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Moving Toward Lutheran Unity  
OLIVER R. HARMS

Interaction: Ecumenism and Confessionalism  
JOHN E. GROH

Fellowship  
THOMAS COATES

Living with the Brothers in the Lord  
ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

Some Thoughts on the Church  
in the Lutheran Symbols  
HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN

Homiletics

Brief Studies

Theological Observer

Book Review

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THE HISTORY OF PIETISM RECONSIDERED:  
A REVIEW ARTICLE

*The Rise of Evangelical Pietism.* By F. Ernest Stoeffler. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965. xii and 257 pages. Cloth. G 32.

Almost all Protestant denominations have been affected by Pietism, and much of their church life is either applauded or decried as Pietistic. Yet the phenomenon of Pietism has remained a stepchild of historical research. And so we welcome the efforts of F. Ernest Stoeffler to present a history of Pietism in three volumes, the first of which we shall here discuss.

Not only the subject matter in question but above all its competent treatment by the author requires more than a usual book review. And since there are few similar studies with which one can compare this work, it is advisable to engage in an extended dialog with the presentation. This may help clarify the issues at stake as well as contribute to further research in this area. Let it be said at the outset that the questions to be raised are not necessarily criticisms. They only intend to reflect the insights gained out of another approach to the same subject.

Volumes II and III will be devoted to continental and American Pietism during the 18th century, respectively. Volume I begins at the end of the Reformation and leads through the 17th century. The terminal dates chosen are 1590 and 1690 (page ix). This raises two questions. The term "Pietism" was coined some years after the appearance of Spener's *Pia desideria* (1675) and was not employed in a positive sense until 1689 in a poem by the Leipzig professor of poetry, Joachim Feller. Thus the first question is whether it is legitimate to use the very term "Pietism" anachronistically for earlier movements. If one can agree on such a procedure

and therefore begins to look for earlier sources of Pietism, one wonders whether the post-Reformation period is the right place to start. Does not the Reformation itself set the stage for the Pietistic developments? And is not the mystical stream flowing through the church from the very beginning also responsible for Pietism?

In the introductory chapter the author describes his approach to Pietism and gives his major definitions. The first of these sees Pietism as a movement "focused on deepening and strengthening the devotional life of people rather than upon correctness of theological definition or liturgical form" (p. 2). Unfortunately, such a sharp contrast leaves out people like Spener and Wesley who, although they emphasized devotion, also constantly insisted on proper theology and liturgy. Also the other definition that "the early Pietists meant to be reformers" (p. 3) can be misleading. Certainly they were interested in reforms. But can they be placed on the same footing with the leading figures of the Reformation? In other words, did they advocate a new reformation or just a continuation of the one already begun?

In discussing Pietism's significance, its influence on education and literature is probably not seen in its full impact. Recent studies will not allow for the statement that "the relationship of Pietism to the development of education has been almost totally ignored" (p. 5). The Pietistic interest in education has led Martin Stallmann, the co-editor of the *Pädagogisches Lexikon* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1961), to the judgment that through the Pietistic educational contributions particularly of Francke but also of Zinzendorf and others, "the 18th century became the pedagogical century" (col. 725). And to turn to the field of literature, as far as the formative influences of Pietism on

Goethe are concerned, the German study by Peter Meinhold on Goethe and the history of Christianity, *Goethe zur Geschichte des Christentums* (Freiburg: Allber, 1958), has probably not been consulted.

The thesis of the book urges that Pietism represents the experiential tradition in Protestantism. The links from similar emphases in mysticism and the Reformation are acknowledged but not elaborated. The more critical questions however are, first, whether it is possible to narrow the heart of Pietism down to this one experiential element. Pietism certainly emphasized religious experience. But does this suffice to explain its very nature and all of it? Experience becomes manifest in practice. But the sweeping statement that "the universal emphasis of Pietists [is] upon *praxis pietatis*" (p. 9) presents a problem. For the *praxis pietatis* was advocated long before anybody thought of calling these people Pietists. Furthermore, it has been the consensus of recent research that Pietism could not be dealt with as a unity. See, for example, Kurt Aland's statement in his article on "Pietism" in *Weltkirchenlexikon*, edited by Franklin H. Littell and Hans Hermann Walz (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1960, col. 1151): "Der Pietismus tritt im 17. Jahrhundert gleichmässig auf reformiertem . . . wie auf lutherischem Boden in Erscheinung, ohne dass man daraus Abhängigkeiten . . . ableiten könnte. . . . Der Pietismus ist eine abstrakte Grösse, die als solche nie existiert hat, fassbar sind nur seine einzelnen Ausprägungen." The various forms of Pietism as spread over various countries differed so much from each other and were to such a great extent conditioned by their actual settings that the unity of Pietism has thus far been asserted hesitatingly. Against this the author puts his claim that "it is the conviction [of this book] that all experiential Protestantism during the post-Reformation period can be treated as an essential unity" (p. 8). But in spite of all similarities, is it

really true that a Pietism fed by Spiritualism, a Pietism fed by Lutheranism, and a Pietism fed by Calvinism can be so easily united? And a second problem presents itself: would it be fair to overlook the fundamental differences between the pre-Enlightenment forms of Pietism on the Continent and the post-Enlightenment forms of Pietism in the Anglo-American world?

The author's interest in the essential unity of Pietism is based on his approach to the history of Pietism as a history of ideas (p. 9). This probably presents the greatest problem, whether ideas are the proper area of concern of Pietism. How can the world of thought be primary for Pietism if its main emphasis is not doctrinal but practical, related to the life of devotion and the life in the church where ideas are only of secondary significance?

Aside from the Lutheran and Reformed forms of Pietism, modern scholarship usually acknowledges a radical form. The author certainly reveals his own bias when he tries to exclude radical Pietism as a movement not essentially related to Pietism. He speaks of it as "illuministic deviations" (page 10), whereas classical Pietism is seen as Word-centered. But is this really so much a contrast in kind, or perhaps only in degree? For after all, also the radical Pietists adhered to the Word; granted that they interpret it in their way, distinguishing between the inner and the outer Word. On the other hand, the classical Pietists also insist that the proper reading of the Word is accompanied by the illumination of the Spirit. Thus their differences are probably overemphasized.

A genuinely critical understanding of the Pietists should also involve an appreciation of the fronts on which they are fighting. It may be that orthodoxy was not such a "dry-as-dust-orthodoxy" as the author would like to see it (page 11). The judgment on orthodoxy (page 21) that "unwittingly the schoolastics of their day redefined the concept of

faith until it lost its fiducial nature and became assensus" sounds rather harsh, particularly in the light of the actual insistence on the life of faith by the greatest representatives of orthodoxy, John Gerhard, for instance. One could say that there is really not such a sharp break between orthodoxy and Pietism as the author seems to imply. He himself admits (page 12) of the Pietists that "in addition to being *bekennende Christen* (confessing Christians) they desired to be *tätige Christen* (active Christians)." Does he not contradict himself here?

Of the four characteristics that the author attributes to Pietism, the first one, the emphasis on man's individuality, seems to be the core. But is it really correct to say that the "experiential, inward and personal" emphasis of the Pietists marks their main concern? (page 13). Does this not have to be seen against the background of the overemphasis, as they saw it, on the theoretical, outward, and corporate elements? In other words, could it not be that the emphasis of the Pietists was not on setting the inward against the outward but on a new proper relationship of the two in the sense of the Reformation? Is it not the Reformation externalized that they want to correct by letting mysticism back into the church? The author would suggest that mysticism is not essential to Pietism when he states that "mysticism repeatedly infiltrated the ranks of the Pietists" (page 15). But is not Pietism by definition Protestant mysticism? Can there be a Pietism apart from mysticism?

When discussing the perfectionist church concept of the Pietists, the author shows his sympathy in stating that "the church's perennial temptation [is] to be satisfied with much less than the best" (page 18). Therefore the Pietists insist on conventicles as the best means of reform (page 19)! To say that this is "an institution which Pietists may have borrowed from John a Lasco or possibly Zwingli" (p. 19) is far too weak. One

would have expected a concentrated discussion of Lasco's stranger churches and Zwingli's *Prophезеи* as well as the related statements by Luther and Bucer, for the *ecclesiola* ideal is constitutive for Pietism.

The way in which the ethical norms of the Pietists are characterized again poses too sharp a contrast. For to say that the Pietists do not advocate a mystical but rather a New Testament ethics would imply that the ethics of Christian mysticism is not New Testament in its orientation and that the New Testament ethics does not contain mystical elements. Unfortunately, the case is not that easy. There is certainly the emphasis on ethics in Pietism. But there is as distinctly a New Testament orientation as there is a mystical permeation of this ethics (p. 22).

Before we can deal with the chapters that delineate Pietism in England, Holland, and Germany, we have to comment on some of the footnotes of the first chapter. Page 4, n. 1: The missionary outreach of Pietism has certainly been discussed more recently than in the work by R. H. Glover (1924). Cf. the chapter "Die Mission des Pietismus" in the history of mission by Knut B. Westman and Harald von Sicard, *Geschichte der christlichen Mission* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1962), pp. 71 ff., and "New Beginnings in East and West, 1600—1800" in Stephen Neill's *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 210 ff. Page 6, n. 3: The reference to Calvin's interpretation of the heart is not substantiated. Nor is the quotation from John Wesley relating to the same subject in n. 4. Page 8, n. 2: One should really not use Heinrich Heppе (1879) but, for example, Martin Schmidt (1965) for substantiating the rise of the term "Pietism." Page 9, n. 1: The statement of Max Weber that "Pietism first split off from the Calvinistic movement in England, and especially in Holland" should not only be cited but criticized. Page 10, n. 2: The claim that the Lutheran Pietists

"maintained that this (3rd) article [of the creed] was being neglected in the confessional churches" needs to be substantiated. Page 16, n. 1: For "terms of endearment" in Pietism the reader is referred to "early Moravian hymns." But unfortunately no example is quoted.

It is not altogether uncommon, although it is not generally accepted either, to see the first signs of "Pietism among the English Puritans." In this the author acknowledges his debt to August Lang. Kurt Aland sees things similarly. But there are indeed three great problems such an approach raises. In the first place, scholars still debate whether the links between English Puritanism and Continental Pietism are really as strong as has sometimes been asserted. In the second place, too many indigenous preparatory movements in the various countries have been found which make it rather awkward to interpret the rise of Pietism on the continent through decisive influences from England. In the third place, one wonders whether the Pietistic element in Puritanism can be so easily separated from its other concerns. To see Puritanism reach over into Pietism is one thing, but to call it the first form of Pietism is another thing. One should not overlook two facts. First, Pietism on the continent was engaged in a second Reformation, consciously building upon the already achieved first Reformation. Puritanism, however, still struggles with the first Reformation, which it considers incomplete and which ought to be perfected. Second, Pietism has abandoned all attempts to erect a Christian country institutionally. Following Luther and preparing the way for modern secularism, it sees the state as a secular institution. Puritanism, however, holds the state to be part of the sacred realm. The Puritan ideal is the Holy Commonwealth. These two points account indeed for two different worlds and contradict the author's statement that "the fact is that essential differences between continental Pietism and what we have called Pietistic

Puritanism cannot be established because they are non-existent" (page 29). The author's point must be granted that "the whole Pietistic movement whether it occurs in Saxony, in the Netherlands, or in England presents remarkable similarities" (page 29). But these do not yet prove historical links and historical dependence of the one on the other. The subsequent attempt to understand Pietism mainly out of Calvinism leads therefore to a misrepresentation of the situation prevailing at the time, in the view that "the spell of Calvinism . . . reigned supreme not only at Geneva but also at Frankfurt" (page 31). The latter point is just not true. Fortunately the Calvinistic understanding of Pietism is corrected by making room for the connection between Zurich and England (page 35 ff.) and above all for the important role of Bucer (page 42 ff.). And very legitimately William Perkins has been called "the very center of this early group of Pietistic Puritans" in England. He is indeed the father of Reformed Pietism. But in being a father of Pietism, he is not yet its child. He is a Puritan preparatory figure, not yet a Pietist himself.

A wealth of material is presented when the individual representatives of Puritanism are asked about their understanding of piety. Every serious student of this period must be grateful for the discussions of Hooper, Bradford, Greenham, Rogers, Dod, Bound, Downame, Bayly, Dyke, Bolton, Baynes, Sibbes, Hall, Rous, Burroughs, Goodwin, Baxter, Bunyan, and Jeremy Taylor.

The third chapter deals with "The Origin of Reformed Pietism on the European Continent." Again one can hardly argue with the author about the careful way in which he presents the main representatives of this type of Pietism. He always summarizes the works of the men under consideration by focusing on their concept of piety. Thus he may occasionally neglect other important aspects of Pietism. But what he presents is so carefully worked through that again one is grateful for

the material. The men discussed in this context are: Coccejus, Voetius, Coornhert, Taffin, Udemans, W. Teellinck, Amesius, Lodensteyn, T. G. Brakel, J. Teellinck, W. Brakel, Saldenus, Labadie, Undereyck, Neander, Alardin, Nethenus, and Horche.

The author may expect more criticism on his fourth chapter called "The Advent of Lutheran Pietism." For it is indeed unique to think of Lutheran Pietism as the last link in the chain of developments from England via the Netherlands to Germany as he presents them. Above all it is the final inclusion of Philip Jacob Spener among the preparatory forces in the rise of Lutheran Pietism that probably will not go undisputed. For usually Spener is seen as the beginning, not the end, of Pietism in whatever forms. Although he epitomizes in his own activity the reform attempts of the late orthodoxy, his *Pia desideria* is usually seen as the program of Pietism initiating something new rather than bringing to a close earlier developments. The author is aware of this situation when he admits that "the man whose name has been most often and intimately associated with Pietism is Philipp Jakob Spener" (page 228). He also knows (page 230) that Spener has been called "the Father of Pietism." His contention however is that "in reality his life and thought constitute the highest development of a movement which had been in progress for a hundred years." This is the basis for shifting the emphasis and treating Spener in a much briefer way than Lutherans will probably want to see him treated.

Before discussing Spener as the last figure of Lutheran Pietism the author treated extensively the following names: Praetorius, Nicolai, Weigel, John Arndt, Dame, Egardus, Lessenius, Grossgebauer, Lütkeemann, Müller, and Scriver.

In addition to these general remarks, the last chapter requires some critical notes that will show that the author is much more familiar with the literature concerning the English and Dutch developments than the

German ones. Page 181, n. 1: The one quotation taken over from Uhlhorn (1911) is not sufficiently satisfactory as substantiation for the rather sweeping statements that follow concerning the horrors of the Thirty Years' War. Hans Jessen's recent source collection, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg in Augenzeugenberichten* (Düsseldorf: Karl Rauch, 1963), could have served the purpose better. Page 182, n. 1: The publication date of Koepf's work is 1912, not 1959. Page 185, n. 1: One wonders why the work by Heinrich Schmid, *Die Geschichte des Pietismus*, 1863, which already Ritschl criticized 20 years after its appearance, is taken to be an authority? Page 186, n. 1: Henke's work on Calixtus is dated 1853. Hermann Schüssler has recently presented a new study on this man, entitled *Georg Calixt: Theologie und Kirchenpolitik; eine Studie zur Ökumenizität des Luthertums* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1961). Page 187, n. 1: Why is Luther quoted according to an ancient edition and not the modern American edition? Page 190, n. 2: All the works on Luther's theology are of rather ancient date. What about modern Luther theologies? Page 197, n. 1: The idea of the pectoral theology has a longer history and wider ramification than suggested. Page 211, n. 7: Why is Spener not quoted from his own work? Page 321, n. 2: The correct spelling of the name under discussion is Kurt Aland. And one final remark about Spener. His *Theological Reflections* in four volumes (page 230) are not "his last important work," as one thinks about a composed work. These are rather occasional papers collected and edited.

May it be said again that this study has to be considered as a very weighty contribution in the field of Pietism, well worthy of serious study, careful interpretation, and further discussion. No student of this period of the history of the church will be able to afford to bypass this study and the other two volumes for which we are eagerly waiting.

Evanston, Ill. EGON W. GERDES