

# RENEWAL: PHILIPP JAKOB SPENER'S PARALLEL WORD FOR SANCTIFICATION

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This address should really deal with John Wesley's doctrine of holiness, but for me to lecture on that topic at Asbury Theological Seminary would be quite unnecessary (like carrying coals to Newcastle), to say nothing of quite foolhardy (like representing a subject to a group of people, most of whom know more about it than you do). Wanting this address to be neither unnecessary nor foolhardy, I have chosen instead to speak about Philipp Jakob Spener, the patriarch of seventeenth-century Lutheran Pietism. I believe that by doing so I will honor my good friend, Dr. Steven O'Malley, who is being installed today into the John T. Seamands chair of Methodist Holiness History.

As I do so, let me express my congratulations to him and to Asbury Seminary on this wise selection of such an able and faithful professor, and also to affirm the profound satisfaction and honor I feel in being invited to share in this significant occasion.

Spener lived between 1635 and 1705. Although he was separated from John Wesley by a century (he was virtually seventeenth-century and Wesley eighteenth-century), a channel (he was a German and Wesley an Englishman), a confession (he was Lutheran and Wesley Anglican), and a family commitment (he was married and the father of eleven children, while Wesley's short marriage produced no offspring)—yet, they had much in common. Both were ordained clergymen who wanted their people to have a vital personal realization of God's salvation in Christ and both were much concerned with helping to bring renewal to the European state churches of which each was a part.

Spener was in his ninth year as dean of the Lutheran clergy in Frankfurt/Main in 1675 when he published his *Pia Desideria*, his pious wishes for reform that brought him to national attention. This, his most famous work, lamented the cor-

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ruption of his Lutheran church, which was demonstrated by the formalized understanding of the Christian faith accompanied in many cases by debauched living that manifested itself most in drunkenness and lawsuits on the part of the nobility and the laity. Contributing immeasurably to this was the professionalism, scholasticism, and lack of deep faith and personal piety on the part of the large number of clergy.

Spener was optimistic about the future, however. He predicted "better times for the church on earth" and made six concrete proposals that would help to bring them to pass: (1) There should be more extensive use of the word of God among the people (here he promoted small groups for Bible study and prayer); (2) the establishment of the spiritual priesthood in which laity would assume more responsibility for their spiritual lives and those of others; (3) an emphasis on Christianity as a way of life, not just orthodox belief; (4) a minimization of polemical theological debates; (5) a reform of theological education that would send university graduates to their parishes as believing Christians, and (6) a reform of preaching so that "faith and its fruits may be achieved in the hearers to the greatest possible degree."<sup>1</sup> Spener's balanced approach and positive suggestions for renewal of the church won a very supportive reception for his book.<sup>2</sup>

In a 1976 article entitled "Wiedergeburt und Erneuerung, bei Philipp Jakob Spener" (New Birth and Renewal According to Philipp Jakob Spener), Johannes Wallmann, a leading Spener biographer and interpreter in Germany, made the penetrating observation that in the *Pia Desideria*, Spener did not follow Theophil Grossgebauer's earlier promotion of church renewal through a greater stress on church discipline nor did he fully adopt Christian Hoburg's sweeping emphasis on the New Birth. Instead, said Wallmann, Spener promoted the practice of piety, the process of growth in faith, and the striving after Christian perfection—all of which were rooted in the New Birth, but which really belonged to the doctrine of *Erneuerung* (renewal). Renewal was Spener's major concern.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, Wallmann was distancing himself from Prof. Martin Schmidt's thesis that the New Birth was Spener's primary thrust, and thus may have been influenced a bit by his own contrary opinion. Still, he amassed some significant arguments. He found it interesting that in the *Pia Desideria*, his ninety-one-page program for renewing the church, Spener mentioned the New Birth only three times and then somewhat in passing.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, when in 1696 Spener published his well-known sixty-six sermons on the New Birth, only five of these, said Wallmann, dealt with the nature of the New Birth and the vast majority of them dealt with the nature of the new person who should result from the New Birth.<sup>5</sup> Wallmann concluded that while the New Birth was the presumption upon which Spener's 1675 reform program was built, he was really out to improve the life of the church through the renewal or sanctification of individuals.

The point is that Spener seemed to use the words 'renewal' and 'sanctification' interchangeably. Of course, there are more references to *Heiligung* (sanctification) than there are to *Erneuerung* (renewal) in the index of his *Theologische Bedencken*, his major theological work. In his 1691 farewell sermon to his Dresden congregation, Spener stated that the blessings of our salvation are justification, sanctification, and glorification.<sup>6</sup> In the *Pia Desideria* it is plain that one of Spener's main reasons for holding an

optimistic view of the church's future was his contention that the same Holy Spirit who once affected all things among the early Christians "is neither less able nor less active today to accomplish the work of sanctification in us."<sup>7</sup> Unquestionably, the Pietist leader was comfortable with the word 'sanctification' and used it extensively.

Still, a number of times Spener identified sanctification with renewal or even equated the two words. In his writings one finds expressions suggesting that we are not able to exclude the least beginning of sanctification and renewal from the life of this salvation.<sup>8</sup> He could state that renewal is "the greatest part of sanctification; indeed, that is entire sanctification."<sup>9</sup> He mourned that it is "even lamented by God that such words as 'renewal' and 'sanctification' are strange to some teachers of the people."<sup>10</sup> Spener insisted that these were good biblical words. One of his definitions of renewal sounded somewhat like sanctification, when he wrote:

It is actually renewal when a believing Christian, who always stands in God's grace and daily more and more lays evil aside from himself and strives to crucify the old nature in daily repentance and in the contrary, puts on the new nature....<sup>11</sup>

It is most likely that Spener made the identification of sanctification with renewal because he was a Lutheran. The confessional statements of that church, which emerged in the sixteenth century, seem to have made that easy connection. The *Formula of Concord* stated that the word 'regeneration' means "sanctification or renewal which follows the righteousness of faith, as Dr. Luther used the term in his book *On the Councils and the Church*, and elsewhere."<sup>12</sup> In addition to several other references to "renewal and sanctification" together in the *Formula of Concord*, one encounters a summary statement like this: "After the person is justified, the Holy Spirit next renews and sanctifies him, and from this renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works will follow."<sup>13</sup> Thus, it would have been quite natural that Spener, educated theologically in the Lutheran Reform Orthodoxy at Strassburg University near his Alsatian home, would have had little difficulty linking renewal with sanctification or even substituting renewal for sanctification. Indeed, Immanuel Hirsch, a German theologian of our century, found that for Spener faith is received from the Holy Spirit in the New Birth, "which is the foundation for union with God and sanctification or renewal."<sup>14</sup>

So, for the moment conceding that the word 'renewal' was important for Spener and that he used it not only with but sometimes as a substitute for the word 'sanctification', let us consider briefly some of the claims he made for it.

First, Spener saw renewal or sanctification as the continuation of the New Birth or regeneration. For him, three things happen when a person experiences New Birth: faith is ignited in the heart; newborn persons have their sins forgiven, are justified, and are adopted as God's children; and an entirely other and new nature is created in them.<sup>15</sup> Spener's comparison of the New Birth and renewal helps describe what he thought of each. He averred that the New Birth for us is essentially like our physical conception. Just as a child does absolutely nothing about its conception, so the New Birth happens to us. It is "pure unmixed grace," for which we can make no preparation. In the New Birth, the person takes no initiatory steps, although one could pre-

vent its happening. Spener was very clear on this point, asserting, "Although we have it in our hands to be able to reject our New Birth, we do not have the ability to come to it of our own free choice."<sup>16</sup>

In Spener's catechism, which was really to be used as a commentary on Luther's *Small Catechism* and which became the Pietist leader's most widespread work, one finds this succinct summary:

Q. 1028 What follows after the New Birth?

Renewal, so that once a person has received a spiritual life, this always continues in renewal and the still remaining evil is laid aside more and more, together with all bad habits.

Q. 1029 How are the New Birth and Renewal distinguished from one another?

The former is the beginning of the spiritual life, but the latter is its continuation. New Birth is perfect for we are born entirely as God's children. Renewal is imperfect. The New Birth happens all at once, but for renewal one has to work daily. Through the New Birth we attain faith; through renewal we demonstrate it. The New Birth simply happens only through God and his grace; at the same time renewal occurs through the new powers given to people (2 Thess. 1:3).<sup>17</sup>

Spener gladly pointed to Titus 3:5 where we read that "God saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the working of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." Thus as soon as persons are reborn, the Holy Spirit takes residence within them, instantly effecting the renewing process. The New Birth is the initiation of one's spiritual life; renewal is its continuation. Richard Lovelace in his book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* agrees in essence by stating: "The Holy Spirit begins to apply this completed work in the believer's life at regeneration and continues it in a progressively enlarging sphere of renewal in the personality."<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, renewal or sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit but in cooperation with the believer. Whereas believers are, at best, permissive when it comes to receiving the New Birth, they must definitely cooperate in their renewal. Of course, we are not able to renew ourselves through our own powers. It is really God's work in us through the Holy Spirit that accomplishes this, but for the continuation of the renewal process, we as believers must cooperate with the powers sent and imparted to us by the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Commenting on Eph. 4:22, Spener wrote,

The putting off or mortification or weakening of the old person is a work in which God, as well as the individual, does the work involved. In this way renewal is different from New Birth, which is simply God's work, with individuals unable to do even the least. Because, however, they in the New Birth have received a few powers for good, they can and must use these in renewal. Therefore, it means here that the Ephesians, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, must put off the old person.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, in this call to serious human commitment and cooperation with the Holy Spirit for the purpose of our renewal, Spener could ask his auditors and readers to seek the assurance that the Holy Spirit was still active in their lives. They would have sure testimony that this was the case if they still truly accepted Jesus Christ as Lord. They would also know if they were children of God if they were being led by the Spirit of God as Rom. 8:14 says, and if they were following the impulses of the Spirit's leading in obedience. Without clearly defining it, Spener warned people again and again against pleasure and worldliness by which they could lose the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

Thirdly, Spener saw renewal as being of lifelong duration. New Birth, like conception, happens in a moment; spiritual renewal, like the fetus' growth in the mother's womb, is slow and gradual.<sup>22</sup> Actually, to complete the metaphor, Spener taught that the rest of the Christian's life is really the gestation period for the soul and that at physical death, *the* New Birth occurs when the Christian is transferred by God's grace from the kingdom of grace, in which we are now living as possessors of salvation in a limited sense, into the kingdom of glory, where we shall abide forever with God in the attained perfection that we sought but never achieved in this life, where the old nature is still clinging to us.<sup>23</sup>

Here seems to be the point where Spener approached John Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification, but did not quite approximate it. His caution might be construed as being similar to Wesley's exhorting people to entire sanctification and yet refusing to claim "sinless perfection" for them.

Thus, for Spener, physical conception is analogous to the new Birth, and physical growth in the womb is like sanctification or renewal. This sees the Christian life on this earth as a many years' pregnancy until physical death (*the* New Birth) ushers us out of this mortal and sinful existence into the full light of God's glory and imperishable salvation. Our renewal is never complete in this life.

Fourth, Spener taught that the New Birth and renewal differed in intensity. New Birth is far more essential and dramatic. It is like waking the dead. When the Holy Spirit cooperates with us in moving us from weak Christian faith and shabby Christian living to a more vital Christian life, that was somewhat less drastic. It is like healing the sick.<sup>24</sup>

The Pietist patriarch used other analogies to renewal that revealed its less stringent nature. It was like rubbing an old corroded drinking vessel, freeing it from rust and making it constantly brighter.<sup>25</sup> It was like breaking off sprouts from a tree trunk as soon as they appear so that the roots will eventually wither and die.<sup>26</sup> Paul's admonition to the Ephesians in chapter four regarding our putting off the old nature and putting on the new provided another example of renewal. Spener told his Berlin congregation,

New Birth is the beginning of our Christianity; renewal is, therefore, its constant usage. Renewal, accordingly, has two parts: the constant putting off of the evil still remaining within us and the actual so-called renewal or constant growth of good.<sup>27</sup>

Fifth, Spener saw a connection between renewal and suffering. The actual means of renewal are the divine Word and sacraments. A secondary help that God uses, however, to penetrate our minds and to remove hindrances to the divine workings in our lives is "the dear cross." It is a special help in the slaying of our old nature, which sanctification often promotes.<sup>28</sup> Luther, who made suffering one of the seven marks of the church, had struck a similar note, saying,

But when you are condemned, cursed, reviled, slandered, and plagued because of Christ, you are sanctified. It mortifies the old Adam and teaches him patience, humility, gentleness, praise and thanks, and good cheer in suffering. This is what it means to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit and to be renewed to a new life in Christ....<sup>29</sup>

Spener indicated that there is a greater usefulness in suffering than we might think. He intoned Paul's words in 2 Cor. 4:16: "Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day." Suffering can contribute to our renewal.<sup>30</sup>

Now what does all this say to us in 1994? What does it say to pastors, Christian educators, and diaconal ministers regarding their ministerial functions, as well as the Christian lives they and the laity in our congregations are endeavoring to live?

First of all, it says that in our congregations people need to hear doctrinal preaching alongside inspirational preaching. Sermons ought to deal with *didache* as well as *kerygma*. Or, pastors must be intent upon teaching theology. I taught an adult church school class at Trinity United Methodist Church in Wilmette, Illinois, where my wife and I attend. For seven years we looked at such materials as the Upper Room's *Living Selections from Devotional Classics*, Cokesbury's series on Paul and "The Cloud of Witnesses," and the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith—two of the landmark documents in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*. As we discussed Scripture, sin, grace, justification, regeneration, sanctification, and other doctrines of the church, more than once people said to me, "Jim, I've been a Methodist all my life. Why haven't I heard these discussed before?" I say this not because I did this; I know that I am not the only one who has taught these doctrines to lay people. But I am also sure that only a small minority of people in Methodism know what these mean. To be sure, it is more important that they experience them than that they understand them. I suggest, however, that Methodism will be that much a more vital force for God when its people not only experience God's saving grace in Jesus Christ, but can have some help being able to articulate what this actually means for them.

Secondly, it says that renewal comes not out of our own power, but only as we make use of the divine means of grace. Howard Snyder in his book *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* contends that when the church is renewed, "...renewal certainly must spring from or result in a new or renewed experience of God's grace, whatever other features it may have."<sup>31</sup> Spener, at the end of one of his sermons, reminded his people to seek growth and renewal by using the divine means of grace. He wanted them to know that from the Gospel alone and not out of the law comes the inner living power.<sup>32</sup> This is why he never appealed to Christians in his day to be renewed through self-discipline. This was a work of the law and could only lead to

inflated pride and hypocrisy. Instead it was through Bible study, prayer, and faithful attendance upon the Lord's Supper that renewing grace would come.

Thirdly, it says that we ought not to discount suffering as a means God uses to renew us. Recently I heard President Joseph Stole of Moody Bible Institute in a radio broadcast say that the first thing Job did after the three messengers had brought him the news of complete financial and family disaster was to worship God. I had never thought of it that way before. Job said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (1:21)." Something had prepared Job to see that God was in his anguish and that God would do something with it to refine his soul. Oh! we dare not blithely attribute the personal tragedies we or other people face to God, but we can say that God can use this suffering to renew and refresh the soul.

This was driven home to me in 1993 when my wife and I visited Israel. As our tour bus dropped us off in a driving rain at the Garden of Gethsemane, we entered "The Church of All Nations" built over the "Rock of Agony" at which our Lord reputedly prayed that night before his crucifixion. The church is kept in darkness to commemorate our Lord's struggle at night with doing the will of God. What impressed me most, however, is the fact that a fence of thorns surrounds the rock, but on two corners doves are hovering as if to say that, like their Savior, Christians receive grace for renewal even in dark moments of anguish and suffering.

Finally, this says that the church needs to be reminded that renewal is connected with Christian love, that Christians are to be renewed in love as well as in faith, and that they are privileged to be the conduits, the channels through which God's love can flow salvifically to others in a lost and broken world. Spener wrote that "...indeed love is the whole life of the man who has faith and who through his faith is saved, and his fulfillment of the laws of God consists of love."<sup>33</sup> Pietism's extensive social reform institutions stem from Spener's and Francke's concern in this regard.

Dr. O'Malley recounts a wonderful story in his book, *Touched By Godliness*, a delightful treatment of Bishop John Seybert and the Evangelical Association heritage that he and I have in common. Seybert, a truly pious man, was the Francis Asbury of the *Evangelische Gemeinschaft* in the mid-nineteenth century. A bachelor bishop, he too traveled thousands of miles, preached hundreds of sermons, held scores of annual conferences, and helped lead many people to Christ. In Seybert's journal there is this 1846 entry describing how the bishop on a cold winter day encountered a constable hauling away the loom of a weaver who could not meet his debts. Seybert paid the debt and saved the loom for the weaver and his large family. The weaver and his family were converted to Christ and he became the leader of the class organized in that community. Steve O'Malley's words are instructive for us all at this point. He wrote that Seybert "...knew that the Spirit's fruits (Gal. 5:22f.) are what we are by virtue of the new birth. The *fruits* are the attributes of the new nature that we share in Christ."<sup>34</sup>

There is great need for the doctrine of sanctification or renewal to be experienced, preached, and taught by Christians in today's world. It needs all the more to be manifested in loving service to the world.

Nietzsche is supposed to have said that "Christ's followers should look more

redeemed." He meant by that "more joyful." I agree with that. Surely we would also add that "they should appear to be more renewed"—twice-born people who by God's grace are growing to maturity "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

## NOTES

1. Theodore Tappert, ed. and trans., *Pia Desideria* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964) 87-122.
2. K. James Stein, *Philipp Jakob Spener: Pietist Patriarch* (Chicago, IL: Covenant Press, 1964) 102.
3. "Wiedergeburt und Erneuerung bei Philipp Jakob Spener" in *Pietismus und Neuzeit* (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1977), p. 29.
4. *Ibid.*, footnote 50, 17.
5. *Ibid.*, footnote 67, 20.
6. "Christliche Abschieds - Predigt" in *Kleine Geistliche Schriften* (Magdeburg und Leipzig: Gedruckt bei Christian Leberecht Faber, 1741). p. 1364f.
7. *Pia Desideria*, 85.
8. "Christliche Abschieds - Predigt," p. 1367.
9. "Die Andere Wiederholungs Predigt," *Kleine Geistliche Schriften*, p. 863.
10. *Herrn D. Philipp Jakob Speners Theologische Bedencken und andere Briefliche Antworten...* (Halle: in Verlegung des Waysen-Hauses, 1712) III, p. 431. Hereafter referred to as *T.Bed.*
11. *Der hochwichtige Articul von der Wiedergeburt* (Franckfurt am Mayn: In verlegung Johann David Zunners, 1696), p. 951. Hereafter referred to as *Hochwichtige Articul*.
12. Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 542.
13. *Ibid.*, 546.
14. *Geschichte der neuern Evangelische Theologie in Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegung des Europäischen Denkens* (Güterstoh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951) II, p. 141.
15. Spener cited this often. See, e.g., *Hochwichtige Articul*, pp. 149, 150, 156, 187, 222, 223, 939; *T.Bed.*, I, 336.
16. *Hochwichtige Articul*, p. 951.
17. *Einfültige Erklärung der Christlicher Lehr nach der Ordnung des kleinen Catechesmi des teuren Manns Gottes Lutheri*, 1677, reprinted in Erich Beyreuther, ed., *Philipp Jakob Spener Schriften* (Hildesheim. New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 1982), pp. 738-739. Hereafter referred to as *Einfültige Erklärung*.
18. Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 104.
19. "Predigten über Johann Amtds Wahres Christenthum," quoted in Wallmann, "Wiedergeburt und Erneuerung," footnote 104, p. 27.
20. *Hochwichtige Articul*, 967.
21. *Ibid.*, 88-89.
22. *Ibid.*, 977.
23. *Ibid.*, 1041-1042; *Einfültige Erklärung*, 400-403.
24. *Hochwichtige Articul*, 951.
25. *Ibid.*, 976.
26. *Ibid.*, 970.
27. *Ibid.*, 954-955.
28. *Einfültige Erklärung*, 511.
29. "On the Councils and the Church: in Eric W. Gritsch, ed., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) vol. 41, p. 165.
30. *Einfültige Erklärung*, p. 511.



31. Howard Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 274.
32. *Hochwichtige Articul*, 988-989.
33. *Pia Desideria*, 96.
34. J. Steven O'Malley, *Touched By Godliness: Bishop John John Seybert and the Evangelical Heritage* (Granite Publications, 1984), p. 207.

