

The Wisconsin Synod's Debt To C. F. W. Walther

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[Presented at the Southwestern Pastoral Conference of the WELS Michigan District at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Dorr, Michigan on May 2, 2006.]

C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887) was the most influential Lutheran theologian in America in the nineteenth century. The only man who could even approach his stature was Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883), the great confessional leader of the General Council. There were others who may have been his equal as a scholar and theologian—Adolph Hoenecke (1835-1908) comes to mind¹—but none had as great an impact on Lutheranism in America as he. His gift for leadership, his teaching ability, his energy, and the strength of his personality combined to make him the most important confessional Lutheran leader in the history of Lutheranism in America.²

His influence extended well beyond the bounds of his own synod and reached also into ours. No one who has studied the history of the Wisconsin Synod can doubt that Walther had an impact on our synod. Some have questioned the extent of that impact. The study of the extent of influence or impact is subjective by its very nature. Nevertheless, there is evidence that can be cited to demonstrate both the influence of Walther on the Wisconsin Synod and the independent confessional spirit at work in our synod. That will be the task of this essay.

We will look at the differences in the background and development of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, the contributions of key leaders in the Wisconsin Synod, and Walther's contributions to the Wisconsin Synod in various periods of our synod's history.

The Backgrounds of the Two Synods

Confessional Revival in Europe

After the Age of Orthodoxy Lutheranism in Europe was dominated by Pietism and Rationalism. By the beginning of the nineteenth century Rationalism was dominant in nearly every university and theological department. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the dominance of Rationalism began to be challenged by a resurgent Pietism and a resurgent confessional Lutheranism.³

The *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* was founded in Basel in 1780 to unite Christians around the fundamental doctrines of Christianity in opposition to the inroads of Rationalism. The *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* stated this general aim:

Our purpose is that in these days, when the foundations of Christianity are being deliberately undermined, the Christian brethren of all confessions must hold together. We want to transmit the doctrine that since the Apostles' time to this day has been sealed with blood undefiled to our descendants. Our special concern is that we and others not be filled with doubt as to doctrine, so much attacked today, of the divinity of Jesus Christ and of His work of atonement, and that the blessed confession be maintained that if we be in Christ there is no condemnation to us, but that we rather, thru [sic] faith, of the fullness of God and Christ may receive grace for grace.⁴

¹ Prof. Kurt Marquart gives Hoenecke an exceptional compliment. He calls Hoenecke "the great Wisconsin Synod Theologian...whose magnificent dogmatics is in important aspects superior to F. Pieper's." *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), p 39.

² August Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, edited by Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) vol. III, p 254.

³ A confessional Lutheran is one who believes that the Lutheran Confessions have a continuing significance for the church of all times and remain normative because they are statements of the changeless truths of Scripture.

⁴ Quoted in J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. ed. By Leigh Jordahl (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970), p 20.

Other Christian or "Christianity" societies were also formed throughout Europe in opposition to Rationalism. These societies were in contact with each other and did much to revive an interest in historic Christianity.

From these Christianity societies flowed mission societies to carry the gospel to foreign lands. In 1815 the Basel Mission Society developed from the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*. Other mission societies quickly followed.⁵ One purpose of the mission societies was to bring the gospel to the heathen. Another purpose was to serve the scattered German immigrants and "to protect the distant brethren and sisters from falling from the faith and to lead the erring upon the way of truth, to supply them with the Word of Life, and to gather them into congregations, in order that to them and their descendants the possession of the treasure of evangelical doctrine might be assured."⁶

Many of these societies sent out pastors and missionaries who were willing to serve both Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Depending on who the leadership of the mission houses or societies was at any given time, candidates for the ministry may have had a greater or lesser confessional Lutheran training. The founders of the Wisconsin Synod were committed to the Lutheran Confessions but had not come to an understanding of the importance of Scripture's fellowship principles. They were not "liberals" or "rationalists," but had a love for the proclamation of the gospel and were dedicated to the Bible as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God. At its founding the Wisconsin Synod was pledged to the entire Book of Concord.⁷

Other societies like Louis Harms' (1808-1865) Hermannsburg Mission Society and Wilhelm Loehe's (1808-1872) Neuendettelsau Mission Society trained strictly confessional Lutherans. Harms sent men both to Africa and America. Loehe sent numerous pastors and candidates for the ministry as well as whole colonies of immigrants to the United States.

Other developments in Germany gave an impetus to confessional Lutheranism. Prussia was predominantly Lutheran from the time of the Reformation. In 1613 Elector John Sigismund (1572-1619) converted to Calvinism. In 1617 he issued his *Confessio Sigismundi* in an attempt to unite the Lutherans and Reformed in his realm. Although the confession rejected Calvin's double predestination and used definitions of the sacraments as close to Lutheranism as possible, Lutheran pastors and theologians quickly warned about the Calvinism that the document contained. The two groups, therefore, did not unite.⁸

Although there were some attempts to modify the differences between Lutheranism and Calvinism (particularly in the externals of worship) in the years following the death of John Sigismund, little was accomplished in overcoming the division. Frederick II "the Great" (1712-1786, ruled 1740-1786) was a deist and showed little interest in the religious differences of the two groups. Frederick's great nephew, Frederick Wilhelm III (1770-1840; ruled 1797-1840), however, was a devout Calvinist and was quite concerned about the division between Lutherans and Calvinists in his realm. He ruled like a seventeenth century despot and was willing to use the force of government to bring about a union. He began his efforts to force a union of the Lutherans and Reformed in Prussia in 1817. On the 300th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation he announced the merger of the Lutherans and Reformed into one congregation at his court and appealed for the voluntary union of Lutherans and Reformed throughout Prussia and elsewhere in Germany. By 1821 candidates for the ministry were required to pledge loyalty to the union at their examination. In 1823 Frederick William required pastors to pledge to the confessional writings of the United Evangelical Church in so far as these confessions were in harmony. In 1830 the Prussian government decreed that "Evangelical" was to substituted for the names "Lutheran" and "Reformed." The Union Agenda or service book was prescribed in 1834.⁹ This forced union became known as the Prussian Union and soon was adopted in principle in other areas of

⁵ Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*. trans. by James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), vol. II, p 352-353.

⁶ Quoted in *Continuing in His Word: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States*. ed. by Max Lehninger (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), p 12.

⁷ Max Lehninger, "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod during the Century of Its History." *Quartalschrift*. Vol. 47 #1 (January 1950), p 1-3.

⁸ Martin O. Westerhaus, "The Confessional Lutheran Emigrations from Prussia and Saxony around 1839." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 86 #4 (Fall 1989), p. 249.

⁹ *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. ed. by Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), p 644.

Germany.

Some Lutherans in Prussia and neighboring lands began to oppose the Union because it compromised distinctive Lutheran doctrine. In honor of the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in 1817 Claus Harms (1778-1855) had issued a new edition of Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* and included ninety-five theses of his own. His theses championed confessional Lutheranism in opposition to rationalism, the religious theories of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and the proposed Prussian Union.¹⁰ Even though Harms was writing from outside of Prussia in Schleswig-Holstein, his theses had a profound effect in Prussia and throughout Germany.¹¹ Soon groups of "Old Lutherans" (the label given to those who refused to go along with the Prussian Union) began to form. Noteworthy leaders included Johann Scheibel (1783-1843), John Grabau (1804-1879), and Martin Stephan (1777-1846). Stephan and Grabau led emigrations of Old Lutherans to America.¹²

Confessional Lutheranism in America

Lutheranism in America in 1800 was influenced by rationalism. Lutherans paid little or no attention to the Lutheran Confessions with the exception of Luther's *Small Catechism*. The Second Awakening began to crystallize opposition to rationalism and deism while revivalism swept America. The revivals crossed denominational lines and began to break down denominational distinctions and to foster unionism. The combination of rationalism, unionism, and revivalism brought Lutheran consciousness to an all time low.¹³

Some attempts were made to preserve the name Lutheran in America. The General Synod, a federation of Lutheran synods, was such an attempt. Founded in 1820, it was the first federation of Lutheran synods in America and eventually united most of the synods in the eastern United States. Samuel Simon Schmucker (1799-1873), later professor at Gettysburg Seminary, was one of the prime movers in founding this organization. Among the accomplishments of the General Synod was the establishment of a seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1826. Schmucker was also instrumental in the development of this school. Until Gettysburg Seminary was established, Lutherans in America were dependent primarily on Europe for pastors. Busy parish pastors also took promising young men under their wings and trained them privately. A lack of a steady supply of well-trained pastors plagued Lutheranism in America from the earliest colonial times until well into the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Most members of the General Synod were not confessional Lutherans. The synod was founded about the same time as the Prussian Union was being inaugurated in Germany and it shared the confessional ambiguity of the Union. There is no mention of any of the Lutheran Confessions (not even the *Augsburg Confession*) in the original constitution of the Synod.¹⁵

Some Lutherans in America were deeply affected by the Second Awakening and adopted the methods of revivalism. They believed that the only way Lutheranism could survive in America was to discard some of the distinctive doctrines and practices of the Lutheran Church and become more like the Protestant denominations that seemed to be thriving in this country. Some of these "American Lutherans" even issued a *Recension of the Augsburg Confession* in a document authored by Schmucker in 1855 called the *Definite Synodical Platform*. The recension removed from the *Augustana* the distinctive Lutheran doctrines that separated Lutherans from the

¹⁰ An English translation of Harms' theses can be found in the *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. by Henry Eyster Jacobs and John A.W. Haas (Charles Scribners' Sons, 1899).

¹¹ Aland, vol. II, p 335.

¹² For an overview of the reaction to the Prussian Union in Germany and the subsequent Old Lutheran emigrations see the entire article by Westerhaus, *op. cit.*, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 86 # 4, p 247-264; vol. 87 #4, p 38-60; vol. 87 #2, p 123-163; vol. 87 #3, p 192-208; vol. 87 #4, p 283-293; vol. 88 #1, p 34-63. See also Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, 1839-1841* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

¹³ *The Lutherans in North America*, ed. by E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p 95.

¹⁴ *The Lutherans in North America*, p 116-129.

¹⁵ J.L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck. *A History of Lutheranism in America*, ed. by John W. Drickamer and C. George Fry (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1979), p 53. This volume is an updated edition of the third revised edition of *The History of Lutheranism in America* by Neve and Allbeck.

generic sort of Protestantism that had developed in America.¹⁶ Nearly every Lutheran synod in the United States rejected the *Definite Synodical Platform*.¹⁷ The young Wisconsin Synod, though not known for its confessionalism at the time, also rejected the *Definite Synodical Platform* at its 1856 convention.

Resolved that the newly conceived so-called *Definite Platform* be categorically rejected by us, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, because the synod recognizes: 1. That the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is based upon the Word of God, and 2. That the adoption of the so-called "Platform" is nothing else but a definite suicide of the Lutheran Church.¹⁸

By the third decade of the nineteenth century the revival of confessional Lutheranism in Germany began to have an influence in America. Among the early leaders of this confessional movement were Paul Henkel (1754-1825) and his sons. The Henkel family supplied many pastors to the Lutheran church in America and established the Henkel Press which produced the first English translation of the *Book of Concord* in America in 1851.¹⁹

Some of the Old Lutherans in Germany, longing for religious freedom, emigrated to America. John Grabau and his followers sailed from Prussia and settled in the area around Buffalo, New York, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1839. They founded the Buffalo Synod²⁰ in 1845. Followers of Martin Stephan left Saxony and settled in Perry County and St. Louis, Missouri, in 1839. Wilhelm Loehe sent whole colonies from Franconia to Michigan. He hoped that the Native Americans in Michigan would be so impressed by the Christian lives of these colonists that they would desire to become Christians.²¹ The Saxons in Missouri and the Franconians in Michigan founded the Missouri Synod in 1847. Some of Loehe's men refused to join the Missouri Synod because of differences on the doctrine of the church and ministry. These Loehe emissaries moved to Iowa and founded the Iowa Synod in 1854. Iowa and Missouri also came to differ on "open questions," confessional subscription, and their approach to the Lutheran Confessions.²² Confessional Lutherans from Norway founded the Norwegian Synod in 1851 and soon entered into fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod.

Other Lutheran Synods were founded in the upper Midwest by pastors sent out from various European mission societies and mission houses. For example the Wisconsin Synod was organized in 1850 as a "New Lutheran" synod.²³ During the first two decades of its existence the Wisconsin Synod developed a greater appreciation for the Lutheran Confessions and an understanding of proper principles of church fellowship and gradually moved closer to the Old Lutheranism of the Missouri Synod. The Saxons and the Prussians had

¹⁶ For an overview of this "American Lutheran" controversy see David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). The "five errors" eliminated from the Augsburg Confession by the American Lutherans were (1) the approval of the ceremonies of the mass, (2) private confession and absolution, (3) denial of the divine obligation of the Sabbath, (4) baptismal regeneration, and (5) the real presence of the body and blood of our Savior in the Lord's Supper. For the complete text of the *Definite Synodical Platform* see Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) p 100-104.

¹⁷ Only three small synods adopted the *Definite Platform*, the East Ohio Synod (founded 1830), the Wittenberg Synod (1847), and the Olive Branch Synod (1848). See *The Lutherans in North America*, p 224.

¹⁸ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1856*, translation provided by Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann in the *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 11, #1 (April 1993) p 3-6.

¹⁹ For more information on the Henkel family see Socrates Henkel, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod* (New Market, Virginia: 1890).

²⁰ The synod was officially named "The Synod of the Lutheran Church Emigrated from Prussia."

²¹ Herman F. Zehnder. *Teach My People the Truth: The Story of Frankenmuth, Michigan* (Frankenmuth: Herman F. Zehnder, 1970), p 11-150.

²² *The Lutherans in North America*, p 228.

²³ The name "Old Lutheran" was originally applied to Lutherans who refused to join the Prussian Union. In America the name was given to confessional Lutherans who had migrated to this country from Prussia and Saxony. The name eventually referred to those who took the Confessions seriously and who had an understanding of the scriptural principles of church fellowship. "New Lutheran" was the name given to those who were willing to go along with the Prussia Union in Europe while striving to remain Lutheran. In America New Lutherans were willing to serve German Reformed congregations. Although they subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions, they were sometimes inclined to view those confessions as "paper fences" which kept Lutherans from joint endeavors with the Reformed and interfered with mission work.

emigrated to America because of religious persecution and for the sake of sound doctrine. Most of the people served by the Wisconsin Synod came to this country for economic reasons. The Prussian and Saxon pastors for the most part were well-educated and had received solid Lutheran training. The pastors in the Wisconsin Synod for the most part had limited training and were sent out by unionistic mission societies that were concerned with the spiritual welfare of the Germans who were streaming into this country.

When Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede met in Milwaukee in 1849 to discuss the formation of a new Lutheran synod, they were aware that there were already two Old Lutheran synods at work in the Milwaukee area. They deliberately founded a New Lutheran synod because they wanted to be able to serve all the German immigrants with the gospel. They were hurt by the charges leveled against New Lutherans by the Old Lutherans of Missouri and Buffalo and were put off by what they perceived as the Old Lutherans' haughty condescension.²⁴

The Contributions of WELS Leaders to Growing Confessionalism

1849-1860

In 1853 John Bading (1824-1913) came to America and was accepted as a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod. Bading had been trained by Louis Harms (1808-1865) at the Hermannsburg Mission School and, for a brief time by John Wallmann (1811-1865) at Barmen,²⁵ and therefore had a better confessional Lutheran understanding than those he joined in Wisconsin. Philipp Koehler (1823-1895) was ordained as a pastor in the synod in 1855. He had received a good confessional training under John Wallmann at Barmen. Wallmann was a confessional Lutheran who inculcated staunch Lutheranism in his students. His stand was that of the confessional Lutherans who were willing to remain in the Prussian Union because they viewed it as an administrative union or union in externals rather than a doctrinal union.²⁶

Until the arrival of Adolph Hoenecke, Koehler, Bading, Gottlieb Reim (1828-1882) who joined the Wisconsin Synod in 1856, J.J. Elias Sauer (d. 1889), and Jacob Conrad (1828-1890) served as the leaders of the movement toward a firmer confessional stand in the synod. They were members of the old Northwest Conference. Bading and Reim served the synod as presidents. Koehler, who was not encumbered by the restraints in language required for those holding the office of synod president, served as a burr under the saddle with his many letters decrying unionism and promoting confessionalism. This letter to Pres. Muehlhaeuser, dated July 24, 1859, serves as a fitting example of Koehler's attitude and contribution.

Manitowoc, Wis., July 24, 1859

Dear Brother Muehlhaeuser,

With the contents and form of the memorial I agree barring one point. Namely, concerning the office of missionary-at-large, the writing reads, "The Reiseprediger were in the employ of the Berliner or Langenberger Verein and worked in agreement with and supported by the preachers and congregations of our Synod."

For one, I do not believe that a missionary employed by a *unionistic* society can work in agreement with a *Lutheran* synod. And then I hold that the missionary-at-large certainly must be in the employ of our Synod. Otherwise harm to our Lutheran synod might easily grow out of it...²⁷

One can make the argument that Koehler even more than Bading was the real confessional conscience of the

²⁴ Lehninger, *op. cit.*, p 13.

²⁵ August Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism." *Our Great Heritage* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) vol. III, p 371.

²⁶ J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p 47-48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 63.

early Wisconsin Synod.²⁸

The *Definite Synodical Platform* caused many Lutherans in America to reexamine their Lutheran heritage and attitude toward the Lutheran Confessions. C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887) of the Missouri Synod provided confessional leadership through the periodicals *Der Lutheraner* (founded 1844) and *Lehre und Wehre* (1855). In the forward to *Lehre und Wehre* (January 1856) Walther issued an invitation to all who called themselves Lutheran and subscribed without reservation to the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* to hold "Free Conferences."²⁹ Four conferences were held between 1856 and 1859. Members of the Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Missouri, Tennessee, Pittsburgh, and Norwegian synods attended at least some of the conferences. Men from the Wisconsin Synod expressed interest, but were not able to attend. The *Augsburg Confession* was the subject under discussion and the participants demonstrated a fair degree of unanimity. It seems clear that the leaders of the Wisconsin Synod were aware of Walther and his confessionalism through the periodicals *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*, but there does not seem to have been any direct contact with Walther. Bading and Koehler, no doubt, admired Walther's staunch Lutheranism,³⁰ but chafed under the accusations made against the Wisconsin Synod in Walther's periodicals. The Missouri Synod evidently took little note of the Wisconsin Synod in its periodicals until about 1858 when they began to look at the Wisconsin Synod as an opposition synod intruding on Missouri's territory in Wisconsin.³¹ Conflicts between congregations of the two synods in Princeton and Montello³² and in Lebanon/Watertown³³ brought pastors of the two synods into contact with each other and brought recriminations in Missouri's periodicals.

The Wisconsin Synod grew steadily more confessional during the first decade of its existence, attaining a better understanding of the nature and practice of church fellowship. These developments can be traced to the arrival of men who had a better confessional Lutheran training than Muehlhaeuser. In addition, religious freedom and pluralism in America necessitated a more distinct confessional stand to distinguish one church body from another.³⁴ Some in Wisconsin also recognized the need to bring the practice of their congregations more in line with their confessional stance. Although the men in Wisconsin no doubt read Missouri's periodicals and became aware of Walther's staunch confessionalism, the Missouri leader had no direct influence on the Wisconsin Synod. Missouri's doctrinal strife with Iowa and Buffalo and the accusations made against Wisconsin in their periodicals tended to make our forefathers leery of Missouri's brand of Lutheranism rather than winning them over.

1860-1868

In 1860 Muehlhaeuser decided to step down from the presidency of the Wisconsin Synod, and John Bading was elected to replace him. Bading's election marks an important turn in the synod's history. While Muehlhaeuser had been president, there had been no doctrinal essays at the synod's conventions. Bading

²⁸ August Pieper says that Philipp Koehler was the most determined foe of unionism in the synod in "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," p 372. Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann, who has been working for years to transcribe and preserve the early correspondence of the Wisconsin Synod, once suggested to this writer that on the basis of the correspondence Koehler more than any one else ought to be credited with leading our synod to a solid confessional stand. A thorough study of Koehler's influence based on his correspondence would be a major contribution to understanding the early history of our synod.

²⁹ A free conference is an open forum for discussion of doctrinal and practical issues. The conference is free in the sense that none of those who attend appear as an official delegate or representative of any synod. Discussions at the Free Conferences of the 1850s were intended to see first of all whether there was unity among Lutherans in America and secondly, to work toward such unity of understanding and doctrine.

³⁰ Koehler relates that Bading shortly after his arrival in Calumet approached Pres. Ottomar Fuerbringer (1810-1892) of the Missouri Synod's Northern District to join the Missouri Synod. Bading was disappointed in Wisconsin's lack of confessionalism and troubled by the rationalists who made up his Calumet congregation. "Fuerbringer advised him to stick with Wisconsin and lend his influence for raising the standard of doctrine and practice" (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p 45).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p 79.

³² *Ibid.*, p 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, p 79-80.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 65.

changed that. In 1861 he had Gottlieb Reim present an essay entitled, "Confessional Position of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin."³⁵ The purpose of the essay was twofold:

For those outside the synod it is necessary to declare as falsehoods the false accusations which are being spread about the confessional position of the Hon. synod. For synod members it is however doubly necessary; in the first place our co-workers meet annually in convention; it is of the utmost importance that they clearly understand the confessional position of our synod, if we desire to stand and work together in spirit and confession of faith. In the second place it is essential for a church body to pay utmost attention to this topic lest gradually and unnoticed it becomes weakened and lost.³⁶

The accusations of having an indecisive doctrinal stance and tolerating unsound practice made by Walther and the other Missourians against Wisconsin stung. At the same time Reim and Bading wanted to make sure that there was unanimity on the Lutheran Confessions in their synod. Reim pointed to repeated examples of the synod's official stand on the confessions in the constitution and proceedings of the synod. Reim also took a shot at what he perceived to be the loveless attitude of synods like Missouri and Buffalo.

If the synod is truly Lutheran, why has it stayed away from the conflicts over the confessional position which has affected everything both here in the new world and there in the old? That it has up till now stayed away from these conflicts is a fact; the cause, however, does not lie in the confessional stand, but in circumstances. It has not as yet been attacked because of its confessional stand. In its midst no attempt has yet been made to question the confessions; for it to take part in the conflicts of other church bodies it does not have the time or the strength, because both were demanded in the development of the Lutheran Church in Wisconsin and Other States. However, it does not and will not recognize such loveless quarreling which restricts Christ to its own quarters and which indulges in the use of sophistry and word battles for the purpose of rendering suspicion on other Lutheran synods. May this attitude remain foreign to our synod.³⁷

Reim finishes the essay with an explanation of the importance of insisting that pastors pledge to the Lutheran Confessions at their ordination. Six theses based on the essay were discussed by the delegates to the convention and published along with the essay in the *Proceedings*.³⁸

In his first two presidential reports Bading pushed for the founding of a seminary. He was concerned about the number of vacancies in the synod and the insufficient numbers of pastors being sent by the mission societies. He also implied that the synod was not able to accept some of those sent. His 1862 report urged the synod forward. The *Proceedings* report a rather lengthy discussion of his proposal. It was noted that the

³⁵ A translation of this essay by Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann is printed in the *WELS Historical Institute Journal* vol 14 #1 (April 1996) p 3-8.

³⁶ "Confessional Position of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin," p 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p 4.

³⁸ I. In regard to the specific declarations of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin as expressed in its constitution concerning ordination and obligations formulas which expose the Lutheran character, no one has the right to deny it this character.

II. The synod declares that it exercises a gentle practice with a strict adherence to the Lutheran Confessions, not because of feeble compliance, but with full knowledge.

III. Congregation members not originally Lutheran, who in connection with the forming of Lutheran congregations declared themselves to be in agreement with Lutheran doctrine and practice, but who later on emerge as having differences with the confessional position of the synod and congregation, are to be advised by the congregation, but not released as long as they comply with the existing doctrine and practice and do not endeavor to introduce foreign doctrine and practice into the Lutheran confession.

IV. The synod allows that some of its congregations do not have to have pronounced Lutheran liturgical formulas or regulations, such as responsorials, altar candles, private confession, etc., which also were not considered as required in the confessional writings.

V. The synod considers the Lutheran church to be the church of pure doctrine, but not to be the only soul-saving church, but to be an endowed and blessed part of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth, and it recognizes that other confessions also possess gifts.

VI. The synod considers the building up of the kingdom of God in its congregations to be more important than participating actively in confessional conflicts which generally lead away from the focal point of the Christian faith rather than toward it.

Ibid., 8.

Catholics were spending large sums of money in Wisconsin and Minnesota to establish seminaries. The Methodists and *Albrechtsleute* (German Methodists) were making inroads and over the past twenty-five years had won over many Lutheran congregations. Although there was the possibility of using the seminaries of the Missouri and Iowa synods, it was stated that "our synod does not agree with the exclusive direction of both synods and cannot permit its future members to be filled with such a spirit." Gettysburg Seminary seemed to be too far away to be of much help. The synod would need to establish a seminary of its own on a small scale and eventually also add a college.³⁹ In usual synodical fashion a committee was appointed to look into the matter.

Bading's presidential report in 1863 expressed sorrow over the horrors of the Civil War in which our country was then embroiled. The synod that year met May 29-June 3, only a month before that Battle of Gettysburg which was fought on and around the campus of the Gettysburg Seminary. The horrors of the war, however, did not prevent Bading from pushing the synod to go ahead with the founding of the seminary. He wrote,

As we left last year's synodical convention, a bird's eye view of our working areas and of our workers recalled to our remembrance the words of the Lord: "The harvest is great but the laborers are few." No less than thirteen vacant congregations have sent us pleas for preacher and minister. Several have already been without spiritual care for a long time and were heavily proselytized by Methodists, *Albrechtsleute*, and other fanatic-preachers, and we still did not know where the proper forces should come from to peacefully satisfy the necessities. But the Lord was gracious to us. He was aware of means and ways; he crowned the trip of our Hon. Senior [Muehlhaeuser] to Germany with such a result that a group of evangelists crossed the sea to labor in conjunction with us in the work of the Lord. We would then meet these necessities with relief, and give our traveling preacher with his restless, eager spirit the opportunity to open new fields and prepare them for receiving a pastor. This indeed demands new personnel. For should thousands of countrymen in the woods and prairies not become victims of the spirit of the sects or fall into unbelief, should the thousands who annually settle in Wisconsin and neighboring states remain with the Ev. Lutheran Church, then we for our significant growth each year need additional workers. For this we must still always turn to our old fatherland and rely on the fact that the German brothers, who are concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of their fellow countrymen in America, send us capable workers. Although thankful for such help which German societies and associations send us, we nevertheless in the face of our synod and congregations must always return to the matter of erecting our own theological seminary. The desire for it has long been expressed, the plan of founding it was pretty well thoroughly discussed at the last synod convention. Now the time has come that it be vigorously implemented. One must indeed thoroughly discuss the costs ahead of time if one wants to build a tower, but, with costs alone nothing is done, that discourages more in going ahead with the founding of the seminary. We have to place our trust for the costs in the almighty Savior, and for the welfare of immortal souls, we must not fear by trusting in the almighty strength and grace of our Lord that our work will come to ruin. Therefore being confident that this year's synodical convention will move ahead with the founding of an educational institution, let us remember that the Lord will provide and will lead the work already begun to a magnificent goal.⁴⁰

The convention resolved to go ahead with the seminary project and engaged in a lengthy debate over the location, whether Milwaukee or Watertown. The debate revolved around a number of issues including the cost of land and building in each location, the contribution to be expected by each community, ease of travel, central location, and the relative merits of a small town over a big city (and vice versa). Muehlhaeuser, Streissguth, and others favored Milwaukee. Bading, Hoenecke, and the majority favored Watertown. By a vote of 45 to 19 Watertown was selected. The synod chose Pastor Moldehnke, a graduate of the University of Halle, as the first professor. The convention authorized Bading to collect funds in Europe and provided for substitutes to cover his congregational responsibilities during his absence.⁴¹ Two days later the location of the seminary was reconsid-

³⁹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1862*, p 13-14.

⁴⁰ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1863*, in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 16, #2 (October 1998) p 38-48, citation on p 43-44.

⁴¹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1863*, in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 17, #1 (April 1999) p 3-16. Discussion of the seminary proposal is on p 7-9.

ered. Watertown was again selected, but with the provision that the location could be changed if the city and community would not fulfill obligations for building the institutions there and "bring up at least \$2,000 for the project."⁴² J. P. Koehler sees the selection of Watertown over Milwaukee as a kind of statement for confessionalism, a victory of the Bading forces over the Muehlhaeuser forces.⁴³

Bading was sent to Europe to collect funds to make the building of a campus a reality. He was more successful than the synod could have hoped. Not everyone, however, was pleased with the collection in Europe. Philipp Koehler was concerned about the reputation of the synod and the honesty of collecting from unionistic societies while pursuing Lutheran confessionalism in this country.⁴⁴ Bading, however, claimed that he had been honest. While he was still in Germany he forthrightly stated the synod's confessional stance in reply to an attack on the Wisconsin Synod by a German periodical. His reply was printed in that same periodical. Bading wrote,

All I can oppose to the harsh accusations, therefore, is the fact that our Wisconsin Synod adheres not only to the Augsburg Confession but to *all* the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church; that it pledges all its candidates to them at ordination without distinction *upon them*; that all of its congregations have adopted the Lutheran confession; that everywhere the Lutheran form of administering the Lord's Supper and Luther's Small Catechism as the religious manual for the children in school and confirmation instructions have been introduced. Reformed congregations there are neither in our synod membership, nor are such served by our pastors according to "their usage."⁴⁵

In 1863 the Wisconsin Synod reached another milestone on its way to staunch Lutheran confessionalism. Adolph Hoenecke (1835-1908) arrived in Wisconsin in February of that year. Hoenecke's life⁴⁶ is a remarkable story of God's grace. When Hoenecke was born, the affects of Rationalism were dominant in Germany. His father was not a believer. His mother was a believer, but other than teaching him how to pray when he was young, she had little influence on his later religious direction. His older brothers were soldiers in the Prussian army. A severe case of typhoid made the choice of a career in the army impractical for him. A joking remark by the father of a friend pointed Hoenecke to the study of theology. The man pointed at a well fed pastor friend of his and said, "Look, Adolf, become a pastor and then you will have a good thing." He matriculated at the University of Halle and came under the influence of the mediating theologian, August Tholuck, (1799-1877) whose simple Christian faith brought Hoenecke "to the saving knowledge of Christ." Tholuck groomed Hoenecke for a theological teaching position and pointed him to a study of the great Lutheran dogmaticians, particularly Calov (1612-1686) and Quenstedt (1617-1688). After being graduated from Halle Hoenecke served as a tutor for two years for the family of a gentleman in Bern, Switzerland. In Switzerland he met his future wife, the daughter of a Reformed pastor. His life in Switzerland gave him the opportunity for more intensive study of the Lutheran dogmaticians and impressed on him the important differences between the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Much to Tholuck's displeasure Hoenecke volunteered for service in America because pastoral calls and teaching positions in Germany were few and far between, and he desperately needed a source of income. The Berlin Mission Society, which John Wallmann was now heading, sent him to Wisconsin where he became a member of the Wisconsin Synod. He briefly served in Racine before settling in Farmington about seven miles south of Watertown. By this time Bading was serving at St. Mark's in Watertown and the two men became close friends. Their gifts, personalities, and training perfectly complemented each other. As Pieper relates,

Bading, like Koehler was a resolute Lutheran, as we have heard. The two men, in standing together for a firm molding of our synod's life, had exerted themselves most successfully in that direction. But both men

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 11-12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p 89-90.

⁴⁴ Koehler, p 93ff.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p 97-98.

⁴⁶ The following biographical details are based on August Pieper's, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," *The Wauwatosa Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) vol. III, 359ff. See also Im. P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 60 #3 (July 1963) p 201-208.

were deficient in a knowledge of the biblical languages and in a systematic training in the doctrine of salvation. Therefore they also lacked the doctrinal clarity and the doctrinal certainty which alone convinces others and wins the day in doctrinal disputes. This was precisely what Hoenecke did have. To be sure, he was not a smooth-tongued, imposing orator. On that account he was not the equal of his immediate predecessor, Eduard Moldehnke, at the institution that was still to be erected. Even his printed works are not distinguished by rhetorical beauty. But this is what made the difference: He had an uncommonly sharp mind, was precise in his definition of terms and concepts, and—he knew his subject from the ground up. In exegesis and in clear dogmatic exposition he simply was the unexcelled master in our circles.

Among ourselves, we call this "combat readiness." This writer had to experience the uncomfortable proof of it personally more than a few times. Anyone who could not stand that soon withdrew from public debate with him and from any closer personal contact with him. Bading could not claim a scholarly theological training. He acknowledged Hoenecke's superiority in the field of doctrine. He learned much from him, and was very expert in shooting the cannonballs that Hoenecke had poured—and he did this too in the proceedings then being taken against un-Lutheran practices in the synod. On the other hand, Hoenecke lacked much of the inclination for administrative work and adeptness in it. Bading possessed this gift in a high degree, and he gave ample proof of that as he conducted the business of the synod as its president. In exercising this talent, he now and then went as far as Alexander did in the capital of Gordium, but then he did so without Hoenecke's advice to that effect.⁴⁷

The well-educated Hoenecke soon gained the confidence of his colleagues in the Wisconsin Synod. He was elected secretary of the synod in 1864.⁴⁸ In 1865 the synod began publishing a synodical paper *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*. Moldehnke was appointed editor-in-chief. Bading and Hoenecke were named assistant editors.⁴⁹ This periodical gave Hoenecke a forum for leading the synod toward greater confessionalism and for replying to the accusations of the Missouri Synod. In 1866 the synod resolved to call Hoenecke as *Inspector* (dean of students) and theological professor at the Watertown institutions. When the resolution passed, Moldehnke resigned as professor and chief editor of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*. The reason for his resignation is not indicated in the minutes, but the minutes show that the convention did not recognize his reasons as valid and stated that it was urgently desirable that he remain a theological professor.⁵⁰ Hoenecke became the head of the seminary and editor-in-chief of the *Gemeinde-Blatt* and his influence continued to grow in the synod.

In 1867 a group of Iowa Synod leaders were cordially greeted by the Wisconsin Synod in convention. It seems that Bading and Prof. Martin were in favor of closer relations with that synod.⁵¹ In fact, Prof. Sigmund Fritschel (1833-1900) was allowed to preach for one of the convention services.⁵² The Iowa delegation was given the floor to make their case for "open questions"—non-fundamental doctrines on which Lutherans could disagree and remain in fellowship (e.g., Sunday observance, chiliasm, Antichrist, etc.).⁵³ At one point in the discussion Muehlhaeuser agreed with the Iowa men and quoted Bengel (1687-1752), "You chiliasts can with a clear conscience underwrite the Confessions. The millennium is not found in the *Augsburg Confession*, but in the Bible."⁵⁴ Although some in Wisconsin expressed agreement with the Iowa position, many others did not.

⁴⁷ Pieper, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke..." p 374-375.

⁴⁸ 1864 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 17 #2 (October 1999), p 10.

⁴⁹ 1865 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 15 #1 (April 1997), p 15.

⁵⁰ 1866 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 19 #1 (April 2001), p 13. Prof. Fredrich suggests that Moldehnke thought that this was a waste of manpower because there were so few students. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p 16-17.

⁵¹ Koehler, p 153.

⁵² 1867 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 19 #2 (October 2001), p 3.

⁵³ In a letter dated July 17, 1865, Walther lists the following as the errors of Iowa: "that they do not have an unqualified acceptance of the symbolical books, that they do not hold the pope to be the Antichrist, that they make articles of faith into open questions, that they have people among them who justify chiliasm, etc." *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Letters*, translated by Roy A. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p 115.

⁵⁴ 1867 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 19 #2. The whole discussion is recorded on p 18-20.

Hoenecke took the lead in opposing Fritschel.⁵⁵

At the same convention the synod went on record as opposing membership in secret societies or lodges.⁵⁶ A floor committee that included Hoenecke proposed a strongly worded resolution on the Prussian Union. "It is not enough under present church conditions only to give the positive side, namely that we are Lutheran, but more so to add the negative declaration that we reject the Union." A minority report suggesting softer wording was adopted by the convention. The resolutions condemned all doctrinal unionism and declared that the synod aligned itself only with those in Europe who wanted to see the forced union between Lutherans and the Reformed annulled. The resolutions, however, attempted to justify receiving money and men from the unionistic mission societies. It was noted that there were still confessional Lutherans within the state churches who protested against the union that the government had imposed on them. So long as these groups remained confessional and protested against the union, it was possible to accept their aid with thanks. The mission societies were the agencies through which such help from these confessional Lutherans came to the synod.⁵⁷

The mission societies reacted sharply to Wisconsin's resolutions. For some time they had been concerned about the theological direction of the synod. They saw the new resolutions as a slap in their face. They accused the Wisconsin Synod of ingratitude and casting aside former friends for the sake of new friends (a veiled reference to the Missouri Synod).⁵⁸

After Wisconsin's 1867 convention Missouri and Iowa had a colloquy on "open questions" in Milwaukee and some Wisconsin men, including Hoenecke, attended. Hoenecke agreed with Walther's position. Koehler reports this anecdote:

After the close of the colloquy, when the gathering dispersed, some of the visitors heard a young man say to his companion: "Walther no doubt is right in his stand against the Iowans, who really have no command of the whole subject in spite of the many things they know." The listeners made inquiry and found out that the young man was Prof. Hoenecke of Watertown. When they reported to Walther, he answered: "Yes I have been taking note of him for some time. We may hope for much from him."⁵⁹

As more confessional Lutherans came to America during the great period of German immigrations, the Pennsylvania Ministerium (founded 1748), the New York Ministerium (1786), the Ohio Synod (1818), the Wisconsin Synod (1850), Michigan Synod (1860), and Minnesota Synod (1860) grew more and more confessional. This trend led to the founding of two new federations of synods, the General Council (1867) and the Synodical Conference (1872).

When the Pennsylvania Ministerium withdrew from the General Synod in 1866 because of the General Synod's lack of confessionalism, the stage was set for the founding of a new federation of more confessionally-minded Lutheran synods. Pennsylvania issued an invitation to all Lutheran synods in the United States and Canada which accepted the *Augsburg Confession* to meet to discuss the possibility of forming a truly Lutheran organization. Thirteen synods responded favorably, including the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota Synods. At the preliminary meeting in Reading, Pennsylvania, December 12-14, 1866, the eminent confessional theologian, Charles Porterfield Krauth, delivered an essay in which he emphasized subscription not only to the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*, but also to all of the Lutheran Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord*. The delegates established a committee to prepare a constitution and elected officers. Three synods Ohio, Iowa, and Missouri, were unwilling to join because they believed that complete theological agreement had not yet been established among all of the participants.⁶⁰

The General Council held its first regular convention in Fort Wayne, Indiana, November 20-26, 1867.

Muehlhaeuser's remark is on p 19.

⁵⁵ Hoenecke's argument against the Iowa position is given in the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, August 15, 1867. Pieper offers a summary in "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," p 404-407.

⁵⁶ 1867 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 19 #2 (October 2001), p 23-24.

⁵⁷ 1867 Proceedings, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 20 #1 (April 2002), p 4-6.

⁵⁸ Koehler, p 112-114.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p 115.

⁶⁰ *The Lutherans in North America*, p 230-237.

The Ohio Synod sent delegates who were granted the right to debate. They did not have right to vote, however, because Ohio had not joined the Council. Ohio's delegates asked for clarification of the Council's theological position on four points: altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, chiliasm, and secret societies. No doubt, Ohio was concerned about chiliasm because a prominent member of the delegation of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, Joseph Seiss (1823-1904), was a well-known millennialist.⁶¹ Lodge membership was an issue in many conservative church bodies of the day. Fellowship, whether altar or pulpit, was a key doctrine for all who wanted to be known as confessional Lutheran.

Hoenecke, Bading, and Prof. Martin of Northwestern were Wisconsin's delegates. Hoenecke was named as a replacement for Muehlhaeuser when the latter died on September 15 of that year.

The answers of the General Council to the "four points" at the Pittsburgh convention in 1868 were less than satisfactory to some of the synods. President John Bading of Wisconsin, President Stephen Klingmann (1833-1891) of Michigan, and President Reinhold Adelberg (1835-1911) of the New York Ministerium attempted to strengthen the statement adopted by the majority of the delegates.⁶² Prior to the General Council convention in 1868 the Wisconsin Synod had resolved to break with the Council if suitable answers to the "Four Points" were not forthcoming.⁶³ When Bading reported to the 1869 Wisconsin Synod convention the answers given to the "Four Points" by the General Council in 1868, Wisconsin officially withdrew from membership. The Minnesota and Illinois Synods withdrew from the Council in 1871. The Michigan Synod withdrew in 1888.

Wisconsin's 1868 convention demonstrated how far the synod had come since its founding. In his presidential address Bading called for a declaration against the Prussian Union which ultimately meant a break with the unionistic mission societies which had supplied the synod with money and manpower.

We have been accused of a clandestine United-friendly sentiment by various Lutherans because of our relationship with friends in the United Church; our confessional faithfulness is being attacked, our synod labeled as non-Lutheran, and all was done to start a conflict by designating us as a non-Lutheran corporation. We want to publicly and honorably admit that even though the accusations made against us were exaggerated, unjust, hateful, and not made with love which improves matters, yet some of them were truly applicable. Our position, it is true, was for a long time a vacillating one. On the one hand we openly accepted all the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, a fact which the synod pronounced virtually every year, yet on the other hand we considered the relationship with the societies which are incorporated with the United Church and the Union to be something proper. On the one hand, I dare say it, love to our dear church and its Symbols, while on the other hand the feeling of thankfulness to our friends who helped us in times of need, also through the sending of forces, making us what we are, made the synod often appear in a light that neither friend nor foe could understand. Indeed the feeling of gratitude restrained the synod from letting its long existing inner confessional decision come openly to full expression, and from repelling the accusation of a friendly feeling towards the Union with a candid statement against all Union doctrine and regulations. The vacillations, Hon. Pastoral-brothers and fellow-believers, must have an end...⁶⁴

The Synod of Wisconsin is also obliged in such time of great and common danger to draw the sword from the sheath, to produce a clear tone with the trumpet, to break the earlier respectful silence, to declare to the utmost that we lament the introduction of the Union, which disregards all differences, as well as the annihilation of our dear church, and cry out to God, that he would ward off such heavy judgment on us and would not, because-of our great unfaithfulness and indifference, deal with us as we deserve to be dealt with. May no one accuse us of unthankfulness, we cannot do differently and we believe that thankfulness and love will be in partnership with our profession of truth and the testimony against

⁶¹ For information on the life and work of Joseph Seiss see his autobiography, *Notes on My Life*, transcribed by Henry E. Horn and William M. Horn (Huntington, Pennsylvania: Church Management Service, Inc., 1982).

⁶² *Minutes of the General Council*, 1868, p 25. In 1869 Adelberg accepted a call to the Wisconsin Synod's Northwestern University in Watertown and later served as an English professor at the synod's Wauwatosa seminary.

⁶³ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #2 (November 2003) p 5.

⁶⁴ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #1 (April 2003), p 6.

wrongdoing.⁶⁵

In the light of Bading's request and in response to the "Four Points" of the General Council the convention discussed the matter of altar and pulpit fellowship at length. At the end of the debate the convention adopted the following resolution: "The synod should resolve that it together with the entire correctly believing Lutheran church rejects all and each Communion and pulpit fellowship with the heterodox and people who believe differently as the doctrine and practice of the Lutheran church." The resolution was adopted by a standing vote. Four pastors remained seated. One lay delegate abstained from voting and another later withdrew his vote because neither delegate had received direction from their congregations.⁶⁶ Later Wisconsin resolved, "If a satisfactory answer and one that is in agreement with our resolution about Communion and pulpit fellowship is not given in the next meeting of the General Council, that we cannot be considered a member of that body."⁶⁷ Prof. Martin of Northwestern was not present for this debate and resolution. On the following Tuesday he asked for clarification and then declared that "he would resign from the Wisconsin synod on the day on which the synod would leave the Joint Church Assembly (i.e. General Council)."⁶⁸ The Synod also recognized that a break had occurred with the unionistic mission societies which was justified and resolved to thank the societies for their past support.⁶⁹

On the last day of the convention the synod addressed its relationship with the Missouri Synod. The *Proceedings* record this action:

1. As far as the committee knows, there is no conflict in doctrine, but it is confined to disputes over practical matters, encroaching on individual members of both synods, and placing articles in the public press, which often contain the tone of hatefulness and derision rather than sincere sorrow over such improper actions, and loving admonition. The committee regrets this discord wholeheartedly.
2. The synod authorize the Hon. president to take the proper steps for the restoration of peace, so that a mutual recognition of both as Lutheran synods and a brotherly relationship between the members of both synods in the spirit of truth on the basis of pure doctrine may result.

The resolution of a member of the convention for an addition to No. 1 of the committee report, that no "church-separating" differences between the Synods of Missouri and Wisconsin are in evidence was discussed and finally over the protest of Prof. Hoenecke and Pastor Lange was adopted.⁷⁰

The way was now paved for discussions with the Missouri Synod leading to a declaration of fellowship. Contacts with Missouri Synod pastors and Concordia Publishing House's colportage (book selling) in Wisconsin had begun to draw Wisconsin closer to Missouri.⁷¹

The Influence of Walther on the Wisconsin Synod

During this period the influence of Walther on the Wisconsin Synod was indirect. One might say that rather than being strongly influenced by Walther, the Wisconsin Synod men were recognizing more and more that they were in agreement with Walther's position. Bading, Koehler, and Hoenecke came to this country as confessional Lutherans independent of Walther, although they grew in their understanding of fellowship in this country. They were leading the synod in a more confessional direction and would have undoubtedly continued to do so without any influence of Walther. The accusations against Wisconsin in Missouri's periodicals were seen as spiteful, inaccurate, unkind, and even unloving. Nevertheless those who were honest had to admit that some of the charges were justified because of Wisconsin's continued relationship with the unionistic mission

⁶⁵ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #1 (April 2003), p 7.

⁶⁶ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #1 (April 2003), p 20.

⁶⁷ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #2 (November 2003), p 5.

⁶⁸ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #2 (November 2003), p 13-14.

⁶⁹ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #2 (November 2003), p 12-13.

⁷⁰ 1868 *Proceedings*, translation in *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, vol. 21 #2 (November 2003), p 14.

⁷¹ Koehler, p 153.

societies. The accusations of Walther and other Missourians "awakened their consciences in regard to their confessional responsibility."⁷² At the same time the leaders of the synod were reading the *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* and undoubtedly benefited from the solid doctrinal articles those periodicals contained.

1868-1887

For some time Walther and the Missouri Synod had been critical of the Wisconsin Synod's ties to the unionistic European mission societies and the synod's lax practice on the congregational level.⁷³ In addition there were problems between Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod congregations, particularly in the Watertown area. Missouri's periodicals, *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* did not hesitate to point out and criticize Wisconsin's failings. As time went on there was less and less justification for these criticisms.⁷⁴ Some of Missouri's accusations were anachronistic, others were based on faulty information. Hoenecke repeatedly defended his synod, pointing out the inaccuracies and the less than loving spirit of the articles on Wisconsin that appeared in Missouri's periodicals.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, fraternal relations with Missouri developed very rapidly.

The Racine convention directed President Bading to initiate discussions with the Missouri Synod not only to address problems between the parishes of the two synods but also in the hope of establishing brotherly relations. Bading presented his synod's resolutions to Missouri's Northern District meeting in Milwaukee on the very day the Wisconsin Synod convention adjourned. Walther was present and suggested that the committee to be appointed by the Northern District should represent the whole Missouri Synod.⁷⁶

The meeting between Wisconsin and Missouri took place on October 21-22, 1868, in Milwaukee. The two sides discussed all of the doctrinal questions at issue among Lutherans of that day.⁷⁷ The discussion demonstrated complete doctrinal unity to the joy of all the participants.⁷⁸ Walther, who had been a sharp critic of Wisconsin, showed himself to be a man of Christian humility and integrity by writing in the November 1 edition of *Der Lutheraner*, "All of our reservations about the dear Wisconsin Synod have not only faded but have been put to shame. God be thanked for his inexpressible gift!"⁷⁹ Koehler reports that Walther closed the meeting with Wisconsin with this declaration, "Brethren, if we had known before what we know now we might have declared our unity of faith ten years ago."⁸⁰

In May 1869 the two synods worked out a reciprocal worker training agreement. Wisconsin was to close her seminary and transfer her students to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and supply a professor. Missouri's students in Wisconsin would attend Northwestern in Watertown and Missouri would supply a professor to that institution. Later that year both synods in convention ratified the agreement and the mutual recognition of orthodoxy. For various reasons the Wisconsin Synod was not able to supply a professor for St. Louis. The Missouri Synod's Frederick Stelhorn (1841-1919) served at the Wisconsin Synod's Northwestern College from 1869 to 1874.

Wisconsin's fellowship with Missouri was part of a growing confessional movement among Midwestern Lutherans. The Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853, had been in fellowship with the Missouri Synod and had a working arrangement for the training of Norwegian Synod students at Missouri's St. Louis Seminary since 1857. The Ohio Synod, founded in 1818, had grown more confessional through the immigration of German Lutherans who were pouring into the region and the efforts of men like Wilhelm Lehmann (1820-1880) and

⁷² Pieper, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," p 408.

⁷³ For examples of Missouri's criticisms during the years 1862-1864 see Koehler, p 107-108.

⁷⁴ Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), p 38-40.

⁷⁵ Koehler offers several examples of these exchanges from the years 1867-68 in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, p 115-117.

⁷⁶ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p 51-52.

⁷⁷ Walther's "Theses on Open Questions," served as the basis for the discussions and the basis on which the two synods established fellowship. An English translation is printed in *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS* (Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, 1997), p 35-37.

⁷⁸ For an English translation of the resolutions of fellowship adopted at the Wisconsin/Missouri Colloquy see Koehler, p 129.

⁷⁹ *Der Lutheraner*, Nov. 1, 1868, p 37.

⁸⁰ Koehler, p. 74.

Christian Spielmann.⁸¹ Matthias Loy (1828-1915), a younger contemporary of Lehmann and Spielmann, was particularly sympathetic to the Missouri Synod's doctrinal position.⁸² Representatives of Ohio and Missouri met in colloquy in 1869 and found that they were in complete doctrinal agreement. The Illinois Synod sought closer ties with the Missouri Synod between 1868 and 1870. Fellowship was declared in 1872. Minnesota's withdrawal from the General Council in 1871 led to fellowship with Wisconsin. Missouri representatives recognized unity of faith at a meeting with Minnesota representatives in January 1872 which led to a declaration of fellowship later that same year.⁸³

The stage was set for the founding of a new organization of confessional Lutherans. In June 1870 the Eastern District of the Ohio Synod in convention urged the Ohio Synod to take steps toward establishing cooperative activities with the Missouri Synod, particularly in educational institutions. That October Ohio's President Matthias Loy recommended to his synod "that steps be taken towards effecting a proper understanding between the Synods of Missouri, of Wisconsin, of Illinois, and our own Synod, which all occupy substantially the same position, and arranging a plan of cooperation in the work of the Lord."⁸⁴ The convention appointed a committee to approach the officers of the other synods and the Norwegian Synod to ask whether such joint work might be undertaken.

A preliminary meeting was held January 11-13, 1871, at a Missouri Synod church in Chicago. Representatives from the Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Norwegian Synods attended. The president of the Illinois Synod⁸⁵ was present but did not actively participate because his synod was still a member of the General Council. Meeting in six three-hour sessions the representatives drafted a constitution for consideration and adoption by their respective synods. The meeting was chaired by Walther.⁸⁶ They also considered a proposal to provide a single seminary for the various synods by moving Ohio's Columbus seminary to St. Louis as the Wisconsin Synod had recently done with its seminary program. Ohio was to move its college to Pittsburgh with Missouri's support and participation. The delegates scheduled a second preliminary meeting for November 14-16 and extended invitations to all pastors and teachers of the participating synods to attend.

When the November meeting convened at Pastor Wilhelm Sihler's (1801-1885) St. Paul's Church in Fort Wayne, representatives of the Minnesota and Illinois synods were also present. Both of these synods had recently left the General Council for confessional reasons. The proposed constitution with a few minor changes was to be presented to the constituent synods for approval as the basis for the formation of the Synodical Conference.

Prof. Friedrich Schmid[t] (1837-1928) of the Norwegian Synod presented a paper entitled, "Memorandum containing a Detailed Explanation of the Reasons Why the Synods that are Uniting into the Synodical Conference of the Ev. Lutheran Church Are Unable to Join One of the Already Existing so-called Associations of Synods in Our Country."⁸⁷ The paper stated that the General Synod holds tenaciously to the Lutheran name but in reality is completely devoid of the essence and character that corresponds to that name. Schmid noted that the United Synod, South, (founded in 1863 by six southern synods which left the General Synod during the Civil War) made an attempt to be more confessional than the General Synod, but had no interest whatsoever in the "exclusive Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord" or of the so-called "Old

⁸¹ Matthias Loy reports that these two men were "more pronounced in their Lutheranism than was usual in the Ohio Synod." Lehman and Spielmann both served at the Ohio Synod seminary in Columbus, Ohio. See Matthias Loy, *The Story of My Life*, (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), p 85.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p 211ff. Loy writes that he and Spielmann "leaned toward Missouriism" more than Lehmann. In fact, Loy was a friendly opponent of Lehmann, his former teacher, on many points.

⁸³ Schuetze, p 41-50.

⁸⁴ *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, edited Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966) p 186.

⁸⁵ The Illinois Synod was formed in 1846 when the Synod of the West divided. In 1848 Illinois joined the General Synod. In 1867 Illinois left the General Synod to join the General Council. In May 1880 the Illinois Synod merged with the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod.

⁸⁶ Schuetze, p 52-53.

⁸⁷ This was published under the title *Denkschrift enthaltend eine egehende Darlegung der Gruende, weshalb die zur Synodalkonferenz der evangel. -luther. Kirche von Nord-America* (Columbus, Ohio, 1871). The publication also included a brief history of events leading up to the 1871 meeting and the proposed constitution.

Lutherans." The General Council had a staunch, confessional leader in the person of Charles Porterfield Krauth and the Council's constitution committed itself without reservation to all of the Lutheran Confessions. Nevertheless, the Council had failed to take a decisive stand on the "Four Points." Schmid argued that there was a need for a new Lutheran organization, one that would be decidedly confessional in theory and in practice.

Conspicuous by its absence in the discussions leading to the founding of the Synodical Conference was the Iowa Synod. Longstanding animosities between Iowa and Missouri precluded Iowa's participation. As noted previously, the founders of the Iowa Synod had separated from the Missouri Synod over the doctrine of the church and ministry. Iowa also espoused an "historical" approach to the Lutheran Confessions. In the course of time Iowa's spokesmen contended that the only normative doctrinal statements in the confessions were those dealing with the doctrines which were in dispute at the time of the writing of those confessions. Other doctrinal statements were open to further development and refinement. Iowa claimed that there were doctrines of Scripture that were "open questions." Lutherans did not need to agree on these doctrine in order to join in expressions of church fellowship.⁸⁸ The founding members of the Synodical Conference strongly disagreed with Iowa's stand. Iowa's approach to the Lutheran Confessions and open questions would play a part in the various stages of the election controversy.

One of the purposes of the Synodical Conference was to try to eliminate problems between its member synods and their congregations. Such problems had occurred over the years because the various Lutheran synods had congregations in the same geographical areas. Members of one congregation at times joined the congregation of another synod for less than sanctified reasons. Congregations did not always honor the church discipline carried out by another synod's congregation. One aim of the Synodical Conference was "the endeavor to fix the limits of synods according to territorial boundaries" in order to deal more effectively with these inter-congregational problems. Another aim was "the consolidation of all Lutheran synods of America into a single, faithful, devout American Lutheran Church." At three of the earliest conventions of the Synodical Conference delegates considered "Theses about Parish Rights" (*Jus Parochiale*) which contended that parishes and congregations should have geographical boundaries and their own territory.⁸⁹

President Johann Sieker⁹⁰ (1839-1904) of the Minnesota Synod had been assigned a paper for the 1875 convention with the purpose of setting up rules for the merging of congregations existing in the same geographical area and determining their synodical affiliation.⁹¹ Because of the press of his duties Sieker was unable to carry out his assignment, but recommended to the 1875 convention that it might be time for the merging of the synods into state synods. The Conference established a committee to present proposals to the next convention to determine how this might be done. The committee concluded that the only way to eliminate the evils that existed among the rival German congregations was to merge all the German synods of the Synodical Conference into one church body. This body would divide itself into district or state synods.

The proposal was voted down because it was seen as impractical, obstructive, and not feasible. A resolution, however, was passed to "advise all our synods without delay to take steps to bring state synods into being, even if this does not happen everywhere at the same time, yet in any case where it can be done without difficulty, detriment, and disadvantage." A resolution also was passed to "to establish one joint seminary and place this under the control of the Synodical Conference." A final resolution stated, "Until the dissolution of the larger synodical bodies has taken place, it should be left up to the respective state synods whether they wished to join one of the existing general synods."

The reaction of the various synods was mixed. Wisconsin's resolutions on the state synod proposal provoked resentment and condemnation of the synod's actions by Missouri Synod representatives. Wisconsin

⁸⁸ Charles P. Arend, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995) p 119-149.

⁸⁹ Schuetze, p 77-79.

⁹⁰ Sieker had been trained at Gettysburg for service in the Wisconsin Synod. He served at Salem, Granville, 1861-1867. He accepted a call to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1867 and became President of the Minnesota Synod in 1869. He was instrumental in leading Minnesota out of the General Council and helped to found the Synodical Conference.

⁹¹ For a more extensive treatment of the State Synod Controversy see Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), p 77-90.

declared:

1. The synod endorses and heartily approves the original plan to unite all orthodox Lutherans within the Synodical Conference into individual, independent state synods.
2. The synod asserts that it is ready for such, an amalgamation into a state synod of Wisconsin as soon as the possibility is precluded that this state synod might as a district attach itself to an existing synod and thereby lose its separate identity and independence.
3. The synod asserts that it cannot view any such attachment to an existing general synod either as commanded in God's Word or as essentially necessary for true unity and profitable and advantageous for our congregations.⁹²

A final resolution turned down the proposal for establishing a joint seminary and committed Wisconsin to re-open its own seminary. The synod believed that it was losing candidates for the ministry because there was no opportunity for training them in Wisconsin. The synod re-opened its own seminary in Milwaukee in 1878. From 1869 to 1878 Walther and his colleagues at St. Louis trained a number of future pastors for the Wisconsin synod. Twenty Wisconsin Synod students were graduated from Concordia during the years of the worker training accord.⁹³ Among these graduates were three who would play an important role in the future of the Wisconsin Synod—J. P. Koehler (1859-1951), August Pieper (1857-1946), and John Schaller (1859-1920). The men trained by Walther "brought with them into the Wisconsin Synod a large measure of Walther's theology and spirit and friendship for Missouri."⁹⁴ When Wisconsin reopened its seminary in Milwaukee in 1878, August L. Graebner (1849-1904) and Eugen Notz (1847-1903) joined Hoenecke on the faculty. Both of these men had been trained by Walther.⁹⁵

Bading and Hoenecke had led the opposition to the state synod plan because they were concerned that the Wisconsin Synod would merely become a district of the Missouri Synod and lose its identity and independence. Subsequent history has demonstrated the wisdom of having independent synods rather than a mega-synod.

Walther and the Missourians were irate when they heard of Wisconsin's resolutions. They viewed Wisconsin's actions as a slap in the face. Some Missourians suggested that recognition of unity in doctrine and practice must ultimately lead to merger and that Wisconsin's resolutions gave them impression that there was doctrinal disunity or that there was something wrong with the Missouri Synod. Walther called the reason for Wisconsin's resolution *widergoettlich* (antigodly). He stated that the resolution was prompted by antipathy toward the Missouri Synod. A St. Louis pastor accused Wisconsin of "ingratitude toward the Missouri Synod, which, as a matter of fact, has pulled it out of the unionistic morass," although Walther quickly disavowed that statement.⁹⁶

Even though there were more efforts within the Synodical Conference to proceed with the state synod plan, within a few years the project was dead. A bigger controversy involving the doctrine of election began to tear the Synodical Conference apart. Whereas the State Synod Controversy had caused hard feelings between Missouri and Wisconsin, the Election Controversy brought the two synods closer together.

Why did Wisconsin ultimately decline to participate in the state synod project? The centennial history, *Continuing in His Word*, offers this explanation:

It is sometimes said that Wisconsin rejected the idea of state synods. That was not the case. Our fathers favored the plan as such, but insisted that these state synods must remain synods and not be reduced to the level of districts. The reason is evident. Our fathers were afraid of bigness; they realized that bigness

⁹² *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1877, p 41-42. *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1877, p. 17.

⁹³ Im. P. Frey. "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 60 #3 (July 1963), p 200.

⁹⁴ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," in *The Wauwatosa Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) vol. III, p 278.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 281.

⁹⁶ Koehler, p 148. Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, p 82-87. 1877 *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, p 16-30. 1877 *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, p 37-41. 1878 *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, p 33-41.

easily leads to domineering. Bigness, in which the importance of the individual member decreases in proportion to the size of the body, in which open deliberations are reduced of necessity and the work becomes departmentalized and mechanized, almost inevitably leads to create a mentality of rulers and subordinates. This is not the spirit of the Church in which all members are brothers. The idea of state synods was lost, but our Wisconsin fathers were not guilty of scuttling it.⁹⁷

The men in Wisconsin were not blind followers or sycophants of Walther. They understood the difference between doctrinal unity and unity in outward organization. They did not hesitate to express their wishes or to go against Walther when they deemed it appropriate.

No sooner had the State Synod Controversy drawn to a close when a more serious controversy on the doctrine of election tore at the fabric of the Synodical Conference.⁹⁸ At the heart of the Election Controversy was the perennial problem of why some are saved and not others. Sinful human reason either tries to blame God for those who are lost (double predestination) or tries to give human beings some credit for their own salvation (synergism or semi-pelagianism). Article XI of the Formula of Concord rejects both the teaching that God predestines some to eternal damnation and the teaching that there is a cause in us of God's election. Nevertheless some dogmaticians in the Age of Orthodoxy began to use the expression that God elects *intuitu fidei*, in view of foreseen faith.

In the early 1870s controversial articles on the subject began to appear in Lutheran periodicals pitting Gottfried Fritschel (1836-1889) of the Iowa Synod against Walther of the Missouri Synod. About the same time a debate about a related doctrine, objective or universal justification, resulted in the presentation of Schmid's "Theses on Justification" at the first convention of the Synodical Conference.

For a number of years Walther had been reading essays before the conventions of the Western District of the Missouri Synod on the general topic: "The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God—an Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine is the Only True Doctrine." At the Altenburg, Missouri, convention in 1877, he discussed the doctrine of predestination on the basis of the Formula of Concord. In the essay Walther rejected the use of the terminology that God elected "in view of faith." The 1878 convention of the Synodical Conference gave official approval of the doctrinal contents of the Western District Report including Walther's essay.

Opposition to what Walther had written soon mounted. Friedrich Schmid⁹⁹ of the Norwegian Synod on January 2, 1879, presented to Walther his objections to the Report of 1877, stating at the same time: "I can no longer go with you...I dare no longer keep silence." Attempts at reconciliation were of no avail. In January, 1880, Schmid began publishing, *Altes and Neues*, a monthly periodical, in which he attacked Walther, even though the Synodical Conference had a policy against such public attacks between members.

Schmid was supported by his brother-in-law, Henry Allwardt (1840-1910) and Frederick Stellhorn,¹⁰⁰ both of the Missouri Synod. The Ohio Synod joined in opposition to Walther as did a minority of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and theologians. In 1881 Ohio left the Synodical Conference. Fourteen pastors then

⁹⁷ *Continuing in His Word*, p 77.

⁹⁸ For an overview of the Election Controversy see Schuetze, p 91-112; Fredrich, p 59-61; Koehler, p 157-161.

⁹⁹ Schmid had been raised in the Missouri Synod, studied under Walther in St. Louis, and served with Walther in St. Louis as the Norwegian Synod's professor at the seminary. He had also defended Walther's teaching of election when Fritschel had written against it.

¹⁰⁰ Stellhorn was Missouri's professor at Northwestern. In the early to mid 1870s Stellhorn made public his doctrine of conversion, which was mildly synergistic, at a meeting of the Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod in Watertown. Koehler relates this anecdote: "For some reason Hoenecke was also at Watertown and at Ernst's instance attended the Missouri conference. Ernst very likely had knowledge of Stellhorn's tenets and at once entered the debate, trying to meet the essayist's arguments on his own philosophical ground: for that very reason without success. Then Hoenecke asked for the floor and in his trenchant way showed in short order that the approach was all wrong. The Missouri conference at once decided to make Hoenecke its spokesman, and in the ensuing debate between him and the latter, by Hoenecke's animated gestures, was backed up against the wall of the church, where he sat down and admitted defeat. Strassen and Wambsganns, who told the story at different times, independently of each other, concluded with the statement that the conference at this point heaved a sigh of relief and satisfaction." Koehler, p 158. The doctrine of conversion was one of the related articles in dispute in the election controversy.

left Ohio and joined Missouri, while eleven pastors left Missouri to join Ohio. Even though the majority of the Norwegian Synod supported Walther's position, the Norwegian Synod withdrew its membership in the Synodical Conference in 1883, but did not withdraw from its fellowship. The Norwegians hoped that this step would make a settlement of differences with Professor Schmidt and his followers easier. In 1887 Schmidt and about a third of the Norwegian pastors left the synod to form a new group which eventually became known as the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood.¹⁰¹

The Wisconsin Synod, under the guidance of Professors Hoenecke, August Graebner (1849-1904) and President Bading, consistently stood with Walther and the Missouri Synod. Minnesota stood with Wisconsin. Hoenecke supplied articles on the doctrine of election and the issues in controversy for the Wisconsin Synod's periodical, *Gemeinde-Blatt*.¹⁰² Pieper gives us this insight into Hoenecke's attitude in the controversy:

Privately he (i.e., Hoenecke) declared: Walther's teaching is not Walther's, but the teaching of the Scriptures, of Paul, of Luther, and of the Formula of Concord. The second way (*tropos*) of presenting the doctrine (i.e., election *intuitu fidei*), however, is a dogmatic derailment. Walther, in his zeal, let slip several sentences that said too much, and they will have to be set straight. But Walther stands directly on Scripture, and his opponents are mired in reason. With him we stand on Scripture. Several Missourians are hard to bear, but on the score of theology we are of one flesh and blood with Walther. Therefore there can be no talk of separating from Missouri. He persuaded Walther to make a public correction of his dubious sentences, and he kept our synod on the right track, although a small number of men—they were never really one with us—deserted us. Humanly speaking, our synod might well have been torn apart if Hoenecke's theology—not outwardly dazzling, but strong because it was Lutheran to the core—had not held us together.¹⁰³

Wisconsin's 1879 pastoral conference raised some concerns about certain statements in Missouri writings and eventually received an explanation. In February 1881 Walther, to his credit, retracted some of the statements in the 1877 essay because the wording was misleading and could be misunderstood.¹⁰⁴ The retraction was made at the urging of Hoenecke and others. About the same time Walther expressed his joy that the Wisconsin Synod was standing together with Missouri in the controversy. He wrote, "Praise God! We Missourians do not stand in this fight alone! The Wisconsin Synod, in the theologians of its faculty and in its many able members, stands at our side."¹⁰⁵ Some in Iowa accused Wisconsin of merely aping Missouri because "they like to be guided by the Missourians."¹⁰⁶

During the week of June 8-15, 1882, the Wisconsin and Minnesota synodical conventions were held simultaneously in La Crosse. The two synods joined their sessions when doctrinal discussions were on the agenda. Professor Graebner presented his "Theses on Conversion." His second thesis dealt with the cause of conversion and thus brought election into the discussion. Professor Hoenecke supplied "a brief but thorough presentation" of the Bible's teaching on election, ascribing it alone to God's mercy and Christ's merits without any human contribution, whether foreseen faith or anything else.¹⁰⁷ A Minnesota spokesman made a brief

¹⁰¹ In 1890 the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood became part of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.

¹⁰² E.g., Volume 13 #9 (January 1, 1878) "If Only God Can and Must Convert Men, and Does So Without Man's Cooperation, Then Why Do So Many Men Remain Unconverted?" Volume 15 #16 (April 15, 1880) "Regarding the Doctrine of Election." Translations of these two articles are in "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference and an Appendix of Translated Articles," by Jonathan Schroeder. *WELS Historical Institute Journal*. Vol. 17 #2 (October 1999), p 25-31.

¹⁰³ Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," p 417-418.

¹⁰⁴ Walther's correction is entitled, "*Sententiam teneat, linguam corrigat*," *Lehre and Wehre*, vol. 37 #3 (15 February 1881). He corrected his language in three areas: that there are no conditions in God; that those who are lost perish because their perdition is foreseen by God; that the elect receive a richer grace. See Schroeder, p 19.

¹⁰⁵ C. F. W. Walther, "*Das Colloquium*," *Der Lutheraner*. vol. 37 #2 (January 15, 1881) p 1. The English translation of this quote is in Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p 18.

¹⁰⁶ A. L. Graebner offered a rebuttal to this opinion expressed in Iowa's *Kirchenzeitung* in the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, vol. 17 #8 (December 15, 1881), p 62. See Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p 21.

¹⁰⁷ Graebner's essay, "*Thesen ueber die Bekehrung*," is printed in the 1882 Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings*. Hoenecke's brief explanation of election is recorded' on p 33-34 of the *Proceedings*. For an English translation of Hoenecke's explanation see

presentation in support of Graebner and Hoenecke.

In a subsequent session those attending the convention were polled to determine where they stood in the controversy. The Wisconsin Synod eventually lost nine men and about eight congregations. The Minnesota Synod lost three men and three congregations.

Leadership provided by Hoenecke and Bading held the synod together and kept Wisconsin with the Missouri Synod in confession of the truth. Others recognized the leadership qualities of Bading. He was elected president of the Synodical Conference in 1882 and had to preside over the sessions that barred Prof. Schmid from being seated as a delegate.¹⁰⁸

Walther, however, was the main combatant in the controversy. His "Thirteen Theses" on election held the Missouri Synod together and also kept the faithful in the Synodical Conference.¹⁰⁹ Walther's 1884 Synodical Conference essay, "Church Fathers and Doctrine," is a clear exposition of the necessity of basing everything on Scripture.¹¹⁰ Although Wisconsin's Wauwatosa theologians later often pointed out Walther's over-dependence on Luther and the orthodox dogmatists of the 17th century, they could not object to Walther's approach to doctrine as stated in this essay and, in fact, recognized it as Luther's and their own.

Although the Election Controversy was bitter and split the Synodical Conference, it served to strengthen the bonds between the remaining members of the conference. Wisconsin and Missouri drew closer together. The controversy forced these synods into a thorough study of Scripture and they emerged stronger for the experience. For decades to come the member synods spoke with one voice and were able to lend their support to struggling groups of confessional Lutherans not only in this country but in other parts of the world as well.

The continuing fellowship with Walther and the Missouri Synod and participation in the Synodical Conference proved to be a great blessing for the Wisconsin Synod. Walther promoted a Lutheran elementary school system that was second to none in the United States and a system which trained the majority of Missouri's pastors from elementary school through high school, college, and the seminary.¹¹¹ Under his influence a ministerial education system was developed in the Missouri Synod that produced pastors who labored in the tireless, selfless manner of Walther, imbued with a love for pure doctrine *and* the spreading of the gospel. Several Wisconsin Synod pastors received their training from Walther in St. Louis. Other Missouri Synod pastors received calls into the Wisconsin Synod and brought Walther's influence and spirit with them. Prof. Fredrich once remarked in this writer's hearing that one of the real gifts of the Missouri Synod was that it demonstrated that a truly confessional, orthodox Lutheran synod could also be truly mission minded. Walther's *Lehre and Wehre* became the primary theological journal read by pastors in our synod until the establishment of the *Quartalschrift* in 1903. The constitution for Walther's St. Louis congregation was "taken over in substance by almost all Missouri and most Wisconsin Synod congregations."¹¹²

Walther's influence on our synod from 1868 until his death in 1887 is immense. August Pieper, a student of Walther's and an outspoken Wisconsin Synod theologian and leader, writes,

We have that one man, Walther, to thank for the greater share by far of all that we have.¹¹³

As a spirit-filled witness of God's grace toward poor sinners, as an immovable confessor of God's pure truth, and as an indefatigable, self-denying worker, Walther created what we have today (1923) in the

Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p 34-36.

¹⁰⁸ Edward C. Fredrich. "Bading and the Formative Presidency of the Wisconsin Synod." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 72, #2 (April 1975), p 125.

¹⁰⁹ Walther's Thirteen Theses were adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1881 (*1881 Missouri Synod Proceedings*, p 33-35) and the Synodical Conference in 1882 (*1882 Synodical Conference Proceedings*, p 23,25). An English translation of these theses can be found in *Moving Frontiers*, by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964) p 272-273.

¹¹⁰ *1884 Synodical Conference Proceedings*, p 5-75. For an English translation of this essay see C.F.W. Walther, *Essays for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), p 67-101.

¹¹¹ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," p 242.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p 270.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p 233.

Synodical Conference and all that has come out of it.¹¹⁴

Few great men in the church have with greater power and success than he created a following. The people he attracted from outside Missouri--the Franconians and Hanoverians, the Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin synods and others—all fell under the spell of his gospel, the spirit of his testimony and his sanctified personality. Whoever came into personal contact with him had to take a liking to him and involuntarily looked up to him. The longer one knew him, the greater was one's respect for him. The others were all directly or indirectly his students. Three years in St. Louis were enough to make one a Waltherian in doctrine and love.¹¹⁵

Humanly speaking, however, all of Walther's contributions to our synod might never have happened if it had not been for Adolph Hoenecke. Pieper observes,

He [Walther] made a greater impact on our synod's coming to a state of sound health than the great majority of us are inclined to admit. Not until these two men became acquainted and discussed matters with each other did the mutual recognition between Missouri and Wisconsin become possible and actual.

But this recognition, humanly speaking, would never have come about if Hoenecke had been of the same natural temperament as Walther. We know Walther never achieved peace with the doctrinal leaders of the Iowa Synod, even though he defeated them in every controverted point. He had cut personal wounds so deep that they were not able to bite down the pain. The Wisconsin Synod as well often felt the sword of Walther to be much too sharp, and none of our older leaders ever got over the painful memory. A number of times Hoenecke rejected Walther's criticisms as unjustified. But there were two factors that finally brought about agreement: the actual basic unity of both men in their Lutheranism, and the objective, quiet, discreet way Hoenecke had of doing battle. He was deeply conscious of his youthfulness, and he sensed that he still had not fully worked his way through biblical doctrine. As a result, he met the battle-tested champion with becoming modesty, and he opposed Walther more with a shield than with the sword. In his natural temperament, Hoenecke was neither a conqueror, nor a leader of assault troops, nor a fiery champion, but simply an unrelenting defender of the Lutheran fortress against every attacker.¹¹⁶

Wisconsin Synod scholars have never been shy in pointing out Walther's weaknesses. Koehler recognizes Walther's deficiencies in being dependent too much on the 17th century Lutheran dogmatists.¹¹⁷ Pieper states that students found Walther's dogmatics courses to be tedious. His pastoral theology courses, Luther hours, and conference essays were much better.¹¹⁸ The Wisconsin Synod did not go along with Walther's applications in the areas of geographical church boundaries, usury, dancing, theater attendance, life insurance, and in-law marriage.¹¹⁹

Walther's influence on the Wisconsin Synod increased greatly during this period as fellowship between the two synods was declared and the Synodical Conference was established. Besides the pastors Walther trained for our synod his theological leadership, example, writings, and theological journal helped solidify our synod's confessional stand. The State Synod controversy and the Election Controversy, however, both demonstrate that the Wisconsin Synod did not blindly follow the great Missouri leader. The Wisconsin Synod always maintained independence in thought and action.

1887-the Present

Walther's impact continues to be seen and felt to this very day. The Wisconsin Synod would owe him a debt of gratitude if the only thing he ever did was give his thirty-nine evening lectures on the proper distinction

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 240.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 245-246.

¹¹⁶ Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke ..." p 378-379.

¹¹⁷ Koehler, p 153, 215.

¹¹⁸ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," p 237-238. Pieper is more sympathetic to Walther's opinions in some of these things than later WELS theologians have been.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 257-259.

between the law and gospel (published posthumously from shorthand notes of students, German edition in 1897, first English edition in 1929). This volume is one of the greatest theological works produced by a Lutheran theologian in America. Since its publication it has found a spot on the bookshelf of nearly every pastor of the Wisconsin Synod and has been studied and praised even by many outside the former Synodical Conference. Dr. Siegbert Becker suggested to this essayist's class that every Lutheran pastor ought to read through this volume once a year for his first ten years in the ministry. Students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary continue to be encouraged to read and study it today. Pastoral Conferences and pastoral study clubs frequently choose it for study and discussion.

Walther's writings on church and ministry are foundational for confessional Lutheranism in America today. Prof. August Pieper and Prof. Carl Lawrenz both wrote lengthy essays on Walther's work. Those in our synod who have made a careful study of Walther's writings do not believe that there is a difference between Walther and our synod on these important teachings.

The standards set for faithfulness to the doctrines of Scripture in the Synodical Conference under the leadership of Walther continue to be the standards of the Wisconsin Synod today.

What was Walther's influence on the Wisconsin Synod? What debt of gratitude do we owe him? This essay has attempted to show that prior to the Wisconsin/Missouri Colloquy of 1868 Walther's influence on our synod was mostly indirect and often negative. Our forefathers chafed under his accusations and often resented them. Some recognized that there was some truth in what Walther was saying. By the end of the first decade of the synod's existence the confessional leaders in our synod had moved their church body in an ever more confessional direction. Confessionalism on paper led to confessionalism in practice. After 1868 Walther's influence in our synod grew dramatically. Nevertheless a careful examination of our history reveals that our synod never followed Walther blindly.

In considering Walther's influence on the development of the Wisconsin Synod and the consequent debt our synod owes to him, some have overestimated his influence and some have underestimated his influence. It is easy to overestimate his influence for several reasons:

- The European mission societies implied the Wisconsin Synod was turning its back on them for the sake of new friends.
- Some in the Missouri Synod have attributed the growth in confessionalism in Wisconsin to the direct influence of Walther and his synod.
- In the Election Controversy some in Ohio and Iowa accused the Wisconsin Synod of simply parroting Walther. Walther was an internationally known scholar and Lutheran leader. The Wisconsin Synod had no leader with a comparable reputation.
- Some fail to recognize the individualism and independence over against Walther in the State Synod Controversy, the Election Controversy, and in certain applications Walther made to Christian life and the life of the church.
- Because the Missouri Synod has always been several times the size of the Wisconsin Synod, it has been easy for some to assume that little Wisconsin always followed the lead of Missouri and her leading theologian.
- In the late 19th and first five decades of the 20th century, the Wisconsin Synod was often willing to let Missouri take the lead in mission work and expansion.

Why would anyone underestimate Walther's influence? Perhaps some react negatively to those who imply that the Wisconsin Synod blindly followed Walther. Perhaps we have displayed a misplaced synodical pride from time to time, not wanting to recognize the debt we owe to another man and his synod.

We need to avoid both extremes. In doing so we can acknowledge that we owe a debt of thanks to the great Missouri Synod leader while recognizing that his comments about our synod were not always accurate or helpful. And we can honor his memory by imitating his love for Scripture and pure doctrine, his love for the

gospel and desire to proclaim it to others, and by striving to maintain the proper distinction between the law and gospel in all of our teaching, preaching, counseling and pastoral work. As the Scriptures encourage, "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).