

Germany's Lawless Pietism and Salvation through the State

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The evangelistic method of pietism[1] in Germany, which became prominent after the revolution of 1848, started its message by claiming a bad conscience and Jesus as the solution to get rid of it. Sin was what produced a bad conscience. This made sin a subjective feeling. There was no discussion about the objective law which must rule and guide the conscience. There was no discussion about sin being sin even if one was unconscious of it. And the discussion did not start with the creator as reality, but with conscience as a feeling[2].

Since for centuries millions of protestants learned the Ten Commandments through Luther's Small Catechism this evangelistic method did work for some time. In Catholic areas the problem was much greater, as this evangelistic methods bound and binds Catholics back to their church. That this evangelistic method is devastating in the long run can be seen nowadays because today most German consciences do not even make judgements on the basis of some Christian-oriented natural law. Pietism could not claim God's law to govern the whole creation. God rules the individual heart, and the heart was defined together with Goethe, Schiller and other German classics more as a feeling, than - as it is in the Bible - as the centre of thought, decision and judgement. So for pietism Jesus only dealt with part of the inner life, not with the thought and work of the whole person, not to speak about the family, the church or the state.

We have to understand this if we want to understand why pietism was so often ready to preach salvation through the state. We will look at three examples.

The first example is from the **18th century**. At the beginning of Prussian state education you will find one of the fathers of pietism **August Hermann Francke**. He founded huge Christian schools which for a long time educated the best Prussian officers, officials and politicians. But in order to get an education for all children he forced the Prussian state to educate all children in state schools and did not ask the Christian parents to shoulder the task[3].

The second example is from the 19th century. It is the Prussian and later German chancellor **Otto von Bismarck**. During my studies I wrote a thesis about Bismarck's pietism[4]. I argued that he was born again and that he read his Bible and prayed daily. His wife was a truly pious woman[5]. Of course I had difficulties understanding why Bismarck never really belonged to a local church. But I must confess that I did not have any insight about his politics and was unembarrassed by his views of law.

Today I know that Bismarck was one of those politicians who increasingly turned Germany into a country dominated by the state and obstructed the influence of church and family on German everyday life and culture. As the uniter of Germany he made what became a model to the whole world: 'Realpolitik', a practical politics not following principles and ideas, but the real situation, meaning choosing the best among the possible. The real value was the 'Volk', the nation, which had to become one, no matter what this meant. During the re-unification of Germany you could see that the 'Volk' still is a religious value in Germany, and even among the evangelicals.

A lot of pietists, who normally keep out of politics and do not believe in a God who rules history, suddenly praised God in special services for the re-unification. The parties in the German parliament only agreed on the re-unification treaty because they allowed a major change in the abortion laws. Although protest against the abortion laws is normally the only political and moral topic which stirs up the evangelical world, they suddenly kept silent and praised the 'Volk' becoming one, even though this re-unification was only possible by taking over the devastating legacy of East German abortion laws.

Back to the pietist Bismarck. In order to fight the socialistic party he founded the social security system run by the state, which in the long-run made Germany the forerunner of a state secured future which forces nearly every citizen to pay into the different state assurance policies all his life. Most evangelicals think that this is evidence of his Christian influence in politics!

In order to oppose the influence of the pope and the Catholic Church Bismarck also brought all private and mainly Christian schools under the control of the state^[6]. From the time of Bismarck on every teacher had to be state-approved, no matter where he taught. From now on everybody had to marry at a state office, so that the Christian or religious marriage became an optional ceremony with no legal value. With this and other new laws Bismarck hit mainly the Protestant Church because the Catholic Church was much stronger through its international connections. The Protestant Churches did not protest, because liberals and pietists alike were in favour of Protestantism being the uniting factor of the new Germany. They loved their Kaiser Wilhelm I, the only man above Bismarck, because he confessed his Protestant belief personally to the pope; they were unconcerned that he was not only the protector of the Prussian protestant churches, but at the same time the protector of German Freemasonry, a position held by most Prussian Kings since Frederike II called the Great^[7].

The third example is from the 20th century. In 1966 the left-wing Social Democratic Party became partner in government of the right-wing Christian Democratic Union which had governed Germany since 1949. In 1969 it took over the government until 1982. The minister of justice, who became president of Germany later, was a well known Christian lawyer, **Gustav Heinemann**, who had belonged to the confessing church under Hitler. He was not a pietist in the strict sense, but was heavily influenced by pietism. With the argument that Christians could not force their ethics on the non-Christians he started to get rid of nearly all German laws that had something in common with the Ten Commandments. Soon it was no longer forbidden to speak blasphemously about the Christian God - a typical start. Later the laws on abortion, homosexuality and divorce were changed, to name just a few examples, and with the exception of the problem of abortion most evangelicals do not even know any longer what the law forbade 30 years ago. To most of them it seems impossible and incredible that the state outlaws things that are seen as criminal acts in the Old Testament, although many of those laws were still in force till the sixties.

Without God's law, pietism was lost and helped his biggest enemy, the modern state claiming salvation, to come to power.

Hegel's salvation through the state

It is well known that the minister of propaganda of the national socialist government **Joseph Goebbels** was a Marxist and a socialist before he became a national socialist. Ulrich Höver now has shown in his outstanding book *Joseph Goebbels as national socialist*^[8] that Goebbels stayed a socialist all his life. Judging from the common left-right-spectrum people are shocked to hear that a fascist like Goebbels at the same time was a socialist. But has there ever been a fascism and a nationalism that was not socialistic and statist? And has there ever been a socialism and statism that was not nationalistic and fascistic? Was the Russian socialism in the Soviet union really an international socialism? Was it not a Russian National Socialism? Ask other ethnic groups in the former Soviet union how 'international' this kind of socialism was. On the other side Hitler's National Socialism was 'international' because Hitler wanted to reign the whole world after the final victory ('Endsieg') of the Second World War. He planned to send German national socialists as protectors to every country of the world.

The common root of National Socialism and Marxistic socialism is Hegel's salvation through the state. The German atheistic philosopher Ernst Topitsch has shown^[9] that National Socialism and Marxism are only the best known examples of the right and left wing totalitarian state ideas that followed Hegel's philosophy which saw the Prussian state as the final outcome of the spirit governing world history. Hegel's philosophy was heavily influenced by the French revolution and Freemasonry, as some of his followers have shown to relieve him from being responsible for the Prussian and German idea that the state is above everything and the people live for the state. But they did not understand that the left and right revolutionists understand the same message of Hegel as the Prussian kings and the Marxists and national socialists after they had come to power: salvation comes through the state.

This message is still working in reunited Germany, which now tries to get all of Europe under a even bigger - European - state, which is believed to bring even more salvation. If this plan, the United State of Europe, does not succeed, than the only reason will be, that the religion of nationalism in the European countries is too strong, which also believes in salvation through the state. Only if Christian Reconstruction takes place - being based 1) on the presupposition of an creator, 2) who revealed himself in His infallible book, which contains 3) His laws as theonomic ethics for the whole world, 4) the salvation according to Calvinistic understanding and 5) the hope and faith that this earth once will serve God at large - can the two rival static religions be overcome by the "kingly law of freedom", as James calls it.

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Notes

[1] Of course all the following judgements on pietism are only true in general. There always have been exceptions and especially some of the few Reformed pietists (e.g. in Bremen and Wuppertal) have protested against of typical thoughts among pietists.

[2] For details on the biblical view of the conscience see my article "Das Gewissen in der Bibel", *Querschnitte* 2(1989): 2/19-22 and Hans-Joachim Eckstein, *Der Beriff Syneidesis bei Paulus*, WUNT 2/10 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983)

[3] On the Prussian state education and its influence on the USA see Samuel L. Blumenfeld, "Is Public Education Necessary". *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* IV(1977), vol. 1(summer 1977), pp. 108-120, here p. 110-112; Samuel L. Blumenfeld, *Is Public Education Necessary* (Boise: The Paradigm Company, 1985/1989), pp. 158-164; Samuel L. Blumenfeld, *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education* (Boise: The Paradigm Company, 1984/1989)

[4] *War Bismarck Christ? Ein Urteil im Spiegel der Geschichte, Master Theses* (Basel: Freie Evangelisch-Theologische Akademie, 1982), reprinted under the same title Lörrach: Institut für Weltmission und Gemeindebau, 1982)

[5] See the biography *Sophie Charlotte von Sell, Fürst Bismarcks Frau* (Berlin: Trowitsch, 1915)

[6] For a general overview over this so called "Kulturkampf" see Karl Kupitsch, *Kirchengeschichte* V (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986), pp. 51-69 and Ronald J. Ross, "Enforcing the Kulturkampf in the Bismarckian State and the Limits of Coercion in Imperial Germany", *The Journal of Modern History* 56(1983): 456-482. For general characteristics of Prussia see Oswald Hauser, *Vom Wesen des preussischen Staates* (Kiel: F. Hirt, 1962)

[7] See my book on the Freemasons Jochen Neuer, *Die Freimaurer: Die Religion der Mächtigen* (Berneck: Schwengeler, 1991)

[8] Ulrich Höver, *Joseph Goebbels als nationaler Sozialist* (Verlag Bouvier: Bonn 1992)

[9] Ernst Topitsch, *Die Sozialphilosophie Hegels als Heilslehre und Herrschaftsideologie* (München: Piper, 19812); Ernst Topitsch, *Gottwerdung und Revolution*, UTB, (Pullach: Verlag Dokumentation, 1973). On Hegel religious background in Freemasonry and his influence on right und left totalitarianism see also: Jacques D'Hondt, *Verborgene Quellen des Hegelschen Denkens* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 19832) (from the French); Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel und seine Zeit* (Beerlin: Akademie-Verlag, 19842) (from the French); Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Hegel und die Folgen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970); Karl R. Popper, *Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde Band 2* (Tübingen: Francke, 19806) (title of English original: *The Open Society and Its Enemies II*)

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