
In this fine work, the University of Calgary professor of Christian Thought, Douglas Shantz, provides readers with the distillation of decades of investigation and reflection on a theme clearly of personal importance to him. Though it is entitled “An Introduction”, this terminology is capable of misleading the reader. It is not an “introduction” in the sense that this is the first work a reader, curious to understand Pietism, need take up. A “doorway” or “first encounter” it is not.

What Shantz has provided in ten well-documented chapters is a thorough introduction to the state of studies in Pietism – that post-Reformation movement in European Protestantism which sought sometimes to renew and rejuvenate the territorial churches (both Reformed and Lutheran), and sometimes to provide an alternate Christianity outside their jurisdiction.

An English-speaking reader might think that he or she is already reasonably informed about Pietist Christianity because of a familiarity with already-existing standard treatments of the subject by Ernest Stoeffler (1965, 1971, 1973), Dale Brown (1978), Peter Erb (1978, 1996), or Carter Lindberg (2005). Shantz, who takes as his task the gathering and interpreting of a vastly larger (and European) body of Pietist research, aims initially to help us to see these English-language interpreters as part of a larger effort to rehabilitate the Pietist movement for modern Christians. Like the writers whose research he collates, Shantz truly laments that this once-vital stream of Christianity, which emphasized the religion of the heart, has largely evaporated from both western Europe and the new world.

The truth is, there was never just one strain of Pietism. Shantz docu-
ments that the origins of the movement lay in diverse places: post-Reformation Holland, German cities of the Rhine region (such as Frankfort), and centers in Saxony such as Halle and Leipzig. We have heard most about the “churchly” Pietists, such as Spener (1635-1705) and Francke (1663-1727); yet at least as influential were the “radical” Pietists such Tersteegen (1697-1769) who would not align themselves with the territorial churches of the Reformation. The “churchly” Pietism may have worked within the institutional church, yet its relationship – rooted in pragmatism – could be rocky. Radical Pietists, not willing to make their peace with institutional Protestantism, were by and large harassed in Germanic territories and were more likely to emigrate abroad. As Shantz helpfully explains, by 1700 Holland and Britain were miles ahead of the German territories in offering religious toleration to minorities. In the process, the Germanic territories impoverished themselves.

Particular strengths of the Introduction to Pietism are a seventh chapter given over to gender; this explores the greater relative freedom afforded for the ministry of women in the two streams (churchly and radical). It was an outworking of the conviction that the indwelling Spirit empowered without respect to gender. The eighth chapter, “Pietism and the Bible”, strikes many sparks, showing that Pietism surpassed territorial Protestantism in its desire to distribute Scriptures widely and cheaply in contemporary translations. When Europe’s first Bible Societies were created in the 18th century, they were entirely Pietist undertakings. Pietistic scholars such as Johan Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) were at the forefront of the study of the Greek text of the New Testament. The ninth chapter, “Pietism, World Christianity and Mission”, offers the best overview this reviewer has seen of two spheres of 18th century Pietist missionary labor: that of the Danish-Halle Lutheran mission to south India and that of the Moravians to Greenland and Labrador. All this labor unfolded decades in advance of William Carey’s departure for India in 1793.

With contributions so notable as these, the reader naturally wants to inquire why Pietist influence across the Christian world has so diminished since the early 19th century. To this question, Shantz offers only partial answers. He maintains that Pietism contributed to the Enlightenment growth of individualism and the right of private judgment in a way that advanced modernity; he allows that Pietism – especially in its radical manifestations – was made vulnerable by its repeated dependence on charismatic leadership – which often led to disappointments and disillusionment.

Two themes bearing on this demise of influence which this reader would have liked to see explored further are the intertwined questions of what educational institutions were erected – beyond Halle in Saxony – to sustain this movement, and of what was done within Pietism to safeguard fundamental biblical convictions. Radical Pietism was just distrustful enough of reason that it may have disparaged the creation of the colleges and seminaries necessary to ensure its growth and survival. Again, there is the question about
whether adequate measures were taken to ensure the doctrinal integrity of the Pietist movement over time. Pietism championed the new birth, the indwelling of the Spirit, and the right of the believer to study the Word for himself. But this approach to a Christianity which was primarily experiential did not sustain itself well over time. Halle itself ceased to stand for Christian orthodoxy over a century ago. In the modern era, so many expressions of Pietism have, in a kind of exhaustion, been absorbed into moribund mainstream denominations from which – in their heyday – they would have stood apart. Those which remain suffer from anemia.

Shantz’ *Introduction to Pietism* offers the curious reader more than he or she will initially want or need. But this is a resource book which ought to be in libraries of many institutions of Christian higher learning. Like no other book known to this reviewer, it opens up the field of Pietist studies and points one forward in valuable lines of inquiry.

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Professor Finlayson of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, has demonstrated with this book that a bite size biography can provide a rich banquet of highly digestible food for the soul. In a brief 152 pages he has summarized and highlighted all that is essential to know in the life of Thomas Chalmers, a man who had a profound and godly influence not only in his native Scotland but in North America as well.

The significant thing about the book is that Finlayson is not afraid to bring out both the strengths and weaknesses of his subject, to make judgments, to identify with Chalmers but at the same to acknowledge his weaknesses and failures. This was in sharp contrast to previous biographers such as Chalmers’ own son-in-law William Hanna and most recently Stuart Brown’s definitive *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth*. Hanna was deferential, Brown detached and academic. Somewhere in between was Hugh Watt’s centenary of the Disruption biography. One might well ask, how much more can be said about Chalmers? The answer simply is that Finlayson makes him approachable and provides a teachable moment for the non-academic layper-