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Pietism as an Ecclesiological Heresy

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1. The historical coordinates

We give the name “pietism” to a phenomenon in church life which certainly has a particular historical and “confessional” starting point, but also has much wider ramifications in the spiritual life of all the Christian Churches.

Pietism made its appearance as a distinct historical movement within Protestantism, at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, around 1690-1730.¹ Its aim was to stress “practical piety,” as distinct from the polemical dogmatic theology to which the Reformation had initially given a certain priority.² Against the intellectualist

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¹ There is a rich bibliography on pietism, chiefly in the form of monographs dealing with the numerous local pietistic movements and the personalities of their leaders. Although not very systematic, the fullest study of the phenomenon as a whole is still A. Ritschl's three-volume work *Geschichte des Pietismus* (Bonn, 1880-1886). A recent work, exceptionally informative and well-documented, is Martin Schmidt's *Pietismus* (1972). The Roman Catholic approach, with a concise, objective and reasonably full description of the phenomenon and history of pietism, may be found in Louis Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality and Protestant and Anglican Spirituality* (History of Christian Spirituality 111, London, 1969), p. 169ff. As for the rest of the bibliography, we note here some basic aids: W. Mahrholz, *Der deutsche Pietismus* (Berlin, 1921); H. Bornkamm, *Mystik, Spiritualismus und die Anfänge des Pietismus im Luthertum* (Giessen, 1926); M. Beyer-Frohlich, *Pielismus und Rationalismus* (Leipzig, 1933); K. Reinhardt, *Mystik und Pietismus* (Berlin, 1925); O. Schöhngen, ed., *Die bleibende Bedeutung des Pietismus* (Berlin, 1960) ; E. Sachsse, *Ursprung und Wesen des Pietismus* (1884) ; F. E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Studies in the History of Religions IX, 1965), pp. 180-246.

² “The picture one gets from the relevant bibliography would justify the view that the historical roots of pietism are spread throughout the religious and theological tradition of western Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. There is, nevertheless, a particularly direct historical link between this phenomenon and certain Dutch offshoots of Protestantism, English Puritanism and above all Roman Catholic mysticism. Jansenism in seventeenth century France, the Port-Royal movement, Quietism, Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis of Sales and Fénelon are considered by most scholars to be immediate forerunners of Protestant pietism. It is typical that Lutheran “orthodoxy” always condemned pietism as pro-Catholic. See M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, p. 26; L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality...* pp. 169-170 and 193.

and abstract understanding of God and of dogmatic truth, pietism set a practical, active piety (*praxis pietatis*): good works, daily self-examination for progress in virtues according to objective criteria, daily study of the Bible and practical application of its moral teaching, intense emotionalism in prayer, a clear break with the “world” and worldly practices (dancing, the theatre, non-religious reading), and tendencies towards separatism, with the movement holding private meetings and distinguishing itself from the “official” Church.³

For pietism, knowledge of God presupposes the “rebirth” of man [i.e., a “born again” experience—*ed.*], and this rebirth is understood as living up to the moral law of the Gospel and as an emotional experience of authoritative truths.⁴ Pietism presents itself as a mystical piety, and ultimately as a form of opposition to knowledge; as “adogmatism,” in the sense that it ignores or belittles theological truth, or even as pure agnosticism cloaked in morality.⁵

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Under different forms and in various “movements,” it has ,not ceased to influence Protestantism, and indeed also the spiritual life of other churches, to this day. In combination with humanism, the Enlightenment and the “practical” spirit of the modern era-the spirit of “productivity” and “efficiency” -pietism has cultivated throughout Europe a largely “social” understanding of the Church, involving practical activities of public benefit, and it has presented the message of salvation primarily as a necessity for individual and collective morality.

³ See Karl Heussi and Eric Peter, *Précis d'Histoire de l'Eglise* (Neuchatel, 1967), ¶106; M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, p. 140. The first of the founders of the pietist movement, Philip-Jacob Spener (1635-1705), a Lutheran pastor from Alsace, created the blueprint for this moralistic campaign by organizing the zealous faithful into Bible study circles (*Bibelkreise*) independent of the Church’s gatherings for worship. Study of Scripture was meant to lead to practical moral conclusions affecting the individual lives of the members of the movement. Any of the faithful could be in charge of such a “circle.” Spener and the other pioneers of the pietist movement (A.H. Francke, 1663-1727, G. Arnold, 1666-1714, N.L. Graf von Zinzendorf, 1700-1760, J.A. Bengel, 1697-1752, F.C. Oettinger, 1702-1782) laid particular emphasis on the universal priesthood of the laity, and were sharply critical of the clergy of their time and the “institutional Church, compromised with the world.” See L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality...* , pp. 170-171; M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, pp. 12-42; *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise* vol. 4 (Paris, 1966), pp. 35-36.

⁴ See L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality...* p. 174: “...the dissolution of all defined dogmatic faith and its substitution by unverifiable sentiment....

⁵ “[Pietism] considers the practice of piety as the essential element of religion ...but is accompanied more often by a growing indifference with regard to dogma”: *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise*, p. 35. “Whenever the Church started dogmatizing, so he held, it fell into decadence, and the only way out lay in the fact that each generation produced simple-minded men whose instinctive reaction (bullied by authority) constituted a prophetic reaffirmation of the one pure Christianity, primitive and free from all ratiocination”: L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality...*, p. 175.

2. The theological coordinates

Pietism undermines the ontological truth of Church unity and personal communion, if it does not deny it completely; it approaches man's salvation in Christ as an individual event, an individual possibility of life. It is individual piety and the subjective process of "appropriating salvation" made absolute and autonomous, and it transfers the possibility of man's salvation to the realm of individual moral endeavor.⁶

For pietism, salvation is not primarily the *fact* of the Church, the theanthropic "new creation" of the body of Christ, the mode of existence of its trinitarian prototype and the unity of the communion of persons. It is not man's dynamic, personal participation in the body of the Church's communion which saves him despite his individual unworthiness, restoring him *safe* and *whole* to the existential possibility of personal universality, and transforming even his sin, through repentance, into 'the possibility of receiving God's grace and love. Rather it is primarily man's individual attainments, the way he as an individual lives up to religious duties

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and moral commandments and imitates the "virtues" of Christ, that ensure him a justification which can be objectively verified. For pietism, the Church is a phenomenon dependent upon individual justification; it is the assembly of morally "reborn" [i.e., "born again"] individuals, a gathering of the "pure," a complement and an aid to individual religious feeling.⁷

By this route pietism reached a result opposite to its original intent. Seeking to reject the one extreme of intellectual religion, it ended up at the other extreme, separating practical piety from the truth and revelation of the Church. Thus piety loses its ontological content and ceases to be an existential event-the realization and manifestation of man's existential truth, of the "image" of God in man. It turns into an individual achievement which certainly improves character and behavior and perhaps social *mores* as well, but which cannot possibly transfigure our mode of existence and change corruption into incorruption, and death into life and resurrection.

⁶ "At the center stands the individual person: the early Christian image of 'building up' is transformed in an individualistic direction (building up of the inner person)": M. Schmidt, "Pietismus," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 5, Col. 370. *Idem, Pietismus*, pp. 90 and 123.

⁷ "The new type of community... is the formation of groups of reborn individuals, not the community of those called by word and sacrament. The initiative lies with the subject... Individualism and subjectivism undermine the sacramental perspective": M. Schmidt, "Pietismus," Col. 371. "In the confusion between faith and sense experience and the tendency to replace the objective data of faith and the sacraments by an emotional subjective event, he discerns at least latent indifference regarding all established doctrine, and, in a more general way, loss of sight of the Church and its ministry as institutions": L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality...*, p. 174.

Piety loses its ontological content; and, in addition, the truth and faith of the Church is divorced from life and action, and left as a set of "principles" and "axioms" which one accepts like any other ideology. The distinction between contemplation and action, between truth and life or between dogma and morality, turns into a schizophrenic severance. The life of the Church is confined to moral obedience, religious duties and the serving of social ends. One might venture to express the situation with the paradox that, in the case of pietism, ethics corrupts the Church: it turns the criteria of the Church into worldly and conventional criteria, distorting the "great mystery of godliness" into a rationalistic social necessity. Pietistic ethics distort the liturgical and eucharistic reality of the Church, the unity in life and communion of the

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penitent and the perfect, sinners and saints, the first and the last; they turn the Church into an inevitably conventional~ institutional corporation of people who are individually religious.

A host of people today, perhaps the majority in western societies, evaluate the Church's work by the yardstick of its social usefulness as compared with the social work of education, penitentiary systems or even the police. The natural result is that the Church is preserved as an institution essential for morals and organized like a worldly establishment in an increasingly bureaucratic fashion. The most obvious form of secularization in the Church is the pietistic falsification of her mind and experience, the adulteration of her own criteria with moralistic considerations. Once the Church denies her ontological identity— what she really, essentially is as an existential event whereby individual survival is changed into a personal life of love and communion— then from that very moment she is reduced to a conventional form under which individuals are grouped together into an institution; she becomes an expression of man's fall, albeit a religious one. She begins to serve the "religious needs" of the people, the individualistic emotional and psychological needs of fallen man.

The utilitarian institutional mentality, a typical product of pietism, has led many churches and Christian confessions to a fever of anxiety lest they should be proved outdated and useless in the modern technocratic, rationalistically organized society, and should appear to lag behind in keeping up to date with the world. Frequently they try to offer contemporary man a message as convenient and well-fitted as possible to his utilitarian demands for prosperity. "Humanistic" ethics— the principle of keeping up appearances— takes precedence over truth, over the salvation of existence from the anonymity of death. The miracle of repentance, the transfiguration of sin into loving desire for personal communion with God, the way mortality is swallowed up by life— these are truths incomprehensible to the pietistic spirit of our age. The Gospel message is "made void," emptied of its ontological content;

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the Church's faith in the resurrection of man is made to appear vacuous.

3. The moral alienation of salvation

When the piety of the Church is transferred to the plane of individual ethics and separated from her truth, this inevitably results in a blurring of the difference between the truth of salvation and the illusion of salvation, between the Church and heresy. The idea of heresy or schism loses all real content, and is confined to abstract, theoretical differences understood only by "experts" who discuss them at meetings and conferences, exchanging the thrust and parry of confessional articles and formulations which fail to correspond in any way to the life of human beings.

Increasingly pietism equates the spirituality and piety of the various churches and confessions, taking them on the level of individual, or socially useful and efficacious, ethics, while disregarding even fundamental dogmatic differences. The piety of a Roman Catholic, a Protestant and frequently even an "enlightened" Orthodox, do not present substantial differences; practical piety no longer reveals whether the truth one lives is real or distorted. Dogma does not appear as a "definition," laying down the limits within which the Church's experience is to be expressed and safeguarded. Christian piety appears unrelated to the way we experience the truth of God in Trinity, the incarnation of the Word, and the energies of the Holy Spirit which give substance to the life of the members of the Church.

The model of Christian piety in the different churches and confessions is increasingly equated with that of a more .. perfect" utilitarian ethic, with an individual morality which takes precedence over the fact of the Church. The only distinctions in piety are variations in religious customs and religious "duties." Even the liturgical act is incidental to individual piety, a complement, aid or fruit; it is thought of as an opportunity for "edification" or a religious duty. The eucharist, the original embodiment of the fact of salvation,

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is distorted by the pietistic spirit; it is construed as a narrowly religious" obligation, a duty to pray together and perhaps to listen to a sermon which usually confines itself to prescribing how the individual should behave. The eucharist is not the event which constitutes and manifests the Church, the changing of our mode of existence and the realization of the ethos of the "new man."

Ultimately, even participation in the sacraments takes on a conventional, ethical character. Confession turns into a psychological means of setting individual guilt-feelings at rest, and participation in holy communion becomes a moral reward for good behavior— when it is not a scarcely conscious individual or family custom bordering on magic. Baptism becomes a self-evident social obligation, and marriage a legitimization of sexual relations without regard to any ascetic transfiguration of the conjugal union into an ecclesial event of personal intercourse or communion.

4. The moral assimilation of heresies

A typical and entirely consistent extension of all this blurring and alienation of the ontological character of the Church's truth is the modern movement towards the so-called "union" of the churches, and the much-vaunted priority of the "love" which unites the churches over the "dogma" which divides them. One could say that this movement was historically justified, since it often looks as if union has been accomplished on the level of a common, non-dogmatic piety on the level of pietism. What used to divide the Church from heresy was not abstract differences in academic formulations; it was the radical break and the distance between the universality of life and illusions of life, between realizing the true life of our trinitarian prototype and subjugating this truth to fallen man's fragmentary mode of existence. Dogma "defined," or showed the limits, while the Church's asceticism secured participation in that truth of life which defeats corruption and death and realizes the image of God in the human being.

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When piety ceases to be an *ecclesial* event and turns into an individual moral attainment, then a heretic or even a non-Christian can be just as virtuous as a "Christian." Piety loses its connection with truth and its ontological content; it ceases to be related to man's full, bodily participation in the life of God—to the resurrection of the body, the change of matter into "word," and the transfiguration of time and space into the immediacy of communion. Piety is transformed into an entirely uniform manner of being religious which inevitably makes differences of "confession" or tradition relative, or even assimilates the different traditions, since they all end in the same result—the moral "improvement" of human life.

Thus the differences which separate heresy from truth remain empty verbal formulations irrelevant to the reality of life and death, irrelevant even to piety. They are preserved simply as variations in religious customs and traditional beliefs, with a purely historical interest. It is therefore natural for the distinct Christian confessions to seek formal union respecting, of course, the pluralism in religious customs and theoretical formulations—since they are already substantially assimilated in the sphere of "practical life." This is the obvious basis for the unity movement in our times—when, of course, it is not guided by much more stark socio-political considerations.

Socio-political considerations, however, have influenced church life in every age; they are the sins of our human nature which has been taken into the Church. And they are not a real danger so long as we are aware that they are sins; they do not succeed in distorting the truth and the fact of the Church. The danger of real distortion lies in heresy: when we take for truth and salvation some "improved" version of the fragmented mode of existence of fallen man. And the great heresy of our age is pietism. Pietism is a heresy in the realm of ecclesiology: it undermines or actually denies the very truth of the Church, transferring the event of salvation

from the ecclesial to the individual ethos, to piety divorced from the trinitarian mode of existence, from Christ's way of obedience. Pietism denies the ontological fact of salvation the Church, life as personal coinherence and communion in

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love, and the transfiguration of mortal individuality into a hypostasis of eternal life.

Pietism undermines the ontological truth of the Church or totally rejects it, but without questioning the formulations of that truth. It simply disregards them, taking them as intellectual forms unrelated to man's salvation, and abandons them to the jurisdiction of an autonomous academic theology. Pietism preserves a formal faithfulness to the letter of dogmatic formulation, but this is a dead letter, irrelevant to life and existential experience.

In that particular, this real denial of the truth of salvation differs from previous heresies. It does not reject the "definitions," the limits of the Church's truth; it simply disconnects this truth from the life and salvation of man. And this disconnection covers a vast range of distinctions and nuances, so that it is exceptionally difficult to "excommunicate" pietism, to place it beyond the bounds within which the Church's truth and unity are experienced. But this is precisely why it is perhaps the most dangerous assault on this truth and unity.

5. The individualistic "culture" of pietism

Pietism is definitely not an autonomous phenomenon, independent of the historical and cultural conditions which have shaped western civilization over the last three centuries. The spirit of individualism, rationalism and utilitarianism, the priority given to rationalization, the myth of "objectivity" and the "values" it imposes, the connection of truth with usefulness and of knowledge with turning things to "practical" account— all these are factors which have influenced and shaped the phenomenon of pietism, and have equally been influenced and shaped by it. Corresponding currents and tendencies, like the Enlightenment, humanism, romanticism or positivism, are part of the web of interdependence formed by these same factors which ultimately make up the mentality and the standards of our modern culture, setting an imperceptible yet decisive seal on people's character and temperament.

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This assertion poses an exceptionally difficult problem for Christian theology. If the way of life in western civilization, the only civilization which can really claim to be called worldwide, presupposes and imposes the cult of the individual, what place remains for the experience and realization of *ecclesial* truth and life? If the technocratic consumer society throughout the world presupposes and develops the primacy of intellectual ability in the subject, the autonomy of his will, the rationalistic regulation of individual rights and duties, "objective" backing for individual choices and for the economic safeguards assured for the individual by trade unions, and a

rationalistic linkage of the individual with the group— then the individualistic religion of pietism is the inevitable consequence. Indeed, it is the only possibility for religious expression in western culture— the necessary and sufficient condition for religious life. There seems little or no scope for experience and historical realization of the Church's truth, the trinitarian mode of existence: no room to live our salvation through a practical subjection of the individual to the experience of communion which belongs to the Church as a body, and to realize the ethos or morality of the Gospel through self-transcendence on the part of the individual and through the freedom and distinctiveness of persons within the communion of saints.⁸

It is no accident that the first pioneers of pietist ideals consciously envisaged an ecumenical movement which was to restore "genuine Christianity" throughout the world.⁹ Pietism

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spread with exceptional speed over a remarkably wide area. From Germany it passed at once to England, where the ground had been prepared by Puritanism, and to the Netherlands and Scandinavia; it spread eastwards as far as Russia ' and took hold in America with the first generations of settlers, as also in the missionary churches of Africa and Asia. But the factual details of how pietism spread so rapidly and the ecumenical ambitions of its founders are only a part of its far more general and organic identification with the tendency towards expansionism and universality innate in western civilization.

It is certain that pietism holds a central place in the web of mutual influence between the factors which have shaped the peculiar character of western culture. However much this might seem both a generalization and a paradox, it could be maintained that pietism has played one of the most significant roles in the historical development of "western-type" societies. This assertion becomes more comprehensible if we accept the view of scholars who attribute to pietism the birth and development of the system of the autonomous economy, or *capitalism*¹⁰— a system

⁸ Precisely because the Church is not a religious ideology but the continuous assumption of the flesh of the world and the transformation of it into the theanthropic flesh of Christ, it is impossible for the ontological truth of the Church's unity and communion to "coexist" passively with a culture centered on the individual, a culture of objectification. The Church lives and functions only so long as she is continuously and dynamically assuming individualistic, objectified existences in order to transfigure them into unity of life, into personal relationship and communion. But this means that on the historical and social level, the life and unity of the Church operates as a radical and direct rejection or subversion of the cultural "system" of individualism and objectification. Otherwise, the Church would be subject to the way of life imposed by the "system," so that she herself would be alienated both as a reality of truth and salvation, and as an institutional expression of this reality.

⁹ "Pietism originally was an ecumenical, world-wide phenomenon...Above all it understood itself to be of ecumenical scope, the representation of true Christendom over all the earth": M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, p. 11.

¹⁰ See R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Penguin Books, 1975¹¹); Max Weber, *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, in *Die protestantische Ethik*, I (Hamburg, 19733) ; E. Troeltsch, *Die*

which today is decisive in determining the economic, political and social lives of people all over the world.

The initial historical link between pietism and capitalism is well known. The linchpin of the capitalist ideology may be identified with the pietistic demand for direct, quantifiable and judicially recompensed results from individual piety and morality—in this case, from hard work, honesty, thrift, rationalistic exploitation of “talents,” etc. Work acquires an autonomy: it is divorced from actual needs and becomes a religious obligation, finding its visible justification and “just deserts” in the accumulation of wealth. The management of

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wealth similarly becomes autonomous: it is divorced from social need and becomes part of the individual’s relationship with God, a relationship of quantitative deserts and rewards.¹¹

Confirmation of the conclusions thus formulated could be based not only on the inevitably relative agreement among students of the phenomenon of capitalism, but also on reference to direct historical examples. Perhaps the most representative example is that of the birth and development of the United States of America. This superpower of our times, which is also the most powerful and important factor in the operation of the world capitalist system, has its roots in the principles and the spirit of pietism. The successive waves of Anglo-Saxon Puritans and pietists who first emigrated to America with the millenarian vision¹² of a Puritan “promised

Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen (Tübingen, 1965); H. Hauser, *Les débuts du Capitalisme* (Paris, 1927); A. Fanfani, *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism* (London, 1935); H.M. Robertson, *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism* (Cambridge, 1933).

¹¹ “Convinced that character is all and circumstances nothing [the morally self-sufficient] see in the poverty of those who fall by the way, not a misfortune to be pitied and relieved, but a moral failing to be condemned, and in riches not an object of suspicion—though like other gifts they may be abused—but the blessing which rewards the triumph of energy and will”: Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, pp. 229-230.

¹² “Millenarist tendencies and expectation of the Messiah are characteristic of pietism, “...a sort of renewed ‘chiliasm,’ that is to say the immediate expectation of a kingdom of God on earth which it would be within our power to produce”: L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality...*, p. 174. See also M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, pp. 130-132 and 160; and Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest of Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination* (Urbana, Ill., 1961).

land”¹³ identified trust in God with the power of money,¹⁴ and religious feeling with the economic efficiency of work (work ethics) I and ultimately hallowed as ethics whatever ensured individual security and social prosperity.¹⁵ By the

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very fact of their existence, the two hundred and fifty or so different Christian confessions in that country make the truth of the Church body take second place; in defining the quality of a Christian, priority is given to the peculiarly American idea of individual ethics (civil religion).

Going by the example of America and the pietistic basis of the “gospel of wealth” which took shape there,¹⁶ one might venture to make a further assertion. The whole of mankind lives today in the trap of a lethal threat created by the polarization of two provenly immoral moralistic systems, and the constant expectation of a confrontation between them in war, perhaps nuclear war. On the one side is the pietistic individualism of the capitalist camp, and on the other the moralistic collectivism of the marxist dreams of “universal happiness.” At least the latter refuses to cloak its aims under the forged title of Christian, while the name of Christianity continues to be blackened in the sloganizing of even the foulest dictatorships which support the workings of the capitalist system, upholding the pietistic ideal of individual merit.”

If the witness of an ecumenical council of the Church were to have any meaning in our day, its chief purpose would be to denounce this torture of man, this imprisonment in an adulterated and falsified idea of Christian piety: the corrosion and destruction of the truth of salvation and the reality of the Church by generalized pietism.

¹³ See Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant— American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (New York, 1975), especially pp. 7-8 and the chapter “America as a Chosen People” (p. 36ff.); Conrad Cherry, *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Prentice-Hall, 1971); H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, 1937).

¹⁴ “In God we trust” is the inscription on every coin and dollar note. See also Moses Rischin, ed., *The American Gospel of Success* (Quadrangle Books, 1965); Howard Mumford Jones, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1966).

¹⁵ See Robert Handy, *A Christian America* (New York and Oxford, 1971), especially the chapter: “Components of the New Christian Civilization. Religion, Morality, Education,” especially pp. 33-40; William McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston, 1967); Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self-made Man in America* (Free Press, 1966).

¹⁶ “See Andrew Carnegie’s famous essay “The Gospel of Wealth,” reprinted from *The American Review* 148 (1889), pp. 653-664, in Gail Kennedy, ed., *Democracy and the Gospel of Wealth* (Boston, 1949).

Additional Note:

Some specific products of pietism are the Halle movement (founded by August-Hermann Francke), the Moravian Brethren (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine— founded by N. L. von Zinzendorf), the Methodists (founded by John Wesley, 1703-1791), the Quakers (founded by George Fox, 1624-1691), and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a host of “Free Churches,” missionary societies, schools of preaching, “inner mission” movements, Protestant monastic brotherhoods, etc. See M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, pp. 243-60.

In Roman Catholicism we rarely hear of autonomous groups or movements of pietists, perhaps because pietistic tendencies and initiatives were officially adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in the form of orders, societies, sacred confraternities, etc. In Roman Catholic mysticism, certainly, Pietism has always found the conditions for its natural generation. The in-

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dividual approach to virtue, anthropocentric sentimentality and the transference of religious feeling to the “interior” of the individual are all hallmarks of Roman Catholic mystics, whether as individuals or in organized and officially recognized groups. The link with the body of the Church is of secondary importance and sometimes of purely legal and formal significance. “Bei ihnen kam alles auf die inneren Menschen, nichts auf die aussere Form der Kirchlichkeit an”: M. Schmidt, *Pietismus*, p. 26.

Of the Orthodox churches, the Russian Church was the first to be invaded by the spirit of pietism. Early in the eighteenth century, Bishop Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736), professor and later rector of the Theological Academy in Kiev, represented in Russia the pietistic Halle movement (see Schmidt, “Pietismus,” article in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 5, col. 372; R. Stupperich, “Protestantismus in Russland,” in the same volume, col. 1248). Prokopovich’s influence was very widespread and left a distinct mark on the Church and spiritual life of Russia, from the moment when Peter the Great (1672-1725) took him on as a close collaborator, after promoting him to the archbishopric of Novgorod, and let him fundamentally shape his religious reform. (See Igor Smolitsch, *Geschichte der russischen Kirche, 1700-1917* [Leiden, 1964], p. 94ff; and Reinhard Wittram, *Peter I—Czar and Kaiser*, vol. 2 [Göttingen, 1964], p. 189ff.) The religious reform of Peter the Great had as its aim the systematic westernization of the Russian Church both in structure and in spiritual life. And under the influence of Feofan Prokopovich, many areas of Russian church and spiritual life were shaped precisely in accordance with the spirit and the criteria of Protestant pietism. At the same time, his theological “system” and his writings imposed on the academic study of theology in Russia what Florovsky calls “the domination of Latino-protestant scholasticism” (*Puti russkogo bogosloviia* [Paris, 1937], P. 104; the reference is from I. Smolitsch, *Geschichte der russischen Kirche*, p. 577. See also H. Koch, *Die russische Orthodoxie im Petrinischen Zeitalter* (Breslau, 19291; Cyprien Kern, “L’enseignement théologique supérieur dans la Russie du XIXe siècle,” *Istina*, 1960; Igor Smolitsch, *Russische Monchtum*, 988-1917 [Würzburg, 1953]. p. 383ff.) The influence of Feofan Prokopovich’s theology reached even as far as Greece, at least through Theoklitos Farmakidis, “the first to teach dogmatic theology at the Ionian Academy on Kerkyra in 1824, following the text of the Russian Feofan Prokopovich”: Manuel Gedeon, *The Cultural Progress of the Nation in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* [in Greek—Athens, 1976], p. 206.

Actual pietistic movements in Russia were probably very few; the best known is the Moravian Brethren, from 1740 in Sarepta on the Volga (R. Stupperich, "Protestantismus in Russland," col. 1250). What is more striking is the way in which the Church's mentality as a whole was undermined. In combination with the stress on sentiment introduced into Russia by the religious romanticism of the nineteenth century, and the corresponding prevalence of baroque in church art which distorted basic theological presuppositions in Russian Orthodox worship, a general climate of pietism often shapes the atmosphere and complexion of Russian church life.

Pietistic influence is apparent even in the figures most representative of Russian spiritual life. The most important spiritual figure in eighteenth century Russia, St Tikhon Zadonsky (1724-1783), is also a typical representative of pietistic and Roman Catholic influences. "He was strongly influenced by contemporary western piety, both Counter-Reformation Catholic

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piety and Protestant piety with an emphasis on pietism... We find in [his works] a direct echo of St Augustine and the *Imitation of Christ*, as of Lutheran works such as Arndt's *True Christianity*... and Anglican ones such as the *Meditatiunculae subitaneae* by the Puritan Bishop Hall": L. Bouyer, *Orthodox Spirituality*..., pp. 37-38.

In the form of an organized movement, pietism appeared in the Romanian Orthodox Church just on the eve of World War II, under the name of "the Army of the Lord" and with the priest Joseph Trifa at its head. There, however, the Church reacted swiftly; she excommunicated the founders and excised from her body this danger which threatened to alienate her tradition and her life.

In Greece, pietism made its appearance as a symptom of a more general "europeanization" of the country. Quite early, around the eighteenth century, Humanism and the principles of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment exerted an obvious influence on Greek scholars and church writers who turned to the West for their higher education. Rationalism and moralism, as direct results of European thinking and theology, reached the Orthodox Greek East through the writing and teaching of the "enlightened Teachers of the Nation," learned preachers and writers from the period of Turkish domination. At least in the works of Vikentios Damodos (1679-1752), Elias Miniatis (1669-1714), Evgenios Voulgaris (1716-1806), Nikeforos Theotokis (1730-1800), Theoklitos Farmakidis (1754-1860) and Neofytos Vamvas (1770-1855), there is manifest influence from western theological positions of their day: moral eudaemonism, the "religion of sentiment" (Schleiermacher), the connection of Church and "culture" (*Kulturchristentum*), the identification of spiritual regeneration with moral regeneration, the juridical understanding of morality (see Ch. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West—Theology in Greece Today* [in Greek—Athens, 1972], especially pp. 57-95, with bibliography).

With the establishment of the independent Greek state and the imposition of German and Protestant models on the organization of the Church of Greece (which became "autocephalous" in 1833) and of theological education, western influences prevailed in Greek academic theology and in "official" church life—though not without exceptions and reactions. The phenomenon could perhaps have been contained there, since popular spirituality and piety remained untainted by western alienation. But from the very first decades of our own century, pietism made its appearance in Greece in the form of a specific movement whose intention was to bring in the broad masses of the people. Initially it seemed that the aim of the

“movement” was the renewal of church life, with the systematic organization of sermons, catechism classes, religious publications and confession. But it very soon separated itself and its activity from the life of the Church, the life of the parishes and the jurisdiction of the local bishops. It was organized as an independent effort, with a system of administration and organization independent of the church hierarchy, and with its own spiritual and theological direction.

It is quite extraordinary how closely the modern Greek pietist movement copied its German and Anglo-Saxon prototypes. Preaching and teaching were based on exactly the same premises: the theological truth of dogmas was ignored or passed over in silence and replaced with the teaching of ethics, a rationalist apologetic, utilitarian rationalism and moral eudaemonism, and stress on individual virtue and the cultural necessity of religion. Fol-

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lowing Spener’s method to the letter, the “movement” organized a vast number of Bible study circles meeting in houses all over Greece. This led to the formation of a kind of private worship outside church—in imitation of the Protestant “service of the word” (*Vortgottesdienst*)—with the lay element alone. It consisted of reading from the Bible, always with a moral conclusion, *ex tempore* prayers and sentimental songs, usually from Protestant collections of hymns. The Greek pietist movement, exactly like the Protestant ones, came to be dominated by a strongly military discipline: its members were forbidden to go to public spectacles or recreation centers, to smoke, or to read books or other material of their own choosing. They have developed more or less a common style of dress, and cultivate a militant missionary spirit to gain followers.

To the general public, the pietistic movement in Greece is known as the Zoe movement, after the first “Brotherhood of Theologians” which began its organized efforts in 1911. Later, however, there emerged offshoots of this same organization (the Fellowship of Academics “Aktines,” the Student Christian Union, the Christian Union of Working Youth, the Womites Fellowship “Evseveia,” the Fellowship of Nursing Sisters “Evniiki,” the Christian schools “Elliniki Pedeia,” etc.). There were also parallel movements which copied the Zoe model in principles and structure (the Brotherhood of Theologians “O Sotir,” the organizations of Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kandiotis of Florina, etc.).

Making their moralistic criteria into absolutes, these movements in Greece turned into complete religious units, divorced from the life of the Church, and society. They developed into closed, autonomous religious groups, entry to which could be secured only by objectively recognized “suitability and moral rectitude. Divorced from the life of the parishes and from local bishops, these pietistic groups consolidated their independence by taking the form of secular “associations” with recognition from the state. They were thus able to control the numbers and the morals of their members and organize a kind of “para-ecclesial” life in open opposition to the official Church. They acquired buildings of their own for catechism meetings and, where possible, their own churches. They have their own clergy who are formally attached to the local bishop but are in reality directed, down to the last detail by the administration of the organizations. They thus have their own confessors and separate confession, in the buildings belonging to the organizations rather than in the churches, their own separate liturgies, where entry is controlled and only organizations are allowed in.

It may perhaps be useful to add some mention of the position taken up by the pietistic organizations in Greece on the question of ecumenism, a position which contradicts their principles. The organizations came out in fanatical opposition to the idea of church unity, although the idea of union had to a great extent been embodied by these same pietistic movements. It was they who had been exclusively responsible for transferring to Greek Orthodox territory both the practice of western piety and also, on many points, such western dogmatic teaching as was essential for their moralism. Such points of doctrine include the legalistic theory of the satisfaction of divine justice through Christ's death on the Cross, denial of distinction between God's essence and energies, rejection of hesychasm and the neptic tradition, an apologetic devised with utilitarian ends, the general priesthood of the laity as an autonomous absolute, a legal understanding

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of the transmission of original sin, etc. We are bound to conclude that their stance against church unity is simply the result of a tragic confusion in spiritual criteria, and shows the movements' lack of theological selfawareness, or else is nothing but a conventional attempt to outdo everyone else in conservatism. Either way, it cannot be a matter of deliberately upholding Orthodox spirituality and the Orthodox tradition, since the organizations could be said to ignore these quite provocatively and to distort them systematically.

It would require a separate study to analyze the various forms these distortions take: the abolition of the holy icons, which are replaced with Renaissance art (both in their catechetical work and in the buildings belonging to the organizations), the almost exclusive use of Roman Catholic and Protestant manuals and religious literature for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful, the polemics against monasticism and the Holy Mountain, the institution of "lay brotherhoods" (like the western "orders"), neglect and erosion of the authority of the episcopate, etc. See further Christoph Maczewski, *Die Zoi-Bewegung Griechenlands* (Göttingen, 1970); V. Yioultsis, "A Sociological View of the Religious Brotherhoods" (in Greek), in *Sociological Questions in Orthodoxy*, ed. Prof. G. Mantzaridis (Thessaloniki, 1975), pp. 169-203; A. Alexandridis, "A Phenomenon of Modern Greek Religious Life: The Christian Organizations" (in Greek), in *Synoro* 39 (1966), pp. 193-204; Ch. Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West—Theology in Greece Today* (in Greek), p. 95ff.; *idem*, *The Privilege of Despair* (in Greek—Athens, 1973), pp. 80-92; *idem*, *Chapters on Political Theology* (in Greek—Athens, 1976), p. 114ff.; *idem*, *Honest to Orthodoxy* (in Greek—Athens, 1968), pp. 68-73.

Nevertheless, the most positive sign in the history of Orthodoxy in Greece over the last century must surely be the progressive weakening and ultimate disintegration of the pietistic movements. It is extremely encouraging how the Orthodox consciousness has reacted to this foreign intervention in its living body. Over approximately the last two decades, the pietistic Movements have undergone a relentless series of internal problems; they have suffered splits and lost their followers, and have really ceased to be a Substantial presence in the spiritual life of the country. At the same time, there has been an awakening of theological consciousness in the Church in Greece, and the initial fascination which pietism exerted over a majority of lay theologians and clergy has been significantly curtailed.

This awakening is summed up and expressed in a truly unique manner, and in organic continuity with the Orthodox patristic tradition, in a text which is among the most important products of modern Greek

theology and spirituality. This is the declaration of the “Holy Community” of the Holy Mountain on the academic approach to theology independent of the Church’s experience, and the pietism of the religious organizations which corresponds to it. This memorable Athonite text was published in the Periodical *Athonitikoi Dialogoi* (1975, pp. 20-27) a propos of Prof. P.N. Trembelas’ work *Mysticism-Apophatism-Cataphatic Theology*, vols. 1.2 (Athens, 1974):

The help of the logic and language of Western theologians and the spiritual opinions that spring from the experience of a closed, Pietistic mentality, are both things that leave no place for the mys-

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tery of the mystagogic coinherence of Orthodox theology and living experience...

The tragic state of our times does not allow us to concern ourselves with pietism and the obsolete theology of the workshops of scholasticism, that characteristic curse of the West which is effectively nourished by the Western tradition and which suffers from its divisions and passes on its sickness... Especially today, when young people all over the world, in their barren journey through the desert wilderness of modern so-called civilization remain dissatisfied with a dry scientific approach, with the paltry productions of an insipid pietism...

The theology of the universities and the various Christian movements needs to be rebaptized into the mystery of our living church tradition; this will give them new strength and new methods of work and evangelism ...

A scholastic and spiritually jejune theology is useless for the salvation of man. And a dogmatically spineless pietism which thinks that deification is an improvement in character should by its very nature be rejected. Such a theology is at its last breath; and such a way of life is powerless to withstand the general crisis of our era. The two together, theology and pietism, form one of the causes and the consequences of the spiritual decadence of our times.

If the theology of the Church were like this, it would create not fathers and confessors who spoke the words of God, but cold academic researchers and disputants of the present age. And if the spirituality of our tradition were like this, it would not create the neptic fathers as “gods by grace” and “lamps of discernment,” but morbid sentimentalists who were prey to psychic hallucinations.

Why should we wander pointlessly in sterile concern with a cerebral and superfluous theology and an unreal, insipid pietistic way of life? Both of these are unknown to our holy tradition, alien to the wishes and needs of man and unworthy of them.

Our pietistic ideas about sanctity as “improvement in character” are shocked and rendered powerless when set side-by-side with the holy experience of our saints, who received Christ in their hearts... as light, in a real and substantial way; seen invisibly and

comprehended incomprehensibly, with formless form and appearance beyond appearance."

We feel as Orthodox that we do not simply belong to the East geographically, nor do we fight the West in a geographical sense. We belong to the Church of the uncreated divine Light that knows no evening, which saves both East and West.

From henceforth, then, "let no profane hand touch" the mystery of Orthodox theology, but "let the lips of the faithful" sing without ceasing in praise of the Church, the Mother of God which brings forth gods according to grace; for only in her and through her saints are we led unfailingly to life and knowledge.

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