

WILHELM LOEHE AND THE MISSOURI SYNOD: FORGOTTEN PATERNITY OR LIVING LEGACY?

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The same year that Wilhelm Loehe began his pastorate in Neuendettelsau, over 600 emigrants under the leadership of Martin Stephan departed Germany to establish their Lutheran Zion on the Mississippi. It had been twenty years since Claus Harm's issued his own ninety-five theses provoking a resurgence of Lutheran confessionalism in the face of the Prussian Union.¹ This confessional revival shaped both Loehe and the Missouri-bound Saxons and it would provide common ground for their eventual contact and cooperation even as unresolved issues of church and ministry within nineteenth century Lutheranism² would ultimately lead to a parting of their paths.

While C.F.W. Walther would give the Missouri Synod its theological and ecclesial shape, Loehe's influence was essential to the confessional orientation and the missionary character of the Synod in its early years. It is not without reason that Wilhelm Loehe is hailed as "the father from afar"³ even though leaders of the fledgling synod would come to see him as a prodigal father. Hermann Sasse identifies the rift between Loehe and Walther as "one of the most grievous events in the history of the Lutheran Church in the 19th century."⁴ How did a relationship so full of promise emerge between this Bavarian pastor and his emigrant counterpart? How did Loehe contribute to the founding of the Missouri Synod? What factors contributed to the decline and severance of Loehe's ties with the new American Synod? How did the influence of Loehe continue in the Missouri Synod after 1853? And finally, how does the legacy of Loehe show itself in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod today? These are the questions that I will attempt to take up in this paper.

¹ See Robert C. Schultz, "The European Background" in *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church: Missouri Synod*, edited by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 47-89 and Theodore Tappert, *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3-37.

² For the broader context of this debate, one may see Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekennntnis, Kirche, und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19 Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1952) and Walter C. Conser Jr., *Church and Confession: Conservative Theologians in Germany, England, and America 1815-1866* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), 3-96. Also see Walter Sundberg, "Ministry in Nineteenth-Century Lutheranism" in *Called & Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, edited by Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 77-92.

³ James Schaaf, "Father from Afar: Wilhelm Loehe and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (January-April 1996), 427. Schaaf borrows the phrase "Father from Afar" from a 1958 article on Loehe in the *Lutheran Standard* by Charles Lutz.

⁴ Hermann Sasse, "Ministry and Congregation" in *We Confess the Church*, edited and translated by Norman E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 69

Christian Weber maintains that Loehe's missionary vision stands behind all of his other projects.⁵ Inner and outer mission are always in motion. The church gathered around the apostolic Word is always caring for the baptized so that they are maintained in the unity of the faith while at the same time seeking those who do not confess Christ Jesus. Loehe's soul is stirred by the appeal of Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken in his *Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*. Reading Wyneken's plea while at the home of his former professor, Karl von Raumer in Erlangen late in 1840 would move Loehe to make contact with Wyneken.

F.C.D. Wyneken, two years Loehe's junior was the son of a Lutheran pastor in Hannover. Like Loehe his father had died at an early age. Wyneken would study theology at Goettingen and Halle. It was while at Halle that he came under the influence of Friedrich August Tholuck⁶ and led away from Rationalism toward an understanding of positive Christianity⁷. Not a confessional Lutheran at the time of his ordination in 1837, Wyneken was sent to Baltimore under the auspices of the unionistic State Bible and Mission Society. Arriving in Baltimore early in 1838, Wyneken affiliated with the Pennsylvania Ministerium and is sent as a missionary pastor to Indiana to gather scattered German Protestants into congregations.

Surveying the tremendous spiritual needs among German emigrants on the frontier, Wyneken makes an impassioned appeal to the homeland for aid. Painting a bleak picture of churchless Germans in America who "give reign to their animal drives there without any awe for that which is holy, no longer restrained even outwardly by any discipline"⁸ Wyneken urges faithful Christians to rise up and assist in rescuing their fellow Germans. Lamenting the lack of orthodox pastors, Wyneken notes how many Germans have been snatched from the Lutheran fold by sectarian preachers. He writes of villages that in spiritual desperation "hire" self-made clergy without theological training or ordination. Wyneken relates several instances where he personally encountered such preachers and the harm that they had inflicted on gullible settlers. Carnal living and spiritual apathy have dulled the souls of many. "No preacher comes to rouse them from their earthly thoughts and pursuits, and for a long time the voice of the sweet Gospel has no longer been heard."⁹ Children grow up without baptism and catechism instruction. Worldly concerns crowd out and stifle the desire for heavenly things and "many thousands die away into eternity unprepared and unconsolated."¹⁰ Wyneken challenges his readers: "I

⁵ Christian Weber, "The Future of Loehe's Legacy" *Currents in Theology and Mission* (April 2004), 101. Also see Weber's definitive study of Loehe's missiology, *Missionstheologie bei Wilhelm Loehe: Aufbruch zur Kirche der Zukunft* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus, 1996) and David Radtke, *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament: The Ecclesial Theology of Wilhelm Loehe* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 137-205.

⁶ For an assessment of Tholuck's relationship to the Awakening, see Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 494-504.

⁷ For an account of Wyneken's life and contributions, see David Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 109-115 and Norman J. Threinen, "F.C.D. Wyneken: Motivator for Mission" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (January-April 1996), 19-45.

⁸ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 91-92.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

myself have had to baptize at one time 12 or more children of greatly varying ages, often 10 to 12 years old. But who gives instruction to those who have been baptized? How can the washing of regeneration continue its action, grow and become powerful when preaching or instruction is missing? Who will confirm the children? Who will administer Holy Communion to them afterward? Perhaps their parents of German extraction are themselves heathen, unbaptized; just imagine- *German heathen!*”¹¹

Noting that thousands of German emigrants are teaching the shores of the United States each year, Wyneken appeals to both German and Christian sentiments: “What will become of our brethren in 10 or 20 years if help does not come? To the disgrace of the German name, to the shame of the church, and to the eternal reproach before the Lord a German population that knows nothing of its God and Savior will inhabit the West, and subsequent centuries will point the finger at the people and church which in the midst of plenty in its own house has left its children to perish.”¹²

Loehe published an energetic article in the *Sonntagsblatt* shortly after reading Wyneken’s appeal. Together with the newspapers’ editor, Johann Wucherer, Loehe began collecting funds to assist the ministry among German Lutherans in America. The two would found the Neuendettelsau Society for Home and Foreign Missions. This society would be the sending agency for the *Nothhelfer* or “emergency helpers” who would be instrumental in the formation of the Missouri Synod.

By the time Wyneken wrote his *Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*, his Lutheran convictions and consciousness were becoming more solidly formed even though the congregation that he served in Fort Wayne was one of mixed confession, both Lutheran and Reformed. Before his visit to Germany in 1841, Wyneken was still open to pastors who were either Lutheran or Reformed. In a letter to F. Schmidt, he stated “As a confessional basis the Augsburg Confession or, where the people are Reformed, a Reformed confession should serve.”¹³ His visit to Germany in late 1841 and early 1842 would provide him with an opportunity to meet Loehe. The contact with Loehe deepened Wyneken’s Lutheran instincts. When he returned to Fort Wayne in Wyneken would begin to preach on the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed confessions, leading the Reformed component of his congregation to withdraw and organize a congregation of their own.

Loehe’s literary activities would serve a robust echo Wyneken’s appeal. In response to Loehe’s publicity of the dire needs in America, Adam Ernst and George Burger present themselves as candidates for service on the frontier. Loehe provides training for these two men in a variety of theological and secular subjects. In the summer of 1842 Ernst and Burger are sent to the United States after agreeing to a set of stipulations that will govern their work and affiliations. Only in the event that they come to a territory without a Lutheran pastor, are they to aspire to the ministerial office. They are to serve primarily as teachers in German schools. They vow their allegiance to the Book of Concord, promise

¹¹ Ibid., 96.

¹² Ibid., 97.

¹³ Threienen, 25.

to affiliate only with a genuine Lutheran body, and agree to submit regular reports of their work.

Ernst and Burger arrive in New York and establish contact with Pastor C.H.Stohlman of St.Matthew's Lutheran Church. Stohlman was not optimistic concerning their plan to serve as teachers among the German population either in the Midwest. At Stohlman's urging, the young men journey by canal boat to the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. This, they believed, was still within the bounds of the agreement with Loehe.

When Ernst and Burger arrived in Columbus in the fall of 1842, they enroll in a seminary with a student body of around twenty students.¹⁴ As most of the students were sons of German emigrants, the transition to English was already beginning. Loehe knew of the Columbus seminary from Wyneken who had given him a favorable report.

After learning from Ernst and Burger of their arrival in Columbus, Loehe addresses a letter to the Ohio Synod containing five questions: (1) Can you accept Ernst and Burger as students in your seminary? (2) Is it acceptable to you for us to send more men for this purpose? (3) Does your synod subscribe "quia" or "quantenus" to all the symbolical documents contained in the Book of Concord? (4) In what manner do the synods in America cooperate and work together? (5) Should we send you hymnals, service books, and other similar literature?¹⁵

The question of confessional subscription was uppermost for Loehe. The seminary had a stronger attitude toward the Confessions than did its parent synod. Loehe was satisfied with the response he received and proceeded to direct his energies toward providing monetary support, books and students for the seminary. More men were to follow including a convert Jew, Paul August Baumgart¹⁶ and F. Lochner¹⁷ whom Loehe called his best student as well as Dr. Wilhelm Sihler¹⁸ and August Craemer¹⁹ who come to play prominent roles in the Fort Wayne seminary and the Missouri Synod. The next year, five more men would be sent from Neuendettelsau. Seven more would be sent in 1845 and twenty-two in 1846. Most would eventually become ordained pastors although several would serve in other capacities.

¹⁴ James Schaaf, "Wilhelm Loehe's Relationship to the American Church: A Study in the History of Lutheran Mission" (Thd diss. University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany, 1961), 35.

¹⁵ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶ For the story of Baumgart's life and work, see James Schaaf, "Paul August Baumgart" *Missionary to America: The History of Lutheran Outreach to Americans-Essays and Reports of 1992 Meeting* (St. Louis: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1994), 92-112.

¹⁷ See Otto F. Hattstaedt, "The Life and Works of Pastor Friedrich Lochner" *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (January 1949), 169-174.

¹⁸ See Lewis W. Spitz, Jr., "Professor Wilhelm Sihler: Founding Father of Lutheranism in America and First President of Concordia Theological Seminary" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (April 1999), 83-96.

¹⁹ See Erich Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets* (St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 42-53 and Lawrence Rast, Jr. "Friedrich August Craemer: Faithful Servant in Christ's Church" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (January 2000), 39-60.

Almost from the very beginning, Loehe's men would be drawn into the controversy known as American Lutheranism. American Lutheranism, a movement identified with the General Synod organized in 1820²⁰ and especially its most imminent spokesman, Samuel S. Schmucker sought to shape Lutheran identity with an emphasis on principles held in common with other Protestants. English-speaking Lutherans should acculturate to the world of American Protestantism by shaping the confessional witness contextually. The context, as Schmucker and others saw it, demanded the radical redefinition if not abandonment of elements that were seen as remnants of a lingering Catholicism carried over from Reformation times. In this way, the American Lutherans saw the Reformation as a movement that was ongoing and certainly not complete. Hence there was an antipathy to the confessional theology and liturgical forms recovered in the confessional revival in Germany. American Lutheranism held sway in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Loehe knew of Schmucker and others associated with American Lutheranism. He saw it as an American version of the theology that led to the Prussian Union. Loehe's staunch rejection of the use of English in work among German Americans stems in part, at least, from his fear that linguistic accommodation will lead to doctrinal accommodation. Certainly he sees evidence of this in Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz. The "new measures" adopted by the American Lutherans appalled Loehe as they did Walther.

The conflict between the American Lutherans and the "Old Lutherans" was embodied in the Ohio Synod in the controversy of the distribution formula in the Lord's Supper. The Old Lutherans insisted on the removal of the words "Christ said" ("Christus spricht") from the liturgy as this formula was used in the Prussian Union as a way of providing space for either a Lutheran or Reformed interpretation of the sacrament. The Ohio Synod upheld the use of this formula at their 1845 convention. Loehe was not surprised. He and his men would now look elsewhere. The break with Ohio would also parallel the movement of Loehe's colonies in the Saginaw Valley away from the Michigan Synod.

Twenty-two men gathered in Cleveland on September 13-18, 1845 to draw up a declaration of separation from the Ohio Synod. Eleven of these men had been sent to America by Loehe. The document adopted by the assembly listed several reasons for their departure from the Synod: Ohio's favorable disposition toward unionism, the retention of the problem distribution formula in the Lord's Supper, the refusal to require a vow to the Book of Concord in ordination, the practice of licensing candidates for a specific period of time rather than issuing a call, and the toleration of some Reformed congregations in the membership of the Synod. The conference in Cleveland would lay the foundation for a new synodical body that was marked by complete loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions and a renunciation of unionism. Potential members of this new synod included not only Loehe's men but other pastors who had left the Ohio Synod, the Prussian emigrants under the leadership of J.A.A. Grabau as well as the Saxons from Missouri.

²⁰ For a description of American Lutheranism, see Gustafson, 62-103.

Loehe knew of both the Saxons in Missouri and the Prussians in New York and Wisconsin. In a letter to Ernst in October 1843, Loehe expressed his mistrust of Grabau's hierarchical approach to the governance of the church.²¹ Likewise, Loehe deplored the absolutistic claims made by Martin Stephan. In another letter Loehe wrote to Ernst: "One recognizes that the scattered Saxons in Missouri have been purified and strengthened through the fire of tribulation, and certainly our hope is not in vain that our friends over there may be able to unite completely with them in *one* holy communion. In this the work of the church there will flourish more and more"²²

When Wilhelm Hattstaedt was sent to the United States in 1844, Loehe provided him with a set of questions for the Saxons and directed him to go by way of New Orleans and visit Missouri before taking up his work. Since circumstances surrounding Hattstaedt's call to Michigan prevented him from making the visit, the task was assigned to Ernst who had already had exchanged some correspondence with Walther.

Ernst's positive impressions of the Saxons was gained by his reading of *Der Lutheraner*, a church paper edited by Walther. When Ernst first saw the paper during a visit to Wyneken in Fort Wayne, he is reported to have remarked: "Thank God, there are still real Lutherans in America."²³ Loehe likewise was impressed by the sturdy confessional and churchly nature of the paper. Ernst was encouraged to go to St. Louis for a meeting with Walther. This trip had to be delayed due to the upcoming gathering in Cleveland.

Walther was invited to attend the Cleveland conference but was unable to do so due to illness. Instead Walther drafted a letter to Ernst expressing his support for a new synod and the desire of the Saxons to enter into a body of genuinely Lutheran character. In this letter Walther noted that such a body should be marked by six characteristics: (1) it should be based on the Lutheran Symbols as contained in the Book of Concord and, if possible, the Saxon Visitation Articles; (2) it should eschew all syncretistic activity; (3) it should guard and promote the unity and purity of Lutheran doctrine; (4) it should be a consultative, not a judicial body; (5) it should give the laity rights as well as the clergy; and (6) it should allow each congregation to pass judgment on the synod's decisions.

Those meeting in Cleveland authorized Ernst, Lochner, and Sihler to undertake a trip to St. Louis for a meeting with Walther. In May of 1846, the party arrives in Missouri. The meeting results in a draft of a constitutional proposal drawn up chiefly by Walther but signed by Ernst, Lochner, Sihler, Walther and six of the Saxon pastors. This document became the basis for a more formal constitution adopted in Fort Wayne in July. Some potential synod members could not be present at this meeting it was decided that the constitution would not go into effect for a year in order that it might be studied by those who were absent. The next meeting would be held in Chicago in April, 1847. It was at this meeting that the Missouri Synod was actually established with all but one of Loehe's

²¹ Schaaf, "Wilhelm Loehe's Relation to the American Church", 105.

²² Schaaf, "Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod" *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (May 1972), 58.

²³ Schaaf, "Wilhelm Loehe's Relation to the American Church", 107-108.

men joining the new synod.²⁴ Over half of the ministerium of the newly-organized Missouri Synod was composed of Loehe's men. Schaaf mistakenly asserts that of the Loehe contingent only Craemer was elected to a leadership position in the new Synod.²⁵ In fact, the constituting convention elected Shiler to serve as vice president. While Walther clearly emerged as the theological and organizational leader of the Missouri Synod, Loehe's men exerted considerable influence in the formation of the Synod.

The Fort Wayne seminary predates the founding of the Missouri Synod by a year. With the number of students volunteering for service in America on the increase and ties with Columbus severed, Loehe turned his attention to the establishment of an American seminary that would serve to bring to completion the initial training that he was able to provide the men coming to America. Fort Wayne was chosen as the site for the seminary and Wilhelm Sihler as its president. With Fort Wayne being the locale of Sihler's congregation as well as its proximity to Michigan, it was deemed as logical choice. Land was purchased and the school formally opening with the arrival of seven men from Neuendettelsau along with four theological candidates who were to serve as teachers on October 10, 1846. By 1853 when the relationship between Loehe and the Missouri Synod ends, 82 of his men had to come to the Synod by way of the Fort Wayne seminary.

At the organizing convention in April, 1847 a resolution was passed requesting Loehe to transfer the Fort Wayne seminary to the Synod while at the same time continuing to support the institution with funds and books. After consulting with Wucherer, Loehe replied affirmatively to the request with three provisions: (1) that the seminary serve only the Lutheran Church that accepts the entire Book of Concord; (2) only German will be used in instruction; (3) the seminary will not alter its mission of speedy preparation of pastors for German-speaking congregations.²⁶ While the seminary was now out of his hands, it was perhaps his greatest gifts to the Missouri Synod.

Loehe had reservations about the constitutional foundation of the Synod from the beginning. He was especially uneasy regarding the notion of equal representation of clergy and laity in church governance. This seemed to him to reflect a democratic form of church life more reflective of American principles than the ecclesiology of the New Testament. Such a democratic approach, Loehe feared, would subordinate the pastor to the will of the congregation. But at this early stage, Loehe was unwilling to protest too strongly, believing that over time the weaknesses of this approach would be realized and appropriate adjustments made in the constitution. Schaaf observes that for Loehe, "The desire for unity with confessionally minded Lutherans was stronger than the fear of congregationalism."²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 109.

²⁵ Ibid., 110.

²⁶ Ibid., 114. On the issue of the use of the German language, it is important to remember that little confessionally sound Lutheran literature was available in English. The first English translation of the Book of Concord would not appear until 1851 due to the efforts of Ambrose and Socrates Henkel .

²⁷ Ibid., 118.

In the months after the constituting convention, Loehe expressed his reservations in a number of letters. In a letter to Walther written in September of 1847, Loehe writes: “With heartfelt sorrow we have noted that your synodical constitution, as it now stands, could not completely meet the model of the first congregations and we fear, certainly with complete justification, that the fundamental strong mixing of democratic, independent, congregational principles in your constitution will cause greater damage than the mixing of princes and secular authorities in our homeland. Careful attention to many teachings of the holy apostle about the organization of the church and the *Seelsorge* in general would have taught the dear lay brethren something different. A constitution is a dogmatic adiaphoron, but not a practical one.”²⁸ A few months later, in December, Loehe writes to his German pastoral colleague, L.A. Petri: “One thing is regrettable. When our good people arrive over there and breathe the American air they become imbued with democracy and one hears with amazement how independent and congregational they think about church organization. They are in danger of forgetting the high, divine honor of their office and becoming slaves to their congregations.”²⁹ These letters point to a conflict that would emerge in the coming years and ultimately lead to a rift between Loehe and the Synod that he had helped to father.

Casting shadows over the Synod’s organizing convention in 1847 were two factors. First, there was the fresh and painful memory of the Stephan debacle and the spiritual anguish that it had inflicted among the Perry county colonists, even to the point of creating doubt as to whether they were still members of the *una sancta*.³⁰ Then there was Pastor J.A.A. Grabau³¹ and his authoritarian defense of the pastoral office. Walther had come into conflict with Grabau as early as 1840 at the time the Prussian pastor had published his *Hirtenbrief*.

The two groups had experienced opposite threats. For Walther and the Saxons, it was the threat of abused episcopal authority in the hierarchical attitude of Stephan. For Grabau, it was the threat of conventicles that would circumvent the ministerial office.³² There was heated literary exchange between the two men, complicated by the unwillingness of the Missouri party to recognize excommunications enacted by Buffalo pastors unjustly to the Missourian’s point of view.

Loehe’s attempt to mediate this dispute earned him the disfavor of both groups. Pointing out what he believed to be errors in both the approaches of Grabau and Walther, Loehe urged each of the parties to something of a truce, leaving the disputed issues as “open

²⁸ Schaaf, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod”, 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁰ See Walter Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri 1839-1841* (St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 411-534.

³¹ See Alfred H. Ewald, “From a German Jail: Who Has Authority in the Church?” in *Church Roots: Stories of Nine Immigrant Groups That Became The American Lutheran Church*, edited by Charles P. Lutz (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 41-59.

³² For an account of the early relationship of Grabau and the Saxons, see William Cwirla, “Grabau and the Saxon Pastors: The Doctrine of the Holy Ministry 1840-1845” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (Summer 1995), 84-99. For a spirited defense of Grabau, see Lowell C. Green, “Grabau and Walther: Theocentric versus Antropocentric Understanding of Church and Ministry” *Logia* (Eastertide 1996), 25-40.

questions” until they could be resolved in an amicable manner and in such a way achieve reconciliation.

The debate was not resolved but continued to simmer. At the 1850 convention, the Missouri Synod requested Walther to prepare a document clearly stating the Synod’s position on church and ministry. That same convention petitioned Loehe to visit the States in order to inspect the field cultivated by his labor and most importantly, to meet with Walther and his associates to discuss the questions of church and ministry. Due to circumstances in Bavaria, Loehe declined this invitation. Walther and Wyneken were deputized by the Synod to travel to Neudendettelsau to meet with Loehe.

The two men traveled to Germany where Walther spent more than a month using the library at Erlangen to examine the writings of the old Lutheran dogmaticians on church and ministry in preparation for the book, *Kirche und Amt*. In October and November, 1851, Walther and Wyneken are guests in Loehe’s parsonage for extended discussion of both the situation of Lutherans in America and the debated questions surrounding church and ministry. Upon their arrival at Neuendettelsau, Walther noted how positively he and Wyneken were received: “Mindful of the crucial nature of this visit, as to its success or failure, we stepped into the Neuendettelsau parsonage with anxious hearts. But the cordiality, candor, and uprightness with which Pastor Loehe greeted us banished all uneasiness from our hearts.”³³

No minutes or official reports were submitted from these conferences but it appears that the meetings were successful judging from the reports made both by Loehe and his visitors. Just prior to departing Germany, Walther wrote a letter of thanks to Loehe stating “I can and must confess to you that the unhappy prejudices with which I entered your house have completely dissipated; that I am taking with me a heartfelt trust in your fidelity to our dear Lutheran Church, and the strongest conviction of the unity of the spirit in which we Lutherans in North America stand with you...I have seen how precious the welfare of our Church, which is largely a plant of your faithful care, lies to your heart, therefore, I do not have to beg you to do all your conscience will permit, that our orphan church in America may ever be able to extol her closest unity with you before the whole world.”³⁴ Upon his return to the States, Walther praises Loehe in the May 25, 1852 issue of *Der Lutheraner*: “We may assure our dear readers that a reconciliation in the truth and in love has by the grace of God been attained which is of far greater value than one which gets its guarantee from a subscription to certain strictly formulated theses, attained through insistent demands.”³⁵

Loehe likewise gave a positive evaluation to the meetings. He lauds the fraternal love and goodwill expressed by his Missouri visitors: “Such a spirit requires no haste to become one in formulas and theses. Hand in hand they go to the school of the Holy Spirit, where they see over the doorway the inscription: ‘the longer, the more love; the longer, the

³³ Erich Heintzen, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod, 1841-1853” (Phd. Diss. University of Illinois-Urbana, 1964), 201.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

greater unity and faithfulness.”³⁶ Loehe extols the progress made: “We do have a common fundamental concept of the Church; we are one in the acknowledgement of a divinely-instituted pastoral office; the practice of our American brethren ... is known to us and recognized by us as altogether good and proper; so that we joyfully desire to, and shall send our students to them and none other. We repeatedly found ourselves acknowledging to each other that we are fundamentally one.”³⁷ Loehe also includes a reproof of Grabau’s reckless handling of excommunication and rebukes his harsh words against the Missourians. Loehe adds that he renders this judgment against Grabau on his own accord and not at the prompting of his guests.

Neither Walther or Loehe thought that all disputed points had been resolved. Loehe lists four points he believes his American counterparts need to address: (1) The relation of the invisible church to the visible, the necessity of a living expression and form of the invisible church to the visible; (2) The God-pleasing connection of the individual congregation with the whole church, the presentation of the doctrine of the body and its members in the pilgrim church; (3) The difference between Law and apostolic institution, and the full recognition of the latter for guidance of the visible church; (4) The proper recognition of the progress and victory of the Lutheran Church in the Pietistic and related controversies of the previous centuries.³⁸ In this same article, Loehe declares his intention with the Missouri Synod but reserves for himself certain independence for future activity in the States.

The positive sentiments expressed by Walther and Loehe would be short-lived. The appearance of *Neue Aphorismen* in 1851 and Walther’s *Kirche und Amt* the following year would painfully demonstrate that the earlier dispute had not been solved. The two key points that led a fracture had to do with the nature of the church and the relationship between congregation and office³⁹.

In the preface to his *Neue Aphorismen* of 1851, Loehe notes that his position on church and ministry has been sharpened and clarified since he first published his *Aphorismen* in 1849. Loehe now revisits and elucidates themes he had set forth in 1849.

Walther and Loehe both used the conceptuality of visibility and invisibility in their discussions of the church. Loehe used the analogy of body and soul: “The soul is the life of the body; the invisible church is the soul of the visible, its corporeality ... Only in the visible church lies the possibility to perceive and feel community; and the communion of saints proves its presence to its members only through the visible churchly presence. Also the invisible Church finds its completeness here on earth only by virtue of the visible church”.⁴⁰ Walther, on the other hand, asserts that the church is essentially invisible. Thus in Thesis V of his *Church and Ministry*, he asserts: “Though the true church in the

³⁶ Ibid., 207.

³⁷ Ibid., 207.

³⁸ Ibid., 207-208.

³⁹ For an analysis of the differences between Walther and Loehe on the doctrine of the ministry, see Thomas Winger, “The Relationship of Wilhelm Loehe to C.F.W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the Debate Concerning Church and Office” *Lutheran Theological Journal* (Fall/Winter 1994), 107-132.

⁴⁰ GW V/1:527.

proper sense of the term is essentially (according to its true nature) invisible, its existence can nevertheless be definitely recognized, namely, by the marks of the pure preaching of God's Word and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution."⁴¹ For Loehe, the invisible church is made known only through the visible church. For Walther, the visible church conceals the invisible church which is known only by its "marks", the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. Loehe worried that Walther made of the church a "Platonic Republic" to use the words of Melancthon while Walther accused Loehe of "Romanizing tendencies" for his insistence of a particular institutional form for the church.

Tied up with the debate over the visibility/invisibility of the church was the question of office. Again both Loehe and Walther confessed that the office of the ministry is not an arbitrary human arrangement but a divine office, distinct from the royal priesthood of believers. The controversy rather had to do with other, which comes first- church or ministry. Walther answered in Thesis VI that "the ministry of the Word is conferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call, which God Himself has prescribed."⁴² For Loehe this sounded perilously close to Schleiermacher's description of all ecclesiastical power "derived ultimately" from the congregation.⁴³ Loehe instead argues that Christ Himself is the first bearer of the apostolic office (Hebrews 3:1) and that He bestows the office to selected apostles who then proclaim His Word which creates a congregation of hearers.⁴⁴

Walther and Loehe view ordination differently. A concise presentation of Walther's view is given in Thesis VI of his *Church and Ministry*: "The ordination of the called (persons) with laying on of hands is not a divine institution but merely an ecclesiastical rite

⁴¹ C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, translated by J.T.Mueller (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 20. For a helpful study of Walther's theological method in *Church and Ministry*, see Norman E. Nagel, "The Doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry in the Confessions and in Walther's *Kirche and Amt*" *Concordia Journal* (October 1989), 423-446.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴³ Friederich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, translated by J.S.Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1956), 667.

⁴⁴ Loehe writes: "One could reject the first part of the question, by saying that the congregation is brought into existence by the Word regardless who proclaims it (i.e. from either an ordained or unordained person). However, if one considers the order which God followed and revealed, then it was like this: Christ is the great Apostle of His Father (Heb.3:1). He is not only the cause and substance but also the first bearer of the office. In Him the Word and Office are united. From His Word and Work arose the first congregation; from this congregation in turn He chose His apostles and entrusted them with His Word both before and after His resurrection. To them, especially after His resurrection, He spoke the words of John 20:21 and Matthew 28:16 (The Great Commission). On the basis of this development, the twofold question may be answered as follows: Just as Adam was not taken from Eve, but Eve from Adam, so the Lord, the Apostle of His Father, is not of the congregation but from God (Luke 3:38), and the congregation from Him, thus from the office. Just as Adam's children came not from him as Eve did, but were born of and through Eve, so the following generation of office bearers come always from Him; though from and through the congregation. The congregation, therefore, in its first beginnings would be from the office, because it came from Christ; thereafter, the office would not come the congregation, but from Christ. But the office would take office-bearers from the midst of the congregation and through its service. Thereby that which belongs to Christ order would be protected, without denying to the Word proclaimed outside the office its power and efficacy. The discussion is entirely of Christ's order" –GW V/1:547-548 (translation from Heintzen, "Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod", 213.

(*Ordnung*) established by the apostles; it is no more than a solemn public confirmation of the call.”⁴⁵ Loehe maintained in his *Neue Aporismen* that “this setting apart and conferral of both office and the grace and authority needed for it is called ordination, and although they are never lacking, the essence of ordination does not consist in them; on the contrary, its essence is the conferral of office, authority, and grace of office. The gifts for the holy office can also be purified, lifted up, strengthened, and increased through ordination, but this is something accidental rather than something necessary, and what the Lord gives the called servant in ordination is something that has already been said”⁴⁶

The visit of Grabau and Heinrich von Rohr to Germany in 1853 would accelerate the rift between Loehe and Walther. The Buffalo leaders sought to obtain *Gutachen* from various theologians in Germany that would support them in their struggle against the Missouri Synod. A conference in Leipzig in September 1853 criticized Missouri for accepting excommunicated members from the Buffalo Synod while noting that both synods have gone too far in opposite directions over ordination.⁴⁷ Another pastoral conference in Fuerth also attended by Loehe attempted to mediate between the two sides. Loehe had an amicable meeting with Grabau in which he expressed sympathy for much of his teaching on the ministry while urging moderation of expression. Grabau like Loehe was willing to concede that the exact nature of the issues of church and ministry were “open questions.”⁴⁸

Coupled with the disputed theological issues of church and office, the friction that had developed in Saginaw would lead to the break between Loehe and Walther. In addition to the four colonies Loehe had established in Michigan, he established a seminary in Saginaw in 1852. The Michigan seminary, unlike the Fort Wayne institution, was not handed over to the Missouri Synod. The director of the seminary, Georg Grossmann elected not to affiliate with the Missouri Synod even though he was a member of Holy Cross congregation. Grossmann was involved in a dispute with another Loehe man, Ottomar Cloeter who was the pastor at Holy Cross on the doctrine of church and ministry.⁴⁹ There were also tensions surrounding the last of the Loehe colonies established in Michigan, Frankenhiif, under the leadership of Pastor Johannes Deindoerfer who remained sympathetic to Loehe’s position on church and ministry. James Schaaf observes “The actual incidents in the Michigan colonies which led to the break with Missouri are shrouded in silence; the participants were loath to discuss the painful details and contented themselves with presenting generalities. Apparently no one single item led to the decision to leave Michigan; the final break was a result of hard feelings and dissatisfaction which had been building for years.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Walther, 22.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Loehe, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Klas Ganzert (Neuendeteelsau: Freimund, 1954) V/1:545.

⁴⁷ Schaaf, “Wilhelm Loehe’s Relation to the American Church”, 157.

⁴⁸ See Schaaf, “Wilhelm Loehe’s Relation to the American Church”, 159.

⁴⁹ For the details of this dispute, see Schaaf, “Wilhelm Loehe’s Relation to the American Church”, 168.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

The break came in the summer of 1853. Grossmann and Deindorfer decided to relocate in Iowa. Loehe sends a letter to F. Sievers bordered in black bidding farewell but also rebuking the Missourians for what Loehe identified as their “papistical territorialism.”⁵¹

The remaining nineteen years of Loehe’s life will be largely devoted to work in Germany. He will continue to send men to Iowa but the Iowa Synod will develop, in large part, independent of Loehe.⁵² There will be some occasional contact between the Missourians and their former mentor. For example, Johann Streckfuss wrote Loehe saying that he did not wish to be counted among his ungrateful pupils.⁵³ Sievers and Ernst are among those who remain on amicable terms with Loehe. Friedrich Wyneken’s son, H.C. Wyneken took an extended trip to Germany in 1869-1870. In his diary of June 23, 1869, he writes of his visit with the aging Pastor Loehe: “I will not forget how he greeted me with a warm handshake and a sweet-melancholy smile, after having read my name on Mr. Volck’s card. And my heart ached when he said: ‘Yes, there is friendship between me and your father, which seems to have been forgotten, though.’ My silly heart’s emotion only allowed me to say ‘No, not at all.’ I have retained my immense love and respect for this man from the very first moment I saw him.”⁵⁴

Loehe’s eschatological speculations, his teaching on ordination, his opinions on certain liturgical practices such as confirmation and his developmental approach to the Lutheran Confessions⁵⁵ will draw fire from the Missourians in the remaining two decades of his life. When Loehe dies in 1872, his death is announced in the February 15 issue of *Der Lutheraner* with little comment: “From *Lutherische Zeitung* we learned the shocking news that Pastor Loehe of Neuendettelsau, ‘after a brief illness’ died at five forty-five o’clock on the evening of January second.”⁵⁶

The significance of Loehe’s work was often overlooked in the first hundred years of the Missouri Synod’s history. Walther Baepler’s *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* gives a positive but scant treatment of Loehe’s role in the formative stage of the Missouri Synod’s life⁵⁷. The few references to Loehe in Franz Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* are all negative in identifying him as one given to

⁵¹ Heintzen, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod”, 233.

⁵² Todd Nichol observes that “The Iowa Synod, as its history makes clear, learned much at the knee of Wilhelm Loehe, but not his doctrine of the ministry”-Todd Nichol, “Wilhelm Loehe, the Iowa Synod and the Ordained Ministry” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Spring 1990), 24.

⁵³ Heintzen, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod”, 237.

⁵⁴ Heinrich Christian Wyneken, *A Journal of Travels in Germany 1869-1870*, translated by Erika Bullman Flores (privately printed, 1999), 57.

⁵⁵ On this issue, see Charles Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity* (St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 119-130. Walther states the classic position of the Missouri Synod in his 1858 convention essay, “Why Should the Confessions of Our Church Be Subscribed to Unconditionally Rather Than Conditionally by Those Who Wish to Become Ministers of the Church?” in *Essays for the Church* –Volume I (1857-1879), edited by August Suelflow (St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992). In this essay, Walther observes that Loehe espouses a conditional form of subscription (23).

⁵⁶ Heintzen, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod”, Preface.

⁵⁷ Walter Baepler, *A Century of Grace: Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 65-74.

“Romanizing tendencies”⁵⁸ thus echoing commentary often made in *Lehre und Wehre* in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Only in the 1950s and 60’s does a more appreciative picture of Loehe begin to emerge in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. This may, in part, come from the influence of Hermann Sasse. Sasse himself came to a Lutheran confessional position through his reading of Loehe’s *Three Books About the Church* while doing graduate studies at Hartford Seminary in 1925-26. Numerous of Sasse’s essays make positive use of Loehe⁵⁹. In a 1949, Sasse wrote an article entitled “Walther and Loehe: On the Church”⁶⁰ in which he argues that Walther and Loehe shared much more in common than is often realized and each failed to apply his own principles in relation to the other.

In 1964, Erich Heintzen authored a Phd dissertation for the University of Illinois on “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod 1841-1853.” Heintzen concludes his dissertation with Walther’s tribute to Loehe in 1852: “Next to God, it is only Pastor Loehe to whom our Synod is indebted for its happy beginning and rapid growth in which it rejoices; it may well honor him as its spiritual father. It would fill the pages of an entire book to recount even briefly what for many years this man, with tireless zeal and in the noblest unselfish spirit, has done for our Lutheran Church and our Synod in particular.⁶¹” Then, significantly, Heintzen writes “These words, it is true, were written when the romance between Loehe and the Synod, though threatened, was still in bloom. After it faded, such acknowledgements became noticeably restrained, and Loehe gradually forgotten. The tribute, however, still remains what it was. Like any monument, though largely ignored, it stands for all to see if they will but look.”⁶²

A condensed and popular version of Heintzen’s dissertation appeared in print in 1973 as *Love Leaves Home: Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod*. When Concordia Theological Seminary celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1971, an anniversary of its theological journal, *The Springfielder* prominently featured the legacy of Loehe⁶³. Other popular works such as Richard Stuckwisch’s *Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Loehe: Portrait of a Confessional Lutheran Missiologist* published by Concordia Theological Seminary Printshop in 1993 and A.M. Bickel’s *Our Forgotten Founding Father* served to accent Loehe’s contributions to the Missouri Synod. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod’s Concordia Publishing House published David Ratke’s *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament: The Ecclesial Theology of Wilhelm Loehe* in 2001.

⁵⁸ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume III, translated by Walter W.F. Albrecht (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 447-449.

⁵⁹ See Hermann Sasse, *The Lonely Way* (Volumes I-II), translated by Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

⁶⁰ Hermann Sasse, “Walther and Loehe: On The Church” *Springfielder* (December 1971), 176-182. A fresh translation by Norman Nagel appeared in Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Church* (St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 69-83 under the title “Ministry and Congregation.”

⁶¹ Heintzen, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod”, 249.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 249.

⁶³ This issue contains the above-mentioned article by Hermann Sasse as well as contributions by Max Loehe and F.W.Kantzenbach.

While there seem to be some parallels in the thinking of Arthur Carl Piepkorn to Loehe especially in relationship to ecclesiology and the Lord's Supper, as far as I can tell, Piepkorn never produced any published essays invoking Loehe. However, a number of Piepkorn's students would go on to write on Loehe. In 1954, John Tietjen would submit an STM thesis to Union Seminary on "The Ecclesiology of Wilhelm Loehe." Walter Bouman wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The Unity of the Church in Nineteenth Century Lutheran" for Edmund Schlink at Heidelberg devoting a significant portion of this project to Loehe. Most significantly, Kenneth F. Korby authored his dissertation on "Theology of Pastoral Care in Wilhelm Loehe with Special Attention to the Function of Liturgy and the Laity" at Concordia Seminary in Exile in 1976.

Korby, a professor for many years at Valparaiso University and then as an adjunct professor for Concordia Theological Seminary stimulated a renewed interest in Loehe. His instruction of future deaconesses at Valparaiso connected them with the diaconal tradition of Neuendettelsau. As an adjunct professor at Fort Wayne and frequent conference lecturer in the 1980's and 90's, Korby challenged stereotypical renderings of Loehe and presented Loehe as a model for pastoral theology and mission in contrast to the therapeutic approaches of pastoral counseling and "church growth" paradigms for mission that were becoming increasingly popular in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Among other things, Korby urged a recovery of the practice of private confession and absolution as the seat of pastoral care⁶⁴

In the early years, Loehe was a source of abiding influence on the liturgical life of the Synod. His *Agenda* of 1844, dedicated to Wyneken, would serve to shape liturgical practice in the frontier congregations until the adoption of the *Saxon Agenda* of 1856. The practice of every Sunday communion preceded by private confession in Frankenmuth and the surrounding area would continue for several decades. What Lochner learned from Loehe in the way of liturgics, he transmitted to his students at Springfield and published in his book, *Der Hauptgottesdienst der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* in 1895. This book shows signs of Loehe's historical and confessional appreciation of the liturgy. It remained in print until 1935 and was used as a text in liturgics at both seminaries into the twentieth century.

Loehe's imprint will also be seen in the Missouri Synod's new hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book* and its accompanying *Agenda* to be released in the autumn of 2006. Not only is Loehe's "heavenly birthday" (January 2) included on the calendar of commemorations, but the hymn that he wrote less than a year before his death, "Wide Open Stands the Gates Adorned with Pearl" will find its place in an American Lutheran hymnal for the first time. The suggestions for daily prayer from Loehe's *Seed Grains* will be included as it is hoped that new book will be a prayer book for the Christian home as well as a book

⁶⁴ See Kenneth F. Korby, *Theology of Pastoral Care in Wilhelm Loehe with Special Attention to the Function of Liturgy and the Laity* (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Printshop, n.d.), 236-272 and Kenneth F. Korby, "Loehe's *Seelsorge* for his Fellow Lutherans in America" *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (November 1972), 227-246. For Loehe's influence in the young Missouri Synod in regard to the practice of private confession and absolution, see Fred Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 347-351.

for corporate worship. Loehe's influence is especially apparent in the Agenda as the introduction lays out an approach to pastoral care that is centered in confession/absolution and framed by the liturgy. Loehe's liturgical formula for anointing the sick, that provoked both Bavarian and Missourian reaction in the nineteenth century, has found its way into the new LCMS Agenda.

While the appreciation of Wilhelm Loehe's legacy is far from universal in either the ELCA or the LCMS, I am grateful to be on the faculty of a seminary that has its origins and its present existence in the liturgical and missional vision of this pastor from Neuendettelsau. I trust that the International Loehe Society will also serve to strengthen a discerning appreciation of its "father from afar" in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

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