

G. Stoeckhardt: The Exegetical Task

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[Presented at the Bethany Reformation Lectures—Mankato, Minnesota,
October 26, 2006]

In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church:

Good morning, fellow theologians of the cross:

First of all, I would like to thank the Bethany community and more specifically, the Bethany Reformation Lectures Committee, for their gracious invitation to be one of the presenters at your annual lecture series. I am truly honored, and for the rest of my life, will rejoice that I will now have the privilege of counting myself as a “presenter alumnus” of the renowned Bethany Reformation Lectures. Before your kind invitation came to me last fall, my only other claim to fame in life was that by the grace of God I had the good fortune of meeting, falling in love with, and eventually marrying a 1981 graduate of Bethany Lutheran College, Linda Siewert. From nearly twenty years of personal experience, I can rightly say that Bethany truly produces quality graduates, who are committed to a life of Christian discipleship.

For the past three years I have been occupying some of my time with an extensive study of the life and writings of Dr. Karl George Stöckhardt, known here in America as George Stoeckhardt. I have had an interest in Stoeckhardt since my own seminary days and it was further enhanced by my “Walther professor” down at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Dr. Thomas Manteufel. Dr. Manteufel suggested that I write my Ph.D. dissertation on how Stoeckhardt in his various writings understood the doctrine of the ministry. I accepted the suggestion and am now finishing the first draft of the dissertation. Chapter two of this dissertation focuses on George Stoeckhardt’s exegetical method, which fits very well with my assigned topic for this morning, **“G. Stoeckhardt: The Exegetical Task.”**

In order to present a complete picture of George Stoeckhardt the theologian and exegete, I believe it is essential that we wait several minutes before we study how Stoeckhardt approached the task of biblical exegesis. I believe the wisest course of action is to begin with a brief but comprehensive study of his life. Stoeckhardt spent fully half of his life in Europe before coming to America in the fall of 1878 to be the pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, St. Louis. His educational and ministerial experiences in Europe were indeed formative for his later ministry in America. The lion’s share of our time will, of course, be spent examining Stoeckhardt’s doctrine of Scripture and how he went about the exegetical task of mining the truths of God’s Word. The third and final portion of this presentation will be a summary of what can be learned from the life, ministry and writings of Dr. George Stoeckhardt to enhance the ministries and vocations into which God has called each of us.

Part 1: The Life And Ministry Of George Stoeckhardt

To date, no full-length biography of George Stoeckhardt has ever been written. Shortly after his death, a memorial book in the form of a brief biography was written by Stoeckhardt's longtime friend, Rev. Otto Willkomm. In time this book was translated into English as senior church history projects by two students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon. Willkomm's book provides the most complete information available on Stoeckhardt's life, especially his background, education and ministerial experiences in Germany. Unless otherwise noted, the information presented to you comes from the pages of Willkomm's book.¹

George Stoeckhardt was born on February 17, 1842 in Chemnitz in the Kingdom of Saxony, a full generation before Chancellor Bismarck created a united Germany. By the time of his birth, Stoeckhardt's family line had produced over twenty Lutheran pastors for the Saxon *Landeskirche*, the state church of Saxony. His parents were Julius and Rosalie Stoeckhardt. Stoeckhardt's father was a chemist but both his grandfather and uncle were pastors. In 1847 Stoeckhardt's family moved to Tharandt, Saxony where his father took a teaching position at the Royal Forest Academy. Stoeckhardt attended the city school in Tharandt. When he was fifteen he enrolled in the gymnasium, St. Afra, in Meissen. Upon his graduation, he was accepted into the University of Erlangen, Bavaria.

It was at this time that young George Stoeckhardt became active in the *Wingolf*, what today would be called a Christian student fraternity. He developed a number of lifelong friendships in this organization. Several members of this *Wingolf* organization eventually became prominent leaders in the Missouri Synod. What separated this student fraternity from other student groups in the German university system was that it renounced "academic fencing." This was a type of ritual duel between university students which had as its objective inflicting a non-fatal wound on the face of the combatants, so for the rest of their lives the duelers had bragging scars. I trust that Bethany has never had such a custom!

The *Wingolf* in contrast was a distinctly Christian organization that sought to make a clear confession of the life and work of Jesus Christ. After spending only a year at Erlangen, Stoeckhardt transferred to Leipzig, where he spent five semesters. It was here that Stoeckhardt took the initiative of founding a Leipzig chapter of the *Wingolf*. He took pains to make sure this chapter's constitution contained a clear confession of the deity of Christ.

During the winter of 1865–1866 Stoeckhardt took the candidate's examination. He then did what many other well-heeled German university students did in the nineteenth century; he made the rounds of some of the other universities in Germany to get a sampling of the lectures of professors who had become famous. During this time he went to Berlin to listen to several famous names. After some more traveling, he went to Bavaria and met Loehe at Neuendettelsau. It was here in Bavaria that Stoeckhardt heard about how confessional Lutheranism was on the rise in America and it was from Loehe that he first heard how Saxon and Franconian Lutherans had founded the Missouri Synod.

After further visits to both Erlangen and Marburg, Stoeckhardt, perhaps with some assistance and encouragement from his home pastor, Rev. Ernst Siedel, accepted a position to serve as the headmaster and teacher at the Luisen Academy, a girls' school in Tharandt. Here he taught religion and several other subjects from 1867–1870, when the school moved to another location.

After briefly considering a career as a missionary to East India, Stoeckhardt turned down an offer from the Leipzig Mission for an assignment and instead focused on a career in the German university system. After turning down a teaching position in Breslau, Stoeckhardt applied to be a tutor at Erlangen. To prepare for the faculty examination, he moved to Paris in the late spring of 1870 to serve as an assistant pastor at a German-Lutheran church. This invitation came from one of his friends from the *Wingolf* days.

It was here in France that Stoeckhardt truly developed a heart for pastoral ministry and for sharing the Word of God. After a ministry of only a matter of weeks in Paris, the Franco-Prussian War broke out in July of

¹ Otto Willkomm, *Dr. th. Georg. Stöckhardt, Lebensbild eines deutsch-amerikanischen Theologen*, (Zwickau, Sachsen: Johannes Herrmann, 1914), 7-148.

1870. Stoeckhardt and other German nationals were soon ordered to leave the city. On the way to Belgium, Stoeckhardt found his way to the Sedan battlefield where he began to minister to sick and wounded German soldiers as a hospital chaplain. It was here especially that Stoeckhardt honed his skills as a *Seelsorger*, a pastor to sick and wounded souls.

The source of information for this chapter of Stoeckhardt's life is a series of articles that eventually were collected and published as a little booklet with the title translated into English: *The Battlefield of the Sedan: Memories from the War Year*.² In these articles Stoeckhardt tells story after story of how he ministered to his countrymen who had been ravaged by battle wounds and disease, especially typhus. He and a number of other pastors made regular visits to the numerous military hospitals that were set up to care for the casualties the war produced. In one particularly memorable account, Stoeckhardt was led by a soldier to a French chateau or castle. Finding the door locked, Stoeckhardt, a young man at the time, managed to climb through a window into the building. There he found a horrifying sight. In several halls were about seventy sick or wounded Prussian and Bavarian soldiers, lying there helpless "swimming in their blood and pus." With steady compassion Stoeckhardt made the most out of this grisly scene by immediately pulling a New Testament out of his pocket and proceeding to prepare many of these soldiers for their impending death. Stoeckhardt later remarked that the dying soldiers appreciated the ministrations of a fellow countryman. In another traumatic scene, he came to the bedside of a Bavarian artilleryman whose leg had been amputated and who had suffered a severe head wound. Stoeckhardt's gentle ministrations were greeted with shrieks from the delirious man. He then began to pray the Lord's Prayer with other soldiers who had gathered around the man's bedside. The wounded soldier heard the prayer, ended his shrieks and attempted to fold his hands. The following night the soldier died.

The major battles of the Franco-Prussian War soon ended and Stoeckhardt's work as a hospital chaplain eventually came to an end. He returned to his native Saxony and resumed his preparations to take the faculty examination. He soon began to serve as a tutor and religion instructor at the gymnasium in Erlangen. He was eventually denied the right to be a lecturer at the university because the theological faculty rejected his dissertation entitled, "The Son of Man."

New chapters of Stoeckhardt's life were beginning to unfold. In September of 1873, George Stoeckhardt was issued a call by the Saxon *Landeskirche* to serve as an assistant pastor of a congregation in Planitz, Saxony. The following month, George Stoeckhardt married Anna Koenig, a relative of his home pastor, and began his ministry as a parish pastor. Stoeckhardt's three years in the service of the state church were not happy ones. He and several other pastors immediately protested the lax moral conditions in their parishes, but largely to no avail. After repeated protests and authoring pamphlets in which he described the unevangelical doctrine and practice of the Saxon state church, Stoeckhardt eventually severed his ties to the *Landeskirche* in June of 1876 and joined the newly formed *Freikirche* in Saxony which had close ties with the now generation-old Missouri Synod.

In sharp contrast to his experience in the rationalistic state church, Stoeckhardt's two years in the Saxon *Freikirche* were happy and productive ones. Within a month, Stoeckhardt and two other men became editors of the *Freikirche's* new periodical. The founding of the new synod was formally completed a few weeks later. After a few months, Stoeckhardt took it upon himself to found a "Latin school," a miniscule gymnasium to prepare young men for the Lutheran ministry. It was in existence for two years before a lack of students and Stoeckhardt's call to St. Louis permanently closed it. The school met in Stoeckhardt's parsonage. During this time, Stoeckhardt served as an assistant pastor in the *Freikirche* congregation in Planitz and busied himself with being a confessional Lutheran voice in Saxony. He soon began to accumulate enemies who tried to make life miserable for him. He was formally charged with committing slander against some officials of the state church. Only a call to be pastor of Holy Cross Ev. Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri spared him further legal trouble in Saxony.

² George Stoeckhardt, *Das Schlachtfeld von Sedan: Erinnerungen aus dem Kriegsjahr*, (Zwickau, Sachsen: Julius Naumann, 1914), 1-137.

Upon his arrival in St. Louis in October of 1878, Stoeckhardt within a matter of days began teaching Hebrew exegesis part-time at Concordia Seminary. Dr. C. F. W. Walther preached his installation sermon shortly before Christmas of that year. Stoeckhardt then began a nine-year ministry as pastor of Holy Cross, St. Louis, which was the congregation where the majority of the faculty and students of Concordia Seminary attended. During his parish ministry, Stoeckhardt was especially known for his pastoral visitations to all of his members which he conducted annually. He also began what is called today fieldwork education for the St. Louis seminary students, by having them make regular visits to patients in the city's hospitals. All the while he was serving the Holy Cross parish, Stoeckhardt also served as a part-time professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at Concordia Seminary. Less than a year after his arrival in St. Louis, Stoeckhardt also began writing for Missouri Synod periodicals. In 1880, at the height of the Election Controversy, Stoeckhardt began publishing articles in *Lehre und Wehre* on election. In the fall of that year he delivered a lengthy exegetical presentation on election at a general pastoral conference of Missouri Synod pastors in Chicago. The following year, Stoeckhardt was formally called by the Missouri Synod's annual convention to serve as a part-time professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at Concordia. At the dedication of the new Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in September of 1883, he delivered a Latin address on the errors of modern Lutheran theology.

Stoeckhardt faithfully served Holy Cross Lutheran Church, one block west of Concordia Seminary, for nine years. After the deaths of Dr. C. F. W. Walther and Prof. Gottlieb Schaller in 1887, Stoeckhardt began a full-time teaching career at Concordia. With some interruptions because of illness, he taught at Concordia for the rest of his life, from 1887-1913. Concordia Seminary catalogs during these years reveal that Stoeckhardt taught exegetical courses on numerous books of the Bible. The books of the Bible that he lectured on most will sound very familiar to students and graduates of either Bethany Lutheran Seminary or Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, and Romans. The regular exegetical study of these biblical books at the seminary level, all which present vital truths of God's message of salvation, could be legitimately seen as a lasting legacy of Dr. George Stoeckhardt in two of the synods that made up the former Synodical Conference.

Due to a variety of circumstances, not only did George Stoeckhardt educate future Missouri Synod pastors, but also for several years he had the opportunity to educate students from other Lutheran synods as well. During the years that the Wisconsin Synod did not have a separate seminary of their own, 1869–1878, three of the students that George Stoeckhardt taught were future Wisconsin Synod seminary professors: John Philipp Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller. Although by the time he arrived in St. Louis, the Norwegian Synod had opened their own seminary in Madison, Wisconsin (1876), Stoeckhardt still had the opportunity to teach several Norwegian Synod students in the early portion of his career.³

Stoeckhardt's ability as a preacher was honed in Germany and he made a memorable impression on his hearers at Holy Cross. Several who heard him remarked that he had an unusual delivery in a very noticeable Saxon brogue that took awhile to get used to. His sermons were characterized not by high eloquence or memorable anecdotes, but by their solid doctrinal content and his earnestness in presenting the truths of salvation. Stoeckhardt was a regular contributor to the Missouri Synod's homiletics journal and in time both some of his Advent and Lenten sermons were published in book format.

In September of 1898, shortly after his adopted country's victory in the Spanish-American War, George Stoeckhardt suffered a staggering blow. Shortly before their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, Stoeckhardt's wife Anna, died. Stoeckhardt and his wife did not have any children of their own, but in America they adopted two boys. One became a pastor and the other a St. Louis businessman. Stoeckhardt dealt with his loss by immersing himself into his work to the point that he began to suffer from nervous exhaustion. In the spring of 1900, he was forced to take a leave of absence from his teaching duties at Concordia because of a nervous disorder. In the fall of that year, Stoeckhardt's concerned friends and relatives had the venerable professor committed to the Missouri Baptist Sanitarium in St. Louis for treatment of this disorder. In October of 1900, after a number of weeks at this institution, the still delirious Stoeckhardt escaped one evening from the sanitarium and after a chase of several blocks was apprehended by members of the St. Louis police force and

³ Carl S. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 84.

returned. One St. Louis newspaper which covered the event sympathetically concluded: "About a year ago Mrs. Stoeckhardt died and the professor grieved over her death so intensely and applied himself so studiously to his work that his present mental affection is not entirely unexpected."⁴

Stoeckhardt eventually recovered from his nervous disorder. This appears to be at least partially due to the care of a woman eighteen years his junior, Mary Kohne of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania whom Stoeckhardt married in the fall of 1901. The recovered Stoeckhardt now began the final portion of his academic career. He resumed his teaching at Concordia Seminary and he began publishing renowned commentaries which are still in use today. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in 1903 by Luther Seminary, Hamline, Minnesota. In conjunction with the work of his brother-in-law, Prof. August Pieper of the Wisconsin Synod, who published an extensive commentary on Isaiah 40-66, Stoeckhardt published a much shorter commentary on Isaiah 1-12 in 1902. Three more commentaries on New Testament epistles would follow: Romans in 1907, Ephesians in 1910 and 1 Peter in 1912. It is interesting to note that before the nervous disorder which sidelined him for over a year, the only commentary work that Stoeckhardt published were two cursory commentaries on Old and New Testament histories, which were based on many of the morning devotions he conducted at Concordia Seminary.

While his wife of twelve years was away attending a relative's funeral in Pittsburgh, George Stoeckhardt died suddenly of a massive stroke at his home on Ohio Street across the street from Holy Cross on January 9, 1913. Four days later, his brother-in-law and pastor, Rev. C. C. Schmidt, conducted his funeral at Holy Cross. The mortal body of Dr. George Stoeckhardt was laid to rest at Concordia Cemetery, near the tomb of his seminary colleague, Dr. C. F. W. Walther. A tall granite cross now marks his grave, symbolizing the Savior whom George Stoeckhardt trusted in and shared with the world.

⁴ *St. Louis Republican*, October 11, 1900, Stoeckhardt archives, Supplement I, Box 2, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

Part 2: Stoeckhardt's Exegetical Methodology

George Stoeckhardt will be remembered in American Lutheranism first and foremost as an exegete. Accolades concerning his exegetical skills are legion and range across a wide spectrum of theologians: "The greatest exegete in American Lutheranism" is how O. P. Kretzmann, president of Valparaiso University, described Stoeckhardt in 1946.⁵ "The present writer has met no theologian who possessed such a knowledge of Scripture as did Stoeckhardt, especially in the New Testament, of course in the original," so wrote a former student of his, August Pieper, a longtime seminary professor for the Wisconsin Synod.⁶ Pieper went on to describe how Stoeckhardt had the ability to quote any section of the New Testament by heart in Greek, along with the section's parallel passages.⁷ "In a certain sense Stoeckhardt was the sharpest theologian in our midst. In fact, because of his complete Gospel attitude no one put the edge to the Law sharper than he," so wrote another former student, John Philipp Koehler, a seminary colleague of August Pieper.⁸ "The first exegete of the Missouri Synod," so wrote Leigh D. Jordahl, a Lutheran church historian, who served in more than one synod during his lifetime.⁹ "Stoeckhardt was a scholar of the first rank....gifted with a deep insight into the revealed truths of the Word, and he had a remarkable ability to preach and write in clear, simple language," so memorialized Wilbert Gawrisch of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on the occasion of the sesquicentennial of Stoeckhardt's birth in 1992.¹⁰ "He was a master of exegesis," is the way church historian J. L. Neve of the former United Lutheran Church described Stoeckhardt in his American Lutheran history.¹¹ The accolades could be extended much further. Clearly George Stoeckhardt has left an indelible mark on the history and practice of biblical exegesis in American Lutheranism.

The second portion of my paper will address how Stoeckhardt regarded the Bible and examine his exegetical methodology. Stoeckhardt's understanding of Scripture and how he went about the exegetical task has been thoroughly studied before. The most comprehensive study is the 1964 dissertation by William E. Goerss, "Some of the Hermeneutical Presuppositions and Part of the Exegetical Methodology of Georg Stoeckhardt." William J. Hassold's 1971 dissertation, "A Case Study in Exegetical Methodology: Georg Stoeckhardt and Johann Philip (sic) Koehler on Ephesians," compares how Stoeckhardt and Koehler differed in their understanding of the interpretation of Ephesians by examining their underlying exegetical methodologies. Richard Baeppler's thesis, "The Hermeneutics of Johannes Christian Konrad von Hofmann with Special Reference to His Influence on Georg Stoeckhardt," provides insight to how Stoeckhardt developed his exegetical method from his most influential teacher, while all the while avoiding Hofmann's theological pitfalls.

George Stoeckhardt's view and understanding of the Holy Scriptures can be readily understood to be orthodox Lutheran. The most complete set of writings on his view of the Bible is the serial set of articles he authored in *Lehre und Wehre* with the English title: "What Does the Scripture Say about Itself?" These articles form Stoeckhardt's main polemic against the modernists of his day who denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Stoeckhardt presents his doctrine of Scripture in three major theses with numerous subordinate points in his lengthy journal article which was published serially over the space of half a year in *Lehre und Wehre*. Other samples of Stoeckhardt's writings could easily be cited as well. Since the essayist was assigned to present a

⁵ O. P. Kretzmann, Foreword, in George Stoeckhardt, "Law and Gospel According to Their Several Effects," trans. Walter H. Bouman, Valparaiso University Pamphlet Series – no. 9, (Valparaiso, Indiana: Valparaiso University Association, 1946), 3.

⁶ August Pieper, "Stoeckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America," trans. James Langebartels, *Wauwatosa Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Curtis A. Jahn, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 422.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John Philipp Koehler, "Dr. G. Stoeckhardt," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 10, no. 1, (January 1913), trans. Alex Hillmer, cited in *Faith-Life* 35, no. 9 (September 1962): 8.

⁹ Leigh D. Jordahl, "The Wauwatosa Theology, John Philip (sic) Koehler and the Theological Tradition of Midwestern Lutheranism, 1900-1930, (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1964), 94.

¹⁰ Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "150th Anniversary of the Birth of Karl Georg Stoeckhardt," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 303-304.

¹¹ Willard D. Allbeck and J. L. Neve, *History of the Lutheran Church in America*, 3rd ed., (Burlington, Iowa: Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), 197.

paper on how George Stoeckhardt went about the exegetical task, it will be simply stated that George Stoeckhardt's view of Scripture is readily recognizable as confessional and orthodox Lutheran. Through his periodical articles and his commentaries, Stoeckhardt consistently demonstrated a high view of the Bible and regarded it as the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. This fact also is thoroughly displayed in his pastoral ministrations and in his homiletics.

Stoeckhardt's high regard for the Bible prompted him to have a very definite hermeneutic and exegetical method. Johann von Hofmann's influence on Stoeckhardt's exegetical method has already been mentioned. An influence that is much more relevant is that of another Hofmann, Carl Gottlob Hofmann, who authored a hermeneutics text in 1754, *Institutiones Theologiae Exegeticae* (*Institutes of Exegetical Theology*). This book, written entirely in Latin, was reprinted by the Missouri Synod for use at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1876, two years before Stoeckhardt came to America. Stoeckhardt used Carl Hofmann's textbook on hermeneutics and exegesis in his seminary lectures. This information is revealed in William Hassold's 1971 dissertation in footnote #59, where Hassold describes Carl Hofmann's work as a "systematic survey of the principles of biblical hermeneutics from a confessional Lutheran viewpoint."¹² Hofmann's text has never been completely translated into English, but there are both German and English seminary notes extant which are largely based on the Hofmann text.¹³ It appears that this textbook on exegetical theology was ground zero for many of the confessional Lutheran hermeneutical principles which were taught to pastors of the former Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference.

What were George Stoeckhardt's main hermeneutical principles, which he employed in doing exegesis? Stoeckhardt's chief hermeneutical principle was to take the biblical text literally, unless there was a compelling reason not to: "One must take the text as it reads."¹⁴ This position is one that Stoeckhardt consistently follows throughout his exegetical work. In his Isaiah commentary, he further explains his understanding of how Scripture uses figurative language. Stoeckhardt maintained that while the prophets of the Old Testament used a great deal of figurative language, the correct sense and understanding of it springs to the eyes of the impartial reader. William Goerss regularly comments in his dissertation that Stoeckhardt interpreted the words of Scripture in their simple sense, holding to the Word as it stands and the obvious meaning of the words as they read.¹⁵ In the introduction to his New Testament commentary, Stoeckhardt explained at length that the Bible itself is the sole source of its interpretation principles.¹⁶

Few biblical exegetes are masters of both Old and New Testament exegesis. Usually one specializes in one or the other. George Stoeckhardt was truly a master exegete of both Testaments. In his Old Testament interpretation, Stoeckhardt consistently demonstrated that the promise of the Messiah was the focal point of the Old Testament and that a red cord of redemption ran through the entire Old Testament. This red cord of redemption found its fulfillment in New Testament times in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his commentary on selected psalms, Stoeckhardt uses the German expression *Kern und Stern* (heart and star, the guiding light) to describe the preeminent place of Christ in the Bible.¹⁷

George Stoeckhardt's doctrine of Scripture and his hermeneutical principles can be legitimately described as thoroughly Lutheran. A complete study of his life reveals that Stoeckhardt never wanted to be anything but a confessional Lutheran.

¹² William J. Hassold, "A Case Study in Exegetical Methodology: George Stoeckhardt and Johann Philip (sic) Koehler on Ephesians," (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1971), 15.

¹³ cf. Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Theologische Hermeneutik: Leitfaden für Vorlesungen*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912); *Theological Hermeneutics: An Outline for the Classroom*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924); Frederick S. Wenger, ed., *Biblical Hermeneutics*, (Springfield, Illinois: Concordia Seminary Print Shop, 1967). Wenger also reports that *Institutiones Theologicae Exegeticae* was used as a textbook at the St. Louis seminary, 56; George O. Lillegard, ed., *Biblical Hermeneutics or Principles of Bible Hermeneutics*, Mankato, Minnesota, 1957.

¹⁴ George Stoeckhardt, *Commentar über den Propheten Jesaja*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1902), 22.

¹⁵ Goerss, 45; Stoeckhardt, *Jesaja*, 121.

¹⁶ George Stoeckhardt, *Die biblische Geschichte des Neuen Testaments*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), vii.

¹⁷ George Stoeckhardt, *Ausgewählte Psalmen*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), 19.

Since Stoeckhardt was the first prominent exegete in the history of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, how exactly did he implement his view of Scripture and his hermeneutics by doing exegesis? What precisely was his exegetical method?

Stoeckhardt's exegetical method, at least while a professor of Old and New Testament exegesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, can be understood with the paradigm of having three periods, a beginning, a middle and a late period. Stoeckhardt began teaching exegesis at Concordia in 1878, the same month he was installed as pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church. He along with the rest of the St. Louis faculty soon became embroiled in the Election Controversy, which reached its height in the Synodical Conference in the early 1880's. In 1885, after the controversy had died down somewhat, Stoeckhardt published his article regarding a pastor's study of theology, "On the Scriptural Study of Theology." In the opening paragraph, Stoeckhardt reminded his readers: "Bible reading, the study of Scripture is also a special and holy duty of the preacher and theologian."¹⁸ He then confessed that one of the positive results of the tumultuous Election Controversy was a renewed interest in serious Bible study:

Precisely in these days God has pointed us toward Scripture, as with an outstretched finger. The doctrinal strife of the last years has directed us once more into Scripture. We have become aware anew of the proper principle of Lutheran theology, and that is the scriptural principle. We confront face to face old and new opponents and hold fast: We let the Word remain, as it reads, and we renounce on principle all rational harmonizing.¹⁹

Stoeckhardt then attempts to prick the consciences of the readers of *Lehre und Wehre* by asking this searching question about the priority that the earnest study of Scripture receives in the economy of time for a pastor: "Which preacher has not caused himself somewhat yet the rebuke, that he, on account of other unimportant things, neglects Scripture and the study of Scripture in the press of official business, and has not given the appropriate justice to the Word, which God spoke,?"²⁰

Stoeckhardt then proceeds in this journal article to review how and why a theologian should study Scripture. His first point is to quote from the apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:13: "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." "Take up and read" the Word of God is job one for a pastor according to Stoeckhardt. He is quick to point out that it is not enough for a pastor to be the "house father" and edify himself only by the morning and evening devotions with his family. Reflecting on his own practice to take his New Testament with him wherever he went on a trip, Stoeckhardt declared that if a Roman Catholic priest can take his breviary on a trip, then an evangelical preacher can take his New Testament on a trip as well.²¹ Stoeckhardt's first major point in teaching the why and how of the study of Scripture is that "every theologian should walk through the Scriptures and overall be at home with them."²²

Stoeckhardt's second exhortation to pastors in "On the Scriptural Study of Theology" is that a theologian should meditate on Scripture day and night. A pastor should not spin threads of thought from his own wisdom, which will only produce theological hay, straw and stubble. Instead a pastor takes out godly thoughts, which God himself lays down in the Scriptures. A pastor establishes his thoughts from Scripture and in Scripture. When this is done, a shepherd is able to perceive correctly the sense and meaning of the Holy Spirit. Thus great attention has to be shown to be sure of the connected thoughts. One easily gets into distorted ways, when anyone rashly, as it appears, takes out intended thoughts from Scripture and then he himself disengages from Scripture, following up with his own thoughts. In the inner cohesiveness of Scripture belongs, strictly speaking, all of Scripture. Every doctrine of the divine Word has its own particular seat, and appears only then in the proper light, when one places and contemplates it in its particular place of discovery. Error

¹⁸ George Stoeckhardt, "Vom Schriftstudium der Theologen," *Lehre und Wehre*, 31, no. 12 (December 1885), 361.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 362.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

originates most often, therefore, when one introduces positions of Scripture, which do not belong to the subject.²³

Stoeckhardt continues by reiterating the principle that Scripture must be interpreted with other Scripture:

So one must compare Scripture with Scripture, apostles with apostles, the apostles with the prophets. And continuous reading, continuous contemplation of Scripture, namely all of the Holy Scriptures, leads here to the earliest and best success. Our knowledge and perception is and remains moreover patchwork. So no theologian should multiply the gaps excessively, in that he permits to lie neglected whole parts, whole books of the Scriptures.²⁴

Stoeckhardt's last word regarding the importance of meditation is meant to serve as a warning to pastors and theologians: "Diligent, continuous meditation brings also *tentatio* (temptation) with it, for the devil is in all respects obstructive to the Word, and propels one into prayer. And so scriptural study makes proper theology."²⁵

Stoeckhardt saw the importance of using the right tools to draw out the meaning of the sacred text. He also stressed to his readers the importance of understanding the grammar and syntax in the task of biblical exegesis:

It may never be forgotten, that the divine thoughts exactly in the Word, which lies written before our eyes, like the sword in the sheath, are contained and concealed. On that account proper study of Scripture, proper meditation of manifold divine truth, is not possible, without one also turning his attention to the individual words, sentences and to the sentence structure. Whoever is always conscious that the Holy Spirit has taught, placed and arranged also the words, will consider the trouble it is worth, to be continuously occupied with vocables, lexicon and grammar. Whoever has not learned to read the Bible in the original text, has sufficient means of help, to investigate the precise literal sense of the Word.²⁶

Stoeckhardt concludes his article on the importance of the continuous study of the Scriptures by assuring his readers that when a pastor continuously draws from the source and norm of theology, the Scriptures, then and only then will the doctrine of Scripture be a living thing. He will be a man who is instructive, capable and qualified to teach others. The remaining portion of the article deals with how a pastor puts the continuous study of Scripture into practical use in his parish ministry and a call for the pastor to be a daily reader and meditator of Scripture, calling the study of Scripture "inseminating" for the parish ministry.²⁷

George Stoeckhardt taught at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis for nearly thirty-five years. At the time the teaching method at Concordia was almost entirely limited to lectures, often before large classes. Several years after his death, some of Stoeckhardt's classroom lectures on various biblical books began to be translated into English by a handful of his former students who were nearing the end of their own ministries. Rev. H. W. Degner was responsible for all of these translations. In some of the prefaces of these translations, mostly on New Testament books, Degner described how Stoeckhardt approached the exegetical task in both the middle part and the latter part of his career at St. Louis. In the 1894-1895 school year, Stoeckhardt lectured on the epistle to the Philippians. Using Gabelsberg stenography, one of the students in the class, H. E. Meyer, recorded the lectures. Degner translated these lecture notes into a running commentary on Philippians.

According to Degner and other Stoeckhardt students at the time, Stoeckhardt performed in class the exegetical task often without notes, just the original Hebrew and Greek text in front of him. At least in class, his exegetical work seemed to be extemporaneous, and often his lectures differed in detail but remained the same in substance. Degner relates his own classroom experience with Stoeckhardt as his professor of exegesis in the preface of two translations of Stoeckhardt's lectures:

²³ Ibid., 362-363.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 363-364.

²⁷ Ibid., 364-367.

Dr. Stoeckhardt never lectured with a fixed manuscript in hand. All that we students saw was the sacred text in the original before him and at times a little piece of paper with a scribbled note in his right. And we have long looked in vain for the manuscripts of his classroom lectures. All we found was a drawer filled with brief handwritten notes, rather harder for us to decipher than our shorthand records. But these notes seem to cover practically every book in the Bible. We have also discovered, when the venerable Doctor from year to year lectured to different classes on the same subject, his lectures differed widely both in diction and detail, while the substance proved to be the same.²⁸

He did not read these lectures from carefully prepared manuscripts, but he delivered them extempore, with only the original text before him. Some of his students carefully took down in shorthand every word he said. Today only these records of these lectures remain. And it is to these that this writer had decided to confine his efforts for reproducing Dr. Stoeckhardt's exegesis.²⁹

Translated notes of Stoeckhardt's exegetical lectures were eventually published for eighteen selected psalms and the book of Micah in the Old Testament and for the New Testament books of 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Titus, 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation.

The format of these lecture booklets is consistently the same. Stoeckhardt performed the exegetical task in the St. Louis classroom by reading a verse in the vernacular and then offering extemporaneous comments on the vocables and grammar. Stoeckhardt's comments on Philippians 2:9 would be typical of these lecture transcripts:

V. 9: 'Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.'
(KJV)

'Therefore (dio),' because of His humble mind and willing obedience,' God has exalted Him, so that that which God did for Christ corresponds to that which Christ did for God. And so God exalted Christ as He well deserved. Meyer thinks Christ merited His exaltation. However, that is not necessarily expressed in our text. God was pleased with the mind He saw in Christ, and that good pleasure He revealed by exalting Christ.³⁰

Stoeckhardt's exegesis of this single verse continued for five additional paragraphs. The main focus of his exegetical method is commenting on the doctrinal content of the verses, with often brief references to what other commentators have remarked on the meaning of the verse being studied, followed by Stoeckhardt's often polemical rejoinders. Stoeckhardt then often supplied a brief application of the verse at hand. His comments on 1 John 5:4 would be typical of the applications found in the translations of these seminary lectures:

'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.' Whoever is born of God has God dwelling in his heart, and God is stronger than the world. In the world sin and unrighteousness hold their sway. That men hate and hurt each other, as much as they can, that belongs to the way of the world. The world does not know love. And Christians, living in this evil world, are exposed to all its evils and even find in their natural heart an innate propensity towards bitterness and hatred. But then they remember that a divine germ has been implanted in their heart. They believe in Jesus Christ, and so they know that they are born of God. And the new life in them overcomes the old man. And so a Christian can suppress and overcome the old man. And so a Christian can suppress and overcome the evil that springs from his own flesh and blood. The good in Christians is stronger than the evil.³¹

²⁸ George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on The Revelation of Saint John*, trans. H. W. Degner, (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing, 1964), preface.

²⁹ George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on The Second Epistle of St. Peter*, trans. H. W. Degner, (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing, 1967), preface.

³⁰ George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on The Epistle To the Philippians*, trans. H. W. Degner, (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publishing, 1967), 39.

³¹ George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on The Three Letters of St. John*, trans. H. W. Degner, (Fairmont, Minnesota: by the author, 1963), 68.

This procedure and format appears to have been the way Stoeckhardt publicly taught exegesis in the seminary classroom throughout his teaching career. Some of these published transcripts came from lectures done in 1898 and some from the last exegetical classes Stoeckhardt taught before his sudden death in January of 1913.³²

In Goerss' Appendix B, he provides the information that "during the academic year of 1901-1902, Stoeckhardt was unable to teach his classes because of his severe illness."³³ The severe illness was his nervous disorder which struck him shortly after the death of his first wife. After his recovery and his remarriage, (not necessarily in that order!), Stoeckhardt resumed teaching exegesis at Concordia and began immediately writing biblical commentaries. After completing a commentary on the first twelve chapters of Isaiah in 1902, Stoeckhardt completed a 600+ page commentary on Romans. In this commentary's preface, Stoeckhardt provided an analysis of how he went about the exegetical task:

The epistle to the Romans is admittedly the foremost doctrinal writing of the New Testament. And so with this explanation, it is the main duty of the exegete, to expound the doctrinal contents. This is indeed not possible without a thorough investigation of the biblical text and context. The undersigned has endeavored with the work at hand, first to do justice to the linguistic aspect of the epistle. Then, however, above all, to correctly bring to the full consciousness to himself, and the readers the eternal, divine thoughts, which have been expressed in the apostolic circular. The pure historical interest in which many modern exegetes treat biblical books and precisely also the epistles of the apostle, cannot lay claim to glory in a particular scholarly method. Every writing desires to be judged according to its own individuality and according to its own tendency. And the tendency of the Holy Scriptures is plainly obvious by itself and is testified clearly by Paul in 2 Tim. 3:16.

The followed method in the at-issue commentary, continuous, coherent interpretation and development, as it finds itself also in Hofmann, Godet, and essentially also in Philippi, to me appears precisely to correspond to the above mentioned aim of exegesis.³⁴

Stoeckhardt's Romans commentary, followed by two other New Testament commentaries on Ephesians (1910) and 1 Peter (1912) reveal a consistent, mature exegetical method. As noted in the Romans preface, Stoeckhardt's exegetical methodology began with citing the text in the vernacular, followed by explanatory comments, often extended comments and analysis of the Greek vocabulary and grammar, followed by a running commentary of the text and often several applications for the reader. Stoeckhardt's Ephesians commentary contains no lengthy discussion of his exegetical method, while his introduction to 1 Peter deals strictly with isagogical matters pertaining to the letter itself.³⁵

Stoeckhardt's exegetical method in his commentaries is far more comprehensive and complete than his recorded exegetical lectures, many of which were recorded a decade earlier. The prevailing theme regarding how George Stoeckhardt proceeded to accomplish the exegetical task was to deliver the divinely intended meaning from the text. Then he proceeded to develop that meaning with doctrinal appropriations, followed by practical applications. Coupled with drawing the meaning from the text and context of the passage, Stoeckhardt stressed the importance of a continuous and a cohesive reading by the exegete of the entire Bible. This he believed was necessary to keep the major soteriological and Christological themes before the eyes of the exegete as he performed the exegetical task on a particular portion of the Bible.

William Dau summed up Stoeckhardt's skills as a biblical exegete in the encomium he wrote after Stoeckhardt's death. Dau, who knew Stoeckhardt personally as a colleague on the St. Louis faculty, attributed part of Stoeckhardt's exegetical genius to his ability to concentrate: "Stoeckhardt's power of concentration

³² Goerss, Appendix B.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Stoeckhardt, *Römer*, iii.

³⁵ George Stoeckhardt, *Kommentar über den Brief Pauli an die Epheser*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1910); cf. *Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, trans. Martin S. Sommer, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952); *Kommentar über den Ersten Brief Petri*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), 1-17.

accounts for much of his unquestioned success as a teacher of exegesis.”³⁶ Dau does not attribute a laborious treatment of the text, going through the text slowly and surely, word for word, to George Stoeckhardt. Instead, Dau describes Stoeckhardt’s exegetical method after presenting the courses Stoeckhardt taught and the years he taught them:

This conspectus of the academic work of Stoeckhardt shows a centripetal tendency. He follows the sound method of leading the Bible student into a comprehensive and penetrating knowledge of the principal writings of the divine revelation, and making them thoroughly familiar with those books of the Bible which embody in the most striking form the marrow and the essence of the saving doctrine. It is like taking the classes to the great mountain ranges of God’s Book, and leading them to the lofty summits, whence commanding views can be had of all the surrounding plains and valleys, rivers and rivulets of the prophetic and apostolic records. Thorough mastery of even one book of the Bible means very much for the general understanding of the entire Bible. How much more a good exposition of the principal portions, or writings, of both Testaments!³⁷

Dau continued his description of Stoeckhardt’s exegetical method by describing how Stoeckhardt understood and wrote about biblical history. Dau reiterated Stoeckhardt’s methodology of doing justice to the main features of each story in the Old and New Testament, all the while working to preserve the connection with the whole, showing how each story relates to the course of salvation history.³⁸

Dau continues his description of Stoeckhardt’s exegetical skills by pointing out that while there is an element of charm for the method of exegesis which minutely dissects every aspect of the biblical text, Stoeckhardt’s method is much to be preferred:

But we believe that the short and direct method of going at the great matters in the text benefits the exegetical tiro more. It goes without saying that the application of this method not only presupposes, on the part of the instructor, a comprehensive grasp of the entire contents of his text, but it also imposes great self-restraint on him. But it is self-restraint that reveals the master in any pursuit.³⁹

In further describing why Stoeckhardt succeeded as a biblical exegete, William Dau pointed out that Stoeckhardt’s method was continually guided by a burning desire to make the text of Scripture plain:

Those who have read his late commentaries know that with his method, he succeeds, not only to make the text of Scripture plain, even to men who are not extraordinarily proficient in the mastery of the original languages of the Bible text, but also in laying hold with a powerful grasp on the conscience and heart of his readers by his eminent ability to exhibit the practical bearing of Scripture on all sorts and conditions of men and affairs. His commentaries can be read with relish....

Stoeckhardt’s commentaries were all written with an eye to their immediate use by pastors and theologians in the work of the Church. His summing up of the contents of a division or subdivision of the text he has expounded is always a valuable hint to the homilist or preacher how to present the contents properly and effectually in a discourse before the congregation. Frequently there comes into the current of his expository remarks, a pious reflection, a devotional thought, that cools and refreshes, and relieves the mental tension created by the intricate argument which had preceded it, and makes the student see and feel the point of an excursus by direct application to his own spiritual life.⁴⁰

Dau concludes his comments on Stoeckhardt’s exegetical skills by declaring that Stoeckhardt was an old school theologian, “to whom theology in all its manifestations is ‘habitus *practicus* theosdotos.’”⁴¹ He promised to any

³⁶ William Dau, “Dr. George Stoeckhardt. III,” *Theological Quarterly*, 17, no 2 (April 1913): 19.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

unbiased reader, that a reader of Stoeckhardt's writings would find in these writings "one of the most earnest efforts put forth in modern times to allow the Spirit to speak His real thought to the reader of God's Book."⁴²

In summarizing George Stoeckhardt's exegetical method, the overarching theme for Stoeckhardt was the importance of carefully deriving God's revelation to sinful mankind from the Spirit-inspired words of the biblical text. Stoeckhardt was singularly guided by this principle and he always considered the ultimate goal of exegesis as making the Word of God full of meaning to the individual reader. Important to him also, was the process of an exegete continuously reading and meditating on the entire Bible, for only then could a Bible interpreter develop a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of the soteriological themes of Scripture. It was only with this soteriological theme in mind that Stoeckhardt then proceeded to do exegesis.

⁴² Ibid.

Part 3: Conclusions About George Stoeckhardt And His Exegetical Task

Fellow theologians of the cross:

Thank you for inviting me to this beautiful campus on a hill to share the story of George Stoeckhardt. I have been doing a fair amount of research about him the past couple years and I do appreciate this golden opportunity to tell his story. For the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation, it is a story worth telling and worth knowing. Here are some concluding thoughts about George Stoeckhardt and his exegetical method.

The topic of the 2006 Bethany Reformation Lectures is “Exegesis in the Synodical Conference.” What would this essayist like his audience to remember the most about how George Stoeckhardt approached the exegetical task? A key contribution of Stoeckhardt is that he consistently taught and practiced constant or continuous (*anhaltendes*) and coherent (*zusammenhängende*) study of the Scriptures. Stoeckhardt regarded this as the most important work a pastor could do to hone his theological and pastoral aptitude. Clearly Stoeckhardt shared with his illustrious student, John Philipp Koehler, the belief that one of the underlying causes of the tragic Election Controversy was that some Synodical Conference pastors did not have a coherent understanding of the whole counsel of God as revealed over the ages in the Holy Scriptures. Stoeckhardt would want everyone here to know that before a church body can articulate a systematic theology, it must first skillfully articulate a coherent exegetical theology. If he was here today, he would also want especially the young men present who are seminary students to know this: Desiring to be a shepherd of God’s people means committing oneself to a lifelong, dare we say, **daily** study of the Bible, so that a man of God might be constantly prepared to share the full counsel of God with his assigned flock.

Another important lesson for all of us to learn from the life and work of George Stoeckhardt is that Stoeckhardt saw the exegetical task as having a soteriological goal. He regarded exegesis as a task not to be done in an ivory tower, but in the church and for the church, so that blood-bought souls might hear the message of the forgiveness of sins. Truly Stoeckhardt saw the exegetical task as a *habitus practicus*, a practical aptitude, to save souls. George Stoeckhardt was a man who was animated with the results of the exegetical task and he was a man who carried out the results of his exegesis, on both the European and the American sides of the Atlantic. The exegetical task moved Stoeckhardt to perform ministry, which to him was not so much *Amt* (office) but *Dienst* (service). His exegesis and his understanding of the ministry moved him to bring the message of the forgiveness of sins to people who needed to hear it, whether it was sick and wounded soldiers during a war, hospital patients in St. Louis, members of his own Holy Cross congregation, or an entire generation of Lutheran seminary students.

As one studies the life of this German-American exegetical theologian, one is also struck by this truth of the Christian faith. God in his wise providence often chooses to bless people through other people. George Stoeckhardt is being remembered today as a master of exegesis. But look how he became a master of the exegetical task. His life history is a beautiful example of how God guides the events of each of his children’s lives. He was born into a pious Lutheran family, received the best education available to him, was called into various ministries which tempered and honed his meddle, and was eventually blessed with a godly helpmeet, who shared his confessional Lutheran convictions. When the Lord took this first wife from him, Stoeckhardt for a brief period of his life “went to pieces.” Eventually this exegetical master was reduced to being a patient in a mental hospital. Yet the Lord of the church still had vital work for Stoeckhardt to do. Through effective treatment and through the love and care of a young woman who became his second wife, Stoeckhardt once again became a champion for Synodical Conference Lutheranism. A clear faith lesson in all of this is the importance of truly appreciating the individuals that God sends into our lives to bless us and support us in good times and not-so-good times. To the young men who are studying to be pastors, and who have not been blessed with a spouse yet, remember the story of George Stoeckhardt. A man can be a wonderful and effective pastor without being married. No argument there! But a pastor blessed with a godly wife has many advantages. If you doubt me, remember what happened to Stoeckhardt after the death of his first wife and what he became after

being blessed once again with a godly helpmeet. At this time when we celebrate the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, we once again have reason to thank God that one of the secondary blessings of the work of Martin Luther was the establishment of the Lutheran parsonage, where pastor, wife and children live, bound together by their love for the Lord and for each other.

Again I thank you for inviting me to Bethany to speak on how George Stoeckhardt approached the exegetical task. My dissertation is on George Stoeckhardt's understanding of the ministry, but his understanding of Scripture and how he went about interpreting it certainly has much to do with how he understood the ministry. As we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, we have come to see, through the life and work of George Stoeckhardt, what a true heir of Luther and the Reformation he was in regard to his understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the exegetical task which he employed to interpret them. To the fine young men who are present here preparing themselves to be workers in the Lord's vineyard, I say this: After twenty years of being in the ministry, I have developed a very short list of books that I feel I must regularly return to in order to stay grounded as a theologian of the cross. My short list is composed of four books, Bo Giertz's *The Hammer of God*, Walther's *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, the *Book of Concord*, and most of all, the Holy Scriptures. George Stoeckhardt would insist that the Bible is the book that must be mastered **first** in order to be a true theologian of the cross. I do not think anyone here would disagree with that sentiment. Let us honor the memory of this master of exegesis by following in his humble footsteps.