

Pietism

Historical Conditions

In the first half of the 17th century, armies from all over Europe marched and fought in the kingdoms of Germany as the **Thirty Years' War** raged. By the time the war ended officially with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Germany was blood-soaked, exhausted and impoverished. It was also deeply in doubt that the theological differences which had at least partly driven the war could be resolved, or even really mattered. At the same time, scientific discovery was showing great promise, which led some people even more deeply into religious doubt. In this broad malaise, **Christian piety** suffered.

Knowing that this was the world into which **Pietism was birthed** should make the movement a bit easier to understand. Faith without works is indeed dead, and **dead faith was widespread in Germany's churches in the late 17th century**. In response to this, various Pietist movements arose around that time, some of them Lutheran, others Reformed. But the most influential strands go back to Philipp Jakob Spener, a Lutheran theologian. **He sought to revive the faith of a morbid church**, and his intentions were good, even laudable. But harm tends to result from good intentions when those intentions aren't accompanied by sound biblical teaching. Let's explore where Spener and Pietism went wrong...." (Lutheran Witness, <https://witness.lcms.org/2018/piety-vs-pietism/>)

Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705)

In 1675, Spener published his *Pia desideria* or *Earnest Desire for a Reform of the True Evangelical Church*, the title giving rise to the term "Pietists". He included six proposals as the best means of restoring the life of the church:

1. The earnest and thorough study of the Bible in private meetings, *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* ("little churches within the church")
2. The Christian priesthood being universal, the laity should share in the spiritual government of the church
3. A knowledge of Christianity must be attended by the practice of it as its indispensable sign and supplement
4. Instead of merely didactic, and often bitter, attacks on the heterodox and unbelievers, a sympathetic and kindly treatment of them
5. A reorganization of the theological training of the universities, giving more prominence to the devotional life
6. A different style of preaching, namely, in the place of pleasing rhetoric, the implanting of Christianity in the inner or new man, the soul of which is faith, and its effects the fruits of life

August Franke (1663-1727)

"In this state of anguish I knelt down again and again, and prayed earnestly to that God and Savior in whom I had, as yet, no faith, that if He indeed existed, he would deliver me from my misery. At last he heard me! He was pleased, in his wondrous love, to manifest himself, and that, not in taking away, by degrees, my doubts and fears, but at once and as if to overpower all my objections to his power and his faithfulness. All my doubts disappeared at once, and I was assured of his favor. I could not only call him God, but my Father. All my distress was dispelled, and I was, as it were, inundated with a flood of joy, so that I could do nothing but praise and bless the Lord. I had bowed before Him in the deepest misery, but I arose with indescribably peace and joy." (This memoir was written for the American Tract Society and was published around 1830. Read his Memoire)

What is Dead Orthodoxy?

What are the historical conditions that give rise to the phenomenon that we call dead orthodoxy. Dead orthodoxy rises in a church that has been engaged in a fierce struggle for the truth after she has been forced to make a sharp distinction between truth and error. From one point of view a period such as that is good for a church, for she is forced to give a clear and precise expression of God's Word over against those that oppose her. The church at such time is alive, vibrant, she is spiritually at a high point. That church gives expression to the truths that she has hammered out in battle by means of a creed, a statement of what she believes. That creed is to give a concrete formulation, and to preserve that which she has confessed over against those who have opposed her. That confession, although set down on paper, **really lives in the heart** of those who made it.

Soon after the heat of the battle is over that church lets down her defenses, she is weary of battle; she is not so ready to go out to battle again. She feels that once she has fought the battle and formulated the answer to the enemy, that answer, her creed, will be enough to turn back the foe. But her creed will not stop the attacks of the enemy. The church must always be ready to counter all attacks with the only effective weapon, and that being her living confession of the truth of Scripture. Once the **church allows only that creed to make her confession** she is in trouble. She is still orthodox, of course, but dead. Dead orthodoxy has set it.

Many churches, once truly orthodox, have become dead. **Their confessions no longer live in their hearts, but only on paper.** Let us cite a couple of instances in which the phenomenon known as dead orthodoxy has manifest itself in history.

The first is **the great Lutheran Reformation**. You will recall how Luther and his followers were engaged in a fierce battle with the Roman Catholic Church and later with others. They fought long and hard for the truth, and they gave expression to it by means of creeds. Then, weary of battle they let down their defenses as if the battle was forever finished. **The orthodox truth was still proclaimed from their pulpits, but it no longer lived in the hearts of the people.** Corruption and apostasy were soon rampant in the church, and it was headed for trouble. (<https://beaconlights.org/sermons/beware-of-dead-orthodoxy/>)

Early German Lutheran Pietism's Understanding of Justification, by Gary DeLashmutt Lead Pastor at Xenos Christian Fellowship, Columbus, Ohio,

The most important factor in German Lutheranism just prior to the emergence of Pietism was its **rigid confessionalism, or *Verkonfessionalisierung***.

After Luther died in 1546, Lutheran scholars tried to precisely formulate the doctrines of the Christian faith as they understood them. This was felt to be necessary since the Lutherans were experiencing acute doctrinal pressure from both aggressive Calvinists and Jesuit Catholics.¹ Two camps developed within Lutheranism: the "Philippists", who, following the example of Luther's mentor Philip Melanchthon, emphasized the common doctrinal ground that they shared with the Calvinists, and the "Gnesio-Lutherans", who held rigidly to Luther's main tenets and regarded all other groups with suspicion. It was the Gnesio-Lutherans who won out in this struggle for ascendancy. The Formula of Concord of 1580 formally resolved the doctrinal disputes within Lutheranism.

With its center at the University of Wittenberg, the same school from which Luther launched the Reformation, Lutheranism **lapsed into a rigid orthodoxy and sterile scholasticism.** Ironically, though Luther had unseated Thomist scholasticism from its throne of power over theology, the Lutheran scholars of this period consciously reintroduced it in order to formulate their doctrinal statements.⁵ The University of Wittenberg declared that the resulting credal formulations of Lutheranism "possessed the force of divinely revealed and binding truth, not only in matters of doctrine, but in all affairs."

This defensive, heavily dogmatic emphasis produced Lutheran Confessionalism--a dead orthodoxy that Luther would hardly have desired. Stoeffler describes this confessionalism and its effects on how people came to view Christianity.

It (*Verkonfessionalisierung*) refers to the **rigid confessionalizing of Lutheranism** which was undertaken by its seventeenth century theologians. The process was aided by the reappearance of Aristotelianism in German universities and gymnasia early during that century. The result was an **unprecedented hardening of Lutheran doctrine**. Not only did the guardians of orthodoxy endeavor to keep pure the teachings of the communion but the truth had to be stated in accepted phrases. Any deviation in phraseology was immediately viewed with great suspicion. **After John Gerhard** the various minutiae of the seventeenth century systems of Lutheran theology had to be treated in proper order and sequence so as not to raise apprehensions of heresy. In this heavily dogmatic atmosphere the essence of Christianity came to be regarded as consisting in **a series of rationally ordered propositions. Faith had been largely re-defined so as to consist in personal assent to those propositions. Confessional theology and Christianity were regarded as almost synonymous.**

Brown is similarly critical in his evaluation of **Lutheran Confessionalism, viewing it as a virtual reversal of the Reformation:**

Negatively, some have felt that in **Protestant Scholasticism** we have an "intellectual Pelagianism" in which the good works of the medieval church were exchanged for **the works of understanding**. Aristotle, who had been thrown out the front door, quickly came in the back. Justification by faith became one of the dogmas instead of the source of dogma. **Luther's God, who was a Thou, became an It. The testimony of the Holy Spirit became a mere intellectual process of increasing acquaintance with the truth. Though there was an apotheosis of the Bible, the Scriptures were used primarily as proof texts to verify the creedal dogmas.**

Spener, writing in *Pia Desideria*, similarly complained about the scholasticism of Lutheran Confessionalism:

Although by God's grace we still have pure doctrine derived from the Word of God, we cannot deny that much that is alien, useless, and reminiscent of the world's wisdom has here and there been gradually introduced into theology.

Since the pastors were being educated in this spiritual climate, it is not surprising that their preaching consisted mainly of **dogmatic expositions of Lutheran doctrine and polemical denunciations of Catholicism and Calvinism, rather than applied scripture which would build up the spiritual life of their congregations.**

Dead Orthodoxy

What exactly is dead orthodoxy? Is it...

- A. Correct Doctrine without a change (regenerate heart)
- B. Correct Doctrine without a correct practical outworking (Ortho-Praxy)
- C. Correct Doctrine without a Zeal! A lack of zeal for the Word or for Souls!
- D. A Combination of A leads to B which leads to C.
- E. A lack of Emotional experience in worship
- F. Formalism (A strict rigidity in worship)

Puritan Board: "Dead orthodoxy appears to happen in confessional churches where the confession is still honored officially but **most of the people lack any fruit**. Evangelistic zeal seems to come into play somewhere in the equation. Instead of the church officially falling away, the church officially remains orthodox, but there is no fruit and the members lack zeal or love for others."

Pietistic Lutherans

-Pietism sees a **lack of good works** in the church. Their solution is the preaching of sanctification and the encouragement of an inner transformation by pietistic methods.

-Bible study "in a proper manner," (to build up believers **in holy living**). No private confession/absolution. The importance of Baptism and Lord's Supper is downplayed.

- Heart over Head. They are focused on the subjective experience of inner transformation as a source of assurance and an effect for change. **Sanctification** over Justification.

--A conversion experience and decision. They believe "that any true Christian could point back in his or her life to an inner struggle with sin that culminated in a crisis and ultimately a decision to start a **new, Christ-centered life**."

--They emphasize following "biblical divine commands of believers to live a **holy life** and to strive for holy living, or sanctification." These are the marks of a true believer.

-- Deeds not Creeds. The church is found where true believers are **living correctly**, not where the Word and Sacraments are rightly administered. And thus "denominational" differences in doctrine and practice were downplayed by pietists.

-The priesthood of all believers is emphasized. The laity meet together in conventicles apart from the Divine Service in order to mutually encourage **piety**.

"Dead Orthodoxy" and Pietistic Misuse of 1 Corinthians

Church history tells us that the charge pietistic reformers level against the church is that the church practices "dead orthodoxy." Some years ago I hosted a pastor's meeting at which pastors could discuss theological ideas. Position papers were presented and then critiqued by the group. Some of the pastors came from the Charismatic movement (also pietistic). A common theme from the charismatic pastors was their disdain for doctrine. Because theirs was a reform movement, they were fighting "dead orthodoxy."

I spoke after one of our meetings with a pastor who told me that when he was a Lutheran, reciting creeds and doctrines caused him to be spiritually dead. I responded, "So believing that Jesus Christ is God Incarnate, who lived a sinless life, who died for sins and was raised on the third day and bodily ascended into heaven killed you spiritually?" He said, "I didn't really believe those things." He had assumed that the cause of his unbelief was not sin, but a church that recited creeds. I believe that it is much better to preach those doctrines from the pulpit and call for people to repent and turn to Christ than to make recitation part of a liturgy. But nevertheless the creeds were not the problem, unbelief was.

https://www.apprising.org/2012/05/12/dead-orthodoxy-and-pietistic-misuse-of-1-corinthians/Apprising_Ministries

"Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig" Gunther Stiller (Bach: 1685-1750)

We can therefore hardly overestimate the Communion piety of Lutheran orthodoxy, and that is even more true because Pietism has contributed practically nothing to enliven sacramental piety. Preuss makes the point that "in looking for samples of pietistic Communion piety he was impressed" to learn "how relatively unimportant a role this sacrament actually plays in Pietism," and "what a genuine exception the Moravians with their glowing love for Jesus represent." Gottfried Arnold "went so far as to say that the more perfect a Christian is, the less he is in need of Holy Communion, and that it is only an aid to the weak." In Leipzig, too, "immediately after the inroads of Pietism on the people, the Leipzig clergy complained that attendance at worship and participation in the sacred acts was no longer as regular as before among the adherents to Pietism." And since rationalism, too, had only a destructive effect on Communion piety, the great honor for having taken up the cause for a vital Communion piety in a time of general

weakening of faith belongs to Lutheran orthodoxy alone (see also Appendix of Sources, No.8). Whoever considers the service of that time a one-sided act, characterized by altogether too much indoctrination, or looks on orthodoxy as an epoch that in its zeal for Lutheran orthodoxy finally shows an interest only in dogmatic formulas and in controversies but has almost entirely lost contact with practical life, simply ignores reality. We cannot repeat too often what Simon Schoeffel in his studies of Lutheran orthodoxy in Hamburg has stated with great emphasis: "Nothing is more foolish and more ridiculous than to speak of 'dead' orthodoxy, which has only brought forth letters but has not promoted life. Only monumental ignorance gives a person the right to reject it as 'dead'" (pages 141-142).

The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, Volume 1, Robert D. Preus

One can only echo the complaint of Hermann Sasse: "When will men stop this idle talk about 'dead orthodoxy'; a charge that is completely without historical foundation, resting only on a dogma of Pietism--for Pietism has had its dogmas, and some very obvious ones at that." See his "Letters Addressed to Lutheran Pastors II, Concerning the Nature of Confession in the Churches," in *Quartalschrift*, XLVI (July 1949), 170. (Footnote #2 on page 412.)

True Piety

4] ... for He has redeemed, justified, and saved us from our sins as God and man, through His complete obedience; that therefore **the righteousness of faith** is the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and our adoption as God's children only on account of the obedience of Christ, which through faith alone, out of pure grace, is imputed for **righteousness** to all true believers, and on account of it they are absolved from all their unrighteousness. (Formula of Concord, III, 4)

7] First, there is no controversy among our theologians concerning the following points in this article, namely: that **it is God's will, order, and command that believers should walk in good works**; and that truly good works are not those which everyone contrives himself from a good intention, or which are done according to traditions of men, but **those which God Himself has prescribed and commanded in His Word**; also, that truly good works are done, not from our own natural powers, but in this way: **when the person by faith is reconciled with God and renewed by the Holy Ghost**, or, as Paul says, is *created anew in Christ Jesus to good works*, Eph. 2, 10. (Formula of Concord, IV, 7)

9] ... **Faith must be the mother and source**; and on this account they are called by St. Paul true *fruits of faith*, as also *of the Spirit*. 10] For, as Dr. Luther writes in the Preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: *Thus faith is a divine work in us, that changes us and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men in heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it [confers] the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing.* (Formula of Concord, IV, 9-12)

15] ... many fabricate for themselves **a dead faith or delusion which is without repentance and without good works**, as though there could be in a heart true faith and at the same time the wicked intention to persevere and continue in sins, which is impossible; or, as though one could, indeed, have and retain true faith, righteousness, and salvation even though he be and remain a corrupt and unfruitful tree, whence no good fruits whatever come, yea, even though he persist in sins against conscience, or purposely engages again in these sins, all of which is incorrect and false. (Formula of Concord, V, 15)

Lutheran Orthodoxy

1530 Augsburg Confession

Martin Luther

Philip Melancthon's *Loci Communes* 1543

Lutherans clarify Lutheran teaching in reaction to Romanism, Calvinism, etc.

1580 Book of Concord (Completion of Formula of Concord)

Golden Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy

1580 to 1618

Framers or signers of the Formula of Concord.

Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) *Loci Theologici* (published after his death in 1591)

Forerunner of Pietism - John Arndt (1555-1621) *True Christianity* 1605-1610 mystical union, Christ's life in His people

"High" Lutheran Orthodoxy

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648)

1648 - Peace of Westphalia

John Gerhard (1582-1637)

Silver Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy

1648 Close of Thirty Years War to the rise of Pietism (~1700)

Abraham Calov (1612-1686)

David Hollaz (1648-1713) *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum* 1707

German Pietism

1675-1749

Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705)

-formed University of Halle in 1694

-published John Arndt's Postils, including a preface entitled *Pia Desideria* (1675) which laid down six points of reform.

August Franke (1663-1727)

After a visit with Spener, he went to Leipzig, 1689

Manuductio ad lectionem Scripturaes cum additamentis regulas hermeneuticas de affectibus.

Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673-1749) *Timotheus Verinus* 1718, fought against Pietism

John Philip Fresenius (1705-1761)

Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), Bishop of Moravian Church

Norwegian Haugean Pietism

1796 to Norwegian Independence in 1814 (at the end of the Napoleonic Wars)

Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824), lay evangelist in

Norway, Received his "spiritual baptism" in 1796

The main tenets of the Peace of Westphalia were:
--All parties would recognize the [Peace of Augsburg](#) of 1555, in which each prince had the right to determine the religion of his own state (the principle of [cuius regio, eius religio](#)). However, the *ius reformandi* was removed: Subjects were no longer forced to follow the conversion of their ruler. Rulers were allowed to choose Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Calvinism. Christians living in principalities where their denomination was *not* the established church were guaranteed the right to practice their faith in private, as well as in public during allotted hours. Wikipedia

Pietism spread from Germany to Switzerland and the rest of German-speaking Europe, to Scandinavia and the Baltics (where it was heavily influential, leaving a permanent mark on the region's dominant Lutheranism, with figures like Hans Nielsen Hauge in Norway, Peter Spaak and Carl Olof Rosenius in Sweden, Katarina Asplund in Finland, and Barbara von Krüdener in the Baltics), and to the rest of Europe. It was further taken to North America, primarily by German and Scandinavian immigrants. Wikipedia