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is professor of history and chair of the history department at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. He also helps coordinate the Christianity and Western Culture program and contributes to the program's podcast. He is the coeditor of *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*.

Bringing together leading scholars associated with Bethel University, this volume edited by Christopher Gehrz presents a distinctively Pietist approach to Christian higher education, which emphasizes the transformation of the whole person for service to God and neighbor.

The Need for a Holy Approach: An Interview with Christopher Gehrz

What's your background in the Pietism/Reformed spectrum? How did that inform your editing of this book?

I once interviewed a colleague of mine who teaches environmental studies. We got to talking about his experience growing up in the Christian Reformed Church and teaching at Reformed colleges. He was struck that at those schools, everyone on faculty could tell you what was distinctive about the "Reformed approach" to Christian higher education. When he arrived at Bethel University, however, and heard that it was founded by Baptist Pietists, he couldn't find anyone who could tell him what was "Pietist" about Bethel.

That mirrored my own experience. Having grown up in a deeply pietistic denomination, the Evangelical Covenant Church, I found myself very much at home at Bethel, but wondered why all of our professional development leaned so heavily on the Reformed language of "faith-learning integration." At some level, most of us understood that our history shaped us and we valued it enough to claim a pietistic heritage, but we had little more than anecdotes and isolated phrases to articulate our distinctiveness.

And my sense is that many evangelicals in higher education could tell a similar story. The Reformed approach predominates, yet as Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen have observed, it forces non-Reformed Christian educators to speak a second language, using "worldview" and "integration" to talk about something that's really more about "conversion" or "transformation."

If Pietism is (in Roger Olson's words) "the main form of Protestantism" in North America and one of the founding influences on evangelicalism in particular, it seemed like exploring its implications for Christian higher education would be valuable well beyond our small university. What would a Pietist educational vision mean for teaching, mentoring, researching, building community or serving a pluralistic culture?

You drastically shifted your career to write this book. What was the catalyst for that?

I've published a couple of articles on Pietism and higher education, I've given several talks on those subjects, and the themes in this book have recurred in the three years I've been keeping my blog *The Pietist Schoolman*. But my ambition was always to write a single book that could start (but certainly not finish) the conversation about how Pietists do Christian higher education. As I write in the introduction, I initially had the idea that I'd write a kind of Pietist answer to Arthur Holmes's (Reformed) *Idea of a Christian College*, but I'm glad that I recognized that a Pietist vision of Christian higher education would be more appropriately cast by a kind of conventicle of scholars rather than via a single-author monograph.

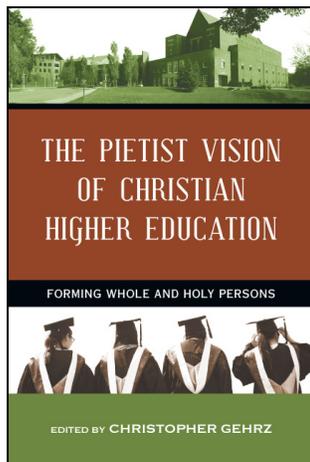
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*The Pietist Vision of Christian
Higher Education: Forming
Whole and Holy Persons*

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This book is the culmination of an eight-year project that saw me put my career as an international/diplomatic historian on hold while I tried to better understand how Pietism shaped my own approach to teaching and scholarship and that of the university at which I work. It's been a tremendously challenging but fulfilling project. I've stepped well outside my training and expertise as I pursued research that dovetailed substantially with teaching, mentoring and service at my university and church.

What do you want readers to take away after reading the essays in this volume?

We contend that Pietism can sustain a distinctive vision for Christian higher education, one that aims at the transformation of the whole person and – through those individual renewals – the larger renewal of the church and the world. That education is centered on our shared, convertive experience of Jesus Christ as he is encountered in a learning community that is strongly marked by the virtues of love, hope and humility, and by an “irenic spirit” that is at once evangelical and peaceable.

One distinctive attribute of the book is that it does not cast one individual's vision but is written by the members of one community (in the hopes that our conversation will then draw in the wider Christian church and academy). All of our contributors have spent a significant part of their careers at Bethel, the Christian college most vocally committed to its Pietist heritage. So there is no single voice dominating the conversation, but there is shared experience and commitment.

It's not quite explicit in the book, but I do think it's telling that teaching is so central to most chapters. While we address research and other academic vocations, our vision centers on the relationship between teacher and student.

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