

FROM SPENER TO STANLEY: EXPLORING PIETISTIC THEMES IN MODERN
AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

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ABSTRACT

The Pietist movement that took place among German Lutherans in the 17th century was predicated on a turning inward. Pietists saw moral improvement as the goal of Christianity, and focused on Christ in us rather than Christ for us. The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent the spirit of Pietism has pervaded American Evangelicalism. In this paper, Andy Stanley is used to represent Evangelical theology. A report of his sermons and books is presented. The conclusion reached is that Stanley's theology holds many similarities to the theology of Pietism. Stanley has a tendency to emphasize the advancement of personal piety in the life of the believer over forgiveness won for the believer through the work of Jesus. The danger of this emphasis is that it directs the attention of his audience to themselves, rather than to God and his love demonstrated in Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Pietistic. It is a word that can effectively end any conversation among confessional Lutherans. No one wants to be known as a Pietist (even if they fail to understand exactly what it means). *Pietist* has become a dirty word in many circles. The implication is that those who embrace pietistic teachings and tendencies have distanced themselves from Bible-based Lutheranism.

The word *pious* by itself does not normally carry negative connotations. A pious person is simply someone who lives an upright and respectable life. All Christians should strive to be pious. Why is it, then, that labeling someone a Pietist can serve as an insult?

Many Lutherans have a vague understanding that a Pietist is somehow preoccupied with living a holy life to the extent that it takes over his thinking and theology. He is more focused on strict observance of rules than on anything else. He holds himself in high regard and looks down on those who do not live up to his standards. A Pietist is a legalist, a hypocrite, a Pharisee.

But is this a fair assessment of Pietism? How close are these caricatures of the movement to the reality? To answer these questions will be the first goal of this paper. It is my hope that the reader would gain a basic understanding of the main teachings of Pietism. While the themes of Pietism have been around for millennia, the main group that was known by the moniker *Pietists* sprang out of Lutheranism in 17th century Germany. Many different offshoots came from this stem, but for our purposes we will exclude the later evolutions and focus solely on the original group. By examining its causes, leaders, and main points of theology, we will determine how the flower of pietism grew in Lutheran Germany.

In the second half of the paper, we will seek to assess the prevalence of Pietism in 21st century American Christianity. Specifically, we will search for Pietism in Evangelicalism. The reason for this focus is not that Lutheranism is completely void of Pietism (in fact, this study should allow us to diagnose Pietistic tendencies in our own circles.) Rather, we zero in on Evangelicalism because of its widespread reach over American Christianity. Due to its sheer size and frequent use of media to carry its messages to a large public audience, Evangelicalism is the natural choice for a study on generic Christianity. We will study basic Evangelical theology and find similarities and differences between 17th century German Lutheran Pietism and 21st century American Evangelicalism.

My hope is that by gaining an understanding of the similarities between Pietism and Evangelicalism we can have a clearer picture of how we Lutherans should view popular Evangelical preachers. If there is an abundance of similarities between the two movements, Lutherans should be wary of consuming Evangelical content in the form of books, podcasts, music, and sermons. Pietistic theology is similar to Lutheran theology in many ways, but its differences are important and dangerous. As we will see, Pietism tends to distract people from God's grace and the love he has shown them in Christ Jesus. Evangelical preaching and teaching has a strong tendency to do the same. Because it turns the Christian away from God and directs his attention elsewhere, 21st century Evangelicalism has the same spirit as 17th century German Lutheran Pietism.

PART I: THE HISTORY OF PIETISM

The Soil for Pietism is Prepared

Pietism did not originate in a vacuum. Like any other religious movement, many factors, both in society and in the church, fostered the conception and the rise of Pietism. The flower of Pietism was able to bloom and flourish because the soil in which it grew was rich and fertile. In order to fully understand Pietism, we must be familiar with the setting in which Pietism made its beginning.

Secular

Any study of life in 17th century Germany must begin by addressing the effects of the Thirty Years' War. Ronald Feuerhahn proposes that "the main causes of Pietism are undoubtedly to be found in the conditions following the Thirty Years' War."¹ As its name indicates, this conflict spanned three decades and wreaked havoc on European society. In his essay, "Present-Day Pietism," E.W. Wendland quotes Professor M. Lehninger:

Germany had been the broad battlefield upon which Germans, Swedes, Frenchmen, Spaniards, and other nationalities had rendezvoused and waged war for more than a quarter of a century. As an aftermath, Germany lay prostrate, bleeding from a thousand wounds. The communal life of the nation was disorganized. Many people had been killed, soldiers and civilians alike, while villages lay desolate, its inhabitants having either fled or having died in the plagues which were ravaging the country. Orphaned children roamed through the countryside, begging and robbing to still their growing hunger. They had never known what peace was, and many had forgotten what the love of a father and mother meant. Ragged and unkempt, they fled from other humans as they fled from wild beasts, distrusting everybody and being distrusted by everybody. Forests were their hiding places and caves and ruins their dwellings. Murdering bands of former soldiers, bereft of their livelihood by peace, pillaged the open country. No wonder that

¹ Ronald Feuerhahn, "The Roots and Fruits of German Pietism," pages 50-74 in *The Pieper Lectures: Pietism and Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 1999), 55.

the fields and gardens grew up in weeds, and commerce and industry should be at a standstill.²

The war left in its wake a trail of destruction. Not only did it ruin the infrastructure of the state, it nearly obliterated society itself. C.V. Wedgwood asserts: “The breakdown of social order, the perpetual changing of authority and religion in so many districts, contributed to that disintegration of society which was more fundamentally serious than the immediate damages of war.”³ An entire generation of Germans had grown up knowing nothing of peace. The effect this had on national ethics was undeniable. In his analysis of the causes of Pietism, Heinrich Schmid writes, “The war threw the entire cultural state of affairs in Germany back a hundred years. Poverty and moral degeneration reached a degree never seen before.”⁴ F. Ernest Stoeffler quotes a 17th century pastor, Heinlin of Wurttemberg, who complained: “Old and young 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 hunger and cold.”⁵ The world in which Pietism was planted was one in which morality was all but forgotten by society.

Religious

The deplorable conditions of 17th century German society were exacerbated by the situation inside the church. Pietism was not the result of just one factor. Rather, several different religious issues came together to create the perfect situation for this particular religious movement to spring up.

² E.W. Wendland, “Present-Day Pietism,” pages 168-183 in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. III, ed. Lyle Lange (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), 170-171.

³ C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1995), 516.

⁴ Heinrich Schmid, *The History of Pietism* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2007), 15.

⁵ F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Boston: Brill, 1971), 181.

State-Church System

Perhaps the root cause of the religious climate that led to the rise of Pietism was the relationship between the church and the state. The church had not been separate from the state since Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Over the centuries, the relationship between the two kingdoms remained tight, even as it underwent changes. At the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War, the Peace of Westphalia restored the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, and each prince was given the authority to determine the religion of his territory. The church was now under the administration of the government.

This led to several problems. First, leadership within the church itself grew weak. Schmid writes, "Strictly speaking, the government alone conducted church affairs. Only seldom did the clergy with all their complaints gain for themselves the portion due them in church government, and the congregations lost all part in it. The congregations became apathetic toward ecclesiastical concerns, but what else could have happened?"⁶ Because the state was functioning in a role normally reserved for the church, strong leaders inside the church were scarce.⁷

This led to another problem. A church without strong leadership will struggle to practice church discipline, and this held true for the 17th century German church. Schmid complains that "the moral degeneration that spread during the war aroused in the congregations a stubbornness

⁶ Schmid, 17.

⁷ In his book, *The Spirit of Pietism*, Robert Koester proposes that the result of the state stepping into the territory of the church was a result of poor church leadership, and not *vice versa*. He points out that Luther and other Reformers depended on rulers like Elector John the Steadfast to keep them from harm. Luther recognized the precarious position the church assumed by relying on the state for protection, but had no choice but to continue to do so. Eventually, the lack of strong Lutheran leaders allowed the state to step in and usurp authority in the church. It is difficult to say which came first: poor church leadership or a government that reached into church affairs. Perhaps both Schmid and Koester are correct. As leadership inside the church grew weaker, the state took more control. As the state took more control, church leadership grew weaker.

toward church discipline, against which the clergy were not able to prevail, particularly when they were left in the lurch by the worldly authorities.”⁸ The Thirty Years’ War had critically wounded the morality of the German people, and no solution was in sight. The state, which possessed the power to exercise church discipline, had no desire to do so. Church leadership, which had the desire to discipline straying members, lacked the authority to carry it out.

This is not to say that the rulers were completely indifferent about what happened in the church. Robert Koester notes that in many areas the state persecuted non-Lutherans. However, he is quick to point out that these displays of force did little to convert anyone to faith. Instead, what often resulted was a church filled with nominal Lutherans; those who attended church on Sundays to avoid punishment, but who had no desire to put into practice (or even listen to) what they heard there.⁹

Orthodoxy

In church history, the era immediately following the Reformation is known as the Lutheran Age of Orthodoxy. This was the time when Lutheran dogmatics rose to prominence. Although Martin Luther was a tremendous theologian, he was not a dogmatician *per se*. So in the years following his death, men like Martin Chemnitz, Johann Gerhard, Abraham Calov, and Johannes Quenstedt set about systematizing and categorizing Lutheran doctrine. The blessings that came from this work are myriad, and Lutherans are still reaping the benefits today.

However, this Age of Orthodoxy was not some golden age of Christianity when everything in the church was perfect. In their attempt to make Lutheran doctrine ordered and

⁸ Schmid, 19.

⁹ Robert J. Koester, *The Spirit of Pietism* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2013), 36.

logical, some believed that Lutherans had lost something important. Dale Brown asserts that for many Lutherans the Bible had become nothing more than a proof text for creeds and doctrines.¹⁰ Rather than seeing God's Word as "living and active" (Heb 4:12), "the power of God for salvation" (Rom 1:16), many Lutherans primarily viewed Scripture as a tool to be used to help them organize true Lutheran doctrine. Dogmatics, rather than exegesis, was the king of theology.¹¹

This trend fostered confusion in the church over what it meant to be a Christian. Stoeffler explains how many Christians began to view faith: "In this heavily dogmatic atmosphere the essence of Christianity came to be regarded as consisting in a series of rationally ordered propositions. Faith had been largely re-defined so as to consist in personal assent to these propositions. Confessional theology and Christianity were regarded as being almost synonymous."¹²

It would be a gross overstatement to say that the church had replaced, "Believe and be baptized" (Mk 16:16) with "Give assent to our doctrine." The good Lutheran theologians would have been cut to the heart by such an accusation. Their intention was not to diminish the importance of the Word or to reduce faith to an intellectual acknowledgement of the veracity of certain teachings.

Yet this was the impression held by many 17th century Germans. For them, faith became cold and lifeless. Good works and love for one's neighbor were forgotten. Mission zeal was desperately lacking. Biblical teachings served only as theories to be argued about and organized

¹⁰ Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 24.

¹¹ Koester, 64. Koester adds that many Lutherans did not see the need for exegesis, assuming that their forefathers had already mined everything out of Scripture.

¹² Stoeffler, 183.

by scholars and professors. Brown asserts that the emphasis the church placed on correct doctrine failed to make a difference in people's moral lives.¹³ For many 17th century Germans, Christianity had become a dull and shallow veneer that thinly veiled the rank unbelief under the surface.

Use of Non-Lutheran Devotional Material

The state-church system and the perceived dead orthodoxy which plagued the church were the source of many problems in the Lutheran church. The issues mentioned above on their own would warrant an adjustment, if not a reformation, of the church and its practices. But the mixture of church with state and the lifeless Christianity of the time were not the sole causes of the rise of Pietism in Germany. An often-overlooked factor that played a role as well was the frequent use of non-Lutheran devotional material by members of the church.

Koester observes that long before Pietism began its rise, two different kinds of devotional material were already in use in Germany. Some of the material used by laypeople at this time came from the pens of confessional Lutherans. But other devotionals were being used as well. These alternative options were less Christocentric than one might have desired, and leaned toward what we now know as Pietism. The most prolific writer of these materials was a man by the name of Johann Arndt.¹⁴

In 1605 Arndt published the first volume of his most famous work, *True Christianity*. The popularity of this book and its numerous reprints is staggering. Koester relates that it was

¹³ Brown, 25.

¹⁴ Koester, 84.

sometimes said that every person at that time had two books in their homes: the Bible and Arndt's *True Christianity*.¹⁵

Arndt authored this book in order to explore what it really meant to be a Christian. He hoped to show

wherein true Christianity consists, namely, in the exhibition of a true, living faith, active in genuine godliness and the fruits of righteousness. [Also] how true repentance must proceed from the innermost source of the heart; how the heart, mind, and affections must be changed, so that we might be conformed to Christ and his holy Gospel; and how we must be renewed by the word of God to become new creatures.¹⁶

Clearly, Arndt's focus was on leading his readers to grow in their life of sanctification. This is an admirable goal.

Yet Arndt went beyond what would have fallen under the canopy of confessional Lutheranism. Peter Erb explains where Arndt went too far in the eyes of his critics:

Arndt is no longer describing a union [between the Christian and God] of the exact type discussed by Luther. Rather, the believer is directed to explore the nature of his union with Christ; he is admonished to cast aside all love of the creaturely and to learn progressively to have, in fullness, the God who has united himself with the believer. Spiritual joy, Arndt believes, will crown the fulfillment of this unitive experience. When one considers such a position in the light of Arndt's extensive use of medieval texts, one can better understand why the antagonisms against him were so fierce.¹⁷

Ted Campbell explains that Arndt's focus on the inner life of the Christian is due to the fact that he "was familiar with the traditions of both Western and Eastern Christian mysticism."¹⁸ Arndt's

¹⁵ Koester, 78.

¹⁶ Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, The Classics of Western Spirituality series, trans. Peter Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 21.

¹⁷ Peter Erb, introduction to *True Christianity*, 9.

¹⁸ Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 79.

emphasis on the union of Christ with the believer and the resultant life of faith made some Lutheran theologians, including Gerhard and Lucas Osiander, uneasy.

But in the face of such rampant immorality in society and even in the church, a segment of Lutherans found Arndt's ideas refreshing. They believed Arndt provided a way to combat the wickedness that they saw in the world around them. Koester reports that "there were those who sought more than the gospel offered – a feeling of union with Christ, power over sin that went beyond normal growth in Christian sanctification, and spiritual power outside the Word."¹⁹ In the works of Johann Arndt, these people found what they were looking for. The wide use of this kind of devotional material among Lutherans was a catalyst for the rise of Pietism.

The Seed of Pietism is Planted

It was into this setting that Philip Jacob Spener was born on January 13th, 1635. His family was devoutly religious; "he grew up in a surrounding in which a mixture of Arndtian and Puritan piety set the tone for daily living."²⁰ Spener was the possessor of a sensitive conscience even from his youth. Once, upon being asked whether he had ever sinned in his youth, Spener replied that "To be sure he had done evil, for he still remembered that when he was twelve years old he had seen some people dancing and had been persuaded by others to dance with them. However, scarcely had he begun when a great fear overtook him and he ran away from the dance. After that time he never undertook anything like that again."²¹ Spener's tender conscience would factor greatly into the rise of Pietism.

¹⁹ Koester, 87.

²⁰ Stoeffler, 228.

²¹ Schmidt, 29.

In 1651 Spener began attending the University of Strassburg. Koester reports that there he received a solid training in Scripture and in orthodox Lutheran doctrine.²² In 1664 he earned his doctorate, and two years later accepted a call to serve as superintendent in Frankfurt, a large and influential city. Spener would spend the next 20 years laboring to improve the morality of those under his care:

During his years in Frankfurt, Spener chafed under the immoral conditions there and the lack of cooperation on the part of the administration to help the clergy do its work. During his tenure at Frankfurt, he worked to reform the life of the people of the congregation he served, but when he left Frankfurt, he listed lack of improvement in the city as one of his reasons for accepting his new call.²³

Spener worked tirelessly to improve the sad condition of the church in Frankfurt. It was during these years that Spener did two things that directly led to the rise of Pietism.

The Collegia Pietatis

Spener first made use of the *collegia pietatis* (pious groups) in August of 1670. The *collegia* were small groups of Christians that would meet during the week to study and discuss God's Word and to pray. Through these meetings, Spener hoped to combat two misconceptions prevalent in the church:

1. Because he is justified by faith alone, it is not necessary for a Christian to walk with great care in the way of the Lord and to conform his life with the utmost diligence to the rules and example of the Savior.
2. It is not possible in this life, even for believers, to lead such a life out of divine grace that sin no longer rules in them.²⁴

²² Koester, 118.

²³ Koester, 119.

²⁴ Schmid, 35.

Spener hoped that the *collegia* would serve to strengthen the faith and improve the morality of church leaders. With Stoeffler, we note that

In Spener's thought...the *collegia pietatis* were not meant to be a means to separate "true" Christians from others and of imbuing the former with a pharisaical self-image. They were meant to constitute one of the major facets of the new reformation. Through them, pastors and dedicated laymen were intended to work in concert to add to the reformation of doctrine the reformation of life.²⁵

As Spener combated the immorality of his day, the *collegia pietatis* were one of his most important tools.

Pia Desideria

The second tool that Spener used against the unrepentant sin in the church was his book *Pia Desideria* (Pious Desires). First published in 1675, Spener's most famous work was written for a specific purpose, as explained in its introduction:

Where one sees distress and sickness it is natural to look about for remedies. The precious spiritual body of Christ is now afflicted with distress and sickness. Since in certain respects it is committed to the care of every individual and at the same time to all and sundry together, and since we must all be members of the body and hence should not regard affliction anywhere in the body as alien to us, it is therefore incumbent on us to see to it that medicine which is suited to its cure be found and applied.²⁶

Spener hoped that *Pia Desideria* would serve as a wake-up call for the church. He recognized the immorality that pervaded the body of Christ, and he desperately wanted to correct it.

Pia Desideria was divided into three parts. In Part One, Spener set the stage by reviewing the horrible conditions in the church. Part Two was a glimmer of hope, in which Spener expressed his optimism for better times that would result from a change in morality. In Part

²⁵ Stoeffler, 237.

²⁶ Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964), 31.

Three, Spener laid out his six-point plan for improving the church. We will discuss parts of this plan in detail below.

Upon publication, *Pia Desideria* met with overwhelming praise from laypeople and clergy alike. The book

At once catapulted (him) into the lime-light. In a relatively short space of time it was known throughout Lutheranism. Its author received hundreds of letters regarding it. Among his respondents were some of the most famous theologians and statesmen of his day. His friends quickly began to regard him as the man who was about to complete the Reformation. The extremists among them talked of Martin Luther as Spener's predecessor.²⁷

K. James Stein reports that *Pia Desideria* received praise even from Lutheran theologians such as Abraham Calov.²⁸

Through the *collegia pietatis* and the publication of *Pia Desideria*, the seed of Pietism had been scattered on the fertile soil of 17th century German Lutheranism. But Spener's work would not have blossomed into the flower of Pietism without the help of another man: August Hermann Francke.

Pietism Takes Root

Born in 1663, Francke was only 12 years old at the publishing of *Pia Desideria*. When Francke was three years old, his father was called to Gotha to serve as a court counselor. The court at Gotha was staunchly Christian; during his childhood years, "a spirit of piety was in the very air Francke breathed."²⁹

²⁷ Stoeffler, 234.

²⁸ K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1986), 102.

²⁹ Gary R. Sattler, *God's Glory, Neighbor's Good: A Brief Introduction to the Life and Writings of August Hermann Francke* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1982), 22.

Nonetheless, in his teenage years Francke complained: “I found no peace of mind or true satisfaction because I well knew that I had strayed far from true Christianity, which as a child I had begun to follow.”³⁰ Francke continued to study theology at the university level but mourned, “I was no more than a natural, unconverted person who had a great deal of head knowledge, but was far from living the kind of upright life that is in Jesus Christ.”³¹ In order to improve his Christian living, Francke started his own *collegia philobiblicum* (a group dedicated to studying the Bible). Soon after the group began meeting, Spener met with Francke for the first time. Yet Francke still felt as though his outwardly pious life was not matched by an inward holiness.

That would dramatically change in the year 1687, when Francke began to study under Kaspar Sandhagen, a follower of Spener. It was at this time that Francke fell into despair. He later wrote: “I saw my entire life – everything I had ever done, said, or thought – was nothing but sin and an abomination to God.”³² His angst grew so great that for a time he even denied the existence of God.

Francke, however, rose from the depths of hell to the heights of heaven at his conversion experience. In his own words,

I again got down on my knees and called out to that God whom I did not know or believe in, to save me from my wretched condition – if there truly was a God. At that point the Lord heard me, the living God, from his holy throne, as I was down on my knees. So great was his fatherly love that he did not remove from me my doubt and turbulence of heart in a gradual way – with which I would have been satisfied – rather, he did it instantly so that I would all the more be convinced and my confused reason would be reigned in lest it turn on God’s power and faithfulness. For this reason he answered my prayer as he did. As one turns over his hand, so all my doubt was taken away; I was assured in my heart of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, I knew God not only as God, but as my father. All sadness and restlessness of heart was at once taken away, and

³⁰ Koester, 171.

³¹ Koester, 173.

³² Koester, 179.

immediately I was showered with a stream of joy so that with complete courage I praised the Lord who had given me such grace.³³

Historians debate whether Francke's conversion was genuine or not. For Francke, there was no doubt that this was the moment when he became a Christian. This conversion experience was a watershed moment in his life and in the history of Pietism.

Pietism Grows and Flowers

Francke visited Spener in the year following his conversion. The two formed a bond that would last the rest of their lives. Gary Sattler claims that at this time "Francke had entered fully the Pietist circle."³⁴ With Spener serving as the leader of Pietism, the gap between the Pietists and the Orthodox was almost imperceptible. But as Francke took over more of a leadership role, that gap would widen.

Francke began to teach at the University of Halle in 1694. This school would become home base for German Lutheran Pietists. Every year more and more Christians were being indoctrinated with Pietistic thought.

Partly due to Francke's relentless promotion, Pietism began to spread rapidly. Once this had begun it was impossible to stop. Orthodox pastors tried to limit the expansion of this unorthodox teaching but were unsuccessful. The rich soil of 17th century German Orthodoxy provided nourishment for the seeds of Pietism, planted by Spener. Thanks to Francke, the shoot had begun to grow, and by the turn of the century, Pietism was in full bloom.

³³ Koester, 180.

³⁴ Sattler, 34.

PART II: CHARACTERISTICS OF PIETISM

A Spirit

As we begin our review of the characteristics of Pietism as taught by Spener, Francke, and their followers, we recognize the inherent difficulty in doing so. We must remember that Pietism, by definition, is a spirit. While Luther's reformation was doctrinal, Spener and Francke's reformation was moral. They did not intend to revamp the teachings of the church. They set forth no new doctrinal theses. They did not engage in debates over church dogma. Kurt Aland refers to Pietism as "an abstract entity. . . . Pietism is not something tangible, but what is tangible is only its various manifestations which must be examined and evaluated separately."³⁵ There are perhaps as many different kinds of Pietism as there are Pietists. For this reason, Pietism is difficult to define and study.

But as Koester says, "spirits do not simply exist in some formless state. They show themselves in concrete ways – how people teach and discuss the faith."³⁶ Although Pietism comes in many different shapes and sizes, there are common threads that run through each type. In our study we will focus on these similarities; the core and essence of Pietism.

Well-meaning

When reading Pietistic writings, one is struck by the good intentions that drove Pietism. It can be said of almost every religious movement (even heresies) that the intent of its leaders was not to lead people astray or promote false doctrine. In almost every case there is a genuine belief that

³⁵ Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. II, trans. James L. Scaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 235.

³⁶ Koester, 264.

what is being done and taught is helpful and good. This conviction was held by the leaders of Pietism as well.

These leaders believed that they were simply continuing in the footsteps of Luther. Wendland notes that “neither Spener nor Francke claimed to be aware of any deviation from Lutheran doctrine.”³⁷ Brown judges Spener “to be as much the enemy of heresy as he was the enemy of ungodliness.”³⁸ While we may (and will) question the teachings of the Pietists, we should not accuse them of trying to cause harm to the body of Christ.

This is especially true of Spener. When reading Spener’s writings, one is left with the picture of a man with a tender conscience who witnessed Christians around him failing to live as redeemed children of God. His pastoral heart drove him to speak out against the immorality that was so pervasive.

Although the phrase had probably not yet come into existence, Spener was trying to find the narrow Lutheran middle. He believed that Luther lived at a time when people focused too much on good works and failed to understand God’s forgiveness. So Luther correctly emphasized grace. But Spener believed that in his own time, people were not trusting in good works, rather, they had gone too far in the other direction and regarded good works as unnecessary and impossible. Many members of the church had become comfortable with sin, and Spener desperately wanted to put a stop to this. His motivation was admirable.

We should also note that the early Pietists wanted to provide help for those who were less fortunate. Francke started a school for the poor and an orphanage, as well as a home for widows. He encouraged Halle students to embark on mission trips, and even corresponded with

³⁷ Wendland, 173.

³⁸ Brown, 92.

missionaries in America.³⁹ We will point out many mistakes made by the German Lutheran Pietists, but we must keep in mind that they had a genuine desire to help people and to spread the message of Christ's forgiveness to the ends of the earth.

A Turning Inward

When studying a religious movement, it is helpful to boil down, if possible, the teachings and beliefs of its leaders to one single thought. While it will not give the complete picture, it at least provides a starting point. If we apply this technique to German Lutheran Pietism, we will come up with one word: subjectivity. Wendland points out, "As we summarize early Pietism in an attempt to place our finger upon its fundamental error, it is simply this: the difference between Lutheranism and Pietism is religious objectivism in distinction from religious subjectivism."⁴⁰ While Luther emphasized the objective nature of faith and salvation, Pietism took the opposite approach. Spener "believed feelings to be the experience of grace, and he taught that a certain measure of feeling should be associated with faith."⁴¹

This is not to say that Spener and Francke simply wanted people to feel happy. Brown notes that Spener recognized that emotions are subjective and liable to change, and that even Francke, who himself had an emotional experience when he came to faith, rejected extreme emotionalism.⁴² It is an oversimplification to say that Pietism was nothing more than a "feel-good" movement."

³⁹ Sattler, 82.

⁴⁰ Wendland, 176.

⁴¹ Brown, 113.

⁴² Brown, 114.

Yet it remains true that at the core of Pietistic thinking and belief was an overemphasis on the subjective. Christianity has always been based on unalterable facts, specifically the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet “Spener focused more on the subjective appropriation of the believer’s redemption than on God’s objective saving act in history in the incarnation.”⁴³ Rather than pointing people to God and the love he showed mankind in Christ, Pietism primarily focused its followers’ attention on themselves. We will examine several ways in which Pietists tended to turn inward.

Mixture of Justification and Sanctification

As a general rule, the goal of Pietism was behavior modification. The movement had started as a reaction against the immorality that permeated the church in the 17th century. Pietists desired to find a way to get people to lead better lives. This was an admirable goal, and one which aligned with the Bible’s commands. Sadly, their vigor to improve morality led them to make this the ultimate purpose of Christianity. Instead of emphasizing Christ’s work of salvation, Pietists commanded people to focus almost exclusively on their life of sanctification.

Brown perfectly summarizes the difference between Pietism and Orthodoxy: “For Luther, the new person is created in justification; for Pietism, in regeneration.”⁴⁴ He suggests that Spener and others fell into teaching a form of work-righteousness.⁴⁵ While it would be an overstatement to say that Pietists taught that good deeds are necessary for salvation, it would have been very

⁴³ Peter Erb, *Pietists: Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality series (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 6.

⁴⁴ Brown, 111.

⁴⁵ Brown, 93.

easy for a Pietist to slip into this mindset. So strong was the emphasis on sanctification that justification was forced to play second fiddle.

It is unfair to say that Pietists failed to understand and teach justification by faith in Christ. On the contrary, Spener once wrote that “justification takes place out of pure grace for the sake of Christ and is not in the least reflected directly or indirectly by our holiness or righteousness. If anyone should endeavor to mix in anything of human worthiness I would oppose that person from the bottom of my soul.”⁴⁶ And again in *Pia Desideria*:

We gladly acknowledge that we must be saved only and alone through faith and that our works or godly life contribute neither much nor little to our salvation, for as a fruit of our faith our works are connected with the gratitude which we owe to God, who has already given us who believe the gift of righteousness and salvation. Far be it from us to depart even a finger’s breadth from this teaching, for we would rather give up our life and the whole world than yield the smallest part of it.⁴⁷

Clearly Spener had a solid understanding of justification through faith.

Jeffrey K. Mann notes that preaching justification was the first method the Pietists used to accomplish their goal of increasing good works in the lives of their people. He writes, “What is being used here by the Pietists is not a message of what would Jesus do, but of what *did* Jesus do? For Lutheran Pietism, and especially for Spener, one needs to answer the latter question before one can engage the former.”⁴⁸ Pietists employed the Lutheran (and Biblical) method of encouraging good works to flow out of gratitude to God.

⁴⁶ Paul P. Kuening, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism: The Rejection of an Activist Heritage* (Mercer Island: Mercer Publishing, 1988), 20. The quote is from Spener’s *Clear Thoughts on Justification*.

⁴⁷ Spener, 63.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey K. Mann, “Not by Accident: The Christology of Lutheran Pietism,” pages 34-44 in *The Covenant Quarterly*, Vol. 60: No. 1, 2002, 40.

But if their people failed to produce enough good works, the Pietists would resort to their second method, one that Mann refers to as “scare tactics.”⁴⁹ In order to lead Christians to improve their lives, Pietists cast the seed of doubt by narrowing the definition of faith. They acknowledged that faith in Jesus is what saves but overemphasized the idea that good deeds must flow from faith. Mann asserts, “The Pietists were insistent that what was needed was not just *bekennende Christen* (confessing Christians) but *tätige Christen* (daily Christians).”⁵⁰ The only way to know for certain that you had faith was to examine yourself and decide if you were truly producing the fruits of faith in your life.

Here is where we see the Pietists turning people away from God and toward themselves. Pietists were so concerned with changing the behavior of their people that they were even willing to cause Christians to doubt their faith and salvation in order to accomplish it. Rather than assuring their listeners of the salvation that had been won for them by Jesus, Pietists directed people to look to their own lives as proof of their salvation.

This is an example of one of Pietism’s main problems: the mixing of justification and sanctification. Brown acknowledges that Spener saw these two teachings as being tied together: “Justification must always be continued, as if it were a steadily continuing act.”⁵¹ Pietists were afraid that the church was handing out “cheap grace” by assuring every person who confessed their sins that they were forgiven. Spener worried that this system of confession and absolution allowed a person to use forgiveness as a license to sin. In order to guard against this, he and

⁴⁹ Mann, 40.

⁵⁰ Mann, 41.

⁵¹ Brown, 96.

others pointed to the truth that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). They demanded that Christians prove the genuineness of their faith by living a life of outwardly God-pleasing acts.

But in directing people to focus on themselves and their own piety as proof of their faith, the Pietists did the very thing they were trying to avoid: they diminished the magnitude of the gospel. Instead of defending the gospel from those who would take advantage of it, Pietists themselves obscured the beauty of the unconditional gospel by adding qualifiers and caveats to it. Pietism turned the gospel into a law.

Rather than viewing justification as a completed act, a declaration made by God in view of Christ's atoning work, Pietists taught that justification was an ongoing process. In his *Complete Timotheus Verinus*, the most comprehensive review of German Lutheran Pietism ever published, Valentin Ernst Loescher wrote that Pietists "mix human activity, which they call the activity of faith, into the work of justification, so that in their opinion faith justifies, not only in so far as it has Christ, but also in so far as it is active and practiced in its more noble activity."⁵² Pietists were far more concerned with the process of sanctification than they were with the immutable truth of justification. Pietists wanted to prevent people from using the gospel as a "get out of jail free card." In order to accomplish this, they turned justification into a process that required human participation.

As confessional Lutherans, we might struggle to understand why Christians went along with this idea. The gospel is a pure and beautiful gift and is to be kept separate from the law. These Germans were the followers of Martin Luther. They knew the importance of the

⁵² Valentin Ernst Loescher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), 145.

separation of the law and the gospel, of justification and sanctification. Why would they accept this teaching that turned the gospel into a law and justification into a process?

We must admit that there is something appealing about the idea of people working together to improve society and create a better world. Hope for better times was a key part of Spener's *Pia Desideria*. Paul Kuenning writes that Spener advocated

a form of postmillennial eschatology that looked forward to a gradual and progressive improvement of conditions on earth, aided by the church's proclamation of the gospel and efforts on behalf of moral reform. He viewed the future with a degree of hopefulness permeated by a note of victory. He stood opposed to the more pessimistic view of history propounded by Luther and enunciated by Lutheran orthodoxy, which envisioned a worsening of conditions on earth and the imminent return of Christ in judgment.⁵³

Koester says that, "The prospect of the church working to usher in a time of glory for the church on earth appealed to the people of his day. The idea of working for better times seemed to trump the customary Christian motivation for doing good works, namely, because of the righteousness and hope of eternal life Christians have in Christ."⁵⁴ In essence, Pietism promoted a form of millennialism, in which Christians could improve their own lives and in turn improve the world. If everyone focused more on their own personal piety, they thought, things would change for the better. In order to achieve this goal, Pietists directed people to focus on themselves.

Loescher recognized what was really going on with this mixture of justification and sanctification:

The doctrine of justification is the article by which the church stands or falls. It includes the basis of our salvation, trust and hope, and accordingly is to be kept all the more holy. This cannot happen when a proper distinction is not diligently maintained between the basis of salvation and the order of salvation, between faith and all human works and activity, between having Christ and His righteousness and all our activity. For some time,

⁵³ Kuenning, 24.

⁵⁴ Koester, 354.

Satan has sought through the fanatical movements that have arisen to destroy this fortress of justification. He has not yet stopped, but has poured out his wrath on justification.⁵⁵

By turning Christians away from Christ and his merit, Pietists were playing into Satan's hand and adulterating the pure gospel of salvation.

Conversion Experience

We have already examined the dramatic conversion experience of August Francke. In this way he was different from Spener, who had no such memory of his conversion. Because of this, Spener was much less insistent that each believer have a powerful moment of conversion than was Francke, for whom

true conversion... was...something that the individual sinner had to achieve through a prolonged period of tearful contrition and the agonizing struggle of prayer. As a matter of fact, in order to know whether or not you are truly converted, you had to be able to point to the exact hour of your *Gnadendurchbruch*, an emotional experience in which you became personally convinced of the "breaking through" of God's grace.⁵⁶

Francke's own conversion experience had convinced him that it was necessary for every Christian to have something similar.

In fact, Pietists even broke the process of conversion down into three parts: *busskampf*, *gnadenstunde*, and *durchbruch*. *Busskampf* was the terrible struggle a believer must go through to arrive at the point of genuine repentance. *Gnadenstunde* was the hour of grace; the time when God wants to give a person the gift of grace. *Durchbruch* was the breakthrough, the climax of the conversion experience.

⁵⁵ Loescher, 150.

⁵⁶ Wendland, 174.

We would not deny that this three-step process provides an accurate description of how some Christians come to faith. The mistake of the Pietists, however, was teaching that this kind of experience is essential for every true Christian. When Valentin Loescher, an Orthodox Lutheran pastor, attempted to call Spener and Francke back to orthodoxy, they refused to listen to him because he had not experienced their kind of conversion.⁵⁷ Koester states that “a true Pietist (is) not primarily...someone who was striving to be pious but ...someone who had experienced a breakthrough into an enlightenment experience.”⁵⁸ If you asked a Pietist how he knew that he was a true believer, he would point to his conversion experience as proof. Instead of directing attention to the sure and certain promises of God, the emphasis on the conversion experience turned attention inward.

The Source of Truth

This leads us to one last way that Pietism turned people inward. Christianity is based on truth; truth that comes from outside of ourselves or our own experiences and thoughts. This is a tremendous comfort for the Christian: that God loves me regardless of whether or not I feel like it. If I believe that he loves me, he loves me. If I do not believe that he loves me, he still loves me. These truths are conveyed to us through God’s Word, the only source of ultimate truth for the Christian. The Christian looks for truth outside of himself.

For the Pietists, finding the ultimate source of truth was slightly more complex. It is unfair to say that German Lutheran Pietists had no use for God’s Word as revealed in the pages of Scripture. Spener and Francke held the Bible in high regard. Francke even helped to arrange

⁵⁷ Koester, 299.

⁵⁸ Koester, 298.

for the printing of a large number of Bibles that would be inexpensive enough for poor people to purchase. Both Spener and Francke usually employed solid hermeneutical principles, advocating the importance of understanding the context in interpreting a passage and emphasizing the necessity of finding Jesus in the Old Testament.⁵⁹ The Pietists said all the right things about the importance of the Scriptures in the life of a Christian.

And yet, something was amiss. While they saw the value of studying and applying the Scriptures, Pietists simply could not stop themselves from turning inward. Their emphasis on emotions began to push the Bible out of the spotlight. Wendland says, “Of primary importance to faith, according to Pietistic thinking, was not the unshakeable foundation of the objective means of grace, but the shifting sand of a subjective emotional experience.”⁶⁰ As Pietism advanced and drifted further from Orthodoxy, its gaze turned more and more away from the Bible and toward the individual.

Gradually, the way Pietists thought about Scripture evolved to fit their focus inward. Again, since Pietism is a spirit and not a doctrinal system, it is impossible to accurately assess the range of beliefs of all its followers. In general, however, Pietists began to view the Bible in an unscriptural way.

The prevailing belief among Pietists was that the Bible only became God’s Word when it was read and believed by a true Christian. Koester says they believed that “only a pious person can really understand Scripture”⁶¹ and that even if “an unholy person correctly interprets Scripture, it is not God’s word in that person’s heart.”⁶² Spener wrote in *The Spiritual*

⁵⁹ Brown, 79.

⁶⁰ Wendland, 176.

⁶¹ Koester, 297.

⁶² Koester, 299.

Priesthood, “He who does not read the Scriptures in this way (desiring to have his behavior improved by them) does not read them as God’s Word. He deprives himself of their power, and, therefore, will not come to the true spiritual knowledge of them.”⁶³ The Pietist viewpoint failed to recognize the working of the Holy Spirit through his Word. It reduced the Bible to serving merely as a guide for sanctification and holy living, instead of being “alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb 4:12).

Since the Bible served only as an instruction manual for the Christian life, systematized doctrine had little or no purpose. Pietists despised the way that Orthodox Lutherans placed so much emphasis on dogmatics. In their estimation, organizing doctrine into categories and arguing about biblical teachings was a waste of time. Brown says, “Spener deplored the fact that much of the theology of his day remained distant from the people, a wasteland of unintelligible dogma...Spener proposed to test each doctrine by whether faith in that doctrine led forth to piety through the grace of God in Christ.”⁶⁴ Rather than teaching that all doctrine is practical, Pietists taught that a teaching is only doctrine if it is practical. This low view of Scripture and doctrine was a direct result of the constant turning inward that was the hallmark of Pietism.

The Purpose of Christianity

Finally, the difference between Lutheranism and Pietism comes down to its purpose. What is the point of being a Christian, of going to church, of having faith? What is Christianity all about? A Lutheran would answer that Christianity is theocentric, focused on what God has

⁶³ Philip Jacob Spener, *The Spiritual Priesthood*, trans. Peter Erb in *Pietists: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 57.

⁶⁴ Brown, 84, 85.

done for us. More specifically, it is Christocentric, focusing on the salvation won by Christ.

Above all, a Lutheran looks to God for forgiveness and eternal life on the basis of Jesus's merit.

This is not the case in Pietism. Rather than looking to God for forgiveness above all else, Pietists look to God primarily to help them change their behavior. We would agree that God desires that we grow in sanctification and holy living every day. This is not, however, the main gift he wants to give us. Yet the Pietist sees Christianity as a means to an end. Koester diagnoses the problem of Pietism as being "a shift from yearning for God's grace in Christ to yearning for morality."⁶⁵ More than he desires forgiveness and pardon from God for his sins, the Pietist desires God's help and power to improve his life. In this system, piety is the goal and the gospel a tool to be used to achieve it.

⁶⁵ Koester, 337.

PART III: CAUSES OF PIETISM TODAY

Earlier we examined the factors that led to the rise of Pietism in 17th century Germany. We learned that a unique set of circumstances aligned, both in society and in the church, to foster an environment that was conducive to the conception and growth of Pietism. Now we will compare the situation in 17th century Germany to the situation in 21st century America in order to see if the circumstances in our time and place could cultivate the growth of Pietism.

Secular

The main secular cause of 17th century German Lutheran Pietism was the Thirty Years' War. The war left German society in shambles and decimated morality. There is no 21st century American equivalent to the Thirty Years' War. Over the previous 150 years, all of the wars in which the United States has participated have taken place on foreign soil. When we read about the devastation of Germany that was the result of the Thirty Years' War, we may have difficulty picturing the carnage; so far is it beyond anything we have experienced.

Yet there are some similarities between 17th century German society and 21st century American society. We may have taken a different route, but we have arrived at a similar destination. The Thirty Years' War obliterated the family structure in Germany and severely impaired the moral compass of the German people. To varying degrees, these problems exist in our setting as well.

It is no secret that divorce has long been a plague in the United States. The divorce rate has decreased since its peak of 50% in 1980, but *Time* reports that as of 2018 around 39% of marriages in the United States end in divorce.⁶⁶ The result of this, according to the U.S. Census

⁶⁶ Belinda Luscombe, "The Divorce Rate Is Dropping. That May Not Actually Be Good News," *Time*, <https://time.com/5434949/divorce-rate-children-marriage-benefits/>, 2018.

Bureau, is that 31% of children under age 18 live in a single-parent household. In raw numbers, this adds up to 11 million American families that exist with only one parent.⁶⁷ As was the case in 17th century Germany, the traditional family structure in 21st century America is not as common as one would hope.

The lack of solid family structure is both an effect and a cause of the main secular issue that leads to Pietism: a dearth of what might be considered Christian morality. The further our nation drifts from the traditional Christian worldview, the more damage is inflicted on the Christian family. This, in turn, leads to more immorality. Dominic Schmuck reports that “single parents consistently report more externalized behavioral problems of their children than dual-parents do.”⁶⁸ This vicious cycle only adds to the lack of Christian values that exist in our country.

The moral compass of the American people does not line up with God’s will. The Pew Research Center reports that for every 100,000 people in the United States there are 368.9 violent crimes (offenses such as rape, robbery, and assault).⁶⁹ While this number has dropped significantly in the last 25 years, it shows that violent crime is still a major concern, and may be compounded by the fact that the average 18 year old has seen 200,000 violent acts on television.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “The Majority of Children Live With Two Parents, Census Bureau Reports,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-192.html>, 2016.

⁶⁸ Dominic Schmuck, "Single Parenting: Fewer Negative Effects of Children's Behaviors than Claimed," pages 117-125 in *Modern Psychological Studies*: Vol. 18: No. 2, Article 12, 2013.

⁶⁹ Gramlich, John. “5 Facts about Crime in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/17/facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/>, 2019.

⁷⁰ Kyla Boyse, “Television and Children.” University of Michigan Medicine. <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/tv>, 2010.

Violence is not the only way in which American morality differs from the Christian ideal. A 2007 survey reported that by age 44, 95% of Americans have engaged in premarital sex.⁷¹ It has been estimated that more than 70% of the population has cohabitated outside of marriage.⁷² Disregard for God's plan for men and women, normalization of gossip and slander, and glorification of alcohol abuse and profanity have created a society that bears a striking resemblance to that which served as an incubator for Pietism in Germany.

It is this immorality in society that fosters the growth of Pietism. Men like Spener and Francke saw the rampant sin in the world around them and wanted to correct it. This is a distinguishing feature of Pietism: the desire to clean up the moral lives of its people and to thereby improve society. The secular causes of 17th century Pietism have been reconstructed in 21st century America.

Religious

State-church system

The root religious cause of German Pietism was the state-church system, in which the church fell under the administration of the government. This led to a large number of nominal Christians, who merely went through the motions of Christianity in order to satisfy the government. Pietists were concerned that the church was filled with hypocrites.

⁷¹ Lawrence B. Finer, "Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954-2003," pages 73-78 in *Public Health Reports*: Vol. 122: No. 1, 2007.

⁷² Scott Stanley, "Cohabitation is Pervasive," Institute for Family Studies, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/cohabitation-is-pervasive>, 2018.

Clearly, the relationship between the government and the church in the United States is different. America was founded on the principle of freedom, which includes the separation of church and state. In general, this separation has been maintained for more than 200 years.

While our government does not require church affiliation, one could argue that we have our fair share of nominal Christians. More than 70% of Americans identify as Christian,⁷³ and yet only 38% attend church every week.⁷⁴ Christian denominations across the board are experiencing a decrease in worship attendance. The nominal Christianity of 17th century Germany is mirrored in 21st century America.

Orthodoxism

This information goes hand in hand with the second religious cause of Pietism: the perceived dead orthodoxy of the Christian church. Spener and Francke believed that the church was so focused on doctrine that it was neglecting acts of Christian love. Pietists claimed that the church should not waste time arguing about teachings, but instead should embrace a living and vital faith characterized by an abundance of good deeds.

One does not have to look far to find quotes from contemporary religious leaders that call to mind Pietism's war against dead orthodoxy. "The first Reformation was about belief; this one needs to be about behavior. We need a reformation of not creeds but deeds," pastor and best-selling author Rick Warren implored his audience in a 2005 speech to the leaders of the World Baptist Alliance. "It's time to stop debating the Bible and start doing it...This is the new

⁷³ "Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>, 2019.

⁷⁴ "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance," Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/242015/church-leaders-declining-religious-service-attendance.aspx>, 2018.

reformation I'm praying for."⁷⁵ Warren reflects the belief of the German Pietists, along with countless Christians today who call for a faith marked by "deeds, not creeds."

Use of Non-Lutheran Devotional Material

The final religious cause of Pietism was the use of non-Lutheran devotional material. During the 17th century, Christians began to read devotional materials, like those of Johann Arndt, that strayed from biblical orthodoxy into a syncretism of Christianity and mysticism. Many German Lutherans saw no problem with consuming non-Christocentric religious content from Christians outside of their fellowship.

Today, thanks to television, radio, and the internet, Christian content is more accessible than ever. Just a few clicks can provide a person with a limitless supply of sermons and blogs. Technology does not discriminate, however, and error-filled preaching and teaching is just as accessible as that which is in line with Scripture. While it would be impossible to determine exactly how much syncretistic religious material is consumed every day, it seems safe to say that it is a significant amount. We will examine some of this devotional material in the next section.

We can see that many of the factors that led to the rise of Pietism in 17th century Germany are mirrored in 21st century America. A lack of morality in society as a whole is compounded by problems in the church, including a large number of what would seem to be nominal Christians, a perceived dead orthodoxy among believers, and the consumption of unorthodox devotional material by many inside of the church. The soil of the religious climate in our setting is fertile for the growth of Pietism.

⁷⁵ "Rick Warren Challenges Baptists to Launch Reformation of Deeds, Not Creeds," Baptist News Global, <https://baptistnews.com/article/rickwarrenchallengesbaptiststolaunchreformationofdeedsnotcreeds/#.Xe-zJOhKjIU>, 2005.

PART IV: PIETISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF ANDY STANLEY

Why Andy Stanley?

Now that we have examined the history and characteristics of Pietism and observed that our setting is ripe for its rise, we will attempt to determine the extent to which Pietism exists in American Christianity.

The only way to find out exactly how thoroughly Pietism has pervaded Christianity would be to conduct extensive interviews with millions of people. This is simply not feasible. Alternatively, we could observe anecdotal evidence from a small sample size, but this would not provide us with a clear and complete picture of the existence of Pietism in America. A study of laypeople is not the most realistic way to put one's finger on the pulse of American Christianity.

This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to observe trends and tendencies of American Christians. The best available practice is to study the preaching and teaching of the clergy. We can assume that what is proclaimed by pastors is taken to heart by the parishioners. The extent to which Pietism pervades American Christianity can be estimated by conducting a survey of the writings and sermons of America's most famous preachers. This will serve as our technique.

While taking a cursory glance at a number of preachers would give us a large sample size, it would limit us to a shallow and superficial understanding of each of their individual theologies. In order to truly gain a hold of the theology of a pastor, one must be immersed in his material. Therefore, rather than taking a few glimpses at many different preachers, we will choose one preacher and examine his theology in great depth.

Whom shall we choose? There is no shortage of popular American preachers for us to study. So that we may gain a deep understanding of his theology, we want someone who has

published a large amount of material. We also should choose a preacher who is well-known and has an impact on many people.

For these reasons, Andy Stanley is the perfect choice. Stanley is the founder of North Point Ministries, which consists of seven churches in the Atlanta area and a global network of more than 90 partner churches. Every week, more than 30,000 people attend services at North Point Ministries, and its messages are accessed online more than a million times a month.⁷⁶ Stanley has published more than twenty books, and hundreds of his sermons are available online. In 2018, Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary conducted a national survey of American homileticians and named Stanley one of the 12 most influential preachers of today's generation.⁷⁷

In order to gain a deep understanding of Stanley's theology, I read five of his books and watched more than fifty of his messages and sermons. All of the sermons referenced in this paper are available online on the North Point Community Church website or on YouTube.

After consuming a significant amount of Andy Stanley's religious material, I have attempted to identify and tabulate the Pietistic teachings therein. This will allow us to begin to gauge the prevalence of Pietism in modern Christianity. We will approach the Pietism in his theology under the same headings we used to assess German Pietism.

A Spirit

Pietism is difficult to assess because it is not a doctrinal system. The differences between German Lutheran Pietism and Lutheranism were subtle. Upon its publication, Spener's *Pia*

⁷⁶ Information accessed from North Point Ministries' website: <http://northpointministries.org>.

⁷⁷ "12 Most Effective Preachers Survey," Baylor University, <https://www.baylor.edu/truett/index.php?id=951217>, 2018.

Desideria was met with praise even from Orthodox theologians. The distinction between orthodox and Pietism is a difference in spirit.

The same could be said about the differences between Lutheranism and the theology of Andy Stanley. As I watched Stanley's sermons and read his books, I often had a sense that something was wrong with his theology. Yet it was difficult to nail down exactly what it was. Later, we will discuss some of the doctrinal differences that became apparent. But for the most part, the problem with Stanley's theology is similar to that of Pietism. More than proclaiming outright false teaching, it commits the subtle errors of misemphases and false emphases. Just like Pietism, the errors in Stanley's theology are difficult to pinpoint because they are differences in spirit.

Well-meaning

As we studied German Lutheran Pietism, we noted the good intentions of men like Spener. While reading Stanley's books and viewing his sermons, I was struck by the very same thing. Confessional Lutherans will criticize Andy Stanley for many things (and rightly so), but one facet in which we find no fault with him is his intent.

Stanley has no desire to introduce heresy into the church. While he believes and teaches things that do not line up with Scripture, he does not do so knowingly. He is not a spawn of Satan intent on destroying the church with false doctrine. Rather, despite his errors, Stanley is a man who loves his Savior and wants to communicate the love of God to his hearers.

In particular, I was impressed with Stanley's emphasis on the importance of the physical resurrection of Jesus. It is a central point in many of his sermons, and in his theology as a whole. In his Easter sermon *Invitation to Believe*, he states that the story of Jesus is not worth telling

without the resurrection.⁷⁸ Lutherans would agree wholeheartedly with Stanley in regard to his view of the resurrection.

We can also appreciate Stanley's pastoral heart. He realizes the struggles that people face every day, and he aims to encourage them in their faith. When he invites people to church, he sometimes points out that there are only three problems in the world: sin, sorrow, and death. He then informs his listener that the Bible helps all of them.⁷⁹ Stanley instructs his members to explain their church to nonmembers with this simple phrase: Life is complicated, you want to get it right, we want to help.⁸⁰ Clearly, a caring heart is behind Stanley's message.

This care for others is further evidenced by Stanley's involvement in the Be Rich program. Every November, Stanley's North Point Community Church invites its members to donate time and money to a local charity. North Point does not keep any of the funds raised; every penny goes to support the work of nonprofit organizations. Stanley's desire to help the poor and needy is reminiscent of that of August Francke.

One gets the sense that the similarities between the intentions of the German Lutheran Pietists and those of Andy Stanley do not end there. We noted earlier that the Pietists, and especially Spener, made it their goal to prevent people from feeling comfortable with sin. This is an admirable objective, and one that is found in the work of Andy Stanley as well. Problems arose for the Pietists in the methods they used to accomplish this. As we study Stanley's material, we will note many of those same issues. Yet we must admire the care for souls

⁷⁸ *Bystander, Part 7: Invitation to Believe*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOuXfB0JusY>, 2019.

⁷⁹ *More Than Ever*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWSDirAYsDs>, 2019.

⁸⁰ *More Than Ever*.

exhibited. It is very much his desire that his people not be spiritually stagnant, but continue to grow in their lives of sanctification.

As we move into the next section, let us keep this thought in mind. Whatever we think about his beliefs, we must view Andy Stanley not as a wicked heretic but as a Christian pastor whose preaching and teaching comes from a good heart, a heart that is concerned about the welfare of the souls entrusted to him. His theology is impure, but his intentions are admirable.

A Turning Inward

In our study of German Lutheran Pietism, we determined that the fundamental error of Pietism was its turn from the objective to the subjective, from things happening outside of us to what is going on inside of us. We see this trait in Andy Stanley as well.

Stanley does speak about the objective nature of the Christian faith. We have already noted his insistence on a physical resurrection of Jesus. He has stated that “Christianity is an informed, evidence-based faith.”⁸¹ In many of his sermons he explains the objective facts of Christ’s work and God’s love.

Yet Stanley, like the German Lutheran Pietists, fails to speak about these objective truths as much as we would like. His writings and his sermons have a strong tendency to focus the individual on himself and to look at the things that are happening inside of him, instead of at things that have happened outside of him. Stanley’s turn inward manifests itself in the same ways as it did in the German Pietists.

⁸¹ *Ninety, Part 3: Fish Tricks*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LJgrhN6cR4>, 2018.

Mixture of Justification and Sanctification

Andy Stanley's theology includes a strong emphasis on sanctification. Leading his people to change their behavior to more closely model the life of Christ is a major point of emphasis in his writings and sermons.

Take for example his sermon series and Bible study *Guardrails*. The purpose of the series is to help people set up boundaries for themselves to prevent them from falling into heinous sins. Stanley says, "*Guardrails* is how you plan not to (wreck your life). *Guardrails* is how you set yourself up to walk wisely, to live carefully. ... At the end of the day, this discussion isn't about becoming better people. It's about becoming more surrendered people. It's about living in a way that glorifies God."⁸² *Guardrails* is one example of the grand importance Stanley places on sanctification.

Just because Stanley focuses mostly on sanctification, however, does not mean that he fails to comprehend and preach justification. In his sermon on John 3 entitled *Nic at Night*, he speaks about how God loved and gave, while we simply believe and receive, and states that getting into the kingdom of heaven is not about what we must do, but about what has been done for us by Christ.⁸³ His books *The Grace of God* and *Am I Good Enough?* clearly proclaim that salvation comes through faith in the atoning work of Jesus alone. His sermon series *Ninety* walks through the life of Jesus and explains that he came to do something new for the world, that he was paying for the sins of the world. He even relates that the account of the temptation of Jesus is not primarily an instructional text on how we can overcome temptation, but instead is an

⁸² *Guardrails, Part 1: Direct and Protect*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgCBcWx17-4>, 2018.

⁸³ *Ninety, Part 6: Nic at Night*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcPI-afuDFY>, 2018.

example of how Jesus overcame temptation during his whole life.⁸⁴ Many of Stanley's sermons and books contain beautiful declarations of the gospel.

Stanley even uses the gospel to motivate good works in his listeners. In his sermon *Better: The Banana King*, he exhorts his people to let go of the things that are causing them to continue to fall into sin. He implores them, "Don't be mastered by anything or anyone. You already have a Master."⁸⁵ He describes this Master as the one who demonstrated his love for us while we were still sinners. Stanley will often provide his audience with gospel motivation to lead God-pleasing lives.

As was the case with the 17th century Pietists, however, Stanley is so concerned with effecting change in the lives of his listeners that he often resorts to unbiblical methods to do so. Unlike the early Pietists, Stanley does not tell his people outright that their lack of good works might actually reflect a lack of saving faith. But this idea is implied in instances when he mixes justification and sanctification.

We see an example of this in his sermon *Better than True*, based on Luke 6. Stanley tells his listeners that the good news about Jesus is that he gives you an opportunity to change your life:

According to Jesus, anybody, regardless of their starting point, regardless of what they know, ... regardless of what they believe and regardless of what they believe about Jesus, anybody can make a step and choose to take a step to follow Jesus from where they are right now. Everyone is invited to take a step, to follow Jesus. This is incredible news. Isn't that good news? That regardless of how low you go, or how far you wander, or how deep a pit you've dug, ... that Jesus says, "You can start there and follow me."

And Jesus said, "I've come for the people who know that they're not all that good, that they could be better." That's good news. But listen to this next part: "I've come to call sinners to repentance." Do you know what this means? This may be the best news of all. "I've come to call them to see the entire world in a different way. To change their

⁸⁴ *Ninety, Part 2: Upside Down*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFZyudfPIWs>, 2018.

⁸⁵ *Better: The Banana King*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae4j5AqpGdg&t=910s>, 2019.

thinking about themselves. To change their thinking...about God. To change their thinking about the people around them. To change their thinking about everything. And to see themselves in a way that allows them to connect with God their Heavenly Father and to change from the inside out.” That’s good news. Jesus called his followers not to be good, but to do good.

(Jesus says) “If you are that good, if you embrace this level of good, if you choose to be good to those who mistreat you and those who cheat on you and those who aren’t good in return, if you choose to be good to those who can’t offer anything in return, you will be called children of the Most High, because that’s what your Father in heaven is like.”

The reason this is confusing to us is because this is not how most Christians act. ... Too many Christians – and I hope we’re not those kinds of Christians – too many Christians for generations have been content to believe but not follow. Because believing doesn’t make any difference in this life. It’s following, it’s doing, that makes all the difference in the world. This is why Jesus’s initial invitation was “Follow me.”⁸⁶

In these paragraphs, Stanley conflates justification and sanctification by painting justification as a process in which we must participate.

We see this again in *Enemies of the Heart*, where Stanley refers to God’s claim that he can give a person a new heart (Ezek 36:26). Rather than seeing this as a declaration of what happens inside of a person when he or she comes to faith, Stanley sees this as something that the individual can achieve through hard work. He explains,

Perhaps you prayed a prayer some time ago inviting Jesus to come into your heart. And like me, you may have assumed that once he was in, all was well. I mean, Jesus has made himself at home in my heart, so everything’s copacetic, right? But somewhere along the way, each of us is forced to face the painful truth that all is not well. So we pray the prayer a second or third time for fear that the first one didn’t take. And yet we continue to see disturbing signs that our hearts aren’t entirely new. So what’s up?

What’s up is this: What God begins at the moment of our salvation is not completed in that moment. I bet you already knew that about yourself, didn’t you? If you didn’t know it, I’d bet your best friend does. At the risk of oversimplifying, let me put it this way: Jesus may have moved into your heart, but he may not have been given full access.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Christmas: It’s All Good, Part 1: Better than True*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhEuyPNf-M0>, 2019.

⁸⁷ Andy Stanley, *Enemies of the Heart: Breaking Free from the Four Emotions That Control You* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2014), 12-13.

Stanley has a tendency to present justification not as an instantaneous event that makes us perfect, but as the beginning of a journey that we can complete with God's help.

Like the German Lutheran Pietists, Stanley also confuses justification and sanctification when he expresses concern about the practice of confession and absolution. He worries that a confession which involves nothing more than an admission of guilt can have a negative effect on piety:

This kind of confession can actually fuel destructive behavior rather than curb it, leading to more secrets and greater guilt. Let me explain.

One of the first Bible verses I memorized as a child was 1 John 1:9... "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (KJV). This was too good to be true. I mess up, I admit it, God forgives me, I move on. Clearly I'd discovered a loophole. Over time this verse became an escape hatch. Every night before I went to sleep, I would carry on an excruciatingly detailed monologue with God. Mostly about my sin. I would try to remember all the sins I'd committed that day. Sometimes my list was short; oftentimes it was not. Either way, I was oh so careful to confess each and every thing I'd done wrong, thought wrong, and said wrong. And at the end, just to be safe, I would add, "And forgive me for anything I've overlooked."

I went to sleep knowing my sin bucket was empty. But in the back of my mind I knew I would probably fill it up again the next day. In fact, odds were pretty good that I would fill it up with the same sins I'd just dumped out before slipping off to sleep. But hey, I confessed! I did what the verse said. And I was counting on God to keep his end of the deal.

But then I began to notice a dangerous trend. When I was tempted to sin, I would reason to myself, *I know this is wrong, but if I go through with it I can always confess it and God will forgive me and everything will be fine.* Before long my confession habit was supporting my sin habit.

We (he and his Catholic friends, who had a similar system) weren't confessing as a step toward changing. Confession was all about guilt relief. I knew even as I was confessing that I would be back at it the next day, confessing the same sins. My routine had nothing to do with change. I just wanted to *feel* better.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Stanley, *Enemies of the Heart*, 93-95.

Stanley is deeply worried about turning grace into a license to sin. This is a worthwhile concern, but in seeking to avoid this problem, he misses the beauty of the free forgiveness offered in the absolution. For him, the process of confession should not be about forgiveness but about how we can effect change in our lives. This is a confusion of justification and sanctification, and it turns Christians away from God and toward themselves.

Earlier we noted that one reason that many people were drawn to Pietism was its teaching that Christians could improve the world by working together and increasing their piety. This mild form of millennialism is present also in Stanley's theology. In his sermon *Memorial Day*, he says, "A thriving church is how we get a great nation." He relates that Jesus against all odds changed the world. As Christians we have the ability to do that as well.⁸⁹ In *The American in the Mirror*, Stanley states that by learning to be better leaders of ourselves we can make the country better.⁹⁰ Just as it did in Spener and Francke, the idea that Christians can make the world a better place lurks in the background of Stanley's preaching and teaching.

We can see that, in his mixture of justification and sanctification, Andy Stanley draws attention away from the love God has shown the world in Christ. Like the Pietists before him, he has a tendency to direct the eyes of his listeners to themselves. Though it is not his intent, the inevitable result is an adulteration of the pure gospel.

⁸⁹ *Memorial Day 2019*. <https://northpoint.org/messages/memorial-day-2019>, 2019.

⁹⁰ *The American in the Mirror*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJLO8MdIApY>, 2018.

Conversion Experience

The German Pietists taught that every Christian should experience a dramatic moment of conversion. For the Pietist, this episode would provide certainty that he was truly a Christian. In his belief about the conversion experience, Stanley is both similar and dissimilar to the Pietists.

Stanley does not describe the conversion experience in terms nearly as powerful and vivid as did the Pietists. Although he does praise his congregation for creating a church environment that will inspire people to follow Jesus,⁹¹ I did not come across anything that came close to a demand for a dramatic emotional experience as proof of faith. Stanley does not preach in such a way that he could be accused of trying to elicit a visceral, emotional response from his hearers. He does not hold up his own conversion experience as an example. Stanley's view of conversion is not nearly as sensational as that of the Pietists.

Yet Stanley's view of conversion does have one important commonality with the Pietistic view. German Pietists wanted people to be able to point to the moment of their conversion so that they would have proof that they truly were Christians. In doing so, Pietists taught people to put their trust in their own experiences rather than in Christ. While Stanley does not demand a dramatic experience, he does invite people to make a decision to follow Jesus. As an Arminian, he believes that every Christian comes to faith as a result of his or her own personal decision. If Stanley were asked how he knew that he was a true believer, he would point to his decision to follow Christ. Like the 17th century Pietists, Stanley directs his hearers' attention not to the promises of God, but to their own experiences. This is a classic trait of Pietism.

⁹¹ *More Than Ever.*

The Source of Truth

One final way that Pietists turn attention away from God and towards the human is in the quest for the source of truth. We saw that German Pietists had a different understanding of the Bible than their Lutheran counterparts. They failed to appreciate the working of the Holy Spirit through his Word.

Stanley does believe that the Bible was inspired by God,⁹² but, in true Pietistic fashion, he fails to mention the biblical truth that the Holy Spirit works when and where his Word is preached. I found no reference to the work of the Spirit anywhere in Stanley's preaching or teaching. He bases his sermons on the Bible, but never acknowledges that God alone can create and strengthen faith through them.

For Stanley, as it did for the Pietists, the Bible serves mainly as a guide for sanctification. In his self-help books, Stanley quotes Scripture for the purpose of improving the behavior of his readers. In his sermons, Bible passages are quoted to teach his listeners how they should live. Stanley employs Scripture mainly as a tool to enhance sanctification.

This is not to say that Stanley views the Bible as nothing more than an ancient rulebook. He of course recognizes the life-changing message of the gospel is found in God's Word. He is not so brash as to say that someone today could be saved apart from the truths of the Bible. Stanley knows that the Scriptures are lifegiving.

But in practice, Stanley follows in the footsteps of the Pietists by failing to teach that the Scriptures are God's chosen means of communication for his people today, and that through them the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith. He gives the impression that the Bible is simply a God-given set of rules and guidelines for Christian living. This is yet another way in

⁹² Andy Stanley, *The Principle of the Path: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 42. Stanley here states that God inspired Solomon to write Proverbs.

which Stanley's theology shows Pietistic tendencies and turns people away from the work of God.

The Purpose of Christianity

Here is where we most clearly see Pietism in the theology of Andy Stanley. The ultimate difference between Lutheranism and Pietism is in their purpose. Above all else, what do I hope to receive from God? A Lutheran looks to God mainly for forgiveness; a Pietist looks to God mainly for changed behavior. In this respect, Andy Stanley preaches and teaches like a Pietist.

After consuming a large amount of Stanley's material, I was left with the impression that his preaching lacks a certain "high stakes" law and gospel presentation. Stanley preaches for this life, but not for the one to come. He holds that people who practice what he preaches will experience better lives here on earth, but rarely makes reference to how his message affects them for eternity.

Stanley's presentation of the law leaves much to be desired. Because he fails to communicate the effect our sins have on our relationship with God, Stanley's preaching of the law lacks real power. This is true even when he tries to condemn. In *Upside Down*, he explains that Jesus had to give his life for us because we lack the power to heal the consequence of sin or receive forgiveness from the people we love.⁹³ There is no mention of a broken relationship with God. Stanley is much more focused on demonstrating how sin affects our lives on earth. He is fond of saying that, "Every sin comes prewrapped with a consequence." The consequences that he is speaking about, however, are not separation from God and eternity in hell, but merely difficulties here on earth.

⁹³ *Ninety, Part 2: Upside Down.*

In his sermon *The Heart of the Matter*, Stanley explains, based on Matthew 15, that Jesus's disciples had grown up thinking that they had to keep God happy. But when Jesus came, he instituted a new idea. Jesus taught that loving other people is more important than keeping God happy.⁹⁴ Stanley believes that God is offended by our sin only because it hurts other people. He fails to grasp that sin is an abomination before the holy and perfect God.

Because of this, Stanley does not preach about hell. I never once heard him say that Jesus came in order to save us from eternal damnation. In fact, in *Appealing is Revealing*, he states that he does not believe that those who persist in sin will be sent to hell.⁹⁵ Stanley fails to effectively point out the serious nature and eternal consequence of sin.

It follows that, if Stanley's preaching of the law is less than stellar, his imparting of the gospel would lack luster as well. Stanley frequently speaks about how Jesus came to earth in order to do something for the world, and even mentions that Jesus came to save us from sin. But since he never instills the fear of eternal punishment in his hearers, this gospel message loses some of its impact. The audience is led to believe that Jesus came to save us from having to live a life full of the consequences of sin here on earth.

Here we come face to face with the biggest issue with Andy Stanley. Rather than directing people to look to God for forgiveness and eternal life, Stanley instructs his people to look to God for help in changing their behavior here on earth. A key phrase for the German Lutheran Pietists was, "The God who is good enough to forgive us is powerful enough to change us."⁹⁶ Hundreds of years later, Andy Stanley puts this idea into his own words: "Following Jesus

⁹⁴ *Guardrails, Part 5: The Heart of the Matter*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL9IK7h6JOo&t=937s>, 2018.

⁹⁵ *The Beginner's Guide to Predicting Your Future, Part 4: Appealing is Revealing*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VJwjGwLaxI>, 2018.

⁹⁶ Brown, 28.

will make your life better and make you better at life.”⁹⁷ Stanley repeats this phrase over and over in his sermons. His audience is left with the conclusion that the main purpose of Christianity is to help you improve your behavior.

We find this tendency of Stanley’s on display in his sermon series *Love, Dates, and Heartbreaks*. This series is aimed at enabling people, with God’s help, to improve their romantic lives. In the first sermon of the series Stanley says,

Following Jesus will make your life better. Following Jesus will make you better at relationships. Following Jesus will make you better at life. Following Jesus will help you become the person that the person you’re looking for is looking for. . . . The kind of person Jesus leads his followers to become is the kind of person we are all ultimately looking for and ultimately want to become.⁹⁸

While we would agree that God is working to change the behavior of his people, we would never want to give the appearance that this is the main gift which God wants to impart to us.

This kind of Pietistic emphasis on sanctification turns the gospel into nothing more than a tool to enact change. When Stanley presents the gospel, he almost always does so not to forgive the sins of his hearers, but to motivate them to live better lives. For example, in *Better Done than Said*, he talks about how Jesus generously paid the price for our sin. He follows this up by saying that since Jesus did that for us, we should be happy to generously share our possessions with the poor.⁹⁹ Stanley, like the German Lutheran Pietists, employs the gospel in his preaching and teaching mainly as a motivational tool.

⁹⁷ *Christmas: It’s All Good, Part 1: Better than True*.

⁹⁸ *Loves, Dates, and Heartbreaks, Part 1: The Right Person Myth*. <https://northpoint.org/messages/love-dates-and-heartbreaks/the-right-person-myth>, 2019.

⁹⁹ *Be Rich 2019, Part 1: Better Done than Said*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTbUhQQXZxA>, 2019.

Conclusion

In our study we have seen that 21st century American Evangelical theology, as represented by Andy Stanley, bears a striking resemblance to the theology of the 17th century German Lutheran Pietists. There are some differences between the two, to be sure. Evangelicalism is not a mirror image of Pietism. It is fair to say, however, that the two branches of Christianity share the same spirit. Instead of directing attention toward God, both direct the sinner toward himself. Both by their preaching give the impression that the goal of Christianity is behavior modification. Both place the salvation of the Christian on less than steady ground.

I am willing to acknowledge that there is a major shortcoming in this thesis. I have made the assumption that the theology of Andy Stanley can be viewed as an accurate representation of Evangelical theology as a whole. This is not an entirely fair assumption. Evangelical theology varies greatly among pastors, churches, and denominations. We cannot say with certainty that every Evangelical holds to Pietistic theology.

In this way, Evangelicals bear semblance to the German Lutheran Pietists. Because of their tendency to focus more on themselves than on God, there is a wide variety in beliefs and practices. We stated earlier that there are probably as many types of Pietism as there are Pietists. Could the same be said about Evangelicals? That is the topic for another paper.

Finally, I would like to address this question: Why does it matter? Why is this kind of study worth our time? What benefit can be gained from studying the theology of a pastor most of us will never meet?

The answer to these questions can be found in this haunting line from Robert Koester: “At heart, we are all pietists waiting to happen.”¹⁰⁰ The temptation for confessional Lutherans

¹⁰⁰ Koester, 402.

after reading this paper is to feel arrogant and to pat ourselves on the back for our good theology and avoidance of Pietistic teachings. What wonderful Christians are we, to have avoided falling into the trap of this heresy! Our sinful nature can cause us to look down on Stanley and the Pietists and, at least subconsciously, to feel sinful pride about our orthodoxy.

In these instances, Koester's sobering thought is reminiscent of Paul's warning to the Corinthians: "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Cor 10:12) We are not so cunning and smart that we could never fall into the traps that have ensnared our Christian brothers. The false emphases of Pietism intrigue our own sinful natures as well. The self-focus and works-righteous undertones of Pietism beckon to us.

My prayer is that this thesis leads the reader to thank God for his grace in preserving sound biblical teaching in our churches, and in providing godly theologians to teach and preach to us. My prayer is that this thesis also rouses the reader to greater diligence and self-examination in respect to his or her own theology. With the Holy Spirit's aid, let us beware the subtle traps of Pietistic theology. May God in his grace grant it!

APPENDIX I: LIST OF STANLEY'S MESSAGES VIEWED BY THE AUTHOR

Aftermath, Part 1: Stand Alone. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmoTAtH3zus>, 2018.

Be Rich 2019, Part 1: Better Done Than Said.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTbUhQQXZxA&t=1s>, 2019.

Believe Again. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_jsUqOGB60, 2017.

Better: The Banana King. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae4j5AqpGdg&t=910s>, 2019.

Born To Run. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFrtg1Mjtwo>, 2019.

Bystander, Part 7: Invitation to Believe.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOuXfB0JusY&t=1s>, 2019.

Catalyst 2019: The Irresistible Church. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lknciTSdtnw>, 2019.

Christian: It's Not What You Think. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ20w6tHR5c>, 2018.

Christmas Celebration 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upgllrRBQ-8>, 2018.

Christmas: It's All Good, Part 1: Better than True.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHEuyPNf-M0>, 2019.

Easter Matters. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv1qCdx9jF0>, 2018.

Five Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith: Group Bible Study.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SpsfdHY9AQ>, 2019.

Guardrails, Part 1: Direct and Protect. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgCBcWx17-4&t=3s>, 2018.

Guardrails, Part 2: Proximity. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69hWZiyGO7Y>, 2018.

Guardrails, Part 3: Forever Yours. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eF7D-H80pQc&t=2s>, 2018.

Guardrails, Part 4: Money Matters. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipep6mdj6d4>, 2018.

Guardrails, Part 5: The Heart of the Matter.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fL9IK7h6JOo&t=939s>, 2018.

Helping Other People. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UN4ftzVY60&t=586s>, 2019.

How Not To Be Your Own Worst Enemy, Part 1: Pay Attention!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qun9w2CTMW0>, 2019.
- How To Be True To Yourself.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcXG97tShBM>, 2019.
- How To Be Content With Life.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71IvuLx0YMW>, 2017.
- It's Worse Than You Thought.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31NRyiXXk_0, 2017.
- Lawless.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QD8-SYjtfxo>, 2017.
- Love, Dates, and Heartbreaks: Part 1 of 6: The Right Person Myth.*
<https://northpoint.org/messages/love-dates-and-heartbreaks/the-right-person-myth>, 2019.
- Memorial Day 2019.* <https://northpoint.org/messages/memorial-day-2019>, 2019.
- More than Ever.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWSDirAYsDs&t=6s>, 2019.
- Ninety, Part 1: For the World.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPn2dwMMugU>, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 2: Upside Down.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFZyudfPIWs>, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 3: Fish Tricks.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LJgrhN6cR4&t=1s>, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 4: New World Order.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh93_QLPFmU, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 5: Greater Indeed.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-4zt9Wy_qM, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 6: Nic at Night.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-4zt9Wy_qM, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 7: Leading Great.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-4zt9Wy_qM, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 8: The New Covenant.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYDsuC8_-tQ, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 9: The One Commandments.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tria4XPSzZ4>, 2018.
- Ninety, Part 10: The Pilate Chronicles.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vySUTYjuPo>, 2018.
- Now You Know.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qdCIT6bA-g&t=5s>, 2017.
- Reclaiming Irresistible.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGCIOrvgohU>, 2018.
- Staying Dead.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQyvEKz8t2I>, 2017.
- The American in the Mirror.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJLO8MdIAPY>, 2018.

The Beginner's Guide to Predicting Your Future, Part 1: Principle of the Path.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfxULOv44QI>, 2018.

The Beginner's Guide to Predicting Your Future, Part 2: Your Intention Please.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyvtIX_8BJs&t=48s, 2018.

The Beginner's Guide to Predicting Your Future, Part 3: Follow.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm9JsoOz4W4>, 2018.

The Beginner's Guide to Predicting Your Future, Part 4: Appealing is Revealing.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VJwjGwLaxI&t=1s>, 2018.

The Last King: Why Won't God Just Look the Other Way?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8C-e3uSg4A>, 2017.

The Unsettling Solution for Just About Everything, Part 1: Undeserveable.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5ZW8tqojvU>, 2018.

The Unsettling Solution for Just About Everything, Part 2: Don't Do The Math.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZC9BoZOjzE>, 2018.

The Unsettling Solution for Just About Everything, Part 3: Do You See What I See?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnW-AhVnAo>, 2018.

Wishful Thinking. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBs9hV6udpY>, 2019.

What it Means to Have Faith. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OplztyjHEc>, 2017.

You're Not the Boss of Me, Part 1: From the Heart.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHrn7dXX1Y>, 2019.

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