

The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present

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The nineteenth century has been called the *saeculum historicum*. In it a new way of thinking is said to have taken over, the historical-genetic. For example, as history develops, the question is asked how each historical phenomenon became what it is, what events caused it to develop as it did.

This way of thinking today controls the entire scholarly world and has had a fruitful and stimulating effect in the most diverse areas. But because of an unnecessary admixture of philosophy it has also had its harmful effects. Theology especially has been influenced profoundly and not always favorably by it.

In Europe, where the scholarly community is closely knit, all countries were involved. In the last century we Americans were not always in close touch with the developments in the field of scholarship in the old world because we had various tasks to perform which kept us busy in other areas.

But in the historical field we by and large did not lag behind. Bancroft, Motley, and Prescott were in close contact not only with the intellectual giants in this field especially in Germany, but also in part with the great leaders of European politics. Especially the first of these three did much to advance historical science in this country.

For a long time, however, our American Lutheran church remained untouched by this development, and at the time this did not hurt her. But now that we are in a period of transition to a new era a lack of historical approach and, in some respects, of historical judgment are becoming evident so that a change is desirable for the future of our church.

The wish to help along in this direction led to the treatment of the subject indicated in the title. Even on its own it is interesting enough and deserving of study.

In encyclopedia the structure of theological study was built up in various ways. The ancients divided the theological disciplines into four classes: exegesis, history, systematic theology, and practical theology. Since Schleiermacher a threefold division has come into being: philosophy, history, practical theology. Thus the essential difference between the old and the new way in the conception of theology is indicated. The older men considered theology a descriptive science, the more recent, a constructive. In recent times the Reformed Hagenbach followed the older teachers while the Lutheran von Hofmann followed Schleiermacher, an interesting comment which Lutherans do well to notice.

No matter how one might react, so much is certain that we are dealing with two kinds of disciplines when we ask: How do you get your material, and how do you treat it? They are the historically descriptive and the systematically constructing. Exegesis and history belong to the first group, dogmatics and practical theology to the second.

There is no argument about the first group. The only difference between exegesis and history is that in exegesis Holy Scripture is the object of all investigation and presentation. But the method is the same as with history. The contents of this source of salvation are searched out. There is this restriction with exegesis that God's infallible Word is the source, while with history it is human writings. Occasionally a division has been attempted which combines Scripture with the human sources of church history and then assigns to exegesis the work of investigating the sources and to history the work of combination and presentation.

In the case of the second group (dogmatics and practical theology) there are various conceptions. The term "construction" is understood in various ways and the corresponding activity practiced with even more variety. Our older theologians saw also in systematic theology something that in the last analysis was descriptive in character. They wanted only to present the doctrines which are revealed here and there in

Scripture in their close interrelation of thoughts, and that not in any other than that which is supplied by Scripture itself. For that reason they also did not think it possible to develop one doctrine out of the other, but merely gathered the *sedes doctrinae* and drew the individual doctrines out of them and in their *loci* simply placed one next to the other. As certain as it is that this activity in the final analysis is no different from that of the historian, still because of the abstract nature of the subject the thought could arise that the constructing of a system was involved. This had the result that the logical development of doctrine was not entirely lacking among the older theologians, as is evident in the peculiar development of the analogy of faith.

On the other hand, the moderns since Schleiermacher see in the systematic work of the theologian something akin to the constructing activity of the philosopher. The systematician starts with religious-philosophical thoughts or with the Christian consciousness or the like and on the basis of the inner cohesion of concepts, excluding contradictions, constructs a structure of thoughts about the relation of man to God which in the final analysis is a creation of the systematician and not God's Word.

With this work practical theology is then combined. In the case of the older theologians the principles are taken directly out of Scripture. But because of the manifold changes in matters which lie in the area of Christian liberty, it is here that the constructing activity of the theologian is perhaps most apt to assert itself. The moderns, however, continue to build philosophically. They construct concepts of church, state, and congregation, of office and work, etc., and that is often done in such a manner that they develop formulas for existing situations with which they try to justify the former before their scholarly conscience.

Aside from this difference between the old and the new view of systematic theology one might also define the difference between the historical and the systematic branches in this way that the former lays more claim to the objective approach. It asks: how are things? how did they become what they are? The second uses the subjective approach, seeking to determine what one must consider the inner logical connection between the abstract doctrines and what is therefore correct in presentation and practice. The former has as its starting point the contents of the source and is governed by them; the other uses as its starting point the established doctrinal statement and draws whatever conclusions can be drawn from it. The former promotes the humble acceptance of what has been given; the other produces the energetic firmness which carries on the battle against false doctrine. The former demands intellectual independence on the part of the theologian since the method of study compels him to be critical and to come to independent convictions. The other makes it easier to grasp the theological material which is ready at hand in the complete system and can easily be acquired. Where there is no balanced combination of the two, the former will result in a skeptical uncertainty which cannot quickly come to firm opinions; the latter will result in always insisting that one is right and show a fanatical zeal which is not always able to understand the other party.

The starting point of the Lutheran movement in the eighteenth century was the Prussian Union. Reformed pietism first arose out of rationalism. Schleiermacher, who stands at the beginning of this development, was the son of a Reformed pastor. His lasting religious impressions he received among the Moravian Brethren, in whose schools he was educated. The south German reawakening was begun by the Reformed pastor and professor Krafft of Erlangen. Schleiermacher started with a scholarly-philosophical approach, Krafft's prime concern was pastoral activity.

In northern Germany the Union arose out of this originally confessionless movement through the intervention of Friedrich Wilhelm III. He was deeply grieved by the difference in confession between his wife Louise and himself, for as a matter of form at least this difference was still being emphasized. His Reformed-pietistic way of thinking had little patience with doctrinal differences and imagined that a governmental edict could settle the matter. But the Lutheran consciousness rebelled against this and pointed to the confessional writings. As early as 1817, the anniversary year of the Union and of the Reformation, Harms in Kiel voiced strenuous objections. But although an exchange of some two hundred polemical writings ensued, his words for the most part were at first not heeded. But he had sowed a seed which was to bear fruit in due time. Later when the Union was being enforced, there were objections in the thirties by Scheibel in Breslau, who operated in the area of ecclesiastical polity and practical considerations, and by Sartorius in Dorpat and the Dane Rudelbach, who operated in the area of scholarship.

So in the nineteenth century we have a movement in the church which is the reverse of what had happened earlier when Luther started with Scripture, for it started with the writings of the fathers and did not set exegetical work in motion, as did the Reformation in the sixteenth century, but rather the dogmatics of the seventeenth century. That was the content of the first writings of Sartorius, Rudelbach, Thomasius, and Schmid. That was the natural course because of the roots which lay in the period before rationalism. The orthodox dogmatics of the seventeenth century had been succeeded by pietism. It emphasized exegesis and history, which the older dogmatists naturally had neglected. But pietism did not live up to expectations. Both exegesis and history deteriorated even before rationalism appeared upon the scene. Francke, Michaelis, Mosheim were the only important representatives of the period, and even in their case there is an evident tendency to make more of being spectacular by means of the external and sensational novelty than to concentrate upon the faithful, thorough, and comprehensive working through the subject matter which had been customary in the case of the orthodox. Rationalism put an end to the whole business. Since the time of Ernesti and Semler it has also taken over the historical branches and when the reawakening came was dominated brilliantly by Winer and Gesenius. As a result a number of important rationalists monopolized exegesis in the first third of the nineteenth century and confessionally conscious Lutherans considered themselves restricted to historical-dogmatical work. This seemed all the more necessary since after its decline in the period of pietism this area was not cultivated by Schleiermacher because of his philosophical conception of systematic theology. Furthermore, this was the arena in which the battle against the Union had to be fought.

We have the same development here in the Lutheran church of America. The opposition against the rationalism which had crept in had its origin in pietism and asserted itself in the formation of the General Synod in 1819. The Ohio Synod, which had come into being a year earlier, on the basis of the Augsburg Confession had its scruples about this union. The North Carolina Synod disintegrated before it could join that fellowship when a number of pastors under the leadership of Henkel withdrew and formed the Tennessee Synod. These also insisted upon a scrupulous recognition of the confessional writings. For this purpose the Henkel family had an English translation of the Book of Concord prepared. The movement was the same as the one in Prussia against the Union and rationalism. Then about twenty years later the Germans came, Prussians and Saxons. The former under Grabau turned to Buffalo, the latter under Walther later organized the Missouri Synod. The importance of both of them in this country originally was that they showed the American Lutherans the right approach to confessions by again leading to direct acquaintance with Luther and the fathers. For in this country, in spite of the fact that they were moving in the right direction, they ever since Muehlenberg's day were unable to take sure steps because of a lack of proper training and the strong remnants of the pietism of Halle. The result of this new impact soon showed in the appearance of capable Lutherans in English circles. Over against S.D. Schmucker, the head of Gettysburg, who advocated a modified or American Lutheranism in his practical and dogmatical writings and otherwise, W.W. Reynolds and the elder C.P. Krauth arose as advocates of orthodox teaching in the *Evangelical Review*. Later the younger Krauth continued his father's work in an even more significant manner. Meanwhile Buffalo and Missouri became embroiled in strife about the doctrine of church and ministry. That started the splintering of the German-American circles and of the Lutherans in general although they all wanted to take the confessions seriously over against the Union and rationalism. Because opposing positions and polemics were involved, all of this activity took place in the dogmatical arena.

Grabau had come to his position and his method in his struggle against the Prussian Union. Walther had been moved by his pietism to take a stand against Saxon rationalism. In the course of time, however, he became acquainted with Luther's writings. Later when Stephan had been exposed and Walther had to reassure the despairing Saxons, he turned to the confessions and the fathers. Although at this time the principle was maintained that this work was to be nothing else than a historical description of what truly Lutheran theology is, the constructive method which characterized the theology of the late seventeenth century surfaced at times.

Later the Iowans entered the picture under the leadership of S.G. Fritschel. In their battle for open questions they had made the demand that one dare not draw deductions where God's Word does not make them, that the exegesis in the confessions dare not be considered binding over against a careful independent exegesis of Scripture itself, that, in fact, the confessions dare not be placed above Scripture.

These were hints of moving in the direction of historical studies. Evidently the Iowans were influenced in this direction by their connection with Loehe, who was in contact with Erlangen. Here the new movement had led to the origin of a group of exegetes who opposed the monopoly of rationalism in exegesis. The guiding spirits were Harless and von Hofmann, and in Leipzig Delitzsch and Keil. But in their case the weakness which comes from a lack of doctrinal firmness also over against so-called scholarship soon became apparent. Furthermore, they were more or less dependent upon Schleiermacher's ideas. A doctrinal presentation true to the confessions was called repristination of the fathers; with that the scholarly conscience could not be satisfied. The Iowans were accused of not being free of the erroneous tendencies inherent in this approach. The battle which Missouri waged against Hofmann was also directed against the aforementioned synod.

Be that as it may, the exegetical intimations of Iowa missed the mark for various reasons. First of all, the exegetical energy which would have been capable of surmounting the prevailing conditions in this country was lacking. Furthermore, the objections which were not incorrect as far as exegetical method was concerned were employed in the service of a false doctrinal position over against a correct one. Not only did they involve a false insinuation against the opponent but also just because of it lost all value as true exegesis. Finally, time and opportunity were not suited for exegetical work. This explains why also Iowa's activity was nothing else than dogmatizing, something which was characteristic of the theology of that time. That is how the polemical writings were written; that is how doctrinal discussions were conducted at synod and conference meetings.

A degree of tranquility in external conditions is necessary if exegesis is to flourish. Dogmatical and practical labors were involved in the pioneer activity of our fathers with which they built our church home. Now that the boundaries have been made secure and the fences built, we may turn our attention to historical studies. Already in the earlier period there was in this country an occasional pursuit of these branches of theological effort in all parts of the Lutheran church. C.F. Schaeffer, C.W. Schaeffer, G.F. Krotel, and M.L. Stoever wrote historical books or translated those of German authors into English. This kind of writings appeared also in the Missouri Synod. But these were not written in the historical-genetic but rather in the more practical or devotional spirit. The concern was either to justify the position of a given party or to work on the popular level. Only after the election controversy and by it were historical studies set in motion. It became necessary carefully to test the traditional interpretations of Scripture and critically to shed light upon the dogmatical presentations of the more recent among the fathers in their connection with contemporary events. The fact that some of the older fathers had been called home led to looking back upon historical beginnings. Then within the Synodical Conference it was Hoenecke who called attention to the necessity of making sure that careful exegesis received due attention in doctrinal controversies. Stoeckhardt put this into practice as teacher of exegesis and author of exegetical treatises and books. In the east the best edition of Meyer's great commentary was translated into English and the condensed *Lutheran Commentary* was published. Gradually it came about that the doctrinal discussions at synod and conference meetings began to be more original and thorough in the use of exegetical proof than had been the case earlier. The east took the lead in the historical domain. The *Hallesche Nachrichten* were reprinted. H.E. Jacobs treated the history of the Lutheran church in our country in English, and A.L. Graebner began his great work concerning the same subject in German. Everywhere a strength of originality showed itself which was ready to investigate underlying causes and reach independent conclusions.

One can see that during the forty years from 1840 to 1880 dogmatics ruled supreme in the theological efforts of the Lutheran church in this country almost without opposition. Circumstances brought this about and in one respect it was a blessing. Firmness and clarity in confession and the right attitude toward Scripture were maintained thereby, while at the same time the influential quarters in Germany lost the confessions and Scripture. Who knows what might have happened in this country if the battle had been waged in the arena of exegesis instead of that of dogmatics. Self-evidently other factors come into consideration, certainly above all else in our case God's grace. But it was not my intention at this time to touch upon the ethical side of this question. My concern at this time is with methods.

The undisputed dominance of dogmatics for such a long time also had its disadvantages for the scholarly and practical side. A degree of mental inflexibility (*Geistesstarre*) has begun to assert itself coupled with a hyperconservative attitude which is more concerned about rest than about conservation. This is always the case

at the end of a period of mental development. The masses get into a rut which has been worn by what had long been customary. In our case it was dogmatics. This mental inflexibility is not healthy, for if it continues it will lead to death. Both in the mental activity of an individual and of a community fresh, vibrant, productive activity is a sign of health.

The inertia of which I am speaking shows itself in a lack of readiness again and again to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. For in the course of time circumstances change and our views also change. For example, words and expressions change their meaning. And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that all of this can become mere empty form without spirit or life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.

This view is opposed by mental inflexibility. It rejects criticism and does not want the traditional to be disturbed. But no man can escape change. Even the most conservative of men after thirty years of development would not be the same as he was at their beginning. Then the influence of the former monopoly of dogmatics shows itself in this way that one seeks to satisfy his conservatism by discovering a formula for the new things which unconsciously have become part of him which is to demonstrate harmony with his former views. Even though the discrepancy is evident, one is at least satisfied that the formula sounds good. As a case in point I refer to the fact that there is no readiness to reckon with the knowledge that the so-called analogy of faith is untenable both on exegetical and historical grounds. In the same category is the demand that in the case of Lutherans discussions are to be based only on the confessions and the writings of the fathers. Another example is the principle that Scripture is to be interpreted by the confessions and not vice versa. To this too is to be attributed the fact that the position of the Synodical Conference is considered an innovation which must therefore be rejected as un-Lutheran. Finally, this is also symptomatic that old opponents are constantly reminded of their past sins without paying attention to their own interpretation of their words, so that conclusions are drawn from their past record instead of showing them the errors in the position they now hold.

For us of the Synodical Conference it would be a reprehensible trend toward dogmatism if we refused to admit that the aforementioned trends were dominant among us just as the Ohio ideas of the election of grace were found also among us before the controversy. It would show a lack of historical sense and judgment to be ashamed to make such an admission, a lack which in part has been spawned by the still prevalent dogmatical insistence upon orthodoxy which leads to the fear that with such an admission something of the former orthodoxy would be sacrificed. The remark is in place that where these things appeared in the past they had a different character from what confronts us today. *Si duo idem faciunt, non est idem*. Time and circumstances give it a different stamp.

Even more is it dogmatical bias and a lack of historical judgment to throw these things up to us of the Synodical Conference. This is not in keeping with calm and sober historical investigation. Furthermore, what is decisive is not whether a matter is old or new, but whether it is right according to God's Word. That is Lutheran. We want to get at the bottom of things once more and that makes it necessary to abandon all prejudice against an opponent in the historical process. This characterizes the true exegetical-historical spirit.

What has been said above about attitudes also applies to the practical life of the church. Our practice is determined by the truth which we represent and the unique circumstances to which we apply it. The truth must remain unchanged but the method must vary in order always to remain the spontaneous expression of the truth. Today we are confronted by new situations. There is the lodge fight, there are the new features in our congregational life: fairs, entertainments, the proliferation of organizations, business methods of raising money for church work, liturgical innovations to beautify our worship services, questions of church polity because of the growth of our synodical body or because of the realization that the demonstration of Christian love leaves much to be desired, our schools, the transition from German to English. We have to face these questions. Ethical considerations play a big part. They can be covered with one term, the intrusion of worldly ways into

the church. We are not about to speak of that here. We are only treating of the influence of methods of study upon the mental makeup of our pastors and their effect upon practical matters.

Now in these questions there often becomes evident the same lack of flexibility, showing itself either in forcing its way with a stupid *fiat justitia, pereat mundus* or in reaching a compromise which is no better by working out a formula which sounds good but won't satisfy anyone with clear insight.

For example, there is lodgery which again is becoming quite a problem. The circumstances which induce people to join today are as difficult to cope with as those of thirty-five years ago. Two slogans summarize positions taken: "Excommunicate them," or "Bear with them as long as they are willing to be instructed." The results? The first breaks up congregations, the other produces second-rate congregation members. But the right course when the problem arises is to solve it by working inner conviction. That demands a degree of mental flexibility which must be coupled with dogmatical firmness. Only he who is sure of his position and firm in it can be gentle and patient. But he will do it with his goal clearly before his eyes to straighten matters out. On the other hand, the flexible blade won't lose its cutting edge or break when it meets stubborn resistance.

The same holds true in other areas. It won't do to go into isolation and pretend that problems do not exist. That would cause us to lose our capacity to fulfill our calling as the salt of the earth. But neither is anything accomplished by making compromises and bringing the world into the church by means of dogmatically correct formulas. We need to be mental masters of adverse situations.

Then we need to know how they came into being, with what they are interrelated, what effect the basic ideas exert, what is effective for overcoming them. That marks the beginning of independence. Clarity leads to purposefulness and prevents becoming dependent upon others and surrendering to a utilitarianism which is satisfied with superficial immediate results. What counts is that we actually stay with the truth in doctrine and conduct and actually shut our church against worldliness.

What is the remedy? What will remove inertia and make the spirit elastic once more? In the realm of the spirit this usually develops by itself, if I may say so. There is change which in part may be traced to its roots and in part not. Most of the time it is brought about by some contrast. Often it is by the exemplary conduct of prominent persons. Often the intimations of a change are there for some time but the impulse vigorously to pursue the course was lacking.

In our case it is the historical studies that indicate that a change is taking place and it is highly important that we do not remain inactive and let it dominate us so that our church may not be harmed by it.

Its impact is already evident and we must be concerned about understanding its importance and retaining control of the rudder. This must be our goal in our seminary and college work.

Our theological students dare not be satisfied with acquiring a knowledge of dogmatics together with the practical skills in homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral theology. Exegesis and history have their proper place in the course of study and deserve to be pursued in a deeply imaginative and earnest manner. But these studies are also indispensable for an ideal practical ministry to the extent that God has supplied the necessary gifts.

Exegetical work produces immediate benefits for both sermonizing and teaching in general. It leads the preacher deeper into Scripture and an understanding of God's thoughts and their influence upon the heart of man and makes him intellectually independent and not bound to commentaries and other aids. History not only gives all kinds of valuable information concerning practical questions but also trains to observe how minds work and to trace historical connections. By this, but even more by the method which is peculiar to history and exegesis, it develops a mental attitude which is of importance for effective practical life. While dogmatics promotes sharp thinking and by directing attention to the precise definition of theological concepts leads to a clear, unambiguous presentation, both historical branches train the mind to probe, to criticize, to be cautious in judgment. They promote modesty, gentleness, and patience in judgment and thus in the mental attitude supplement what dogmatical study has produced.

Our college does preliminary work in this direction in its general history courses, and that not only by supplying students with the general knowledge which becomes the framework into which what is studied in church history is set. No, even there the main emphasis is laid upon the process of historical development in a

clear and concrete manner so that the students are trained in the historical approach. Even there it will be necessary to counteract carefully, but yet firmly and purposefully, the evil which characterizes most history textbooks which overemphasize the historical-genetic approach in the interest of the theory of evolution. Thus the college training prepares the way especially for the study of isagogics at the seminary. Likewise all of the study of languages at the college serves the study of exegesis. At this juncture I would like to insert a kind word for Hebrew. Instruction in this language is apt to be considered secondary to the other courses because it does not fit into the closely knit pattern of the other college courses. The primary purpose of these courses is not to prepare for the seminary, but to supply the students with a comprehensive general education such as is common among the leaders in the community so that when they go apart to pursue their specialized studies they might retain a common basis for working together in the cultural life of the nation. Although our Lutheran colleges are schools of the church, I believe that it is profitable if they keep this goal in mind. Still they remain the institutions from which we expect the preparation of our theologians. Therefore it ought in some way to be made possible to offer so much Hebrew that at the seminary it will be possible at once to begin with exegesis proper also in the Old Testament.

Certainly no one will misunderstand me so completely as to think that I am suggesting that the historical studies are a panacea for every possible evil, both theoretical and practical, in the theological world. My concern was to call attention to their importance at this time when they are again becoming prominent. Therefore it also became necessary to call attention to the dangers inherent in an overemphasis on this trend.

If exegesis were to concentrate exclusively upon current questions, e.g., with the Bible and questions about the Bible, or with the controversy about the Gospel of John; if history were to concern itself primarily with the controversies between Harnack and Zahn concerning the first three or four centuries and the origin of the New Testament canon or to emphasize a rebuttal of the slander of Luther by Denifle and others, in short, if the historical studies were to be devoted more to scholarship and specialization than to serve to train for the practical ministry, that would be a wrong trend. Within certain limitations it might be proper, but it dare not dominate the work at our seminaries. That would lead to a spirit which is foreign to the definitely religious character of our schools and in time also undermine confessional firmness. Therefore it is self-evident that dogmatics and pastoral theology must keep their old place of importance in the curriculum of our theological studies and that the preparatory work at our colleges which is done especially in the religion courses must be of such a nature that nothing is changed in it.

(A sequel to the above article appeared in Volume 2, Number 1, of the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. It is self-explanatory. It is added because of the insights which it affords.)

The above article has been understood as a derogatory criticism of the Missouri Synod, especially also in the years prior to 1880, a criticism which will cause hurt feelings. My attention has been called to this from various quarters.

In brief, what I wrote was taken to imply that Walther and his coworkers practiced a dogmatics which produces mental inflexibility and death; that they did not practice exegesis so that one must receive the impression that they did not stand upon Scripture and only upon Scripture, yes, that they were more concerned about resting than conserving. Furthermore it was supposed that mental inflexibility was referred to in such a manner that it was applied also especially to the work of the Missouri Synod or its representatives in the doctrinal controversy in which we are presently involved in the Lutheran church of this country.

When I spoke of mental inflexibility, I was not becoming personal, wanting to describe any one person or group of persons in the Lutheran church as being incapable of understanding or judging theoretical or practical problems objectively. I was concerned about remaining completely objective. Also when I sought to illustrate what I meant by mental inflexibility by quoting thoughts or statements or referring to actions on the part of our opponents of which I knew from reports or personal observation, I had no intention of becoming personal. Rather it is my intention purely abstractly to describe a way of thinking or understanding things to which we are all exposed as I have often noticed in my own case. Those references were only intended to make my presentation relevant to matters which concern the entire church. Since they are capable of being interpreted either correctly or otherwise than the context in my article requires, they have been understood to apply to

persons whom I would never have had in mind in the pertinent context if I had meant my comments to be personal.

This mental inflexibility itself I do not regard as a consequence of the theology of our fathers prior to 1880 as if they were responsible for the fact that their students or sons were no longer capable of thinking objectively. Rather, I said that it was a mental condition which from time to time simply comes by itself. There are times when certain people appear upon the scene who contend for a cause with intense mental energy. The second or third generation rests upon the shoulders of their predecessors in this matter and does not treat it in the same original manner as they. They simply accept this or that idea as a finished product without having to go through the mental effort which the fathers put forth. So quite spontaneously it comes about that in this matter there is a lack of mental effort which gives the impression of inflexibility. Not only is there no more investigating, but there is also a vigorous championing of the matter because that which has been received from the fathers has taken on the character of something that must be revered. There is some justification for that and for that reason it was in no way my intention to attach any offensive implications to the term even though by itself it might have them. Furthermore, it is not implied that the second and third generation of which we have been speaking has to be lazy and dull. This reverential acceptance of one point may occur because the descendants need their entire mental energy for the other problems which now face them. Self-evidently this can also be accompanied by a reluctance again and again to undertake a new investigation of those matters which are considered settled. This cannot even be done. Still it is always necessary again and again to jolt the mental processes into action. So I look upon mental inflexibility as more of a kind of weariness which takes hold of children after the fathers have used all of their energies to take care of a certain matter. For that reason I have no thought of applying terms like mental inertia and the like to our fathers prior to 1880. It does violence to my sense of modesty to mention in this context my own high opinion of these fathers. But I definitely also do not in any way hold them responsible for the mental inflexibility of later times. My presentation was intended only to show how the specific characteristic of mental inflexibility, which I call the dogmatic, came into being.

When I spoke of Walther's activity as teacher, I did not want to say that Walther did not draw his theology out of Scripture and did no exegesis. This was excluded by the fact that I said that he practiced the dogmatics of our old Lutheran fathers. That makes it self-evident that he and his coworkers are Bible theologians, that is, that their entire theology rests upon Scripture. The first proof which they bring to show that their doctrine is correct is always proof from Scripture. That was the only proof which counted for them and no other authority.

But I did have a distinction in mind between historical-genetic exegesis, as it is now called, and an exegesis which more or less is employed in the service of dogmatics. There is a difference between the exegesis of a man who makes exegesis his specialty and that of a man whose prime concern is dogmatics. The difference does not lie in the result, in the truth or correctness of the argumentation, but in the nature of the mental process. This was my concern in the entire article.

This type of exegete at the outset bypasses the finished product of the doctrinal truth and comes to it only at the end of his labors. His activity is to search, to dig, to find. Knowledge of language is the tool with which he works. He observes the feeling for language which people have and how it creates words and language structure as times change to find a unique way of expressing each thought. When the professional exegete works through the entire Scripture or entire books of the Bible in that manner, he develops a unique way of thinking and perceiving and a faculty for noticing how people express themselves and an interest in the history of the development of language. Under normal circumstances this is a man-sized job.

The dogmatician, however, is concerned about the careful and neat formulation of concepts so that neither too little nor too much is understood by them. He puts the doctrines into orderly sequence, makes sharp distinctions between them in his presentation, excludes deductions from one to the other, and thus presents the entire system of doctrine as a connected whole. His tool is logic and his sphere of activity is the doctrinal presentation which has developed in the course of centuries. When one considers that it took the ancient church three centuries to find adequate terms in the language and ideas of classical antiquity clearly and purely to express concepts for which there is no specific term in the Bible itself, terms like *physis*, *ousia*, *hypostasis*,

prosopon; when one considers further the fine distinctions which had to be made because of the opposition to orthodox teaching on the part of Rome, the Reformed, and the rationalists of the sixteenth centuries in order to present it clearly and unambiguously, it becomes evident that again it is a man-sized job to do justice to this work and teach dogmatics.

Of course both of these mental activities have something in common. They belong together. The exegete cannot get along without the dogmatical distinctions nor the dogmatician without the exegetical proof. But I am under the impression that very rarely can one find the same person gifted with both aptitudes in an outstanding manner. I find them both in Luther and would like to consider him both the greatest exegete and the greatest dogmatician. Otherwise, however, it seems to me that either one or the other activity is always predominant, and in my opinion in the great period of our American Lutheran church it was dogmatics.

When the dogmatician brings his exegetical proof, it will usually happen that he relies upon the work which the exegete has done for him. That results in two peculiarities in his exegesis. 1. It is not really original work, that is, he does not do the research but finds the results of such work elsewhere. 2. That leads to the second peculiarity that his presentation at times makes it evident that among the various possible interpretations he picks the one which best suits his dogmatical purpose.

It is my impression that our American Lutheran fathers inherited their exegesis from the fathers, just as this trend appeared even in the time before pietism that the interpretation of certain passages was perpetuated by word of mouth or from author to author, yes even sometimes in such a manner that the unbiased observer is struck by the fact that in some relatively unimportant instances the exegesis is incorrect from the exegetical standpoint.

I am not applying this to specific individuals. Rather, my only thought was that due to prevailing circumstances in large circles of our Lutheran church study of the old Lutheran fathers flourished to such a degree that people became completely involved in it and that they took the exegetical weapons for their doctrinal controversy out of the arsenal which the old armorers had forged two and three centuries earlier. At the same time in Europe exegetical schools arose who made exegetical studies their specialty, yes, their profession and in so doing paid more attention to the results of language study since 1750 than was the case with us.

It was in this sense that I spoke of the predominance of dogmatics in the years prior to 1880.

Two conclusions are unwarranted. 1. Exegetical proof did not come out on the short end with our American fathers. On the contrary, always and throughout they stood upon Scripture. For all that they presented as doctrine they brought proof from Scripture. 2. One dare not say of their activity that it was without imagination, not original, mechanical; or that our fathers were more concerned about resting than about conserving; that in all of this there appeared in certain respects a lack of scholarship. I do not have to say that even Walther's opponents will consider him the equal of the chief theologians of the previous century. For me it is more important that through his work a very large circle not only of pastors but also of laymen was led into God's Word so that, for example, many pastors who lacked to a greater or lesser degree the scholarly equipment which is taken for granted at European universities knew how to handle Holy Scripture and the heavy armor of the fathers better than any other circle of like size in the entire world of that time.

For this kind of theology I may borrow a term with which Walther's opponents in a contemptuous tone tried to nullify his work: *restitution of the ancients*. It certainly was that, and Walther wanted nothing else. But it does not express the contempt which the others without justification implied. This implies no lack of mental ability or originality. This is proved by two easily observable facts. 1. In spite of what one might have expected because of the peculiar nature of the matter, Walther with a proper sense of values stood upon Luther and not upon the later dogmaticians. 2. In any number of doctrines, of which that of the election of grace was the last, he opposed the presentation of many of the great teachers of the past and in our time independently championed the correct doctrine and proved it from Scripture.

Furthermore, the expression "*restitution of the ancients*" does not imply the charge that our fathers were behind the times in respect to the method employed in their theological work. Their opponents of that period did raise the charge. But wrongly so. For in practice both in doctrinal controversy and in promoting the

kingdom of God in general what counts is not method, but representing the truth of Scripture. Walther and his students and coworkers not only did that but also proved it.

One example to illustrate what I mean. Walther's sermons have their own character which I call dogmatical. The text and the exegesis of it receive less emphasis than dogmatical explanation. These sermons are typical of the preaching style of his students. And yet I do not know what type of sermons on the part of his contemporaries would have accomplished more to lead people into Scripture and to promote God's kingdom and to teach correct doctrine than they.

Candor demands that I mention that this explanation is contradicted by people in whose knowledge and judgment I have more confidence than in my own. They contend that my theory of the historical development of history in this country does not correspond to the facts. I am not ready now to drop my views, for at present I lack the time to undertake the necessary review. So I must leave the correctness of my presentation in suspense. At present my concern was to show that a derogatory disparagement of my great teacher and his coworkers and contemporaries was farthest from my thoughts.