

DR. HÖNECKE IN PRIVATE LIFE

W. Hönecke

Adolf Hoenecke (1835-1908) was the most important theologian during the early history of the Wisconsin Synod. He served as professor of dogmatics for many years and wrote a complete dogmatics in the German language. He was one of the founders of the *Quarterly*. This reminiscence was written by one of his sons.

Those who go to the trouble of recording in writing their memories of Dr. Hönecke will deal with the part of his life they were closest to and most familiar with, namely, his public work in the circles of our church. It is completely natural that they would not deal with the other side of his life, his life apart from his public appearances, because they would be very, or maybe completely, unfamiliar with it. But we should start dealing with this side of him, in order not only to complete, but also to set right, the overall picture of the man. Especially with a learned man, many will often make a completely skewed portrayal of him, by dismissing everything but the man's public appearances, taking a part for the whole. They imagine this man as one who lives exclusively for his books, has interest only in his intellectual work, and with disgust looks down on everything that surrounds him in life and goes on around him, as if a deep cleft separated him from temporal things. You imagine such a man to be someone who lives in his family like a stranger, completely outside the sphere of their thoughts and interests, without any kind of participation in them, as if near them in body but far away in spirit. Whoever would imagine Dr. Hönecke thus would have a completely false picture of him. Certainly, to describe this side, the private life, can only be done well by someone who has witnessed it daily, perhaps by a son. But of course, it may be an awkward job for him.

When I now make the attempt to describe my father's home life, I would like to briefly answer both of the following questions: What did his home mean to him? What was he like in his home? In answering the second question these topics will be considered: Father at his work, his relationship with Mother, with his children, his hobbies, and his favorite things.

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What did his home mean to him?

He loved being home the best. In his life in the office of pastor at St. Matthew's Church he made, of course, all the necessary visits to the sick and those who needed admonition. General house visits, as we make today, were rarely made. The church members were more pious than today. You didn't need to visit even the new members in those days. They came on their own. Indeed, even though Father regularly made his visits, he loved sitting at home the best. Saturday afternoons were the one exception. Then he regularly went to visit old Jäkel. Bading and Adelberg also came. I myself can still well remember what an uproar the whole house always fell into when Father sometimes had to travel somewhere for several days, perhaps to a synodical meeting. He was always sullen all day long and everyone stayed away from him. To sit every day in coat and tie and not have the comforts of home went against the grain for him. Father was a man for whom the restful, quiet life at home surpassed everything; he was content and happy when he could just sit at home. For a man whose calling demanded of him much reflection, searching, and study, such a disposition is the best in every case. Whoever can't stand it at home and always has to get out will not sit all that much at his desk and makes little progress in his studies.

Among those who have known Father, it is common knowledge that he always harbored a definite aversion to so-called synodical politics. That is correct. He did not love the scheming. To him there was definitely something wrong with it. Just as little could he acquire an interest in the purely practical things in synodical life, for example strife in congregations, intersynodical differences, filling vacancies, and all the other matters of a synodical praesidium. When he did intervene anywhere, he had to be forced into it. But that was in no way the result of a longing for undisturbed rest, rather it came more out of a lack of interest in purely practical questions. Theological questions could captivate him. This is why the older age-group among our pastors will also remember that at synodical gatherings Father was spirited and lively to the uttermost, so long as doctrinal matters stayed on the floor, but in contrast he sat comfortably in his seat as soon as matters passed over into the practical field. He was very stimulated by doctrinal strife, prepared himself thoroughly for it, and put himself into it body and soul, even though he honestly wasn't seeking strife.

What was Father like in his home?

We observe him first at his work as preacher and professor. At home there were two rooms in which Father loved to linger most, his study and the kitchen. He regularly spent the evening in the kitchen, especially in the later years. There he could savor the fellowship of his

wife and children. There he sat comfortably at the dinner table and read the newspaper or else, for leisure, a magazine.

At work

Father's study was always furnished simply. He didn't care about his furniture and décor. The furniture that, through long use, had already adapted to the shape of his body was his favorite. The furniture which had already served him for years, long out of fashion, you dared never replace. He was used to the old furniture, and it didn't distract him from his studies. New furniture would have done that.

Let's take a little look around his study. First a table with very long legs attracts our attention. That was his studying table. Father always studied and wrote standing up. On this table always lay a stack of paper, already written on one side, but not by him. When he received letters and the writer had left one side of a page blank, it never ended up in the wastepaper basket, because he could take notes or write a sermon outline on it. Next to that, he had the pile of unused paper, but that he didn't touch. That was not stinginess, for Father was not stingy. This habit stemmed from much earlier, in his time of study at Halle, where he had to eke out a living for himself without support from home. There he had become used to spartan living and learned to throw nothing away that you could still get some good out of. So also his coat pocket was always full of strings, rubber bands, nails, etc., for it made him feel bad to throw away something that later he could still find a use for. That is not at all a vice. A little piece of string in the pocket often spared a long search, many troubles, and many pennies.

We look around the study some more. Along the walls stood genuinely antique bookcases: they reached from the floor to the ceiling. The library which these cases contained was not at all big, but what it contained was good. Father didn't consider quantity, rather quality. There stood the Leipzig Luther, Chemnitz, Hafenreffer, Heerbrand, Quenstedt, Calov, Hollaz, Hofmann. There stood the later theologians from the time of the decline, from the time of the revival. There stood the rationalists Brettschneider and Wegscheider, the newer theologians in good representation. There stood philosophical works, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew lexicons, theological reference works, etc. It was a choice selection and nothing worthless in it. Every work had its specified place, which Father knew exactly. Also this you dared not alter, which unfortunately in spite of all care happened often during housecleaning and agitated and annoyed him much.

In earlier years, in the corner of the bookcase that was next to the study desk, stood four long pipes, so-called "student pipes." In his ear-

lier years Father was a heavy smoker. In the pipes he smoked only "German tobacco." When he first stepped into his study in the morning, he filled the pipes first. They lasted that way until noon. When the first was all smoked out, with the right hand he would place it to the side, while at the same time the left hand grabbed the second pipe. With time, many evils appeared as a result of the heavy smoking, especially sudden spells of faintness. Dr. Senn, our family doctor, called it nicotine poisoning and advised him to stop smoking completely because of it. Father decided to follow the advice, but he could not bring himself to go through with his decision right away. One Christmas Eve, however—it was after the children's service—while we were all together for a while in the study, Father wanted to smoke just a little, but the tobacco was all gone. One of the sons was sent to 12th Street in order to get a packet of tobacco. He came right back, but without tobacco. The shop was already closed. Then Father said, "I am giving up smoking completely," and to my knowledge he no longer smoked from then on. Instead of the smoking, he got used to drinking coffee. For this he used an unusually large cup. He held onto this habit until his end.

Eight o'clock sharp, as a rule, Father was in his study, stood at his writing table, studied, and wrote, without interruption, until twelve o'clock. There he wrote down his sermons; he was always four Sundays ahead on those. You can never know, he used to say, what complications could arise. By far his favorite was working out sermons and sermon outlines. He would rather work on sermons than on his dogmatics and pastoral theology. To find new thoughts, new points of view, in the gospel and epistle texts was always a pleasure to him. Up till his last days, as a rule he stood at his lectern on Saturday and made outlines; it didn't matter to him if he would get to use them or not. He had his reward in the joy of having a thought come to him that he had not discovered before.

If he was not preparing his sermon, then it was his preparation for dogmatics and pastoral theology, which he lectured on at the seminary. He was never finished with either, for Father was never content with that which he had prepared before. The already finished product would always be improved upon again, presented more clearly through exposition of Scripture and citations from Luther, whom he studied industriously, and likewise made more complete from the dogmaticians' works. Incidentally, to him the dogmatician was not equal to scriptural proof. In his dogmatics, he began every paragraph with proof from the scripture. When he had substantiated his doctrinal thesis from the scripture, he counted that as substantiated conclusively. The dogmaticians didn't make him any more certain about it. He quotes them extensively, but only in order to show that our Lutheran church of today stands exactly as it did from Luther to the 17th century.

When Father was in the study, no one dared disturb him. He became very indignant, whenever one of us opened the door to his study. "Vamoose!" was the order given. Possible visitors were not all too welcome either and were disposed with as quickly as possible. One visitor, when he came, would usually stick it out for a while, but his presence never disturbed Father. That was the elderly Father Krueger, a solid Christian. When he came—it wasn't often—he greeted Father and sat on a chair. After a while he would normally say, "Yes, that's how it is, Herr Preacher." My father answered, "Yes, that's how it is, Father Krueger." This two-line conversation usually repeated itself after long intermissions. Finally Father Krueger stood up and grabbed his hat. "Come now," asked my father, "do you want to go already?" "Yes," said Father Krueger, "it is time and I don't want to hold you up any longer: but it is sure good when you can speak your mind sometimes."

Our father's relationship with Mother

Our mother was a native Hessian, the daughter of a Hessian pastor in Hoechstetten, near Bern in Switzerland. Father and Mother had gotten to know each other when Father was the private tutor for a Mr. von Wattenwyl in the vicinity of Bern. Mother came to America later than Father, following him. They lived first in Farmington, near Watertown, where Father held his first position as pastor. The relationship between Father and Mother was always an uncommonly happy one. Of course there were small differences once in a while. You only rarely see a completely cloudless sky. Father and Mother were happy with each other because they both were governed by what God's Word commands to all married people. That is the foundation for happiness in married life. Our mother felt a heartfelt devotion to Father. She esteemed him highly, let him be the head of the wife, constantly paid attention to that authority of his, submitted, and acted as his representative toward the children. Father thought the world of Mother, paid attention to her rights, and did for her what he could. As a result, they both had a happy married life with each other, until death separated them. But the reason they both let God's Word govern their married life was their sincere piety, in which they took their stand on their heartfelt trust in God through Christ. Faith is and remains the source of all good behavior, also in married life. What made things even easier for them was that they both had a heartfelt trust in each other, too.

Father's relationship with his children

In raising his children, Father's theological schooling came in handy for him. He knew that in our relationship to the heavenly Father, everything depends on faith. When we trust God, we willingly behave according to God's command, are content with his leading, and

bear without complaining the cross laid upon us. From this Father knew that trust has to be the foundation underlying every human relationship, so that no father can raise his children, no matter how fervently he seeks their inner piety, unless his children put a proper trust in him.

Accordingly Father was careful above all to have the trust of his children. He gained it, too, and kept it as long as he lived. He never heard an evil word from us, never anything contrary, not even when we youngsters started to become gray. And even though we later had our own homes, we were drawn back there and were always happy when we could rest our feet under Father's table again.

As a result of this trust and confidence we placed in Father, it was neither difficult nor at all impossible for him to achieve with his children a true Christian upbringing, planting them in Christ through faith. He was clear about true upbringing, and this alone is what he sought. In the home, Christianity, faith, and out of faith a pious life, have to come to the children through the parents, as through a stop along the way. When the parents nourish the children's trust, then they will willingly also receive teaching, direction, admonition, and warnings from them. But when the parents through mistakes in upbringing, through carelessness in their relations with their children, lose their children's trust, then mistrust steps in where trust was, and that mistrust grows into despising and hatred. There the parents have awfully hard soil to try to do the work of raising the children in a Christian way. They won't get through to their hearts, and the children comply only unwillingly, so long as they are dependant on the parents' wallets, only to go the way of the flesh as soon as they do not need their parents anymore. As far as the parents, you can't raise Christian children without having their trust.

As a result of this trust, it was also not difficult for Father to get us to obey his commands and rules and do our chores willingly. With that it should not be said that we children were always paragons of virtue. We were plenty naughty, broke plenty of windows, and trampled many flowers, whose blossoms Father had been dotting on for so long. That then led to some painful scenes.

As a result of this trust, it did no harm when Father sometimes had to punish us severely. In St. Matthew's Church in those days, there were a number of solid Christians among the council members. I still see them standing alive in front of my eyes. There was Fritz Brandt, old Kringel, John Birk, and, above all, Friedrich Zell, a wagon-maker and horseshoe-er. His workshop was at 12th and Garfield Ave. He was a man with a good heart, outwardly rough and tough. Once he said to my father, "The youngins give you trouble, Herr Pastor: I'll

bring something that will get respect.” And one day he brought Father an implement, a long piece of wagon-wheel spoke, on which was nailed a piece of horse’s rein, cut to just the right length. How this implement was applied, needs no further explanation. From then on, it hung on a cupboard in the kitchen in plain sight. In honor of its inventor, we children named it “Uncle Zell.” Father did not use this instrument often, but when he did, he was thorough with it, not gentle. But in no way did that embitter us toward Father. Our trust in him prevented that. But where mistrust toward the father is the rule, every chastisement from his hand will only embitter the children more and harden their hearts against him more. Producing children who trust Father and Mother is indispensable in raising them, the one goal that all the other results of good upbringing depend on.

How did Father awaken in his children this trust? First, it took earnest studying and much thought. It was nothing he could just shake out of his sleeve. The wisdom of how to bring up children is not at all something that, as many think, the father gets as soon as his baby comes. Above all, it is necessary for a father to be conscious of his children’s precious value as treasures dearly bought with the blood of Christ and entrusted to him by Christ that they might be saved. It was this consciousness that had the Apostle Paul campaigning against all who through unrestrained exercise of their freedom could have misled the weak Christians into a sin against conscience. Where this consciousness lives, a father will be earnest about bringing up his children. He will pray to God to be properly enlightened, so that he can do it right and not ruin everything by taking well-intentioned but foolish measures. He will study and get advice with which he might begin, continue, and finish the job right. That is also the way Father began.

Only fatherly love will awaken children’s trust, as God’s love leads us to trust in him. But when the father, who is appointed to be lord over his children, instead of being loving won’t let them forget what a severe lord he is, or when he is a weak lord like Eli, then there will not be any of this chief part and foundation of all upbringing: trust. Great severity kills all trust and stirs up fear and hate. Weakness gets the child to despise his father and be his father’s lord. When the sun is hidden by the clouds, it doesn’t give warmth.

Father did not fall into either mistake in the love he certainly felt for his children. He behaved neither like a tyrant nor like a weakling. He was never rough, nor did he let his children despise him. He always stood before us as one who demanded attention and respect. His whole manner made the impression of someone who constantly had himself under control. He was cheerful and loved a good joke, but he hated impropriety. Upright in his Christian living, without contradiction between his words and deeds, faithful in his calling, always

worthy in his fatherhood, steady, letting it be known that he was the lord of the house, he demanded respect. That did not at all dim his love for his children.

This showed itself in many ways. He gave all his children a good education, the sons going through Watertown and through the seminary. That didn't vex him, although it cost him a pretty penny, as he said. For a while he supported three sons at Watertown at the same time. All his sons entered into the preaching ministry. He was especially proud of that. He was constantly thinking of his children's well-being. If he had to punish us sometimes, he was conciliatory right after, especially conciliatory, especially friendly and would give us some present. As Luther says, the apple must always lie next to the rod. His children will never forget how Father always took part so sincerely in their playing. I still often think of how many kites Father built us. When kite-flying time came and the sky over the Tenth Ward was swarming with kites, Father was very busy. He built one kite after another. He put the pen down and made kites. He had one goal in mind for them: the kites should not teeter back and forth in the air, but stand there still against any blast. When we had one of his kites flying well in the air and called to him, he came right out of his study, checked with his expert eye how the kite was handling itself in the air, and usually said, "Nah, it still isn't just right." And when all too often the tissue paper, with which the kite-frame was covered, ripped, Father bought book-binder's linen and covered the kites with that. In addition, he built us a water fountain, and a lot of other things. Without doubt, he must have spent a lot of time thinking through all of that. It was sincere, and it made us children very attached to our Father.

Hobbies and favorite things

Father was a great friend of music. He himself had not learned how to play any instrument except the guitar, which he, however, no longer picked up in his later years. He had a good tenor voice at his disposal and preferred to sing classical arias. He was familiar with classical music and with his children, who had received piano instruction, he could show what expression this or that passage had to be played with. He knew all the master composers: Bach, Beethoven, Weber, Gluck, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Haydn, Händel, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, etc.; the operas, sonatas, oratorios, and symphonies. He took uncommon pleasure in hearing them when they were played. On Sunday afternoons, when I was a student at our seminary, I often played for Father for hours, and he would never get tired of it. If he sat upstairs in his study and heard the striking of the piano keys below, he was soon downstairs right next to the player and conducting.

In connection with this theme, an amusing incident comes to mind. My father was still pastor at St. Matthew's Church. One day, during summer vacation, there was supposed to be a funeral at church. Our old Teacher Schwartz, the organist, couldn't play the organ on that given afternoon and had asked me to fill in for him. I said I would, went to church to practice a little, and took Father Praefke along to pump the organ. It didn't last long before Father was there. First he listened. Then he wanted to play himself. So I left the organ bench and made a place for him. He played a chorale, always with four fingers, two on each hand. He was also playing the pedal for the first time. When he was done, he turned to me and said, "It actually surprised me how smoothly that all went." I was surprised too, but then I looked and saw that we had forgotten to pull out the stop for the pedals. We both had to laugh hard and my father said, "Now it is clear to me why it all sounded so good."

It is known that Father also had a great love for flowers. At home, every surface was covered with flowerpots from top to bottom. He was a fan of new varieties and had them delivered as soon as they were announced in the catalog. He was the first in Milwaukee to grow palms from seeds. For a string of years when we lived on 10th Street, he also had a greenhouse in which he grew nothing but tropical plants. One of his palms, a date palm, stood later for many years in the city greenhouse at Mitchell Park. It stood there until its tip threatened to break through the high dome. Then they had to cut it down. An old German flower gardener in our neighborhood, who discussed flowers a lot with Father, often said to him, "You should have been a botanist."

Celebrating the Fourth of July was always beautiful at our house. Father always made his own fireworks: jumping jacks, Catherine wheels, flares, and Bengal fire fountains. He had obtained a book for himself on pyrotechnics. He prepared his own paper tubes and gunpowder. We often had to help with it. Once he almost lost his eyesight from setting off fireworks. He wanted to light a Catherine-wheel fastened on a post. It lit prematurely and the whole load went off right in his eyes.

For many years, he was also a zealous stamp collector. While we were still going to school at St. Matthew's Church, the collecting fever developed there. We were also infected with it and were soon searching through Father's correspondence for stamps. It wasn't long before Father also started to take interest in it. First he helped us collect them, and here and there bought us stamps. But when the collection grew, he took it over and collected more himself. In his first collection, which he sold in 1883, he had a row of very rare stamps, among others old Spanish stamps and especially stamps from the Swiss cantons, very valuable today. But later, when he began to collect again, he devoted himself to collecting stamps of the United States, Canada, and

Newfoundland. He was an uncommonly particular collector. The stamps he pasted into his album had to be in the best condition. If he got a stamp from any dealer, he pasted it into his album and looked at it daily all week long, for he knew that at first glance you only get an overall impression of the object in front of you. Only with frequent examinations do you recognize the peculiarities, i. e., any flaws. But it is better if you recognize the flaws before the purchase than after.

As a Brandenburger, Father came from a place not far from Berlin and had absorbed a lot of Berlin mannerisms, especially the earthy expressions in his speech: like *Tranlampe* (dimwit), *Trödelfritze* (slowpoke), *Tränenbartel* (crybaby), *Angstmeier* (scaredy-cat, worrywart), *Heulemeier* (whiner), *Quasselstrippe* (chatterbox), *Trauerweide* (lit: weeping willow; fig: a person who is sad), *nu verkrüemelt euch* (get away from here now), etc. In public he was very self-conscious about using these expressions, less so at home. But it happened to him once that he said in a sermon, "And when you won't let yourself be trained by the word of God anymore, then you go to the *Geier* (vulture)." The word had hardly slipped out of him before he regretted it. With the word *Geier*; he meant the devil, but the word itself in this use of it was bad German; in English we call it "slang." Still, the congregation nodded as if they had completely understood him. At that time there was actually on Walnut Street a pastor from the sects named Geier. Whoever thought the teaching at St. Matthew's Church was too strict left and went to Geier and was taken in.

While all this is being written, an enlarged portrait of Father hangs on the wall to the left of the writing desk. He has a certain questioning in his eyes, as if he would say, "This isn't going right. It's better to wrap it up!"