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Lehre und Wehre 1855–1930

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ARCHIVES

The Story of *Lehre und Wehre*

By WILLIAM F. ARNDT

HAVING in 1947 observed the centennial of our dear Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, we can in 1955 recall that 100 years have elapsed since *Lehre und Wehre*, our first theological journal, was called into being. As all students of American Lutheran church history know, *Lehre und Wehre* was not the first paper or journal published by our church. That honor goes to *Der Lutheraner*, which C. F. W. Walther, supported by several other pastors in Missouri and Illinois and by his congregation, founded in 1844. If anything required faith and courage, it was the issuing of this biweekly, because for its support only the most meager resources were available and there was no reason to anticipate that it would receive a wide welcome. Its watchword, "God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure shall now and evermore endure," was, as the history of the times amply shows, far from promising to capture the *aura popularis*. The paper, however, was able to maintain itself, and its undaunted testimony for the old truth won for it many friends beyond St. Louis and vicinity. When the Missouri Synod was founded, it adopted this paper as its official organ. (Cf. the first Synodical Report, pp. 7 f.)

Through God's grace the Synod grew, and before long the need of a more technical, scholarly journal was making itself felt. At the convention in Cleveland in 1853, that is, when the new body was six years old, it was resolved that such a publication should be founded and that it should appear monthly. (Cf. Report of the Seventh Convention, p. 272, in the collection containing the second edition of the Synodical Reports, dated 1876.) The resolution reads: "Besides *Der Lutheraner*, which, as in the past, appears every 14 days and whose style is to be made still more popular so that the average reader can understand it without difficulty, a monthly journal is to be issued for preachers and such members of the laity as are able to benefit from articles written in a more scholarly style." A note adds, "For the first the editorship of this journal will be entrusted to Pastors Brohm and Hoyer." Pastor

Theo. Brohm at that time served a congregation in New York City, and Pastor A. Hoyer, one in Philadelphia. When Synod met in St. Louis in 1854, the distressing fact had to be reported that nothing had been done to carry out the resolution of the preceding year pertaining to the new journal. No reason is given. One can well understand, however, that for busy pastors, living far away from the center of Synod and, besides, not residing in the same city, it was difficult to inaugurate so exacting an undertaking as the publication of a theological magazine. In the minutes of the 1854 convention (op. cit., p. 286) we find this paragraph: "The publication of a theological journal, which is to appear monthly and had been considered and resolved upon at last year's meeting, was made again a matter of discussion by Professor Walther, and the urgent need of it was demonstrated. As a result it was suggested that Professor Walther should be made the editor of this theological journal and Dr. William Sihler the editor of *Der Lutheraner*." After this important topic had been considered repeatedly and from various angles, the resolution was adopted that Professor Walther should be entrusted with the editorship of the theological journal, and that for the first he should retain the position of editor of *Der Lutheraner*, and that in case Pastor Hoyer should be elected as director of the college (gymnasium) in St. Louis and should accept the call, he should be requested to take over the editorship of *Der Lutheraner*. On this occasion the wish was expressed that other members of Synod should as much as possible assist in furnishing material for *Der Lutheraner*. This is interesting and in a manner amazing. Walther was overburdened with work, and still, when a new difficult task had to be essayed, it was his willing shoulders on which the burden was placed. What a mighty instrument for good the Lord had bestowed on the church!

At the same convention Synod resolved, as is hinted at in the paragraph just quoted, to call a new professor for the college who should be the director of that department of the St. Louis institution and assist in the Seminary, too (ibid., p. 287). Walther, who was a member of the electoral college, in a letter dated September 6, 1854, and addressed to Pastor Ferdinand Sievers, evidently the chairman or secretary of the electoral committee, states that he

still casts his vote for Pastor Hoyer. Apparently there had been a previous vote. Why the matter had not been decided at that time we have no means of knowing. (Cf. *Walthers Briefe*, ed. L. E. Fuerbringer, I, 92 f.) Another letter, dated December 12, 1854 (*ibid.*, p. 93), contains the news that Pastor Hoyer was elected and that he declined the call, which makes Walther write: "Unfortunately this delays the appearance of the projected preachers' magazine." It is evident that Pastor Hoyer was thought to possess the literary and spiritual qualifications that were required. But in spite of the pessimistic tone of Walther's letter the new journal actually was launched in 1855. In a prospectus which appeared in *Der Lutheraner* of January 16, 1855, and announced that in that very month the journal was to appear, he wrote: "It is true that Synod has given the present editor of *Der Lutheraner* the permission to defer the publication of the theological journal till a director of the college has been chosen and has begun his activities. But there are three reasons which, after conferring with venerable President of Synod and several other brethren, have induced us to begin in God's name the undertaking as early as this month. In the first place, several of our worthy co-workers have sent us so many contributions that the first two numbers have been almost completely provided for. Among these contributions there is an essay which discusses what today is a burning question and which ought to be published at the present time. It is a review of J. F. Wucherer's treatise on the holy ministry. [This article, we might remark in passing, had been written by Walther's brother-in-law, Pastor Ottomar Fuerbringer.] In the second place it seems that it may take a long time before the position of director at our college can be filled, and in the meantime there becomes ever more evident our need of a journal in which articles may appear which cannot be published in *Der Lutheraner*, since the latter is intended for the general public and, if published in *Der Lutheraner*, would not properly serve a large section of its readers. And finally the beginning of a new year appears to us as an especially suitable date for the launching of a new journal of which we should not like to fail to avail ourselves." In the same prospectus Walther served notice that the new journal was not to be a scientific open forum of theological views where anybody who had an idea to present,

whether it was Scriptural or not, could get a hearing. He writes: "The journal is not to be a friend of the church, but a servant of the church. It is to take a position not above or alongside, but in and under, the church. It will not serve as a sort of arena for those whose aim is to attack the church of the true doctrine and its sacred institutions and who—while they cannot destroy these foundations, for even the gates of hell cannot do this, let alone the bellowing of would-be-wise men—will at least try to damage and to shake them." All this is highly significant. While many theological journals are free lances, as it were, being entirely without church control, this magazine was to have a different nature. It was to belong to Synod, and the teachings which it was to set forth were to be those of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.

As to the editorship of the journal the minutes of the convention of 1860 (cf. the official report, p. 74) contain an interesting item informing us that pursuant to a motion of the

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word was signed by Walther and Lange. A footnote states that Conrector Schick had declined to accept the appointment mentioned but had promised to serve as an unofficial contributor to the extent of his ability. Whether the resolution of Synod in 1860 to separate the college department from the Seminary and to remove the former to Fort Wayne while the so-called Practical Seminary was to be removed from Fort Wayne to St. Louis had anything to do with Conrector Schick's negative decision we are unable to say.

Before the first decade of the journal's history came to its close, another important decision as to the editorship took place. At the convention of 1864 the question was debated whether Walther should edit *Der Lutheraner* or *Lehre und Wehre* or both. A pastoral conference had recommended that the editorship of *Der Lutheraner* should remain in his hands and that as to *Lehre und Wehre* the "Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches" (that is, the area of current events in the religious field) should be distributed in such a way that Professor Lange would report on news contained in the English journals of our country, Dr. William Sihler and Pastor Philipp

Fleischmann on matters found in German-American papers, and Professor E. A. Brauer on developments mentioned in journals published abroad. As to the articles in *Lehre und Wehre*, the gross of them was to be the material which Walther submitted to his seminary students in his course on pastoral theology (later on published in book form). This recommendation was adopted by Synod, with the proviso that the decision as to the publication which Walther was to edit was to be left to him and to the St. Louis Pastoral Conference. A note in the minutes of the 1866 convention shows that Walther, undoubtedly with the approval of the conference, chose to edit *Der Lutheraner*. When Professor Brauer at the latter convention presented the petition that the editorship of *Lehre und Wehre* again be placed into the hands of Walther, Synod resolved not to change the *status quo* ("es beim alten zu lassen").

It may be proper to pause here for a minute, after a decade of the journal's existence has been looked at, and to inquire what impression these early volumes made on an interested reader in 1865. In our opinion no Lutheran theologian who loves his church will deny, after a cursory perusal of what these volumes offer, that the articles manifest a remarkable, pleasing freshness and forthrightness in their presentation; furthermore, that they are marked by kindling warmth as well as genuine scholarliness. One finds here discussions of the church and of the office of the holy ministry — topics which were much debated in those years. Since Rome in 1854 had promulgated its dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary, several articles were directed against its Antichristian pretensions. An article of profound importance was Walther's examination of the question whether the rejection of one of the antilegomena makes a person a heretic or a dangerous false teacher, having been occasioned by Pastor Roebbelen's declaration in the conclusion of a series of articles in *Der Lutheraner* on the Apocalypse that he himself, following Luther, considered this book uncanonical. The foreword for Vol. VIII (1862) closes with the statement that the journal considers its warfare on the false deistic and atheistic humanism and philanthropism as the salient point in its program for the year. Let no one think that the fathers were lacking in keenness of observation with reference to the world about them.

Quite often Walther as editor speaks of the charge of reprinting, of merely reproducing the opinions of men who lived long ago, as raised against the journal and the theology it professed. He and his associates were not ashamed of having this accusation hurled at them. Frankly he called himself merely a humble student of the great reformer Luther, and without hesitation he admitted that he held in great reverence a dogmatician like Johann Gerhard. He quoted Luther and his chief followers in the remote past so extensively not only on account of the intrinsic merit of their writings but also in order to demonstrate to all seekers of the truth what really constitutes genuine Lutheranism. We might mention, by the way, that in his insistent call, "Back to Luther!" he may be said to have anticipated the Luther renaissance in Germany and elsewhere, which has been productive of great blessings.

In the second decade, 1865—1874, if we interpret correctly the synodical resolution of 1866 quoted above, the editorship of *Lehre und Wehre* was not the sole responsibility of Walther, but was at least in part shared by the brethren there mentioned. By and by the editorship was simply given to the faculty of the Seminary of St. Louis, which selected one of its members to serve as managing editor. It was an important era, for in it fell the colloquies with Buffalo and Iowa and the formation of the General Council and of the Synodical Conference. Accordingly, the topics that were discussed in the articles, especially those written by Walther himself, had to do largely with the subject of open questions and the nature and distinction of fundamental and nonfundamental doctrines. The reader of these articles cannot fail to see that Walther and his associates, though constantly insisting on orthodoxy, were by no means fanatics, but stood for genuine Scriptural ecumenicity. It was this spirit, fostered both in the Missouri Synod and in several other Lutheran bodies, which led to the establishment of the Synodical Conference in 1872.

In the decade 1875—1884 arose the severest controversy which our church body has experienced, the clash on the doctrine of election and conversion. Whoever wishes to obtain an adequate picture of the soul-stirring discussions of that period ought to read the respective volumes of *Lehre und Wehre*. The articles took on such great length that the size of the journal had to be considerably

increased. There appeared in the arena, in addition to Walther himself, who continued to furnish truly important articles, new writers of striking ability, of whom we must mention George Stoeckhardt and Francis Pieper. It has been asserted that the exegetical articles of the former on the Scripture passages whose scope and teaching were debated, especially Rom. 8:28-30, were a strong factor in keeping the Missouri Synod united in its testimony, officially expressed in the theses on predestination adopted in 1881, which had been drafted by Walther.

The decade extending from 1885—1894 saw the homegoing of the great leader Walther (May 7, 1887). The members of the St. Louis faculty, which after the death of Walther and J. M. G. Schaller (the latter likewise died in 1887) consisted of Martin Guenther, Lange, Pieper, Stoeckhardt, A. L. Graebner, and since 1893 of L. E. Fuerbringer, nobly continued the editing of *Lehre und Wehre*. A notable contribution of this period was the series of articles on *Walther als Theologe* by F. Pieper, president of the Seminary. It will not be necessary to speak of the following decades in particular. It must suffice to state that the spirit of Walther was constantly in evidence. The managing editorship for several decades was in the hands of G. Fr. Bente, favorably known for his live, incisive style.

Meanwhile several other journals of a professional nature made their appearance. In 1878 the *Magazin für Ev.-Luth. Homiletik* was taken over by Synod and the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis appointed as editors. The journal had been founded the year before (cf. the synodical report for 1878, p. 58). In 1881 the *St. Louis Theological Monthly* was accepted by Synod as its journal. Professor Lange, who had been the editor since the inception of the publication in 1880, was appointed by Synod to continue in this capacity. The journal had a very brief existence; after 1882 it ceased to appear. Perhaps the coming of the *Lutheran Witness* made it apparent that under conditions as they prevailed at that time this journal was not needed.

In 1897 the *Theological Quarterly* was begun. It was edited by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, and its managing editor was Dr. A. L. Graebner, whose able and prolific pen had to furnish most of the articles till the time when he was stricken by illness

in 1903 (his death occurred in 1904). The editorial management, after a short interval, fell to the lot of Dr. W. H. T. Dau, who in 1905 had become a member of the St. Louis faculty. This journal in 1921 was changed into the *Theological Monthly*. In compliance with the resolution of Synod in 1929 the three journals *Lehre und Wehre*, *Magazin für Ev.-Luth. Homiletik* (with its English adjunct, the *Homiletic Magazine*), and the *Theological Monthly* were merged in the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, which began its career in January 1930, being edited by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Our narrative shows that *Lehre und Wehre* ceased to exist as an independent journal in December 1929. But it is the devout hope of all faithful members of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod that in spite of the prevailing relativism, pragmatism, skepticism, and modernism the spirit of loyalty to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions which gave birth to the journal in 1855 will continue to live and vigorously manifest itself in the present vehicle as long as it pleases God to let it exist. *Soli Deo gloria!*

St. Louis, Mo.