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"Triumph Of Truth"

*A footnote to the History of Concordia Theological Seminary,
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SOME MEN CLIMB mountains. Other men move mountains! In the early days of the assault on Mt. Everest, back in the 20's, one of the foremost climbers and challengers of earth's loftiest peak—29,000 feet plus!—was an Englishman by the name of Mallory. He perished high on the mountain, within about a thousand feet of the summit. Observers below, watching the progress of Mallory and Irvine, his climbing partner, lost sight of the pair when cloud cover intervened. It was the last contact. When the climbers failed to return, they were presumed lost, apparent victims of the stupendous odds—icy slopes, dizzying height, intense cold, incredibly strong winds, all of which safeguard Mt. Everest's lofty isolation. The radio and wire report to the world was short, terse. Included were the epigrammatic words: "When last seen, they were going strong for the top."

Friedrich Brunn was not a mountain climber, but a man who moved mountains. The story of his remarkable life and service in the church is briefly and interestingly told by his grandson, Rev. August F. Brunn, who now lives in retirement at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. *The Triumph of Truth*, published during Epiphany, 1971, is a translation and adaptation from a German version, *Zum Gedenken an Pfarrer Friedrich Brunn*, compiled by a great granddaughter, Mrs. Gertrud Eikmeier Rücker. Printed in mimeograph form this memorial booklet marked the 150th birthday observance of Friedrich Brunn, in 1969, at Steeden (Saxony), Germany.

"Triumph of Truth" is a fitting title. During the first part of the 19th century, bitter religious struggles rent Europe, especially Germany, the heartland of the Reformation. At this time many of our forebears, including the Saxon band or group that settled around Perry County and St. Louis, Missouri, emigrated to America, to escape oppression and religious disintegration. But . . .

"Friedrich Brunn was among those who stayed to fight it out in the homeland. He also prepared and sent more than 200 young men to America, to become pastors of some of the many new congregations formed by immigrant Germans, sorely in need of spiritual leaders. They completed their studies in the American Seminaries. The hope was to provide, even in this distant land, the purity of biblical and Christ-centered teaching for which so many, even among them, had fought in the home country under the pressure of rationalism. . . . History repeats itself. But it need not repeat its mistakes." (p. 3)

Brunn's "triumph of truth" followed the same pattern as Luther's. It was first a personal, deeply spiritual triumph of faith,

then one which affected the church widely, intensively and extensively. Humanly speaking there was every reason why Friedrich Brunn should have continued in the rationalistic steps of his father, court pastor or chaplain at Castle Schaumburg, about 25 miles north of Wiesbaden on the Lahn, a tributary of the Rhine. Like many another "advanced" thinker of his day Brunn's father was a firm advocate and follower of the whole Kant-Schleiermacher theologizing method, which put great emphasis on personal religious experience and undercut Biblical faith as outmoded. Through a roommate at school in Leipzig, however, young Friedrich Brunn was won back to a Biblically based loyalty to Christ. It marked a turning point in his life, effected only after considerable *Sturm und Drang*.

The first years of his ministry (as assistant, first of all, to his father) were fraught with deep inner soul struggle, as he strove, with the help of the Holy Spirit through study of the Scriptures, to overcome the clash between the rationalistic theology of the day and the Biblical faith which he had learned to value. Finally he fought through to a clear-cut, forthright, open defense of Scripture's truth.

The Runkel-Steeden area was where Brunn first really got his initiation into parish life and the opportunity for building a spiritually alive congregation. Competition from pietistic sects, the clash between Reformed and Lutheran views on the Sacrament, and intense opposition from the state or territorial church were all obstacles that he had to surmount personally, along with his congregation. These families stood by him, especially the people of Steeden who had "come alive" through his inspired Scriptural preaching and teaching. A real test—because it was a theological monkey on their backs!—was the repudiation of the so-called (and infamous) Church Union of 1817, which was to unite the Reformed and Lutheran Churches in Germany. Regarding it as a terrible compromise document, in large part responsible for the breakdown of evangelical preaching, Brunn and his little flock struck out bravely for faithful, Confessional Lutheran theology and practice. On July 6, 1846, 32 families from the Steeden area ventured forth with Brunn to bolt from the Saxon state church and its repressive control. Repercussions followed immediately, almost engulfing him and his little band. One of his chief counselors, who comforted him greatly during this trying period, was Wilhelm Loehle, the great friend of Lutheran missions, from Neuendettelsau, Germany. Eventually the political upheavals at this same time, in the early part of 1848, worked a reprieve in the arena of religious freedom as well. It was like a miracle sent from God. In short order, Brunn, who had been forced to leave Steeden under threat of governmental penalties, was back once again with his congregation, this time to stay.

A new church building was promptly built by the congregation which now stood free and independent of the state. It was a thriving enterprise. From his post in Steeden, Brunn worked tirelessly, too, for genuinely Lutheran theology and practice in other congregations and districts throughout Germany, wherever opportunity beckoned.

Through a continuing correspondence and personal visitation with like-minded pastors and people everywhere, Brunn extended widely the idea of truly Lutheran "free" churches.

Simultaneously came Brunn's contacts with Lutherans in America. Pastor Keyl, of Perry County, Missouri, actually was the first to write, sending him, in 1848, a letter of brotherly concern and comfort in connection with Brunn's courageous stand against governmental pressures. So began his relation with "Missouri." In 1860 he met Dr. C. F. W. Walther, who had gone to Germany to enlist Loche's help in recruiting pastors for America, and who then also paid a visit to Steeden for the same purpose.

The conference with Walther led Brunn to found his famous "Proseminary," or preparatory school, at Steeden. If ever there was a one-man effort, started and grounded on faith, this was it. There was no financial help, or even promise of it, from "Missouri" or anyone else, to get the institution off the ground. Brunn simply "beat the bushes" himself for the first contingent of students. The original seven lived with his family, in the parsonage, and he launched his first classes of instruction in the church building in 1861. Besides general subjects, there were also special catechetical training and instruction in Latin. It was a curriculum planned for proficiency in reading the Symbolical books of the Lutheran church. The students were expected to complete their seminary training in America, either at St. Louis or Springfield, usually with additional preparatory work at Ft. Wayne.

By 1865 this one-man project had already grown to such proportions in size of student body that "Missouri" sent financial help for the erection of an educational wing at the Steeden church. Eventually other instructors assisted Brunn, among them, for a time, Pastor Henry Wyneken, son of Friedrich Wyneken, one of the founding fathers of the Missouri Synod. Later, after his stint at Steeden, Henry Wyneken, who had been born in the United States, returned to serve various parishes and ultimately became a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, 1876-1890.

"Graduates" issued forth from Steeden until 1886, almost all of the more than 200 going to America to complete their theological training and enter the Missouri Synod's ministry. *The Triumph of Truth* reads like the "Who's Who" of "Missouri," names of men who, under God, left an indelible imprint on the life and destiny of the Missouri Synod. Sons, and sons' sons, followed in the train of the intrepid band "produced in Steeden." Indeed, it would be difficult to calculate exactly the total number—pastors, professors, teachers—stemming from this shoestring effort. Not least among the "graduates" of Brunn's school was Friedrich Pfothenauer, for years the esteemed president of the Missouri Synod. One of Brunn's own grandsons, Arthur Brunn, served as vice-president of synod during World War II days. August F. Brunn, author of *The Triumph of Truth*, was an English District vice-president for nearly twenty years. It was a grateful C. F. W. Walther who acknowledged in behalf of the

synod that the young men from Steeden were a truly selfless, dedicated, sincere corps of workers, whose spirit and Confessional loyalty bound them immediately and closely to "Missouri" in the new land of their adoption.

Of one mind and heart were these Lutheran Christians on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Both had to bear the unpleasant accusations of having caused fragmentation and division in the church by their insistence on purity of doctrine and teaching. "But," in Brunn's words, "the issue is not whether there are quarrels and separations." It was, as Brunn expressed it, remarkably simple and basic:

If all Christians in the world were united in faith and doctrine and there were no sin, no error, no false teaching, this would be beautiful indeed. But this would be a dream and pure phantasy. Sin and error are here to stay, and will increase until the end of the world, so that when Christ comes again he will hardly find any true faith on earth. So we ask: if sin and error are here, isn't it better to face and combat them, than to cover and hide them for the sake of peace? . . . There is no blessing in (compromise), for indifference to false doctrine and lack of healthy struggle against false teaching stunts the heart and conscience, undermining loyalty to the Word of God and gnawing away as a cancer at the heart of the Church. The battles for the truth of God are verily not a sign of death and defeat in the church, but of life and growth! Where there is no struggle, there is no life. (p. 51f.)

Brunn realized, of course, that there was no blessing in separation either *per se*. Thus, from Steeden, he reached out persistently for fellowship and unity with like-minded Lutheran Christians. Fellowship with the Lutherans of the Breslau synod came into reality, and eventually Brunn was able to expand the idea of independent Lutheran congregations in Saxony also. This led, almost a century ago now, to the founding of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (The Lutheran Free Church.)

In the fall of 1970, at Steeden, a historic pastoral conference convened (at which the undersigned was privileged to be present), under the banner of "Lutherisches Bekenntnis vor 100 Jahren und Heute." (Lutheran Witness 100 Years Ago and Today) Assembled at Steeden were pastors from the Lutheran Free Church, the Breslau Synod (Evangelisch-lutherische (altluth.) Kirche), and the Independent Lutheran Churches (Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche), in an effort to lay the groundwork and formulate theses for fashioning their already existing fellowship into one body under one name, consummated now, as of October, 1971, in Wittingen-Hannover.

It was fitting that this meeting take place at Steeden, where over a century before Pastor Brunn had fought a valiant battle for purity and integrity in Lutheran theology and practice. This was to be the starting point from which all efforts towards expanded fellowship and church unity were to be sought. (Little wonder, too, that

the 1970 conference expressed grief and dismay over "Missouri's" fellowship with the American Lutheran Church on a basis less than this!) It was in pursuit of unity that Brunn had edited a church paper throughout the years of his ministry. Towards that same end he produced and finally published his large *Exposition of Luther's Catechism*. It was this work, along with his doctrinal articles in his church journal, which played a large role in building a solid foundation for the Lutheran free churches in Germany, an influence which extended also to America. "Every mature Christian," said this great pastoral heart, "should have the full treasure of divine truth in clear understanding, with the true faith founded on the whole truth revealed by God and given us to preserve." (p. 57)

Pastor Brunn experienced the joy of celebrating fifty years in the ministry, an uncommon and remarkable attainment and blessing of God in view of the rigorous, full life he had so selflessly devoted to the Lord and His church. Courageous, resourceful, innovative—are the attributes by which this trooper in the Lord's service may be described, a real footslogger for the Lord, who never discarded his equipment, particularly the pure Word which God had entrusted to him, and who, when life was over, lay down quietly on the steep mountain heights of life, his serving years over. Indeed, "when last seen, he was going strong for the top!" Seldom has a man in our modern era left a deeper imprint on Confessional Lutheran theology and church life, in his own homeland, and on "Missouri" through the young men he sent into her service.

The archives at Steeden, faithfully preserved and neatly arranged by his great granddaughter, Mrs. Gertrud Rücker, document the story of his life. "May the testimony of his clear, biblical teaching remain a signpost for the Lutheran Church and lead to true spiritual unity," writes his grandson, August Brunn, in a concluding exhortation. (p. 63)

The Steeden church is one of history's remarkable markers, little noted by the world perhaps, but deeply inscribed in the records of heaven. Out of this little church—a congregation originally built by one man's faithful preaching and into whose walls the same man's hands put much honest labor—there has gone forth a mighty surge of strength into the world for the sake of the pure Gospel and in behalf of Lutheran Confessional purity and unity.