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Table of Contents

Professor Wilhelm Sihler: Founding Father of Lutheranism in America and First President of Concordia Theological Seminary

Lewis W. Spitz Jr 83

Parting Company At Last: Lindbeck and McFague in Substantive Theological Dialogue

Terrence Reynolds 97

Official and Unofficial Piety in Early Lutheranism

A. G. Roeber 119

Theological Observer 144

The Historicity of Jonah Douglas Mc. L. Judisch

Two Significant Archival Collections

. Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

Books Received 159

Professor Wilhelm Sihler: Founding Father of Lutheranism in America and First President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Lewis W. Spitz

Just as the Reformation movement was born in a university setting and was initially carried forward by the young university-bred humanists, so the founding of Lutheranism in the New World enjoyed the benefits of the learning on the university level of founding fathers who were highly educated, deeply religious, and faithful to the Lutheran Confessions. The Holy Scriptures admonish us to “remember the days of old.” But even more poignant reminders come from some of the non-canonical books of the Old Testament apocrypha; books that Luther translated and included in his edition of the Holy Bible as “useful reading,” though not inspired Scriptures. One passage in particular, familiar to Catholics, Anglicans, and Episcopalians, but somewhat less so to Lutherans, reads as follows:

Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations. The Lord apportioned to them great glory, His majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name for themselves by their valor; those who gave counsel because they were intelligent; those who spoke in prophetic oracles; those who led the people by their counsels and their knowledge of the people’s lore; they were wise in their words of instruction; those who composed musical tunes, or put verses in writing; rich men endowed with resources, living peacefully in their homes all these were honored in their generations, and were the pride of their times. Some of them have left behind a name, so that others declare their praise. But of others there is no memory; they have perished as though they have never existed; they have

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become as though they had never been born, they and their children after them. But these also were godly men, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten. Their offspring will continue forever, and their glory will never be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name lives on generation after generation (Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, 13-14).

Martin Luther recognized the majesty of these words in honor of the worthy dead in his translation of *Ecclesiasticus*, *Das Buch Jesus Sirach*, which there begins in the forty-fourth chapter on "the general praise of famous people" and applies especially to the great fathers of the church.

Lasset uns loben berühmten Leute, und unsere Väter nacheinander.

Viel herrliche Dinge hat der Herr bei ihnen gethan von Anfang durch seine grosse Macht . . .

These words apply very profoundly to the founding fathers of confessional Lutheranism in America, men such as Wilhelm Löhe, C.F.W. Walther, Friedrich Wyneken, August Crämer, and Wilhelm Sihler (November 12, 1801-October 27, 1885). He was a man with leadership qualities and extraordinary organizational ability. He became the first vice-president of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States; the first president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, which recently celebrated the 150th anniversary of its founding; the first president of the Central District of the Synod; and the president of the teachers' seminary that relocated from Milwaukee to Ft. Wayne in 1857.

For forty years he was the pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ft. Wayne, which grew into a major congregation. He lies buried with his wife Susanna in Concordia Cemetery near the original site of the Seminary.

One might well approach the subject of a great man of the church with a simple encyclopedic account of his life and surrounding relevant events. A more suitable approach for a man of Sihler's stature and achievement would be to recount the

biographical data in simple form, then to add flesh to the biographical and statistical bones, and finally in conclusion to see whether, as Cicero observed in his day, a peaceful death provided the seal of approval on a good life. The *Nachruf* of those whom in death he left behind echoes from afar their sadness, but also their joy in the conclusion of a life well lived and a future for him with his Lord.¹

Wilhelm Sihler was born near Breslau, Silesia, in 1801. He studied at the University of Berlin from 1826 to 1829. He was deeply influenced by the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, a student of the idealist philosopher Immanuel Kant, and known as the "founder of modern theology." Schleiermacher opposed the skepticism that resulted from the philosophical destruction of *a priori* rationalistic constructions based upon the traditional, basically Aristotelian in origin, logic of major premise, minor premise, and the inevitable conclusion within a limited logical framework. Schleiermacher emphasized religious experience and the feeling of absolute dependence on the near totally Other, the ground of being, *GOD*. Sihler was deeply moved by this response to false rationalism and shattering religious skepticism, and moved ever more deeply into Schleiermacher's theocentric theology. Sihler had not as yet decided for himself who God is. Is the God a god of love, demanding or begging mankind to love and trust in Him, ready to forgive and to embrace fallen man?

At that moment this brilliant student came, of all things, under the influences of a professor and a pastor. Gottfried Scheibel was a professor at the University of Breslau, Silesia, a university

¹*The American National Biography*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press), which was recently published, carries an article on Wilhelm Sihler, one index of his importance for American history. Other publications of some value include Lewis W. Spitz, *Life in Two Worlds: A Biography of William Sihler* (St. Louis and London: Concordia Publishing House, 1968); E. G. Sihler, "Memories of Dr. William Sihler, (1801-1885)," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 5 (1932-33): 50-57; Wilhelm Sihler, *Lebenslauf von Wilhelm Sihler*, I (1879), II (1880); *Zum Ehrengedächtnis des am 17. Oktober 1885 im Herrn Selig entschlafenen Dr. Wilhelm Sihler* (St. Louis: Luther Concordia Verlag, 1885); "Wilhelm Sihler," Erwin L. Lueker, editor, *Lutheran Concyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 727.

that provided a forum for the union and interaction of German Renaissance humanism and evangelical theology.² Pastor and church superintendent, the Rev. Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach, made the crucial difference for the still young and confused Sihler. Pastor Rudelbach, educated in Copenhagen, was a conservative confessional Lutheran and had answers for Sihler's troubled questions. But Sihler still had a spiritual journey ahead of him. He visited three Bohemian Brethren settlements and was very deeply impressed with their hard work at menial tasks, their religious consecration, their personal faith in Christ, and their missionary zeal.

From 1838 to 1843 Sihler served as a domestic tutor in the Baltic states, for two years in the household of a retired officer in the Russian army, Major von Tunzelmann, on the island of Sarena in the Baltic Sea near Estonia. The Major was a good Lutheran whom Sihler had met earlier in Dresden. In 1840 Sihler moved to Riga, the capital of Latvia, where he served as a tutor in the household of a merchant named Lösewitz. In that home of a Lutheran layman Sihler had an opportunity to study the Lutheran Confessions, especially the Formula of Concord. Sihler's deepening faith in Christ as sin-bearer, substitute, and savior gradually merged with his concern for the clear, correct expression and exposition of his Christian faith.

Just as the German state of Silesia was very significant for Renaissance humanism and the intellectual life of the Reformation, so East Prussia and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were important for a new pietistic and mystical revitalization of the Christian faith. Johann G. Hamann, the so-called "Magus of the North," proved to be an inspiration to many. Johann Herder, a Lutheran preacher, was one among these, and his views on intellectual life and human nature were very important for Sihler and Lutheran thinkers and

²Manfred Fleischer, *Späthumanismus in Schlesien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Munich: Delp'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1984); Lewis W. Spitz, *Luther and German Humanism* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing, 1996).

philosophers of history throughout Europe.³ In such a vibrant intellectual, pious, and emotional environment, Sihler experienced an ever growing intensity of religious fervor. He developed a powerful desire to become a Christian minister, to preach the gospel, and to care for the spiritual needs of the people. He decided to serve in the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a pastor.

In the year 1843, while Sihler was visiting an evangelical Lutheran pastor in Riga, he was given a copy of Friedrich Wyneken's *Notruf*, a call for help for Lutheran ministers in the New World.⁴ In the nineteenth century the church was unable to cope with the sheer numbers of immigrants who were spread over an entire continent.⁵ Johann Konrad Wilhelm Löhle (1808-1872) – a Lutheran pastor in Neuendettelsau and an opponent of rationalism in theology, ethical laxity, and state control of the church – responded to Wyneken's cry for help for pastors in the New World by publishing his appeal for missionary preachers, which reached Sihler and many other confessional Lutherans.⁶

³One may see the articles by Lewis W. Spitz, "Natural Law and the Theory of History in Herder," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (October 1955): 453-475, and the relation of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) to the brilliant Lutheran philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), "The Significance of Leibniz for Historiography," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (June 1952): 333-348.

⁴Friedrich Wyneken, "Aufruf an die lutherische Kirche Deutschlands zur Unterstützung der Glaubensbrüder in Nordamerika." *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche* 5 (February 1843): 124-170; *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America: Laid upon the Hearts of the Brethren in the Faith in the Home Country*, translated by S. Edgar Schmidt, edited by R.F. Rehmer (Ft. Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982).

⁵Rudolph F. Rehmer, "The Origins of Lutheranism in the Ft. Wayne Area (1829-1847)," *Old Fort Wayne News* 30 (Spring 1967), chapter 3, "Wyneken's Activities in Germany and Their Influence on the Lutheran Churches of Allen, Adams and Surrounding Counties." One may also see Norman J. Threinen, "F.C.D. Wyneken: Motivator for the Mission," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60 (January-April 1996): 19-45.

⁶James L. Schaaf, "Father from Afar: Wilhelm Loehe and Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60 (January-April 1996): 47-73. Löhle published an appeal for pastors to serve in America, *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und über Nord-Amerika* (1843). One may also see Marvin A. Huggins, "Home Missions in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: Strategies and Resources," *Concordia Historical Institute*

In the 1830s and 1840s a remarkable spiritual revival developed both in America and Europe, which caught up people like Sihler, who had been sated with rationalism and religious nothingness. Meanwhile, a religious revival movement developed in the United States. In 1835 Charles Finney published his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, the most powerful theoretical statement of revival theology and practice. In America the "Second Great Awakening" transformed American Christianity. One might say that a pre-established harmony between the religious upsurge in eastern Germany and the revival of religion in America seems to have developed which allowed Wilhelm Sihler to move easily from the one to the other. But he was a controlled university-educated intellectual not to be swept away into emotionalism but sturdied by the Confessions.

Pastor Wilhelm Löhe with assistance from Pastor Wucherer sent a group of eleven young, dedicated men to Ft. Wayne to an informal institute that soon developed into a seminary – now known as Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Adam Ernst and Georg Burger arrived as the first volunteers in Ohio in 1842. They were originally appointed to serve as teachers in Ohio, but they subsequently studied theology and became pastors in Ohio and Indiana. The Ft. Wayne Seminary educated and trained teachers and in one decade supplied fifteen teachers for the church. Many pastors in the nineteenth century also taught parochial school, often the only school in town.⁷

By the time the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States was founded in 1847, Pastor Löhe had sent twenty-three candidates to America. They were not university graduates, but pastors with enough learning and practical instruction to tend to the spiritual needs of the farmers, artisans, tradesmen, mechanics, and the common folk who have always

Quarterly 69 (Summer 1996): 69-81 and Hans Kressel, *Wilhelm Löhe: Ein Lebensbild* (Erlangen und Rothenburg ob der Tauber: Martin Luther Verlag, 1954).

⁷Erich Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989).

made up the body of Lutheran congregations. Löhe not only continued to send support by way of money but, even more importantly, of books, in short supply in frontier America. During the Civil War the Ft. Wayne seminary was transferred and conducted jointly with the St. Louis seminary. In 1875 the Synod moved the “practical seminary” to property provided by Trinity Lutheran Church in Springfield, Illinois. In the course of time, however, the seminary, no longer “practical” but fully accredited, moved back to Ft. Wayne, its point of origin, where there was much local support.

With the encouragement of Löhe, Sihler emigrated to America in his forty-second year and lived another forty-two years in America. He was born in 1801, during the reign of King Frederick William III of Prussia, and died in 1885, during the presidency of Grover Cleveland. In June, 1844, he was ordained as a minister in the Evangelical Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States. He began to serve as a pastor in Pomeroy, Ohio in the spring of 1845, and in July of that year was called to the St. Paul congregation in Ft. Wayne, as Wyneken’s successor. Sihler left the Ohio Synod and became, in 1847 at a conference in Chicago with Walther, Wyneken, and others, one of the founders of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

Sihler served as president of the new Synod’s Central District from 1854 to 1860. As pastor of St. Paul he helped to found and to support smaller congregations in the area. Sihler served as president at the seminary from 1846 to 1861, and as professor when needed for theological or church history courses. In contrast to the St. Louis seminary, which held up an ideal European pastorate with a working knowledge of the biblical and European theological languages, the “practical seminary” in Ft. Wayne educated pastors to serve the many thousands of recent immigrants across the Midwest and West.⁸ When, largely

⁸The literature on the Lutheran church history in Europe and America is simply monumental. A few of the more recent books include: Leif Grane, *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987); David P. Scaer, *Getting into the Story of Concord: A History of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977); Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff, editors, *Discord, Dialogue and Concord:*

due to financial pressures, the teacher training school for parochial school teachers was moved from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Ft. Wayne, Sihler became president of the college. This teachers' college later moved to Addison, Illinois, and subsequently to River Forest, Illinois. Sihler was truly a skilled organizer, as well as an impressive preacher and mover.

Sihler was also a university man who understood that the pen is more powerful than the sword. His books were all pastoral in nature and directed toward practical problems for parish pastors and their parishioners. One was *A Conversation between Two Lutherans on Methodism*, which dealt with the success of the Wesleyan Methodists in winning over to their movement religiously and otherwise undereducated immigrants including many Germans.⁹ Frontier conditions were primitive with life difficult and life expectancy short. Ft. Wayne itself was at that time a mere village of some fifteen hundred inhabitants. As William Warren Sweet and Avery Craven have noted, during the rugged early frontier days when people lived in dugouts or log cabins, the congregations begged the frontier preachers who thought they were being amusing and entertaining: "Preacher, don't make us laugh, help us to cry!" The

Studies in the Lutheran Reformation's Formula of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1997); Wenzel Lohff and Lewis W. Spitz, editors, *Widespruch, Dialog und Einigung: Studien zue Konkordienformel der Lutherischen Reformation* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1997), which are original and independent essays and not, as some reviewers of the book have assumed, translations into German of the English essays. One may also see Robert E. Smith, "Laborers for the Harvest Field: The Practical Seminary," *Called to Serve* (Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Fall 1995): 16-17. We alumni of Lutheran parochial school education of half a century and more ago would find amusing in retrospect of the many carry-overs from German elementary parochial education. One may see, for example, the charming book by Katharina Chromik, *Lernen und Ev. Zielen in vier Jahrhunderten* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1987).

⁹Wilhelm Sihler, *Gespräche zwischen zwei Lutheranern über den Methodismus*, 4. Aufl. (St. Louis: M. C. Barthel, 1878); *A Conversation between Two Lutherans on Methodism* (St. Louis: Printed at the Publishing House of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, 1877).

Methodists knew how to move peoples' emotions, better than did the more staid and better educated Lutheran pastors.

Sihler published books useful for preachers such his *Sermons for Sunday and Festival-Gospel Days of the Church Year*, *Timely and Occasional Sermons*, and *Sermons on the the Sundays and Festivals of the Church Year*.¹⁰ Under pressure from the family, fellow ministers, and parishioners he wrote up his own life story in a modest and winsome way, *Lebenslauf von Wilhelm Sihler*. His son, E. G. Sihler, became one of the leading classical scholars in America. At New York University, after an education at Johns Hopkins and Berlin, he authored many scholarly volumes. He enjoyed returning to Concordia College, Ft. Wayne, as an eminent guest lecturer in later years. He wrote that the Christian example of his parents was the most powerful *apologia pro fide Christiana* ever provided to him in life. Sihler's sons and daughters all lived splendid constructive lives in the new American world, for their Christian faith knew no political, linguistic, or ethnic boundaries. Their descendants were strong church people and citizens to the "third and fourth generation of them that love Him," to adduce a biblical phrase. In his simple, fairly brief, compact sermons, Sihler proclaimed that God is Lord of all!

As Sihler understood confessional Lutheranism it meant loyalty to and faith or trust in the biblical teachings as expressed in the three ecumenical creeds of the Christian church, and the acceptance and affirmation of the specifically evangelical Lutheran Confessions, the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530, the Apology (defense) of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Small and the Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord of 1577. This body of confessional writings was incorporated into the Book of Concord (1580). The name Concordia, or harmony, which has been given to towns, churches, colleges and universities in the western world, is, of course, in commemoration of the doctrinal or confessional unity of the largest Protestant church body in Europe and America, when taken together.

¹⁰Rehmer, 27; Spitz, *Life in Two Worlds*, 45.

The emerging alliance of confessional Lutheran theologians and churchmen, which included a remarkable lay participation, marked a dramatic moment in American church history in the nineteenth century. The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther initiated the publication of *Der Lutheraner* on September 7, 1844. He chose as the motto for the new periodical *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*, given the rubric, *Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr' Vergehen Nie und Nimmermehr* ("God's Word and Luther's Doctrine Pure Shall to Eternity Endure").

Both Wilhelm Sihler and the Rev. F. C. D. Wyneken (1810-1876) received copies of this first edition of *Der Lutheraner*, and they responded with excitement and great gratitude. Wyneken exclaimed; "Thank God there are still other Lutherans in America!"¹¹ Sihler, then in his first year in the New World, was a pastor in Pomeroy, Ohio. In his autobiography years later he wrote: "It was a great joy for me when the first edition of *Der Lutheraner* appeared in St. Louis . . . for such a periodical was badly needed by Lutherans (in America) who, for the most part, did not really know what it meant to be Lutheran Christians. Naturally I soon entered into extended correspondence with the editor."¹² When Sihler came to Ft. Wayne, July 15, 1845, to replace Wyneken, St. Paul was a congregation of merely sixty communicants. Two theological students, Jaebker and Frincke, lived in the parsonage with Sihler. Both of them became highly successful ministers respectively in Ohio and Maryland. In 1846, J. Adam Ernst and F. Lochner came as Löhe's latest missionaries. Sihler was now reaching out to other confessional Lutherans. To call these men conservative may well be a misnomer, for in striking ways to be a confessional Lutheran in the religious milieu of the nineteenth century meant to be not conservative, but radically different. In September, 1845, a number of Löhe missionaries met in Cleveland, Ohio, and

¹¹Walter Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847-1947* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 52.

¹²*Lebenslauf*, 2:39-41; Rehmer (29-33) provides fascinating details of how delegates in those frontier days traveled by polling barges upstream, on horseback, by horse-drawn carriages, and wading through swamps on the way to Chicago, which was then a city of about 16,000 inhabitants and without a railroad.

resolved to leave the Ohio Synod and to unite with the Missouri Saxons. While a pastor in Pomeroy, Ohio, Sihler had already left the Ohio Synod. In May, 1846, Sihler met in St. Louis with the Missouri Saxons, Walther, G. H. Löber, E. G. W. Keyl, K. F. Grüber, O. Fürbringer, and G. Schieferdecker. In July a follow-up meeting was held in Ft. Wayne, where sixteen pastors from the Midwest attended, staying in Sihler's parsonage and in the homes of parishioners. They signed a slightly modified version of a constitution drafted in the St. Louis meeting.

Finally, April 24-27, 1847, the formation of the new synod was completed at the St. Paul congregation in Chicago, with the formulation of a Synodical Constitution subscribed to by signators from Missouri, Ohio, and other states. Significantly, the majority of participating congregations were from Indiana! Thus came into being the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States. The trip from Ft. Wayne took five days for Sihler and six companions, riding horseback; two other ministers rode in a buggy. A lay delegate from St. Paul, a Mr. Voss, rode in a wagon with a small load of books. Along the way the entourage stayed overnight with settlers living in small huts. The weather was excellent and on Jubilate Sunday, the third Sunday after Easter, an opening worship was held in the morning with the Rev. G. H. Löber of the Saxon delegation preaching the sermon. He described the model of the early Christian church, which continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayer (Acts 2:42).¹³

Sihler was elected first vice-president of the new Synod. He was very active in the decades following, challenging other Lutheran synods, such as the General Synod and the Ohio Synod, to more confessional positions. Some Lutheran leaders, however, such as Samuel S. Schmucker, referred to Sihler and his colleagues as "Symbolists" or "Old Lutherans" (*Alt Lutheraner*). To this Sihler replied with his customary dignity that there were no such things as "old-Lutherans," but merely confessional Lutherans and anti-confessional Lutherans. As

¹³*Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, volume 7, number 16, page 124.

Emerson once wrote: "We are reformers in the spring and summer; in autumn and winter we stand by the old, reformers in the morning, conservers at night." Sihler was a staunch conservative and confessionalist from midlife to the end of his life.

What sort of man was Wilhelm Sihler? He was a person of outsized proportions; in terms of intellect, education, character, religious experience, Christian faith, determination, and a goal orientation toward a New Jerusalem in the New World. A social reformer he was not. He believed that individuals reborn through the work in the heart of the Holy Spirit will find ways of holding society together and improving it, beginning with their own families and moving the common life politically and socially to a higher plane. Sihler's sermons were simple and forceful in speech, sharp, fearless, and well organized.

Sihler was the father of a large and quite wonderful family and was known for his hospitality and many friendships. When he came to Ft. Wayne he was a bachelor of forty-four years. His friend, the Rev. J. Adam Ernst, however, envisioned for him a better life with a wife and a real parsonage. Just as Luther in 1525 had married sixteen years younger than he, so Sihler took a much younger bride—twenty-eight years younger. Rev. Ernst told him of a young woman "fit to be a pastor's wife, of Christian mind, of good understanding, and a soft quiet spirit, very home-loving and used to work." After the St. Louis conference in 1846 Sihler traveled with Pastor Ernst to visit the home of the young girl of seventeen, Miss Susanna Kern. Susanna was in the field working when Ernst and Sihler arrived. Although, as Sihler later observed, "she would hardly have inspired an artist," he was favorably impressed by her disposition and bearing, and they married the following day.¹⁴ The following years saw the arrival of nine children.¹⁵

¹⁴Spitz, *Life in Two Worlds*, 848-85; Rehmer, 30-33. Rehmer relates that Sihler had met Susanna Kern before more than once, though without documentation, or eye witnesses.

¹⁵Spitz, *Life in Two Worlds*, 48-52, 175. Sihler's namesake, Wilhelm Sihler, died on January 6, 1986, at age 82, in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. Olga Buchheimer, née Sihler, widow of the Rev. Dr. Edward Buchheimer, died at

Sihler's bearing was always that of a Prussian army officer, a German academician, and a dignified pastor. His health was good, and he was active in congregational and synodical affairs until nearly the end of his life. Advanced in years, on June 5, 1885 he appeared before his St. Paul congregation to deliver a communion sermon. But he almost swooned and was taken to the parsonage where he was nursed during the following weeks. He constantly repeated the words of Scripture such as, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" and "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." On October 2 he felt that the end was near, and he asked for the sacrament. He spoke Christ's words from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." In answer to Susanna's last question as to what she should tell the children, he answered, "That they abide in Christ." With these words ended the life of Wilhelm Sihler, a man who was a devout Christian, a dedicated minister, a "practical" doctor of philosophy, and a Prussian pioneer in America. He was true to Luther's admonition: *und tue was du schuldig bist zu tun in deinem Berufe* ("and do what you are obligated to do in your calling").

Sihler's funeral was quite splendid, as funerals go. Some sixty to seventy ministers walked in the procession, thousands of people followed on foot, with two hundred carriages coming after in the van. Though he left only three hundred dollars to his heirs and a library of theological and church history books (he had always given generously to poor students and good causes), he left to his family, church, and country a rich inheritance, a vibrant faith, great moral strength, and a model for a Christian life dedicated to the highest cause.

Sihler was criticized by some as being too severe in preaching the law to his congregation, but he was dealing with German farmers and rough day laborers. He had a sense of moral earnestness, penetrating judgment, and a rare independence of mind. He was not, unlike all too many preachers of our time, swayed by current fashions and trends, or by majority opinion.

The Rev. A. Biewend of Washington, D.C., the son of Sihler's former colleague at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, described Sihler as "earnest and forceful, Scriptural, quiet and patient, a clear and thorough thinker."¹⁶

His life bridged equally two continents, the old world and the new. He grew to manhood in aristocratic Prussia, but lived out his life in democratic America. He was baptized and confirmed in a state church and became one of the leaders in a free church with a congregational organization. He reached maturity hostile or indifferent to the claims of the Christian faith and carried out his last decades as a stalwart for conservative and confessional Lutheranism.

Sihler's assistant as a professor at the Seminary and his successor as the pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ft. Wayne, the Rev. J. H. Jox, paid him this tribute: "He was a wonder of God's grace, a spiritual son of Paul and Luther, a learned man, a gifted, energetic preacher, diligent for truth and God's honor, a restless worker, earnest in prayer, a friend and helper of the needy, a loyal spouse and worthy father, a sinner living by grace, an upright soul, a rich blessing to the church."¹⁷ Little more need be said about Dr. Wilhelm Sihler, a pioneer of culture and of the Christian religion in nineteenth-century America.

¹⁶J. H. Jox, "Zum Ehrendedächtniss des am 17. October 1885 selig heimgegangen Dr. W. Sihler, treuverdienten Pastor zu St. Paul in Ft. Wayne, Ind.," *Der Lutheraner* 41 (June 15, 1886): 92.

¹⁷Jox, "Zum Ehrendedächtniss."