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SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PIETISM AS A PROTESTANT FORM OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

Abstract. Can counterparts of the Catholic new evangelization be found in the Protestant world? They certainly can. One of them—despite all their temporal and theological difference—is Pietism, a religious revival movement initiated by Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705), who presented his proposals in the book titled *Pia Desideria* (1675). Pietism emphasized the revival of personal faith, ardent prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, human involvement in the transformation of socio-economic structures, missionary activity, and community life.

Is there, conversely, also a Catholic form of Pietism? The answer is not straightforward, because the 21st century Catholic Church has behind it the great work of the Second Vatican Council with its call for lay apostolate, biblical renewal, and the revival of ecclesial movements. The idea of the parish as a “community of communities,” sensitivity to the need to proclaim the kerygma, the emergence of prayer and formation groups, charismatic renewal—in all of these one can see the implementation of the ideals that guided the Pietists. In a sense, Pope Francis’ exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* deserves to be called the *pia desideria* of our times.

Keywords: exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*; Pope Francis; new evangelization; *Pia Desideria*; Pietism; Philipp Jacob Spener.

New evangelization has existed for ages, says Card. Walter Kasper¹. It was already present in difficult times. Here are just a few examples of figures who were the originators of new evangelization, each of them in his or her times. Hildegard of Bingen († 1179) was the first nun to preach in public;

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¹ Walter KASPER, “Nowa ewangelizacja—wyzwanie pastoralne, teologiczne i duchowe,” in *Nowa ewangelizacja. Impulsy do ożywienia wiary*, ed. George Augustin (Ząbki: Apostolicum, 2012), 35ff.

Francis of Assisi († 1226) saved the Church with his penitential sermons; Philip Neri († 1595), with his joyful apostolate of the streets, is regarded as the second apostle of Rome.

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, new evangelization is not about beginning everything anew, but the changed social, cultural, economic conditions demand that Church members experience their faith in a new way and proclaim it by an evangelization “new in its ardor, methods and expression” (Pope John Paul II’s Address to the 19th General Assembly of CELAM, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 9 March 1983, no. 3). It is about an evangelization that is “directed principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life. [...] to help these people encounter the Lord” (Pope Benedict XVI’s homily during the Holy Mass for the official opening of the 13th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme of “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,” Rome, 7 October 2012).²

Is it legitimate to speak of similar phenomena in the Protestant world? It certainly is. One of them is Pietism—a religious renewal movement that originated in the 17th century, initiated by Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705), a Lutheran preacher, in Frankfurt am Main.

1. *PIA DESIDERIA*, OR P. J. SPENER’S *HEARTFELT DESIRES (PIOUS WISHES)*

The main cause of grievances is the fact that “almost everywhere there is something wanting in the church, except that in His inexhaustible goodness God has not taken away His Word and holy sacraments.” “How many there are who have fleshly illusion of faith in place of the faith that saves.” True faith “changes us and makes us to be born anew of God.” “It makes altogether different men of us in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Spirit.” “Again, you hear the Word of God. This is good. But it is not enough that your ear hears it. Do you let it penetrate inwardly into your heart?” “Accordingly if your Baptism is to benefit you, it must remain in constant use throughout your life.”

² The words of the popes are cited from: John Paul II, Address to CELAM (Opening Address of the Nineteenth General Assembly of CELAM, 9 March 1983, Port-au-Prince, Haiti), *L’Osservatore Romano English Edition* 16/780, no. 9 (18 April 1983); Holy Mass for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops and Proclamation of St. John of Avila and of St. Hildegard of Bingen as ‘Doctors of the Church’: Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Rome, 7 October 2012, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121007_apertura-sinodo.html (accessed: 20.01.2018).

The above text is not a contemporary evangelizer's words. It is a collection of a few paraphrased sentences written over 340 years ago. They come from Philipp Jacob Spener's book published in 1675, *Pia Desideria*.³

The mid-seventeenth-century Europe was a continent decimated by the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), experiencing a social, demographic, and economic crisis. It was also a time of a theological crisis, because when the great sixteenth-century controversies had died down, three major theological strongholds crystallized: Catholic (post-Tridentine), Lutheran, and Reformed; each of them lives its own life. The preaching of that epoch succumbed to the charms of the baroque: the oratorical art represents a triumph of form over content. One of the Lutheran historians, Prof. Janusz Maciuszko, writes that the Church and theology of that time

[...] were unable to come closer to the problems of ordinary people; as a result, these people were unable to come closer to the Church, which offered grandiloquent words and little more than that. [...] The official, formal Lutheran Church was incapable of offering forms of spiritual help to people who often lived in poverty or deprivation and who remembered the acts of violence committed by soldiers, fires, loss of property, and the death of their loved ones. The Church delegated a preacher proficient in rhetoric to the pulpit, where he communicated the wisdom acquired in the course of his studies over the heads of the faithful [...]⁴

This had its results in church life: weight was attached to ceremonialism at the cost of living personal piety. "Catechism learned by heart became a sufficient pass into adult life." Too little place was left for personal self-development of the faithful. "The Church took it upon its shoulders to guide man through life and directed the work of each parish by applying its norms in a dry and detached manner."⁵

³ Philip Jacob SPENER, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), 42, 64–66 [further referred to as *Pia Desideria* (English edition)]. The fuller title of the work reads: *Pia Desideria: Or, Heartfelt Desires for a God-pleasing Improvement of the True Evangelical Church, with some Christian Proposals to that End [...]*.

⁴ "[...] nie potrafiły zbliżyć się do problemów zwykłych ludzi, a ci w rezultacie do Kościoła, który oferował górnolotne słowa i niewiele więcej. [...] Oficjalny, urzędowy Kościół luterński nie był w stanie wykrzesać z siebie form pomocy duchowej ludziom żyjącym w wyniku wojny często w nędzy lub niedostatku, pamiętającym gwałty zadawane przez żołnierstwo, pożary i utratę majątku, wreszcie śmierć bliskich"; Janusz MACIUSZKO, "Niezamierzony manifest pietyzmu" [introduction to Spener's work], in SPENER, *Pia desideria* (Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo Augustana, 2002), 9–10 [further referred to as *Pia desideria* (Polish edition)].

⁵ "Opanowany pamięciowo katechizm stawał się wystarczającą przepustką do dorosłego życia. [...] Kościół brał na swoje barki przeprowadzenie człowieka przez życie i stosując w suchy, beznamiętny sposób swoje normy, kierował pracą poszczególnych parafii"; *ibid.*, 9.

This situation worried many people, including Philipp Jacob Spener. He presented his diagnosis of the situation and proposed reforms in the already cited *Pia Desideria*. He points to the zeal of the early Church, remarking that, after all, “[i]t is the same Holy Spirit who is bestowed on us by God who once effected all things in the early Christians, and he is neither less able nor less active today to accomplish the work of sanctification in us.”⁶ Spener’s six specific proposals deserve attention:

1) to popularize the word of God by more frequent reading of the Bible in families and during meetings of the faithful, who—alongside the clergy—would have the right to speak at debates⁷;

2) to revive the common priesthood of the faithful⁸;

3) to increase the significance of the practice of Christian life in relation to religious knowledge⁹;

4) to extinguish futile doctrinal controversies¹⁰;

5) to reform theological studies and to make the students aware of the fact that in theology everything should be oriented towards the practice of faith and life¹¹;

6) to rid preaching of baroque rhetoric and futile scholarly airs.¹²

As regards the first proposal, it should be noted that private Bible reading and prayer meetings of the faithful had already taken place in the Anglican Church in the 16th century and were called “conventicles,” but both the Church and monarchy considered them illegal. They were also known in the tradition of Reformed piety, and in Spener’s times they appeared in Frankfurt in Lutheran circles as a kind of novelty. They were referred to as *collegia pietatis*, or “little churches within the Church” (*ecclesiolae in Ecclesia*).¹³

As regards the reform of the clergy, Spener observes that “a worldly spirit” is also reflected in many lives that seem to be impeccable when viewed from the outside: “They are still stuck fast in the old birth and do not actually possess the true marks of a new birth.” This causes the greatest scandal “when it is not recognized for what it is.” But what is the most sad,

⁶ SPENER, *Pia Desideria* (English edition), 85.

⁷ SPENER, *Pia Desideria* (Polish edition), 67–71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 71–73.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74–79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79–87.

¹² *Ibid.*, 87–89.

¹³ MACIUSZKO, “Niezamierzony manifest petyzmu,” 12; Tadeusz J. ZIELIŃSKI, *Protestantyzm ewangelikalny. Studium specyfiki religijnej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe ChAT 2013), 216.

concludes Spener, is the absence of the fruits of faith in the lives of many preachers. They are wanting in faith themselves; “[w]hat they take to be faith and what is the ground of their teaching is by no means that true faith which is awakened through the Word of God, by the illumination, witness, and sealing of the Holy Spirit, but is a human fancy.” Appealing for a reform of the clergy, Spener nevertheless humbly concedes that he does not want to “go to the other extreme, by throwing out the baby with the bathwater,” because he is increasingly aware of what he is wanting in himself.¹⁴

To sum up, Pietism can be seen as a religious renewal movement, placing emphasis on the revival of personal faith, prayer, Bible reading as well as personal engagement in changing the socio-economic structures, missionary activity, and community life. Pietist theologians influenced the changes in the education and economic ethics of their times, developed a characteristic religious language, and contributed to the development of new literary genres.¹⁵ Pietism found a way to combine personal interest in faith with building the community of the Church, whose members must go through a process of renewal and conversion. August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), a continuator of Spener’s work, emphasized the need to create external conditions for people’s faith to grow: to liberate them from poverty, loneliness, and addictions.¹⁶

Spener’s proposals and the movement of which he became a symbol soon faced criticism. Theologians representing Lutheran orthodoxy charged Spener (sometimes rightly, sometimes exaggeratedly) with stressing sanctification alongside justification, promoting ethical perfectionism, ignoring the role of the clergy, unjustly condemning academic theology, and disseminating separatist tendencies in parishes.¹⁷

Pietist proposals were not received in the same way throughout the Protestant world. In continental Europe (except *Herrnhuter* [brethren of the Moravian Church] and Cieszyn [Teschen] Silesia) and in Germany, according to Maciuszko, “the direct legacy of his [Spener’s] thought led to a paradoxical outcome”: ignoring the dogmatic plane in the teaching of theology and promoting subjectivism gave rise to theological rationalism and religious

¹⁴ SPENER, *Pia Desideria* (English edition), 45–46.

¹⁵ Mariusz KONIECZNY, “Pietyzm,” in *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 15, (Lublin: TN KUL, 2011), col. 550ff.

¹⁶ Herman J. SELDERHUIS, “Tradycja protestancka w Europie (od XVI do XIX wieku),” in *Duchowość chrześcijańska. Zarys 2000 lat historii, od Wschodu do Zachodu*, ed. Gordon Mursell (Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła, 2004), 180.

¹⁷ MACIUSZKO, “Niezamierzony manifest pietyzmu,” 14–15.

indifference.¹⁸ Pietist ideas were well received in Anglo-Saxon evangelicalism, however: in the eighteenth-century Methodism, in the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement, and in the twentieth-century Pentecostalism.

2. *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*¹⁹—THE *PIA DESIDERIA* OF OUR TIMES?

I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation (EG 27).

Seeing Pietism as a Protestant form of new evangelization—despite all the temporal and theological differences between them—it is possible to invert the perspective and ask: what is the Catholic form of Pietism?

The answer is not simple, because the 21st-century Catholic Church has the great work of the Second Vatican Council behind it, together with a call for lay apostolate, biblical renewal, and a revival of church movements. The idea of the parish as a “community of communities,” sensitivity to the need for proclaiming the kerygma, the emergence of prayer and formation groups—all of these can be seen as implementing the ideals that guided the Pietists. Yet, there is one other reality, not unrelated to the ones listed above, that ought to be particularly highlighted: charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church. Does it not especially deserve the name of the Catholic form of Pietism?

In his book titled *Postmodernism in the Church? The Charismatic Renewal*,²⁰ Paolo Maino, a lay theologian studying church movements argues that the Catholic charismatic renewal is a kind of “bridge” that the Holy Spirit has built in the contemporary Church so as to make it capable of engaging in dialogue with the postmodern culture. This culture is characterized, among other things, by an emphasis placed on the subjectivity of personal experience, on the directness of relationships, and on spontaneity. According to Paolo Maino, if there was no point of contact between this culture and

¹⁸ “[...]bezpośrednie dziedzictwo jego myśli dało w efekcie rezultat paradoksalny”; *ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (henceforth abbreviated to EG) (accessed: 20.01.2018).

²⁰ PAOLO MAINO, *Il postmoderno nella Chiesa? Il Rinascimento carismatico* (Milan: San Paolo Edizioni, 2004).

the Gospel, there would be no possibility of evangelizing the postmodern man.²¹

Perhaps the document deserving the name of a present-day *pia desideria* will be Pope Francis' exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. One will find plenty of contents that this exhortation and Spener's work have in common. First, it is enough to look at some of the titles: "No to spiritual worldliness" (EG 93–97); "Words which set hearts on fire" (EG 142–144); "Spirit-Filled Evangelizers" (EG, Chapter V). Also closer analysis of the contents of the exhortation reveals some similarity to the Pietist ideas of Church renewal. For example, one of the main themes of *Evangelii Gaudium* is the proposal of converting ecclesial structures²²: "There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them" (EG 26). Similar resemblances can be found regarding the issue of the practice of life: "In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. In this way, the life of the Church turns into a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few" (EG 95). As regards proclaiming the word of God: "The Sunday readings will resonate in all their brilliance in the hearts of the faithful if they have first done so in the heart of their pastor" (EG 149). "These are words that are suitable in theology or catechesis, but whose meaning is incomprehensible to the majority of Christians" (EG 158). "Let us also keep in mind that we should never respond to questions that nobody asks" (EG 155). "Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence" (EG 259). "How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts" (EG 261).

In conclusion, one may ask: what lesson can contemporary Catholicism learn from the history of Protestant Pietism? The question about Pietism can be supplemented by others, about a whole range of awakening movements,

²¹ Ibid., 58ff.

²² Zbigniew NOSOWSKI, "Nawrócenie kościelnych struktur," in *Lublin—Miasto zgody religijnej. Ekumenizm w historii, teologii, kulturze*, ed. Sławomir Pawłowski and Sławomir Jacek Żurek (Lublin: TN KUL, 2017), 193.

such as the phenomenon of Revivalism in English colonies in North America and subsequently in the United States—the First Great Awakening (1730–1750) and the Second Great Awakening (1790–1810).²³ Above all, it is a lesson of stable relations and at the same time differences between two aspects of faith: *fides quae* (objective faith, the contents of faith) and *fides qua* (subjective faith, the act of faith). Although these two aspects are inseparably linked to each other—because the confidence of faith consists in clinging to a certain message with comprehensible contents, and the proclamation of faith is not reducible to words but should come from the heart²⁴—the history of the Church provides examples of different emphasis being placed on them, e.g. in the *credere Deum* of the Magisterium of the Church and in the *credere in Deum* of folk piety (cf. EG 124). The same kind of relationship and difference exists between the proclamation of the kerygma and catechesis.²⁵ “A great pedagogical mistake in pastoral work focused on evangelization is the tendency to *Catholicize* before proclaiming the living person of Jesus.”²⁶ Therefore, before catechizing takes place, is it necessary to evangelize. Still, evangelization should also accompany catechesis, since faith may have weakened in many of those who are catechized.²⁷ Likewise, tension and complementariness can be observed in the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the life and mission of the Church.²⁸

Finally, the history of Pietism makes us aware of the fact that movements proposing a renewal or change of ecclesial structures may not be received in the same way across Christian communities; they may be rejected here and there, but they may also be rehabilitated after some time and return into the life of the Church in a different form.

²³ Cf. ZIELIŃSKI, *Protestantyzm ewangelikalny*, 45–47, 52–54.

²⁴ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Teologia dzisiaj. Perspektywy, zasady i kryteria* (Cracow: Dehon Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów, 2012), 21.

²⁵ Adam PAWŁOWSKI, *Kerygmat w nowej ewangelizacji* (Poznań: Agape, 2014), 32.

²⁶ “Wielkim błędem pedagogicznym w duszpasterstwie ewangelizacyjnym jest tendencja *katolizowania* przed głoszeniem żywej osoby Jezusa”; Waldemar SZLACHETKA, “(Nowa) ewangelizacja—obowiązek wszystkich czy przywilej wybranych,” in *Polskie drogi nowej ewangelizacji*, ed. Kazimierz Święs and Dariusz Lipiec (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2014), 114–116.

²⁷ Jacek NEUMANN, “Dlaczego katecheza ewangelizacyjna?,” in *Ewangelizować czy katechizować?*, ed. Stanisław Dziekoński (Warsaw: Verbinum, 2002), 139.

²⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*, <http://episkopat.pl/relacja-miedzy-darami-hierarchicznymi-a-charyzmatycznymi-list-kongregacji-nauki-wiary/>, no. 18 (accessed: 14.06.2016).

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