoided saying anything. Rather, their treatment of election focussed almost exclusively on denying Calvinistic double predestination. As one might expect, then, errors of omission and distortion resulted.

The scholastic method of the dogmaticians is fraught with many grave dangers. In many cases their idea of causal nexus cannot be carried out, and in many other cases it must be supplemented. Sometimes when *mysteria fidei* are forced into it serious inconsistencies result.¹⁸

On the other hand, they went too far, and erred, in relating faith to election--they all taught that God elects us *intuitu fidei*. In men like Gerhard, Quendstedt, and Calov, it is clear that calling faith a "cause" of election did not mean they were Arminians. Their words on conversion make this clear. However, in Hollaz, whose dogmatics was published in 1707, original sin and concupiscence (man's love for evil and hatred of everything divine) are seriously eroded. Hollaz' work is Arminian. Eventually, the errors of omission and distortion in election led to errors in conversion, and quickly led people away from their confidence in the objective, always effective power of the Means of Grace.

As we shall see, this great failure deprived the orthodox of a much-needed weapon against Pietism. God's election is the ultimate ground of the fact that everything that has to do with our salvation comes from outside us. When Spener said, "Election does not cause man's steadfast remaining, but God elected only men who would remain steadfast," he was carrying the normally ironclad words of the dogmaticians to their only conclusion.

Over against the Catholics, of course, the dogmaticians spoke much of justification. One worthwhile distinction that is not found in them, but is certainly implied, is to speak of objective and subjective justification. (I believe this distinction is a fruit of the Election Controversy.)

Regarding both Catholics and the Reformed, we should also note that the orthodox Lutherans produced a huge amount of polemical literature, and engaged in more polemical preaching than we are accustomed to do. The best example

¹⁷ Hagglund, p. 316.

¹⁸ Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, p. xvi. In view of his excellent article, "The Doctrine of Election As Taught By the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians," reprinted in *Our Great Heritage*, I have no doubt that election is precisely what he had in mind when he wrote these words.

was Gerhard's *Confessio Catholica*, which proved Rome's folly from the lips of her own treasured church fathers and theologians.

Some of this polemical work was coarse in language. The dogmaticians, especially Calov, often drew unwarranted conclusions from the words of their adversaries. Men who made it a practice always to use words and terms in one way often did not realize their opponents might use terms differently than they did. (The vast majority of the dogmaticians' modern critics do the very same thing to them.)

The dogmaticians also contended with the Socinians. This anti-Christian cult, which had many followers in Poland and Eastern Europe, denied the Trinity and the Incarnation, but saved its biggest salvos for the utterly unreasonable and unfair, but nevertheless true, doctrine of the vicarious atonement. Everything Scripture said had to pass the test of human reason. The polemic here was especially (and deservedly) severe. One gets the idea that to the dogmaticians, attacks on the very heart of the Gospel were still shocking and brought deeply angered cries of "Blasphemy!!" to their lips. Most modern appraisals of these men deplore their harsh polemics. While we may regret the excesses, we should also commend a spirit ^{of} and love for God's Word that considered heresy and false doctrine unthinkable presumptuous. Perhaps we could stand to lose a few of our callouses in this regard.

The Syncretistic Controversy was primarily an inter-Lutheran affair. As the Thirty Years War dragged on and on, few understood that the war had long since lost whatever religious character it once had and had become a power struggle between France and the Hapsburgs. A number of voices asked, "How can people who all believe in the Bible fight so horribly over what it says? Can't we be reasonable and reconcile our differences?"

The most prominent of these voices belonged to George Calixtus. A professor at the University of Helmstedt, which had never adopted the Formula of Concord, Calixtus represented Lutherans at the Conference of Thorn, in Poland, in 1645. The conference hoped to forge a "peaceful coexistence" among Catholics, Lutherans, and the Reformed.

Calixtus' proposal for achieving it was quite simple. His *Quinquesaecularis* was the idea that the doctrines expounded in the first five centuries form the common basis of all churches. Therefore anyone who confesses them should be treated with recognition, tolerance, and Christian love. While the differences which had arisen since were of some importance (he did not propose an actual merger of the churches), Calixtus considered them quite secondary. As long as a doctrine did not influence people's behavior for the worse, it should be tolerated.

While the conference produced no agreement, Calixtus had tried to give away the farm. The most serious intra-Lutheran conflict between the Book of Concord and Pietism came where no WELS pastor should be surprised to find it--doctrinal indifference and its disastrous consequences for the doctrine of fellowship.

Calixtus introduced the distinction between fundamental and secondary articles of faith into Lutheran theology. He was the first "Lutheran" to make ethics a separate subject from dogmatics in the theological curriculum--doctrine, to him, just wasn't practical enough. When Calixtus died in 1656, the "Helmstedt school" continued his work. This may be part of the reason later orthodox polemic (especially Calov's) was so severe. The real goal may not have been to convert the heterodox as much as to show the orthodox how very serious the doctrinal differences were.

D. Church Life in Lutheran Germany, 1600-1675

Lutheran orthodoxy's careful dogmatic work, its polemic against Catholicism and Calvinism, the scandalous immorality of many of its members, and lack of mission endeavors have led many to label it "dead orthodoxy." Such charges reveal more about an author's bias than the facts of church history.

The apologetical and homiletical thunder directed against Reformed and Philippist alike was such as should have been reserved for the devil . . . [Lutheranism showed] pronounced ethical insensitivity . . . While the pastors were generally faithful to their

calling, their preoccupation with "right" belief often made their message weak and ineffective.¹⁹

Paul Gerhard grew up in the horrors of the war. He buried his wife and four of his five children in the grinding poverty that followed it. He knew the price of uncompromising orthodoxy. Yet when he represented Lutheranism at a union conference arranged by his Calvinistic prince, Elector Frederick William of Prussia and Brandenburg, he refused to compromise Lutheran doctrine. He also ignored a ban on anti-Calvinist polemics. When his behavior cost him one of Germany's most prestigious pulpits, the loss of income left him destitute for two years. Was he an ethically insensitive, ivory-tower polemicist, whose preoccupation with right belief made his message weak and ineffective?

What is all this life possesses, But a hand full of sand
That the heart distresses? Noble gifts that pall me never
Christ our Lord will accord To his saints forever.

Thou art mine; I love and own Thee. Light of Joy, ne'er shall I
From my heart dethrone Thee. Savior, let me soon behold Thee
Face to face--May Thy grace Evermore enfold me!²⁰

Who clings with resolution To Him whom Satan hates
Must look for persecution; For him the burden waits
Of mockery, shame, and losses, Heaped on his blameless head;
A thousand plagues and crosses Will be his daily bread.

From me this is not hidden Yet I am not afraid;
I leave my cares, as bidden, To whom my vows were paid.
Though life and limb it cost me And everything I own,
Unshaken shall I trust Thee, And cleave to Thee alone.²¹

Johann Heermann was a pastor in Koeben. The city was largely destroyed by fire and sacked four times by Catholic armies. He lost everything he owned and had to flee for his life several times. He conducted hundreds of funerals when the plague struck in 1631. Do these words from his hymn, "O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken" (1630) express an ivory tower faith unconcerned with sanctified living?

Yet unrequited, Lord, I would not leave Thee;
I will renounce whate'er doth vex or grieve Thee
And quench with thoughts of Thee and prayers most lowly
All fires unholy.

But since my strength will nevermore suffice me
To crucify desires that still entice me,
To all good deeds, oh, let Thy Spirit win me
And reign within me!

I'll think upon Thy mercy without ceasing,
That earth's vain joys to me no more be pleasing;
To do Thy will shall be my sole endeavor
Henceforth forever.

¹⁹ Stoeffler, *Rise*, p. 184.

²⁰ "Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?" *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 523.

²¹ "If God Himself Be For Me," TLH 528.

Whate'er of earthly good this life may grant me,
I'll risk for Thee; no shame, no cross, shall daunt me.
I shall not fear what man can do to harm me
Nor death alarm me.²²

We should also mention Martin Rinckart, who wrote "Now Thank We All Our God" in the depths of destitute poverty and plagues in 1636. Job had many, many rivals in the age of orthodoxy. While the more subjective tone of these hymns is sometimes seen as a retreat from the objective, doctrine-teaching chorales, to put words of faith and confidence on the lips of sheep being led to slaughter was an eminently practical response to the realities of their ministry--especially when we remember that illiteracy and shortages of hymnals often meant congregations memorized these hymns by rote.

Nor was their work limited to dogmatics and hymn writing. Gerhard wrote *Meditationes Sacrae* (*Sacred Meditations*), a devotional book so excellent that it was still being published and read in England as late as 1846. His *Schola Pietatis* (*Comments on Piety*), a detailed book of instruction on godly living, and Heermann's *Practica Pietatis* (*The Practice of Piety*), put the lie to a dead orthodoxy unconcerned with Christian living. Calov, who buried several wives and two dozen children, is often portrayed as a heartless scholastic who loved polemic for its own sake. Yet he always insisted he loved constructive theology far more; his *Biblia Illustrata* (a four-volume Bible with study notes) bears out his words.

Such work is evidence of a ministerium dedicated to bringing the Gospel they loved so deeply to their people. We cannot begin to comprehend the depth of faith and courage God gave such men. The orthodox Lutherans were not ivory-tower scholastics. Rather, they expounded truths they deeply believed in and strove to live by. By faith they served in the most difficult circumstances Lutheranism has ever faced. Our twentieth century minds may find the Aristotelian arrangement of their dogmatics thick, unappealing, and "impractical." Let him who risks death to serve his people and has lost "life, goods, fame, child and wife" for the sake of Christ, as they did, call them "impractical."

This is not to say that the church of this time had no serious problems; it certainly did. Caesaropapism was one. The clergy, who came from the lower classes, were often held in low regard.²³ Some nobles hired and fired pastors and professors at will, and arbitrarily interfered in church and theological affairs. They have justifiably been called "Protestant popes." In these state churches, church discipline was all but impossible; every citizen was a nominal member. The princes wanted it no other way, since they felt the church's job was to instill unity, integrity, and loyalty among the people. Many members attended services occasionally only to avoid legal penalties. The laity had no role and no rights in the work of their church. Nor did very many have the inclination or ability. Nobles generally administered the church through a consistory, a board of pastors and lawyers headed by his court chaplain. The chaplain was at times the noble's weak-willed tool, who would not condemn him for his sins or urge him to reconsider doubtful decisions. Nor did such a system make possible any kind of foreign mission work.

Before we condemn these men for a perceived lack of mission work, we should remember their circumstances. They lived in a landlocked, war-torn nation, cut off from the lost, dying world which the seagoing nations of Europe were exploring and colonizing. When Gerhard wrote that the Great Commission had already been fulfilled by the apostles,

²² "Oh Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken," TLH 143..

²³ Things in the Duchy of Wuerttemberg might serve as an especially horrible example. During the war its population dropped from 455,000 to 166,000. In 1636, there were exactly 2 horses and 1 cow in the entire District of Weinsberg, once a rich farming area. The desperately impoverished survivors worked to restore the land, only to see it plundered again by Louis XIV in 1688-1692. The Duke who took power in 1717 let his mistress run the government; she imposed crushing taxes so that the court could imitate the opulence of Louis XIV. The next Duke (1733-1737) was a Catholic, who raised taxes even more; the citizens lynched his revenue collector when he died. Before becoming a Pietistic Lutheran later in life, the third Duke raised taxes yet more, forced the peasants to work in slave labor gangs on several grandiose castles, and brutally crushed the faintest hints of opposition. Things were so bad that the records of the consistory repeatedly show requests for transfer from pastors due to the constant burglarizing of the parsonages.

we learn more about his limited knowledge of the world than his love for the Gospel. The dogmaticians undoubtedly believed that their systematic dogmatic work was the best way to "go into all the world," since for them "the world" meant Europe, Russia, Scandinavia, and "the places where the Turks are." They wrote in Latin--the international language of the day. They hoped and prayed that through their writings many would see the truth and reform their Catholic or Reformed churches. (We should remember that almost every European was nominally churchd.)

This was not as far-fetched as it might sound at first. After all, that's exactly what had happened just a century before. The Lutheran Reformation's greatest mission tool had been the printing press and Luther's books. While we may be saddened by the circumstances that so limited their vision, we should be very slow to blame them for it and decide that because they didn't have a Board for World Missions, they had never taken to heart the closing verses of the Gospels.

Another problem was the state of the clergy. Pastors were dreadfully underpaid; in rural areas they were expected to have secular employment--as a farmer, beekeeper, or brewer, or as a tutor or servant in the home of the local noble. With memberships running in the thousands, most were overworked just trying to preach, hear confession, and conduct funerals and weddings. Like us, there were things they wished they could get to but often didn't. During and after the war, catechism instruction and confirmation had fallen on hard times. In some places there was none, in others the children's attendance was quite sporadic and the instruction not always of high quality. Knowing the appalling ignorance of many of their nominal members, most pastors preached catechetical sermons during the week. The confessional was the only opportunity for individual admonition--and when the lines got long, that opportunity often vanished, too. I believe the Confessional Service in our hymnal dates from these years, as a compromise for those times when it was simply impossible for pastors to hear all the people's confessions before a communion service.

The quality of sermons is hard to judge. While by 1675 most pastors were university educated, we should remember the dreadful state of literature and letters in Germany at this time. Good writing was rare, and pastors who read poor writing tended to produce it. Men who learned their theology in Latin often had trouble getting the ideas to come out in German. Gerhard was not alone in using Greek, Hebrew, or Latin terms to add emphasis to his message. It probably didn't help that Gerhard's list of 12 different kinds of sermons was outdone by lists of over 100 kinds of sermons pastors should preach. Detailed descriptions of doctrines like the ubiquity of Christ's body made their way into technical, polemical sermons which soared over the heads of indifferently educated peasants. (Our sermons, of course, never go over listeners' heads.) On the other hand, when the next prince might switch his people's religion, such preaching did have very real, pastoral motives. There were no Bible classes where we usually address such subjects. It may also be that the published sermons which are extant exaggerate the number of such sermons.

Yet one critic of these men also pokes fun at a year-long series of sermons that portrayed Christ as various laborers. One of them spoke of Christ as a chimney sweep, divided into parts about the sweeper, flue, and broom (presumably Christ the Savior, man, and the Gospel). While no preacher is immune to some criticism, these men are often condemned for their complicated sermons and mocked for their simple ones.

The leaders of orthodox Lutheranism were aware of these problems and worked to overcome them. Gerhard, among others, was quite critical of the tendency to let polemics and scholarly doctrinal formulations overshadow the Gospel they were intended to protect. They knew, as we also do well to remember, the truth of J.P. Koehler's words, "It is legalism when the correctness of faith is stressed in such a way that the emphasis shifts from faith to correctness."

E. The Reform Party in Lutheranism

Throughout these years, there were a number of men who sharply criticized the established church for its tendency to stress abstract doctrine over genuine, living faith. One such man, we have seen, was Calixtus, who felt precise formulation of doctrine was silly and impractical for teaching "true Christianity."

Another even more powerful voice against the establishment was that of Johann Arndt (1555-1621), whom many consider the true father of Pietism. His *True Christianity* was wildly popular as devotional reading; it went through over 125 editions before 1800. In many devout homes, well-worn copies of the Bible and Arndt (and nothing else) sat above the mantle. His purpose in writing, he said, was to show "wherein true Christianity consists, namely, in the proving of

true, living, active faith through genuine godliness." Since the Gospel of Christ is "basic," (i.e. "everyone knows that already"), he almost exclusively stressed God's work in the individual, not Christ's work for him.

Because God is pure love, grace, righteousness, goodness, and mercy, man offends him by his sins.* By injustice we offend God's justice, for he is justice itself. By lies we offend God's truth itself. By hate we offend God's love*, for God is love itself. God is the highest eternal good, source of all virtue, and highest love.

He forgives us our sins when we sigh and he is always ready to receive us when we turn to him. He gave us his dear Son and the Holy Spirit, and he gives us himself. He is our Father and adopts us as his children. A penitent man therefore experiences a great fear of God's righteousness and judgments* which threaten him so seriously inwardly in his conscience and outwardly in plagues. Therefore man has neither peace nor rest. The whole world sours so that he can neither eat nor drink.* This threat is nothing else than the living sentence of God's righteousness in our consciences.

[Prayer] I bewail and confess with contrite and broken heart my shortcomings and misdeeds. O Lord! My sins are as many as the sands of the sea. But your mercy is vast, too, enduring from eternity unto eternity. Therefore be merciful to me for the sake of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.²⁴

Faith is a deep* assent and unhesitating* trust in God's grace promised in Christ and in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is ignited by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Through this faith we receive forgiveness of sins, in no other way than through pure grace without any of our own merits, but only by the merits of Christ. For this reason, our faith has a certain ground and is not unsteady*. This forgiveness of sins is our righteousness, which is true, continual, and eternal before God. It is not the righteousness of an angel but of the obedience, merit and blood of Christ and becomes ours through faith. Even if it is weak* and we are still hemmed around by many sins, these are covered over out of grace . . . [By this faith man] unites himself with God, is a participant of all that which is God and Christ, becomes one spirit with God . . . The consolation of living faith becomes powerful in the heart; it convinces the heart, in that one finds in one's soul heavenly goodness,* namely, rest and peace in God . . . [this faith] is a completely unhesitant certainty.²⁵

God did not reveal the Holy Scriptures so that they might externally on paper remain a dead letter, but that they might become living in us in spirit and faith and that a completely new inner man might arise. [If this does not occur], the Scriptures are of no use to us. This must occur in men through Christ in the spirit and faith as the Scriptures externally teach . . . The flood must occur in you . . . the faithful Noah must remain in you, God must make a new covenant with you and you with him . . . You must fight with Abraham against the five kings that are in you, namely, the flesh, the world, death, the Devil, and sin. You must leave Sodom and Gomorrah with Lot . . . In a word, God gave the whole of the Holy Scriptures in spirit and in faith and everything in them must happen to you spiritually. This is true as well of the battles of the Israelites against the pagan peoples. What is this other than the battle between the flesh and the spirit . . . In the New Testament as well, the letters are nothing other than an external witness to that which must occur in faith in all men . . . Note that faith does everything that makes the holy Word of God alive in

²⁴ Clouse, *The Church*, pp. 51-52. The asterisks mark sentences that demonstrate the points made in the discussion which follows these excerpts.

²⁵ Arndt, *True Christianity*, pp. 46-47.

you and it is a living witness of all which the Scriptures testify. Faith is a substance and essence (Heb. 11:1).²⁶

Just as our natural life has its steps, namely childhood, manhood, and old age, so also does our spiritual and Christian life. It, too, has its beginnings in repentance, by which man daily betters himself. Thereafter follows middle age, more illumination, through the contemplation of divine things, through prayer, and through suffering. By all of these the gifts of God are increased. Finally, the perfection of old age comes. It consists in the full union through love, which St. Paul called the perfect age of Christ and the perfect man of Christ (Eph. 4:13).²⁷

Notice the use of Gospel-preaching words to teach the law, insistence on certain experiences that prove faith genuine, allegorizing Scripture to make it "practical," repeated use of adjectives like **true**, **living**, **active** faith, **genuine** godliness, **full** union, **deep** assent, the constant repetition of "must," and the one-sided emphasis on growing faith at the expense of justification as a once-and-for-all, completed event. He also uses the term "regeneration" quite frequently--not to refer to one's baptism, but to his daily progress in sanctification.

Sadly, the second passage above is from one of Arndt's better devotions, entitled, "What True Faith Is." We pass by others with such titles as, "A Man Who Wishes to Grow and Mature in Christ Must Reject All Worldly Company." Furthermore, Book I of *True Christianity*, which is translated in the book available to me, is probably his best material. In the later books he borrowed heavily from Osiander (whose idea of infused righteousness, condemned in Article III of the Formula, is evident in the third quotation above), the medieval mystics, and the Jesuits. As one kind critic put it, when he read things he liked, "As long as there were no coarsely obvious errors, he used them."²⁸

Arndt was first the rallying point, later the father and hero, of a reform movement that remained as an undercurrent in Lutheranism throughout these years. These men deplored polemics and the dogmaticians' insistence that everyone accept their carefully worded doctrinal statements. Their main interest was in personal growth, Christian virtue and devotion. Polemical, intolerant defense of Lutheran doctrine against other denominations, which after all also included virtuous, devoted Christians, showed just how much reforming the church needed. One of them, Theophilus Grossgebauer, wrote *Voice of a Watchman out of Devastated Zion* (1660). "Devastated Zion" is the Lutheran church.

As we approach 1675, we note some very unhealthy trends. The long, drawn-out Syncretistic Controversy occupied the lion's share of leading theologians' time and energy. As any WELS pastor will understand, year-in, year-out battles over fellowship principles tend to sap the energy and patience of those who hold them. Too often the Gospel is missing from such discussions ("everyone **knows** that--we're talking serious theology now!"), even though the treasure of the Gospel alone breathes life into these principles, and is in fact what we seek to defend in the first place. "Holding the line" on fellowship can make pastors defensive, unbalanced in their teaching, and may lead to a legalistic party spirit. The truths we know by experience were very much a part of Lutheranism in the later 1600's.

Theology was not integrated. The later dogmaticians were strongly systematic, and exegesis did begin to give way to incisive logical definition of doctrinal problems. One symptom was that if the Confessions used a passage, its exegesis was limited to the meaning the Confessions saw in it. The weaknesses of the system began to show. Worse, some became "hyper-orthodox," and tended to look with suspicion at anyone who displayed too many fruits of faith, or was too happy or excited about his faith. They were over-specialized, and did not remedy their weaker areas by listening to those who had the corresponding strengths. The words "frazzled and a bit reactionary" aren't out of place.

²⁶ Arndt, pp. 47-50.

²⁷ Arndt, p. 221.

²⁸ Loescher, *Timotheus Verinus*, p. 17.

Those who wanted more sanctification and Christian living listened even less. They repeatedly wrote and spoke using terms borrowed from false teachers. This led to confusion--first in their readers, then in the writers themselves. They mocked "meaningless subdivisions of philosophy;" by which they meant the doctrine so carefully expounded by their brothers. Some felt that one could speak more freely in the pulpit than in the classroom, that language you couldn't use in a theological proof might be useful in urging Christian living. The end justified the means.

When theologians "specialize" as "expert in doctrine," or "expert in spiritual growth," they are dangerous. "Experts" tend not to listen to each other. "Experts in doctrine" may get lost in their own books and forget that doctrine is "useful . . . so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Sound doctrine is God's Word for real people in a real world. The "expert in spiritual growth," who uses what false teachers write "as long as there are no coarsely obvious errors," because "the pure doctrine we're so proud of isn't practical enough," this expert in growth has forgotten the goal of growing. "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of doctrine and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."

Cunning, craftiness, and deceitful scheming lie behind every word written by a false teacher--even the "good" ones only sugarcoat the lies. As we shall now see, even an "expert in doctrine" can be fooled. If we want **spiritual** growth, we must immerse ourselves in, and teach, pure doctrine, which alone will produce it, and will always produce it. If we want sound doctrine, we must always remember that if we are not writing and speaking to love and edify the church, even in time of controversy, then by definition our doctrine is not sound--even if it's technically correct.

II The Age of Pietism 1675-1750

A. Background

Why did the movement we call "pietism" burst like a storm upon Lutheranism? As we have seen, its basic tenets had been floating around for 75 years by the time Spener published *Pia Desideria*, which was not the first book to carry this title. Why did the seeds germinate when they did?

First, as we have seen in Melanchthon and again in the late dogmaticians, scholastic method tends to lose the freshness of Scripture. It tends to exalt the Christian's head over his heart, when in fact both are equally the objects of the Spirit's work. This leads others to exalt heart over head, which is no better.

Second, the intellectual and religious world changed profoundly while the dogmaticians weren't looking. While Germany was devastated by war and its aftermath, Newton explained motion, gravity, and thermodynamics, and Galileo proved once and for all that the earth is **not** the center of the universe. The first microscopes revealed an entire new world of tiny little creatures. Algebra and calculus equipped man's mind to further unlock the mysteries of how God usually does business. Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, and others revolutionized philosophy. Aristotle, who was the cutting edge in 1600, was quite quaint by 1675. All that systematic theology, which had been expressed in the most respected thought forms of the day, was now beginning to sound thick and foreign to its readers. Among the philosophers and intellectuals, Aristotle was actually regarded as the enemy. (I can find no source that indicates whether Melanchthon's bones turned over or not.)

The revolution in science impacted how people viewed man and God. The two ingredients of science, of course, are **empiricism** (observing and experimenting), and **rationalism** (using the power of the mind, which includes mathematics, to work out explanations for things on the basis of universal principles or axioms). In the early Enlightenment these two methods, though united in hard science, were separated into two schools of thought about man. Empiricists, mostly the ever-pragmatic British, thought that whatever is shown by experience to influence people for the better, and make them happy, is true and good. Rationalists' motto was coined by the Frenchman Descartes, "I think, therefore I am." They refused to believe anything--in Descartes' case even his own eyes--without an impeccably logical reason. They assumed that the human mind, which was after all rapidly unlocking "God's secrets," was by itself capable of figuring out whatever was really true. The most important problem here is that neither group wanted all its answers revealed from the outside--say, from God. The idea of objective truth about God and man had fallen on hard times. As these two kinds of thought filtered into a slowly recuperating Germany, they destroyed Lutheranism. Pietism is religious empiricism. Rationalism, obviously, is religious rationalism.

B. People and Events

Pietism was not an isolated movement. In Anglican England the Puritans, in the Netherlands and Spain the Catholic Jansenists and Quietists, and similar groups among the Reformed (especially the Arminians), sought to make religion more practical, less doctrinal and polemical. As we have already seen, Lutheranism resisted the weaknesses in the Arndtians and the Syncretists for many years. Spener changed that.

Dr. Phillip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) was a sober, serious man, who had been raised in a strictly religious home on a steady diet of Arndt and several Puritan writers. He would say in comparing Arndt to Luther, "It is by no means clear as yet through whose books God will be more effective."²⁹ During his university years, he travelled (as was customary), and in Switzerland was quite impressed by a Reformed preacher named Jean Labadie, whose fiery denunciations of immorality in the Reformed congregations eventually led him to separate from it and start his own church. Spener had intended to settle down to a quiet life as a professor, but received and accepted a call as Senior Minister in Frankfurt am Main in 1666, quite a vote of confidence in a man only 31 years old. He immediately began to upgrade catechetical instruction--a good thing, though we shall see it had some questionable motivation behind it.

In 1675, Spener's *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Desires*--not the first book from the church's critics to bear this title) became a runaway bestseller. Originally written as a foreword to an edition of Arndt's sermons, it quickly became the talk of Lutheran Germany. In it, after cataloguing a number of problems in the church, he laid out a 6-point plan for renewal:

- 1) More extensive use of the Bible in worship, in private, and in Bible study groups.
- 2) A more diligent practice of the priesthood of all believers--more lay involvement in the church.
- 3) "The people must have impressed on them . . . that it is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice."³⁰
- 4) Less polemics--more tolerance for those of different denominations and willingness to focus on their good ideas.
- 5) Theological education that couples learning with personal piety. ("Make the men at NWC behave better.")
- 6) Sermons which edify the heart and soul and have less scholarly language and polemics in them.

His book was timely, and was very well received by Calov, among others. Spener's moderate language, and his even-handed distribution of blame among laity, rulers, and clergy undoubtedly helped. This reminds us that the orthodox, whatever flaws they may have had, did not have their heads in the sand.

The fact of the matter is that the leading orthodox theologians were well aware of theology's practical purpose, just as they also commonly insisted on the improvement of morals and manners. Many of the strictly orthodox also reacted in a positive way to the recommendations for reform which Spener set forth in his *Pia Desideria*.³¹

But after it appeared, it became increasingly evident that Spener's proposals were not just outward reforms of a church that had the pure Word. Rather, pietism was a spirit, an attitude, which changed the whole goal of theology. These innocuous-sounding proposals brought an agenda and spirit with them that was foreign to Lutheranism.

In 1670 he had begun the first *collegia pietatis* in his home. The *collegia* were cell groups of his "most dedicated" members, which soon began to meet in other homes and in other Frankfurt congregations as well. After *Pia Desideria*,

²⁹ Arndt, p. xiii, quoted from Spener's *Theologische Bedenken*, 1700.

³⁰ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, p. 95. Note the false distinction between faith and practice.

³¹ Hagglund, p. 325.

the practice began to spread. The goal was to have laypeople read "good spiritual books" together--namely the Bible and devotional books by Arndtians and Puritans³²--to gain insight and encouragement for pious, godly living.

After his book appeared, Spener laid increasing emphasis on the cell groups. "If the church was to be renewed, he felt, a beginning would have to be made with the remnant of true Christians in every congregation. These had to be gathered and edified in private meetings in order that they might become a leaven to leaven the whole lump."³³

Problems soon arose. Cell group participants began to look down on "unspiritual" church members. Many of the cells became "gripe sessions." Following their flawed study materials, they bewailed the corrupt, unspiritual visible church, and began to wonder if it could even be salvaged; factionalism arose. Pastors found it difficult to exercise leadership and guidance when such ideas began to spread, because the uncalled, untrained group leaders commanded intense loyalty from their tight-knit, emotionally bonded groups, and were often unable to receive such praise and loyalty with humility. In some cases, these cell group leaders, who emerged as rival leaders in the congregations although no one had intended it that way, were women. Already here we see one of pietism's grave weaknesses. Scripture's objective standards for those who would lead in the church, even including gender, were all but laid aside. A "spiritual" layman, though uncalled and untrained, was a better teacher than an "unspiritual" pastor, even if he was called, qualified, and orthodox. This gross perversion of the priesthood of all believers quickly became a weapon against the public ministry.

By the early 1680's, in spite of Spener's pleas, some were even refusing to commune with "unspiritual people," and to receive the Sacrament from the "unspiritual pastors" who served it to such folk. Years later, Spener regretfully spoke about how intimate he had been with these people, how he felt like "a captain who had lost the rudder," about how good beginnings had been followed by a terrible decline among the members of the cells, and about how he had considered reports of trouble by his opponents (the "doctrine experts") slanderous--until it was too late.³⁴ In none of his later ministries did Spener ever use cell groups again.

In 1686 he was tired of controversy and impatient with lack of cooperation from the civil authorities in Frankfurt. (Frankly, after what his leadership had brought, he had little right to expect lack of controversy or a great deal of cooperation.) So he took a call to be court chaplain in Dresden, Electoral Saxony, where he stayed for five years. (During these years he met August Hermann Francke.) The Elector was not a church-going man (he made it 8 times during Spener's time there), and Spener also found it necessary to rebuke him for his drunkenness. It was not pleasant.

In 1691 Spener was called by the Calvinistic Elector Frederick III of Prussia and Brandenburg (crowned King Frederick I in 1701) as inspector of the Lutheran churches and preacher at St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. That Spener got this call was no accident. Frederick's father had removed Paul Gerhard from this very pulpit for his love of pure doctrine. Frederick, whose descendants would unite Germany, longed for a united protestant church. After the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, and the persecution of the Huguenots (the Calvinistic French middle class) began, Frederick settled thousands of them in his territories. Lutheran and Reformed churches would now coexist in Frederick's lands. The Prussian Union in 1817 was the culmination of work that had already begun over a century before.

Frederick considered Spener his kind of Lutheran, and gave him unqualified support for carrying out his reform ideas. Even more important, he gave Spener and Christian Thomasius, who was exiled from Leipzig in 1690 during the pietistic upheavals associated with Francke, the task of starting a new university in Halle. Founded as a conscious alternative to strict Lutheran orthodoxy, it became the headquarters of Pietism. During the process of starting it, the pietists who formed the first faculty succeeded in destroying the ministry of the local pastor, Albrecht Rothe, who dared to stand

³² Many, many translations of English Puritan books were widely read in Germany. Spener and Francke owe a great deal of their theology to such authors.

³³ Spener, p. 19.

³⁴ Quoted in Loescher, p. 19.

up and speak against their doctrine. Gag orders from the Berlin consistory (i.e. Spener) that prevented publication of Rothe's tracts, and other gross uses of political power ensured the outcome.³⁵

Spener spent the rest of his days editing and publishing his extensive correspondence, and vacillating between hope for his movement and sorrow over the excesses his followers were indulging in. To his dying day, he considered himself a confessional, orthodox Lutheran. Those who attacked his vacillating doctrine he considered disturbed, unenlightened extremists.

August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) was the systematizer and popularizer of Spener. As a boy, his mother had his sister read to him from the Bible, and at age 11 gave him a private room in the house where he was to study and pray. As a student in Leipzig in 1684, he attended the *collegium philobiblicum*, which was begun by Professor Carpzov as an opportunity for students to gather for exegesis. Spener (who was at Dresden) then suggested that this be changed into a more devotional atmosphere, where difficult passages were avoided in favor of reading and applying the Bible to life. Here we notice the pietistic tendency to elevate Law over Gospel, and use the Bible first and most as a source-book for learning how to live as a Christian.

After graduating, he was preparing to preach a sermon and was consciously trying to make that sermon edifying and uplifting. His text was John 20:31, "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," surely a text that speaks of the Bible as objective truth. Yet he writes:

[I intended to speak] about a true, living faith and how such a faith is to be distinguished from a mere human and imagined faith in the sense of assent to the truth . . . I began to realize that I did not have the kind of faith for which I was asking . . . In such great fear I went down upon my knees again and implored the God whom I did not yet know and whom I did not believe that, if there really is a God, he should save me from this wretched condition. Then the Lord, the living God, as I was still upon my knees, heard me upon his holy throne . . . Even as one turns his hand, so all my doubts were gone. In my heart I was assured of the grace of God in Jesus Christ . . . I was suddenly overwhelmed by a flood of joy . . . Upon standing up I was minded entirely differently from the way I had been when I knelt down. That, then, is the time which I may really regard as my true conversion, for from that time on my Christianity had substance. From that time on it was easy to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously and joyfully in this world.³⁶

After his conversion experience, he stayed with Spener in Dresden for several months, and then returned to Leipzig as an instructor. His classroom lectures attracted students by the hundreds. His teaching led them to quit attending their dogmatics and philosophy classes. He turned Carpzov's exegetical *philobiblicum* into a German language devotional group, to which laypeople were admitted. The laypeople were forming independent cell groups completely outside the church within a year. People began having visions and conversion experiences, trying to attain what Francke had. Several people we would label out-and-out pentecostals came to town. Spener, court chaplain of Saxony, timidly tried to restrain these goings on, in effect saying that things had gotten a bit out of hand.

Eventually the government stepped in and forbade all cell groups. Francke, Thomasius, and J.C. Lange were expelled from Leipzig for their disorderly *Schwarmerei*. Francke then went to Erfurt, where Justus Breithaupt ordained him. Professor Carpzov, who became one of pietism's staunchest opponents after seeing its fruit first-hand, soon got both of them dismissed from their ministries, but not before they tried to get the Lutheran school teacher to stop teaching

³⁵ Read Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 58-61. For information Stoeffler omitted regarding the validity of Roth(e)'s concerns, cf. Loescher, pp. 22, 59.

³⁶ Stoeffler, *German*, pp. 11-12.

that it is impossible to keep God's Law. By this time, Spener and Thomasius had received appointments in Berlin. Francke, Thomasius, Lange, and Breithaupt formed the nucleus of the faculty at the University of Halle.

From the early 1690's on, the church was in constant uproar and turmoil. City after city experienced upheavals like those in Leipzig. The controversy between the pietists and the orthodox was vicious. In 1695 the orthodox faculty in Wittenberg published a document accusing the pietists of 285 doctrinal errors. We shall take up the doctrinal issues presently. By 1720 few orthodox voices remained; Ernst Valentin Loescher's was the most prominent. This non-polemical, peace loving man had a sincere love for pure doctrine and for Christian living. Yet even his balanced, fair *Unschuldige Nachrichten* ("Innocent News," the first theological newspaper) was eventually banned by the Prussian government for its stand against the Pietists.³⁷

The spirit of the times and the increasingly powerful Prussian government (after Frederick I came Frederick the Great), were on the pietists' side. Francke was a gifted administrator and a tireless worker. Thousands of pastors received unsound theological training and took calls throughout Germany. Halle had an orphanage, where children from all over Germany were brought and educated from infancy on. At his death, 2200 children were being cared for. Canstein, a wealthy businessman, started a Bible society there, where millions of Bibles and other literature were printed and distributed. By 1800 over 60 Halle missionaries had gone overseas to India, Greenland, and America.

Where did the money for all this work come from?

In order to bring the undertaking to the attention of the moneyed classes of Europe he wrote his *Fusstapfen*, in which he reported the gifts that kept coming in. Through his charitable undertakings he has supplied Pietism with the prototype of all future so called "faith" ventures, as well as with the model for the vivid expectation of concrete answers to prayer . . . [Stoeffler admits there was] too much emphasis on cultivating the favor of the very rich and powerful so as to be able to support the poor.³⁸

He felt it was the joint responsibility of European Protestantism to bring the Gospel overseas. When the English were looking for chaplains to send to India, he did not hesitate to send Halle men, who would conduct Anglican or Lutheran services upon request. While we should not denigrate his love for practical Gospel and mission work, we should recognize it was possible only because Francke had few, if any, fellowship scruples. In fact, Pietists and Anglicans worked so closely together that when the Georges, from pietistic Hanover, became kings in England, there was serious talk of, and initial plans for, an organic merger.

Much could be added here, but this should supply us with an outline of the people and events of these years.

C. The Theology of Pietism

Pietism's symptoms are easy to list, but the spirit of pietism is devilishly hard to define. Reading pietistic material was, to the orthodox, like hearing an out-of-tune piano. The song is still recognizable. If you point out that the song doesn't sound right, most people will think you're nitpicky. It's hard to know just what's wrong, but the careful listener knows something isn't right.

The essence of Pietism cannot be completely identified with socially perceptible forms. If . . . Calvinism is a spirit this can be asserted with even more justification of Pietism. It had no one system of theology, no one integrating doctrine, no

³⁷ Several sources listed in the bibliography seem to think he gradually lost interest in the pietist controversy and turned his attention to the rising tide of rationalism instead. But one source I cannot locate again referred to the decree which muzzled him.

³⁸ Stoeffler, *German*, p. 37.

particular type of polity, no one liturgy, no geographical homogeneity. Yet . . . it presented a discernible historical unity.³⁹

Pietists hated formalism. Spener called his efforts nothing less than a second reformation--to him and his followers (who called him the "new Luther,") the troubles in the church in 1675 were just as serious as those Luther faced in 1517. While in Luther's day justification needed to be stressed over sanctification, pietists felt that now sanctification needed the same kind of emphasis. What they considered rigidity, excessive polemics, and too much reliance on external forms were just as serious to them as doctrinal disaster was to the orthodox. They were deathly afraid, of course, that religion was no longer personally meaningful, because it was too formal and objective.

For this reason, pietists called the confessional (*Beichtstuhl*) the "Devil's Chair" (*Satanspfuhl*). They felt that repeating the confession of sins and receiving absolution was an outward form that merely hardened people in their unbelief, because it did not do anything in them. They hated the liturgy for the same reason--especially the idea that a minister could announce forgiveness of sins to the whole congregation with a general absolution. Scholastic expressions of doctrine they called, "lifeless," "the husk without the kernel," (note the Calvinistic division between "outward" and "inward"), and worse. Many of them even hated the name "Lutheran," because it implied that a certain set of objective doctrines was more important for judging the churches than the lives of their members. To them, confession of faith was first of all a person's life, second (and less importantly) his doctrine. Eventually, this stress on a person's life led to separatism, as we have seen in the Frankfurt conventicles.

So long as the redeemed, converted, regenerated or pious were unidentifiable, these Pietist beliefs led toward the invisible church--the true church in the midst of the actual, visible church. But as soon as it was felt that such people could be identified by outward marks, this stress on the invisible was transformed into a definition of the visible as something other than just the Lutheran church of that day. For this reason early Pietism was accused of the Anabaptist error of identifying the true invisible church with a separate visible community. In theory both Spener and Francke denied such charges; in practice Francke, with his greater stress on the experiential aspects of conversion, was instrumental in leading Pietism in this direction.⁴⁰

We see here a new approach to faith that typifies the Enlightenment. Personal experience, not the Word, is the ground of certainty. "If it works, if it gets results, it's good. If it doesn't, it's bad." What works or not, of course, is in the eye of the beholder. This is why the pietists believed that only a regenerate Christian can teach God's Word effectively--a hypocritical minister could do little good for any of his hearers, even if he preached orthodox doctrine. How could he testify to and teach the experience that made faith "come alive?" They believed it is possible for a person to know and believe everything the Bible says, without being truly converted in his heart. As we saw in the horrible uncertainty preceding Francke's "conversion," this teaching destroys confidence in the Means of Grace, which are **always** effective. Only the *Busskampf*--the long, heartfelt anguish over sin, followed by *Wiedergeburt*--being born again through a subjective conversion experience, can prove that someone **really** believes. (*Wiedergeburt* was the theme for the first 62 sermons Spener preached in Berlin.) Here lie the seeds for existentialism--"It's not God's Word because it's true. It's God's Word when it becomes true for you."

This is why Spener, for example, believed that doctrinally weak literature could help people grow in faith, and had some value in the church. If a person thought it helped them grow, it did help them grow; if it was bringing outward results, this was proof that the material was good. This is why, even when blatant false doctrine and enthusiasm were evident, Spener found it hard to condemn them. This is why the pietists quickly tired of the "details" of doctrine. The pietists didn't understand that "growth" which does not come from sound doctrine is illusionary. False doctrine, even weak doctrine, feeds man's *opinio legis*, or at least is not killing it. To put it another way, the pietists didn't understand that

³⁹ Stoeffler, *Rise*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, p. 46.

the outward fruits they valued so highly can be fruits of faith--or fruits of a work-righteous, legalistic spirit that has not grasped the Gospel.

[The orthodox felt that pietism] elevated experiential piety, personal assurance, and a high moral and devotional life, in practice if not in theory, to the rank of saving graces. For men whose thought moved within the *simul iustus et peccator* (the believer is at once justified and a sinner) paradox of Luther, such a theology was seen as a return to a concept of justification based on merit . . ." ⁴¹

All of this rippled through their theology. Spener to his dying day, and even Francke, insisted they were orthodox Lutherans. They subscribed to the Symbols. When pressed on a doctrine, they could and did speak the right words much of the time. But in both, we can see serious weaknesses and shortcomings.

Pietists confused justification and sanctification.

Although Spener was formally orthodox in his doctrine, his greatest interest was not in orthodoxy of doctrine. Instead, the emphasis of his ministry moved toward practice. *Gottseligkeit* (godliness), one of the favorite words of the Pietists, triumphed over dogma . . . All knowledge, all learning, is dead and useless, as long as it does not impart true life to the heart, or promote the cause of practical Christianity.⁴²

Spener could even say that justification "must always be continued, as if it were a steadily continuing act."⁴³ This is because to the pietists, faith is not just the organ that receives God's forgiveness. Man's justification is not outside him, it is within him. They confused growing in faith for faith itself. They confused the results of faith and salvation with their cause. They forgot that faith looks to Christ to answer the question, "Does God love me," not to itself, seeking to answer the question, "Do I love God?"

For this reason, pietism also **insisted that there are different levels or kinds of Christians.** Sermons were designed to teach something to the false believers, something to the newborn, and something to the "spiritual"--in modern language, "disciples." Late pietism could see as many as 17 different levels of dedication, and was perfectly happy to pigeonhole people into them.

Pietism minimized the power of the Means of Grace.

Spener and Francke often made the efficacy and understanding of Scripture dependent on the religious and moral dispositions of its scholars and preachers. Spener reasoned that the Holy Spirit does not work automatically in the Scriptures but instead becomes effective only under certain conditions. Scripture is in itself true and powerful, but it only becomes so for the individual who lets the Spirit rule by beginning Biblical exegesis with prayer, meditating on God's truth, and attempting to lead a holy life. Consequently, Spener inferred that only the regenerate can understand spiritual matters; the external sense of the Scriptures can be apprehended in only a natural way, but the deep internal meaning can only be understood with the aid of the Spirit, who enlightens the mind.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Orb, *Pietists--Selected Writings*, p. 6.

⁴² Brown, pp. 84-85.

⁴³ Brown, p. 96.

⁴⁴ Brown, p. 70.

[The preacher's] own heart must be warmed, or his sermons will be apt to be cold and lifeless, and therefore unprofitable and fruitless.⁴⁵

In other words, the Word is efficacious, but we are more or less effective preachers of the Word.

Pietism's goal was "Das Wort Gottes reichlich unter uns zu bringen," "to bring the Word of God among us richly."⁴⁶ Here we see the Calvinistic idea of the inner and outer Word. "Since the letter is examined only for the sake of the Spirit of the Sacred Oracles, we should condemn what cannot be reduced to some useful purpose . . ." To pietists, the Word of God is not necessarily richly present among those who have pure doctrine. The presence of the Word (or the **real, inward Word**) is judged by the results it brings in the lives of the members and the outward health of the church.

The sacraments are conspicuous by their absence. Especially after Spener, while lip service was paid to baptismal regeneration, in fact pietists assumed everyone fell out of baptismal grace, and had to be re-converted (experience and all) later in life. For this reason the pietists revived the confirmation vows. The words in our agenda which speak of renewing for oneself the promises made at baptism are a holdover from pietism's demand for a personally meaningful conversion experience.

Francke also spoke at times of baptism as a means toward the new life . . . he treated baptism as being both a gift and a responsibility, a sign of God's promise as well as an occasion for self-examination . . . the baptized infant finds himself in a relation of special divine solicitude, which, however, never precludes the absolute necessity of a personal decision for God either on the part of a child or an adult. At some point in the maturation of the individual, personal faith must be added to baptism.⁴⁷

While . . . Francke did not depart from the Lutheran concept of the real presence, he speaks of it only rarely. His overriding concern was the effect of a Christian's participation on his own psyche. In order that this subjective effect may be as fruitful as possible he counselled frequent communion and intense personal preparation for it.⁴⁸

What God promised is present in the Supper was not nearly as important as the effect it had on a person. In time, communion didn't "work" well enough, and was frequently relegated to four of the year's church services.

Pietism **taught that man can be receptive to the Gospel**. According to Spener, in every person is *das göttliche Licht* ("the godly light") which gives us the power to distinguish the ways of God from the ways of the flesh. This natural light prepares people to recognize the truth when they hear it. When they hear the Gospel, the natural light leads them to realize that the Gospel gives them what they have been longing for. In his sermons Francke frequently speaks of repentance and faith in the same sentence. The reason is that to him, both are a human response to divinely offered grace. In both Christians and unbelievers, the external Word is only effective in a heart which prepares to receive it. Of itself then, the Word doesn't really have the power to convert. While he quotes with approval Luther's insistence on faith as a gift of God, he treats it as something for which man has the real responsibility.

Francke tends to speak more of the new birth than of justification. The reason is that the emphasis here is not so much on the forgiveness of sins as it is upon a new

⁴⁵ Brown, p. 56.

⁴⁶ Brown, p. 68.

⁴⁷ Stoeffler, *German*, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Stoeffler, *German*, p. 22.

life which ensues. "Thus the new birth must be a real birth," he says, "and it must initiate within us something that is real and true." The certainty of forgiveness, which was of such over-riding significance to Luther, is assumed, of course, and in Lutheran fashion the new life is treated as a gift of God's free grace. Yet at this point also Francke's pastoral concern led him to put primary emphasis on man's responsibility to take hold of this gift. For this reason he occasionally used a term borrowed from Christian mysticism, namely *Durchbruch* . . . [which] puts the accent upon man's need to open himself to God's gracious influences.⁴⁹

Pietists confounded Law and Gospel.

In emphasizing equally the Law and the Gospel Francke unwittingly departed from Luther, however, and approached the Calvinistic tradition . . . Without the hammer of the Law, he felt, the sinner tends to overlook God's *Gnadenstunden* [special times when God is knocking at the door of one's heart], and without the Law the Christian cannot know what the conditions of the new life are intended to be. For these reasons Francke was able to rejoice in the Law as well as in the Gospel.⁵⁰

Pietists were **millennialistic**. They were sure that people would be able to grow out of committing intentional sins, and that in general things looked much better for the future of the church than the past. This led many to full-blown millennialism; others were just quite optimistic about the church's coming glory days on earth. Both inward and outward growth were fruits they expected more than prayed for. The years to come did not exactly bear out their hopes.

Pietism, finally, was **pragmatic**. The end justified the means.

The basic theological concern was no longer *reine Lehre* [pure doctrine] but *das Nutzliche*, or that which has immediate relevance for the Christian life. Lives changed, a church renewed, a nation reformed, a world evangelized [were Francke's goals] . . . Theologizing, therefore, was of interest to him only insofar as it served to orient the Pietistic movement toward those ends.⁵¹

All theology is oriented toward the end that man may regain, first of all, the divine image . . . [which is the] spiritual affections of a regenerated person, i.e., the stirrings caused by the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind, as well as in the understanding and will of such a person, which prove effective in this, that God is rightly known and honored.⁵²

To summarize, then, the spirit of pietism expressed itself in a vast number of ways. But had Luther been alive to see it, he would probably have said two things. First, pietism is a theology of glory, not a theology of the cross. It insists that Christian faith, if it is genuine, will be visible because the Christian will live a certain kind of life, and have certain kinds of experiences. Like the Pharisees, it even invented new rules to help make it easier for faith to make itself visible--to the pietists, there were no *adiaphora*. (Francke even forbade "frivolous playing" at his orphanage.)

Second, Pietism turned the Christian's eyes away from the great, saving God of Scripture, who revealed himself as God and man, and died on the cross once and for all. Rather, more and more, people's eyes were turned inward, to examine

⁴⁹ Stoeffler, *German*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Stoeffler, *German*, pp. 16-17.

⁵¹ Orb, pp. 6-7.

⁵² Stoeffler, *German*, p. 46, quoting the introduction to a pietistic dogmatics text.

their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences as they sought a certain answer to the question, "Do I love God," instead of basking in the news of the Gospel, "God loves me." The motive for Bible study was "personal growth" more than coming to know better the great, rich salvation God has given us. As for the great doctrines of the faith--the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, Objective Justification, the Forgiveness of Sins as an object of faith instead of observation--well, "everyone knows those are important. But we need to be practical." When Lutherans stopped believing that only the message of God's saving acts in history is practical, that through this message alone the Spirit always, always works, the decline was inevitable. Pure doctrine is not just a set of abstract principles we need to get right. Pure doctrine is all the church has, because only it puts us in touch with the Savior.

Learning the Lessons of History

"The only thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history," one wag has said. We are members of a church body which has quite consciously seen itself as the "banner-carrier" of orthodox, confessional Lutheranism throughout this author's lifetime. If we are to evaluate our own doctrine and practice in light of history and especially of Scripture, we must begin by looking at the environment in which we find ourselves proclaiming the Gospel.

The religious world is thoroughly possessed by the twin spirits of pietism and rationalism. The starkly honest *Christian Dogmatics* (ELCA) denies the Apostle's Creed *in toto*; some pastors in that body no longer wish to baptize in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, preferring the feminized formula "Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier." The ELCIC communes infants, because it has reduced the Lord's Supper to a socialist object lesson about sharing food with all.

How difficult is it for us to look orthodox in comparison to such horrors? It is far too easy for us to pat ourselves on the back when we look at such things, to shake our heads at the sins of others, and become smug, even pharisaic, in our orthodoxy. How easy it is to consider ourselves superior, "because we have pure doctrine." We easily forget Paul's words, "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but . . . God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant . . . **Through God's mercy** we have this ministry . . . we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God, and not from us." We're just clay jars, in whom a recklessly gracious God has stored his treasure.

The road to apostasy, history shows us, is pietism. Apostasy begins when preaching the Gospel, which brings us Christ's forgiveness in the foolishness of Word, water, wine, and bread, is our means to our end, not our end in and of itself. Empiricism, our inborn belief that God's work must be visible in terms of this life, always seeks to dethrone faith, which trusts that "Our life is hidden with God in Christ." We Christians live with our eyes on eternal, not ephemeral glory.

Is the WELS immune to trouble? Hardly. Pastor James Langebartels was motivated to translate Loescher's anti-pietistic work, *Timotheus Verinus*, after one of the brothers in his conference revealed his belief in millennialism and other pietistic errors.

Pastor Paul Prange writes of a WELS pastor who said, before presenting a talk on using Serendipity Bible study materials in WELS churches, that true koinwnia can only come when there is gut-level communication in a small group. He writes, "When questioned as to where the Means of Grace play in, the pastor responded, 'Oh yes, and it's all based on the Word of God. There, are we orthodox now?'"⁵³

A 2-page article about baptism in the Northwestern Lutheran⁵⁴ was silent about justification; the closest it got to the objective promise of forgiveness is, "Baptism washed all that negative living away with the sin that prompted it." Where does the emphasis lie--in forgiveness, or in a positive life? This is the difference between the orthodox and pietistic understandings of baptism.

⁵³ Prange, Endnote 30.

⁵⁴ September 1, 1991

The author, at a workshop on Youth Ministry, heard a WELS pastor make and defend the statement, "Young people have heard the Gospel all their lives. They're tired of it. They need to learn how to live their faith better. They want and need the Law."

Professor James Tiefel reports receiving a service folder from a WELS mission festival with the following absolution:

In the name of God, our loving Lord, I announce forgiveness to each of you who has honestly confessed your sins, earnestly repented of them, and truly accepts Jesus as your Savior and Lord.⁵⁵

This conditional absolution, which makes forgiveness depend in part on our honesty, earnestness, and truthfulness rather than on God's grace, was mailed to him with a recommendation for use in the new WELS hymnal.

Professor Paul Eickmann writes:

In an effort to be down-to-earth and practical, it seems to me that some of our newer Seminary graduates preach the law very clearly, but with the sanctification of the church in view . . . They may feel that the preaching they themselves have heard from my generation of pastors did not do full justice to the important place of sanctification.⁵⁶

And the list could go on. Do we believe, or do we not believe, that the Gospel which God brings in Word and Sacrament is the only means by which God creates and strengthens faith--the only thing that causes the church to grow? Do we believe that "It is not as though God's Word had failed," (Romans 9:6), even when people reject it?

I know we do. But sometimes we are giving in to the temptation to overlook the "obvious," Law and Gospel in all their truth and purity, in order to look for ways to "prepare" people to hear them, so that they will be "receptive." We sometimes forget that our Confessions reject the statement, "God draws, but he draws the willing,"⁵⁷ and condemn the party which taught so many centuries ago already that "Although man cannot from his own powers fulfill God's command, or truly trust in God . . . nevertheless he still has so much of the natural powers left before regeneration as to be able to prepare himself to a certain extent for grace, and to assent, though feebly."⁵⁸ Before conversion, no one, ever, in any way, is receptive to the Gospel. "The natural mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's Law, nor can it do so. The mind controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

All this is wrapped up in the often abused word, "pietism." Pietism was an anti-intellectual, anti-liturgical "let's get away from all the wrangling about doctrine and be practical" movement in Lutheranism that robbed us of everything we are and believe. Much of the damage came when Lutheran pastors read too many books about sanctification and conversion written by the Reformed, and put the resulting weak, but "practical," devotional materials in the hands of the laity.

We are reading an awful lot of those books today. Do these words, almost 300 years old, describe us at times? "As long as there were no coarsely obvious errors, he used them." In what areas are legalism and poor expression of the Gospel more likely to do damage than in sanctification, where applying Law and Gospel is very difficult, and evangelism, where we deal with the doctrines of original sin, free will, election, conversion and the Means of Grace?

⁵⁵ Tiefel, "A Mailbag Absolution," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Winter, 1992, p. 67.

⁵⁶ Eickmann, "Sola Fide," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Summer, 1989, pp. 187-188.

⁵⁷ Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article II.

⁵⁸ Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article II.

Perhaps we're just a little afraid that Law and Gospel, applied rightly, all by themselves, won't work in the hearts of our people and the hearts of the unbelievers we hope to reach. We have said far too often, "The Word is always efficacious, but we are more or less effective preachers of the Word." This idea carries with it the very real danger of making our trust in the power of the Gospel merely hypothetical, ("God's Word is efficacious, but whether or not it actually works depends on us,") instead of the truth around which our entire ministry is built.

Such language is only useful as Law, to work in the heart of pastor and evangelist repentance for sins of omission in preparing to do their work. Repentance then seeks Christ's forgiveness. Where? In the Scriptures and the Sacraments. When we hear those words, we don't go out and ask the heterodox how to be more effective, seeking yet more law and method by which to appease our feelings of inadequacy. Instead, we go to the Scriptures, asking God how to be forgiven. The Gospel which forgives our sin and strengthens our faith then motivates us to treat his Word better as we prepare to preach it--as a way of glorifying him, not because we're afraid God's Word won't work. God's Word **always** works. "Through God's mercy we have this ministry. Therefore we do not lose heart." God has chosen to use us, weaknesses and all, to do his work. In fact, our weaknesses are part of his plan. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." The Means of Grace are so powerful that they even work in the kingdom of Antichrist. God's mighty Spirit will work through us. That is the Gospel which corresponds to the Law's pronouncements to preachers of the Word.

Brothers, let's be careful. The idea that we are so orthodox we can safely and unerringly weed out crafty falsehoods in book after book is itself a pietistic boast. Some of the things that are being said and done in our midst are making the "nervous needle jump right off the meter"⁵⁹ in many a WELS pastor's heart--including many far older and wiser than your essayist. The essence of pietism is doubt that the Means of Grace are always, always effective, regardless of who administers them. The essence of pietism is that we should then look for proof that they are indeed working, and find methods that yield the kind of proof we're looking for. Pietism says, "seeing is believing."

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do **not** see." "Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, **where and when it pleases God**, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake." (Augsburg Confession, Article V)

⁵⁹ Pastor Kurt Koeplin, "The WELS Today." *Christian News*, 9/28/92, p. 22.

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