

The Influence of J. C. K. von Hofmann  
on Georg Stoeckhardt and J. P. Koehler

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## Introduction

"Intellectual history often ends up as second-rate minds trying to analyze first-rate minds." Such is certainly the case with this paper. Without question, Hofmann, Stoeckhardt, and Koehler are among the greatest minds in the history of the Lutheran Church. Most significantly for this paper, all three placed great stress on exegesis as the heart and mind of theology. Hofmann influenced Stoeckhardt directly; Koehler came under Hofmann's influence via Stoeckhardt and his own study.

The connection between Hofmann and Stoeckhardt has been made before; it was expounded at length by Richard Baepler in his Bachelor of Divinity thesis, "The Hermeneutics of Johannes Christian Konrad von Hofmann with Special Reference to his Influence on Georg Stoeckhardt."<sup>2</sup> Stoeckhardt in turn was instructor of August Pieper, J. P. Koehler, and John Schaller. All three of these Wauwatosa theologians reflect Stoeckhardt's influence in their writings. Koehler was chosen for this paper because, as professor of New Testament, Hermeneutics and Church History, he would have the most to say about Hofmann and Stoeckhardt; and he does echo Hofmann in many ways.

A study of how Hofmann's emphases were handed down is by nature speculative. We cannot ask the men themselves about such influence; and even if that were possible, the men could not recall their exact thought processes. Common themes can be identified by examining the writings of these theologians and the analyses which others have done of them.

Such an "historical-critical" study is valid for the writings of men, although it is not valid for the study of the Bible. But there is a danger

in trying to trace the source of a man's thoughts: it would be easy to forget the direct influence of God's Word. Stoeckhardt and Koehler certainly read Hofmann and others and adopted many earlier ideas as their own; yet they were first of all students of Scripture. The Holy Spirit was alive in their hearts and remained the primary influence on all of their writings.

Therefore this inquiry is of limited importance. God surely does work through the writings of theologians, especially when these are based on his Word. But his purest influence is through the bare Scripture itself. This was the conclusion of Stoeckhardt, Koehler, and the other great early leaders of Missouri and Wisconsin. This was the essence of the "Wauwatosa Theology," and the heritage which we today strive to continue.

J. C. K. von Hofmann

Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann lived from Dec. 21, 1810 to Dec. 20, 1877. He was born in Nuremberg to a family which was influenced by the Awakening in Germany. Hofmann studied at the University of Erlangen, where he was influenced by the Reformed professor Johann Christian Krafft to devote himself to the Scriptures. In 1829 he began study at Berlin, where Schleiermacher, Hegel and Hengstenberg were all lecturing. But Hofmann was more interested in the historical studies of Leopold von Ranke. Hofmann began teaching in 1832 as a *Gymnasiallehrer*; in 1835 he became *Repetent*, in 1838 *Privatdozent*, and in 1841 *Professor* at Erlangen.<sup>3</sup> In 1842 he started teaching Old and New Testament courses at Rostock, but in 1845 he returned to Erlangen to teach New Testament Exegesis, Ethics, and Encyclopedia.<sup>4</sup>

Hofmann must be put into his historical context. Rationalism in the seventeenth century had directly contradicted confessional Lutheranism. Even those theologians who still held the Scriptures supreme allowed reason to dictate how to interpret the Bible. A Pietistic reaction seemed inevitable.

The 1817 anniversary of the Reformation proved fateful for Lutheranism, not only in the way which the celebrants anticipated. The main event of that year was the movement toward the union of the Reformed and Lutheran churches in Germany. This Prussian Union would dominate Protestant and Lutheran events in Germany from that date onward. The Evangelische Kirche

still today retains a near-monopoly on non-Catholic theological developments.

Another event of 1817 would have far-reaching significance, that is, reaching well into the New World. Claus Harms' publication of a new 95 Theses, opposing the new union and all rationalism, formed the rallying point for Lutherans who wished a return to sixteenth-century confessionalism. This movement has usually been defined along two lines: "Repristination Theology" and the Erlangen theology.

Repristination was perhaps best defined by August Vilmar in 1856:

"Theology must know that she has nothing new to say, nothing new to discover, but that her task is to preserve the spiritual treasure that has been given in Holy Scripture and received by the Church, in such a form that it may be transmitted to future servants of the Church undiminished, certain, and in its most useful form" <sup>5</sup>

In many ways Walther, Hoenecke and Francis Pieper can be considered students of this school. German leaders of this movement included Hengstenberg, Caspari, Klieforth and Philippi. Ernst Henstenberg was a great student of Hebrew and Arabic. His exegetical works, especially on the Old Testament, strongly confessed the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture; his Evangelische Kirchenzeitung made him many enemies among the German rationalists.

Friedrich A. Philippi attempted a dogmatics text modeled after the classic Lutheran scholars, with added criticism of the rationalists. But Philippi could only argue for the inspiration of the writers of the Bible and their ideas, not for the particular words they used. "The single letters, syllables, and words, apart from their content and connection, are

not to be regarded as something to be dictated from without, for Scripture is not the words but the Word of God; if it were, divine providence would not have permitted these sacred words to be transmitted to us in variant readings."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, other Germans of the "restitution school" were influenced by Schleiermacher and Hegel to denying strict verbal inspiration.

The other conservative movement among German Lutherans centered around the University of Erlangen. These theologians attempted to tie together classic Lutheran theology with the newer methods of Biblical interpretation. In the Erlangen movement there was a genuine emphasis on making Scripture the source and norm of all teaching: as Thomasius wrote,

...It is true that we have held fast faithfully to the Confessions of the Church, and have defended them on many sides when they were assailed. But it is not true that they have ever been a mere external law or bond for us. We have confessed them from within because we found in them the expression of our own convictions and because we have been convinced of their scripturalness.<sup>7</sup>

The Confessions were defended because they agreed with one's beliefs. Thus the Confessions were put in their place as servants of Scripture, and the power of the Holy Spirit working through Scripture was affirmed.

Yet this emphasis on the subjective aspect of faith was abused by many in the Erlangen school. Thomasius wrote: "We were Lutherans long before we knew it. We finally discovered that the contents of our personal experience was also the content of the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>8</sup> That "personal experience" via the Holy Spirit was used not only to validate Scripture but also to subtract from it anything which did not match the experience. It is easy to see parallels between Erlangen and Bultmann's emphasis on the *kerygma* of the Gospel.

J. C. K. von Hofmann was the great scientist of the Erlangen school. In his 1852 work, Der Schriftbeweis, Hofmann wrote that any theology is valid only as far as it agrees with the three-fold testimony of the Holy Spirit: first, the experience of regeneration; second, the history of the Church; and finally, in Scripture.<sup>9</sup> This testimony validates beliefs before any scientific or dogmatic study of theology; the Holy Spirit makes a person certain of the truths of the Bible, not any rational arguments.

Hofmann sought to build his theology on the personal rebirth of the Christian. A Christian feels God's love for him and his love for God; from this he deduces that it took Christ's coming for God to love him, since he was not naturally in that relationship with God; and from this it follows that man is guilty of something, since he was not naturally an object of God's love.<sup>10</sup> Thus all theology could be deduced from the regeneration experience. But because of sin and evil, deductions can go wrong; thus further testimony is needed, that of the Church and of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the best part of Hofmann's theology is his insistence on taking Scripture as a whole. In Weissagung und Erfüllung im Alten und im Neuen Testament, Hofmann tied together all of the history of Israel as one story pointing to Christ. But for Hofmann, this was not merely the correct method of interpretation; it was necessary in order to establish the historical approach to theology, the *Heilsgeschichte*, which stood in contrast to the systematic approach. Both methods were necessary to offset each other. To Hofmann, systematic theology starts with the individual experience, as previously outlined.

Hofmann was one of the most influential theologians of the 19th century. His commentary on the New Testament was a standard in Lutheran pastors' libraries. This work, entitled Die heilige Schrift neuen Testaments zusammenhaengend untersucht, sought to define Hofmann's views of the establishment of the canon. "The older dogmaticians, in his opinion, had simply applied the authority which belonged to the Scriptures itself to the existing collection of the canonical books; while the newer critical school had excluded a number of books from those it regarded as a part of the trustworthy and primitive Christian tradition."<sup>12</sup> By contrast, Hofmann looked for an inner validation, by the Spirit, based on the certainty of God's love arriving in Christ. This was the same subjective reasoning that the Erlangen theologians used for accepting the Confessions.



### Georg Stoeckhardt

Karl Georg Stoeckhardt lived from 1842 to 1913. Born in Chemnitz, he attended college in Meissen, before going for graduate work. He spent the school year 1862-63 at Erlangen, studying under Thomasius, August Koehler, von Zezschwitz, and von Hofmann. 1863-66 Stoeckhardt was in Leipzig, attending lectures by Kahnis, Franz Delitsch, and Luthardt. In 1866 he went to Berlin, where he took courses with von Ranke, Steinmeyer, Doerner, and especially Hengstenberg. Stoeckhardt went to Marburg in 1867 just to hear Vilmar speak, and also went to Neuendettelsau to meet Loehe.<sup>13</sup> Thus in a few years Stoeckhardt became personally acquainted with the greatest theologians of Germany, especially those who had rejected rationalism.

Beginning in 1867 Stoeckhardt taught at a school for teenage girls in his home town of Tharandt. At this time he realized the need for basic Bible teaching, and he devoted himself to in-depth exegesis.<sup>14</sup> He became a pastor in Paris, but with the coming of the Franco-Prussian War he was arrested as a German spy. He then served as a camp pastor with the German army.

From 1871 to 1873 he taught at Erlangen. He submitted his dissertation on "The Son of Man" to get his degree as Licentiatum Theologiae, but it was rejected as not scientific. He submitted it to the University of Leipzig, where it was accepted.<sup>15</sup> At Erlangen, Hofmann was advisor and reader for Stoeckhardt's thesis. Stoeckhardt felt that Hofmann was not satisfied with the practical aim of the paper.<sup>16</sup>

Yet all the while Hofmann hoped that Stoeckhardt would end up on the faculty at Erlangen. No doubt he realized the younger man's gifts, especially his devotion to exegesis. Fuerbringer recorded these recollections of Stoeckhardt:

...As I know from many conversations, [Hofmann] had exercised the greatest influence upon him, especially in exegesis...Later he showed that he was not only a thorough student of Hofmann's Commentary on the New Testament, but also had to some extent learned from him the exegetical method apparent in his own commentaries; but he carefully avoided the pitfalls of Hofmann, who, instead of reproducing the exact thoughts of the Biblical writer, sometimes inserted his own opinion.<sup>17</sup>

A less sympathetic writer, Theodore Graebner, noted in his biography of Francis Pieper: "In Erlangen labored J. C. K. von Hofmann, one of the greatest interpreters of Scripture, teacher of our own Dr. Stoeckhardt, whose peculiarities of exegetical method were derived from the lectures of von Hofmann."<sup>18</sup>

Stoeckhardt definitely used Hofmann's commentaries, for his personal study and for his exegetical writings. In his commentary on Romans, Stoeckhardt stated that he was following the methodology of Hofmann, Godet and Philippi; as he explained, "Every new commentary on Romans must self-evidently take the previous commentaries into consideration."<sup>19</sup> William Goerss listed the references to other commentators in Stoeckhardt's major commentaries.<sup>20</sup> His list reveals that Hofmann was used most often, not only in total, but for each particular commentary. Stoeckhardt's Ephesians commentary had approximately as many references to Ewald and Haupt, while the Romans commentary referred to Meyer, Philippi and Weisz almost as often as Hofmann. For each individual book of the Bible, Stoeckhardt used the

best commentators available; for every book of the New Testament, that included Hofmann.

But while Stoeckhardt admired Hofmann's exegetical skills, he could not agree with his theological conclusions. In a Bachelor's Thesis entitled, "The Hermeneutics of Johannes Christian Konrad von Hofmann with Special Reference to his Influence on Georg Stoeckhardt," Richard Baepler compared the writings of the two men. "This investigation did not discover any direct analyses of von Hofmann's writings in the large literary deposit Stoeckhardt left behind. But we do possess several analyses of writings of men whom Stoeckhardt considers to be reproducing the theses of von Hofmann." Stoeckhardt links Hofmann to those who assert that "Scriptures are primarily witnesses to God's revelation, not primarily revelation."<sup>21</sup> Stoeckhardt criticizes Hofmann and the other founders of the Erlangen theology for basing their work on the Christian ego. "The general theme of Stoeckhardt's criticism is consistently that von Hofmann is setting aside Scripture as the source and norm of theology, elevating himself above Scripture and developing his theology out of himself."<sup>22</sup>

Hofmann was willing to admit that there may be errors in the Bible: "What Holy Scripture teaches concerning the history of the origin of mankind rests upon a tradition which may not agree with actual facts."<sup>23</sup> Stoeckhardt criticized all who took away from the truth of God's Word. And Stoeckhardt emphasized the sufficiency of Scripture. As Baepler summarizes Stoeckhardt's view, "Everything has been revealed in Sacred Scriptures. The Holy Spirit teaches what is already there."<sup>24</sup> Hofmann, on the other hand, saw revelation as a continuing force in history.

Stoeckhardt also disagreed with many of Hofmann's exegetical conclusions. Hofmann was a kenoticist, as were many in the Erlangen school.<sup>25</sup> Stoeckhardt completely rejected this view in his comments on Philippians, linking it to a denial of Christ's divinity.<sup>26</sup>

Stoeckhardt admired Hofmann greatly for exegetical methods; yet he rejected many of his teacher's conclusions, both in philosophy and in specific doctrines. Certainly the Holy Spirit was working through the Word which Stoeckhardt studied so diligently. And yet, there may also have been other professors whose more orthodox teachings helped to produce the scholar who would have such great influence on both Missouri and Wisconsin men to the present day.

In many ways Ernst Hengstenberg's views on the historical nature of Scripture were very similar to Stoeckhardt's. The son of a Reformed preacher, Hengstenberg became more of an orthodox Lutheran through personal study of the Scriptures. One year after becoming full professor at Berlin, Hengstenberg started Die Evangelische Kirchenzeitung, his mouthpiece to attack Rationalism. His exegetical works, especially of the Old Testament, likewise defended the inerrancy of Scripture against previous commentators. But he also wrote many historical works. Heick summarizes Hengstenberg's approach: "The Old Testament in its entirety was regarded as a prophecy that contained all the essential Christian doctrines."<sup>27</sup> Hengstenberg wrote a History of the Kingdom of God, and perhaps his most famous work, Christology of the Old Testament, which Stoeckhardt quoted at length in his own series of articles in Lehre und Wehre entitled "Christ in Old Testament Prophecy."

Hengstenberg's New Testament commentaries reflect the same emphasis; he felt that "the Gospel of John, e.g., is from beginning to end interwoven with deeply concealed references to the Old Testament."<sup>28</sup> This search occasionally led Hengstenberg to the brink of allegory, as he wrote about every possible connection: in regard to John 6:18 he noted, "The winds in Scripture denote the sufferings and temptations appointed by God"; he then went on to mention six verses where this is true.<sup>29</sup> Taken in the context of his time, this is a minor fault; but it stands in contrast to the careful exegesis of Stoeckhardt.

It is difficult to assess what influence Stoeckhardt may have felt from Hengstenberg. In the area of exegesis, Stoeckhardt would have studied Hengstenberg diligently, especially his Old Testament works. Of course, in formulating his own theological outlook, Hengstenberg himself was likely influenced by the other theologians of the early 1800's. He certainly held a view that was similar to Hofmann and Stoeckhardt, in putting Christ at the center of all of the Bible:

The center of God's decrees for the salvation of man was from the beginning in Christ. But in order that His appearance might effect that which it was calculated to produce in accordance with the condition of men upon whom happiness was not to be forced, it was preceded by a long period of preparation....Thus God's measures of salvation, and therefore their history, is divided into two great parts: the time of preparation; and the time of fulfillment....<sup>30</sup>

Yet Hengstenberg did not accept Hofmann's understanding of *Heilsgeschichte*, evidently because he saw that liberals would use it to deny the canonicity of all the Bible.

Hengstenberg was widely derided for not accepting any "scientific" theories (many of these attacks were the natural reaction to his own fiery writings). Hengstenberg denied any theology which would subtract from the sacred text: "Whoever attacks the least part of the Old Testament is attacking Christ."<sup>31</sup> Hengstenberg's "assumption-less" methodology was derided by his rationalistic colleague Bruno Bauer as leading to the loss of the distinction between Law and Gospel, finally ending in "ever more particulars." Hengstenberg insisted on the Pentateuch as "die einzige Quelle." In return he was dismissed as a Biblicist.<sup>32</sup> In all these references, Hengstenberg seems to be closer to Stoeckhardt than Hofmann is.

The critical treatment of Hengstenberg may shed some light on the mid-twentieth century critiques of Stoeckhardt. In his 1954 thesis, Richard Baepler discovered more differences than similarities between the two theologians. Indeed, Stoeckhardt was directly critical of those who followed Hofmann in emphasizing the preaching of Christ over Scripture.<sup>33</sup> After noting Stoeckhardt's conclusion that Hofmann elevates himself over Scripture, Baepler asked not only, "Does this represent a correct estimate of von Hofmann's thinking?" but also, "Would von Hoffman have agreed to this view of his theology?"<sup>34</sup> Baepler can cite several quotes which answer the latter question negatively, but this does not invalidate Stoeckhardt's conclusion. Baepler felt that Stoeckhardt did not understand Hofmann; but it seems that Stoeckhardt realized the dangers of Hofmann's theology better than Hofmann did.

Baepler went to great lengths to find similarities between Stoeckhardt and Hofmann, but had to admit that the two had completely different views

of the nature of prophecy. William Goerss' 1964 doctoral thesis on Stoeckhardt attempted to make him into a critical scholar. Goerss even wrote this seemingly self-contradictory paragraph:

Stoeckhardt accepts the sixty-six books of the canon as collected. However, he recognizes that there are difficulties inherent in the history of the canon. He recognizes that the first epistle of St. Peter is omitted from the list of the Muratorian Canon. He further recognizes, without elaboration, that the Scriptures in Jesus' time were divided into the Books of Moses, Prophets, and Psalms (Writings). Eventually we hope to find further elaboration from Stoeckhardt himself on the exact canon he claimed to exist in Jesus' day and the effect this would have on his view of the later additions to the Jewish canon at the Council of Jamnia in 90 A. D.<sup>25</sup>

It is no lessening of their scholarship to note that Baepler's advisor was Arthur Piepkorn, his reader Martin Scharlemann; Goerss' advisor was Scharlemann. Very likely these professors would have taught that Hofmann's theology was an acceptable Lutheran one, and they would have looked for connections to their own Missouri Synod. Stoeckhardt was influenced by Hofmann, but this influence could easily be overstated.

J. P. Koehler

Baepler and Goerss had trouble understanding Stoeckhardt. By contrast, J. P. Koehler had no difficulty in accepting Stoeckhardt's work; as he wrote about the Römerbrief, "The writer accepts without reservation the entire canon as the Word of God. For us, who stand on the same ground, this makes reading this work a lot easier and more fun than when we have before us works of another sort."<sup>36</sup> Koehler not only understood Stoeckhardt, he loved his teacher's works.

The connection between Stoeckhardt and Koehler is obvious. After leaving Erlangen in 1873, Stoeckhardt served as pastor of the State Church in Oberplanitz, overlooking Zwickau. He had been sent there to oppose the Free Church and its American pastor, Ruhland. But Stoeckhardt soon was disagreeing with his congregation over church discipline. Some Missouri Synod materials helped convince him that the State Church was not true to Lutheranism. In 1876 he joined Ruhland's church in Niederplanitz. Threatened with oppression by the state, in 1878 he accepted a call to Holy Cross congregation in St. Louis, near Concordia Seminary.

Walther had wanted Stoeckhardt called directly to the Seminary, but the Missouri Synod in convention, still upset at the loss of Gustav Seyffarth, Heinrich Baumstark, and Eduard Preuss, was reluctant to call another German man as professor.<sup>37</sup> The Synod elected to call Francis Pieper from the Wisconsin Synod, although he was only three years out of Seminary himself.

That school year, 1878-79, must have been incredibly active at Concordia Seminary. Francis Pieper arrived in St. Louis on October 1. He



was met at the train station by a carriage driven by Henry Jungkuntz and the new professor's brother, August, a Senior (no mention is made of any conflict between the two). The very next day, at 10:00 A.M., he began his first lecture, Senior Dogmatics. On October 4 Goerg Stoeckhardt arrived. He was soon pressed into lecturing on Hebrew exegesis.<sup>39</sup> The 93 students that year included not only A. Pieper, but also Middler J. P. Koehler, and Junior J. Schaller.<sup>39</sup>

At this time the Election Controversy was coming to a head. The new professor and the new lecturer were each pressed into service, writing for Lehre und Wehre and Der Lutheraner. Stoeckhardt became a part-time professor in 1881, full-time in 1887. His duties eventually included lecturing on Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, Prophets, and most of the New Testament.<sup>40</sup>

There are no records of how F. Pieper and Stoeckhardt got along personally. But, according to Roy Suelflow, "their theological formation, their attitudes that went into their major emphases and their professional life as theologians were certainly vastly different." Pieper was trained under Walther, using Baier as the dogmatics text, and Pieper retained the approach of the seventeenth-century dogmaticians. This method "de-emphasized inductive exegesis of Scripture," emphasizing core doctrines; "exegesis was ancillary to dogmatics."<sup>41</sup> Roy Suelflow commented on the danger this presented to conservative Lutheranism: "When this happens, it becomes difficult or impossible to correct inadequacies in one's own theological stance, because you have lost the craft of really burnishing

your anchor chains in the Scriptures." No doubt A. Pieper, J. P. Koehler and J. Schaller would have agreed with that warning.

Stoeckhardt, on the other hand, was an exegete. In his History of the Wisconsin Synod, Koehler went so far as to write, "Original exegesis was introduced at the St. Louis school by Pastor-Professor G. Stoeckhardt..."<sup>161</sup> This may seem to be a criticism of Walther, and very likely was a criticism of F. Pieper. Yet Koehler was able to put Walther into his historical context. Koehler wrote regarding the 1860's controversy with the General Synod:

Where will one look for the correct Gospel attitude, if one has a closer acquaintance with American church history of that time? Is it not there where the fullness and the depth of the understanding of the Gospel truth are to be found? At that time this was with Walther and his associates.<sup>42</sup>

Walther himself was well aware of the differences between a systematic and an exegetical approach. In the Forward to the 1862 Volume of Lehre und Wehre, subtitled: "Do We Lack Creative Activity?," Walther explained that he went back to the Confessions on purpose: to avoid the mistakes of the modern methods of study. Walther knew that such methods could be used to pervert the truths of the Gospel. As he wrote regarding the Prussian Lutheran Church, "If that church is not willing first to learn humbly from our fathers in the faith, and only then teach and become creatively active, its fate is sealed."<sup>43</sup> This quote indicates not only Walther's method of the time, namely sticking to the Confessions; it also hints that Walther was open to fresh, new exegetical work, after the base of sticking to Scripture was properly laid.

This debate came to the fore in the election controversy. J. P. Koehler, taking his Seminary training at a crucial moment of the debate, recognized the false arguments advanced by many theologians. His own later masterpiece on "the Analogy of Faith" demonstrated that exegesis can very properly refute false doctrine.

Koehler credited both Walther and Stoeckhardt with using exegetical methods in the Election Controversy; as he wrote in his obituary of Stoeckhardt, "Now that theologian departs who next to Walther was the real representative of the theological approach that won acceptance in the process of the Election Controversy."<sup>44</sup>

J. P. Koehler (1859-1951), student of Walther, F. Pieper and Stoeckhardt, became a professor at Northwestern College eight years after his own graduation from Concordia Seminary. Twelve years later, in 1900, he accepted a call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, in Wauwatosa. As professor of New Testament Exegesis, Church History, Hermeneutics, Church Music, Liturgics, and languages, Koehler had many opportunities to comment on hermeneutics texts and methods, most notably including the work of J. C. K. von Hofmann.

Richard Baepler noted that Stoeckhardt did not make the subjective nature of exegesis a strong emphasis. Baepler did find a few references in Stoeckhardt which stated "that the chief content of Scriptures are objects of faith and can be apprehended only by faith."<sup>45</sup> But Baepler concluded that Stoeckhardt referred to the work of the Holy Spirit in exegesis far less frequently than Hofmann.<sup>46</sup>

To be certain, Koehler made a point of emphasizing the Spirit's work in establishing the truth of Scripture, and of every part of Scripture:

Our faith in the Gospels does not rest upon a so-called scientific proof propounded by our respective theologians intended to confound the opponents in isagogics, but on the witness of the Holy Spirit which speaks to our hearts from these Gospels....It might seem to some that I would thereby seek to draw into question the objectivity of our theology. Not at all: rather, I should like to oppose the intellectualizing tendency which has been riding herd over our theology for some time and to show that this is neither theological nor scientific....[In reference to the writings of Peter and Paul:] The message of the saving health in Christ which they relate at once appeals so directly to our hearts as the Word of the Holy Spirit that it creates acceptance with the assurance that no other proof is needed. It possesses the soul with the certainty of sins forgiven, with the certainty that this is truth, so that no firmer assurance is possible.<sup>47</sup>

Koehler stated directly that the subjective analysis is predominant in determining canonicity of a specific book:

The strength of [the exegete's] position toward the individual books of Scripture in their connection with the canon does not, however, rest upon the intellectual decisions, but in his faith in the forgiveness of sins, which he has gained from the entire volume.<sup>48</sup>

Compare this to a wordier yet similar section from Hofmann:

The interpreter does not begin with a critical treatment of [Scripture's] component parts, or with questioning the value which Christianity ascribes to them on account of the fact that they are parts of its Holy Scripture. Rather he approaches them with an assurance rooted in his Christian faith that Scripture will verify his belief in its unity. This assurance is the spiritual disposition which precedes and accompanies his scientific study....Since the distinctive miracle of Holy Scripture lies in the fact that as God's work performed through His Spirit it has those characteristics which are needed to make it normative for the Church, the interpreter's attention must be directed above all to them....He searches Scripture for those features which make it fit to be normative for the life of the Church....To the extent that he succeeds in this task he becomes aware of the canonicity of its parts.

The Christian is more sure of Christ...as the one who personally mediates his relationship to God, than of anything

that is perceptible and given to his senses. In accordance with that fact, he evaluates the witness which Scripture bears to the history which forms the basis of that awareness and of which he is the result.<sup>49</sup>

Of course, for Hofmann, relying on subjective faith to realize the canonicity of a portion of the Bible could be taken two ways: to accept and to reject:

If the exegete finds portions of the canon of the ancient Church which can not be integrated into the framework of a unified truth of salvation, he must not force them into this unity, or accomodate the saving truth to them; rather he is entitled to doubt whether they truly belong to the Holy Scripture of Christendom.<sup>50</sup>

Koehler would not have accepted the destructive attitude behind these remarks.

Hofmann was willing to reject not only whole books, but also portions which did not directly deal with the *Heilsgeschichte*: "...This certainty does not apply to those facts which by themselves are objects of natural knowledge....In other words, Holy Scripture is not an infallible textbook of cosmology, anthropology, psychology, etc...."<sup>51</sup> Evidently Stoeckhardt did not argue against his former professor by name, but he made some obvious references to Hofmann which criticized him for conceding to the rationalists that there are errors in the Bible.<sup>52</sup> Koehler directly refuted Hofmann's denial of the inerrancy of Scripture:

We must bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...Hence Hofmann's thesis must be rejected that errors crept in through the reflection of the writers, at least in regard to matters foreign to salvation. The reasons are threefold: 1. the thesis is obtained only by speculation; 2. it is not confirmed by experience; 3. the scientific results which are to prove it are themselves open to question.<sup>53</sup>

Thus Koehler was able to accept what he could of Hofmann's ideas (whether he got them from Hofmann or not). This reliance on the testimony of the Spirit is connected to Hofmann's emphasis on the subjective nature of faith. According to Baepler,

The difference between the two theologians [Hofmann and Stoeckhardt] becomes much clearer when the *fides qua*, the specifically subjective element of faith, is discussed. Stoeckhardt is extremely reluctant to dwell on this aspect of faith. 'Der Glaube ist ein Correlatbegriff, gar nicht denkbar ohne seinen Inhalt.'<sup>54</sup>

Koehler, on the other hand, always held that *πίστις* is always subjective faith, "the act of believing."<sup>55</sup> This is another area where Koehler, while perhaps not getting his ideas from Hofmann, at least felt secure enough to hold some of the same views as a liberal critic.

Evidently Koehler did not devote too much of his writing to Hofmann. Hofmann is mentioned three times in the Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte, the first time at the head of a sub-paragraph.<sup>56</sup> Hofmann is not listed in the index to The History of the Wisconsin Synod. In the introduction to his Hermeneutics outline, Koehler wrote, "Hofmann's *Hermeneutics* is the last epoch-making work. Many exegetes labored contemporaneously with him and after him. Their disagreements stem from a dogmatic, not really a hermeneutical position."<sup>57</sup>

Likewise in class, Koehler did not spend too much time with Hofmann. One of his students in the middle 1910's, Arthur Werner, recorded in his notebook for "Encyklopädie u. Metodologie" class a list of the Erlangen theologians, including this:

Joh Chr. K. v. Hofmann Erlangen  
"D. Schr beweis" etwas unzuverlässig,  
spint alles aus z.t.l. Bewusstsein. Lehrer  
Stöckhardts.<sup>58</sup>

Werner's notation in Church History reads:

Der Reformierte Krafft legt in Bayern den Grund für e luth  
Wiedererweckg. (De d Studium d Bibel u. d Gesch komt jederman  
zr Erkenntnis, als d luth Ki die richtige ist, wen man ne de  
äusserl Dinge gehindert w.) Schüler v. Krafft u Rothe sind  
Hofmann u Harless, die bedeutendsten Theologen ds 19 Jahrh.<sup>59</sup>

One of the most significant theologians of the 1800's, yet still somewhat  
unreliable; this no doubt summarized Koehler's view of Hofmann. No doubt  
Koehler read Hofmann's works eagerly, and agreed with many points; but when  
Hofmann rejected part of Scripture, he could not be trusted.

## Conclusion

Johann C. K. von Hofmann did some "epoch-making" writing. He sought to reconcile the old Lutheran faith with new methods of Scripture study not simply by going back to what the Lutheran dogmaticians had written, but by going to the Bible itself. This basic impulse of trusting Scripture to provide its own interpretation, rather than relying on dogmatics texts, was Hofmann's great legacy to his students, notably Stoeckhardt, and also to the next generation, especially the Wauwatosa theologians.

But Hofmann was also willing to accept some illegitimate methods of exegesis, notably the historical-critical approach. His *Heilsgeschichte* theology, while clearly explaining the true purpose for all revelation, also cleared the way for later "conservative" Lutherans to agree with the work of men like Rudolf Bultmann and the Gospel Reductionists. The foothold these theories gained at Concordia, St. Louis in the middle 1900's may have influenced the teaching and research of history there, in favor of Hofmann.

Hengstenberg realized there was such a danger, and so did Stoeckhardt. One can imagine the joy which Stoeckhardt must have felt as he learned about the Missouri Synod of the 1800's. Here was the true reconciliation of the faith in his heart with the exegetical work of his mind. True, C. F. W. Walther was using the Confessions, but only as a tool to point out how others were denying the true Gospel by their "scientific" methods.

While exegesis was not the predominant theme of his own teaching, Walther knew that faithful exegesis is essential to growth in the truth of Scripture. Walther went to great lengths to get Stoeckhardt in St. Louis.



Later Missourians may have been more awed by Francis Pieper, and after Stoeckhardt's death exegesis did decline in the Missouri Synod.<sup>60</sup>

But the students of Walther and Stoeckhardt who later taught in the Wisconsin Synod were able to base their work on exegetical methods, even those of Hofmann. After Walther had created a strong confessional Lutheran movement, August Pieper, Koehler and Schaller felt secure enough to by-pass the seventeenth-century dogmaticians and dare to be fresh and new in their theology. Indeed, they saw that every Christian grows by appropriating the truths of Scripture for himself. Koehler's writings credit Walther's greatness within his time and then look to Stoeckhardt's methods as the path for the future.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Roy A. Suelflow, "F. A. O. Pieper: Orthodoxist or Confessionalist?"  
Tape of lecture, Ninth Lutheran Historical Conference, Wartburg Seminary,  
Dubuque, Iowa, 3 Nov. 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Baepler, "The Hermeneutics of Johannes Christian Konrad von  
Hofmann with Special Reference to his Influence on Georg Stoeckhardt,"  
Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Concordia Sem., St. Louis, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Baepler, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ingetraut Ludolph, "Hofmann, Johann Christian Konrad von," The  
Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church, 1965, p. 1033.

<sup>5</sup> Otto W. Heick, A History of Christian Thought, by J. L. Neve, Vol. II  
(Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1946), p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> Heick, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Heick, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Heick, p. 128.

<sup>9</sup> Heick, p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> Baepler, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Baepler, pp. 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Heick, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Ludwig Fuerbringer, 80 Eventful Years (St. Louis: Concordia, 1944),  
pp. 103-105; E. Biegner, "Karl Georg Stoeckhardt, D. Theol," Concordia  
Historical Institute Quarterly, 4, No. 1 (Jan. 1949), 155-156.

<sup>14</sup> Biegner, 156-157.

<sup>15</sup> Biegner, 158.

- <sup>16</sup> Fuerbringer, p. 104.
- <sup>17</sup> Fuerbringer, p. 104.
- <sup>18</sup> Theodore Graebner, Dr. Francis Pieper: A Biographical Sketch (St. Louis: Concordia, 1931), pp. 7-8.
- <sup>19</sup> Georg Stoeckhardt, Epistle to the Romans, Preface and Introduction, Trans. Leigh Jordahl, Faith-Life, 34, No. 4 (July, 1966), p. 12.
- <sup>20</sup> William E. Goerss, "Some of the Hermeneutical Presuppositions and Part of the Exegetical Methodology of Georg Stoeckhardt," Doctor of Theology Thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1964, p.p. 381-413.
- <sup>21</sup> Baepler, p. 28.
- <sup>22</sup> Baepler, p. 31.
- <sup>23</sup> Johann C. K. von Hofmann, Interpreting the Bible, Original Title: Biblische Hermeneutik, trans. Christian K. Preus (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1959), p. 72.
- <sup>24</sup> Baepler, p. 35.
- <sup>25</sup> Heick, p. 135.
- <sup>26</sup> Georg Stoeckhardt, Lectures on the Epistle to the Philippians, trans. H. W. Degner (1967; rpt. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Seminary Press, no date), p. 37.
- <sup>27</sup> Heick, p. 129.
- <sup>28</sup> Ernst W. Hengstenberg, History of the Kingdom of God, Vol. I (Edinburgh, England: T. & T. Clark, 1871), p.16.
- <sup>29</sup> Ernst W. Hengstenberg, Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. I, translator unknown (1865; rpt. Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 312.
- <sup>30</sup> Hengstenberg, History, p. 2.

- <sup>31</sup> Quoted by Joachim Mehlhausen, "Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm," Theologische Realenzyklopädie, 1986, p. 41.
- <sup>32</sup> Mehlhausen, p. 41.
- <sup>33</sup> Baepler, p. 29.
- <sup>34</sup> Baepler, p. 31.
- <sup>35</sup> Goerss, p. 44.
- <sup>36</sup> J. P. Koehler, rev. of Commentary on Romans, by Georg Stoeckhardt, Theologische Quartalschrift, 4 (1907), 189.
- <sup>37</sup> Goerss, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>38</sup> Graebner, pp. 18-20.
- <sup>39</sup> Graebner, p. 22.
- <sup>40</sup> Goerss, p. 142.
- <sup>41</sup> Suelflow.
- <sup>42</sup> J. P. Koehler, "The Question of Church Union." Theologische Quartalschrift, 16, No. 2 (April, 1919). Trans. Alex Hillmer, Faith-Life, 42, No. 2 (March, 1969), p. 9.
- <sup>43</sup> C. F. W. Walther, "Forward to the 1862 Volume." Lehre und Wehre, 7, Numbers 1-2, trans. Herbert Bouman, Editorials from "Lehre und Wehre" (St. Louis: Concordia, 1981), p. 111.
- <sup>44</sup> J. P. Koehler, "Dr. G. Stoeckhardt," Theologische Quartalschrift, 10 (1913), trans. Alex Hillmer, Faith-Life, 35, 9 (Sept. 1962), p. 8.
- <sup>45</sup> Baepler, p. 43.
- <sup>46</sup> Baepler, p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> J. P. Koehler, rev. of Commentary on the First Letter of Peter, by Georg Stoeckhardt, Theologische Quartalschrift, 10 (1913), trans. Alex Hillmer, Faith-Life, 35, No. 9 (Sept. 1962), p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> J. P. Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Seminary Course," trans. E. E. Sauer, Faith-Life, 28, No. 9 (Sept. 1955), p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Hofmann, pp. 29-30.

<sup>50</sup> Hofmann, p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> Hofmann, p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> Baepler, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> Koehler, "Hermeneutics," 35, No. 9 (Sept. 1962), p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Baepler, p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> J. P. Koehler, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, trans. E. E. Sauer (Milwaukee: NPH, 1957), p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> J. P. Koehler, Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte (Milwaukee: NPH, 1917), p. 262.

<sup>57</sup> Koehler, "Hermeneutics," 35, No. 8 (Aug. 1962), p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur Werner, Class notebooks, from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary classes (not dated; Werner attended Sem 1911-1914), "Encyklopädie u. Metodologie," section 21.

<sup>59</sup> Werner, "Church History" notebook, p. 81.

<sup>60</sup> Suelflow.

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