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# Bach and Pietism: Similarities Today

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The topic of this essay is controversial—controversial in regard to Bach, controversial in regard to Pietism, and controversial in regard to any similarities we might encounter between Bach's relationship to Pietism and what is happening in many churches today. The basic problem is that there is much misperception of what Pietism was and much misunderstanding of Bach's relation to Pietism. The literature on Pietism is confusing in that many different and conflicting opinions are propounded concerning the nature of the movement and its relation to Lutheran Orthodoxy. Similarly, there is no unanimity in Bach literature on the subject of the cantor's relationship to Pietism.

I propose first to review some of the contemporary assessments of Bach and Pietism in order to discover the presuppositions regarding both Pietism and Bach's relation to it; then to examine the basic features of the Pietist movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and to test the contemporary presuppositions against the evidence; then, in this light to re-examine various aspects of Bach's career and compositions; and, finally, to begin to address the question of the parallels between Bach's day and our own. So, we shall begin where we are today, then work retrospectively into the origins of Pietism, then from there proceed prospectively, via Bach's life and works, back to the present. The hope is that we shall not find ourselves in exactly the same place from which we started, but shall have come to a new position that gives us a different vantage point, from which our view of Bach, Pietism, and our contemporary situation will be somewhat clearer.

## *Contemporary Views of Bach and Pietism*

In his book *Church Music and Theology*, originally published in 1959, Erik Routley included a discussion of various aspects of Bach, with a section on "Bach and Pietism." Twenty years later the book was substantially revised and reissued as *Church Music and the Christian Faith*.<sup>1</sup> The section on Bach and Pietism is virtually unchanged in the revised version of the book. Routley first summarizes his understanding of Pietism:

In modern terms [Pietism] adds up to a fundamentalist outlook, a layman's religious movement, a contempt for the academic and cerebral aspects of Christian practice, a stress on interdenominationalism, a preference for prayer over instruction, and a system of conversion.<sup>2</sup>

Routley then comes to the following judgment regarding Bach and Pietism:

It is helpful in understanding Bach's religious background to note that he was, to all intents and purposes, moving among and faithful to groups of loyal Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship adherents; for that is exactly what, in its day, pietism was.<sup>3</sup>

The implication is that Routley sees Bach as the ardent devotee of the informal prayer meeting, with a primary concern for cultivating his relationship to Jesus Christ, after experiencing the "new birth" of conversion.

For the evidence of Bach's Pietism Routley looks to the libretti of the choral works, especially the cantatas and passions, and concludes that they are "innocent of any rejoicing in the resurrection."<sup>4</sup> He states further that "pietism reserves all its expository energies for the passion, all its theological attention for the atonement, and all its sense of liturgical drama to this one occasion." He concludes, that "we must ascribe to this religious culture everything distinctive about the Bach Passions."<sup>5</sup> Several paragraphs later he makes the categorical statement: "Bach's Passions are entirely unliturgical"; and the explanation is that "pietism was unliturgical."<sup>6</sup> So, for Routley, Bach was a Pietist, little interested in the outward forms of liturgical worship and much more concerned with inward religion, which he expressed in his music with consummate skill and artistry.

A more recent writer on the subject is Jaroslav Pelikan, the distinguished historical theologian of Yale University. In his book *Bach Among the Theologians*, issued in 1986, there is a fairly substantial chapter entitled: "Pietism, Piety, and Devotion in Bach's Cantatas."<sup>7</sup> Pelikan's analysis of Pietism deals primarily with the hallmarks of the spirituality of the movement. One of these is the awareness of sin as *Angst* [anxiety], in contrast to Luther's *Anfechtung* [temptation]. This anxiety over one's sinful state represented a theological shift from an understanding of sin as a state of being to a

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preoccupation with sins as acts of volition. Pietism was in fact a new Puritanism. Pelikan quotes the “Rules for the Protection of Conscience and for Good Order in Conversation or in Society,” written by August Hermann Francke, the leader of Pietism, in 1689:

Games and other pastimes, such as dancing, jumping, and so forth, arise from an improper and empty manner of life, and common and unchaste postures in speech are associated with them.<sup>8</sup>

Another hallmark of Pietism to which Pelikan draws attention is subjectivity:

...the way Pietism came to interpret the relation of the soul to Jesus entailed a shift in emphasis from objective to subjective, from the idea of ‘Christ *for* us,’ which had predominated in orthodox interpretations both before and after the reformation, to a primary interest in ‘Christ *in* us,’ which had never been absent from orthodoxy but which had been pronouncedly subordinated to the primary concern with the objectivity of the Gospel history and of the redemptive transaction on the historic cross.<sup>9</sup>

In passing, I should comment that we have here an example of the difficulty in coming to terms with the issue at hand. For when Routley and Pelikan are compared, one says the emphasis on the passion is a mark of Pietism, while for the other it is a mark of Orthodoxy.

Pelikan examines the cantatas of Bach and finds that *Angst* is a common theme, as is the emphasis on “Christ in us,” especially in the frequent use of bride-bridegroom imagery. These are for Pelikan illustrations of the position he adopts early in the chapter. Although he carefully avoids calling Bach a Pietist, he states:

All the attempts by Orthodox Lutheran confessionalists, in his time or ours, to lay claim to Bach as a member of their theological party will shatter against the texts of the cantatas and Passions, many (though by no means all) of which are permeated by the spirit of Pietism. Above all, the recitatives and arias...ring all the changes and sound all the themes of eighteenth-century Pietism: all the intense subjectivity, the moral earnestness, and the rococo metaphors of Pietist homiletics, devotion, and verse.<sup>10</sup>

Although there are differences between them, both Routley and Pelikan are agreed on the basic presuppositions that Pietism was essentially a movement of renewed spirituality and that the intrinsic characteristics of Pietist devotion are found in the cantatas and passions of Bach.<sup>11</sup> In actuality, however, do these analyses expose the heart of Pietism, and, therefore, do they provide the adequate background to explain Bach's relation to Pietism?

#### *Lutheran Pietism*

"Pietism" is a difficult term to use without qualification because so many different things are denoted by it. It is frequently used today as a general term for any kind of subjective spirituality. When it is used in a historical context, it is often employed to designate the widespread movement of spirituality that extended throughout Europe from the seventeenth century on, that has its roots in Reformed-Calvinist theology, but which has parallels in different denominational expressions, such as Anglican, Presbyterian, Moravian, Lutheran, Methodist, and so forth. But when investigating Bach, one must use the term in a much more restricted sense. "Pietism" in this context denotes the movement within the Lutheran Church which began around 1675 and reached its peak during the first two decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the interdenominational aspects of general Pietism, appealed to by Routley, are invalid for a discussion of the Lutheran Bach. He did not meet informally for prayer and Bible study with Christians of different confessions. Indeed, the evidence is quite the opposite. While he was *Kapellmeister* to the Calvinist court in Anhalt-Cöthen, between 1717 and 1723, Bach and his family did not worship with the Calvinists but became members of the small local Lutheran congregation. Whatever contact Bach had with Pietism was with this more narrowly defined Lutheran Pietism.

Lutheran Pietism was part of the general renewal movement that followed in the wake of the devastation of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). When the externals of life are destroyed it is a natural response to turn inward to find consolation and spiritual strength. During the Thirty Years War this inward spirituality was sustained by such books as Johann Gerhard's *Meditationes Sacrae ad Verum Pietatem Excitandam*, first

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published in 1606, and Johann Arndt's *Wahres Christenthum*, issued in six books between 1606 and 1609. After the war such spirituality was fostered in the hymns of Paul Gerhardt, which began appearing in print in the 1650's. But in the technical sense the Pietist Movement within Lutheranism had not yet begun.<sup>13</sup> It is exactly here that many misconceptions and misunderstandings have their origin. Expressions of personal piety in such writings have been taken to be the marks of Pietism in a technical sense. But this simple equation of piety with Pietism is invalid and does not take into account the long line of devotional writing within the Lutheran Church. Luther himself uses the bride-bridegroom imagery in His writings from time to time, notably in the treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520). An *Erbauungsliteratur* of devotional handbooks and sermons served subsequent generations of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

Although the Pietists attacked the Orthodox for their preoccupation with polemics, they proved themselves to be masters of propaganda. They created the impression that Lutheran Orthodoxy was uniformly formalistic, dry, and intellectual in its preaching and teaching and that only they and their followers promoted a warm, devotional, and practical Christianity. Of course, their criticisms did apply in some areas of the Lutheran Church, but the Pietists did not have a monopoly on piety. For example, Orthodox Leipzig in the early 1700's was noted for its lively preaching and went through an extraordinary period when long-closed churches were refurbished and reopened and when the other churches in the city were enlarged, all in response to the growth in church membership under the leadership of Orthodox rather than Pietist clergy.<sup>14</sup>

If the Pietists had been concerned only with spirituality, then the Orthodox-Pietist controversy within Lutheranism would hardly have been noticed. The truth is that the Pietists had much wider concerns than simply intensifying spiritual life. At root Pietism was a holiness movement that involved a re-evaluation of confessional Lutheran theology. The six-point agenda was set by Philipp Jakob Spener in his pamphlet *Pia Desideria* ("Pious Desires"),<sup>15</sup> which was originally published as an introduction to Arndt's *Wahres Christenthum* in 1675:

1. Christians ought to read from the Bible daily and to study passages at weekly home meetings with neighbors and friends.
2. Every Christian, not only the minister, is called to lead a holy life.
3. The Christian must be known by his actions, not merely by his knowledge of doctrine.
4. Theological controversy and confessional polemics, now prevalent in the church, must be reduced.
5. Theology students ought to take part in *collegia*, or Bible study meetings for devotional study.
6. Sermons ought to illustrate how to lead a Christian life, not present a rhetorical argument.<sup>16</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, the basic difference between Orthodoxy and Pietism within Lutheranism was, in the first place, ecclesiological rather than a question of the nature of devotional life.<sup>17</sup> The formation of the *collegia pietatis* for weekly Bible study and prayer, in the pursuit of holiness of life, marked a modification of the doctrine of the church: they were *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, little churches in the church. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession gives this definition of the church:

[The] one holy Christian church. . . is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the church is the community of faith, within which the word is read and expounded and the sacraments of baptism and communion are observed. In the following article (Article VIII) there is the further clarification that within the visible church there may well be "false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners,"<sup>19</sup> but their presence within it does not undermine the doctrine of the church, nor invalidate the efficacy of the sacraments.

The Pietists were not so sure. Their call for holiness of life on the part of individual Christians was also a means of purifying the corporate church. But this purification did not take place through the activity of liturgical worship Sunday by Sunday, but rather through the exercises of the *collegia pietatis*, the small groups that met for Bible study and prayer.

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Those who met in the *collegia pietatis* were those who had experienced the “new birth” of conversion and were thus “true Christians.” It was but a small step in logic to conclude that, if the *collegia pietatis* were made up of true Christians, then the *collegia pietatis* comprised the true church and that, if they were the true church, then the outward manifestation of public worship within Lutheranism would be purified when the activities of the *collegia pietatis* were transferred to the local parish churches.

August Hermann Francke argued that the Reformation of the sixteenth century had never been completed. It was good as far as it went, but there was more reforming to be done, and the Pietists regarded themselves as the latter-day reformers who would do it. The Augsburg Confession had stated (in Article XV) that the holy days and festivals of the church year could be observed “without sin” and (in Article XXIV) that no conspicuous changes had been made to the ceremonies of the mass, since “the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ.”<sup>20</sup> The Pietists did not accept this confessional statement but argued that such ceremonies, together with various practices associated with them, were in need of reform. However, their program of reformation was essentially a process of elimination. Eucharistic vestments and exorcism at baptism were remnants of unreformed Catholicism and had to be discontinued. Similarly, the rigidity of the annual cycle of epistles and gospels of the church year had to give way to a more thorough sequence of biblical readings. All elaborate music at worship was considered to be worldly ostentation, which had to be replaced by simple, devotional hymnody, to be sung not to the “heavy” chorale tunes of Luther’s generation, but to the lighter and more accessible tunes that the Pietists sang in their *collegia pietatis*.

The Pietist hymnal was Freylinghausen’s *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* (Halle, 1704). Much of the controversy between Orthodoxy and Pietism centered on this hymnal. In 1716 the Wittenberg theological faculty issued an assessment of the hymnal and declared, on theological grounds, that it was suspect and therefore could not be recommended for use either in church or in the home.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the Wittenberg theologians criticized the omission of classic hymns that deal with the fundamentals of Lutheran theology, such as Luther’s



“Erhalt Uns bei Deinem Wort” (“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word”). They also gave detailed criticism of individual hymns. The second stanza of Johann Adam Haslocher’s “Du Sagst, Ich Bin ein Christ” (“You say, ‘I am a Christian’”) ran as follows:

You say, “I am a Christian.”  
 He is a Christian who knows Jesus.  
 Not only does he name his God and Lord,  
 But also diligently does what His commandment  
 requires.

Not to do so makes whatever you say a mockery.

The Wittenberg theologians comment: “This definition is wrong, for a Christian is so called because of his belief in Christ, not because of his obedience to the Lord’s commandments.”<sup>22</sup> It was a continuing concern for Lutheran Orthodoxy that the Pietists had become Crypto-Calvinists by rejecting the Orthodox understanding of the *analogia fidei*, the analogy of faith, the sequential and distinct operation of law and gospel, and had made obedience mandatory to faith.

Another hymn criticized by the Wittenberg theologians is Ludwig Andreas Gotter’s “Treuer Vater und Deine Liebe” (“True Father and Thy Love”). Stanza 3 ran as follows:

Since I thought I was a Christian  
 And knew how to speak about it,  
 I needed the church and altar,  
 I sang and gave to the poor.  
 I had no terrible vices,  
 And yet it was only hypocrisy.<sup>23</sup>

Here services of public worship are denigrated as outward formalism that is harmful to spiritual life. As the Pietist Movement progressed, together with this devaluation of external worship, there was a greater emphasis on internal worship and the direct illumination of the Holy Spirit. This development was a further concern to Orthodox theologians, who could point to Article V of the Augsburg Confession, which states that faith comes through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, and not by some independent inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Lutheran Pietism, therefore, had theological, liturgical, and musical implications which went far beyond its spiritual intensity.

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*Pietism and Bach*

Was Bach a Pietist? The answer to such a question would have to be an emphatic negative. Where we have evidence of tension between Orthodoxy and Pietism during Bach's lifetime, Bach is always found on the side of Orthodoxy. At an early date, probably while Bach was still in his teens, he became friends with Erdmann Neumeister. Both had connections with the court of Weissenfels, for whose chapel Neumeister wrote cantata texts in 1700, which were published in 1704, the year Neumeister became the court chaplain in Weissenfels. These libretti are important in that, for the first time, operatic recitatives and arias, especially the *da capo* aria, were employed within the church cantata form. Had Neumeister been a Pietist, the thought of using such a theatrical form for Christian worship would never have entered his head. Neumeister was, in fact, a staunchly Orthodox theologian, who had studied theology in Leipzig. He was in Leipzig at the same time as August Hermann Francke before Francke was expelled and moved to Halle. Indeed, Francke made a deep impression on Neumeister. But this impression was quickly dispelled when he heard Francke call Luther's Bible translation into question and criticize the Lutheran Reformation for not going far enough. Thereafter Neumeister became a vigorous opponent of Pietism. But this position did not mean that he therefore wrote cantata libretti in a dry and detached style—by no means! His libretti are full of robust piety and warm, vibrant devotional poetry. Much of Neumeister's imagery may appear to be similar to that of the Pietists, but the theological content and context are clearly Orthodox. Over the years Bach composed music for at least five of Neumeister's libretti, Cantatas 18, 24, 28, 59, 61, and possibly 79, and when Neumeister was pastor of the Jacobikirche in Hamburg in 1720, he attempted to have Bach appointed as the organist of his church.<sup>24</sup> The implication comes across very strongly that here were two like-minded colleagues.

Between 1707 and 1708 Bach was the organist of the St. Blasius Church in Mühlhausen. Among his predecessors were the father and son Johann Rudolf and Johann Georg Ahle, musicians of known Pietist sympathies; and the pastor of the church, Johann Adolph Frohne, with whom Bach worked, was a dedicated and militant Pietist. During Bach's short time in the town it is significant that he appears to have become a close

friend of Georg Christian Eilmar, the Orthodox pastor of St. Mary's Church in Mühlhausen, to whom Frohne was in frequent opposition. Bach's Cantata 131 was commissioned by Eilmar, who may have had a hand in writing the libretto, and performed in St. Mary's Church, rather than St. Blasius Church. The Orthodox pastor was also godfather to Bach's firstborn child, Catharina Dorothea, during this time.<sup>25</sup> Having been in Mühlhausen for just about a year, Bach requested permission to leave in a letter dated 25 June 1708. In it he wrote as follows:

Even though I should always have liked to work toward the goal, . . . [of] a well-regulated church music, to the glory of God. . . and would, according to my small means, have helped out as much as possible with the church music that is growing up in almost every township, and often better than the harmony that is fashioned here. . . yet it has not been possible to accomplish all this without hindrance, and there are, at present, hardly any signs that in future a change may take place. . . Now, God has brought it to pass that an unexpected change should offer itself to me, in which I see the possibility of a more adequate living and the achievement of my goal of a well-regulated church music without further vexation. . .<sup>26</sup>

The vexations and hindrances to his "goal" of "a well-regulated church music"—significantly mentioned twice in almost the same words—are probably references to the unsympathetic attitude of the Pietist Frohne toward the kind of music with which Bach wanted to be involved.

Similarly, when Bach was appointed to a position in Leipzig in 1723 he appears to have been on friendly terms with the Orthodox clergy.<sup>27</sup> The leading clergy with whom Bach worked were also on the theological faculty of the university, among them Solomon Deyling, superintendent of Leipzig for the whole of Bach's time in the city, and Johann Gottlob Carpzov, Hebraist and Archdeacon of the Thomaskirche. Carpzov's daughter stood as godparent to one of Bach's children;<sup>28</sup> after he moved to Lübeck in 1730, Carpzov was involved on the Orthodox side in various controversies with the Pietists. The Leipzig theological faculty, which included both Deyling and Carpzov, was the bastion of Orthodox Lutheranism, and when appealed to again and again in disputes over Pietism, it always

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came down on the side of Orthodoxy and against Pietism. Thus, the context for Bach's life and work in Leipzig was markedly Orthodox.<sup>29</sup>

It is at this juncture that we need to raise two related questions. First, would Bach have been happy among the Pietists? Secondly, would the Pietists have wanted to own Bach as one of their adherents? Again, both answers have to be negative. For Bach to have joined the Pietists would have meant resigning from his position in Leipzig. The Pietists argued for the elimination of elaborate music from the liturgy (allowing only simple congregational song) and the reduction of liturgical form to a basic sequence of hymns, prayers, biblical readings, and sermon. The liturgy in Leipzig was a magnificent amalgam of the traditional structure of the old Lutheran mass with all the propers (some of it still in Latin), congregational hymnody, ecclesiastical monody, a one-hour sermon, and, like a gemstone in a chaste platinum setting, the cantata—a rich combination of choral, vocal, and instrumental sound, which functioned as a liturgical proper for the day.<sup>30</sup> These were all things that the Orthodox were intent on retaining and that the Pietists wished to eliminate from the worship of the church. The Pietists argued that such things were formalistic and diverted the congregation from true spiritual worship; the Orthodox asserted that they were the substance of liturgical and devotional life.<sup>31</sup>

No shred of evidence can be found to link Bach with the viewpoint of the Pietists, but there is much evidence that theologically he sided with the Orthodox. In many of the complaints he made, either to the church consistory, city council, or school authorities, Bach's principal concern was with what he saw as the erosion of the role of music within the liturgy. For example, he wrote a memorandum to the city council in the summer of 1730 and headed it as a "short but most necessary draft for a well-appointed church music, with certain modest reflections on the decline of the same." In this memorandum Bach states that the church music of the city was in jeopardy; he just did not have the necessary singers and players for what needed to be done. He stated that his minimum requirements were thirty-six good singers and eighteen good instrumentalists.<sup>32</sup> The Pietists would have thrown up their hands in horror at such a suggestion.

Another example would be Bach's dispute with the rector of the St. Thomas School in 1736 over the question of the appointment of prefects in the school.<sup>33</sup> Theretofore the cantor, that is, Bach, had appointed prefects, because they had to take musical leadership in some of the churches. Then the rector arbitrarily decided that he would appoint the prefects, and chose non-musical ones. Bach objected on the grounds that, if this practice were not reversed, then the highly developed music of the church, which the schoolboys provided under the leadership of Bach, could not survive. Again, no Pietist could have found himself arguing from Bach's position. Then there is the other question: Would the Pietists have wanted to own Bach as one of their adherents? From the facts we have just reviewed, clearly they would not.

From all this evidence it can be seen that some of the presuppositions of Routley and Pelikan are based on either wrong or incomplete information. But what shall we say of their other presuppositions? We can take Routley first. His implication that Bach was a Pietist who attended the informal meetings of the *collegia pietatis* is misinformation. There is no evidence that Bach was a Pietist or went to Pietist meetings for prayer and Bible study. Indeed, the evidence points to the opposite conclusion. Furthermore, Routley's view that there is no rejoicing in the resurrection in Bach's choral works is untenable. The truth is that there are resurrection themes everywhere in Bach's works. Bach has certainly been charged with having a preoccupation with death, a theme frequently recurring in his choral works.<sup>34</sup> But when one examines this concentration on the subject of death, one will find that the works of Bach are not filled with hopeless remorse but that the note of resurrection is always sounded. Obvious examples are found in his funeral music, such as the early cantata (BWV 106) "Gottes Zeit ist der Allerbestes Zeit" and the later motet (BWV 118) "O Jesu Christ, Meins Lebens Licht." But even more direct than this evidence is the unequivocal "et resurrexit" of the B-Minor Mass, with its exuberant fanfares, celebrating the joy of faith in the resurrection.

Routley is right when he states that "Pietism was unliturgical"; but he is quite wrong when he asserts that "Bach's passions are entirely unliturgical." As I have sought to show in my small book *J.S. Bach as Preacher: His Passions and Music in Worship*,<sup>35</sup> the passions of Bach cannot be understood

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without appreciation of the fact that they were written and first performed as liturgical music. The context of the Bach passions was the vespers service on the afternoon of Good Friday. His passions were performed within a liturgical sequence of prayers, congregational hymns, motets, and a substantial sermon that was preached between the two halves of the passion. For Bach, his passions did not exist in their own right, like an Handelian oratorio; they were rather musical expositions of the passion of Christ set within a particular liturgical framework.

This presupposition that the passions and cantatas of Bach were unliturgical appears to lie behind Pelikan's arguments also. Since he discovers in the cantatas of Bach an emphasis on the indwelling Christ, he equates it with the primary Pietist concern with the individual's union with Christ, a mystical and spiritual union that is subjective and internal and exists without the context of public worship. Pelikan's exegesis would be quite correct if the cantatas were independent pieces in their own right. But the fact is that the cantatas were fundamentally liturgical.<sup>36</sup> As stated earlier, the cantata of the day was in essence a proper, related both to the epistle and gospel of the day and to the sermon. But the context was not only liturgical; it was also eucharistic. Thus the "Christ in me" emphasis in Bach's cantatas is not the hallmark of the spirituality of Pietism; it is instead the hallmark of Orthodox eucharistic devotion. "Christ for you" is the objective proclamation of the gospel in the eucharist, and "Christ in me" articulates the subjective response of faith to the gospel of the eucharist.

Another thing which Pelikan appears to have missed is the exposition of the analogy of faith in Bach's cantatas. Instead of the Pietist order of salvation, focussing on conversion, the cantatas deal with the dialectic tension between law and gospel. Many cantatas have a similar ground plan. In the opening chorus the problem is stated, that is, the demands of the law; a recitative and aria draw out some of the implications; then, approximately midway through the cantata, the problem is resolved, that is, the Gospel is proclaimed; a note of joy in the gospel is heard in the following aria or arias; and the cantata concludes with the chorale, which underscores the message of the gospel with a statement of faith. One has to conclude that, although the contents of Bach's cantatas may have the appearance of Pietism in imagery and expression, the

liturgical purpose, the eucharistic context, and the theological content mark these cantatas as the product of a vibrant and lively Lutheran Orthodoxy.<sup>37</sup>

### *Contemporary Implications*

We do not have to look very far to see that today there is a new spirit of pietism abroad, a pietism that sees the essence of Christianity in the small, informal group, rather than in the total community of faith at worship within a recognized and formal liturgical order.<sup>38</sup> It is a pietism that measures its success by the number of people it touches, rather than by the truth of the message it proclaims. It is a pietism that is preoccupied with “simple hymns” and informal structures of worship. It is a pietism that is impatient with the German Reformation of the sixteenth century, a pietism that asserts that we need new forms and less of the old. It is a new spirit of pietism that looks in many respects like the old pietism—the Pietism in the technical sense which we have considered here.

The leading question, of course, is this: Where did the old pietism lead? By the end of the eighteenth century German Lutheranism had almost disappeared. Liturgical forms had been eliminated, the highly developed church music of Bach and his contemporaries was no longer heard in the churches, and the content of the Christian faith had been watered down to little more than Unitarianism, with an invertebrate spirituality lacking the backbone of confessional theology. Instead of leading to a period of growth of the church, Pietism precipitated an era of decline of the church, a situation which was not reversed until, around the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a recovery of Lutheran confessional theology, Lutheran liturgical practice, and Lutheran church music,<sup>39</sup> that is, a recovery of those things with which Bach was so intimately concerned.

### ENDNOTES

1. Erik Routley, *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream: Agape, 1978), pp. 54-58.

2. Ibid., pp. 54-55.
3. Ibid., p. 55.
4. Loc. cit. Routley's conclusion is based on the listing of biblical texts set by Bach found in William H. Scheide, *Johann Sebastian Bach as a Biblical Interpreter* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1952), pp. 37-38. However, this listing, like others [see Robin A. Leaver, ed., *J.S. Bach and Scripture: Glosses from the Calov Bible Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), p. 100], is minimal, recording only the movements of cantatas which comprise purely biblical text. It does not record the many scriptural quotations that can be found imbedded within the cantata libretti. Dr. Ulrich Meyer of Gifhorn, Germany, has completed a valuable analysis of the biblical basis of the libretti of Bach's cantatas, *Bibelwort and Bibelwortanklang in J.S. Bachs Kantatentexten*, which is, as yet, still unpublished.
5. Routley, *Church Music*, p. 56.
6. Ibid., p. 57.
7. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 56-71.
8. Peter C. Erb, ed., *The Pietists: Selected Writings*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 111, cited by Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians*, p. 59.
9. Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians*, p. 65.
10. Ibid., p. 57.
11. The same presuppositions are found, for example, in June L. Saler, "The Theological Influence of the Pietist Movement on the Texts of Bach's Cantatas," master's thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 1982.
12. The two books by F. Ernest Stoeffler remain the basic literature in English: *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965); and *German Pietism in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973).
13. For example, James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 52, gives what he regards as a representative list of Pietist hymnwriters and composers: Paul Gerhardt, Johann Franck (who is confused with August Hermann Francke), Dietrich Buxtehude, Johann Pachelbel, and Johann Sebastian Bach. Although men of distinctive piety, not one was a Pietist; they were actually Orthodox hymnwriters and composers.



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14. See Günther Stiller, *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, ed. Robin A. Leaver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), pp. 39-48.
  15. Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).
  16. Spener is cited by Dianne M. McMullen, "The Geistreiches Gesangbuch of Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen (1670-1739): A German Pietist Hymnal," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1987, p. 224.
  17. Robin A. Leaver, *J.S. Bach as Preacher: His Passions and Music in Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), p. 12.
  18. *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 32.
  19. *Book of Concord*, p. 33.
  20. *Book of Concord*, pp. 36 and 56.
  21. The document is presented both in the German and in an English translation in McMullen, "Geistreiches Gesangbuch," pp. 567-631.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 578.
  23. *Loc. cit.*
  24. See Robin A. Leaver, "The Libretto of Bach's Cantata 79: A Conjecture," *Bach: The Quarterly Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute*, 6:1 (January, 1975), pp. 3-11.
  25. *Bach Dokumente*, ed. Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze, 4 vols. (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1963-1979; hereafter cited as BD), 1:37.
  26. BD, 1:19-20; *The Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. H.T. David and A. Mendel (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966; hereafter cited as BR), p. 60.
  27. See Stiller, *Liturgical Life*, pp. 67 and 102.
  28. BD, 2:200.
  29. In recent studies of Bach's relationship to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the common conclusion is that Bach was theologically Orthodox: see Paul S. Minear, "J.S. Bach and J.A. Ernesti: A Case Study in Exegetical and Theological Conflict," *Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler*, ed. John Descher, Leroy T. Howe, and Klaus Penzel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 131-155; Ulrich Siegele, "Bachs Ort in Orthodoxie und Aufklärung,"

*Musik und Kirche*, 51 (1981), pp. 3-14; Martin Petzoldt, "Zwischen Orthodoxie, Pietismus und Aufklärung: Überlegungen zum theologiegeschichtlichen Kontext von Johann Sebastian Bach," *Johann Sebastian Bach und die Aufklärung*, ed. Reinhard Szeskus, Bach-Studien, 7 (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1982), pp. 66-108.

30. For Bach's theological understanding of the role of music in worship, see, for example, his marginalia entered in his copy of Abraham Calov, *Die Deutsche Bibel* (Wittenberg: Christian Schröter, 1681-1682); cf. Leaver, *Bach and Scripture*, pp. 93-96.
31. Although Orthodox Lutheran theologians agreed that music in worship was to be classified as adiaphora and thus technically excludable, in practice they regarded it as indispensable; see Joyce Irwin, "Music and the Doctrine of Adiaphora in Orthodox Lutheran Theology," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 14 (1983), pp. 157-172; Robin A. Leaver, "Lutheran Vespers as a Context for Music," *Church, Stage, and Studio: Music and Its Contexts in Seventeenth-Century Germany*, ed. Paul Walker (Ann Arbor: U.M.I. Research Press, 1990), pp. 143-161.
32. BD, 1:600-601; BR, p. 121.
33. See BD, 1:82-89; BR, pp. 137-149.
34. See Paul F. Foelber, *Bach's Treatment of the Subject of Death in His Choral Music* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961); Paul S. Minear, *Death Set to Music: Masterworks by Bach, Brahms, Penderecki, Bernstein* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), pp. 43-57.
35. See note 17 above.
36. See Robin A. Leaver, "The Liturgical Place and Homiletic Purpose of Bach's Cantatas," *Worship*, 59 (1985), pp. 194-202.
37. Compare the similar conclusions in Hans L. Holborn, "Bach and Pietism: The Relationship of the Church Music of Johann Sebastian Bach to Eighteenth-Century Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism with Special Reference to the *Saint Matthew Passion*," D. Min. dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1976.
38. For the influence of Pietism on earlier generations of American Lutherans, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, *Mysticism in the German Devotional Literature of Colonial Pennsylvania* (Allentown, Pennsylvania: Schlechter, 1950); Paul P. Keuning, *The Rise and Fall of American Lutheran Pietism: The Rejection of an Activist Heritage* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988).

39. It is not without significance that the "Bach revival" is also to be dated within this same period.