

THE HOLOCAUST AND THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT FROM GERMAN PIETISM TO PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

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Let me begin with some simple definitions. The word *holocaust* is of Greek origin, meaning "sacrifice by fire." It has been used to describe the terrible time in Nazi Germany prior to and during the Second World War when some six million Jews were eliminated, as well as uncountable gypsies, prisoners of war, homosexuals, communists, socialists, mentally and physically disabled persons, and many, many others. The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January of 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that anyone "deemed inferior" was an alien threat to the purity of the German racial community. The account of what happened in the 1930s and 40s in concentration camps and gassing facilities - the "final solution" as it was called - is well known and documented by countless eyewitnesses. Only a fool would question or deny these facts.

Although the term *holocaust* is rightly used in connection with the atrocities in Nazi Germany, it also describes a holocaust mentality, philosophy, even a religious belief regarding the supposed superiority of one race, leading to a desire and determination to destroy anything and everything that could interfere with the achievement or semblance of perfection. This mentality finds expression in the most extreme forms of evil, expressed in the worst form of hatred. It can be seen in a person, a tribe, a people, or a nation that believes itself to be superior to all others. The mass killings in Stalin's Russia, Amin's Uganda, Pol Pot's Cambodia, or Hussein's Iraq are some of the most well known examples. There have been, and still are, uncountable other expressions of a holocaust mentality. The people of Darfur, of West Africa, of Palestine, and in many other areas around the world today are experiencing "holocaust" at the hands of fellow human beings who consider themselves superior, or even "chosen" by God.

The evangelical movement had its beginning in German Pietism. The term *Pietism* is to be understood not merely, or even primarily, as a movement in church history in Central Europe from

1675 to 1750 but, even more importantly, as a force within the stream of global Protestantism to the present day. Its origins and development have been seen in Puritan piety, in the mystical spiritualism of some of the radical reformers and, according to the historian Ritschl, even as far back as medieval monastic mysticism.

The publication in 1675 of Spener's *Pia desideria*, the platform (*Programmschrift*) of Pietism, is historically accepted as the beginning of Pietism. Only a few years prior to the publication of the *Pia desideria* Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), a Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt, Germany, had begun to gather together believers in his weekly *collegia pietatis*, the purpose of which was to provide individuals with more spiritual edification than they would be able to receive from the Sunday morning worship service alone. Today, nearly 350 years later, this practice is still carried on in the bible study fellowship meetings known in Germany as *Gemeinschaftstunden*.

August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), the great pedagogue and founder of the *collegium philobiblicum* in Leipzig and of the first pietistic institution in Halle, is recognized as the second patriarchal figure of Pietism. Francke differentiated almost to the extreme between the natural man and the born-again man, between the outer and the inner (*Schale* and *Kern*), between mere surface knowledge and real inner experience; between Christian in name only and the Christian marked by the experience of his or her inner life (*Busskampf, Wiedergeburt, und geistliche Früchte*).

The contribution of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), the tolerant, ecumenical, and mission-oriented aristocrat who was immortalized in the work at Herrnhut, is to be seen in the Christocentric piety of Herrnhuter Pietism. For Zinzendorf, the blood of Christ (*Blutsheologie*) and the spirit of love (*Liebesgeist*) are all-important. In this, Zinzendorf emphasized mysticism almost to the extreme; one may cite as an example his concept of the bride and passion (*Braut- und Passionsmystik*).

Radical Pietists, the extremist group, should also be mentioned here as part of the tradition and, finally, Schwabian Pietism, the Württemberg movement, which was influenced by all the other pietistic trends. The Schwabian movement is significant in that it was less dependent on the sponsorship of the nobility and therefore was more a people's movement from the outset. The voice of "the quiet ones" (*die Stimme der Stillen*) is an appropriate title for the Schwabian Pietists.

Each form of Pietism - Reformed, Lutheran, Herrnhuter, and Schwabian - suffered a decline following its initial success, but in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a newly revitalized Pietistic movement, the *Erweckungs- und Evangelisations Bewegung*, sprang up, with special emphasis on revival and evangelism as its new components. Out of this revival grew numerous mission organizations and fellowship groups, most of which are today united in the *Gnadauer-Verband*, an organizational structure holding the many pietistic groups and mission organizations loosely together. For nearly 350 years, the Pietist movement has transcended national and confessional boundaries (*Übernational und Überkonfessional*) to make unquestionably vital contributions in the edification of believers, not only in the realms of Bible teaching, preaching, religious education, literature, and hymnology, but also in the field of social outreach in numerous areas and in mission at home and abroad.

Above all, Pietism has created within the individual believer a deep personal awareness (*Selbstbewusstsein*) of his or her relationship with God. In response to the criticism that their faith is too subjective and based too largely on emotionalism, Pietists point to their good works, their *praxis pietatis*. They thus fail to recognize or appreciate the extent to which their own inner experience (*Erlebnisgehalt*) replaces Christian dogma and is elevated to become the criterion of truth and the norm according to which everything, spiritual or non-spiritual, is judged. While the experience of rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*), the central theme of three and a half centuries of Pietism, creates in the individual such a strong conviction of his or her own inner newness (*Evidenzbewusstsein*) that they are enabled to overcome their fear and failures, often logic and even common sense are also eliminated in the process. This is true whether

Pietism is interpreted according to the formula of Spener, "Are you still reborn?" (*Stehst du noch in der Wiedergeburt?*), of Francke, "Are you converted?" (*Bist du bekehrt?*), or of Zinzendorf. "Do you see and feel the Crucified One?" (*Siehst und spurst du den Gekreuzigten?*). The Pietist who is clearly branded by *Wiedergeburt* considers himself or herself free from the world and able to concentrate on developing his own inner life.

According to Pietistic theology, the "inner life," the life indwelt by Christ, will result not only in a better man but also in a better church and ultimately in a better world (*Weltverwandlung durch Menschenverwandlung*). However, this individualism and subjectivism, this personal overemphasis on the *imitatio Christi*, forces the Pietist to live in a peculiar combination of humility and pride, self-abasement and self-exaltation, submissiveness and a tendency to negativism, a reluctance to assume political responsibility and a readiness to criticize. Each Pietist became his own prophet, priest, and king, prompting Karl Barth to conclude that "for the Pietist, man himself came to be a sacrament." Pietism, the executor of the Reformation and the reconstructor of early Christianity, was never, according to its own evaluation, a united or structurally organized phenomenon. It is rightly called an independent movement of spiritualism (*Frömmigkeitsbewegung*). The following statement expresses the Pietists' position towards the official Protestant church even today: "We are in the church, if possible with the church, but never under the church." From the beginning the Pietistic movement, like the Evangelical movement in Central Europe today, can best be described as being a Bible-centered ministry existing parallel to the official Protestant Church.

(Note: Confusion often results from translation into English. The term used for the official Protestant church in Germany, *Evangelische Kirche*, is often translated wrongly as "Evangelical Church"; it should be translated "Protestant." The term *Evangelical* is correctly translated "Evangelical.")

Let me now focus on some characteristics common to both Pietists and Evangelicals, historically – both before and during the time of Nazi Germany - and, to some extent, even today. These characteristics include both positive and negative elements. From Spener onward, the Pietists

always had a "hope for better times," a chiliastic trend that Pietism shared with the early church. An overemphasis on eschatology was, and still is, a basic emphasis and many of the developments in Pietism have to be theologically and psychologically interpreted in the light of its future expectations (*Zukunftserwartung*). For Luther and the Reformation the emphasis was on justification, based on the Book of Romans, whereas the Pietists and the Evangelicals tended more to focus on eschatology, based on the books of Revelation and Daniel.

It is of great significance that for Pietists and Evangelicals the evangelization of the Jews is closely connected with, or even a part of, eschatology. It seems that the "Jewish question" (the conversion of the Jewish people) was, and still is, a barometer of their eschatology. Today, a large segment of the Pietists and Evangelicals pray daily for the conversion of the Jews as a nation and for the total liberation of the holy city of Jerusalem, believing that these events are absolute requirements for the coming of God's Kingdom. Anything interfering with the conversion of the Jews and the rebuilding of Jerusalem is to be rejected or condemned. They believe that all support for Israel today, in whatever form, helps in the process of achieving the immanent conversion of the Jewish nation. With the mission of the Jews stands or falls to a large extent their belief in Christ's power, even within themselves, as well as their hope for Christ's final victory and soon-expected return.

Spener's concept of the conversion of the Jews and their insertion into the Christian community was far reaching. Spener saw in the conversion of the Jew, just as in the born-again (*Wiedergeburt*) experience, evidence of God's direct intervention (*Heilsereignis*). He approached the Jews not with a strictly Messianic claim but rather he attempted to present the gospel to Jews on their own terms: as law - as in the Sermon on the Mount, and as holiness - not in contradiction to the Mosaic Law and the holiness concept of the Old Testament, but in harmony with them, as part of God's total plan of salvation. The conversion and baptism of the Jews were seen as a model for the born-again experience (*Wiedergeburt*) of the individual, as factual evidence that through rebirth man

can be changed completely. In later years many Pietistic missions to the Jews became much more aggressive in confronting the Jews with the direct Messianic claim.

Another aspect of Pietism was the stress on education, especially with regard to the extensive cultivation of the language of the middle and lower classes. Since education was regarded as primarily for edification, the Pietistic schools were not pedantic in their emphasis; rather, the stress was on public-spirited activities (*Gemeinnützigkeit*). For this reason the learned and the aristocratic languages, Latin and French respectively, were replaced by the national language, German. The Pietists emphasized the use of the language of the common man, especially if one wanted to reach the masses and bring the gospel closer to their daily life experiences. Language was seen as a creative power given to man, and through its use in a Pietistic framework (especially in the edification literature), it was elevated to become the expression of the inner essence of a nation, to the point that the mother tongue became something religious and divine, almost a sacrament. The German language became the heart of the nation.

The idea was, basically, that human speech is a part of creation, on the same level as any other aspect of creation. God Himself is therefore the prime source of language, especially since He Himself was revealed in the Logos. One can see clearly how the emotional, subjective, and mystical feelings of the Pietists were involved in the development of the “sacrament of language.” Although the leaders of the Enlightenment also stressed the use of the German language, they did not reach the heart of the people to the same extent as did the Pietists, for whereas the Enlightenment stressed the intellect and logic, the Pietists reached into the heart, into the inner being of the individual, and stirred his feelings and hopes for a better future.

The importance given to music, hymnology, and art (*Kunstfrömmigkeit*) in Germany is an indication of the extent to which the Pietists' religious enthusiasm and their emphasis on the expression of one's own inner feelings has influenced society as a whole. The Pietistic inner experience on the individual level was transferred to the national level, and the German language,

which had previously been linked with the national character only in an academic sense, now became the vehicle for the expression of the inner being of the nation (*Volkscharakter* and *Volksseele*). It is precisely here, in the awareness of the German language and the consequent shaping of the German character (*Volkscharakter*) and its religious conscience (*Volksreligion*) that the Pietistic influence can be seen more than in any other field. The religious value placed on the German language and culture, and the awe with which they were regarded, the view that education of the inner man would eliminate social distinctions, and the new self-awareness and sense of individual importance, combined with the religious enthusiasm of the Pietists, would not only lay the groundwork for German nationalism but, to a very great extent, carry it through to its completion.

Pietism contributed yet another idea in the development of nationalism; namely, that of revival. Pietism recognized that each individual has to be confronted with the gospel as an answer to his lost, sinful condition until the moment at which the second and real birth (*Wiedergeburt*) takes place. In the denial of one's own will, God's presence is experienced in a subjective manifestation and man can live in victory. This pattern of revival/rebirth, self-denial, holiness, and victory - the only valid pattern of life ever recognized by the Pietists - was transferred from the religious to the secular realm and there further developed in various details by the so-called enlightened Pietists.

The entire patriotic revival of Nazi Germany seems to have been modeled after the Pietistic concept of the conversion of the individual. The nation as a whole recognized its sins: social distinction, indecisiveness, lack of loyalty and responsibility, distrust and lack of faith in the nation and even in authority itself. It was aware of its weakness, and its people longed for fulfillment, for the realization of the dream of the "inner Fatherland". This recognition of sin and the longing for fulfillment led to the rebirth of the nation, and as the national spirit overcame the people their enthusiastic and mystical self-denial resulted in the achievement of what was considered a "national holiness." The concept of the "Fatherland" - the place where you belong, the place you can claim as

your own - became very important. The land of the fathers was, and still is, of extreme value for the German people; it provides a sense of identity and of security. One can see why many Pietists and Evangelicals transfer their beliefs of the “Fatherland” in endorsing the claim of Israel to have their own “Land of their Fathers.”

In Evangelicalism as in Pietism there was and is also a tendency towards perfectionism and absolutism, a tendency reinforced by the belief in the inner experience of the individual, the perfect Christ within. This attitude, combined with a sense of responsibility to educate and evangelize, and the emphasis given to the divine in the German language, culture, and Fatherland, led to the belief that Germany was superior to all other nations. It was believed that whatever came from Germany must be great and noble. Germany was considered to be the pulse of Europe. The Pietistic concepts of industry and social consciousness, of marriage and family life, of the vitality and importance of youth, and of blind obedience to spiritual advisors, to mention only a few, all helped to advance the cause of German nationalism.

Pietism, in imparting to German nationalism its own unique characteristics, was to a very large extent responsible for shaping the mind of the German nation, particularly at the time when the collapse of the lukewarm Weimar Republic had brought about a national malaise and frustration. The defeat of Germany in the First World War was viewed as a disruption of the model of revival/rebirth, self-denial, holiness, and victory - and an expectation of something even greater was simmering beneath the surface. The Pietistic patriotic self-awareness now had to be reawakened, a new inner experience had to take place. The God of the nation Himself would have to step in; if not, all previous developments, achievements, and blessings would remain incomplete or even be regarded as failures. There was thus of necessity a renewed hope for the rebirth of the German people, nationalistically and religiously, and many expected that a new national movement would mean renewal and salvation for Protestantism. The hope of renewal became a reality in the spring of 1933,

when the new leadership of the Nazis promised to take away the disappointment and disgrace of the recent past and to establish a perfect structure with holy freedom and lasting victory, a new millennium. Hitler, the man of the hour, became prophet, priest, and king, especially to those deprived by inflation and unemployment. The German masses rejoiced.

At the beginning, virtually all Pietistic groups supported Hitler. The few warning voices, mainly from courageous members of the official Protestant Church, were not heard. By the time the Nazis began to put their holocaust philosophy into practice it was too late, and disaster was immanent. Those who continued to speak out were ignored, regarded as preachers of doom and not taken seriously. Gradually, however, they were joined by others and in May of 1934 founded the *Bekennnissynode (BK)*, the “confessing” church. The *Bekennnissynode* tried to gain the support of other like-minded individuals and of the Pietistic groups, to unite them against the power and the injustices of the new regime. However, the *Gnadauer-Verband*, the organization that kept all the Pietistic groups together, did not join the *Bekennnissynode*, because the Pietists were unwilling to take a clear stand and because they felt that the confessing church was led to a large extent by liberal theologians. Even later on, when total resistance became necessary in order to save the lives of millions of innocent people, the Pietistic/Evangelical groups failed to act.

One can only speculate what might have happened if the “warning voices” had been louder, stronger, and more convincing. Could they have helped to avoid the catastrophe?

Although the Pietistic and Evangelical groups eventually realized that they had been blind and guilty of indecisiveness, and although they repented in a variety of ways after the collapse of the Third Reich, the sense of guilt remained. It seems that the Pietists and Evangelicals have closed that chapter of their history prematurely, without satisfactorily dealing with it.

In our time, now decades after the defeat of Nazi Germany, the majority of the Pietistic and Evangelical groups support Israel without reservation. They rejoice that finally the Jews can reclaim what they consider to be their own land, the land of their Fathers, and that - with help from the West -

they have become very prosperous. Although these groups claim that they stand with Israel because of their biblical understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant, this is not their only motivation; they are also moved by a deep sense of guilt and the need to make restitution (*Wiedergutmachung*) for the treatment of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Pietists and Evangelicals in Nazi Germany did not see the total picture until it was too late. Their unquestioning support of the state of Israel today shows that, again, they fail to see the whole picture.

The current situation in the Middle East is a situation similar to that prior to and during Nazi Germany. In this case two groups of people, Jews and Muslim Arabs, are guilty of developing a serious holocaust mentality, creating immanent danger of another holocaust catastrophe. Here again many Evangelicals throughout the world fail to see the total picture, and here again the warning voices of the people in the middle are - for the most part - not being heard. These very small, quiet warning voices have as their core the small groups of Christians in Palestine, who point again and again to the atrocities that are being committed daily by both sides, Jews and Muslim Arabs.

(Note: An independent study pointing out the parallel developments between the Pietists/Evangelicals before and during the Second World War and what has happened since the war with regard to Israel in the Middle East is long overdue.)

In relation to our conference and as a guide for our panel discussion, let me now make seven specific recommendations or challenges:

1. The “warning voices” must become louder and more strategic. Our conference, like others before, is noteworthy but, compared to the support that Israel receives through their conferences and contacts, it is miniscule. (The same can be said in relation to the support received by Muslims from the Arab world.)
2. More dialogue with a clear biblical/theological background should take place. The theology of the land, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant through Christ’s atonement, the New Testament focus on the heavenly Jerusalem, the Pauline emphasis on the Promised Land as a universal promise related to the cosmos, and many other key topics must be addressed,

written up, and marketed as textbooks for the training of future Christian leaders in bible schools, seminaries, and universities.

3. A modern “confessing church,” a group of key influential leaders, should be created to give the “warning voices” more substance. The marketing and public relations agencies and the media – including the evangelical media – have to be won over as friends in order for them to become advocates.
4. Tour guides and tourist information need to be more specific in painting a total picture. They need to include Palestinian Christians, in a realistic and positive way. The hundreds of thousands of Evangelicals who visit the Holy Land every year must be won over and convinced to listen to the “warning voices” so that when they return to their home countries they become a force for multiplication in their bible studies, home groups, churches, and wherever they meet others, whether Evangelicals or not.
5. More courage is needed in answering specific questions about the future. One can use the example of Jesus’ harsh rebuke in the discussion with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The minds of those disciples were set on Israel’s future (land) issue, but Jesus redirected their thinking. “How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe what the prophets have spoken,” he said, pointing to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in redemption through Christ.
6. The characteristics of Pietism and Evangelism should be taken into consideration if one wants to change the attitude of today’s Pietists and Evangelicals. Their “hope for better times” and their emphasis on “eschatology,” “revival,” and “rebirth” – all part of the inner man’s experience - have to be taken more seriously. The focus on “language,” on the concept of the “Fatherland,” and on “changing the world through changing man” are topics that resonate with Pietism/Evangelicalism.

7. The topic of reconciliation in the light of the incredible injustices on every side (Jews, Moslems/Arabs, Christians) becomes more relevant than ever before. Peace *making* goes far beyond peace *keeping*. Evangelicals today must be challenged to take on the task of peace making, and the best place to start is right here among the Palestinian Christians, who are at the center of the greatest conflict of our time.

The well-known expressions “Peace be to you” – *Shalom alaichem* and *Salaam alaikum*, in Hebrew and Arabic respectively – are daily greetings in the Middle East, and yet the lack of peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict is monumental, escalating more and more into an entire Middle East war with global implications. Another holocaust may be on the horizon. Those in the middle, the Palestinian Christians – this little group - can make the difference. If they continue to practice the commandment of our Lord to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, this small group, like yeast, must expand many hundred-fold so that the voices for real peace, real justice, and real reconciliation infiltrate not only the mainstream of Evangelicalism but become a force that the entire Christian church must hear in such a way that even Jews and Moslems have to reckon with it.

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