An Essay on the Contribution of Pietism to Early Evangelicalism

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Rodger Rinker, a veteran missionary to the First Nations people of the Sunchild and O'Chiese reservations north west of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, once told me a sad and somewhat baffling story. Several years ago a group came onto the reserves and partnered with the missionaries to hold a series of open air revival meetings. Typically, it is very difficult to get adults to come to event-type ministries without building a very solid relational base in their homes first. Even then it is very rare for men to attend. The organizers of the outside group worked persistently to canvas and invite and were met with a surprisingly sizable congregation of adult men and women on the day of the first meeting. A great opportunity presented itself. And then, to Rodger's shock, the preacher spent nearly an hour preaching a "sermon" about the varying opinions of the use of the term "Canaan-land" as a reference to eternal life. Rodger reminisced that what presented itself as a unique opportunity ended as a waste of time.

Chiefly, Pietism was a reaction and response to just such an occurrence: a "dead orthodoxy" in the pulpit and life of the German Lutheran Church where the governing drives of proposition and polemics\(^1\) gave as spiritual nourishment to its people complex arguments about the fine points of scholastic doctrine. Against this tide, Pietism's central agenda was the development of Christlike personal living and heartfelt experiences of God’s grace in the lives of the believers. Philipp Jacob Spener, to whom we will turn more fully below, asserted,

> Controversies are not the only or the most important thing, although knowledge of them properly belongs to the study of theology. Not only would we know what is true in order to follow it, but we should also know what is false in order to oppose it. However, not a few stake almost everything on polemics. They think that everything has turned out very well if only they know how to give answer to the errors of the papists, the Reformed, the Anabaptists, etc. They pay no attention to the fruits of those articles of faith which we presumably still hold in common with them or of those rules of morality which are acknowledged by us all.\(^2\)

Rodger Rinker would certainly agree with Spener’s sentiment that “... no little damage is done when one tries to be smart and clever without the Scriptures or beyond them.”\(^3\)

Pietism began as a call to the church for personal heart renewal and ended up re-shaping Christian life on the continent of Europe, the British Isles, and the new world of North America. Roger Olson claims that, “every Protestant denomination in North America was affected by the rising tide of pietism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as it became the grassroots form

\(^1\) Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 476.


\(^3\) Ibid., 51. *Emphasis added.*
of religion there.” Indeed, pietism's impact on early and contemporary Evangelicalism is hard to overstate; when you and I observe both the spirit and buzz of activity around our churches, we are often seeing what was first tried by Pietists. This seminar will lay out an historical sketch of the pietist movement, its leaders (with special emphasis on Spener), distinctives, and legacy for early and contemporary evangelicalism. Through it we will see that the event on the Sunchild and O’Chiese reservations ought to have been avoided as one of those lessons learned from the study of history.

Ernest Stoeffler provided an adept genetic history of the Pietistic movement in the introduction to a volume he edited entitled Continental Pietism and Early American History. I have reproduced it here in order to provide a succinct yet broad view of Pietism’s family tree.

It is an historical movement within Protestantism which has its major roots in the Zwingli-Butzer-Calvin axis of the Reformation, which began to show its first characteristic evidences within English Puritanism and the Reformed churches of the seventeenth century, which influenced Lutheranism through Arndt, Spener, Francke, Bengel, and their followers, was radicalized by men like Gottfried Arnold and Konrad Dippel, romanticized by Lavater, Jung-Stilling, and others, and perpetuated within and without the major communions of Continental Protestantism for an indefinite period of time. Through the Wesleys it helped to shape the evangelicalism of Great Britain. In America it combined with and revitalized the older Puritan tradition to form the basic religious ethos of a host of Protestant denominations.

The definitive expression of Pietism cannot be found in one particular time and place. While most often the movement is attributed to Philipp Jacob Spener, Stoeffler is correct when he says that many of the roots of Pietism were mediated to Spener through other traditions. Spener placed himself inside a lengthy and broad tradition of ardent proponents of pious Christian life. “Even the Jansenist and Quietist movements in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Catholicism can be regarded as belonging to the wider spiritual awakening associated with Pietism.” Spener mentions by name in Pia Desideria, the work that has become his most celebrated, many who had already identified and responded to the need to develop personal devotion and Godly character in Protestant evangelicalism. In the Reformed tradition Lewis Bayly's work: Praxis Pietatis challenged believers to examine the practical aspects of their lives. F. A. Lampe

4. Olson, 491.


produced hymns, sermons, and books with long and wide reaching effect. Richard Baxter and his *The Necessary Teaching of the Denial of Self* also number among those that issued a heeded call to piety. That call, indeed, would prove to be the enduring spirit of the age.

Spener’s *Pia Desideria*, originally an introduction to a series of sermons by Johann Arndt, has become the focal point of Pietism’s key elements and rallying cry. In it Spener admits to riding an already strong current but, as Kurt Aland points out, no other work in that current “...even approaches the *Pia Desideria* in the conciseness and clarity of its thoughts and the grasp of its goal.” The manifold program of the volume and that which

was to occupy [Spener’s] attention during the remainder of his life [was] reform of theological education, criticism of scholastic theology and theological polemics, advocacy of interconfessional toleration and understanding, emphasis on a religion of the heart as well as the head, demand for a faith that expresses itself in life and activity, cultivation of personal holiness with a tendency towards perfectionism, upgrading of the laity, recommendation of private meetings for the fostering of piety, development of the spiritual priesthood of believers, [and] endorsement of mysticism...

Perhaps what has caused Spener and *Pia Desideria* to become the focal point of Pietism is that significant ground was gained in essentially all of these areas in his ministry and under his direct influence.

Four major figures come the fore in the development of German Pietism: Johann Arndt, (the Visionary), Philipp Jacob Spener (the Patriarch), August Hermann Francke, (the Organizer), and Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (the Eccentric Prophet). In contemporary parlance we might say that Johann Arndt “cast the vision” for Spener’s Pietism. As a young boy Spener began to read from his father’s shelf and Arndt’s book *True Christianity* was his favorite of the non-inspired variety. A central theme of his writing was the new life to be exhibited by the Christian after having put aside worldliness. Arndt challenged the prevailing theology of his day which claimed that participation in sacraments signaled and effected repentance. It was clear to him that the evidence of authentic repentance and change was nowhere to be found among those who had no true inner repentance. It is only


10. Tappert, 19.

11. For the latter three titles I am following Olson, 479-482.

when inwardly in the heart with earnest sorrow, and most assured feeling of heaviness, we be made contrite and afflicted; and again be made holy and joyful, purged and changed, and amended by remission of sins by faith in Jesus Christ, whereby it cannot but come to pass, that the outward life and manners be renewed and changed. What if now one should only do outward penance or repentance, abstain from great and erroneous offenses for the fear of punishment, and the inward man does keep his old spots still, and take no care to enter into the inward and new life in Christ, shall not such a one nevertheless be damned?”

Most severely, inner repentance was a matter of heaven or hell for Arndt and for many of the Pietists that followed. True inner repentance, however, is the road to joy and fulfillment. Arndt cast a vision for Pietism that stressed objective justification by faith in the work of Christ connected with responsible, holy living and a range of experience and emotion on par with the Psalms.

Philipp Jacob Spener was born on January 13, 1635 not far from Strasbourg in the Alsatian village of Rappolstein. The Germany in which he grew up was severely fractured having suffered new heights of ravage during the Thirty Years’ War. The Lutheran Church in Germany was governed by a host of territorial rulers who were, by and large, nominal Christians using the Church for social organization and political advantage. Church life itself was unspirited and while most people went to church (apparently to gossip or sleep), the highly intellectual content and mechanistic use of the sacraments left the population thoroughly unengaged. Clergymen, it seems, were cogs in the state machinery whose gears ran in time with the concerns of governance, scholastic theology, and rote performance of sacramental ordinances. It is not a surprise, then, that in this environment the people were of an uncommon and vulgar brutality. Clergy and laypeople alike are reported to have been active in the occult, alchemy, and drunkenness.

Spener was navigated away from the tendencies of his society by the guidance of several key figures. Early on, as we have mentioned, he came into contact with the literary influence of Johann Arndt, Lewis Bayly, Richard Baxter, and others who suggested that the inner life and outer fruit was of greater value than displays of “dogmatic intellectualism.” As a child, Spener was mentored and financed by Countess Agatha von Rappolstein. She provided an environment in which he could ingest and an example in which could witness the counter-currents of the Pietist ideal. The Countess also funded Spener’s theological education at the University of


14. Tappert, 2-8. I am essentially following Tappert’s chronology in biographical section on Spener.

15. Brown, 22.

Strasbourg which he began in 1651. Spener excelled in his studies, becoming an instructor in history after completing a master’s degree in two years. Some measure of his success is no doubt due to the fact that he avoided the excesses (and the company) of his fellow students. His university days were spent mostly secluded and on Sundays he adopted habits that would later become a key part of his corrections for the Church: small group study of devotional literature.

Strasbourg Professor John Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666) was another key figure who provided guidance to a forming Spener. “It was he who first taught Spener to think of salvation as a present and not merely a future gift of God. It was he who opened Spener’s eyes to the places of the laity in the church. It was he who suggested the use of the vernacular instead of Latin in some phases of theological education.” After the conservative Dannhauer in Strasbourg, Spener’s post-graduation European travels in the summer of 1659 brought him into contact with the extreme Jean de Labadie (1610-1674) in Geneva. Though de Labadie’s teachings were later “feared and scorned” in some Pietist communities, Spener seemed somewhat captivated by the man and his emphasis on inner experience over and against the perfunctory use of sacraments to provide salvation. He went to hear him on more than one occasion. After two years of travel, Spener returned in 1661 at the age of 26 to Strasbourg to become ordained and write for a doctorate in theology. His mother had chosen a young woman for him to marry and he did. By this time Spener had formed many of the core values that would shape his ministry.

The ministry into which Spener was unexpectedly called in 1666 at age 31 was that of senior minister of the clergy in the culturally and economically prominent city of Frankfurt am Main. Spener was put into a position of authority over ministers much older than himself but heartily took on the responsibility. His normal duties consisted of record keeping, offering the sacraments, ordaining clergy, and superintending clerical meetings. It really is a captivating notion that Spener, having been nurtured in Pietist thought and practice for so many years, was catapulted to a senior position in his Church at such an age as he could have his own significant influence within her. In Frankfurt he began to institute practical initiatives with the goal of forming a richer connection between religion and life in the believers. One of these initiatives was to revive the catechesis and confirmation of young people. Many of the younger churched had no knowledge of nor personal connection with their faith, felt Spener, and this was one of his attempts to restore that connection and elicit a public profession that went beyond the automatic efficacy of infant baptism. Another of the initiatives was the development of small groups for the purpose of studying scripture and spurring one another on to holy living. Probably the “innovation” for which Spener is most famous, the collegia pietatis (pious assembly, often referred to as conventicle) had already been operating in other places and was formed at the

17. Ibid., 10.


19. Olson, 479.

20. Bloesh, 120. Bloesh refers to confirmation as a Pietist distinctive.
request of parishioners in 1670. “The group met on Wednesdays and Sundays in Spener’s home to pray, discuss the previous week’s sermon, and apply the Scripture and devotional writings to their lives.”21 The conventicles engaged the lay of the church who embraced the raw, non-institutional, Spirit-led interpretations of scripture. Spener did not wish to depart from the theological foundation of the church simply because some of its practices were suspect.22 His opening of the Scriptures to lay minds of did, however, in some instances, produce “imposed private interpretations on the Bible”23 and small, schismatic fellowships.24 He sought to balance his efforts by having trained Lutheran clergy present at conventicle discussions but did not stifle what, to him, was paramount: Spirit-nurtured hearts and holiness in the lives of believers. Spener’s initiatives, despite becoming regular parts of evangelical church life ever after, were not innocuous in their own day. In his earliest ministry, Spener effected change.

It was also during this time that Spener gained fame in circles wider than Frankfurt. He remained active in his friendship and correspondence with many influential people and came to inhabit the title “the spiritual counselor of all Germany.” John Dury, a Scot who advocated for religious tolerance, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a philosopher in the burgeoning rationalist school, and George Calixtus, a force for church unity, number among those with whom Spener had association. Spener never championed any of the particular causes of those with whom he corresponded but his active associations reflect the Pietist notions of group reflection and counsel and eroding barriers between clergy and lay. Spener’s widest influence was through the publication of Pia Desideria or “Pious Wishes” in 1675. Originally an introduction to his much revered Arndt’s True Christianity, Spener’s work came to outstrip it. Pia Desideria is humble in tone, sharp in criticism, and practical in suggestion.

These pages... have no other purpose than to be edifying --if not to many, then at least to a few. If nothing else is accomplished, it is hoped that through these pages other enlightened men, who are more highly endowed by God, may be encouraged earnestly to undertake this most important work of advancing true godliness, for a time make this their principle task, and thoroughly consider the devising, the testing, and the practical implementation of salutary remedies which conform with the rule of the Word of God.25

22. Spener wrote “Use and Abuse of Complaints about Christianity” in an effort to correct the conclusion of some that the teachings of the church are incorrect because the church has faults. See Tappert, 20.
23. Brown, 67. See also p. 20 for comment about Pietism’s ‘half-way’ roots in Anabaptist sectarianism and Spirit-led exegesis.
25. Spener, 35.
More sharply stated:

What we mean is that the church should be free of manifest offenses, that nobody who is afflicted with such failings should be allowed to remain in the church without fitting reproof and ultimately exclusion, and that the true members of the church should be richly filled with many fruits of their faith.26

These short excerpts give accent to Spener’s personality and show that he hoped his baton would be taken and carried far beyond his own stamina. It certainly was.

But not in Dresden. At least not at first, and not by the often drunk Elector John George III of Saxony. After twenty years in Frankfurt, Spener left to become the chaplain in his Dresden Court (1686). We might say that the Elector was the embodiment of the life against which Spener had railed. In five years of preaching the Elector was present for only eight of Spener’s messages. While the evangelical church inherited much from Spener, it also, unfortunately, inherited some from John George. Spener did, eventually, find someone to carry his baton -- and robustly. August Hermann Francke admitted that in his early years he “was more concerned to please men and to place [himself] in their favor than... for the living God in heaven.... push[ing] off [his] repentance from one day to the next.”27 He was a student of theology aware of his utter dependence on knowledge and reason as the means of his reputation of faith.28 According to Dale Brown, “...it required an intense anxiety and the example and teaching of Spener to bring Francke to faith.”29 Francke’s moment of crisis came when he was asked to preach a sermon on faith and life in Christ and was he cornered by the fact that he had neither. He bowed to God, admitted his state, and received the balance of God’s fatherly love that he knew had hitherto preserved him. “Reason stood away; victory was torn from its hands, for the power of God had made it subservient to faith,”30 wrote Francke in his journal triumphantly. Francke and Spener organized a group of “Bible lovers” and met often for study and encouragement with other members of the faculty at Leipzig. Together they would spark the intensely practical and long reaching effects of the Pietist movement. In a few years Spener and Francke’s cultivation of the inner life generated adversity towards them. “… [T]he faculty of Luther’s university, the

26. Ibid., 81.


28. Ibid., 8.


University of Wittenberg, would charge Spener with 284 doctrinal errors.”\textsuperscript{31} At Leipzig the number was over six hundred\textsuperscript{32} and Francke was forced out. These locales were not friendly to the Pietist agenda.

The sun rose in Halle for the Pietists and its rays of social action warmed the world for years to come. Having been forced from Leipzig, Francke was once again helped by Spener who secured an appointment for him at the University of Halle. Here Francke earned the title “genius organizer” and taught another major figure in the expansion of Pietist ideals: Ludwig Nicholas von Zinzendorf. Mark Noll marks well the significance of Halle:

Francke’s Hall... became an inspiration for Protestant renewal and Protestant service throughout Western society.

[He] began his extensive practical work by opening his own home in 1695 as a school for poor children. The next year he founded an orphanage that became world famous and established an institute for the training of teachers. Later he was influential in setting up a publishing house, a medical clinic, and other institutions. To understand the importance of these Pietistic efforts in society, it is helpful to remember that when George Whitefield went to Georgia in 1738, the official task of this famous itinerant was to serve as a director of an orphanage, a work inspired by Francke’s example in Halle. ...

Under Francke’s direction, Pietists trained at Halle became the first Protestants to engage in extensive cross-cultural mission work. The university established a center for studying oriental languages and promoted translations of the Bible into non-Western languages. Francke’s missionary influence was felt both directly, through laborers who went from Halle to foreign fields, and indirectly, through groups like the Moravians and an active Danish mission that drew inspiration and guidance from the leaders of Pietism.\textsuperscript{33}

Spener’s program of church reform, having started in the inner lives of the laity was now being taken to the next level through the missionary efforts of Francke and the University of Halle. “Pietism, an authentic renewal movement, put missions of the church’s agenda.”\textsuperscript{34} It was the connection between inner life and outer proclamation that fueled the evangelistic efforts of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Noll, 232.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Olson, 482.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Noll, 233.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Kenneth B. Mulholland, “From Luther to Carey: Pietism and the Modern Missionary Movement,” Bibliotheca Sacra 156 (January-March 1999): 95.
\end{itemize}
Baptists under William Carey\textsuperscript{35}, the Moravians under Zinzendorf, and the Great Awakening preachers.

As for Spener himself, a welcomed move from Dresden in 1691 took him to the Church of St. Nicholas in Berlin as inspector and preacher. Here he focused on publication and attending to the matters that naturally crop up when Christians are active in the pursuit of practical holiness. Among the matters to which he responded were: “Can a Christian become perfect? ... May a Christian wear gold and pearl ornaments with a good conscience? ... What should a preacher do if he gets stuck in his sermon?”\textsuperscript{36} He sponsored the baptism of Zinzendorf and only a few days before his death on February 5, 1705 asked that he be buried in a white coffin to signal his hope for a church on earth as it is in heaven. Philipp Jacob Spener is remembered and revered these centuries later for having brought focus and feet to Pietism in his own lifetime.

“What have you done for me?” was the question that in 1720 sparked Nicholas von Zinzendorf to commit his life to the Lord’s every leading. It was a practical question posed on the inscription of Domenico Feti’s painting “Behold, the man” at an art museum at Dusseldorf.\textsuperscript{37} Zinzendorf, who was steeped in Pietism and sat at the foot of Francke at Halle, took the spirit of the question very seriously. His response did not follow the norm, however, as he did not pursue institutional ministry but formed a religious community called Herrnhut (“the Lord’s Watch”) on land he purchased in Bethelsdorf. As early as 1722 a group of Bohemian Brethren under the leadership of Christian David came to settle on the land Zinzendorf set aside.\textsuperscript{38} The fellowship became known as the Moravians and later Zinzendorf was asked to be a bishop in their church. Zinzendorf was committed to the unity of Christian traditions from very early on and like a true Pietist did not involve himself in the polemical border drawing so despised by Spener. He asserted that love was the identifying mark of the true church\textsuperscript{39} and was ordained as a Moravian bishop three months after becoming a Lutheran clergyman and with the endorsement of an Anglican Archbishop!\textsuperscript{40}

Under Zinzendorf the Moravians gave definite shape to the Pietist ideals of personal experience and active faith. Going beyond the license that Spener had allowed, Zinzendorf rejected formal systems of theology and enshrined feeling as the touchstone of Christian faith. The Moravians had brought a keen dependence on the internal witness of Spirit to Herrnhut and Zinzendorf’s “... emphasis on nondoctrinal, experiential ‘intimacy with Jesus’ as the true heart of authentic Christianity has bled into and permeated much of Protestant Christianity in North

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 93.

\textsuperscript{36} Tappert, 23-24.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Bloesch, 155. In addition, of course, to the orthodox belief that the Word and the Sacraments were also identifying marks.

\textsuperscript{40} “The Rich Young Ruler Who Said Yes,” 34.
A heretofore unknown zeal for missions became the vessel for that permeation. The Moravians took on Spener’s challenge when he claimed that “... one of the principle reasons why the ministry cannot accomplish all that it ought is that it is too weak without the help of the universal priesthood.” They created small groups that not only reinforced their own spiritual life and study of the Bible but “… roved to and fro on the continent, to Moravia, the Baltic States, Holland, Denmark, and even to Britain” to do the same. In the years between 1732-1742 the Moravians made more continental and overseas missionary journeys than has ever been made. Nearly one out of six Herrnhutters proved they were not too weak! By Zinzendorf’s death in 1760 over two hundred and twenty missionaries had embarked, he being one of them.

Even a brief survey of the literature reveals that the effects of Pietism were extremely broad and far reaching. This is no doubt due to the fact that tolerance, relevance, and adaptability were not just vehicles for Pietism but were, in fact, key contributions of the movement. Noll states that, “…evangelicals and pietists made flexibility with respect to intellectual, political, social, and economic conditions into a principle.” The Pietist movement was not one which sought to re-define doctrine and so we have few enduring theological assertions. Rather, it sought the revitalization of personal Christian experience inside of (and sometimes over and against) established theological truth. Pietism was inherently subjective; its foundational contribution to evangelicalism, and the reason its contribution has endured, is its embrace of the great diversity in the Christian experience of faith. To be sure, Scripture was and is authoritative. Pietism completed the Reformation project by placing it in the trust of the Holy Spirit and the hands of the people. It engendered an atmosphere in which individual and communal reflection, interpretation, and application opened the door to a wide range of expressions and personalities in the Christian family. In other words, it pulled the feet of the Protestant Reformation out of the quicksand of Scholastism and set them on the solid rock of knowing God personally.

It was because of this foundation that the evangelical work of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Johnathan Edwards, and others was massively effective. Had they taken the polemical approach and lectured the crowds on doctrinal points we would not know their names. Likely they would not have taken up an effort at all had the Pietists not insisted and had they not themselves personally experienced the grace of God that stretches out ones hands in praise and good works.

John Wesley’s life and ministry provides an excellent framework for capturing and summarizing the many contributions Pietism has made to evangelicalism. At Oxford he and his devout friends started a holy club in which particular methods were used to deepen their faith. This faith, however, showed thin when during an Atlantic crossing in 1736 Wesley observed the

41. Olson, 485.
42. Spener, 94.
45. See Spener, 64-65.
calm singing of the Moravians during a harrowing squall. He, the ordained spiritual leader of the
ship, was overwhelmed with fear. Afterwards a Moravian administrator and close advisor to
Zinzendorf named Gottlieb Spangenberg asked Wesley whether or not he knew Jesus Christ and
that he had saved him. This question took the educated and ordained Anglican priest down a
new road which bent sharply at Aldersgate when Wesley, with a heart strangely warmed, could
finally answer Spangenberg and another Moravian advisor by the name of Peter Boehler, with a
hearty yes!

Wesley’s ministry was built upon his true conversion. First, he began to testify to the
inner working of the Spirit and the personal knowledge of Christ over and above the working of
the institutional church. He pushed himself to step outside of the rigid and solemn structures and
preach with a missionary zeal fueled by that personal conversion. He, like George Whitefield,
who challenged him to preach outside for the first time in Bristol, came to the outdoor pulpit
and employed the rhetorical devices of excitement, relevance, and clarity. They aimed directly at
the heart. Later, Wesley would follow in Spener’s example and develop a range of groups
dedicated to reflection on the Scriptures and self-examination in the matters of holiness. Early
evangelical congregants came sometimes to be scrutinized by their pastors for the sake of their
personal development, something which Spener advocated of ministerial students. In response
to a great need for ministers, Wesley rallied the priesthood of believers as his Pietist and
Moravian mentors had done, and released laymen to preach and superintend.

Wesley took up and developed the doctrine of sanctification. Not only is it possible,
according to both, but it is the goal of faith to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration as
the first step in the Spirit’s sanctifying work overshadowed justification for the Pietists. The
emphasis found purchase in Wesley and the pulpits of evangelicalism. Just as Christians cannot
stop at justification and be glad they are saved, neither can they stop at sanctification and be glad
they are holy. Holiness is social and active; holiness takes up with passion the fruits of the new
life by advocating for the slave and the starved. It is governed by love and seeks to restore the

46. In the Weslyan-Holiness Nazarene denomination words very similar to Spangenberg’s
are used today to receive members into the church: “... and do you know that he saves you now?”

47. Gonzalez, 209-212.


49. Gonzalez, 212.


51. Gonzalez, 214.

52. Spener, 84-85.

53. Olson, 487.
fullness of humanity to all who lack it. Donald Bloesch lists many in addition to John Wesley who demonstrated Pietist zeal as “lobbyist... agitator... [or] chaplain,” noting that it was not seen as its own end but the planting of seeds for faith in Christ. Lastly, Wesley used the hermeneutic and tools developed by the Pietists like Johann Albrecht Bengel who, like himself, balanced the Reformation’s *sola scriptura* with a deep belief that the Spirit enlightens the honest, moral, and informed student. Spener and Bengel offered new precepts for exegesis, advocating serious efforts in the study of biblical languages, the recognition of genre and type, progressive revelation, dynamic inspiration, and the proper use of context. Wesley embraced and exemplified the core Pietist ideals and as a result was used of God to bring many to saving faith.

The evangelical church today is the way it is because of the Pietists. The Great Awakenings, the social and political form of North America, Protestant missions, and the reverberating call that ‘you must be born again’ were all shaped in tremendously large part by the Spirit of God working in the hearts of the men and women that make up this rich Christian tradition. They brought freshness to a stale, intellectual church. They brought responsibility back to the life of Christians. They advocated for cooperation between faith traditions. Pietists recovered the Word of God that pierces to the marrow, the still small voice behind the whirlwind, the pilgrim journey of Jesus’ disciples, the goodness in the Samaritan, and the commission to go. We should look around at churches and wonder what the Pietists haven’t contributed. Short of Christ himself it was their efforts that gave us the light and life of men.


56. Bloesch, 125-129.

57. Brown, 78-79; Bloesch, 114
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