

Chair of Christian Thought Lebel Lecture, February 7, 2011

**“The Church & the Academy:
What an Historian of Christianity can offer the Church of Today”
By Douglas H. Shantz, PhD University of Calgary**

Introduction: The Question

The purpose of my lecture this evening is to raise a *Perennial Question: What can scholars (the Academy) offer the Church that might enhance the life and mission of believers?* This gives rise to some related questions: how should the *Christian Church* view the *Academy* and what it represents: *the university disciplines, research, and scholarship?* More specifically, how should Christian believers and their clergy (Church) consider and evaluate the research and writing of those committed to a scholarly assessment of the Christian tradition in the Academy?

One Christian leader offered an unambiguous answer to these questions:

Universities, with their programs of study, their colleges, their degrees, and their professorships, are products of vain heathenism; they are as much good to the Church as the devil is.¹

The author? John Wycliffe (1329-1384), called “the Morningstar of the Reformation” because of how his views on the Church and Biblical authority anticipated the Reformation.

Fortunately, for me and my talk this evening, there are *more positive answers* to my questions, including this one from the Roman Catholic theologian Avery Dulles:

Historically, the intellectual probings of the medieval scholastics have given the Church of later ages an invaluable doctrinal resource... University theology [and religious studies] which have so ably served the Church in centuries past, are urgently needed in our day. They still have much to contribute to the renewal of Catholic intellectual life. They must bring the full resources of Catholic tradition to bear on major questions regarding belief and conduct raised by other university disciplines.²

¹ Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: from Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 149. See also Anthony Kenny, ed., *Wyclif in his times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

My *Question* this evening is *not* the place of Christians in the Academy, *but* the place of the Academy in the Church. This Question breaks down into several sub-questions:

Q. 1: How have Christians throughout the modern age, since about 1800, viewed the academic study of their religion? Have they welcomed it, learned from it?

Q. 2: What past polemics and present-day suspicions tend to polarize these two social institutions, Church and Academy?

Q. 3: What “cultural differences” might problematise the relationship between Church and Academy?

Q. 4: What examples are there of a fruitful exchange and positive relationship between Church and Academy? When has the Church welcomed and benefited from the insights and discoveries of the Academy?

Q. 5: How have scholars of the Christian tradition and their academic work benefited the Church? (Many scholars have lived within both cultures).

Q. 6: Might study of the Christian Tradition by non-Christian scholars benefit the Church? (eg. Diarmid MacCulloch, *Christianity. The First Three Thousand Years*)

Q. 7: How might my own study of *German Pietism* benefit the Church?

I can only address some of these in my talk this evening!

It is clear that different branches of the Church in our day have different attitudes to the Academy and the life of the mind. In some Church settings the University is seen as a threat to the faith of young people and to be avoided; their youth are encouraged instead to pursue studies at Bible College or trade school. In other Churches, clergy are uni-

² Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, p. 164.

versity educated and the life of the mind is encouraged. But even here relations between the Church and Academy are often complex and troubled by jealousy and suspicion.

I want first to clear the ground by considering the “cultural differences” that exist between the Church and the Academy, differences that can problematise a positive working relationship. This is followed by noting polemics and suspicions that tend to polarize these two social institutions, the Church and the Academy. I then present the views of two scholars who are convinced that their Academic study of the Christian tradition has much to offer that is of value to the Christian Church—Margaret Miles and Rowan Williams. Finally, I will consider *how my study of German Pietism might benefit the Church*.

A Tale of Two Cultures: the Church and the Academy

In considering distinctive features of the Church and Academy, I think it helpful to describe them in terms of *cultural differences*. These two communities are both long-standing Western Institutions with their own histories and traditions, values, norms, goals, and expressions. The two cultures are not necessarily contradictory, just different.

Mark Noll’s history of Evangelical Biblical Scholarship describes the cultural differences between the Church and the Academy in terms of “Faith” and “Criticism.”³

A history of evangelical biblical scholarship must heed both the professional community in which scholars adopt an attitude of intellectual *Criticism*, and the community of belief in which the same scholars embrace a childlike *Faith*. Evangelical students of Scripture live in both communities at the same time. The last century [has witnessed] the often hostile interaction of the two communities...⁴

The culture of the *Church* is centred on values, norms, and goals that grow out of *Faith* and beliefs about God grounded in the Bible and ancient Creeds. This culture expresses itself in the literary genres of preaching, evangelism, song, and Biblical interpre-

³ Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism. Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986, 2nd ed. 1991).

⁴ Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, p. 7.

tation and in social activism in a world of suffering and need. When its members gather, they do so to be reminded of their Faith, to reflect on their authoritative traditions, and to worship the God these traditions point to. This culture dates back to the early Church of the first century. Some of its great representatives and mentors are St. Paul, St.

Augustine, St. Francis, the Protestant Reformers, J.S. Bach, John and Charles Wesley, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and Martin Luther King. [See the *Table* in the Handout]

The Academic culture of the *University* is centred on values, norms, and goals that grow out of *Criticism*, the unbridled curiosity and questioning grounded in the Enlightenment and the disciplines of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. It is a culture that was launched on the basis of skepticism about authoritative teachings about the world and pursuit of new knowledge based upon mathematics and observation. Descartes, John Locke, and I. Kant, for example, rejected the traditional conclusions of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and sought a new basis for knowledge about God and the world. They did not intend to undermine Christian faith; rather, they pursued a positive program of questioning and exploration to gain a better understanding of our world. This culture expresses itself in the literary genres of conference papers, articles, books, and reviews and in an active program of experiment and research into the ways of the world. When its members gather they listen to reports on the latest research, they question these reports, and consider new directions for investigation and study. This culture dates back to the Medieval university of 13th century Europe. Some of its great representatives and mentors are Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, and Stephen Hawking.

See the *Table* in the Handout:

Cultural Differences between the Church and the Academy

| | <i>The Church</i> | <i>The Academy</i> |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Dominant Attitude: | Faith | Criticism |
| Beginnings: | Palestine in the 1 st century | Paris in the 13 th century |
| Guiding Traditions: | Bible, Early creeds, Belief in God as Father, Son, Holy Spirit | Early modern science, Enlightenment philosophy, Disciplines of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities |
| Leading representatives: | St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Francis, Protestant Reformers, Philipp Jakob Spener, J.S. Bach, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Pope John XXIII, Martin Luther King | Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) Rene Descartes (1596-1650) John Locke (1632-1704) Isaac Newton (1643-1727) G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) Charles Darwin (1809-1882) Albert Einstein (1879-1955) Stephen Hawking (1942-) |
| Values and Norms: | Love and mercy | Curiosity and knowledge |
| Literary Genres: | Preaching, song, apologetics, biblical interpretation | Conference papers, articles, books, and reviews |
| Activities: | Worship, evangelism, theological reflection, social activism in a world of suffering and need | A program of experiment and research into the ways of the world |

These two cultures, Church and Academy, can also be described as two Traditions, two established ways of viewing and relating to the world. Leslie Newbigin wrote:

When we are received into the Christian community, we enter into a tradition which claims authority. It is embodied in the Holy Scriptures and in the continuous history of the interpretation of these Scriptures as they have been translated and lived out under different circumstances in different ages and places. This tradition embodies and carries forward certain ways of looking at things, certain models for interpreting experience...

through which the Christian tradition seeks to understand the world. This tradition concerns questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of things and of human life. This is a more comprehensive rationality [than that of the natural sciences] based on the faith that the author and sustainer of the cosmos has personally revealed his purpose.

Newbigin suggested a parallel kind of tradition at work in the Academic world of the scientist.

The scientific tradition as a whole and the many concepts and theoretical models which are the working tools of science form a tradition within which scientists dwell in order to do their work... This tradition carries forward certain models for interpreting experience. A young scientist has to learn to indwell the tradition, its models and concepts. He has to internalize them and to dwell in them.⁵

The challenge for the Christian is “to learn to live fully within both traditions.” “Within my own mind there is a continuing dialogue between the two...” said Newbigin.⁶ To avoid the dialogue is to withdraw into a ghetto, into a small community where the Christian tradition functions as the only plausibility structure and is not questioned.

Overlap and Cooperation between the Church and the Academy

That there should be overlap between these two cultures is not surprising. *First*, there is the simple fact that for much of Christian history, the people who served in the Academy also belonged to the Church. John Paul II observed that The University was “BORN FROM THE HEART of the Church.”⁷ The Medieval Universities began as the effort of Christian people to reconcile and assimilate two great traditions of knowledge, the Christian tradition of the Bible and Fathers and the Classical tradition of Greek and Roman thought. Their Academic work was pursued in the confidence that “no truth of

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 46, 49.

⁶ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 65.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities” (Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 15 August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, in the year 1990), p. 1.

Reason could contradict a truth of Faith.”⁸ (Thomas Aquinas) Centuries later this was still true. Some of the great figures credited with the Rise of Modern Science, such as Copernicus, Newton, and Leibniz, did so as men of Faith who belonged to the Church.

A *second* reason for the overlapping of these two cultures is that Christian faith has always depended upon and valued certain kinds of knowledge. Because Christianity is a historical faith, based upon a series of historical events, there must be continual recollection of and reflection upon these foundational events.⁹ Christianity is therefore “a teaching religion” and the Christian culture a teaching community.

Closely related to this is a *third* reason: for much of its history, Christian leaders have insisted that secular learning should be part of Christian education. This especially included the liberal arts, such as languages, history, and geography. St. Augustine illustrated this point from the story of the Hebrews and their exodus from Egypt. God commanded them to “borrow” all kinds of things from their neighbours that would be useful for their long journey. They “despoiled the Egyptians.” In a similar way, said Augustine, the Church should make use of secular learning and apply it to its own advantage.

The Egyptians had not only idols and grave burdens which the people of Israel detested and avoided, but also vases and ornaments of gold and silver which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if to put them to better use. In the same way, the teachings of the pagans contain not only superstitious imaginings which Christians ought to abominate and avoid, but also liberal disciplines suited to the uses of truth. These are, as it were, their gold and silver. The Christian should take this treasure with him for the just use of teaching the gospel, converting it to Christian uses...This was done by Moses, of whom it is written that he “was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”¹⁰

⁸ Joseph Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). p. 152.

⁹ Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 374f.

¹⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine [Instruction]*, tr. D.W. Robertson (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), pp. 75f. See Paul Griffiths, “Seeking Egyptian Gold,” Lilly Fellows Program (Valparaiso University, October 8, 1999).

Finally, there are features of the Christian faith that encourage the life of the mind. Richard Hughes has shown how *each of the various Christian faith traditions* “has its own theological resources that sustain the academic enterprise.” The R.C. Church values the life of the mind because of its Sacramental principle: the natural world and human culture have intrinsic worth as the good creation of God. God is present and at work in the created order.¹¹ Luther emphasized human finitude: our knowledge is always fragmentary and incomplete. This should encourage believers to constantly assess in critical ways our own judgments and understandings. “We believe what we question and question what we believe.”¹² The Anglican Church is marked by an approach to Christian faith and life grounded in the three-fold authority of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.¹³ Academic learning is encouraged among *Reformed Christians* because of the Calvinist conviction that this is our Father’s world, and “all truth is God’s truth” and falls under the umbrella of God’s providential ordering of the world. Likewise, the *Mennonite tradition* has been marked from the beginning by a commitment to independent thinking, to questioning conventional wisdom, and to suspicion of the *status quo*.

Conflict and Suspicion between the Church and the Academy

Nevertheless, over the last two centuries there have been times of intense conflict and suspicion rather than cooperation between these two cultures of the Church and the Academy. Several reasons account for this—factors that arise within both communities.

One thinks of scientists such as Richard Dawkins or Stephen Hawking and their insis-

¹¹ R.T. Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 61-63, 70, 78, 81.

¹² Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*, pp. 95, 86f.

¹³ Richard J. Bauckham, “Tradition in relation to Scripture and Reason,” in Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery, ed., *Scripture, Tradition and Reason* (London: T & T Clark, 1998, 2004), p. 138. The analogy of the “three-legged stool” of scripture, reason, and tradition is often incorrectly attributed to Hooker. Hooker's description is a hierarchy of authority, with scripture as foundational, and reason and tradition as vitally important, but secondary, authorities.

tence that science and reason are destined to “win” over religion. In June 2010, Hawking compared religion and science saying: “There is a fundamental difference between religion, which is based on authority [imposed dogma, faith], [as opposed to] science, which is based on observation and reason. Science will win because it works.”¹⁴ Charles Darwin, on the other hand, was reticent to speak about religion, saying it was beyond his expertise and understanding.

But I am more concerned with sources of conflict that arise *from within the Church*. One is the tendency towards anti-intellectualism within the Church’s culture. In North America, especially, “piety and activism have often been more highly valued than thinking the faith.”¹⁵

Experiential-expressive religion may seem more exciting and more personally fulfilling than...an ongoing and disciplined exposure to historical narrative and interpretation; but without this basic knowledge, there is nothing to ensure the cohesion of the Christian community.¹⁶

Bruce Guenther pointed to the legacy in some denominations “of giving preference to piety over learning”: the value of remembering forgotten historical figures and events pales in comparison to the priority given to evangelism and bringing about conversions.¹⁷

A *second* reason is that the culture of believers and their clergy often prefers the comforts of certain knowledge that can be managed rather than having to deal with the disturbances and encroachments of new understandings. How much easier it is to rely on the teaching and commentaries one was exposed to in Seminary than to incorporate the new

¹⁴ KI MAE HEUSSNER, “Stephen Hawking on Religion: ‘Science Will Win,’” Interview with ABC’s Diane Sawyer (ABC News, June 7, 2010).

¹⁵ D.J. Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, pp. 373f.

¹⁶ D.J. Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, p. 376.

¹⁷ Bruce L. Guenther, “‘From the Edge of Oblivion’: Reflections on Evangelical Protestant Denominational Historiography in Canada,” *Historical Papers 2008* (Canadian Society of Church History, 2008), p. 161. Guenther noted that in recent decades some 35 evangelical Protestant denominations in Canada have produced a volume on their denominational history. These works vary greatly in quality. (p. 171 n. 23).

research and discoveries in Biblical Studies. I remember my O.T. professor, Raymond Dillard, saying he found more material for sermon preparation in *Biblical Archaeologist* than in most commentaries.

Finally, the Church's disinterest in historical study reflects the influence of Traditionalists and Progressives in our present-day culture. The Traditionalists miss the value of studying the past "because they don't expect to be surprised by the past." The Progressives miss the value of the past "because they don't expect to be interested or questioned by it." "In a cultural setting [such as ours] where a sensible understanding of history is not much encouraged, it isn't surprising if religious people can be as much at sea as anyone else in coming to terms with the past."¹⁸

Two Scholars Answer the Question: What can the Academy offer the Church?

I want to turn now to two scholars who address both academic and popular audiences and who are convinced that their Academic study of the Christian past offers much that is of value to the Christian Church—Margaret Miles and Rowan Williams.

Margaret Miles

A scholar who has pointed the way in this regard is Margaret Miles, professor of Historical Theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. She entitled her 1999 AAR Presidential Address, "Becoming Answerable for What We See."¹⁹ The title aptly sums up the point she wanted to make. She called on scholars of religion to integrate critical scholarship with passionate engagement within the wider community. Miles suggested that scholars have at least *three audiences* to whom they are responsible or an-

¹⁸ Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 3.

¹⁹ Margaret Miles, "Becoming Answerable for What We See," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68:3 (September 2000), pp. 471-485.

swerable: the public sphere, the churches, and the university disciplines. The Academy includes within its ranks scholars who attend to all three of these “publics”—those who consider their scholarship primarily answerable to religious bodies, the churches; those whose main discussion partners are in university departments; and those who address the pressing questions and problems of the public sphere. While scholars may vary in their public of emphasis, Miles challenges us as academics to be more ready than we have been to address the wider world.

In relation to faith communities, Miles suggested that “scholarship has a prophetic imperative to challenge, unsettle, and discomfit religious people as well as to affirm and educate.”²⁰ “Church historians can identify the concrete social, political and institutional circumstances in which doctrinal and practical decisions were made as a basis for asking whether those decisions need to be revised in our [new] circumstances.”²¹ The Academy can also serve faith communities by studying religion for pitfalls as well as insights.

In a religiously plural society, religious studies [including the history of Christianity or church history] still bears the traditional responsibility of representing religion as providing accessible and fruitful proposals for living a richly human life. But it also has responsibility for critical scrutiny of the social effects of religious beliefs and practices... Their *effects*, not merely their intentions, must be acknowledged and examined.²²

The historical investigation of Christianity must be “both sympathetic and critical.”

It must be *sympathetic* in order to present the vivid beauty of Christian resources of ideas and practices. It must be *critical* because it is not only a history of the past, but also a history for the present. Present sensitivities require that issues surrounding power, social location, and the institutional affiliations that authorized some voices and ignored and persecuted others, as well as race, gender, class, must be described.²³

²⁰ Miles, “Becoming Answerable for What we See,” p. 473.

²¹ Miles, “Religious Studies in a Religiously Plural Society,” Lecture at University of Calgary (Nov. 5, 2002), p. 4.

²² Miles, “Becoming Answerable for What we See,” pp. 472f.

²³ Margaret Miles, *The Word Made Flesh. A History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. xiv.

Both beauty and tragedy marked the life of people who lived and died as Christians.

Miles recalled the liberating experience of realizing that “the oppressive fundamentalism of my childhood could not simply be labeled ‘Christianity.’” “Demonstrating the ability to be self-critical and to acknowledge the abuses perpetrated by some forms of religion can attract as many thinking people as will be turned off and turned away.”²⁴

Rowan Williams

In his 2005 book, *Why Study the Past?*²⁵, Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gives concise but provocative answers to this question. *First*, the exercise of examining the history of the Church provides believers with self-understanding and greater clarity about the nature and identity of the Church of God over time.²⁶ *Second*, because the Christian past is the story of the Body of Christ, in which each contributes to the life of all, Christian history holds the power to feed and nourish believers, to help them to grow in Christian maturity. *Finally*, the Church should look at Christian history in the expectation that it will be surprised and questioned by it.

Williams has provided an example of how Academic study can benefit the Church in a work described as his magnum opus: *Arius, Heresy and Tradition*.²⁷ The book is about *Arius*, an early teacher and Presbyter in the Church in Alexandria, and the heresy associated with his name. Conflicts over Arius’ teaching gave rise to the first Christian creedal statement, the Nicene Creed of 325 AD. Williams suggests that his study of Arius speaks to theological issues in our own day and addresses questions of wider methodological relevance. “My hope is that the public for this book will include those concerned

²⁴ Miles, “Becoming Answerable for What we See,” p. 478.

²⁵ Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)

²⁶ Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, pp. 1-3.

²⁷ Rowan Williams, *Arius, Heresy and Tradition, Revised Edition* (SCM PRESS, 2001).

for the *Church's* health as well as the *Academy*.”²⁸

Some of the insights to be gained from the study include the following points. *First*, in the 4th century the bishops of the Eastern Church came to see that because of new questions and debates, the effort to preserve continuity of Christian belief was more than a matter of preserving past language and formulas. They had to choose “what kind of innovation would best serve the integrity of the faith handed down.”²⁹ To reject all innovation was no longer an option. The Church had to move from a theology of repetition to something more constructive. The Church’s theology begins in the language of worship but does not stop there. *Second*, the story of the Arian dispute shows that Scripture and tradition must be read freshly from one generation to another. The task of interpretation and application must be taken up again by every age.

Summing Up

What can the Academy offer the Church that might enhance the life and mission of believers? Margaret Miles and Rowan Williams are confident that Church historians have much to offer the Church today. Miles suggests that historians of Christianity must be “both sympathetic and critical” since both beauty and tragedy mark the life of people who have lived and died as Christians.³⁰ Scholarship has a prophetic imperative “to challenge, unsettle, and discomfit religious people as well as to affirm and educate.”³¹ Williams suggests that, “The Study of the Christian past should be an exercise in living more seriously *in* the Church and *into* the historical corporateness of the Church’s tradition,

²⁸ Williams, *Arius*, p. xi.

²⁹ Williams, *Arius*, p. 235.

³⁰ Miles, “Religious Studies in a Religiously Plural Society,” p. 4.

³¹ Miles, “Becoming Answerable for What we See,” p. 473.

...[so that one] finds in it nourishment and hope.”³²

Miles and Williams have inspired me to formulate the following Six Theses on how Historians of Christianity might benefit the Church of Today:

Thesis 1: The Academy helps the Church by preserving its *collective memory* and helping it to derive a *collective identity*. The historian has a role to play as the Church’s rememberer, as the conduit to Church traditions and earlier times.

Thesis 2: The Academy guides the Church in study of the Christian past in the expectation that the Church will be *surprised and questioned and nurtured* by it.

Thesis 3: Scholarship has a *prophetic role* to play in challenging, unsettling, and discomfiting religious people as well as affirming and educating. The Academy studies religious tradition for its *pitfalls* as well as its *insights*, and notes where it reflects out-dated cultural assumptions.

Thesis 4: Critical study of the Christian tradition involves examining the negative personal and social *effects* of religious beliefs and practices, not merely their *intentions*. The historian can play a role in *liberating believers* from oppressive forms of religion and in *freeing believers* from intrusive authorities.

Thesis 5: Past tradition can function “as a criticism and alternative to modernity.” By comparing the Church of the present with the Church of the past we are reminded that “modernity’s standpoint is not a privileged one.”³³ (Not that past tradition cannot itself be critiqued).

Thesis 6: Fluency in religious history and texts is the sharpest weapon against

³² Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1990), p. 3.

³³ Richard J. Bauckham, “Tradition in relation to Scripture and Reason,” in Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery, ed., *Scripture, Tradition and Reason* (London: T & T Clark, 1998, 2004), p. 138.

fundamentalism. Theses 3 and 4 especially work as a preventive in showing the time-bound setting and imperfections at work in *all* Christian traditions.

Many of these benefits have become apparent in the course of my work on German Pietism.

How my Study of German Pietism can Benefit the Church

The Chair of Christian Thought was founded by Christian leaders in Calgary who believed strongly that an Academic Chair in Christian Thought at the University of Calgary would be of great benefit to Calgary Churches! As holder of the Chair, I have been challenged to consider how my Academic work might serve a larger audience than just fellow historians. I am convinced that Church Historians, in particular, have much to offer the Church and this includes *my own historical research into German Pietism*.

My Life in the Academy; my Life with Pietism

- Some of us can trace our vocational choices right back to childhood: as a young girl my wife Heather was already interested in Nursing; for my sister Jane there was an early interest in being a school Teacher, like our Mother.

- At the annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington last Thursday, President Barack Obama spoke of the influence of his mother's values of the Golden Rule and the equal worth of all human beings; the impact of the faith leaders of the civil rights movement in America; and of his own experience working in Southside Chicago. A few years out of college he signed up as a community organizer for a group of churches on the Southside of Chicago. Obama reflected:

It's because of her example and guidance that despite the absence of a formal religious upbringing **my earliest inspirations for a life of service ended up being the faith leaders of the civil rights movement**. There was, of course, Martin Luther King and the Baptist leaders, the ways in which they helped those who had been subjugated to make a way

out of no way and to transform a nation through the force of love...³⁴

- By grade 11 High School, if you had asked me about my future, it would have included a PhD in History and being a University Professor. A life of books, teaching, and writing were my destiny.

A variety of life-experiences drew me to the study of the history of Christianity, including the experience of growing up in Trinity United Church in Kitchener, Ontario in the 1960s...and then following my parents *at age 12* when they decided to join the Baptist Church. I was curious about the source of this variety and disagreement among Christian groups. *That question has followed me to the present day!*

- My PhD studies at the University of Waterloo focused on the German Reformation of the 16th Century, the English Reformation and English Puritanism, and American Religious History. This was a rich program, really a graduate education in church history within a secular setting.

Of course, in Kitchener, Ontario the first European settlers were German Lutherans and Mennonites and this was reflected in the Academic life of Kitchener-Waterloo: Waterloo Lutheran University and Seminary, and Conrad Grebel College on the University of Waterloo campus. In the 1970s, one of the best centers in North America for studying the Reformation was the Consortium formed by the two Universities in Waterloo in association with the U. of Guelph.

In 1992 I published my revised PhD thesis as *my first book*, a study of a 16th century German Radical Reformer...³⁵

³⁴ Remarks by the President at the National Prayer Breakfast, 9am on **February 3, 2011**: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/03/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>

³⁵ Douglas H. Shantz, *Crautwald and Erasmus: A Study in Humanism and Radical Reform in Sixteenth Century Silesia* (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1992).

- That year, with a year's sabbatical coming up, **I needed a new project**. When my initial contact with a German scholar of Pietism resulted in his invitation to come to Marburg and to work on a project that was ready and waiting for me to pursue, I dove in. Heather and I and our four children spent almost 11 months in Germany, from September 1992 to July 1993.

I read German scholarship on the Pietist movement and began looking for sources that would help me to tell the story of a particular German Court Preacher and millenarian thinker near Frankfurt, named Conrad Bröske. Two years ago this study appeared as *my 2nd book*.³⁶

- Exactly one year ago found Heather and me again on Sabbatical in Marburg. The year resulted in *another book on German Pietism*, now in the final stages of revision before publication.³⁷ *My New Introduction to German Pietism* will be the first treatment of the subject in English in over a generation!

German and Swiss Protestantism have had a huge influence upon Christianity in the West. One thinks not only of Luther and Zwingli, but also of Melancthon, Johann Arndt, Philipp Jakob Spener, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Helmut Thielicke, Dorothee Sölle, and Hans Küng.

Yet German Protestantism has attracted far less attention among North American scholars than has Protestantism in England and America. Only now are Bonhoeffer's writings available in English translation; a newly revised English translation of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* appeared just last year. Many of Barth's works remain untranslated.

³⁶ Douglas H. Shantz, *Between Sardis and Philadelphia: the Life and World of Pietist Court Preacher Conrad Bröske* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

³⁷ Douglas H. Shantz, *Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe: A New Introduction to German Pietism* (Johns Hopkins University, forthcoming).

The writings of a host of lesser Protestant figures are only available in German or Latin.

What is German Pietism and Why is it Significant?

This Semester I am teaching a course at U of C entitled, “German Pietism & Enlightenment Thought, 1670-1780 CE.” I have spent the first five weeks introducing students to German Pietism, discussing *what* Pietism was as a movement and *why* Pietism is significant.

- What was German Pietism?

German Pietism was a lay-inspired Protestant movement in the late 17th century that aimed at bringing ethical and spiritual renewal to believers in Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Germany through Biblical devotion and small gatherings for mutual encouragement and edification.

Its classic expression is a small book by Philipp Jakob Spener entitled, *Pious Longings*, published in 1675. **Spener described the Lutheran Church in Germany as seriously ill, lying in a sick bed, in need of a physician and medications to treat the illness that had spread throughout the whole body.**³⁸ He identified the clergy as the main reason for the lifeless Christianity in the churches. Spener considered increased reading and study of God’s Word to be “the foremost means of improvement.”³⁹ He encouraged the laity to read the New Testament especially because it would be easier for them to understand on their own.⁴⁰ Second, Spener called for establishing “the spiritual priesthood.” It is a Christian’s duty to study God’s Word and then to instruct, admonish, and encourage his or her fellow believers according to its teaching.

Pietism initiated a departure from traditional Reformation Protestantism by

³⁸ Martin Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt und neuer Mensch* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1969), p. 132.

³⁹ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, p. 116.

⁴⁰ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, pp. 112, 114.

introducing *a new paradigm* marked by the experience of renewal and new birth, conventicle gatherings for mutual encouragement, successful mission to the world, and the millennial reign of Christ on earth. While the Reformers saw their discovery and preaching of the pure Gospel as the last event before the final judgment, Pietist post-millennialists pursued worldwide mission in the expectation of mass conversions and better times for the church. None of these emphases can be found in Luther and Calvin. But these features of the Pietist paradigm are alive and well in the Evangelical Christianity throughout much of the world today.

Pietism is best understood in terms of its Historical Context, its urban Setting, its informal Lay gatherings and the prominence of Women as members and leaders in these gatherings, its emphasis upon Lay Bible reading, its Millenarian beliefs, and its Activism in social reform and world-wide mission.

- *Historical Context*

Pietism was part of a wave of reaction and reflection that followed the Thirty Years War, the most devastating conflict in European history to that time. The Protestant north and Catholic south slaughtered one another, poisoned wells, and torched fields. Clergy were bewildered about how to re-instill Christian values after more than a generation of such inhumanity. There was widespread disillusionment, even among believers, about entrenched conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, and between Lutherans and Calvinists (Reformed). There was a growing conviction that the marks of Christian faith are love and unity, not polemical debates.

- *Urban Setting*

Pietism took root in Frankfurt and Leipzig, the most prosperous cities in the

German empire. These cities were full of professionals, businessmen, and university students. Both cities were centres of the book trade, with access to devotional works in translation from England and the Netherlands.

Frankfurt had the most diverse population to be found within the German empire, with a great variety of ethnic and religious groups.

- *Informal Lay gatherings (Conventicles) and Women as members and leaders*

The rise of Pietism is usually dated to the house gatherings in Frankfurt in the 1670s where people met to read and discuss and encourage one another under the leadership of Spener and Schütz. Soon these gatherings were being held independently of Spener's pastoral oversight. In 1682 a large group joined Johann Jacob Schütz in separating entirely from Lutheran worship and sacraments.

The largest gathering met in the home of Frau Eyseneck, a wealthy widow, led by her and Johanna Petersen. Frustrated at Spener's insistence that women sit separately and remain silent at his home gathering, the two women organized their own so they could participate fully in discussions and interpretation of the Bible.

- *Lay Bible reading and Bible translation*

Traditional Lutheranism focused on teaching the lay people Luther's Catechism; it was the Pietists who called upon the laity to read and interpret and teach the Bible for themselves. This eventually gave rise to new German translations of the Bible with commentary reflecting Pietist emphases upon conversion and the coming millennial kingdom.

- *Millenarian beliefs*

Most of the Pietists saw themselves as God's agents in the world in hastening the arrival of Christ's millennial kingdom on earth, when denominations would fall away and

peace and unity reign among the nations and among Christians. They looked for the conversion of the nations, including Muslims and Jews.

- *Activism in social reform and world-wide mission*

German Pietism took on institutional expression in the city of Halle under the entrepreneurial leadership of A.H. Francke. In 1698 he built a massive orphanage building for 1,000 children, complemented by schools for poor and middle-class children, a pharmacy, and printing and book enterprises. These made significant profits, over and above the costs associated with the orphanage and schools.

Halle sponsored missions to Greenland, the Caribbean, Labrador, and south India.

- *Pietism has at least a four-fold Significance:*

1) *Religious Significance*: Pietism represented a new form of Protestant religion (called “Neo-Protestantism” by Wallmann) that departed from traditional Lutheranism in important ways: in its conversionism, millennialism, Biblicism, and involvement in world-wide mission.

2) *Cultural Connections*: Pietism cooperated with the Enlightenment in creating: new kinds of literature such as the journal, the autobiography, and the magazine; new informal social networks bound together by literary and religious interests; and new forms of communication, especially letter-writing.

3) *Historical Impact*: German Pietism played a key role in the rise of religious & political Individualism and Secularism in the West.

4) *Present-day Relevance*: Pietism introduces us to a form of Christianity that is widely popular in our own day—modern Evangelical Christianity.

My Scholarly Research into German Pietism and What it Says to the Christian Church of Today

I find it helpful to think of German Pietism as a particularly interesting experiment in living out the Christian faith in the context of the Early Modern German Empire.

* Aspects of this experiment were successful and exemplary and can inspire us today;

* other aspects went tragically wrong and Christians today would do well to avoid their example;

* there are still other aspects that reveal the Pietists to be creatures of their day, even when they thought they were simply following Christ.

I want to high-light ***Five Research Discoveries*** from my study of German Pietism, noting for each **What Pietism says to the Christian Church of Today.**

Research Discovery 1: Renewal and Innovation in the Lutheran Church derived from a lively encounter with books and ideas in other Christian Traditions and in the Secular Culture

In Frankfurt in the 1670s we observe how exposure to new ideas through books and correspondence and reading circles brought about Christian renewal.

Johann Jacob Schütz's dedication to personal Bible reading, to reading the radical religious literature coming out of the Netherlands, and to corresponding with the authors of this literature brought about a new dynamic in the Lutheran Church in Frankfurt.

Schütz corresponded with Anna Maria van Schurman and Pierre Yvon, members of Jean de Labadie's community in Amsterdam.⁴¹ He nurtured contacts with separatist groups in the Netherlands through Frankfurt businessman Jacob van de Walle.

Schütz also pursued conversations with a circle of Kabbalistic authors in the Sulzbach Court, including Christian Knorr von Rosenroth and Francis van Helmont, and

⁴¹ Johannes Wallmann, *Der Pietismus*, pp. 139-141.

came to share their belief in the soul's pre-existence.⁴² Pietism benefited from an eclectic openness to truths in other traditions of thought: international, Enlightenment, medical. W.R. Ward speaks of "sources of spirituality in the radical underworld" that made up "the thought-world of early Evangelicalism": mystics, Paracelsists, alchemists, cabbalists, and enthusiastic prophets of judgment.⁴³

What Pietism says to the Christian Church of Today:

In Schütz one sees the creative potential of believers outside of the church and the clerical establishment. Pietism also benefited from its eclectic openness to truths in other traditions of thought: international, Enlightenment, medical...

Christian renewal has always benefited from a close exchange with the wider culture, at home and abroad. Today, we see the influence of modern physics on Christian thought as well as the impact of Third World Pentecostal Christianity.

Research Discovery 2: Renewal in the Church in Leipzig was driven by the University and by Student-led initiatives

The 1689 lectures of Francke, Anton, and Schade sparked a city-wide revival in the city of Leipzig as the student awakening began to spread throughout the city. Leipzig theology students held *collegia* for Bible study and prayer in the homes of Burgers, with craftsmen and women attending. Francke led a meeting in the home of Catharina Mey, an illiterate lace washer-woman.⁴⁴ The students became the vanguard of Pietism as a popular movement. By July 1689 the terms "Pietism" and "Pietist" were in the air, much to

⁴² Wallmann, *Der Pietismus*, p. 143. Schütz also read works by the Cambridge Neoplatonist Henry More.

⁴³ W.R. Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), p. 24.

⁴⁴ Tanya Kevorkian. *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650-1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2007), pp. 154, 163; Brecht, "August Hermann Francke und der Hallische Pietismus," p. 448. At Francke's encouragement, Mey became the leading woman among the Leipzig Pietists.

Spener's chagrin.⁴⁵

The students who led the *collegia* were young men in their late twenties, mostly from outside Leipzig. Many of them remained close friends for the rest of their lives.⁴⁶

The students became acquainted with Leipzig commoners through:

- * arrangements for room and board;

- * visits that medicine and theology students made to the homes of the sick (It was common for burgers to send for these students when they fell ill);

- * encounters in bookshops.

Bookshop clerks would often meet with students at the *collegia*. "At the table, at the sickbed, and in bookstores students recruited their acquaintances to come to *collegia*."⁴⁷

Leipzigers attending the *collegia* came from a variety of occupations and classes. Many were Leipzig burgers, citizens who owned property. The greatest number were craftsmen: a baker and wife, a shoemaker and wife, a roper and son, two shopkeepers, a goldsmith, a book dealer, and a journeyman haberdasher—brother to a Leipzig student. Among "sub-artisans" were a gardener, a guard, and a lace washer woman, married to an unemployed carpenter. Also in attendance were the town grain registrar and the town mortuary registrar and his daughter.⁴⁸

What Pietism says to the Christian Church of Today:

Movements of spiritual renewal have arisen in Universities, among professors and

⁴⁵ Brecht, "Philipp Jakob Spener, sein Programm und dessen Auswirkungen," p. 336.

⁴⁶ Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety*, p. 152. Several Leipzig students, including Andreas Achilles, eventually joined Francke in Halle.

⁴⁷ Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety*, pp. 151, 154.

⁴⁸ Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety*, p. 152. The Interrogation protocols of fall 1689 and winter 1690 reveal much about the make-up of the *Collegia* and the networks that united the participants.

students. Such renewal is a Protestant tradition! Eg. Martin Luther, John Wesley....

Renewal movements have also arisen among craftsmen and commoners. One sees the creative potential of those outside of the church and clerical establishment—J.J. Schütz, Leipzig students, women, commoners.

Research Discovery 3: The Optimistic Strain in German Pietism owed as much to the Political and Intellectual Culture of the Time as to the Bible.

Many German Pietists believed that born-again believers should live lives of moral perfection. They also looked for the soon-coming millennial kingdom when denominations would fall away and Christians would live in peace and harmony.

Two influences from the wider culture of Pietism were at work in this theology:

1) From 1683 to 1699 Austria steadily won back lands that had been occupied by the Ottoman Turks. In just six years of fighting the Ottomans suffered the loss of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia and Slovenia.⁴⁹

Pietist eschatological views and hopes for the conversion and baptism of the Turks should be seen in relation to the newly secured political situation in eastern Europe under the Habsburgs. The Habsburg victories over the Ottomans were no distant reality; they resulted in many Turkish young people being brought from Hungary to serve in German courts and often converting to Christianity.

2) Also influential among the Pietists was the spiritual alchemy of Paracelsus, Johann Arndt, Jakob Böhme, and their disciples. These figures expressed a yearning for inner, spiritual transformation and the new man that struck a chord with the Pietists.

On the material level the alchemists' purpose in the laboratory was the production of gold, the most perfect of all metals, by actualizing all the qualities of gold which were

⁴⁹ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), p. 38; Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars*, pp. 97, 280.

thought to be potentially present in lesser metals. **On the spiritual level** [their purpose] was to develop the true Self, to “lead out the gold within,” as they said, by actualizing the qualities potentially present in the human being.⁵⁰

It is likely that the Pietists’ “transformational theology” derived from the influence of Paracelsus and “Spiritual Alchemy.”

What Pietism says to the Christian Church of Today:

By identifying the influence of cultural legacies one gains insight and self-understanding. The challenge is to be aware of the cultural aspects of some of our own faith assumptions. What “mood” in our culture is at work in Christian thought and preaching?

Research Discovery 4: *There is a Dark Side to German Pietism: Their enhanced subjectivity was both a strength and a liability.*

A religion rooted in new birth and prophecy is prone to mistaking personal passion for God’s leading.

As a student in Leipzig in the 1680s, Andreas Achilles had joined A.H. Francke in leading the *Philobiblicum*, the student study circle devoted to study of Scripture and to practical application of biblical teaching.⁵¹ Later in Quedlinburg and Halberstadt Achilles led conventicle gatherings in homes for scripture reading and mutual edification. He soon gained a considerable following; his critics observed that “many ran after him.”⁵² His most devoted disciple was Anna Margaretha Jahn, the unmarried daughter of Oswald Jahn, a citizen and shop-keeper in Halberstadt. From late 1691 to December 1692 Anna attended Achilles’ sermons in the Hospitalkirche, preferring them to Pastor Wurtzler’s in the St. Moritz Church. Her charismatic revelations made her the dominant personality in

⁵⁰ Karen-Claire Voss, “Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images,” in R. van den Broek and W.J. Hanegraaff, ed., *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁵¹ AFSu/H D 90: 967, 968.

⁵² *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 120.

the Halberstadt conventicle. Achilles himself submitted to her inspired messages.

Pastor Wurtzler finally banned Anna from the Lord's Supper until she renounced her Pietist practices. After a brief period in which she submitted to Wurtzler's demands, she fell back into associating with her radical friends, "traveling about the land" with them.⁵³ When Wurtzler died, Anna told Achilles that she had received a revelation that it was because the Pastor had opposed her and her revelations. If his widow would place Anna's prophecy in the hands of the corpse, Pastor Wurtzler would rise from the dead.⁵⁴

One also sees the dangers of "Spiritual elitism" among the Pietists. Valentin Ernst Löscher (1673-1749) was consumed with the effort to mediate the stand-off between Pietism and Orthodoxy. He thought that in order to face the threats of princely absolutism and Enlightenment Rationalism, the Pietists and Orthodox should work together in the common cause of church reform. He hoped to integrate within a renewed Orthodox Lutheranism the Pietist concerns for renewal of piety and a holy life, confident that Spener's reform program of 1675 was fully compatible with traditional Lutheran doctrine.⁵⁵

Löscher came up with six points for discussion between Orthodox representatives from Dresden and Pietists from Halle: the plan was opposed from both sides. His Orthodox colleagues wanted the discussion points increased to sixty; the Halle representatives felt humiliated that their orthodoxy was even in question.

On May 10 and 11, 1719, Löscher arrived in Merseburg for a private conversation with A.H. Francke. At the conclusion, Löscher hoped to arrange for future meetings.

⁵³ *Ausführliche Beschreibung*, 120-123.

⁵⁴ Douglas H. Shantz, "Politics, Prophecy and Pietism in the Halberstadt Conventicle, 1691-1694," in Fred van Lieburg, ed. *Confessionalism and Pietism: Religious Reform in Early Modern Europe* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2006), pp. 129-147.

⁵⁵ Martin Greschat, "Valentin Ernst Löscher," p. 289. In 1718 and 1721 he published *A Complete Setting Forth of the Truth and the Way to Peace in the Present Day Pietist Conflicts*.

Instead, Francke presented him with a sealed letter in which he told Löscher that Halle had the truth and Löscher was caught up in error; he would not be freed from his errors until he converted and was born again.⁵⁶ Löscher's hopes for Orthodox-Pietist cooperation in Christian renewal were shattered.

What Pietism says to the Christian Church of Today:

This form of Christianity, based upon God's inner leading and a strict separation of the "born again" from those who are not, has an unfortunate legacy of pride, failure, and division. It is in need of a strong dose of humility and self-criticism.

Research Discovery 5: An unresolved issue for German Pietism was the place of reason in born-again Christianity

The dangerous tendency to exalt "the Spirit" and to reject reason is evident in Pietist leaders such as A.H. Francke in Leipzig and in the migratory prophet J.F. Rock. The Hamburg Pietist Otto Glüsing said that ordinary Christians had no need of Greek: in weighing different translations, they were able to "test the spirits and determine which are from God." He believed that the "foundational text" of God's Word was not the Greek N.T. but "the light of the Holy Spirit in the soul of believers."

Already in the early 18th century there was a growing demographic of people who had been nurtured in the Pietist fold only to turn their backs on it out of frustration with its irrationality. Two notable examples are Johann Christian Edelmann and Karl Philipp Moritz. Edelmann's autobiography (1753) contains a harsh indictment of Pietism after his encounters with dozens of forms of misguided, pious self-denial and "holy foolishness." Through reading Spinoza, Edelmann came to see "the divinity of reason" and experi-

⁵⁶ Martin Greschat, "Valentin Ernst Löscher," p. 298.

enced a second birth and an intellectual break-through.⁵⁷ Moritz's *Anton Reiser* (1785), an early German novel, is stamped with autobiographical content and represents his "testimony of religious crisis."⁵⁸ Moritz portrays the Pietist environment in which he was raised and how it suppressed all natural joy in life. Not one person from the world of Pietism is portrayed in a positive light by Moritz.⁵⁹

What Pietism says to the Christian Church of Today:

A Christianity that denigrates reason undermines its own integrity and threatens its viability in the next generation and among those who participate in the reasoning culture in our society.

Conclusion

The Christian past is the record of believers' encounter with God in Christ. Our study of how past believers responded to God is part of the way we hear his call ourselves in more and more complete ways. The Church must let go of the progressivist myth that says that we know more of Christ than any earlier age; it must also let go of the idea that we must always submit to the judgment of the fathers and mothers of the past.

Our academic discipline as church historians is somewhat unique for the ready-made audience that we have in the churches, one that, in my experience, is often ready and willing to benefit from our research insights. The challenge for us as Academics is to make the connection.

⁵⁷ See Douglas H. Shantz, "Conversion and Sarcasm in the *Selbstbiographie* of Johann Christian Edelmann," in David M. Luebke, Jared Poley, and Dan Ryan, ed., *Conversions in the German Lands* (Spectrum: Publications of the German Studies Association, Volume 2) (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

⁵⁸ Wolfgang Martens, "Nachwort," Karl Philipp Moritz, *Anton Reiser. Ein psychologischer Roman* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1972), p. 558.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Martens, "Nachwort," Karl Philipp Moritz, *Anton Reiser*, pp. 554f.