

What is Pietism?

Pietism was a reaction amongst German Lutherans to a cold and sterile scholastic dogmatism that arose in the 17th and 18th centuries, stressing the necessity of good works and personal holiness. Some churches had so focused on systematising the theological details of the Reformers that there was little devotional encouragement. In the aftermath of the terrible 30 Years War (1618-1648), many continental Protestants looked for more comfort in teaching and a warmer application of church life.

Pietism fostered a desire for godliness, Biblical study and missionary activity; perhaps occasioned by contact with British Puritanism. This movement spawned charitable works towards the poor and self-sacrificing missionaries. Pietist Count von Zinzendorf established the Moravian Church. While the objectives of the original Pietists were good, it strayed towards the overly subjective regarding communion with God, and also to a wrong emphasis on the value of good works. Some representatives strayed towards mysticism and a wrong subjectivity; extremists of this wing are known as Radical Pietists.

Teachings

- An emphasis on good works following obedience to the Bible.
- An emphasis on holiness and communion with God.
- An emphasis on mission.

Leaders

- *Philipp Jakob Spener* (1635-1705) had worthy aims. He called for a better preaching and knowledge of the Bible, better fellowship, avoidance of controversy, good works and condemned the sins of the day.
- *AH Francke* (1663-1727) established a school, a hospital, a widow's home, a Bible school, and other institutions for the poor and destitute people of Halle. His orphanage later became an inspiration for George Muller.
- *Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (1700-60).
- *JA Bengel*, was a notable Bible expositor and Greek scholar.

Pietism always results in debate amongst church historians; some in favour some against. Some believe it to be a mixture of Medieval mysticism and Puritan godliness, while others see it as a reform movement within Lutheranism. While it had many praiseworthy features, it was not Reformed but had influences from many areas, including Romanism and mysticism. It is having a renewed influence on some evangelical churches today.

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