

**The Legacy of the Norwegian Synod
Commemorating its 150th Anniversary**
The Life and Legacy of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren
By George M. Orvick

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Norwegian Emigration To America

On the 4th of July in the year 1825 a small boat sailed out of the harbor of Stavanger, Norway, on its way to America. It carried 53 passengers and their supplies. Most of these passengers came from the District of Rogaland, with an especially large contingent from Tysvaer, many of whom were related. Some of the people on board were probably Quakers. There was a small colony of Quakers which had become established in the Stavanger area. Undoubtedly some people on board were “Haugeans” who were followers of the great lay leader Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824). The man who provided the strong impetus for the immigration was Cleng Peerson who had been in America and came back to encourage others to emigrate also. The *Restoration* landed in New York on October 12, 1825. Those who arrived on the *Restoration* played virtually no role in establishing a Norwegian Lutheran Church here in America, but their coming does mark the beginning of the emigration to America.

From 1801 to 1865, the country of Norway’s population increased from 882 thousand to 1.7 million. It was not possible for the industries of farming, fishing and forestry as well as shipping to provide a living for everyone, so many decided to emigrate. Therefore, from 1825 to 1865, 78,000 Norwegians left to search for a means of livelihood in America. The year 1865 marked the beginning of large-scale emigration. It lasted until World War I. Between 1865 and 1914, 665,000 people left for America. In America there was greater opportunity for advancement. Here the “Homestead Act” of 1862 gave every man or woman over age 21 one hundred sixty acres of free land which was an encouragement for people to emigrate to America. The story of how the new emigrants fared as they labored to establish their new homes in the wilderness is a fascinating account. When we read about the sacrifices and hardships which they endured we become more aware of the debt of gratitude which we owe to these hardy souls.

Another serious factor faced by the early settlers was the lack of any kind of spiritual care for the welfare of their souls. The Rev. Adolph Bredesen spoke of this in an address in 1894 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Koshkonong Churches:

In the summer of 1844, there was not, among our people in America, a single trained minister of the Gospel nor a fully organized church, nor a church edifice, a periodical, or a school of any kind, bearing the Lutheran name. Lutheranism among our people was not “void,” but it was “without form,” and darkness brooded over its chaotic state. This darkness was made a shade deeper by the circumstances that emissaries of nearly every sect known to the country were hard at work among our people, trying, by fair means and foul, to draw them from their old church moorings.¹

Help, however, was on the way. A few pastors soon came from the mother church in Norway to help the immigrants establish congregations here in the United States. Claus Lauritz Clausen, who had been a lay preacher both in Norway and Denmark, was called on September 13, 1843, to serve a group at Muskego, Wisconsin. Clausen accepted the call and was ordained by the Rev. L. F. E. Krause, a German Lutheran pastor.

¹ *Grace for Grace*, p. 18.

The Muskego Congregation thus began to function although it had not adopted a constitution. Shortly after the ordination of Clausen, the first regularly trained pastor from Norway came to work among the immigrants. This was the Rev. J.W.C. Dietrichson, a graduate of the University of Christiania in 1837. He landed in New York on July 8, 1844, and made his way to Koshkonong Prairie, near Stoughton, Wisconsin, where there were five separate settlements. On Sunday, September 1st, he preached before a large gathering of settlers in Amund Anderson's (Hornefjeld) barn and celebrated Holy Communion. The following day, September 2nd, he preached under two oak trees farther west in the settlement and also gave communion to about 60 persons. These activities soon resulted in the establishment of the East and West Koshkonong Lutheran Churches. Soon other pastors began to arrive. Rev. H.A. Stub came in 1848, followed by A.C. Preus in 1850. Before the end of the year 1851 three additional pastors had arrived from Norway. H.A. Preus accepted a call from Spring Prairie, Wisconsin; G.F. Dietrichson succeeded C.L. Clausen as pastor of Luther Valley; and N. Brandt was called to Rock River and Pine Lake in southeastern Wisconsin. By the spring of 1860, 17 pastors had come from Norway.

After a preliminary attempt at organizing in 1851, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (commonly known as the Norwegian Synod) was organized at Luther Valley Church (near Janesville, Wisconsin). The constitution had been adopted at a meeting at East Koshkonong on February 5, 1853, but final approval took place at the convention held at Luther Valley on October 3-7, 1853. The synod consisted of 17 congregations with 6 pastors. The 6 pastors were H.A. Preus, G.F. Dietrichson, N.O. Brandt, H.A. Stub, A.C. Preus, and J.A. Ottesen. The first president of the synod was the Rev. A.C. Preus. He was succeeded by the Rev. H.A. Preus.

Koren's Early Life

Ulrik Vilhelm Koren was descended from a line of merchants' and pastors' families which had come to Bergen at the time of the Hanseatic League. He was born the 22nd of December, 1826. His parents were Paul Schonevig Stub Koren and Henrietta Christiane Wolffs. He entered the city's Latin School and graduated from there. When he was only 16 his father was killed in an earthquake on the island of San Domingo in 1842. The widow and her five children were left almost destitute. As a young boy he was confirmed. He writes, "At my confirmation I was instructed by an otherwise well-meaning rationalist pastor. I was asked what kind of blood was to be found in a fish. That it was 'red and cold' was to be considered testimony to the wisdom of God. And then the next boy was called."² In 1844 he was enrolled as a student at the University in Oslo. Since he had a remarkable singing voice he became a member of Behrens' Quartet and thus gained entrance to the capital city's leading families. It was his intention to become a pastor and so he began to study theology. He was very independent in his studies and thought for himself. After graduating from the university, Koren was engaged as teacher at the Nissen Latin School in Christiania; but this was not the kind of work which could satisfy his fervent longing to enter upon "real and important work and engage in the spiritual conflicts connected with it."³ He had, indeed, heard about the urgent need for pastors to serve the countrymen who had immigrated to America, but at first he paid little attention to it. One evening he learned that a new congregation had been established in Iowa and that they desired to obtain a pastor from Norway, and in the quiet of his mind he thought about going to America but he said nothing to anyone. When in his circle of friends it became known that he desired to go to America, many sought to hold him back.

"He was too good to cast himself away in that manner," they said. "His talents undoubtedly would open doors for him to follow a glittering official's career in Norway and finally elevate him to a bishop's chair or a position in the state government. 'Iowa?' Where was that? It lies

² *Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. 4, p. 8.

³ *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 33.

west of the Mississippi, a great river. It borders upon the great American wilderness, the Western Sahara. No, he must not go there but remain at home. But the young man was determined.”⁴

At this time Koren was engaged to Else Elisabeth Hyssing, whose father was a pastor in Larvik. He had studied theology and became a teacher in Bergen’s Cathedral School and later served in the parliament. She was of the same mind as her beloved and was willing to follow him wherever the Lord called him. On the 18th of August 1853 a letter of call was sent to Koren from a settlement in northeastern Iowa composed of the congregations at Paint Creek, Norway Settlement, Clermont, and Little Iowa. He writes about his graduation sermon which he was now to preach.

It was my first time that I was in the pulpit and I was very nervous. There was a large gathering of officials before me but there was no expression on their faces. After lunch it was better. My old friend comforted me and said that I had a “sympathetic voice.” He didn’t say anything about the sermon. I then delivered my ordination sermon and spoke with another person as to how my sermon was received and he comforted me in that he said I should not be worried because Bishop Arup had heard many poor sermons.⁵

Koren Arrives In Iowa

After their marriage in Larvik the Koren’s left Norway September 5th, landed at Kiel and went by train to Hamburg, from whence they were to sail for America. They sailed September 15th on the *Rhein* and arrived in New York on November 20th, after a voyage of nine and one half weeks. They spent a few days in New York City, visited some sites and even attended the play, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” They traveled from there by train and by steamer until they finally arrived in Milwaukee. They left Milwaukee by means of a lumber wagon with which they traveled to Koshkonong.

After visiting at the home of Herman Preus and family at Spring Prairie, Wisconsin, they began their journey to Iowa. When they came near Madison, Wisconsin, Elisabeth reports, “We met two wagons with Indians; farthest back in the wagon sat the chiefs, their faces painted red, their heads uncovered and adorned with feathers. They made a brave show as they sat there wrapped up in their white and colored blankets.”⁶ On their journey westward they found shelter in taverns along the way. They left New York December 1st and arrived at the Washington Prairie Settlement southeast of Decorah on December 22nd. Their journey from Larvik had taken 15 weeks and two days.

The taverns in which they had found shelter were often very crowded and filled with travelers. At some of them Elisabeth reports that she was “quite aghast at how filthy and horrid it was.” The next challenge was to get across the Mississippi River. The account of their crossing is a story in itself. Mrs. Koren writes:

After we reached the river, the horses were unhitched. A so-called ‘doctor’ went ahead, trying the ice with a long stake and helped Vilhelm draw the buggy, in which I sat; a Norwegian boy pushed from behind; and so we proceeded—as much as possible across islets, then alternately over ice and trees, a mile or so across in all. When we reached the other shore the boy stayed with the equipment and we followed the ‘doctor’ down a remarkable road through the sloughs along the river.⁷

After spending the night in McGregor, Iowa, they continued their journey to Washington Prairie. Here it was decided that they should live with Mr. and Mrs. Erik Egge. Their small log cabin was divided into a sleeping

⁴ *Kort Udsigt Over Det Lutherske Kirkearbeide*, p. 256.

⁵ *Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. 4, p. 16.

⁶ *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren*, p. 79.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 92.

area and a living area. On one wall were two beds separated by calico curtains. The other side was for the stove, table and chairs and for the two children. They lived there from December 24, 1853, until March 10, 1854. The original cabin has been preserved and is a part of the Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa.

On Christmas Day in the year 1853 Koren preached his first sermon. The service was held at the home of Thorgrim Busness. Elisabeth writes:

When the service was over I talked with several people—as many as I could, for it was so crowded that no one could move. It pleases and interests me to see and talk to all these different people, our Norwegian faun folk, with whom I have had so little acquaintance up to this time. I find many of them attractive; I like those best who have no city flourish about them, but come up, take me by the hand, and say, well, “we wish you welcome to America!”⁸

Pastor Koren immediately began ministering to the settlers in far-flung communities throughout northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota. Koren describes his vehicle by which he traveled as follows:

You would have been amused to see my primitive means of travel: My first sleigh consisting of runners and thins constructed from two long hickory limbs, on top of which there was a little box with a board over it to be used as a seat all put together with wooden pins without the help of a single nail. My first carriage was a single wagon with wooden axles and lynch pins, and no springs under the seat, or my first harness, in which all the running parts, including the reins were made of clothes line.⁹

After their stay with the Egges the Koren moved to the Sørlands' home and finally on May 2nd moved to the home of the Skaarlias. While living at the Sørlands' home Elisabeth describes the conditions as follows: “The rain is forcing its way through the walls here and there all over the room. I do hope we get a tight house so that I will not have to go about with a rag in my hand and mop up every time it rains.”¹⁰

It is truly amazing how this woman who had moved together with her husband in the most cultured circles in Norway yet found no great difficulty in facing the hardships and sacrifices of pioneer life and adjusting to conditions among the pioneer settlers, who were mostly plain folk brought up in humble circumstances in the homeland. Yes, Elisabeth's sensibilities were at times disturbed by their living conditions. She writes that one evening Erik, while they were eating,

drew off his shoes and socks, put both his feet on a stool, and began quite unabashed to rub them with turpentine; my appetite was not particularly sharpened by either his manners or the awful smell. On the whole we have to shut our eyes and ears as much as possible to preserve our appetite and good humor when our finer sensibilities are offended by these rustic manners; fortunately, they usually have the opposite effect, however; one glance at each other, and we have a hard time to keep from bursting into laughter.¹¹

In spite of the harsh conditions which they faced it was their faith that sustained them in the midst of these circumstances. When told after months of waiting that the parsonage was not yet ready, Koren said that for the first time he saw a tear in Elisabeth's eye.

Today it is difficult to imagine the magnitude of the immigration and the westward flow of settlers. Elisabeth writes:

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 103.

⁹ *Symra*, Vol. 23, 1905.

¹⁰ *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren*, p. 198

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 122

I think the whole population of Wisconsin must be moving west. A young man who came here yesterday with greetings from Pastor Preus had passed more than 300 wagonloads of Norwegians the greater part bound for Minnesota.... In Minnesota people are so eager to get a minister that it can hardly be long before they arrange to send a call to Norway.¹²

Koren was quite impressed by the solid character of the people to whom he was to minister. He writes that he found in them “more genuineness, more earnestness, more fear of God, more industriousness, more willingness to make personal sacrifices, more honesty, less demands than I had, as a rule, previously been acquainted with. True, there were differences here and there.”¹³

Koren was alone in serving a huge field, visiting congregations and preaching places in the settlements that soon included eight counties. In 1863 in his six congregations in Iowa, he baptized 170 persons, confirmed 69 and lost 69 to death. He was alone in the field which soon came to number 10,000 Norwegian Lutherans. At least 20 congregations were later formed from that field. The Rev. F.C. Clausen, the Rev. N.E.S. Jensen, the Rev. O.J. Hjort and the Rev. O. Waldland came in the next few years to provide much needed help to Pastor Koren. In the period 1862-65, Prof. Laur. Larsen and Prof. F.A. Schmidt of Luther College aided Koren by preaching to the small congregation in Decorah and assisting in several other congregations. About ten other pastors came to help so that after 1883 Rev. Koren served only the Washington Prairie, Calmar, and Stavanger congregations until the latter received a resident pastor in the Rev. H.J.G. Krogh in 1896.

A synod meeting was held in Washington Prairie, October 9-13, 1857, the first such meeting to be held west of the Mississippi. This meeting is very historic because here it was formally decided that an institution of higher learning should be established and that funds should be collected for this purpose. Thus began the movement which culminated in the building of Luther College on a beautiful site selected by Rev. Koren.

Koren's leadership qualities were early recognized. He served as a member of the church council 1861-1910; vice-president of the synod 1871-1894; president of the Iowa District of the synod 1876-1894; president of the Norwegian Synod 1894-1910. In 1903 the degree of doctor of divinity was conferred upon the Rev. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren by Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. As a theologian he is generally recognized as being, perhaps, the most outstanding that our Norwegian Lutheran Church in America has produced.

His loving wife, *Fru* Koren, was at all times his trusted right hand. Koren gives her much credit for his work in the ministry. He said that it was from her that he learned to preach in a manner which people could understand. He said that when he first came to America he used a high-toned city form of speech, but his wife got him to step down from such learned heights. “Do you think that the farmers understood what you said today?” she asked him, when he had preached after a Christiania preacher's manner. Thereafter when one, after he had preached in the church at Washington Prairie, commented on how he appreciated and understood his sermons, Koren answered, “It came about because of what my wife said.” Rev. Koren himself frequently alludes to her fine understanding and judgment in the most practical and subjective matters.¹⁴ Mrs. Koren provided able assistance to her husband and willingly endured the material discomforts that were to be found in the frontier settlements. Her fine influence and gentility made itself felt in wide circles. The happy union that was to last for 57 years was broken on December 19, 1910, when Pastor Koren died. On December 23rd this talented and faithful servant of the master was laid to rest in the cemetery adjacent to the house of worship where he had those many years proclaimed the message of the one thing needful. His faithful helpmate, Else Elisabeth Hyssing Koren was laid to rest by his side in 1918.

Religious Currents In Norway

¹² *Ibid*, p. 252

¹³ *Built on the Rock*, p. 42

¹⁴ *Kort Udsigt Over Det Lutherske Kirkearbeide*, p. 860.

Rationalism had been a growing force in the religious life of Norway for many years. By 1780 the spirit of Rationalism was dominant in the theological faculty at the University of Copenhagen, where theological candidates were trained for service in Norway's parishes. Thus, after 1780 and into the next century many younger rationalistic pastors took office in Norway. The Rationalism found amongst the clergy in the church of Norway was relatively mild in comparison with that found in other countries. By the year 1800 its influence had spread over most of the clergymen in Norway. There were a number of pastors, however, who remained loyal to the old Lutheran faith. Bishop Johann Nordahl Brun of Bergen fought against Rationalism and by 1814 he was the only one of Norway's bishops who was not rationalistically inclined. The common people, however, were not greatly influenced by the movement. The pastors used traditional terminology and assumed that the common people would not understand what they were saying.

The Haugean Revival

There were two factors which finally arose to restrain Rationalism. The first was the Haugean Revival and the second was the resurgence of evangelical Christianity within the Oslo theological faculty, and a new generation of pastors which had been trained at the Oslo school.

Haas Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) was a lay evangelist. He had undergone a religious experience on April 5, 1796, while he was at work in the fields of his father's farm. On account of his preaching a "religious awakening" took place in Norway between 1796 and 1804. His message of repentance and conversion had a powerful effect upon the people, especially those of the farming class. His preaching, however, emphasized so strongly the law and repentance that the message of salvation by grace alone was often obscured by his legalism. He was also an author who published many books which also had their influence upon their readers. While he remained a member of the church of Norway, he was particularly critical of the clergy. He accused the pastors of being proud, avaricious, worldly, and negligent of spiritual responsibilities. He did, however, urge his followers to be faithful to their congregations and to attend church regularly. This gave rise to the advent of the lay preaching movement. He was also engaged in various business enterprises in an effort to assist the farmers. He was in prison from 1804 until 1811 after being accused of violating the conventicle act of 1741 which forbade itinerant lay preaching and required that public religious gatherings should be held under the supervision of the pastor.

The Haugean Revival Movement had a powerful influence upon the entire country. It became a leaven which reshaped the life and character of the entire church in Norway. Hauge's preaching and activity had this effect that it activated the laypeople which was to have a significant impact upon the future and had much to do with the internal strife that plagued the church of Norway for decades. American Lutheranism was also to feel the effects of the Haugean Revival. Haugeanism was a people's movement which led the farmers to be bold and not be afraid to stand up to authority. By 1833 the "storting" (parliament) was dominated by the farmers, several of whom were Haugeans. The vast majority of the Norwegians who emigrated to America in the 19th century were farmers. Of these only a small minority were Haugeans by personal conviction. But practically all of them had imbibed something of the spirit of the democratic awakening of the mother country and to that awakening Haugeanism had made significant contributions.

Grundtvigianism

Another movement which had some influence amongst the early pastors who came to America in the emigration was that of Grundtvigianism. This was begun by the famous N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). He forcefully condemned Rationalism and attacked religious indifferentism, and thus became a controversial figure in Denmark. At first Grundtvig was recognized as the outstanding champion of Biblical Christianity in his homeland. This, however, was called into question when he made what he called "his matchless discovery" on account of which he drastically changed his theology. In his view, the Apostles' Creed was to be more highly regarded than the Scriptures. To him the Apostles' Creed was the voice of the church that had been unchanged through the centuries. It was the key to the understanding of the Bible because it was confessed by the church before Scripture existed. The Words of Institution of the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Prayer together with the

Apostles' Creed became the testimony of the church. Scripture was considered an invaluable source of information but not a life giving Word. This view of Grundtvig with its exaltation of the church and the sacraments came to be known as the "churchly view." He also held to the view that there would be a second chance to be saved for the people who were in hell. Such views of Grundtvig were thoroughly discredited with the rise of Lutheran Confessionalism as represented by Prof. Gisle Johnson, and Carl P. Caspari.

A few of the pastors, such as Dietrichson and Clausen, who organized the Norwegian Synod in 1851, were influenced by Grundtvigianism. When more orthodox and confessional pastors came, the constitution adopted at the first convention in Muskego was rejected. The new one which was finally adopted in 1853 had no reference to Grundtvigian theology.

Johnsonian Era

After the era of Rationalism, Haugeanism, and Grundtvigianism, which all had a powerful influence upon the church of Norway, there arose "the Johnsonian Era." The leader of this return to Confessionalism was a professor by the name of Gisle Johnson (1822-94). The Johnsonian Awakening began in the 1850s and for about two decades set the religious tone in Norway. Johnson was appointed to the theological faculty of the university in Oslo at the age of 27 years. He was a very gifted teacher who made a deep and lasting impression upon his students. He was later joined by a renowned scholar by the name of C.P. Caspari. Johnson and Caspari contributed to the demise of Grundtvigianism and were instrumental in founding certain church reforms which returned more authority to the people and the congregations and removed some of the power of the government in church affairs. The young church in America, however, inherited all of the tendencies, false teachings, and problems of the mother church in Norway.

Koren's Ministry

It is against this background that we now examine the role of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren, the young pastor who had come to Iowa in 1853. Pastor Koren was called to be the pastor of the congregation at Washington Prairie in addition to several others. He, however, realized the great need of the immigrants that had settled in northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota. They were sheep without a shepherd and so he spent most of his early years as a traveling missionary. He was gone from home for weeks at a time, preaching, instructing children, ministering to the sick, and burying the dead. It is said that some 20 congregations were formed from what was his parish. Koren had a keen understanding of the spiritual feelings and fluctuations that existed in the hearts of his hearers. He knew how lonely they were for their families and their homeland. He understood their weaknesses, their sorrows and their temptations. In his sermons, he applied the law and the gospel in a way that really touched the hearts of his hearers. Koren himself writes that he had been influenced by the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was one who could see through all sham and pretense. Koren likewise would cut through all hypocrisy and outward show and get right down to what was going on in a person's heart. In his preaching he was able to discern and describe what these new settlers in the forests and fields were really thinking.

One of Koren's Sermons

Let us take a look at just one of his sermons. This was the Ascension Day sermon given at a synod meeting in Spring Grove, Minnesota, in 1881, based on Acts 1:1-11. His theme was "The Comfort which Christ's ascension into Heaven and His sitting at the right hand of the Father brings us." Hear him as he proclaims the Law:

He (the Saviour) knew also that it was not enough that we learn the lesson that the entire human race is fallen and all are sinners; therefore, He took us into a one-room school and held up a mirror for us, namely, the law, so that we could see ourselves.... Thus He prepared us until we

were forced to break out with sorrow of heart, and a shame of deepest distress: Oh, yes, I am the man, I am the sick, the leper, the helpless, the condemned; there is nothing good in me! Where is there medicine for this sickness?

Hear Koren now as he proclaims the gospel.

If you have learned this, then surely the Holy Spirit has also opened your heart so that you have heard Jesus' answer to your cry: Behold, I am your Savior, He says, come to Me with your sorrow—I will give you rest—I take away your sins, just leave them on Me! Fear not, I will be with you.... Behold, He who will be your power sits at the Father's right hand. From thence comes help: if you are foolish, He is your wisdom; if you are a sinner, He is your righteousness; if you are smitten, if you are condemned, He is your sanctification and deliverance.

Going on in the same sermon Koren speaks in a most comforting manner to these immigrant souls who are no doubt fearful in this new land.

Do you think that you are forgotten? Do you think that he, therefore, suffered so much evil for your sake, later to let go of you and let you go astray? Has He not said that He will be with you always? Has He not kept that promise? Yes, certainly, thou fearful soul, He has never left you because of sin, not for a day, not for an hour. He has guided you and led you; if you forsook Him, then He went after you and called to you; otherwise you would not have been really anxious and troubled... Are you small and insignificant? You were, however, big enough and precious enough so that He bore your guilt and punishment... See, then, how precious you are in His sight and learn to trust in Him.... Or perhaps there are other needs which burden you? Is it one or another of your dear ones who has gone astray and over whom you sorrow? Oh, they can be heavy, those sorrows, but do you think it lies heavier on your heart than on His, the Good Shepherd's? So confide your sorrow to Him, talk to Him, pray to Him, and honor Him then also by believing Him when He promises to hear your prayers.... Or is it God's congregation which concerns you?... Oh you fool! Do you not think He can steer His church? Do you think that He forsakes His flock and does not care for His own body? Or do you think that He does not know the way and the means, the right time and the right means?... Ah, no, His purpose is certain, gracious and good, and He knows how it can be carried out. Nothing can hinder Him. Just see to it that you cling to Him yourself, that you grasp His hand tightly and let Him hold you firmly, and do not let yourself be confused!¹⁵

Koren makes use of a great number of hymn verses for the comfort and edification of his hearers. He was the author of a number of wonderful hymns, for example "Ye Lands to The Lord," one of the favorites. He wrote numerous poems. Of special note is "*Det Gamle Hus*," a lengthy, beautiful discourse on the Church of God.

This is just a sample of Koren's preaching by which he comforts not only the laypeople but also his fellow servants in the ministry. A number of these sermons have been translated into English and are found in the book *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, published by the ELS in 1978. Also contained in this volume besides the sermons are a number of addresses and doctrinal articles where Koren deals with the real issues that face the church and which trouble precious Christian souls.

Opposition From The Conference

¹⁵ *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, pp. 38f.

In order to understand more fully the role Dr. Koren played in the struggles that took place in the years following the organization of the synod, let us take a look at the strong opposition which was leveled against the synod especially by the Conference for the Norwegian Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. From the year 1870 this group made its headquarters in Minneapolis and carried on missionary activity in the rapidly growing settlements of the Northwest. The leaders of the Conference became bitter enemies of the Norwegian Synod. We now see this from Koren's address entitled, "Why Is There Is No Church Unity Among Norwegian Lutherans in America?" Their leader was Prof A. Weenaas who had come over from Norway. About half of the congregations, which before 1870 had united themselves with the Augustana Synod, followed their pastors into the Conference. The Conference had acquired a building—Augsburg Seminary—already erected in 1872, but had only Prof. A. Weenaas as teacher. In 1873 they secured another teacher in the person of Candidate of Theology Sven Oftedal who accepted the call and stepped into his new office the same year. The Professors Oftedal and Weenaas now attempted with a violent blow, to crush the Norwegian Synod, which, however, they did not succeed in doing. What they did was to issue the well-known and infamous "Open Declaration." [See *Kirketidende* for 1874, p. 102f] In this we read, among other things:

By the Norwegian Synod or Wisconsinism (it was called Wisconsinism because the leading theologians were from Wisconsin. It is not to be confused with the Wisconsin Synod) we understand an anti-Christian school of thought and a dangerous organization, which carried by a papistical principle, works toward dissolving Christianity into universalism and hierarchy, sprung from the catholicizing school of Grundtvigianism."¹⁶

This Open Declaration brought much criticism upon the Conference 'here in America' and in the mother church in Norway.

The Conference was sharply criticized by Prof. Johnson in Norway and sympathy was expressed for the synod. The "Open Declaration" has said quite bluntly that "the Conference can no more be reconciled with 'Wisconsinism' than Christ and Belial, than fire and water."¹⁷ At the annual meeting of the Conference in 1874 it was announced that the theological candidates George Sverdrup and S. A. Gunnensen had also declared themselves willing to become professors at Augsburg Seminary.

Koren comments on these controversies as follows:

In these controversies the Synod was always the attacked part. The attempts that were made, by means of negotiations in free conferences, were not successful. It is my conviction that the Synod in these controversies has strictly held itself to what the Lutheran Church has taught in its confessions.¹⁸

There was always a bitter hatred against the Synod because it represented the State Church of Norway and Orthodoxy. We quote Prof. S. Oftedal:

I know that the Norwegian pastors in America, worm eaten by Latinism, washed out by monarchism, and frozen stiff by orthodoxism, impelled by hunger for an official position and morbidly thinking of home, had been swallowed by Missouri and were in the act of imposing the bonds of slavery and papistical darkness upon a people, whom the Lord had chosen to be the champions of Christianity and freedom.¹⁹

¹⁶ "Why Is There No Church Unity Among Lutherans?" p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 22.

Koren's Theology As Set Forth In His Writings

Dr. Koren's son, the Rev. Paul Koren, who was his father's assistant at Washington Prairie for a number of years, published a four-volume set of his father's *Collected Writings (Samlede Skrifter)*. He also wrote other sermons, addresses and doctrinal articles which were published in the monthly organ of the Synod in years past. Unfortunately, most of his writings have not been translated from the Norwegian into English. Also, his writings have not been very popular since the Norwegian Merger of 1917. Dr. S.C. Ylvisaker points out in *Faith of Our Fathers* that Dr. Koren always pointed to the two mighty pillars by which the church of God is fitly joined together, namely this: "The Word of God as the only norm of faith and life, and the Doctrine of Justification by faith alone without the works of the law as the central and saving truth of that Word."²⁰

Since it is impossible to deal with all of Koren's writings we list them here for those who wish to do further research:

1. What the Norwegian Synod has Wanted and Still Wants
2. The Right Principles of Church Government
3. On the Use of the Word of God
4. Introductory Remarks to a Discussion Regarding Justification by Faith
5. The Inspiration of Holy Scripture
6. The Book of Concord
7. Can and Ought a Christian be Certain of His Salvation?
8. What Hinders the Merger of the Various Norwegian Lutheran Synods?
9. The Requirements Which the Present Condition of our Church Body Demands of Our Clergy
10. Address to the Students of a Theological Seminary
11. Address to the Convention of the Norwegian Synod, 1093

The above-mentioned articles are available in English in *Faith of Our Fathers* and in *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*.

Excerpts From Koren's Writings

Let us now take a look at some of these writings:

"Introductory Remarks to a Discussion Regarding Justification by Faith"

In all of his writings we find Koren quoting extensively from the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and Luther's Works. In writing about the Doctrine of Justification by Faith he calls attention to the church's zeal for this doctrine, whose purpose is, namely, "To comfort and raise up those anxious and fearful consciences and to answer a question of vital importance, 'What shall we do to be saved?' How shall I become righteous before God?" He goes on to say that this doctrine "was the watchword of the Church of the Reformation, and to this very day the first and mightiest demand upon all Lutherans is that they must honestly hold fast to this deepest and highest and most glorious central truth in God's revealed Word." He quotes Martin Chemnitz, who wrote, "The norm and rule for speaking in the church ought to be that the true and necessary things are set forth directly and clearly, without ambiguity and in such a manner that they can be rightly understood without interpretation, also by the unlearned." This was one of Koren's strong points, namely, that he was able to set forth things in such a clear manner that they could not be misunderstood. Koren goes on to say as follows:

It will be beneficial for us that we here also learn from the past. Just as there was a time in the Lutheran church when they were so indulgent and so afraid of bringing forward the motto "*sola*

²⁰ *Faith of Our Fathers*, pp. 39-41.

fide,” that is, by faith alone, that very seldom and scarcely even as a weak whisper was it heard here and there, so there was also a time when it seemed as if many teachers would not hear anything from God’s Word except this, “*sola fide*,”—by faith alone—and as if they scarcely tolerated hearing the phrase “of good works” mentioned. Just as the former were afraid of being accused of despising good works, so the latter were afraid of considering faith too little In the presentation of truth, however, everything has its proper place. If it is taught correctly, then there will be room both for the doctrine whose marks are the words “*sola fide*,” and for the doctrine which has the goal of inculcating good works as God’s will for us.

Koren then continues by pointing out how especially difficult it is to divide rightly between the law and the gospel, while at the same time nothing is more important for us than to do just that. He asks:

What truly evangelical pastor is there really who has not been in great distress on exactly this point both about preaching the gospel fully and unabridged, so that anxious souls can be comforted and edified, and then about chastising secure and self-righteous sinners, so that they do not harm themselves with a false comfort?

With this article about justification by faith Koren penetrated to the heart of the controversies by calling for a thorough understanding of this chief article. He offers these words of encouragement, “If we Norwegian Lutherans by basic and earnest discussions can be united in the right understanding of this chief doctrine, justification by faith, then we dare to have more hope of future unity than the present external situation among us seems to promise...”²¹

Another outstanding article by Koren is the one entitled:

“Can and Ought A Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?”

In the introduction Koren explains why he is writing this article:

I have several reasons for it, both general and more specific. Partly, there are many who think they are certain of their salvation, but who deceive themselves, and therefore need to be admonished; partly, there are many who would very much like to be certain of their salvation, but dare not be, and therefore need to be encouraged; finally, the question has recently become the object of controversy among us—a controversy very closely allied to, or rather a part of, the controversy concerning the doctrine of election.

Koren then writes that there are certain truths which must be noted in advance, be strictly adhered to, and never lost sight of. (The excerpts quoted below are only a summary. It is necessary to read the complete article to get the full meaning.) They are:

1. First of all, we must maintain that when this question of our final salvation is being considered, there can be no talk of any so-called absolute certainty, provided the word “absolute” is used in its proper sense The certainty of which we speak is, first of all, a certainty of faith, which can be only where faith is ..., it does not follow from all this that the certainty of faith is weaker than absolute certainty Faith is certainty, and the Holy Scriptures often use the expression.
2. Furthermore, we must maintain that a certainty of salvation is a certainty of faith; only he who is truly a believer can have it Many imagine that they are certain of salvation (Matthew 7,21-22); it often seems as though they believe that to be saved nothing else is needed than to belong

²¹ *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, p. 137f.

to a congregation, live somewhat decently, and then die. But like their faith, their certainty is only imagination, for their faith does not have the marks which the New Testament places upon faith.

3. Thirdly, we must maintain that a certainty is not here spoken of which all believers must have in the same degree, or which all believers necessarily must feel within themselves, with the result that if they do not do so, they must conclude that they do not have the right faith The strength of faith, we know, can be different, without the essence of faith being changed thereby.

4. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that faith and hope, in the Biblical meaning, are not different in such a way that faith is stronger and hope weaker There is also this difference that, while faith is the assent of the heart to the Word, and appropriation of the promise it contains, hope is the firm expectation of the blessings which are promised in the Word. Faith and hope are therefore inseparable.

5. Further, we must maintain that there is no difference between being certain of one's salvation and being certain of one's election for these two concepts, to be saved and to have been elected, nevertheless amount to the same thing in effect. Every single soul of the elect will be saved, and none except the souls of the elect.

6. Finally, we must be convinced that certainty of salvation cannot be attained by brooding over or wanting to "investigate the secret, concealed abyss of divine predestination." Whoever makes this his beginning will fall into either arrogance or despair and will not attain to any certainty of salvation For we must carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in His Word and what He has not revealed.²²

God has in Christ revealed to us all that we need in order to be certain of our salvation, but much of His secret counsel He has kept hidden. We are not to brood over this-and this admonition is needful in the highest degree. "In our presumption we take much greater delight in concerning ourselves with matters which we cannot harmonize-in fact, we have no command to do so-than with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in His Word."²³

We wish to quote one more excerpt from Koren's essay on:

The Right Principles of Church Government

In this article Dr. Koren sets forth in a very scriptural and logical manner what the Church is, how it is established, and how it is to be governed. He deals with the purpose of synods and what their work is to be. He shows how

the Church is established by the Word of God in accordance with the command of Christ: "Go and make disciples of all nations," etc., for that which makes us Christians is faith, and faith comes by the Word of God. Therefore the Lutheran Church confesses in the Augsburg Confession, Article 5, as follows: "That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For, through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the gospel." There is no reference in this article to the work of the public ministry, by which the office of the word is to be performed in the congregation by certain persons who have been called to it. That is discussed later in the 14th Article. Here the reference is to the essence, power, and effectual working of the means of grace.²⁴

²² *The Book of Concord, Tappert edition, p. 625, 52.*

²³ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly, pp. 149-153.*

²⁴ *Faith of Our Fathers, pp. 117-118.*

Concerning the matter of calling pastors and teachers, we read as follows:

So the office (of pastor and teacher) also belongs to the congregation. But Christ has given the congregation the command and the explanation concerning the public execution of the office, which has just been mentioned and which our church confesses in the 14th Article of the Augsburg Confession. There it is also the congregation which calls its preachers and teachers and which has to see to it that these do the work they are called to do. The pastors are not, according to God's Word to be lords over the congregation. They are to be the servants of the congregation, and at the same time they are to be servants of God.²⁵

Koren writes that there are no special instructions for how the church should be organized to carry out its work but that all things should be done decently and in order.

The Missouri Connection

Koren now goes on to discuss the relationship of the Norwegian Synod to the Missouri Synod.

The Synod had established, already in 1857, after careful investigations, a connection with the Missouri Synod, which was founded ten years earlier, and which had schools for training pastors in St. Louis and Fort Wayne. The conditions were that our synod, in return for appointing and supporting a professor at the Missouri Synod school in St. Louis, was to have the opportunity of having its students admitted there. Much has been said about the effect which our connection with the Missourians has had upon the Norwegian Synod.... We have not learned anything new from them, i.e. any new doctrine or any doctrine other than that which we had with us from the University in Christiania.

The synod has been reproached that from the Missourians it has learned to put all stress upon doctrine and to neglect Christian life. In other words: The Missourians and the Norwegian Synod have been accused of orthodoxism. They, themselves, have rejected this accusation. That the danger lies near, both these church bodies have themselves always acknowledged and confessed. Orthodoxy signifies 'pure doctrine.' Orthodoxism may be translated 'pure doctrinarism.' This last consists of making pure doctrine the end, although it is only the means to the proper end. The end is to be the true, real, living faith. For that is the life in God. As one believes, so he lives.... They (the pastors of the synod) have constantly, again and again reminded their hearers that he who lives an ungodly life, and who lives for this world alone, has no true faith, even if he considers himself ever so orthodox.²⁶

The Norwegian Synod benefited greatly from its association with the Missouri Synod. From its emphasis on pure doctrine, from its brotherly fellowship, and missionary zeal the Norwegian Synod was strengthened and encouraged as they began the tremendous undertaking of founding a church body in a new and unfamiliar land. Koren writes:

I have said above that the Norwegian Synod has much for which to thank the Missourians. In the front rank of these things I will place the earnest, basically Christian and Lutheran character, which, during the studying in St. Louis, was instilled in the Synod's future pastors.... This influence has been continued with loyalty and ability by the present theological professors of the

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 125-126.

²⁶ "Why is There No Church Unity Among Lutherans?" pp. 39-40.

Synod, who have studied in St. Louis, and who, praise be to God, harmoniously work together in the same spirit.²⁷

The Doctrinal Controversies Of The Norwegian Synod

The founders of the Norwegian Synod were determined to hold fast to the pure teaching of God's Word. They were not about to allow the enemies of the gospel to introduce false teachings nor to allow human reason to enter into the teaching of God's Word. This strong stand led to a number of controversies among the Norwegian Lutherans. Most of those controversies were brought with them because they had inherited them from the church in Norway. The effects of Haugeanism and Pietism were felt in most places. Dr. Koren wrote in 1877 in an article entitled, *The Church Parties among our People in America*:

Since the church factions among our people synchronized with the emigration, their roots must be sought in the church conditions in Norway, of which ours are but a continuation under other external circumstances.²⁸

In Norway there were three factions resulting from Rationalism and the Haugean Revival which divided the church people even though they all remained within the ranks of the State Church. There were, first, the rationalistic state church pastors and their more or less worldly and indifferent church members; secondly, the followers of Hans Nielsen Hauge who were serious students of the Word but too often opposed in an unreasoning manner everyone and everything connected with the state church; and thirdly, the Orthodox State Church pastors and their loyal Christian church members.²⁹

These controversies arose in the young church in America and had to be addressed. We read in *Grace for Grace* that "It may seem, indeed, that there was more of such controversy among Norwegian Lutherans than among other groups. But, if so, the reason is to be sought mainly in the peculiar conditions which they inherited from the church in Norway."³⁰

We shall briefly summarize these controversies to show what the fathers had to face:

Lay Preaching

Due to the influence of the lay preacher, Hans Nielsen Hauge, it was quite common to have laymen serve as preachers in Norway. Hauge had attacked the State Church clergy in their "black robes" and encouraged lay preaching. Thus the first preaching amongst the settlers was carried out by men who were not ordained, notably Elling Eielsen. Eielsen was a bitter enemy of the ordained clergy. His anger flared when Dietrichson asked him not to continue in any more religious activity. He grabbed Dietrichson by the beard and exclaimed, "Hear me, you pope, I wish to be your pestilence while yet I may."³¹

There were therefore those who thought it in order to permit lay-preaching by such as were "moved by the Holy Ghost," even though they had not received a regular call. When other ordained clergy came they soon pointed out that the Augsburg Confession states in Article 14 thus: "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."

With the help of Dr. C.F.W. Walther a series of seven articles was drawn up which settled the matter. The theses, adopted in 1862, allowed for a lay man to preach only in case of actual need, such as when a pastor is not at hand and cannot be secured, or in the case of a pastor preaching false doctrine. This marked the end of the controversy in the Norwegian Synod, although others continued to disagree on the matter.³²

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 38.

²⁸ *Grace for Grace*, p. 136.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 136.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 136.

³¹ *The History of Luther Valley: A Pioneer Lutheran Church*, p. 27.

³² *Grace for Grace*, pp. 138-139.

The Third Commandment And Sunday

It was the Seventh Day Adventists who stirred up this controversy in the congregations. They attempted to entangle the settlers in the Law of Moses which required that the seventh day be observed. The settlers had not been sufficiently instructed from the Large Catechism or the Lutheran Confessions to understand that they had been freed from the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. Not only the Adventists but also the followers of Elling Eielsen attacked the Lutheran Doctrine. It was held by some that Sunday only takes the place of the Jewish Sabbath. It was Rev. J.A. Ottesen who wrote a series of five theses which set forth the Biblical doctrine that the observance of Sunday was by free choice, following the example of the early Christians. We truly keep the Third Commandment when we “fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” The theses written by Ottesen were adopted by the Synod in 1863.

The Slavery Issue

The controversy over the slavery question broke out in 1861 within the Norwegian Synod which caused the Synod to adopt the following resolution: “Although according to the Word of God it is not in itself sin to have slaves, yet slavery is an evil and a punishment from God, and we condemn all the abuses and sins which are connected with it, just as we, when our call requires it and Christian charity and wisdom demand it, will work for its abolition.”³³ The Scripture which was cited was the occasion where the Apostle Paul sent the slave, Onesimus, back to his Christian master, Philemon, asking both of them to observe the law of love in their relations with each other, since both now were Christian, though he did not question Philemon’s right to own Onesimus as a slave. Koren writes about the matter as follows:

The pastors, who all were anti-slavery, as the declaration shows, could not retreat from what it was easy to see was the teaching of the Word of God, and they did not yield either, however heartily they deplored this controversy.... a similar controversy had been carried on, for a long time, among just about all the Protestant church bodies here in the Northern States ...and all of these had declared themselves in the same manner as the pastors of the Norwegian Synod.³⁴

Koren points out that it was unknown to the participants at that time that the “Norwegian Mission Society has had slave owners among the members of its congregations among Christians in Madagascar without demanding that they be excommunicated.”³⁵ Koren continues, “The controversy ended with this that the Rev. C. L. Clausen and his congregations left the Synod, and that some few other congregations were split.”³⁶ Rev. Clausen moved to St. Ansgar, and began work there. It was Pastor Claus Friman Magelssen who served Luther Valley from 1859 to 1869. When two-thirds of the Luther Valley congregation voted to leave the Synod because they thought the Synod favored slavery, Magelssen and the minority founded a church in Orfordville. For more than 44 years Luther Valley remained outside any synodical organization until 1913 when they joined the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. Thus the church in which the Norwegian Synod was founded in 1853 was lost to the Synod over the slavery question.³⁷ Koren sums it all up when he writes in “What the Norwegian Synod has Wanted and Still Wants” as follows: “We thank God because our country is freed from the curse of slavery and from the sins crying to heaven which resulted from it, and we regard it as a worthy object of Christians to strive with all their might to exterminate it wherever it is still found in the world.”³⁸

³³ *Ibid*, p. 149.

³⁴ “Why Is There No Church Unity,” pp. 16-17.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 18.

³⁷ *The History of Luther Valley*, p. 150.

³⁸ *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 105.

Regarding Absolution

The controversy on absolution was a serious matter which had to do with the Doctrine of Justification. Koren writes:

We taught that the forgiveness of sin in absolution did not come into existence first when a person believed, but that absolution is always forgiveness of sin by God even though the one who does not believe refuses God's gift and thus does not become partaker of it They (The Conference) continued to insist that "when absolution is pronounced upon an unbeliever, then there is no act of forgiveness of sin connected with it. The minister absolves but not God," consequently that absolution is one thing when it comes to the believer, and another, when it comes to the unbeliever.³⁹

Both the Synod men and the Conference agreed as to the effects of Absolution, that only believers received forgiveness of sins by it; but they disagreed as to the essence or nature of Absolution, what it was in itself.⁴⁰ The Synod held to an "unconditional absolution," namely this, that God has forgiven the sins of the whole world because Christ died and rose again. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." II Cor. 5, 19. Believe this and you will be saved. The Conference held to a "conditional absolution," namely this, that first a man must believe and then his sins will be forgiven. This makes faith a cause of man's forgiveness rather than the empty hand which receives and lays hold of it.

The Gospel And Justification

What part does faith play in the matter of the justification of the sinner before God? This was the question which was at the root of the controversy over the Doctrine of Justification. Does the Gospel offer the forgiveness of sins only to believers or is forgiveness offered to all regardless of whether they have faith or not? Among the opponents it was taught that without faith there was no forgiveness of sins. To them it was as if the justification wrought by the merits and sacrifice of Christ existed only for those who accepted it by faith. This makes faith a meritorious cause of our justification. On the other hand the Synod taught that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2,6) and that therefore the Gospel which tells of the redemptive work of Christ is also the same for all. What is faith then? Faith is the empty hand which merely receives the gift which God offers to all men, and that even the ability to receive it is a gift of God. This is in accordance with the Formula of Concord (III, 3) which says: "Faith justifies, not because it is so good a work and so fair a virtue, but because, in the promise of the Gospel, it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ." Luther writes as follows: "A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it."⁴¹

This "objective justification" is the blessed teaching that God has declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ, to be justified and forgiven on account of what Christ accomplished with His perfect life and His innocent suffering, death and resurrection. We make this precious gift our own when we believe it, when we accept it by faith. Our ELS Explanation of the Catechism contains this beautiful definition:

How can God declare the sinner righteous? God can declare sinners righteous because, on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ, He has acquitted all people of the guilt and punishment of their sins, and has imputed to them the righteousness of Christ; He therefore regards them in Christ as though they had never sinned (general or objective justification).⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 101-102.

⁴⁰ *Grace for Grace*, p. 159.

⁴¹ *Luther's Works* 40, p. 367.

⁴² *ELS Catechism & Explanation*, p. 143.

This controversy naturally led into the controversy over the Doctrines of Conversion and Election. “It is not strange that those who emphasize man’s faith at the expense of the objective validity of Christ’s Gospel and His work of justification should go astray in the Doctrines of Conversion and Election, so as to give man’s faith there also an entirely unscriptural importance.”⁴³ This was the most serious controversy which the Synod had to face and which has not been settled to this day.

The Doctrines Of Conversion And Election

In the 1880s the Norwegian Synod again found itself immersed in controversy. The Doctrines of Election and Conversion were the subject of the disagreement this time and the outcome was a devastating split in the Synod. It raged from 1880 to 1887 and when it subsided about fifty thousand souls, 200 congregations and 55 pastors, or about one third of its membership, had left the Synod. How did such a tragedy happen? The Synod had been united all along also in this teaching. But then, mostly through one man, false doctrine reared its ugly head and the conflict began.

The Doctrine of Election is a beautiful teaching which the Lord revealed to us in His Word for our comfort. We find it in passages such as Eph. 1,3-7. Here we learn that God

has chosen certain individuals to salvation; that this choosing took place in eternity on the basis of God’s grace in Christ; and that through the Word and Sacraments these individuals shall be brought to faith in Christ, justified, sanctified, and glorified. In this doctrine God lays a solid foundation for the Christian’s hope in Christ.⁴⁴

The Doctrine of Conversion likewise teaches that our turning from unbelief to faith in Christ is due entirely to the Holy Ghost who works through the Word and Sacrament of Baptism. This is taught in these words of Scripture: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” Ezek. 36,26. In many other passages also it is clearly taught that our conversion is due entirely to the work of the Holy Spirit, as we confess in the Explanation of the Third Article, “I believe that I cannot of my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel ...”

These teachings are comforting because the Christian can rely on God and God alone for his election, conversion and preservation in the faith. “To God alone be glory” is the theme song of the believer. We say with the Psalmist, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake” Psalm 115,1.

It is right here, however, that a question arises. If God wants all men to be saved (universal grace), if He calls all men with equal earnestness through His Holy Spirit through the Word, and if all men are equally and totally dead in trespasses and sins, then why do some respond to the call, become believers and thus partake of eternal life, while others reject the Holy Spirit and remain lost in their sins? Why some and not others? (*Cur alii, prae aliis*). This is an age-old question which has troubled theologians for centuries. The facts are simply this: God does not answer the question. It remains a mystery. As soon as one tries to answer the question he immediately falls into the error of Calvinism, on the one hand, or synergism on the other. John Calvin (at Luther’s time) taught absolute predestination, namely that God not only elected some to salvation but also others to damnation. This solved the problem for human reason but it violated God’s Word because it denied universal grace. Philip Melancthon, one of Luther’s co-workers, also tried to answer the question. He found the answer in man. He said that some resisted the Word of God while others did not. This answer also violates Scripture because it denies the total depravity of man. It is called synergism because man, by ceasing to resist the Holy Spirit, is given credit for working together with God for his conversion and election, thus denying the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Natural man is dead in trespasses and sins and is unable to cooperate at all in his conversion.

⁴³ *Grace for Grace*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ *A City Set on a Hill*, p. 13.

A disagreement now arose between C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod and F.A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod. At the 1877 convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod Walther had delivered a paper with six theses on the Doctrine of Election. There was general agreement with the presentation except for a few. Pastor H.A. Allwardt of Lebanon, Wisconsin, expressed opposing views in 1879. Previous to this time Prof. Schmidt and Prof. Walther had been in agreement. Schmidt did good work in helping to organize the Synodical Conference of 1872. He was serving as the Norwegian Synod's professor in the new seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. But now Prof. Schmidt, together with Allwardt, rose up against Walther and accused him and the Missouri Synod of teaching Calvinism. He even began a new publication, *Altes und Neues* (Old and New), for the specific purpose of attacking Walther. He later turned his attack against the Norwegian Synod officials and pastors, accusing them of advocating a new and false doctrine which he must oppose. Schmidt had fallen into the trap of using human reason in order to answer the question of why some are saved and not others.

As is often the case, there were private reasons for Schmidt's attitude. A disagreement arose between two professors at the Seminary in Madison. They were Prof. Schmidt and Prof. O. Asperheim. Asperheim soon resigned. Schmidt, on the other hand, began his attack on the Missouri Synod and then brought the controversy into the Norwegian Synod. Schmidt was bitterly disappointed because he did not receive the call to become professor of theology at the Seminary in St. Louis.⁴⁵ This could well have been a cause for his hatred of Walther and the Missouri Synod. Prof. Armin Schuetze writes: "It does not appear to have been mere coincidence that not long after Schmidt failed to receive the desired call, early in 1879, he informed Walther of his objections to the report in the 1877 proceedings, stating, 'I can no longer go with you I dare no longer keep silence.'"⁴⁶

The Missouri Synod took its stand on the matter in May 1881, when it adopted thirteen theses prepared by Dr. Walther. The Theses clearly affirmed God's universal grace, God's earnest call to all men to faith through the Gospel, and man's sole responsibility for his rejection of God's grace in Christ. The controversy in the Missouri Synod was virtually over at that time. In the Norwegian Synod, however, the battle had just begun. The controversy was carried on from 1880 to 1887.

Koren's Leadership Role

Let us now ask, "What role did Dr. Koren play in the controversy?" It was in October of 1884 at the General Pastoral Conference in Decorah, Iowa, that it was felt necessary to explain to the congregations what was the truth in light of all the charges that had been raised.

Dr. Koren, therefore, prepared a document called "*En Redegjrelse*," (An Accounting), consisting of 63 theses, complete with references to the Scriptures and the Confessions. It was not only a defense against all the accusations which had been raised, but a presentation of all the points in controversy. Concerning this document Pastor T.A. Aaberg asserts: "The document no doubt is the finest piece of theological work to come out of the election controversy, surpassing the Missouri Synod's Thirteen Theses."⁴⁷ Koren set forth the doctrine in four parts, universal grace, conversion, election, and the certainty of salvation. We here summarize them as follows: Under Universal Grace the clear teachings of Scripture are set forth, namely, that God will have all men to be saved, that Christ has redeemed all men, that God calls all men to repentance, that the means of grace always possess their innate power, and that the power of the means of grace can be resisted. In each of these truths the corresponding Calvinistic error is rejected. Under the heading of Conversion the truths of Scripture are clearly delineated, namely, that natural man himself cannot change the condition of his heart, nor can he cooperate with the Holy Spirit in ceasing to resist the power of the Word. It belongs to the gracious work of the Holy Ghost to "remove the resistance of the will." Therefore there can be no synergism or cooperation in conversion, but if a man is brought to faith it is solely due to the work of the Holy Ghost. Ascribing any power or ability to man in bringing about a change of heart is clearly rejected. Under the heading of Election the great principle of the

⁴⁵ *The Synodical Conference*, p. 93

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 93.

⁴⁷ *A City Set on a Hill*, pp. 32-33.

Lutheran Church, namely, Grace Alone is clearly set forth. In one brief paragraph from the “Accounting” the entire controversy is summed up. Dr. Koren writes:

According to Scripture it belongs to the essence of grace to be free; for if grace is not free, i.e., undeserved by any kind of merit whatsoever in the one who is favored with it, then “grace is no more grace” (Rom. 11,6) and a man cannot then trust in the grace of God alone. Rom. 3, 23-24, 27-28; Eph. 2,8-10. We reject the synergistic doctrine that the election in Christ has not taken place in accordance with a free purpose of grace by God, and that “salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.” Eph. 1,11.... Prof Schmidt refused to subscribe to the “Accounting” and regarding the above mentioned point he said: “I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God’s Word and our Lutheran Confession, that ‘salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.’”⁴⁸

Another form of false teaching which was accepted by many who insisted that man had something to do with his election was that called “*intuitu fidei*,” (in view of faith). It was basically this that when God looked into the future he saw that some would come to faith, and that it was “in view of this faith” that they were elected to salvation. Faith was, therefore, looked upon as a meritorious cause of a man’s election rather than the result of his election. Salvation is then no longer purely by grace alone. This concept of “*intuitu fidei*” is thoroughly rejected in the “*Redegjørelse*.” We read in Part III, 19, “Since everything is eternally present for God, the faith of the elect is also foreseen, and the elect themselves are foreseen by God as believing, without its being the case, however, that this foreseen faith in any way dare be counted among the efficient causes of election.”⁴⁹

Under the fourth part entitled “Concerning the Certainty, by faith, of Preservation (in the faith) and of Salvation” the following truths are set forth and are here summarized: When a man has been converted he receives a new spiritual life with the desire and power to do that which is good. The preservation of this new life is to be ascribed solely and alone to the power of God. Since faith is a new life, the believer is also willing to do, and be active in, the good by the powers given him by God, works out his own salvation with fear and trembling through daily renewal and strives thus to keep the faith.... Since God has promised His children that He will keep them in the faith unto the end, the believer trusts in this promise of God, which is unbreakable and sufficient; therefore, he has the certainty by faith that he will be kept in the faith until the end, that God then “will grant him and all believers in Christ eternal life” and that he thus actually will attain and share the (life of) glory with God.⁵⁰

Over 100 of the synod’s pastors subscribed to the “Accounting.” The truths of the controversy were made clear to many of the lay people. When Schmidt said that our salvation does not depend upon God’s grace alone, that was enough to cause many to remain with the synod. Those who followed Schmidt and embraced his position were called “Anti-Missourians.” The Anti-Missourians met on Oct. 14, 1885, at Red Wing, Minnesota, and resolved that the pastors who had signed “An Accounting” should be deposed from office. This meant that Pres. B. Harstad of the Minnesota District, and Pres. U.V. Koren of the Iowa District, should be removed from office. As a result Pres. H.A. Preus and his assistant, C.K. Preus, were deposed at Norway Grove, Wisconsin, and Rev. J.A. Ottesen was deposed at the Koshkonong and Liberty Prairie parishes, near Stoughton, Wisconsin. No doubt the seminary students in nearby Madison, who were avid followers of Schmidt, were also instrumental in bringing about the tragic actions in those congregations. The Anti-Missourians established their own seminary at St. Olaf’s School in Northfield, Minnesota. At the convention in 1887 at Stoughton, Wisconsin, this group resolved to withdraw from the Synod. The Synod had a membership of 143,885 before

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 36.

⁴⁹ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Vol. 43, p. 143-145.

the split. It now dwindled down in 1890 to 93,891, but by the year 1902 the number had grown to about 140,000.⁵¹

Koren reports the following:

The anti-Missourian pastors, who had withdrawn from the Synod, got into touch with other Norwegian parties, and, after various preparatory meetings, the United Church was founded in 1890. It consisted of The Conference, the anti-Missourian Brotherhood, and the Norwegian Augustana Synod.⁵²

A joint meeting between the Norwegian Synod and the United Church was held at Willmar, Minnesota, January 6-12, 1892. At this meeting it was revealed that at least two other differences existed. The first pertained to the question of prayer fellowship and the second involved the inspiration of the Scriptures.

The Norwegian Synod, like the Missouri Synod, held to the position that participation in common prayer was to be denied unless there was complete doctrinal agreement. A Synod delegate, T.A. Torgerson, contended therefore that the sessions must not begin with prayer. The United Church representatives reluctantly allowed this, recognizing that the meeting would founder unless they made this concession.... It was not long before the representatives of the Synod suggested an alteration in the wording of the paragraph defining the authority and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.... The response of the United Church men was that...they did not want to make the Doctrine of Inspiration a condition of union.

A vigorous debate followed between President G. Hoyme of the United Church and “the keenest of the Synod dialecticians, U. V. Koren.”⁵³

Koren also reports that later

several efforts have been made toward the goal of attaining a better understanding among the church bodies and a reconciliation among them, but these efforts have not brought happy results. A “colloquium” between the theological faculties of the United Church and the Synod was arranged. But this was foiled by Dr. Schmidt publishing a distorted account of the negotiations in which he declared that the theses drawn up by the colloquium contained a compromise “for concealing a great cleavage between truth and error” and that they were inclined towards the so called “Missourian doctrine.” The Church Council of the Synod declared on that occasion, that since there had, during the 8-year controversy, been so many proofs of Dr. Schmidt’s dishonesty, and that, since he through his own report of the colloquium shows himself to be unchanged, “we consider him to be an essential hindrance not only for unity, but also for understanding between the church bodies.”⁵⁴

This, of course, brought a response from the United Church that the Church Council of the Synod should prove what they had said, which the Council proceeded to do. This was met with a response which was entitled, “The Church Council has spoken evil.” And thus further negotiations were put off for some time.

Dr. Koren Becomes President

⁵¹ *Grace for Grace*, p. 92.

⁵² “Why Is There No Church Unity?” p. 50.

⁵³ *The Lutheran Church Among Noregian-Americans*, Vol 2., pp. 133-134

⁵⁴ “Why Is There No Church Unity” p. 52.

Upon the death of Rev. H.A. Preus the synod elected Rev. U.V. Koren as the next president in the year 1894, a position he held until his death in 1910. At its convention in 1903 President Koren, in his presidential report, spoke of the importance of Christian Day Schools. We quote him as follows:

If there is any matter of importance for us, a matter into which the Synod now at the beginning of a new era should betake itself with power and eagerness it is our Christian Day Schools the *Festskrift* that has just come out has pointed out that the Synod's greatest lack is the neglect of the thorough and constant instruction of the children in Christianity.⁵⁵

He also reported the following to the Convention:

With regard to the dealings with other Norwegian Lutheran bodies in this country I can inform the Synod that I received information from the secretary of the United Church in July 1902, that the United Church holds fast to its resolution of last year (1901, p. 206), and therefore does not find itself inclined to take into consideration the memorial which was drawn up at the last Synod Convention in the interest of this cause. As far as I can see, the door to further dealings in official colloquies is thereby closed.⁵⁶

However, during the Convention, the Synod received a telegram from the secretary of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in which it asked whether or not the Synod recognized the pamphlet recently published against Dr. F. A. Schmidt as its own. The following answer was wired back to the United Church Convention:

“Dr. F.A. Schmidt has demanded that the Church Council prove its accusations against him. The Church Council has complied with the demand. If the Church Council has spoken evil, bear witness of the evil.” A rising vote was called for and the resolution was passed unanimously.⁵⁷

The 1903 Convention was very festive with greetings from various church bodies. The King of Norway, His Majesty Oscar II, of Christiania also sent his greetings. Dr. Fr. Pieper, then president of the Missouri Synod, brought greetings in the German language with these closing words:

“Your Synod has also from its beginning unto this day endured affliction. You have been afflicted both from within and without. They have derided you on account of the truth of God's Word that you confessed.... But by God's grace you confess unto this day the ‘*sola scriptura*’ and the ‘*sola gratia*’ in opposition to the many kinds of seductive error. For this unspeakable grace of God you thank God today, and we, your brethren in the faith, thank God along with you.”

Pres. Pieper then switched to the Latin language and informed the assembly that the Faculty of the Theological Seminary of the Missouri Synod had decreed to create the President of the Norwegian Synod, Pastor V. Koren, and also Prof. Laur. Larsen, Doctors of Theology. This was formally done, and thereafter the entire assembly arose to congratulate Pres. Koren and Prof. Larsen on the occasion of the great honor bestowed upon them.⁵⁸

Pastor Fr. Sievers of the Synodical Conference also sent a congratulatory letter.

⁵⁵ *Synodal Beretning*, A. Harstad translation, 1903, p. 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Grace for Grace*, p. 94.

⁵⁸ *Synodal Beretning*, Harstad translation, 1903, p. 11.

As the convention drew to a close, two of the Synod's pastors were asked to address the Synod. They were Pastor Bjug Harstad and Pastor George A. Gullixson. Pastor Harstad was 54 years of age and Pastor Gullixson 36. Dr. Koren then offered a prayer and pronounced the blessing upon the assembly and all joined in singing "On my heart imprint Thine image." Pastor T.A. Torgerson then spoke up and reported that it was now 50 years since Pastor and Mrs. Koren were married and fifty years since he was ordained. The entire assembly arose in congratulations.⁵⁹

The 1908 Convention Of The Norwegian Synod

The 29th convention of the Norwegian Synod met at Our Saviour's Church, Chicago, IL, in June of 1908. Dr. Koren's presidential address was in the form of a treatise on "The Inspiration Of Holy Scripture." He wanted this address to be considered as his testament to the Synod. The entire address is translated and may be found in *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, pages 145 to 166. Here he takes on the spokesmen for "higher criticism" and shows in great detail how those modern theories do not measure up when they are examined in the light of God's Word. Koren, after dealing with the learned critics of God's Word, says the following:

We must-each one of us-become as children, and learn not to consider ourselves wise, least of all to want to be wise above that which is written. According to the Word of God we have reason to be certain that many an unlearned, and by the world despised, man or woman has come farther in the knowledge of God and His will than the most learned pastors and professors. Jesus has said to us all, "Except ye become as children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18,3.⁶⁰

The District Conventions Of 1910

The districts of the Synod had their conventions in 1910. In the Report of 1910 President Koren made the following announcement: "It is well known to most of the members of the Synod that I have been ill during this synodical year. My sickness is '*angina pectoris*.' It has hindered me from taking part in meetings, and at these the vice-president, Dr. Stub, has functioned for me."⁶¹

An unfortunate occurrence took place at these conventions. Dr. Koren was not able to attend and so Dr. Stub took his place and delivered his message for him. In his message Dr. Koren had called attention to the fact that there was still no real agreement on the Doctrines of Election and Conversion. He called for antitheses in order to be certain there was no misunderstanding. He wrote in his message to the Districts, "The doctrinal discussions which have been carried on with the other Norwegian Lutheran church bodies have not, it is my conviction, led to any reliable results.... If only insignificant things were at stake, then it would not be right to separate; but when the question is raised whether God alone is our Saviour, then we cannot be too careful."⁶² But what was the unfortunate occurrence? Dr. Stub, who favored the union of the church bodies, omitted this portion of Koren's address when he presented it. The testimony of Dr. Koren, calling for caution in dealing with such an important matter, did not come to the attention of the convention.

The Synod Convention In 1911

The 30th Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod was held in Central Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, MN, beginning on Friday, June 23, 1911. President Koren had died on Dec. 19, 1910, lacking only three days of being 84 years of age. He had been president of the Iowa District from 1876 to 1894, and president of the Synod from 1894 until his death. Dr. H. G. Stub, as vice president, now took over as president of the Synod.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁶¹ *Synodal Beretning* 1910, Harstad translation, "Report to the Districts," p. 10.

⁶² *Grace for Grace*, pp. 98-99.

In his report Dr. Stub gave a brief account of Dr. Koren's life and work, and also reported concerning his last illness, death and burial. Dr. Koren's mortal remains were laid to rest in the churchyard of Washington Prairie Lutheran Church, near Decorah, Iowa. Of him, Dr. Stub said: "May our Synod not forget what a gift God gave us in him who after 57 years of tireless work as one of our pioneer pastors and as a champion in doctrine and in the care for the congregation and the Synod was granted to enter into the eternal rest."⁶³

Dr. Koren's Legacy

His legacy is so broad it is difficult to summarize it briefly. That could possibly best be done by pointing out his steadfast adherence to the two principles of the Lutheran faith: The Word of God as our only rule of faith and conduct and the Doctrine of Justification by faith alone without the works of the Law. In all of his writing, debating, and preaching he continually upheld and defended these two principles. D. J. Magnus Rohne in his book, *Norwegian American Lutheranism*, writes as follows: "For years he was the chief champion of the Synod's position and has been called the ablest statesman of the church up until the time of his death in 1910. In the course of the many battles he clearly, and in a very far-sighted manner, enunciated principles that should outlive his time and day."⁶⁴ But there is more to be said. At the Koren Eighty-Fifth Anniversary Festival held at Luther College on September 4, 1938, a booklet was published which gave details about Koren's life, written by Sigurd S. Reque, on behalf of the Anniversary Committee. We quote from the conclusion as follows:

As a theologian he is generally recognized as being, perhaps, the most outstanding our Norwegian Lutheran Church in America has produced.

As a pastor and preacher, the volumes of sermons from his hand to be found in the many homes bear eloquent testimony, as does the fact that his home congregation tenaciously retained his service for fifty-seven years.

His executive talents may be inferred from the positions he was elected to fill.

In speaking of him as an educator, reference need only be made to the impression he has left on our institutions of higher learning, seminary, college and academy, and not to forget the parochial school.

The inner mission found in him a foremost champion. The founding of Luther College, in which he took a leading part, resulted during its first twenty years, in the preparation of 225 pastors to be sent out into the field, in most instances the inner mission field.

His general cultural interests are well known. In music, in his writings and discourses, in his poetry—'Det Gamle Hus.'

His discernment, his clear thinking, his honest reasoning and eloquent presentation, his energy and industry, talent for organization, his high principles and ideals, his highly developed scholarship, and even his erect carriage, in a measure sum up the impression he has left of himself as a man.

To describe fully the part of his loving wife, Fru Koren, in the great work he was given to do would be impossible. She was at all times his trusted right hand. Rev. Koren himself frequently alludes to her fine understanding and judgment in the most difficult practical and subjective matters.⁶⁵

Others outside the Norwegian Synod paid tribute to Dr. Koren as well. Professor Win. Moenkemueller, of the Missouri Synod's Concordia College, St. Paul, MN, had this to say, "Dr. Koren occupied a high position

⁶³ *Synodal Beretning* 1911, Harstad translation, p. 13.

⁶⁴ *Norwegian American Luthanism*, p. 128.

⁶⁵ "The Koren Eighty-Fifth Anniversary," p. 25

as a teacher of the Lutheran church at large; we, too, of the German Synod of Missouri, owe him a debt of gratitude.”⁶⁶

Conclusion

As we observe the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Norwegian Synod we, the spiritual and theological successors of the founders, can do no better than to continue in the doctrine and follow in the footsteps of Dr. U.V. Koren.

“Thus with the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” Jer. 6,16.

*Ye lands, to the Lord make a jubilant noise:
Glory be to God
O serve Him with joy, in His presence now rejoice:
Sing praise unto God out of Zion!*
ELH 56

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⁶⁶ *Built On The Rock*, p. 52.

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