

The Pietist Option: Hope for the Renewal of Christianity
 Available October 3, 2017
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"Warning! The cheeky title of this book is misleading. You'll find no snark here, no polemics. If you're looking for a pugnacious encounter, go elsewhere. What you will find here is an immensely winsome vision, drawing on the riches of the Pietist tradition but addressed to all who seek 'to live as if Jesus Christ has actually conquered the grave.'"

— John Wilson, editor,
Education & Culture

Pietism: Hopeful, Practical, the “Way Forward”

Why talk about Pietism now?

Chris Gehrz: I've been convinced for several years now that Pietism is one of Christianity's "best kept secrets." While it's unfamiliar to most — or known for its worst excesses — I knew from personal experience that Pietism actually offers Christians a hopeful, practical way forward. Whenever I heard people complain that Christianity has grown fearful, angry, power-hungry, hypocritical, or shallow, I wanted to tell them about Pietism. But nothing I'd written before could explain it for a broad audience. Family, friends, and fellow church members loyally picked up my 2015 IVP book on Pietism and higher education, but that only indirectly explained how Pietists respond to broader questions about Christian faith and practice. So I'm thrilled that *The Pietist Option* can share Pietism with any and all Christians who are dissatisfied with the present state of Christianity but still hopeful that God intends "better times" for the church and the world.

What does Pietism offer to the world of evangelicalism?

Mark Pattie: I have long felt that the Pietist heritage offers an especially practical and hopeful path for those seeking to follow Christ faithfully and fruitfully amid the challenges and polarizing influences facing the church and world. It centers and unites us in our core identity in Jesus Christ. It roots us in the fertile soil of the Scriptures and Christian community. It calls us to live out our faith together in hands-on, costly, life- and world-transforming ways as we gratefully share the grace of God we've experienced with others. I believe Pietism offers the kind of integrated, holistic, and meaningful faith many are looking for today.

What do you mean by the “Pietist option”?

Chris and Mark: Just as it has in earlier eras, Pietism again offers hope for the renewal of Christianity in our time. The Pietist option is to opt in to a distinctively hopeful way of coming back to Jesus: growing to be more and more like him, living at peace as part of his Body, and fulfilling his mission in service to others.

The nature of the Pietist option has not changed drastically since Philipp Spener addressed *Pia Desideria* to his readers:

With sincere devotion let us therefore help one another to wrestle with prayer and supplication, that here and there God may open up one door after another to his Word, that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ fruitfully, that we may do so cheerfully and speak in a befitting manner, and



Q & A

Christopher Gehrz (PhD, Yale) is professor of history at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he also helps coordinate the Christianity and Western Culture program. He is the editor of *The Pietist Vision of Christian Higher Education* and coeditor of *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*.

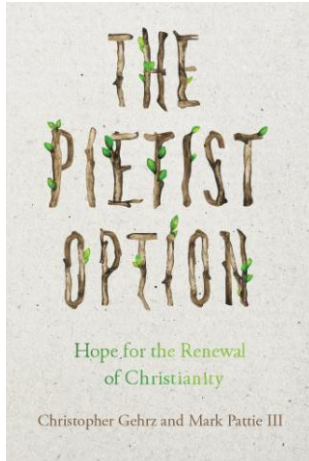
Mark Pattie III is senior pastor at Salem Covenant Church in New Brighton, Minnesota. Mark is a member of the Board of the Ordered Ministry for the Evangelical Covenant Church, and previously of its Board of Christian Education and Discipleship. He has served churches coast to coast and as a leadership consultant for pastors, churches, and corporate executives.

that we may glorify his name with our teaching, our life, and our suffering.

Like him and all Pietists since, we write in the midst of adversity as people of the resurrection, calling people to come back to the One who overcame sin, death, and evil. May you finish this book enlivened and empowered by the Spirit of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ, confident that we can hope for better times.

How do the ideas in *The Pietist Option* counter much of the current political and religious rhetoric?

Chris and Mark: It's hopeful not fearful; it's open- rather than close-minded; it emphasizes love of neighbor rather than culture-warring; it values humility and unity rather than defiance and division; and it stresses service rather than power.



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"One of my mentors used to describe himself as 'a Pietist with a PhD.' After reading The Pietist Option, I know more deeply what he meant, and I realize more clearly why his winsome spirit won my heart. This book invites us all into a more just and generous way of following Christ in today's world."

— **Brian D. McLaren**, author of *The Great Spiritual Migration*

Love Without Justice, Justice Without Grace

Some Pietists have been so committed to cultivating their personal, private relationship with God that they have been “too heavenly minded to be earthly good.” But in my study of Pietist movements and my experience of the ethos, such otherworldliness is fairly uncommon. Most Pietists have understood that faith comes most alive in love of neighbor. “If we can . . . awaken a fervent love among our Christians,” wrote Spener in *Pia Desideria*, “first toward one another and then toward all men . . . and put this love into practice, practically all that we desire will be accomplished.” In this respect, as in so many others, Spener simply thought that Pietism was reviving the principles of Martin Luther, who wrote, “Faith brings you to Christ and makes Him your own with all that He has; Love gives you to your neighbor with all that you have.” According to Francke, some Lutherans let their aversion to “works-righteousness” lead them to “think it is not even their duty to do good,” to the point that he threatened, “if the Lutheran doctrine brought this . . . may we renounce it forever.” Not just “God’s glory” but “neighbor’s good” was the purpose of the new life for Francke.

But too many of us tend to substitute another word for love — like the translators who rendered Paul’s most famous statement of Christian virtue this way: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor 13:13 KJV). There is nothing wrong with charity, but love for neighbor demands that we seek justice for our neighbor. I might summon the empathy required to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger (Mt 25:35), but God also requires that I ask where that deprivation and alienation came from — and what I can do to stop them from happening again.

And those aren’t always comfortable questions for a Christian like me. White, male, upper middle class, PhD holding, and American, I reap enormous advantages from the same racial, gender, economic, educational, and global inequalities that disadvantage most of humanity. All that privilege can distract me from what N. T. Wright calls “the echo of a voice: a voice speaking with calm, healing authority, speaking about justice, about things being put to rights, about peace and hope and prosperity for all.”

In part, that’s why so many Christians like me like to recall a supposed golden age of our nation’s history, when churches seemed fuller, the economy seemed stronger, and our politics seemed less divisive. In its 2015 American Values Survey, the Public Religion Research Institute found that 60 percent of white evangelicals and 56 percent of white mainline Protestants believed that America’s best days were behind it. While majorities of all other religious groups looked forward expectantly to America’s future, white Protestants looked back wistfully at a nostalgic past, prompting Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore to chastise them for “blinding themselves to the injustices faced by their black and brown brothers and sisters in the supposedly idyllic Mayberry of white Christian America.”

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*Historian Mark Noll has written that historic Pietism “breathed a badly needed vitality” into post-Reformation Europe. Now the time has come for Pietism to revitalize Christianity in post-Christendom America. In *The Pietist Option*, Christopher Gehrz, a historian of Pietism, and Mark Pattie, a pastor in the Pietist tradition, show how Pietism holds great promise for the church – and the world – today. Modeled after Philipp Spener’s 1675 classic, *Pia Desideria*, this timely book makes a case for the vitality of Pietism in our day.*

Taking a hard look at American evangelicalism and why it needs renewal, Gehrz and Pattie explore the resources that Pietism can provide the church of the twenty-first century. This concise and winsome volume serves as a practical guide to the Pietist ethos for life and ministry, pointing us toward the renewal so many long for.

We’re still blinding ourselves to such injustices. All lives do matter, but white Christians find it far too easy to ignore the many ways in which our racialized society continues to diminish black lives. Consider the rash of officer-involved shootings that have left African American men dead. “Many white evangelicals,” observed Moore, “will . . . argue that the particulars are more complex in those situations than initial news reports might show. But how can anyone deny, after seeing the sheer number of cases and after seeing those in which the situation is all too clear, that there is a problem in terms of the safety of African-Americans before the law.” He was responding to a July 2016 case when a Minnesota policeman shot and killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop. That incident took place only a mile from my house – but a world away from my own experience. As Moore concluded, “such injustices are so longstanding and are often hidden from majority populations, who don’t pay attention to such questions because they rarely have to think about them.”

At the same time, when my eyes do open, when my ears do somehow perk up at Wright’s “echo of a voice,” I tend to answer with angry self-righteousness. I forget that the Lord demands not only that I “do justice” but that I “love kindness” and “walk humbly with [my] God” (Mic 6:8). Most importantly, I neglect grace, what Philip Yancey calls “Christianity’s best gift to the world, a spiritual nova in our midst exerting a force stronger than vengeance, stronger than racism, stronger than hate.” But grace, he admits, is also a “scandal,” starting with the “unnatural act of forgiveness.” Practicing grace comes even less easily than doing justice; indeed, it often runs counter to what we think and feel to be just. Yet I can hardly love my neighbor as myself if I’m unwilling to forgive either my neighbor or myself when we act unjustly, cruelly, or arrogantly.

So while it can be helpful to engage in something like Francke’s *Busskampf* and contemplate both personal and social sin, Pietists’ emphasis on repentance has sometimes misled them into austere legalism. For example, Yancey interprets the Isak Dinesen story “Babette’s Feast” as a parable of grace revitalizing a pietistic Scandinavian sect that had joylessly “tried to earn God’s favor with their pieties and renunciations.”

But at its best, the Pietist option starts with the decision to be honest about our failures to love God and neighbor (again, “as yourself”), in the hope that we will grow in God’s grace. In her book on Pietist ethics, Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom illustrates the virtue of love by telling of the remarkable Johanna Eleonora Petersen, who not only led a Pietist community in the late seventeenth century but taught and even preached. Petersen went through her own *Busskampf*, but she addressed “sin within the narrative of the gospel – a gospel that both confronts and forgives.” Clifton-Soderstrom concludes by passing along wisdom from one of her mentors, Covenant theologian John Weborg: “Fear, for [Pietists], was never about terror of God’s wrath or punishment; rather, it was the fear of *not* grasping the gift of God’s free grace as a precious gift.”

— Taken from chapter one, “What’s Wrong?”