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***Lecture Two***

**Gustav Adolf Theodor Felix Hoenecke (1835-1908)**  
**By Grace, The Right Man At The Right Time**  
**In Wisconsin Synod History**

The Rev. Prof. Lyle W. Lange  
New Ulm, Minnesota



*Gustav Adolf Theodor Felix Hoenecke*

*I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." Amos 7:14,15.*

Amaziah was the priest of Bethel during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-753 B.C.). He told the prophet Amos to get out of Israel, because Amos prophesied that God would soon judge the Northern Kingdom. Amos responded with the words printed above. He was not a likely prospect to deliver God's message to the Northern Kingdom. Amos was not a prophet by profession. He did not come from a long line of prophets, whose work he was continuing. Yet, he was sent by God to deliver his message. Unlikely a messenger as Amos was, God called and equipped him to be his spokesman. God made Amos the right man to serve at just the right time in Israel's history.

The same could be said of Adolph Hoenecke. He, too, was an unlikely prospect for the ministry. How unlikely, we shall see later. Yet, God led Hoenecke into the ministry. He equipped and prepared him for the work he was to do, so that he could be his tool to guide the Wisconsin Synod. God made Adolph Hoenecke the right man to lead the Wisconsin Synod doctrinally at just the right time in its history.

In order to gain a deeper appreciation for the importance of Hoenecke in Wisconsin Synod history, we will view his life and work against the broader background of the influences which made the world of Hoenecke's time what it was. As an introduction, we will briefly consider:

1. The influences of the Enlightenment which caused religious Liberalism of the nineteenth century.
2. The influences, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, which affected Lutheranism in Hoenecke's day.
3. The influences which shaped the Wisconsin Synod in its early years, before Hoenecke's arrival in America in 1863.

After we have considered these introductory matters, we will proceed to discuss in more depth:

4. The life and ministry of Adolph Hoenecke.
5. The crucial issues through which God guided Hoenecke to lead the Wisconsin Synod to a truly Confessional Lutheran position.
6. The legacy of Adolph Hoenecke.
7. Lessons from Hoenecke and history for Lutherans in the twenty-first century.

## **1. The Influences of the Enlightenment Which Caused Religious Liberalism of the Nineteenth Century**

### **The Attack on the Authority and Inerrancy of Scripture**

Prior to the beginning of the eighteenth century, the western world generally accepted the authority of the Bible. True, the Roman Catholic Church maintained there were two sources of

doctrine (the Bible and Tradition),<sup>1</sup> over against the Lutheran *Sola Scriptura* teaching. Yet, Rome still accepted the Bible as an authority. Lutherans, Reformed, and Roman Catholics alike accepted the Bible as God's Word. The western world viewed science as subservient to God's Word.

Things changed in the eighteenth century. The French Revolution with Voltaire's exaltation of reason<sup>2</sup> challenged the authority of Scripture. The French professor of medicine in Paris, Jean Astruc (d. 1766), taught the composite authorship of Genesis. This gave rise to the practice of biblical criticism. Two Germans supported the views of Astruc. One was Johann Eichorn (d. 1827), who has been called the father of Old Testament criticism. The other was Johann Semler (d. 1791), professor at Halle, who has been called the father of German rationalism. Karl Graf (d. 1869) and Julius Wellhausen (d. 1918) later enlarged on Astruc's hypothesis, producing the Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch.<sup>3</sup>

Challenges to the authority of Scripture arose from other quarters as well. Philosophers and scientists<sup>4</sup> asserted that all concepts must be doubted until proven, and adequate proofs must have the certainty of mathematical equations. David Hume (d. 1776) challenged the possibility of miracles by appealing to the uniformity of nature. Deists in England, France, and America also contributed to the attack on the authority of Scripture. Deism rejected the Book given by God and replaced it with the "book of nature."<sup>5</sup>

The influences at work in the eighteenth century undermined the Bible's authority and elevated the reason of man as authoritative. When that happens, the next step down is sure to come. Man attempts to create God in his own image, and finally doesn't see the need for God at all. Thus, we may characterize the nineteenth century as:

### **The Assault on the Existence of God**

In the nineteenth century, four men in particular led the assault on the existence of God. They were:

In science, Charles Darwin (d. 1882) removed the Creator from his creation and replaced him with chance (natural selection and survival of the fittest). His views also fueled the fires of biblical criticism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, MO., 1941: p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> An example of the result of his influence and that of Descartes was what occurred on November 9, 1793. A veiled woman representing reason appeared before a convention of people. The people were told: "Mortals, cease to tremble before the powerless thunders of a God whom your fears have created. Herewith, acknowledge no divinity but reason." At Notre Dame, the woman was elevated on the altar and received the adoration of those present. Quoted from J.W. Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN, 1975: pp. 95-96.

<sup>3</sup> The JEDP hypothesis.

<sup>4</sup> Examples: Descartes (d. 1650), Spinoza (d. 1677), and Leibnitz (d. 1716).

<sup>5</sup> Some prominent Deists influential in America were Thomas Paine (d. 1809), Benjamin Franklin (d. 1790), Thomas Jefferson (d. 1826), and even George Washington (d. 1799).

<sup>6</sup> Darwin published *Origin of the Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871. Concerning Darwin's influence, Winthrop Hudson observed: "With... evolutionism penetrating every realm of thought, a new history began to be written which was based on the application of evolutionary thought to the understanding of the past. And this new historical understanding bolstered the developing "higher criticism" of the Bible—first in Germany and then in Britain and America." Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1965: p.208.

In politics and economics, Karl Marx (d. 1883) viewed religion as the “opiate of the people.”<sup>7</sup>

In philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) proclaimed the death of God and the rise of *der Übermensch*.<sup>8</sup>

In psychology, Sigmund Freud (d. 1939) asserted that religion perpetuated infantile psychological problems.<sup>9</sup>

What was the reaction of many Protestants to this assault on God? It was to conform their theology to Darwin’s theory of evolution. Religious Liberalism came into being with an overly optimistic view of man and a devalued view of God and his Word. It had the idea that mankind was progressing ever upward. Religious Liberalism rejected the inspiration and authority of the Bible and the deity of Jesus Christ. It’s overly optimistic view of man was summed up by Emil Coue (d. 1926), the French auto-suggestionist, who encouraged people to say, “Day by day, in every way, I am getting better and better.”<sup>10</sup>

The result of the assault on the authority of Scripture and on the existence of God was a loss of the biblical Christ. Men like Ferdinand Christian Baur (d. 1860),<sup>11</sup> Heinrich Paulus (d. 1851),<sup>12</sup> and David Strauss (d. 1874)<sup>13</sup> rejected the biblical record of Jesus. As a postscript to the Christology of the nineteenth century, Albert Schweitzer (d. 1965) wrote his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress From Reimarus to Wrede* (1906). In this study, Schweitzer decried the inability of the previous studies of Christ to produce anything but a fictitious Christ.<sup>14</sup>

These were the influences which produced the climate of Rationalism in Hoenecke’s day. Liberalism had produced a barren and ravaged religious terrain devoid of the living water of the Gospel, having little or nothing to offer the pilgrim through this barren land. Of those Protestants who avoided religious Liberalism in the nineteenth century, many fell into the camps of American Revivalism, the Holiness movement, and other sects.

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<sup>7</sup> The works of Karl Marx are *The Communist Manifesto* (1847) and *Das Kapital* (1867).

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche’s key works are *Die Froehliche Wissenschaft* (1882) and *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1891). In the former, he declares that God is dead. In the latter, he states that only the superman can live in the world without the illusion of God.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Freud’s work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Concerning Freud, Richard Ostling, AP religion writer, observed that he is “arguably the most influential atheist of modern times, now that the credibility of communist Karl Marx has imploded.” (Ostling, Richard, “With the Question of God, PBS tackles an ultimate TV challenge,” *The Journal TV Times*, September 19, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *The Shape of the Past*, John Warwick Montgomery, Bethany Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Baur was founder of the Tübingen school of theology. He applied the Hegelian dialectic to develop his view of New Testament church history.

<sup>12</sup> Paulus is the father of the “swoon” theory concerning Christ. This view was revived by Hugh Schonfield in the *Passover Plot* (1965) and by Donovan Joyce’s *The Jesus Scroll* (1972).

<sup>13</sup> Strauss asserted that the Christ of the New Testament was essentially a creation of myth.

<sup>14</sup> Note the distinction in terms for the N.T. critic:

The “Jesus of History” is the man who actually lived 2000 years ago. He is virtually unknowable because of the alleged unreliability of the Gospel accounts.

The “Historical Jesus” is the historical reconstruction of the words and deeds of Jesus as accomplished by critical research.

It should be noted that at this time, Roman Catholicism resisted the temptations of Modernism. Rome would wait until the twentieth century before it was beguiled by the seductive voice of biblical criticism and all of its attendant evils.<sup>15</sup>

## **2. The Religious Influences, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century, Which Affected Lutheranism in Hoenecke's Day**

### **Melanchthon's Doctrinal Compromises in the Interest of Union with the Reformed**

There were a number of major differences between Luther and Melanchthon. We wish to note two of them in order to serve us in our understanding of later Lutheranism. The first was Melanchthon's willingness to subject Scripture to reason to solve a mystery. When faced with a mystery of Scripture, Luther was content to stop with what Scripture said and take his reason captive to Scripture. Melanchthon, on the other hand, was willing to subject Scripture to his reason. He attempted to find an answer to what Scripture left as a mystery. By doing this, he fostered a number of errors with which the Formula of Concord had to deal. Though the Formula of Concord settled these errors, they did not go away, but continued to plague the Lutheran Church in years to come.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, when faced with opposition from Roman Catholicism, Luther was willing to trust God to take care of the church. He believed that unity in the church was produced through agreement on all the Bible taught. Melanchthon felt it was necessary to form a union with the Reformed in order to survive. For this reason, he was willing to make doctrinal concessions in order to obtain outward union. Melanchthon's willingness to compromise doctrine to achieve union troubled the Lutheran Church after Luther's death and on through the centuries.

### **The State Church**

England had its established church, which had the king as its head. Norway and Sweden had their Lutheran state churches. Germany had its territorial churches. America had religious freedom. The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (1791). Church work would be conducted differently in a land with religious freedom.

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<sup>15</sup> In 1854, Pius IX declared the "Immaculate Conception of Mary." In the "Syllabus of Errors" (1864), he rejected the contention that the pope should reconcile himself with progress, Liberalism, and modern civilization. In 1870, Vatican I affirmed the doctrine of papal infallibility.

<sup>16</sup> Examples:

- a. The Majoristic controversy (FC IV).
- b. The Synergistic controversy (FC II).
- c. The Crypto-Calvinistic controversies (FC VII and VIII).
- d. The Adiaphoristic controversy is an example of Melanchthon's willingness to compromise in the interest of achieving peace.

For a summary of Melanchthon's doctrinal compromises, see the series of articles by G. Westerhaus in the *Quarterly*, Volumes 62 to 65.

The early pastors who came to America from the German universities and mission societies were not prepared for the practical work of the ministry in America. The only experience they possessed came from the state church situation. As Koehler observed, "Here in America, a new pastoral theology had to be born."<sup>17</sup>

### Pietism

The state church situation in Germany tended to foster a nominal Christianity. The incredible suffering of the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648), and Orthodoxy's<sup>18</sup> lack of response to the needs caused by the Thirty Years War, produced the soil from which Pietism grew. Spener (d. 1705), Franke (d. 1727), and Zinzendorf (d. 1760) guided its development. However well-intentioned it was, Pietism was poison for the church. Its many doctrinal aberrations obscured the Gospel and robbed sinners of its comforts.<sup>19</sup> With its subjectivism, Pietism proved totally unable to resist the inroads of Rationalism into the church. Pietism was carried by Lutherans and by the Methodists to America.<sup>20</sup>

### The Prussian Union of 1817 and the Rhine Country Unions

On the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 1817, Frederick William III of Prussia instituted the Prussian Union. His goal was to bring Lutherans and Reformed into an apparent union. Each group was to retain its distinctive doctrines, such as real or spiritual presence in the Lord's Supper.<sup>21</sup> "Old Lutherans"<sup>22</sup> resisted with vigor. They were willing to suffer imprisonment rather than com-

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<sup>17</sup> J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, edited by Leigh Jordahl, Faith-Life, The Protestant Conference, 1970: p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Orthodoxy is good. Orthodoxy is bad. It reduces the Christian faith to an intellectual knowledge of Scripture doctrine. People who have reduced faith to an intellectual assent to a system of doctrine will fail to reflect the love of Christ as they see the misery of others.

<sup>19</sup> Among the errors of Pietism were;

- The belief that sanctification is a cause of justification.
- A confusion of law and gospel.
- A focus on the sins of society rather than on the sins of the individual.
- Subjectivism. The emphasis was on how I feel about God, rather than on his love for me.
- The means of grace were de-emphasized.
- Prayer was treated as a means of grace.
- Icteric conversion.
- Religious unionism.
- Legalism—attempting to produce sanctification through the law.
- Rejection of pastoral absolution.
- Rejection of any adiaphora.
- The weak in the faith were not regarded as converted.
- Perfection was considered possible in sanctification.
- Every baptized child was looked upon as having fallen from the state of baptismal grace, which necessitated a conscious pledge and completion of the efficacy of the covenant.
- The acquisition of secular knowledge was despised.

<sup>20</sup> John Wesley went to America to work among the Native Americans in Georgia. On his voyage he met Moravian missionaries with whom he was impressed. Wesley went to Herrnhut to learn strategies for renewal from Nicolas von Zinzendorf. In 1784 Wesley sent Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury as superintendents to a mission in America. They brought along with them what Wesley had learned from Zinzendorf.

<sup>21</sup> The formula for distribution of the Lord's Supper was designed to allow for either belief in the real presence or in representation. It was, "Jesus said, 'This is my body...This is my blood.'"

<sup>22</sup> Those Lutherans dedicated to maintaining Confessional Lutheranism.

promise. They established “free churches” in areas where the state church favored union, or they left for Australia or America. For example, Pastor J. A. A. Grabau left with a group of Prussians in 1839, leading some to Buffalo and sending others on to Wisconsin. In 1845 Grabau organized the Buffalo Synod. In 1839, “Old Lutherans” from Saxony emigrated to St. Louis and to Perry County in Missouri. This was a step in the organization of the Missouri Synod (1847).

“New Lutherans” believed they could participate in the Union as long as no doctrinal compromise was involved. They failed to see that the Union was already a compromise. There had been Lutheran-Reformed unions in the Rhine country earlier than 1817. It was no problem for these unions to operate union mission societies. They agreed that, with so much work to be done and with so much support needed, it was only logical to join Lutheran and Reformed resources. The motive of these societies to reach people with the Gospel was noble. The unionistic means chosen to deliver the Gospel could only undermine it.

The missions schools at Basel,<sup>23</sup> St. Chrischona<sup>24</sup> and Barmen<sup>25</sup> furnished pastors for the Wisconsin Synod in its early history. These pastors were to minister to Reformed and to Lutherans alike, in a way that did not ruffle anyone’s feathers. If a person took doctrine seriously, this was an impossibility.

Thus, the stage was set for the founding of the Wisconsin Synod. Pastors sent out by unionistic mission societies had to learn what it means to be Confessional Lutheran pastors. It was for this purpose the Lord of the church equipped and sent Adolph Hoenecke to assist in leading the Wisconsin Synod to a Confessional Lutheran position.

### **3. The Early History of the Wisconsin Synod Before Hoenecke Arrived**

In 1863, Adolph Hoenecke boarded a ship and came to America. What were the influences at work in the Wisconsin Synod before Hoenecke arrived in America? We shall start at the beginning, with the “founders” of the Wisconsin Synod and the people whom they served.

#### **Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, Wrede, and the Early Germans**

John Muehlhaeuser, John Weinmann, and William Wrede met together in December of 1849 at Granville, Wisconsin. They eventually formed “The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin.”<sup>26</sup> Their immediate purpose was to care for the spiritual needs of the hosts of Germans

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<sup>23</sup> Brothers-in-law Gottlieb Reim (Wisconsin Synod president from 1864 to 1865) and Wilhelm Streisguth (Wisconsin Synod president from 1866 to 1867) came from Basel.

<sup>24</sup> L. Ebert and F. Hilpert are Wisconsin Synod men who came from St. Chrischona, as was C. J. Albrecht of the Minnesota Synod.

<sup>25</sup> The Langenberger Verein (Officially, the Evangelical Society for North America) contributed the most heavily in missions and money to the Wisconsin Synod from 1850-1868. The three founding fathers of the Wisconsin Synod were Langenberg missionaries.

<sup>26</sup> A traveling companion of Weinmann and Wrede to America was a Pastor Rauschenbusch, who came from a line of Lutherans. However, he joined the Baptist church when he came to America. His son, Walter, was the founder of the Social Gospel movement in America. By the grace of God the Wisconsin Synod was spared from becoming a breeding

who were emigrating to Wisconsin. When these men met in May 1850, to adopt a constitution, Pastors Pless and Meiss joined them. These five men served eighteen congregations. By 1850 there were about 38,000 German-born people in Wisconsin.<sup>27</sup> They came through the ports of Sheboygan and Milwaukee. Brochures had depicted Wisconsin as the land of opportunity for land-hungry and poverty-stricken Germans. By 1860 there were close to 124,000 German-born people in Wisconsin.<sup>28</sup>

These Germans did not find the paradise they envisioned. They could not afford to buy the more expensive prairie land that lay west and northwest of Racine and Milwaukee toward Waukesha and Whitewater. Instead, they had to buy the land covered with hardwood forests. It cost \$1.25 an acre. This was the land that was close to Lake Michigan, from Milwaukee to Manitowoc. The work of clearing the land was hard, and getting settled in homes was difficult. Yet, the land produced when it was worked.

To appreciate the need for pastors among the Germans, we need to remember that there were very few settled communities in Wisconsin by 1850. Except for some large groups of Germans who had settled in Racine, Milwaukee, and Sheboygan, the Germans lived scattered in the woods or in very small communities. As a result, a few number of pastors would have a large number of places to serve.

Not all of the Germans who came to America were of German-Lutheran background. Some were Roman Catholics, Reformed, free-thinking Turners, and “Latin” farmers who were rationalists. The greater number of those who came from the agricultural districts of Northern Germany came from the state church background, where the combination of Reformed and Lutheran confessions had been established by decree.

Missouri synod pastors and followers of Grabau were active among the Germans in Wisconsin. So were the Methodists. The Methodists called themselves Evangelicals and fooled many Germans into thinking they were the same as the church they had belonged to in Germany. The need for pastors to care for these Germans was great, but the cry for help rarely came from these people. Rather, it came from the mission societies in Germany. As E. E. Kowalke, former president of Northwestern College, observed:

State control of church functions and state dictation had taken away from the congregations and from the individual Christian the dignity and the responsibility of the priesthood of the believer. So it was hardly to be expected that people who had been regimented into state-dictated forms at home would in a new country be very active about providing pastors and teachers for themselves. It took time for them to learn that they needed to help themselves if they wanted their children baptized and taught the Way of Life and if they themselves wanted spiritual care.<sup>29</sup>

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ground for the Social Gospel movement.

<sup>27</sup> E. E. Kowalke, *Centennial Story: Northwestern College*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3,4.



## The Mission Societies and the Pastors They Sent to America

The mission society which most directly showed concern for the Germans in Wisconsin was the Langenberg Society. Though Rationalism had devastated the churches in Germany, the Langenberg Society and the other mission societies were still dedicated to the spread of the Gospel among the Germans in Wisconsin. The men sent by the Langenberg Society were usually second-career men. Muehlhaeuser had been a baker; Reim, a shoemaker's apprentice; Philipp Koehler, a weaver; Bading, a wheelwright.<sup>30</sup> These men were trained and then sent to America. However, they were sent to take care of both Reformed and Lutheran groups. It is no wonder that confused theology was the order of the day. One pastor in Washington County served two congregations. In one, he used the Reformed Catechism and administered the Lord's Supper in the Reformed style. In the other congregation, he used Luther's Catechism and the Lutheran liturgy.

The pastors sent out by the mission societies were poorly trained theologically. Philipp Koehler was one of the few pastors who had a knowledge of Greek or Hebrew. Neither Muehlhaeuser nor Weinmann had any knowledge of biblical languages. Some men like John Bading and Philipp Koehler had a more confessional Lutheran training. Bading studied in Hermannsburg where Louis Harms was the director. Philipp Koehler studied at Barmen where John Wallmann headed the mission house. Wallmann, as did Martin Luther, believed a theologian should have a thorough grounding in the original languages.

It is assumed that Wrede was responsible for the paragraph in the constitution of the Wisconsin Synod that dealt with the requirements for ordination. A candidate needed to be acquainted with the biblical languages and to be well-grounded in exegesis, dogmatics, church history, ethics, apologetics and homiletics. However, the proviso was made that the requirements could be waived if the candidate showed fitness for the ministry and promised to devote himself faithfully to the study of theology.

### From Muehlhaeuser to Bading

It is no wonder that the early ministers of the Wisconsin Synod were not entirely "Old Lutheran." Muehlhaeuser did not find "Old Lutheranism" appealing. He said of himself, "I am in a position to offer every child of God and servant of Christ the hand of fellowship over the ecclesiastical fence."<sup>31</sup> Muehlhaeuser did reject the "Definite Platform" of S.S. Schmucker in 1856, but he sought no contact with the men of Missouri at the free conferences conducted in the late 1850's. Though the Buffalo and the Missouri Synods were active in Wisconsin, Muehlhaeuser deliberately started another synod there. He did not like the "Old Lutheranism" for which these two synods stood.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Koehler, *Op. Cit.*, p. 43.

One man who moved the Wisconsin Synod in the direction of Confessional Lutheranism was John Bading (1824–1913). He arrived on the scene in America in 1853. At his ordination, he insisted upon subscribing to all the Lutheran Confessions, against the wishes of his Synod president, Muehlhaeuser. Joined by Philipp Koehler and Gottlieb Reim in what was known as the “Northwestern Conference,”<sup>32</sup> the three formed a strong nucleus committed to the Lutheran Confessions and opposed to unionistic practice. Bading began to influence the Wisconsin Synod in a more Confessional Lutheran direction. In 1860, Muehlhaeuser declined re-election. The Synod elected Bading as president. He served in that capacity until 1863, and then from 1867 to 1889.<sup>33</sup> At his direction, doctrinal papers became a part of the Synod Conventions.

### **Steps Away from Reformed Practices**

In 1862, the Wisconsin Synod repudiated a practice it had mandated just eight years earlier. In 1854, the congregation at Slinger had complained that their pastor was introducing Lutheran ceremonies. The complaint obviously came from the Reformed segment of the congregation. The Synod’s answer to the complaint was to direct the Lutheran segment to cater to the Reformed, especially in Communion practices. By 1862, views had changed. The same pastor who was told to cater to the Reformed in Communion was censured *in absentia* for doing what he had been told to do eight years earlier. Things were changing in the Wisconsin Synod concerning unionistic practices. Bading and the men from the “Northwestern Conference” were making a difference.

### **The Beginning of the Seminary**

In 1863, the Wisconsin Synod resolved to begin its own worker-training school. The Lord had blessed the efforts of the early pastors in gathering people together into preaching stations. For example, Edward Moldehnke, the first teacher at the Watertown Seminary, had earlier served as *Reiseprediger*. At the time of the 1863 Convention, he was reporting for 22 preaching stations. The Wisconsin Synod needed pastors. The mission societies could not supply enough. The attempt to have existing pastors train apprentice pastors did not work. The pastors simply did not have enough time to do this. Relying on pastors who were not trained, or whose character and capabilities were not tested, was a worse problem than not having enough pastors. So, the Wisconsin Synod began its own Seminary, and the Lord of the church eventually supplied Adolph Hoenecke to fill the post of chief theological educator for the Wisconsin Synod.

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<sup>32</sup> The multiple use of the word “Northwestern” in Wisconsin Synod history is not without significance. Northwestern College, Northwestern Prep, Northwestern Publishing House, the *Northwestern Lutheran*, and Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, all carried the name. Originally “Northwestern” implied a deep commitment to a more confessional stance than was available elsewhere.

<sup>33</sup> In the interim Bading was traveling in Germany and Russia, collecting funds for the new seminary.

## 4. The Life and Ministry of Adolph Hoenecke

### From Childhood to his Decision to Study for the Ministry

Adolph Hoenecke was born on February 25, 1835, in Brandenburg, on the Havel River, about 50 miles southwest of Berlin. His father was a military hospital superintendent. August Pieper described the elder Hoenecke as follows: "His father was not a church-goer, to say nothing of being a believer... He concerned himself very little with the religion of his son."<sup>34</sup> Was Hoenecke's mother like Hannah of old, who dedicated her son to the Lord's service from birth? Pieper observed, "His mother, personally a believer, taught him to pray in his childhood, but had little influence on his later religious training."<sup>35</sup>

The Lord himself would have to lead Hoenecke into the ministry. He used a strange way to do it. When Hoenecke graduated from the Gymnasium, he did not have any firm ideas as to what he wanted to do. He was too frail of health to follow his brothers into the military. The Lord used the joking remarks of an unbelieving music director of the Gymnasium, Thomas Taeglichbeck, to lead Hoenecke to study for the ministry. After his final examinations, Hoenecke was invited to the music director's house for the evening. A pastor who made a comfortable living in the ministry was also present as Taeglichbeck's guest. The music director, taking note of Hoenecke's frail frame, suggested, "Look, Adolph, become a pastor and then you will have a good thing."<sup>36</sup> So, Hoenecke studied for the ministry.

### The Training at Halle

Hoenecke enrolled at the University of Halle. He had not previously contemplated studying for the ministry, so he had not learned Hebrew, a prerequisite for enrolling as a student of theology. Hoenecke enrolled as a student of philosophy until he could meet the Hebrew requirement. He devoted himself to the study of Hebrew. After six weeks, he attempted to pass his examination; but he failed. Six weeks later he passed the exam, meeting the Hebrew requirement needed for a student of theology. It was as such that he then enrolled at Halle.

The spirit of Johann Semler, the father of German Rationalism, haunted Halle. However, Pietists and some staunch Lutherans also taught there. H. E. F. Guericke was a staunch Confessional Lutheran who taught at Halle. However, he had little effect on Hoenecke. Guericke's long-winded lectures and his lack of personal interest in his students did not win him any fans. Hoenecke learned Hebrew from Hermann Hupfield, an Old Testament critic who was the successor to H. F. W. Gesenius<sup>37</sup> (d. 1842). Hoenecke regarded Hupfield's lecture style as boring. Hoenecke also had Julius

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<sup>34</sup> August Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolph Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," 1935, p. 8. This article first appeared in four installments in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 32, No. 3, and the next three issues. The translation was made by Werner Franzmann.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> His works include *Hebräische Grammatik* and *Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti*.

Mueller as a teacher. Mueller tried to harmonize science and the Bible (*Vermittlungstheologe*). Hoenecke regarded him as a melancholy pessimist.

The teacher who had the most profound influence on Hoenecke was August Tholuck, the Dean of Students. Some have described Tholuck as a pietist and a unionist. August Pieper, however, indicated that we must be careful about judging Tholuck. In those days, Rationalists called anyone who held to the inspiration of Scripture a “Pietist.” Further, Tholuck did not actively promote the Union. He was averse to controversy. For that reason, he could not bring himself to support a fight for separation from the Union.

August Pieper described Tholuck as follows:

Tholuck was one of the most gifted, brilliant, and learned theologians of his time. He reportedly knew nineteen ancient and modern languages. He was at home in all areas of theology. Moreover, in contrast to the university theologians of his time, he did not teach in the spirit and tone of an objective scientific method. No, with his childlike faith in the word of Scripture as the Word of God, all his teaching was at once an exercise of pastoral care for the souls of his students, a testimony concerning sin, grace and sanctification.<sup>38</sup>

Tholuck took a personal interest in Hoenecke, as he did with all of his students. He liked to take walks with his students, using the occasion as a time for peripatetic *Seelsorge*. Tholuck also gave Hoenecke quite a few free meals, which he had sorely needed. Hoenecke received no support from home for his schooling. The poverty he endured as a student had a profound effect on him. It influenced him eventually to go to America against Tholuck’s advice. Yet, we can thank God that he made the nest in Hoenecke’s homeland uncomfortable enough that he was ready to travel to America rather than endure further poverty.

### **From Hoenecke’s Graduation to the Opportunity to Go to America**

Hoenecke took his examinations in 1859, at the age of 24. Tholuck had encouraged Hoenecke to continue his studies in the field of Lutheran dogmatics, focusing on the writings of Calov (d. 1686)<sup>39</sup> and Quenstedt (d. 1688).<sup>40</sup> However, Hoenecke did not have the money for further study. Tholuck arranged for Hoenecke to serve as a tutor in Switzerland. On January 11, 1860, Hoenecke began his work. He served as a tutor for two years. The favorable climate and less-demanding schedule allowed Hoenecke to strengthen his health. It also gave him time to deepen his knowledge of Lutheran theology by studying Calov, Quenstedt and the Lutheran Confessions. It was also at that time that Hoenecke met the woman he would eventually marry. She was Rosa Mathilde Hess, the daughter of Rudolph Hess, a Reformed pastor in Bern, Switzerland. She became the mother their nine children.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> His greatest work was his *Biblia Illustrata* (1672-1676), a commentary on the Bible which treats both individual texts and longer sections. Next in importance was his *Systema locorum theologicorum* (1655-1677), a 12 volume scholarly dogmatic work.

<sup>40</sup> His major work was *Theologia didactico-polemica, sive Systema theologicum*.

## **The Decision To Go To America**

The Berlin Mission Society was faced with the problem of a surplus of trained candidates for the ministry. The Mission Society requested permission from the High Consistory to call candidates to do work among their fellow Germans who had emigrated to America. The Prussian Church officials readily approved this request. They called on the Prussian universities to bring the request of the Mission Society to the attention of the graduating candidates. Hoenecke was ready to go to America.

Hoenecke's decision to go to America brought him into conflict with his mentor. Tholuck had wanted Hoenecke to further his education so he could secure a position at a prestigious university. However, this would have cost a great amount of money, money which Hoenecke did not have. Tholuck also had advised Hoenecke to wait for a call to a congregation in Prussia. However, that could take three to seven years. Besides, Hoenecke did not want to keep his fiancée on hold for years while she waited for him to be able to support her.

The mission societies encouraged men to go to America as pastors by telling them that after a few years they could return to the fatherland. The time they spent in America would count toward their seniority. Upon return, they could get a call into a congregation in their homeland.

Uncharitably, Tholuck suggested that Hoenecke was going to America to seek material gain. He told Hoenecke so in a letter. Hoenecke never responded to that letter. The tie between teacher and pupil was broken—perhaps providentially—to the benefit of the Wisconsin Synod. Hoenecke was ordained at the Dome in Magdeburg in 1863. He boarded a ship in the Spring and came to America. He promised his fiancée he would send for her when conditions were right.

Hoenecke left Prussia with an understanding of the way things worked in the Prussian Union. There, Lutheran pastors worked with divided loyalties. They could minister to Lutherans as Lutherans so long as they did not condemn Reformed doctrine and so long as they conducted the weekly Union service. We can surmise that as Hoenecke had grown in his knowledge of the Confessions, he would have found the Union situation more and more distasteful. At the same time, Hoenecke left Germany without a clear understanding of the Confessional practice of the Wisconsin Synod and of the other Lutheran churches in America. It would take time for him to arrive at that understanding. When Hoenecke did, the Wisconsin Synod was the better for it.

## **The Earliest Experiences in America**

Hoenecke thought he would be installed in the vacant congregation in LaCrosse. By the time he arrived in Wisconsin, the vacancy was already filled. Muehlhaeuser recommended Hoenecke to the congregation at Racine. He served there for a time, but was not called as pastor. The reason was that the daughter of an influential, well-to-do member of the congregation had taken an interest in Hoe-

necke. Her father did not want his daughter married to “such a poor bugger,”<sup>41</sup> so he blocked Hoenecke from being called to the congregation at Racine. If the man had known about Hoenecke’s engagement to Rosa, he may not have worked to keep Hoenecke from being called there. But, the Lord had other plans for Hoenecke.

### **The Time at Farmington**

Hoenecke was called to Farmington, Wisconsin, seven miles south of Watertown, on the road to Jefferson. A Lutheran teacher had gathered seven or eight families together there for reading services. Hoenecke readily accepted the call to serve at Farmington. He didn’t even ask what his salary would be. At Farmington he was free to preach the Gospel. He could be a Confessional Lutheran, without interference from the state church. Hoenecke sent the High Consistory a letter in which he permanently relinquished a position in the Prussian state church. The ties with the state church were broken.

The years at Farmington were good for Hoenecke—and good for the Wisconsin Synod. The small membership at Farmington allowed Hoenecke time to study Luther, Lutheran dogmatics, and the Lutheran Confessions. Hoenecke used the time to deepen his understanding of Confessional Lutheranism. While at Farmington, he also came into contact with John Bading and the men of the Northwestern Conference, men who were interested in Confessional Lutheranism. While at Farmington, the Lord was preparing Hoenecke for what was to come. Also, while at Farmington, Hoenecke was able to send for his fiancée. Bading performed their marriage.

### **The Early Seminary Years**

In 1863, the Wisconsin Synod had opened its own Seminary. Edward Moldehnke was called as the sole professor. At this time, Hoenecke was serving in Farmington. In 1864, Hoenecke was elected Secretary of the Wisconsin Synod. In 1865 he became Associate Editor of the *Gemeindeblatt* (parish paper). Hoenecke’s work as Synod Secretary included correspondence concerning problems with the Reformed and the mission societies. These were cases which had been dealt with by the Synod. This work and his writing for the *Gemeindeblatt* helped him focus on the problems in the Wisconsin Synod.

Disciplinary problems developed at the Seminary. The governing board created the office of Inspector (Dean of Students). In 1866, they called Hoenecke as Inspector and Theological Professor—after only three years of service in the ministry.<sup>42</sup> Moldehnke immediately resigned from his call as a professor and as Editor of the *Gemeindeblatt*. He viewed two professors at the Seminary as a waste of money. So, Hoenecke became the sole theological professor at the Seminary and the Editor of the *Gemeindeblatt* as well.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Apparently the practice that a man should have ten years of parish experience before being called to the Seminary developed after Hoenecke’s time.

## **The Years at St. Matthew's and Back at the Seminary**

After the Wisconsin and the Missouri Synods declared themselves in fellowship (1869), the Seminary at Watertown was closed. The Wisconsin Synod sent its seminary students to St. Louis for training. Hoenecke was to go to St. Louis as the Wisconsin Synod's representative on the faculty. Hoenecke never went, however. He believed that he was needed more at the college in Watertown. Besides, there was even a more basic reason why Hoenecke did not go to St. Louis. The Wisconsin Synod did not have the funds to finance the professorship in St. Louis. St. Matthew's in Milwaukee then called Hoenecke to serve as their pastor, which he did beginning in July 1870.

Because of the state synods issue (which we will discuss later), the Wisconsin Synod opened its own Seminary again in Milwaukee in 1878. Hoenecke and Eugene Notz (d. 1902) were called as professors. In 1889, ill health prompted Hoenecke to submit his resignation to the Seminary. From 1878 though 1889, Hoenecke had served as pastor at St. Matthew's and as professor at the Seminary. The Seminary Board responded by calling Hoenecke as full-time professor to work solely at the Seminary, a position he held until the time of his death. In 1903, Northwestern University and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, conferred upon Hoenecke an honorary doctorate. At the same time, an honorary doctorate was conferred upon Franz Pieper. At the ceremony held at the Seminary in Wauwatosa, Pieper addressed Hoenecke in classical Latin, and Hoenecke responded in church Latin.

In 1904, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary began publishing the *Theologische Quartalschrift*. Hoenecke served as its editor until the time of his death. Shortly before the 1907 Christmas recess, Hoenecke became ill with pneumonia. He entered his eternal rest on January 3, 1908, at the age of not quite 73 years. So ended his years of faithful service to his Lord and to the Wisconsin Synod. As we remember his life and work, we are reminded of the words of Revelation 14:13: "'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'"

## **5. The Crucial Issues Through Which God Guided Hoenecke to Lead the Wisconsin Synod to a Truly Confessional Lutheran Position**

### **A Break with the German Mission Societies**

The Wisconsin Synod had made some progress in its fight against unionism before Hoenecke had arrived in America. It had rejected the "Definite Synodical Platform" of Samuel Schmucker and the General Synod.<sup>43</sup> Though the Wisconsin Synod rejected this crass attempt at unionism, it had to work toward dealing with its own problems with the German mission societies.

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<sup>43</sup> The "Definite Platform" had left out alleged errors in the Augsburg Confession. The alleged errors were:

- The approval of the ceremonies of the Mass
- The approval of private confession and absolution
- The denial of the divine obligation of the Christian Sabbath
- The affirmation of baptismal regeneration
- The affirmation of the real presence of the body and the blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper

It also left out articles XXII through XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession, rejected the remaining confessional writ-

Prior to Hoenecke's time, the Wisconsin Synod had a fraternal relationship with the "United" mission societies of Germany, with the Berlin Mission Society of the Prussian state church, and also with the United Church of Prussia. From them the Wisconsin Synod had obtained the additional pastors and teachers it needed. However, the demand for candidates outstripped the supply. It became apparent that the Wisconsin Synod needed its own seminary, which it opened in 1863.

In 1866, Hoenecke was called to the Seminary. He noted that many pastors lacked a thorough theological training. He also noted the ties of the Wisconsin Synod to the German mission societies were a source of the Synod's problems with fellowship. Hoenecke did not mount a frontal attack on the mission societies. Rather, through the *Gemeindeblatt*, Hoenecke instructed his readers in the biblical basis for rejecting unionism and for separating from unions with the Reformed.

The mission societies did not like the new direction in which the Wisconsin Synod was moving. They criticized the Wisconsin Synod for being too strict in its dealings with the Reformed. Implicit in the criticism was the reminder that the Wisconsin Synod was biting the hand that had fed it. On the other side of the issue, the Missouri Synod was vocal in its criticism of the Wisconsin Synod's fellowship practices.

The matter of the relationship with the mission societies came to a head in 1867 at the Synod Convention. As Synod Secretary, Hoenecke had handled complicated correspondence with the mission societies who questioned the Wisconsin Synod's handling of cases involving dealings with the Reformed. Hoenecke headed the committee at the Synod Convention which dealt with the issue of the mission societies. The eight-man committee brought in a divided report. The majority report, signed by six men, distinguished between a God-created unity and a man-made union. In connection with man-made unions, the majority report distinguished between doctrinal unions and organizational unions. They concluded that the Prussian Union was a misuse of the power of the state over the church by which consciences were enslaved. The majority report condemned both a manufactured doctrinal union and an enforced organizational union as wrong.

The minority report condemned man-made doctrinal unions but attempted to justify fellowship with the mission societies and acceptance of their money and their trained workers. The convention accepted the minority report but published both reports. Even the minority report was too much for the mission societies. They demanded that the Wisconsin Synod renounce the position it had taken at the 1867 Synod Convention, or there would be no more men and money coming from them. The 1868 Wisconsin Synod convention refused to back down, so the associations with the Langenberg and with the Berlin Societies were broken. Hoenecke had been instrumental in the process.

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ings, removed the descent into hell from the creeds, and left out the Athanasian Creed. It also proposed a plan for establishing a union with the Protestant sects in America.



## Iowa and Open Questions

In the midst of the turmoil of dealing with the German mission societies and with the General Council (of which we will hear more later), Hoenecke was decisive in rescuing the Wisconsin Synod from being sucked in by the Iowa Synod and its “Open Questions.” Men from the Iowa Synod came as guests to the 1867 Wisconsin Synod Convention. Brothers Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel came to make propaganda for their theory of “Open Questions.” They maintained that in “minor” points of doctrine in the Lutheran Confessions, people could deviate from them without losing their Lutheranism.<sup>44</sup> They held that a distinction must be made between essential and non-essential doctrines, with agreement only necessary on essential doctrines. Concerning Iowa’s approach, Missouri’s *Lutheraner* had said that Iowa “tosses together hierarchical and chiliastic ideas with some truth and is again coming forth more boldly with claims for their so-called historical but very unhistorical interpretation of the Symbols. It makes a show of scholarly learning and will need in-depth correction.”<sup>45</sup>

The Iowans came armed with a “*Gutachten*” from “eminent” theologians in Germany. The arguments of the Fritschel brothers may have won the day if it were not for Hoenecke. He argued it is one thing to be patient with some who, in weakness or ignorance, deviate from the Confessions. It is another to demand that false teachings be given authoritative status in the church. His arguments separated the Wisconsin Synod from the Iowa Synod and their “Open Questions.”

### Membership in the General Council

The small size of the congregation at Farmington had allowed Hoenecke time for study. However, his work with the Synod became more and more demanding. In 1864, he had been elected Secretary of the Synod. He was involved in a great deal of correspondence dealing with the problems in connection with the Reformed. In 1866, he was called to the Seminary. In 1867 he led the Synod in dealing with the separation from the mission societies. He took the lead in dealing with the Iowa Synod and their “Open Questions.” From 1867 to 1869, Hoenecke was instrumental in extricating the Wisconsin Synod from the General Council. The following is a brief history of the Wisconsin Synod’s brief membership in the General Council.

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<sup>44</sup> The “Open Questions” were identified as the teachings of the Confessions on:

- The observance of Sunday
- The papacy is the Antichrist
- Millennialism
- The resurrection of the martyrs
- The conversion of the Jews
- The perpetual virginity of Mary (The Latin translation of Luther’s articles in which occurs the *ex Maria, pura, sancta semper virgine, nasceretur*, did not come from the pen of Petrus Generanus until 1541, and the translation that was taken up into the Concordia in 1580 and 1584 most likely was written by Selnecker. The expression is not symbolically binding. Luther’s German Articles did not win acceptance in the form in which he wrote them for the Smalcald meeting, but in the altered and expanded form which he wrote in the next year. Kolb/Wengert translate “he was born of the pure, holy Virgin Mary” (I:4). They indicate that the Latin translation reads: “always virgin” (p. 300).

<sup>45</sup> Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI, 2000: p. 32, 33.

In 1864, the Pennsylvania Synod protested at the General Synod Convention against receiving the Frankean Synod into membership. Their protests were to no avail. In 1866, the Pennsylvania Synod withdrew from the General Synod. They then issued a call to all synods faithful to the Augsburg Confession to meet in Reading, Pennsylvania, on December 12. Their goal was to form a union of new church bodies faithful to the Augsburg Confession. The Wisconsin Synod accepted the invitation.<sup>46</sup>

Wisconsin Synod President Streisguth and President Martin of Northwestern were the delegates for the Wisconsin Synod at the preliminary meeting at Reading. They brought back with them the “Fundamental Principles of Faith and Church,” presented by Dr. Charles P. Krauth. The statement looked good to the 1867 Wisconsin Synod Convention.<sup>47</sup> John Bading, Adam Martin, and Johannes Muehlhaeuser were chosen as delegates to the 1867 assembly of the General Council in Ft. Wayne. On September 15, 1867, Muehlhaeuser died and was replaced by Adolph Hoenecke as delegate.

The General Council’s Convention was held in late Fall in 1867. The Ohio and the Iowa Synods did not join the General Council, but placed a number of questions concerning fellowship practices before them for consideration. These questions were the “four points” which asked the Council’s position on the following:

- Millennialism
- Pulpit fellowship—sharing Lutheran pulpits with pastors who were not Lutheran
- Altar fellowship—allowing those who were not Lutheran to attend the Lord’s Supper
- Membership in secret societies—allowing Lutheran members to join antichristian societies

The Wisconsin Synod also raised questions concerning these issues. Hoenecke served on the Committee which was to study Ohio’s questions. He pressed the General Council for an immediate response to them. However, the General Council responded by evading a definite answer. It appealed for time until all churches could see “eye to eye” on all details of practice. The Wisconsin Synod representatives said they considered their Synod as a member of the Council, but they would have to report the Council’s answer concerning the “four questions” to the Wisconsin Synod in convention.

The 1868 Wisconsin Synod Convention dealt with the issue. It was in this discussion that Hoenecke was very influential. He set forth a position of unbending opposition to all advocates of exchanging pulpits and practicing altar fellowship with the heterodox. As a result, Pastor G. Vorberg

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<sup>46</sup> The church bodies represented at the meeting were the Pennsylvania Synod, the five districts of the General Synod of Ohio, the English synod of Ohio, the Pittsburg Synod, the Michigan Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the Minnesota Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Iowa Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Canada Synod, and the New York Ministerium. The Missouri and the Norwegian Synods did not join the Council. They were of the opinion that “free conferences” were the avenue through which to pursue unity.

<sup>47</sup> Remember that at the 1867 Synod convention, they also dealt with the issue concerning the mission societies in Germany and with the “Open Questions” issue with the Iowa Synod.

of St. Matthew's in Milwaukee, Pastor Kittel of LaCrosse, and President Adam Martin of Watertown parted ways with the Wisconsin Synod.

Hoenecke and Bading attended the 1868 General Council meeting in Pittsburg. The Wisconsin Synod had indicated in its 1868 resolutions concerning the General Council that, unless satisfactory answers were given to its concerns, it would no longer consider itself a member of the General Council. The General Council continued to refuse to give a definite answer to the four questions. In 1869, the Wisconsin Synod, acting on a proposal from Hoenecke, Goldammer, and Gausewitz, formally ratified the withdrawal from the General Council. The issues of unionism had been dealt with, and the door was opened for fellowship with the synod from Missouri.

### **Fellowship With the Missouri Synod**

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Relations between the Wisconsin and the Missouri Synods had been rocky over most of the first two decades of the Wisconsin Synod's existence. Missouri did not appreciate the establishment of a "New Lutheran" group in an area where it had been working. Articles in *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* criticized the Wisconsin Synod for its unionistic practices. Some of the criticism was justified. Some of it was overstated.

By 1865 the *Gemeindeblatt* was able to offer justified rebuttals of Missouri's charges. Up until 1868, Missouri continued its charges, failing to note the changes which had taken place in the Wisconsin Synod. To add to the problem, the two Synods were working in the same state, and found their paths crossing. "Opposition congregations" had their own personal feuds and complaints, which added fuel to the fires of discord.

However, private conversations between Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod pastors indicated there were no doctrinal differences between the two Synods. At the October 21-22, 1869 meetings, a "Document Concerning Peace and Concord Between the Honorable Synod of Missouri and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin" was signed. Among the signers for Missouri were President C. F. W. Walther and Prof. C.A. Brauer. President John Bading and Prof. Adolph Hoenecke were among those who signed for the Wisconsin Synod. Topics which had been discussed and agreed upon were:

- The position towards unionism and open questions
- Church and Ministry
- Ordination
- Inspiration
- The binding force of the Lutheran Confessions
- Millennialism
- The Anti-Christ

Walther observed, "All our reservations ... about Wisconsin have been put to shame."<sup>48</sup> Hoenecke had been instrumental in furthering the cause of peace between the two Synods. Concerning him, Walther is said to have remarked, "I have my eye on this young man and expect great things of him in the future."<sup>49</sup>

The result of the declaration of fellowship was an agreement on worker training. Wisconsin was to transfer its seminary operation to St. Louis and to supply a professor for St. Louis. Missouri was to provide a professor for the college at Watertown. The agreement was ratified by both Synods.

### **The Formation of the Synodical Conference**

Little is written concerning Hoenecke's individual efforts with regard to the establishment of the Synodical Conference. Suffice it to say that he was involved in its formation. He and Bading were among the Wisconsin Synod's representatives who took part in its formative meetings. The result was that in July of 1872, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America met at St. John's Church in Milwaukee. Original members were the Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Norwegian, and Illinois Synods. The Synodical Conference would furnish the setting for the next two issues through which the Lord used Hoenecke to guide the Wisconsin Synod.

### **The State Synods Controversy**

The Wisconsin Synod could have disappeared from the scene had it not been for the efforts of Hoenecke. When the Synodical Conference was formed, an effort was made to break down the existing synodical bodies in the Synodical Conference and substitute for them units which would conform geographically to state lines. The common language was to be German. Those using Norwegian or English were not included in these plans. A practical purpose for the state synods was to eliminate squabbles between so-called "opposition" congregations and their pastors.

The plan was to have one larger synod which would be in association with the non-German speaking bodies. There also was to be one seminary. The Wisconsin Synod expressed some reservations throughout the process of discussion. The concern was not with the state synods *per se*. Wisconsin was concerned with the formation of a state synod in Wisconsin. If the Wisconsin Synod joined with Missouri Synod congregations in Wisconsin to form a state synod, the Missouri Synod would want the newly formed state synod to join Missouri as a district. If that happened, the Wisconsin Synod would be dissolved and would become part of the Missouri Synod.

The 1877 Wisconsin Synod convention decided it did not wish to join the state synod merger, voted against establishing one joint seminary, and voted to re-open its own seminary. The state synods and the joint seminary were pet projects of Walther. He castigated the Wisconsin Synod's desires to retain its identity. He called their attitude *wiedergoettlich*,<sup>50</sup> infringing on Christian liberty

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<sup>48</sup> E. C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI., 1992: p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> Immanuel P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863-1963," p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Fredrich, *Op. Cit.*, p. 58.

and the province of the Holy Spirit. Hoenecke responded that organic union was not necessary to preserve the bond between those united in doctrine and practice, and that the desire to remain independent did not imply a departure from pure doctrine, as Missouri was implying. In 1878, the Wisconsin Synod opened its Seminary again, this time in Milwaukee. Hoenecke and Eugene Notz were called as professors.

### The Election Controversy (*Gnadenwahlstreit*)

The controversy over the doctrine of election began to surface in the early 1870's, and resurfaced with vigor in 1877. Dr. Walther suggested scrapping the terminology of *intuitu fidei*, which had been used by some Lutheran dogmaticians.<sup>51</sup> In 1879, Friedrich August Schmidt (d. 1928)<sup>52</sup> and Frederick William Stellhorn (d. 1919)<sup>53</sup> declared “war” and launched an all-out attack on Walther. Without going through all of the details concerning the Election Controversy, it can be said that Hoenecke was instrumental in keeping the Wisconsin Synod from suffering major defections because of it.

Hoenecke took his stand solidly alongside Walther. He stated that Walther's teaching on election was the teaching of Scripture, of St. Paul, of Martin Luther, and of the Formula of Concord. Hoenecke also served as a steadying influence for Walther. In his zeal during the conflict, Walther had written several sentences that said too much. Hoenecke persuaded Walther to make a public correction of his dubious sentences, which he did. Through his articles in the *Gemeindeblatt*, Hoenecke set the Wisconsin Synod on firm ground with regard to the doctrine of election. As Pieper observed, “Humanly speaking, our synod might well have been torn apart if Hoenecke's theology—not outwardly dazzling, but strong because it was Lutheran to the core—had not held us together.”<sup>54</sup>

### The Free Conference Questions

From 1903 through 1906, five “free conferences” were held at Watertown, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Fort Wayne. Participants at these “free conferences” were not delegates of their synods but had been invited by a committee formed from several synods. Participation in the conferences did not equal an acknowledgment of an opponent's doctrinal position. It was at these meetings that an Ohio Synod spokesman referred to the “analogy of faith” as a method of interpretation which needed consideration. The Ohio and Iowa spokesman defined the “analogy of faith” as a method of interpre-

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<sup>51</sup> For example, John Gerhard (1582-1637) used the term. Among his major works were *Loci theologici* and *Meditationes sacrae*.

<sup>52</sup> F. A. Schmidt was a brother-in-law of pastor H.A. Allwardt who served the Missouri Synod congregation in Lebanon, Wisconsin. Walther had trained Schmidt. The Norwegian Synod called Schmidt in 1861 to its Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. In 1872 he served as its professor to St. Louis, and in 1876 to their newly established seminary in Madison. In 1878 Schmidt had unsuccessfully attempted to become Missouri's English professor of theology at St. Louis. Walther may well have remembered that Schmidt had opposed him in the discussions on conversion with the Iowa Synod. It wasn't long after Schmidt did not receive the call to St. Louis that he began his attacks on Walther. Schmidt, together with Stellhorn and Allwardt, launched the journal *Altes und Neues* (Old and New). Their purpose was to protect the “old” doctrine of predestination against what they considered to be the “new” doctrine of Walther and Missouri.

<sup>53</sup> F. W. Stellhorn had served as Missouri's professor at Northwestern College from 1869 to 1874. At that time already he had expressed false views on conversion at a conference of Missouri Synod pastors. Hoenecke, who was attending as a visitor, took the floor to show Stellhorn the error of his ways.

<sup>54</sup> Pieper, *Op. Cit.*, p. 43.

tation which consisted of all the important teachings of the Bible. These were considered to be in harmony with each other. When a lack of harmony is observed between a less-clear doctrine and the “aggregate of Scripture,” then the “analogy of faith” must be applied. Schmidt went so far as to say that God gave man reason so he could harmonize contradictory statements of Scripture. The Ohio Synod saw in the “analogy of faith” a way that it could “prove” *intuitu fidei*.

Hoenecke responded to this view with an article published in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, which began publishing in 1904.<sup>55</sup> The article was entitled, “Agreement on the Correct View of the Authority of Scripture as the Source of Doctrine—the Way to Unity in the Church.” In this article he also addressed the issue of the “analogy of faith.” He demonstrated that there is no Scriptural warrant for making an “analogy of faith” an authority over the *sedes doctrinae* of Scripture.<sup>56</sup>

The free conferences also discussed the doctrines of conversion and election. Again, Hoenecke was instrumental in stating that both were brought about by the grace of God alone, in Christ. Another issue which surfaced at the conferences was whether they should begin and end with prayer. Prof. Ernst of Watertown had been the chairman of the second conference in Milwaukee. He had arranged for the sessions to begin with silent prayer. The men of Wisconsin had no problems with that. The *Gemeindeblatt* later said, “There no doubt was much earnest praying: The Lutherans longed for unity.”<sup>57</sup>

The Synodical Conference members at the free conferences spoke out against opening and closing the sessions with prayer. They offered the following reasons:

- Every participant prays privately.
- Public, joint prayer is an evidence of and a practice of church fellowship.
- Public prayer could give the false impression that all participants were one in faith.
- Public prayer would imply the doctrinal differences were of no further significance.<sup>58</sup>

Hoenecke was again instrumental in reaching these conclusions.

## 6. The Legacy of Adolph Hoenecke

### The Person

What is the legacy of Adolph Hoenecke? As a person, he was recognized as having a sharp mind, being precise in his definitions of terms and concepts, and having a thorough knowledge of his subject matter. Pieper observed, “In exegesis and in clear dogmatic exposition he simply was the unexcelled master in our circles.”<sup>59</sup> Hoenecke was humble, polite, always a gentleman, even in the heat of

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<sup>55</sup> Adolph Hoenecke, “Agreement on the Correct View of the Authority of Scripture as the Source of Doctrine—the Way to Unity in the Church,” Vol. 1:4 in German; vol 73:1,2 in English.

<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that J.P. Kochler also wrote an article in the 1904 *Quartalschrift* on “The Analogy of Faith.” *Die Analogie des Glaubens* appeared in the first three issues of the *Quartalschrift*, vol. 1, Nos. 1-3. The article is included in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI., 1997: pp. 221-268.

<sup>57</sup> Armin Schuetze, *Op. Cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>59</sup> Pieper, *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.

doctrinal controversy. Pieper said of him, “Even when practicing polemics, he never offended against Christian courtesy... He strengthened and girded his co-workers in the synod and gave his students a firm grounding in sound Lutheranism and with great patience he eagerly pursued peace with all who loved divine truth.”<sup>60</sup>

Hoenecke taught dogmatics and homiletics at the Seminary. In that capacity he would give much advice to his students. However, Hoenecke also was able to receive advice. The following story is told about him. “In America he trained his wife to be a kindly but sharp private critic of his sermons so that he might break himself of unconscious bad habits and of disturbing pulpit mannerisms. But she was also intelligent and knowledgeable enough to tell him now and then in an unabashed and half-joking way regarding the edifying value of his sermons: ‘Well, Papa, today was one of those times when it didn’t come off well at all.’”<sup>61</sup>

### Hoenecke’s Writings

Among the many writings of Hoenecke were his articles in the *Gemeindeblatt* (from 1865 on) and his essays at Synod Conventions.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps his most influential writings were during the Election Controversy. It was his clear presentations and his defense of Walther’s position that held the Wisconsin Synod together. He presented three more convention essays during the years of 1893 to 1897. Hoenecke had only four years to write for the *Quartalschrift*. He wrote the forewords to volumes 1:2 and 4:2, and six theological articles, plus homiletical studies and one book review. He also wrote two volumes of Lenten sermons, translated by Werner Franzmann.<sup>63</sup> Hoenecke produced a four-volume text on dogmatics. He put off writing it until later in his life. After his death, his sons Walter and Otto finished work on the text. It is too bad that more people have not benefited from his text because of their inability to handle the German. Thankfully, the matter is being remedied by having his dogmatics text translated. Volumes three and four have been translated and published. We eagerly wait for Volumes one and two to be completed.

### Hoenecke’s Influence

The following two quotes will help us assess the influence Hoenecke exerted in the Wisconsin Synod:

If there is one note that characterizes Hoenecke’s theological-dogmatic position as it is expressed in the forwards and articles of the *Quartalschrift*, it is the oft repeated emphasis that the ultimate source and authority in dogmatics is the *sedes doctrinae*, the individual Bible passages that convey the details of Scripture’s teachings to us. Koehler, in his obituary of Hoenecke, aptly describes the latter’s approach to theology thus: “that one take the Scriptures simply, the way they read.” Another generation would term this careful attention to the actual wording and import of the original Bible passages rather than to formulations of later systematians the “Wauwatosa Gospel.” From another perspective one could call it the faithful applications of Luther’s *Sola Scriptura* principle in the context of the

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Pieper, *Op. Cit.*, p. 11, note 7.

<sup>62</sup> From 1870 to 1878 Hoenecke presented essays at seven of the nine conventions.

<sup>63</sup> *A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth and Glorified In His Passion.*

19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We...have reason to treasure the heritage Adolph Hoenecke left us in and through his *Theologische Quartalschrift*.<sup>64</sup>

Adolph Hoenecke went on to become the Synod's theological teacher. He filled that role at Watertown until the synod's seminary training was transferred to St. Louis in 1869 without him. When it returned to Wisconsin in 1878, he resumed the role for another 30 years, eventually training almost two whole generations of Wisconsin pastors in theology, especially in its dogmatical and homiletical branches. By the time of his death in 1908, there were 250 pastors on the synodical roll. Over 200 were Hoenecke's students.<sup>65</sup>

## **7. Lessons from Hoenecke and History for Lutherans in the Twenty-first Century**

Permit a few brief observations at the close of this essay. I am no historian nor am I the son of a historian. However, I am a student of history, and I firmly believe in the principle enunciated by George Santanya that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."<sup>66</sup>

Much has changed since Hoenecke's day, and not for the better. When Liberalism ran into the solid wall of man's inhumanity to man in World War I, it lost its vision that man was moving ever upward. What arose to fill the void? Neo-orthodoxy, with Karl Barth, simply retained the old critical attitudes toward the Bible. Rudolph Bultmann gave us Demythologizing and made Existentialism popular. The next step down was Thomas Althizer and the "Death of God Movement." Then came "Post-Modernism." The Roman Catholic Church has succumbed to the tenants of biblical criticism,<sup>67</sup> which has also made great inroads into Lutheran circles.

The twentieth century also has seen the spread of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement.<sup>68</sup> Pentecostalism insists on speaking in tongues as necessary to receive the "Full Gospel." In so doing, it undermines the Gospel of free grace. Fundamentalism arose in reaction to Liberalism. While it was intent on preserving the fundamentals of the Christian faith, it withdrew into its own camp and spent its time in conducting end-times conferences or trying to make inroads into politics. Evangelicalism of the twentieth century has its roots in seventeenth-century Pietism, eighteenth-century Methodism, and nineteenth-century Revivalism. With that background, it is heir to all the false doctrine taught by all three groups.

There are many lessons to take away from a study of Hoenecke's legacy. Among them we might mention:

- The importance of careful exegesis in the study and presentation of Christian doctrine
- The importance of Confessional Lutheranism

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Westerhaus, "Adolph Hoenecke and the *Quartalschrift*, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Fredrich, *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> George Santanya, *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress: Reason in Common Sense*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Charles Scribner's Sons, NY, NY, 1924: p. 284.

<sup>67</sup> In 1943, Pius XII issued the encyclical entitled *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which encouraged Roman Catholic scholars to study the Bible by applying the tools of modern scholarship.

<sup>68</sup> The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, with William Seymour, set off a three-year revival which gained the attention of the entire nation.



- The importance of agreement on all Scripture teaches for unity in the church
- The importance of working together in love to maintain unity in the church
- The importance of a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches concerning fellowship and the importance of a practice that is faithful to what the Bible teaches concerning fellowship

One thing that struck me as I prepared this essay was that it took our forefathers a while to see the dangers involved in working with the Reformed and in using Reformed materials in their ministries. It would seem that a word of caution could be raised today about the same issue. It is in three areas in particular that Lutherans today are making liberal use of Reformed materials: in the areas of church growth, worship and hymnody, and teaching about sanctification. Lutheran churches that use church growth materials without understanding their theological background may soon lose sight of the relationship that exists between the Gospel and God's work of building the church through the Gospel. The method may get in the way of the message. Contemporary Christian music is so full of the emphasis on how I feel about God that it neglects the needed emphasis on the objective means of grace and on objective justification. Reformed materials on sanctification are full of legalism, the attempt to produce sanctification through the law. The end result of legalism is that it will create Pharisees or it will drive people to despair. *Caveat emptor!* As our forefathers discovered, you cannot package the gospel in Reformed theology without losing the message of *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fidei*.

On this 487<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we thank God for men like Martin Luther and Adolph Hoenecke, through whom God restored to his church the pure and unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ! May we treasure our great heritage of the Gospel, preserved for us through the Lord's servants. In thankfulness to God, we will proclaim it in its truth and purity to the generations yet to come.

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