

Concordia Theological Quarterly



Volume 77:1-2

January/April 2013

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The Reception of Walther's Theology in the Wisconsin Synod

Mark E. Braun

The year 2003 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Johannes Muehlhaeuser, founder of Grace Lutheran congregation in Milwaukee and chief organizer and first president of the Wisconsin Synod. He had arrived in Rochester, New York, in 1837 and was received into the ministerium of the General Synod, where he served for ten years until relocating at Milwaukee in 1848. On May 26, 1850, in Town Granville, northwest of Milwaukee, Muehlhaeuser and four other Lutheran pastors formed *Das Deutsche Evangelium Ministerium von Wisconsin*. He served as Synod president for the next decade and remained pastor at Grace Church on the corner of Broadway and Juneau Avenues until his death in 1867.¹

To the best of my knowledge, no periodical, theological journal, news release, celebratory gathering or reverential festschrift of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has marked the bicentennial of Muehlhaeuser's birth. But no one in the Wisconsin Synod would fault the LCMS for that, because scarcely anyone in the Wisconsin noted that anniversary either. In fact, few Wisconsin Synod members have even heard of Muehlhaeuser. There is no Muehlhaeuser Memorial Lutheran Church in the Wisconsin Synod. There is no legacy of young people joining the national Muehlhaeuser League during their teenage years. There is no enterprising merchandiser offering for sale eight-inch-high statuettes of Johannes Muehlhaeuser, suitable for display on one's study desk or attachment to one's dashboard. And no Wisconsin Synod pastor would ever ask, concerning any theological question, "What Would Muehlhaeuser Do?"

By contrast, it comes as no surprise that the Wisconsin Synod also observed the 200th anniversary of the birth of C.F.W. Walther,² nor is it surprising that Wisconsin has praised Walther's theology and sought to

¹ See Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 4–8; Mark E. Braun, "Faith of our Fathers," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 74 (Winter 2002): 198–218.

² John F. Brug, "Foreword to Volume 108: Where There Is No Love, Doctrine Cannot Remain Pure," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108 (Winter 2011): 9.

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emulate it. In 1887, Wisconsin's *Gemeinde-Blatt* began a long obituary, extending over two issues, by saying, "On May 7 of this year a man was called out of this life who in American Lutheranism has had no equal and whose work, greatly blessed by God, will bear more blessed fruit for many years to come as long as this Lutheranism survives." On the 100th anniversary of Walther's death, Wisconsin's Northwestern Lutheran observed that the obituary had stood up remarkably well. The intervening century had produced no peer to Walther, and "the prediction that Walther's labors would bring blessings in future generations and to us stands validated by the hindsight of a hundred years of history."³ At certain times, the Wisconsin Synod has even claimed that it, rather than the Missouri Synod, is the true heir of the theology of the old Synodical Conference, and—by extension—the true heir of the theology of Walther.⁴

I. Early Tensions and Contentions

Muehlhaeuser's training at the Pilgermission in Basel did not include an understanding of the Lutheran Confessions as a clear exposition of scriptural teaching.⁵ He had not received "a scholarly kind of theological training" but was prepared for work in America "only in a minimal way." The Pilgermission "left its students free to choose affiliation in America either with a Lutheran church body or a United one or even a Reformed one."⁶ Muehlhaeuser "meant to be a Lutheran," wrote Wisconsin historian Joh. P. Koehler, yet his experience in Rochester "filled him with antipathy" toward confessional Lutheranism. He "acknowledged the zeal of Old-

³ See Edward C. Fredrich II, "Dr. C.F.W. Walther: 'American Lutheranism Has Had No Equal,'" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 74 (May 15, 1987): 187.

⁴ For examples, see [Joh. P.] M[eyer], "Is Conservatism Traditionalism?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 59 (April 1962): 148; C[arleton] Toppe, "Better, a Hallowed Memory," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 51 (January 12, 1964): 3; E[dward] C. Fredrich, "Wisconsin's Theological-Confessional History—Viewed Especially in the Light of Its Fellowship Principles and Practices," *Lutheran Historical Conference Essays and Reports*, VI (1977), 105; Wilbert R. Gawrisch, "'If ye continue in My Word,'" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 90 (Winter 1993): 4.

⁵ Edwin A. Lehmann, "The Pastor Who Possessed an All-Consuming Love," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 1 (Spring 1983): 9–10.

⁶ August Pieper, "Dr. Hoeneckes Bedeutung fuer die Wisconsinssynode und die americanisch-lutherische Kirche," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 32 (July 1935): 161–74; (October 1935): 225–44; 33 (January 1936): 1–19 and (April 1936): 81–101; trans. Werner H. Franzmann, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 3:357–358.

Lutherans for the kingdom of God but deplored their insistence on Lutheran doctrine and practice as zealotry and priestcraft."⁷

In Wisconsin, Muehlhaeuser dismissed the Lutheran Confessions as "paper fences" and failed to require a *quia* subscription of his synod's pastors in Wisconsin's articles of organization.⁸ In an oft-quoted letter of 1853, he wrote, "Just because I am not strictly or Old-Lutheran, I am in a position to offer every child of God and servant of Christ the hand of fellowship over the ecclesiastical fence."⁹ Yet Muehlhaeuser was, in Koehler's estimation, "a simple-hearted Lutheran from his youth, and the idea of surrendering anything of his Lutheran faith would have filled him with consternation." He displayed "a personal living faith, child-like trust in his Savior, and a burning zeal to build His Kingdom and spend himself in the work."¹⁰

The early Wisconsin Synod "was not of one mold," wrote Wisconsin Professor August Pieper, but was formed by "a conglomeration of people of various confessional leanings," unschooled in Lutheran doctrine and unknown to one another, with neither authoritative leader nor strong unifying force. All of this stood in marked contrast to "the enormous synodical energy" and self-assurance of the Missouri Synod.¹¹

It is not surprising, then, that the casual observer in the 1850s "would hardly have imagined two more disparate groups of Lutherans than the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods."¹² Missouri took little initial notice of the Wisconsin Synod, or, if it did, "considered the new body unionistic and for that reason as outside of [its] sphere." After 1858, with the publication of Wisconsin's first synodical report, Missouri regarded Wisconsin's brand of Lutheranism "with misgivings, if not ridicule." When Johannes Bading became Wisconsin's second synodical president in 1860, Missouri

⁷ John Philipp Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, Minn.: Faith-Life, 1970), 40.

⁸ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 45, 41.

⁹ Johannes Muehlhaeuser to Gotthilf Weitbrecht, November 1853; cited by Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 43–44.

¹⁰ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 72–73.

¹¹ August Pieper, "Jubilaumsnachgedanke," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 20 (January 1923): 1–18, (April 1923): 88–112, (July 1923): 161–77, and (October 1923): 254–70; *Theologische Quartalschrift* 21 (January 1924): 22–45 and (April 1924): 104–111; trans. R.E. Wehrwein, "Anniversary Reflections" in *The Wauwatosa Theology* 3:272. See Pieper's entire characterization of Wisconsin's early years, 3:271–276.

¹² David Schmiel, "The History of the Relationship of the Wisconsin Synod to the Missouri Synod until 1925" (master's thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1958), 1.

"recognized its Lutheran confession but doubted that it would endure."¹³ Buffalo's *Das Informatorium* and Missouri's *Der Lutheraner* sounded repeated warnings and leveled numerous accusations against Wisconsin.¹⁴ By 1865, *Der Lutheraner* had come to refer to the Wisconsin Synod as a "kindred spirit," yet warned that "especially in practice because of its bold intrusions and its daring raids into the congregations," the Wisconsin Synod merited "careful watching."¹⁵

It is difficult to determine how much of Missouri's criticisms of Wisconsin came directly from Walther himself, since he enlisted some of his associates to write key articles on behalf of the editors of *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* and then endorsed the final version. *Der Lutheraner* also contained many unsigned articles, which Walther may or may not have written.¹⁶ Perhaps it is best to say that before 1868 Walther's influence on the Wisconsin Synod was indirect. Wisconsin pastors increasingly found themselves in agreement with Walther's position and would have moved in that direction even without his influence.¹⁷ Early volumes of Missouri publications contained "a simple, instructive, all-embracing and extensive setting-forth of what a Lutheran should know and treasure," which was "unrivalled by any printed word of that day." Yet Wisconsin was slow to embrace Missouri's message because "hostility on the part of the champions of orthodoxy is only too apt to spring from, and certain to foster in its supporters, self-righteousness and pride."¹⁸

¹³ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 74.

¹⁴ For examples, see *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und ueber Nord-Amerika* (1854) I, col. 5. Johannes Diendoerfer, "Die Wirksamkeit der evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Iowa in Staate Wisconsin," *Kirchliches Mittheilungen aus und ueber Nord-Amerika* 19 (October 1861): 72-73; Fr. Ruhland, "Kirchliche Nachrichten aus dem noerdlichen Wisconsin," *Der Lutheraner* 17 (September 18, 1860): 20-22. F. Steinbach, "Neueste Praxis der Wisconsin Synode im Missioniren unter den Deutschen," *Der Lutheraner* 17 (March 5, 1861): 116; J.N. Beyer, "Die Wisconsin Synode," *Der Lutheraner* 18 (March 5, 1862): 120; "Die Synode von Wisconsin," *Lehre und Wehre* 8 (August 1862): 252-253. Koehler documented numerous examples that occurred between 1858 and 1868; see *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 83-86, 93-94, 97-98, 107-108, 115-17.

¹⁵ "Vorwort," *Der Lutheraner* 22 (September 1, 1865): 1; cited and trans. by Armin W. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 33.

¹⁶ John F. Brug, "Foreword to Volume 106: Recovering Walther," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 106 (January 2009): 7-8.

¹⁷ John M. Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 104 (Winter 2007): 36.

¹⁸ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 80.

Sparks of a deeper confessional spirit had already been rising in Wisconsin apart from, and even in spite of, the harsh charges coming from Missouri.¹⁹ One man who played a significant role in Wisconsin's turn to the right was Johannes Bading, who at his ordination in 1854 insisted that Muehlhaeuser require him to pledge loyalty to the Confessions.²⁰ Another man who played a key role in the synod's growing confessionalism was Adolf Hoenecke, who, although having received a thoroughly rationalistic education at the University of Halle, became firmly committed to confessional Lutheranism.

Although Missouri-Wisconsin relations "pursued the even tenor of their polemical way" into the early months of 1868,²¹ Bading, now president of the Wisconsin Synod, reported to Wisconsin's 1868 convention that "an informed and private discussion with pastors of the Missouri Synod, who sincerely desire peace with us as we do with them, justifies the hopes that our relationship also to this church body will become more and more friendly and brotherly."²² Bading addressed an overture to Walther, claiming "there was no need of discussing doctrine" between the two bodies "since the orthodoxy of Wisconsin ought to be sufficiently known." Walther replied to Bading on August 17, 1868:

Reverend Sir! We cannot dispense ourselves from our instructions. So we would have to submit the matter once more to our Synod. But the conversation should not be understood or carried on as though *we* were the judges or school-masters, but a heart-to-heart talk to determine whether we are devoted to the Word of God without guile. If we find ourselves on common ground in this then the practical matters

¹⁹ August Pieper wrote, "We see a resolute Lutheranism and an anti-unionistic spirit stirring in several pastors of the Wisconsin Synod even in the early 1850s." "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," in *The Wauwautosa Theology*, 3:371. Koehler attributed this new trend in Wisconsin to a change at the European mission house under the leadership of the school's second inspector, Johann Christian Wallmann; see *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 47. See also Mark Braun, "Wisconsin's 'Turn to the Right,'" *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 75 (Spring 2002): 31-48 and (Summer 2002): 80-100; Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 47-51; Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 36-42.

²⁰ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 45. At Bading's installation service at Calumet in summer 1854, Muehlhaeuser and Bading "had a somewhat stormy session to begin with" because "Bading demanded to be pledged to the Lutheran Confessions." Muehlhaeuser "finally acceded to Bading's wish," and Bading in his installation sermon then preached on the importance of the confessions.

²¹ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 114.

²² *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1868; trans. Arnold O. Lehmann, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 21 (April 2003): 12.

will easily adjust themselves. No halo of glory for us and humiliation of the others.²³

In view of the lengthy, public and acrimonious accusations Missouri previously had leveled against Wisconsin, one wonders whether Walther's statement is to be taken entirely at face value.

When, however, Walther and other Missouri representatives met with Wisconsin men in Milwaukee on October 21–22 of that year (1868), they were clearly pleased with the outcome. Walther conceded, "We must admit that all our suspicions against the dear Wisconsin Synod have not merely disappeared but were also put to shame."²⁴ More significantly, he was heard to say (by Bading, Hoenecke, and Koehler's father, Philip), "Brethren, if we had known before what we know now we might have declared our unity of faith ten years ago."²⁵ Koehler called Walther's remark "a typical exclamation of the man, who when his trust had been won was apt to make impulsive statements of regard and affection." He further understood Walther to have been acknowledging that "the unfortunate denunciations might have been avoided by seeking personal acquaintance."²⁶ At the formation of the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1872, Walther in his opening sermon in the convention exulted, "O blessed and blissful day!"²⁷

It has been persistently maintained that Missouri's public attacks and private persuasions furnished the key element in the Wisconsin Synod's turn to the right. Though Walther, the Missouri Synod, *Lehre und Wehre*, and *Der Lutheraner* are frequently cited as blessings God gave Wisconsin,²⁸ it was "less the polemical writing in Missouri periodicals" and more "the personal and brotherly example and encouragement of a good Missouri neighbor" that helped move Wisconsin to alter its theological direction.²⁹

²³ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 129.

²⁴ C.F.W. Walther, "Wieder eine Friedenbotschaft," *Der Lutheraner* 25 (November 1, 1868): 37–38; cited by Walter D. Uhlig, "Eighteen Sixty-Eight—Year of Involvement," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 41 (August 1968): 109.

²⁵ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 74.

²⁶ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 130.

²⁷ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 55; quote from Bading, *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1912, 5.

²⁸ Fredrich, "American Lutheranism Has Had No Equal," 189.

²⁹ Koehler cites an outstanding example of Missouri's "neighborliness": at one point shortly after his arrival in America, Bading in a mood of frustration applied to Missouri Pastor Fuerbringer in Freistadt, Wisconsin, to become a member of the Missouri Synod. "But Fuerbringer advised him to stick with Wisconsin and lend his influence for raising the standard of doctrine and practice. Thus Bading remained with

"There is no justification for the charges raised a century ago," Wisconsin historian Edward Fredrich has concluded, "that Missouri alone was setting the pace and [that] the other synods, large and small, were simply following her lead."³⁰ Wisconsin arrived at its confessional state through the careful investigation and personal conviction of its own men.

II. The Election Controversy

Despite such joyful declarations, however, relations between Missouri and Wisconsin did not immediately become harmonious. When Wisconsin failed to embrace Walther's state synod plan that proposed a single synod with one seminary, Missourians charged that "the Wisconsin Synod does not love the Missouri Synod," and the animosity occasioned by Wisconsin's rejection of Walther's plan "lingered in Wisconsin circles years afterward."³¹ Walther called Wisconsin's rejection of his plan an "unholy trespass" against Missouri.³² By 1878 Walther was "no longer overflowing with human kindness toward Wisconsin," not only because of Wisconsin's rejection of Walther's "pet plan" but also because of his suspicion that Wisconsin Synod students attending the St. Louis seminary "had been prejudiced against him."³³

When that same year Walther received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from the Ohio Synod's Capital University, he extolled "the dear Ohioans" and again criticized Wisconsin for its disinterest in the state synod plan. It was at that time that Hoenecke remarked that there was "something sectarian" about Missouri. He was referring not to Missouri's doctrinal position but to "a peculiarity of demeanor, a certain bigotry that inclines one to give others the cold shoulder and never rise above one's parochial view, speech and manners." Koehler likened Missouri's "uniformly trained and well-disciplined corps of defenders of the faith" to "the Prussian army which in that decade was scoring its great successes."³⁴ August Pieper took note of Missouri's "remarkable, intense esprit de

the Wisconsin Synod" and led the synod faithfully as its second president. *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 45.

³⁰ Edward C. Fredrich, "A Few, Faithful in a Few Things: Our Synod's Fathers and the Formation of the Synodical Conference," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 69 (July 1972): 155.

³¹ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 160.

³² Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 147-48; see also Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Missouri and Wisconsin* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 50-52.

³³ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 154.

³⁴ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 153.

corps" and its "strongly pronounced synodical patriotism, not only against all enemies, but also against friendly synods," and compared Missouri's doctrinal impregnability to a "Macedonian phalanx."³⁵

But Wisconsin and Missouri grew closer to each other during and because of the Election Controversy. For several years beginning in the mid-1870s, Missouri conferences under Walther's leadership had been discussing the general theme, "That Only Through the Teaching of the Lutheran Church God is Given All Honor; This is An Irrefutable Proof that the Teaching of the Lutheran Church is the Only True One." The doctrine of election was one topic presented under this theme. Some of Walther's statements regarding election sounded Calvinistic to Friederich Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod and Henry Allwardt and Frederick Stelhorn of Missouri. Following the 1877 meeting of Missouri's Western District, Walther's opponents voiced public criticisms, first in *Lehre und Wehre*, then in a newly-formed journal *Altes und Neues*. Walther and the Missourians "stressed that the individual believer is predestined *unto* faith, solely on the basis of God's grace and the merit of Christ," while their opponents "insisted that when speaking of God's predestination of the individual believer one must understand that predestination takes place *in view of* his faith which has been foreseen by God."³⁶ Other member synods of the Synodical Conference soon became embroiled in the conflict.

Considering the turmoil between Missouri and Wisconsin in 1877 and 1878, "one would have expected Wisconsin to leave the Synodical Conference rather than the 'dear Ohioans.'" Yet "contrary to all human logic," Wisconsin firmly supported Walther and his position on election.³⁷ "It quickly became known that Hoenecke and [Wisconsin's] entire seminary faculty stood on Walther's side," wrote Pieper, and Wisconsin's support "immediately put a strong restraint on the opposing side. Hoenecke stood firmly, calmly, and judiciously with Walther."³⁸

Hoenecke authored a series of articles in Wisconsin's *Gemeinde-Blatt* in full support of Walther's position. In 1877, he wrote, "The word of God clearly and plainly teaches that God alone is the one who begins and completes the work of conversion in the heart of man."³⁹ The next year, he

³⁵ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 245.

³⁶ Eugene L. Fevold, "Coming of Age, 1875-1900," in *The Lutherans in North America*, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 313-317.

³⁷ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 159.

³⁸ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 280.

³⁹ Adolf Hoenecke, "Was kann ich zu meiner Bekehrung bei tragen oder wie werde ich bekehrt," *Gemeinde-Blatt* 13 (November 1, 1877): 1; cited in Jonathan Schroeder, "The

wrote, "The fact that so many men are not converted is not God's fault, but rather solely the guilt of the men who remain unconverted."⁴⁰ As the controversy heated up, Hoenecke wrote again: "If we want to consider the doctrine of predestination in a fruitful way, then we must beat down all our thoughts and all the conclusions of our reason which contend against the Word of God alone. We must cling only to the revealed Word of God."⁴¹

When some statements in Missouri publications seemed open to misinterpretation, Hoenecke initiated efforts at Wisconsin's 1879 pastoral conference to seek for corrections in language.⁴² "The prudent Hoenecke" discussed these changes with Walther, "to deprive his opponents of the opportunity for fruitless controversy" and "to remove every occasion for offense on the part of the weak among his friends."⁴³ Walther subsequently withdrew the language but not the content of three unclear statements, using "the Latin sentence well-known in church history: *Linguam corrigo, sententiam teneo* (I correct the language; the sense I retain)."⁴⁴ But Wisconsin remained in full agreement with the substance of Walther's teaching. Pieper insisted, "The man is yet to be born who can prove that even one of the expressions Walther there dropped is contrary to Scripture when used in the sense he intended."⁴⁵ The issue, as Hoenecke put it, "was not a peculiar doctrine of Missouri, but the clear, eternal truth of the gospel."⁴⁶

Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference and an Appendix of Translated Articles," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 17 (October 1999): 16.

⁴⁰ Adolf Hoenecke, "Wenn Gott allein die Menschen bekehren kann und muss und solches thut ohne es Menschen Zuthun, woher kommt es den, dass so viele Menschen unbekehrt bleiben?" *Gemeinde-Blatt* 13 (January 1, 1878): 1; cited in Schroeder, "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy," 16.

⁴¹ Adolf Hoenecke, "Zur Lehre von der Gnadenwahl," *Gemeinde-Blatt* 15 (April 15, 1880): 2; cited in Schroeder, "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy," 17.

⁴² See Carl S. Meyer, "The Missouri Synod and Other Lutherans Before 1918," in *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 273–274.

⁴³ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 260.

⁴⁴ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 158. See [C.F.W.] W[alther], "*Sententiam teneat, linguam corrige*," *Lehre und Wehre* 27 (February 1881): 43–54. 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; and that the elect receive a richer grace. See Roy Arthur Suelflow, "The History of the Missouri Synod during the Second Twenty-Five Years of Its Existence" (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946), 162.

⁴⁵ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 260.

⁴⁶ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 280.

Walther's teaching on election was "not Walther's, but the teachings of the Scriptures, of Paul, of Luther, and of the Formula of Concord." He stood "directly on Scripture" while his opponents were "mired in reason." In regard to personalities, Hoenecke granted that there were "several Missourians" who were "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."⁴⁷

Walther expressed joy and appreciation for Hoenecke's support: "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."⁴⁸ Hoenecke emerged from the conflict as a strong theologian in his own right. Gottfried Fritschel wrote that Hoenecke "proceeded much more logically and exactly than Professor Walther," and "by gentle and conciliatory speech he took the sting out of the Missouri Synod's offensive phraseology, and accomplished much in the interest of peace in the church."⁴⁹

Negatively, the "unrest and confusion and the forces at work in the Synodical Conference" throughout the controversy "hardly were a credit to any of the embattled parties or to the theology of the day." The conflict was marked, as Koehler saw it, by "a mistaken zeal for the house of God and plain partisan policy," by "high emotion and a certain amount of indifference," by "intense loyalties to personalities and synods," and by both "individualism and independence; ruthlessness and ill-breeding." The controversy brought out "the general dogmatical approach to the problem on both sides," which too often resulted in "falling back on the fathers of Lutheran dogmatics, [in] whom Walther's own theological method had invested undue authority."⁵⁰

But the positive outweighed the negative. The controversy "forced everyone to make a careful study of Scripture and the Confessions," which produced "a deeper grasp of the gospel, a great spiritual awakening, and more cheerful cooperation in synodical work."⁵¹ From this came a "revitalizing influence on the method of study and teaching."⁵² Pieper called it

⁴⁷ Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," 417-418.

⁴⁸ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 46; [C.F.W.] W[alther], "Das Colloquium," *Der Lutheraner* 37 (January 15, 1881): 1.

⁴⁹ Fritschel cited by J.L. Neve, *The History of the Lutheran Church in America*, ed. Willard Allbeck (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), 231.

⁵⁰ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 160-61.

⁵¹ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 280-281.

⁵² Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 171.

nothing less than "a miracle of grace" that "the Synodical Conference did not go to pieces entirely and that the Missouri Synod, on the whole, emerged from the conflict intact, and, in fact, together with Wisconsin, inwardly strengthened and unified." There were losses in the Synodical Conference as a whole, but "a precious Bible truth was more deeply appreciated than ever before," and the bond between Wisconsin and Missouri was "more firmly established."⁵³

Wisconsin's role in the Election Controversy was "no blind following where Missouri led but a deep-seated conviction that the Missouri position was the scriptural position."⁵⁴

III. "When we quoted Walther to them, then they believed us"

Because Wisconsin closed its seminary from 1870 to 1878 as part of the ill-fated state synod plan, Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller were all seminarians in St. Louis during that time and thus were Walther's students. Pieper called Walther "the teacher who held first place in my heart,"⁵⁵ and recalled that "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." Three years at his feet "were enough to make one a Waltherian in doctrine and love."⁵⁶ Decades later, Pieper was effusive in his praise for his teacher.

*"Walther preached [the] doctrine of justification as no one has since Luther. When he preached sin and wrath, hearts quaked with fear; when he testified to God's grace, they embraced it, rejoiced in it, found peace, and humbled themselves before God. Walther literally compelled those who were conscience-stricken to take hold of God's grace; those who were faint-hearted, he made sure of God's grace."*⁵⁷

Walther's "chief work," Pieper wrote in 1912, was that he "repristinated" or "reproduced" the doctrines of justification and church and ministry from Luther and the Confessions "and brought the majority of the Lutheran Church in America to recognize them. That assures him of a place among the greatest theologians of the church and gives him a claim to the

⁵³ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 240; Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 61.

⁵⁴ Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 60.

⁵⁵ Edward C. Fredrich, "Reminiscences from Professor August Pieper," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 1 (Fall 1983): 54.

⁵⁶ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 245-246.

⁵⁷ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 237; emphasis in the original.

thanks of all who love Zion.”⁵⁸ In 1923, Pieper maintained that the prevailing disposition in both synods—their strong confessional stance, their inner spirit and outward growth—were to be attributed largely to Walther’s influence. “As a Spirit-filled witness of grace to poor sinners, as an immovable confessor of God’s pure truth and as an indefatigable, self-denying worker, Walther created what we have today in the Synodical Conference, and all that has come of it.”⁵⁹

Yet Pieper criticized Walther for an overdependence on “the secondary sources of theology—Luther and lesser fathers,” and for his willingness to take over “dozens of proof passages from Luther and the dogmaticians,” even though they “do not prove what they are supposed to prove.” Pieper considered Walther a “brilliant dogmatician” but “an inferior exegete.” However justified Walther’s method may have been at the beginning of his teaching, it was “in principle and in practice wrong” because “it did not rest *directly* on Scripture and did not lead one directly into it.” Though his method “did no harm to the correct doctrine of Walther and his students,” it nonetheless “stressed too strongly the importance of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers in comparison with Scripture.” At its worst, “it even led to this, that later one did not stop with quoting Luther and the old fathers, but now one also quoted Walther” for proof of correct doctrine.⁶⁰ Pieper was reported as having remarked, perhaps only partly tongue-in-cheek, “We could not persuade Missourians with the Bible, but when we quoted Walther to them, then they believed us.”⁶¹

Recalling his own student days, Pieper charged that “the average student in Walther’s time made out poorly” in “everything except dogmatics and pastoral theology.” New Testament exegesis “consisted mainly of dictated quotations from the Lutheran exegetes of the 16th and 17th centuries.” In isagogics “the Bible itself was seldom used in class,” and so “students came out of the seminary without having the slightest ability in exegesis” and “had not ever studied a single book of Holy Scripture some-

⁵⁸ August Pieper, “Review of Walther’s *Die Stimme Unser Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 9 (January 1912): 36, 40; cited and trans. by Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 3.

⁵⁹ Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 240.

⁶⁰ Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 261, 263.

⁶¹ August Pieper, *Tischreden* (Erste Auflage, ungesaeubert, 1937), 1; cited by Mark Jeske, “A Half Century of *Faith-Life*: An analysis of the circumstances surrounding the formation of the Protestant Conference” (senior church history paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 22, 1978), 16.

what thoroughly."⁶² Pieper did not reject the legitimate role of systematic theology; in a review of Schaller's *Biblical Christology* in 1919, Pieper wrote that underestimating the value of doctrinal theology was "one of the gravest mistakes the Church could make." History and exegesis provide the necessary foundation and "a full knowledge [of the] Gospel," but "systematic theology must shape its form, and give it the proper finish." Dogmatics fostered "accuracy of thought and the precision of logical expression peculiar," making it "an indispensable study and a most potent factor in the training of masterly minds."⁶³

Yet Pieper repeatedly voiced warnings against the dangers inherent in dogmatic theology. "The systemizing tendency of Lutheran dogmatics emphasized" the importance of Scripture "in principle but in the application often failed. And the more they systematized, the greater was the damage. Ever since Calixtus, everything had to fit into the logical straightjacket." The dogmatists "learned the *distinguendum est* ['a distinction must be made'] to the minutest detail and—without any evil intention—damaged Scripture here and there."⁶⁴ While dogmatics is "altogether indispensable" for keeping the gospel pure, it is also "is in constant danger of losing the spirit of the gospel and becoming a dead skeleton as a result of processes that involve the intellect alone."⁶⁵ Dogma becomes "the word crystallized into an inflexible form" that "does not express the full content of Scripture."⁶⁶

Koehler likewise warned that "dogmatic training" and "the dogmatism it produces will establish an array of doctrinal theses and make an outward rule of them, without probing their deep content and inner connection." Worse, "it will seek, by means of a supposed logical reasoning, to achieve a connected system of thought, whereby in fact Biblical truth is emptied of its content and the resulting Christian knowledge and life is left superficial."⁶⁷

This overemphasis on dogmatic theology and a corresponding neglect of exegetical theology helped to create what many outsiders referred to as

⁶² Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 265.

⁶³ August Pieper, Review of *Biblical Christology* by John Schaller; in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 16 (October 1919): 298–299.

⁶⁴ August Pieper, "Schrift und Verkunft," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 12 (April 1915): 109–128; trans. James Langebartels, "Scripture and Reason," in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, 1:180.

⁶⁵ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 283.

⁶⁶ August Pieper, "Stoeckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church in America," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 11 (July 1914): 179–189; in *The Wauwatosa Theology* III:423.

⁶⁷ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 168.

the "Missouri spirit," evident "in hundreds of concrete cases, in raising suspicions about doctrine, in dead silence about the boycotting of non-synodical literature, in competition in the area of foreign mission work, in a smug tone of criticism of non-synodical church institutions and theological accomplishments and in all kinds of scornful talk and remarks." Most likely referring to his own synod, August Pieper charged that "this attitude is taken not only toward the synods that have remained hostile, but also toward those that in the course of time were recognized as sufficiently Lutheran." This attitude "confronts even the friends of the Missouri Synod again and again to the present day."⁶⁸

Behind the admittedly sharp and possibly overstated remarks of Pieper and Koehler lay the question of the relation between exegetical and systematic theology. Koehler believed it "takes a generation for independent exegetical work to come into its own and assert itself," but the result "will be that faith, faith in the sense of the Bible, comes into its own, and having come to life by this most intimate and direct association with and concentration on the Word itself, it is recognized as wholly the work and gift of the Spirit himself."⁶⁹

Things changed in the Missouri Synod, Koehler believed, when "original exegesis was introduced at the St. Louis school by Pastor-Professor George Stoeckhardt."⁷⁰ Pieper assessed their differing approaches: "Walther produced chiefly the Lutheran doctrine and then proved it from the Scriptures," while "Stoeckhardt produced the scriptural doctrine and then showed us that it was also the doctrine of Luther and the Confessions."⁷¹ Stoeckhardt's exegesis of Scripture "compelled not only the understanding, but overcame the heart"; he fixed his hearers' consciences "on the rock of the Word of God and made them glad—not about Quenstedt, Calov, Gerhard, and Luther, but about the Word which God himself spoke through the apostles." Following their teacher, Stoeckhardt's students became "not patristic theologians but Scripture theologians," gaining "new interest, new joy in the gospel, new zeal for the salvation of ourselves and of other sinners and new delight and joy in our call, our work in the kingdom of our Savior."⁷²

A comparable change came to the Wisconsin Synod during the height of the so-called "Wauwatosa Theology," in which emphasis was placed on

⁶⁸ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 266–267.

⁶⁹ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 161.

⁷⁰ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 161.

⁷¹ Pieper, "Stoeckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America," 422–423.

⁷² Pieper, "Stoeckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America," 425.

original study of the biblical text and in gaining book-by-book familiarity with the Scripture.⁷³ Most students at Wisconsin's seminary prior to 1900 "concentrated on copying and studying Hoenecke's dictated dogmatics" and paid little attention to other subjects. "Exegesis and history seemed everywhere to have been considered secondary subjects," which, Koehler charged, was as it had been in St. Louis until the arrival of Stoeckhardt.⁷⁴ In what may be taken as a position statement of the "Wauwatosa theology" that he, Koehler and Schaller sought to foster, August Pieper wrote in 1913: "We intend to pursue scriptural study even more faithfully than before," promising to submit "in advance to the least word of Scripture," no matter from whom it may come. "But we submit to no man, be his name Luther or Walther, Chemnitz or Hoenecke, Gerhard or Stoeckhardt, so long as we have clear Scripture on our side." Authorities placed on the same level as Scripture or set in opposition to Scripture, he insisted must not be tolerated, "or we shall be practicing idolatry."⁷⁵

And yet Walther himself, in his 1884 essay "Church Fathers and Doctrine," offered a clear defense for the necessity of basing all teaching on Scripture alone.⁷⁶ The teachers of the church are "nothing else than witnesses. Every true Lutheran believes that. Oh, it is terrible when one always directs people only to human books, instead of to Scripture." Walther feared the "heartbreak" that was yet to come to the Lutheran Church in America "because, only to keep people, some have begun to direct them to human writings and mislead them [by saying], 'Just look at these men! They are highly enlightened, pious, godly, highly gifted church fathers, whom even our opponents cannot reject, and they teach such and such; we must hold fast to it as solely truly Lutheran.'" Criticism in Wisconsin could hardly "object to Walther's approach to doctrine as stated in this essay and, in fact, recognized it as Luther's and their own."⁷⁸

⁷³ See Mark Braun, "The Wauwatosa Gospel," in *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay: Essays in Honor of Ronald Feuerhahn on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J. Bart Day, et. al. (Houston: The Feuerhahn Festschrift Committee, 2002), 131-152; Peter M. Prange, "The Wauwatosa Gospel and the Synodical Conference: A Generation of Pelting Rain," *Logia* 12 (Eastertide 2003): 31-46.

⁷⁴ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207.

⁷⁵ August Pieper, "Vorwort zum zehnten Jahrgang," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 10 (January 1913): 1-10; in Jahn, *The Wauwatosa Theology*, 1:116-117.

⁷⁶ C.F.W. Walther, "Church Fathers and Doctrine," Synodical Conference Essay, Cleveland, Ohio, August 13-19, 1884, *Essays for the Church, Volume II: 1877-1886* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 67-101. Schuetze offered approving remarks on Walther's essay, *The Synodical Conference*, 208-209.

⁷⁷ Walther, "Church Fathers and Doctrine," 80.

⁷⁸ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 47.

IV. Free Conferences and Church Fellowship

Midway through Muehlhaeuser's decade as the Wisconsin Synod's first president, Walther issued an open invitation to "meetings, held at intervals, by such members of churches as call themselves Lutheran and acknowledge and confess without reservation . . . the unaltered Augsburg Confession," and to "promote and advance the efforts toward the final establishment of one single Evangelical Lutheran Church of America."⁷⁹ Some Wisconsin Synod men expressed interest in attending these meetings but were unable to do so. At this time they did not yet have any direct contact with Walther.⁸⁰ Between 1856 and 1859, four "free conferences" were held at Columbus, Ohio; Pittsburgh; Cleveland; and Fort Wayne.

Walther can be cited to support various positions regarding inclusiveness toward other Lutherans. In 1844 in *Der Lutheraner* Walther wrote: "The Lutheran Church is not limited to those people who from their youth have borne the name 'Lutheran' or have taken that name later on." He pledged willingness to extend his hand "to every person who honestly submits to the whole written Word of God, bears the true faith in our dear Lord Jesus Christ in his heart and confesses it before the world" and to "regard him as a fellow believer, as a brother in Christ, as a member of our church," regardless "in which sect he may lie concealed and captive."⁸¹ Yet in *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, first published in 1863, Walther urged caution "that neither the congregation nor individual church members enter into any church union with unbelievers or heterodox communions and so become guilty of religious unionism in matters of faith and church."⁸² In Thesis XXI of *The Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Walther maintained that the Lutheran Church "rejects all fraternal and churchly fellowship with those who reject its confessions in whole or in part."⁸³

⁷⁹ C.F.W. Walther, "Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1856," *Lehre und Wehre* 2 (January 1856): 4; trans. Ervin L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856-1859," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 15 (August 1944): 534-535.

⁸⁰ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 36.

⁸¹ C.F.W. Walther, "Concerning the name 'Lutheran,'" *Der Lutheraner* 1 (September 7, 1844): 3; trans. in Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences," 537, n. 18.

⁸² C.F.W. Walther, *The Form of a Christian Congregation*, trans. John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 137.

⁸³ Cited by John F. Brug, "The Synodical Conference and Prayer Fellowship," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 102 (Winter 2005): 38. See also C.F.W. Walther, "Do We Draw the Lines of Fellowship Too Narrowly?" in *Editorials from Lehre und Wehre*, trans. Herbert Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 74-101, esp. 88-91.

As his biographer August Suelflow tells it, Walther remained agreeable to more open contact with other Lutherans until 1879 and the events surrounding the Election Controversy, when he and Missouri "underwent a radical change in their attitude toward other Lutherans."⁸⁴ A delegate to an 1881 colloquy urged Missourians no longer to pray with Lutherans who had accused Missouri of Calvinism.⁸⁵ Suelflow calls this "probably the first time in its history that a Missourian had refused to pray with other Lutherans when discussing theological issues." Though "prior to this time Walther was ready, under all circumstances, to discuss theology on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, his thinking now had changed," and Missouri felt "so deeply hurt that it began to withdraw from opportunities for establishing fellowship."⁸⁶

As early as 1889, Missouri voiced a more restrictive policy regarding prayer fellowship.⁸⁷ An 1895 essayist, for example, wrote, "People who join in prayer must be of one mind, one faith, one hope, for joint prayer is an expression of a common faith."⁸⁸ In the early 20th century, many leading theologians in Missouri expressed similar thoughts:

August Graebner maintained in 1903, "Where common worship cannot be practiced, Christians are not to carry on prayer fellowship."⁸⁹

⁸⁴ August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 209.

⁸⁵ Koehler described the 1881 meeting: "The Missouri delegates, true to form, met in caucus a day in advance to decide on concerted action regarding the seating of Schmidt." When Schmidt's name was called in the roll, "a Missourian protested the seating of this Norwegian delegate on behalf of Missouri." Walther supporters "contended that the controversy had reached such a stage that there was a real difference in doctrine," which "called for separation to avoid unionism, because Schmidt's teaching had been shown up as false doctrine and heresy." Koehler remarked that the Norwegian delegates were "ahead of the Germans" in their "oratory and their views of parliamentary fairness," arguing that "the floor of the Conference was the very place to thresh out the doctrine." But when the vote was taken, Schmidt was denied seating; see *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 160.

⁸⁶ Suelflow, *Servant of the Word*, 209.

⁸⁷ F[rantz] P[ieper], "Ueber kirchliche Gemeinschaft mit Irrgläubigen," *Der Lutheraner* 45 (1889): 161-162; cited by John F. Brug, "Can There Ever Be Exceptions To Our Regular Fellowship Practices That Do Not Violate Scripture's Fellowship Principles? Part II," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 99 (Fall 2002): 251.

⁸⁸ *Missouri Synod Southern District Proceedings*, 1895, 97; cited in *Fellowship Then and Now: Concerning the Impasse in the Intersynodical Discussions on Church Fellowship* (Milwaukee: WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters, 1961), 18.

⁸⁹ *Missouri Synod Nebraska District Proceedings*, 1903; cited in *Fellowship Then and Now*, 364.

Friederich Bente wrote in 1904 that prayer fellowship with “adversaries” of other synods would inevitably involve “lies and deceit, controversy and inconsequence.”⁹⁰

Theodore Graebner argued in 1920 that “any prayer in which we are asked to join those who speak not from the same faith as we, or in which we are asked to withhold an expression of conviction, or by the participation in and utterance of which we are to treat as immaterial those articles of faith in which we differ, cannot be pleasing to God.”⁹¹

Francis Pieper insisted in 1924 that to pray with false teachers “would mean to consent to, and to become ‘partakers of their evil works.’”⁹²

Missouri’s *Brief Statement* in 1931 “repudiate[d] unionism, that is, church fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine.”⁹³

E.W.A. Koehler taught that it was wrong to “join in prayer fellowship with those who ‘cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned,’ Rom. 16:17.”⁹⁴

Theodore Engelder wrote that “the passages which prohibit pulpit fellowship and altar fellowship apply with equal force to prayer fellowship,” adding that “if we could fellowship the representatives of false teaching in uniting with them in prayer, we could consistently exchange pulpits with them and meet with them at a common altar.”⁹⁵

By the late 1930s, however, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the Missouri Synod was undergoing a change at least in its practice of prayer fellowship. Conservatives sought to demonstrate that their position—that prayer fellowship was to be based only on full agreement in doctrine—had been the position of Walther since the Synod’s founding.”⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Friederich Bente, “Warum koennen wir keine gemeinsame Gottesdienste mit Ohioern und Iowaern veranstalten und abhalten?” *Lehre und Wehre* 51 (March 1905): 109–110.

⁹¹ [Theodore] G[raebner], “Letters to a Young Preacher: Joint Prayers,” *Magazin fuer evang.-Luth. Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie* 44 (May 1920): 231–233.

⁹² Francis Pieper, “Unionism,” *Oregon and Washington District Proceedings*, 1924, 8; cited in *Fellowship Then And Now*, 20.

⁹³ “Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 2 (June 1931): 401–416.

⁹⁴ E.W.A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), 170.

⁹⁵ Engelder cited by Theo. Dierks, “The Doctrine Of The Church With Special Reference to Altar Fellowship and Prayer Fellowship,” *The Confessional Lutheran* 7 (February 1946): 18–19.

⁹⁶ See John Buenger, “Prayer Fellowship,” *The Confessional Lutheran* 3 (March 1942): 34–35; Paul H. Burgdorf, “For the First Time,” *The Confessional Lutheran* 3 (June 1942):

But proponents of union between Missouri and the American Lutheran Church first questioned, then denied, that such a restrictive stance on fellowship accurately reflected Walther's position.⁹⁷ By 1956, a Wisconsin representative to an intersynodical meeting claimed that Wisconsin's prayer fellowship position, not Missouri's, truly represented a continuation of the position of the Synodical Conference; Missouri, this representative charged, had come to take a fellowship stand "similar to that which the Iowa Synod held."⁹⁸

Wisconsin argued that the free conferences of the 1850s took place during "formative years when [confessional] lines had not yet been clearly drawn" between the various newly-formed Lutheran synods. "Walther was dealing with a situation in which scriptural principles of church fellowship were almost totally unknown among the German immigrants who were being gathered into the congregations of the Missouri Synod."⁹⁹ In Wisconsin's view, Walther and his associates regarded the representatives of other Lutheran bodies at that time as "weak brethren."¹⁰⁰ To consider Walther "an advocate of joint prayer with those whom he knew as persistent errorists" is "to slander and misrepresent him." After confessional lines between the Lutheran synods were drawn more clearly following the Election Controversy, Synodical Conference churches discontinued joint prayers with other Lutherans because "it had become plainly evident" that now these other Lutherans "were not weak brethren but persistent errorists."¹⁰¹ With doctrinal lines between the synods now clearly drawn, joint prayers were no longer offered at future meetings between Lutheran synods.¹⁰²

Thus the Wisconsin and Missouri synods "have quite different interpretations of the significance of the Missouri's Synod's differing actions during the free conferences in the mid-nineteenth century and those in the early twentieth century." In Wisconsin's view, the difference between the

71-72; Paul E. Kretzmann, "Trying to Force the Issue," *The Confessional Lutheran* 4 (May-June 1943): 61-65; Paul H. Burgdorf, "Prayer Fellowship: The Position of the Missouri Synod," *The Confessional Lutheran* 7 (May 1946): 51.

⁹⁷ On the change, see Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 132-138, 170-194; Brug, "The Synodical Conference and Prayer Fellowship," 49-50.

⁹⁸ Immanuel P. Frey, "The Voice of the C.U.C.: Joint Prayer and Church Fellowship," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 43 (February 19, 1956): 56-57.

⁹⁹ Brug, "Can There Ever Be Exceptions To Our Regular Fellowship Practices?" 249.

¹⁰⁰ "The Time After Confessional Lines Had Been Clearly Drawn," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 48 (March 26, 1961): 101.

¹⁰¹ Immanuel P. Frey, "Joint Prayer" (paper presented to the Missouri-Wisconsin Synods' Presidents' Conference, Milwaukee, January 12-15, 1954), 3-4.

¹⁰² "The Time After Confessional Lines Had Been Clearly Drawn," 101.

free conferences of the 1850s and the union conferences of the 1940s “was not because Missouri had developed a different view of the role of prayer as an expression of fellowship” but because “they were dealing with two different sorts of people.” Leaders in the predecessor bodies of the ALC “publicly and persistently condemned Walther’s teaching” and “could no longer be considered weak brothers,” but persisted in their error.¹⁰³ Missouri and Wisconsin both claimed to follow the practice of Walther on prayer fellowship, but they disagreed regarding the nature of Walther’s pre-1881 practice.

V. Church and Ministry

The current and most difficult area regarding Wisconsin’s reception of Walther’s teaching concerns the doctrine of church and ministry.¹⁰⁴ Wisconsin Professor John Brug, whose recently published volume *The Ministry of the Word* provides a comprehensive examination of this subject,¹⁰⁵ has concluded: “The intersynodical controversy over ministry never involved being for or against Walther’s view. It was about determining what his view really was.”¹⁰⁶

Dismay among the Saxon immigrants following events associated with Martin Stephan “caused Walther and his fellow immigrants to dig deeply into the biblical teaching on the issue of church and ministry.”¹⁰⁷ The result was Walther’s 1841 “Altenburg Theses.”¹⁰⁸ Koehler credited Walther with restoring “order in this state of chaos” through his “well-considered presentation of the doctrine of the Church”¹⁰⁹ by going back to Scripture, Luther, and the Confessions.¹¹⁰ Far from looking for an excuse to treat the doctrine of church and ministry, Walther “was forced into it

¹⁰³ Brug, “The Synodical Conference and Prayer Fellowship,” 38.

¹⁰⁴ Brug called the doctrine of the ministry “the most debated and the least resolved of all the controversies of American Lutheranism.” “Recovering Walther,” 3.

¹⁰⁵ John F. Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009).

¹⁰⁶ Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 4. Ironically, something of a parallel history took place on this issue. What Walther found it necessary to do in the early 1840s is similar to what Wisconsin theologians Schaller, Pieper, and Koehler found it necessary to do six decades later.

¹⁰⁷ Suelflow, *Servant of the Word*, 163. See also August R. Suelflow, “The Beginnings of ‘Missouri, Ohio, and Other States’ in America,” in *Moving Frontiers*, 135–141.

¹⁰⁸ C.F.W. Walther, “Altenburg Theses,” trans. W.G. Polack; cited in Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutherans in Missouri, 1839–1841* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 523–524.

¹⁰⁹ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 32.

¹¹⁰ Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 4.

through the disturbances in Perry County," Pieper explained, and only later did Walther "go public with it. It would have been the mark of a bungler to ride this doctrine like a hobby horse as if it were an isolated or special article." Pieper considered the Altenburg debate "the real birthday of the Missouri Synod" because "here Walther showed what the church is and that [the immigrants] were still a church. With a single immense pull he again set the desperate little flock of Christians straight."¹¹¹

Walther also opposed the ministry views of J.R.R. Grabau, who taught that the power of the sacraments rests not only on the Word of God but also on the true ministerial office.¹¹² Grabau believed that the Keys belong to the ministry alone rather than to the congregation.¹¹³ The Second Synodical Report of the Buffalo Synod insisted that the injunction of Romans 13 to obey one's leaders "does not merely apply to preaching but to all good Christian things and affairs which are bound up with the Word of God," and so "Lutheran Christians know" that "honor, love and obedience is demanded through the third and fourth commandment" as "a matter of conscience."¹¹⁴

Walther further opposed the ministry views of Wilhelm Loehe, who believed that the office of prophet, with direct communication from God to man, was still present in the church, and that ordination conferred the ministerial office on a person and imparted grace and spiritual powers.¹¹⁵ This put Loehe on "a collision course with Walther."¹¹⁶

Brug has called Walther's 1852 book, *The Voice of Our Church in the Question of Church and Ministry*, the "most important" of "numerous important articles and several books" Walther wrote,¹¹⁷ yet he and other Wisconsin authors caution that Walther never intended the Altenburg Theses to be "the final word on every aspect of the church and ministry

¹¹¹ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 236-237, 234.

¹¹² See Brug, *Ministry of the Word*, 292-293.

¹¹³ *Buffalo Synod Proceedings, 1848*, 9-10; cited by Suelflow, *Servant of the Word*, 163.

¹¹⁴ T. Johannes Grosse, *Unterscheidungslehren* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1889), 5; trans. and cited by Carl J. Lawrenz, "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 79 (Spring 1982): 99.

¹¹⁵ See Brug, *Ministry of the Word*, 293-299.

¹¹⁶ Thomas P. Nass, review of *Aphorisms on the New Testament Offices and Their Relationship to the Congregation—On the Question of the Church's Polity*, by Wilhelm Loehe, trans. John R. Stephenson (Malone, Tex.: Reprint, 2008); in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 106 (Spring 2009): 159-160.

¹¹⁷ Brug, "Where There Is No Love," 9.

question.”¹¹⁸ Later generations of readers must be careful not to read into Walther’s theses ideas that he did not express, and must likewise guard against using his theses to try to answer questions he did not address. His intent was only “to set forth those points concerning which difference has arisen and to carry along only as much of what is not controverted as becomes necessary to keep the matters in context.”¹¹⁹ Wisconsin regards Walther’s views on the ministry to be correct and the teachings of Grabau, Loehe, and others to be at least “in part erroneous,” not because Wisconsin has any “romantic attachment” to Missouri’s early history, but because it has “compared Walther’s position to Scripture, Luther, and the Confessions and found Walther’s position in the debates to be correct in its essentials.”¹²⁰

Muehlhaeuser’s membership in the General Synod demonstrated, in Pieper’s view, that “he was unclear regarding the doctrine of church and ministry” as much as he was indecisive regarding confessionalism. During his synodical presidency, Muehlhaeuser practiced “the disorderly business of licensing pastors and of synods ordaining them.”¹²¹ Wisconsin’s earliest pastors “did not stand on their office, as was generally the case among the original Old-Lutherans,” because they had been trained as missionaries and evangelists, “who in Europe were carefully distinguished from the clergy,” and so “they really had no systematic doctrine of office and were not tempted to make a law of the forms of office.” In addition, pioneer conditions in mid-nineteenth-century America “did not make for the development of hierarchical forms, as a rule.”¹²² Until Hoenecke’s time, most Wisconsin pastors “lay captive” to what Pieper called “an unclear teaching regarding the pastoral office.” They saw “the ministerial office as a class directly ordained by Christ to be in and over the church” and generally believed that God had entrusted the Keys to the pastors, not to the laity. The synod “made” pastors who “understood little about the right administration of the office.”¹²³

Near the end of the 1870s, Synodical Conference leaders discussed “the divineness of the teacher’s call,” and their remarks revealed “a difference as to whether the Christian school derives directly from divine or-

¹¹⁸ Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 4; see also Lawrenz, “An Evaluation of Walther’s Theses on the Church and Ministry,” 105–106; Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 232.

¹¹⁹ Walther, quoted by Lawrenz, “An Evaluation of Walther’s Theses on the Church and Ministry,” 87.

¹²⁰ Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 5–6.

¹²¹ Pieper, “The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke,” 358.

¹²² Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 61.

¹²³ Pieper, “The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke,” 380. See also Brug, *Ministry of the Word*, 405–407.

dinance or from the course of development in human education." Some cited Christ's sayings, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," and, "Feed my lambs," which they understood "to indicate a difference between the pastor and teacher and the latter's dependence on the former, in that the Apostles' mission was the pastor's calling, and the teacher's office received its divineness only through the benefit of clergy." In the mid-1880s, a mixed Missouri-Wisconsin conference "witnessed a discussion of the subject that at least broke away from the usual line of dogmatizing." General agreement was expressed at that time that "because the Christian teacher's whole work of teaching is governed by the Word of God, his work in the school merits the same appreciation of being 'divine' as that of the pastor of the congregation." This, Koehler writes, "signaled the beginning of a real exegetical and historical analysis of such questions in Wisconsin, and beyond, that was destined to have its repercussions."¹²⁴

In 1892, Hoenecke presented a paper in which he "attached the teacher's call to the pastorate in the usual way," yet stressed that "the teacher should receive a regular call from the congregation in accordance with the Augsburg Confession's demand that no one is to teach publicly in the church without a regular call."¹²⁵ At a 1909 mixed conference of Missouri and Wisconsin pastors in Milwaukee, John Schaller, newly arrived to take Hoenecke's place at the Wauwatosa seminary, "set forth that there is only one office in the church, that of the pastor, which is divinely ordained," and that all other offices created in the church were "deaconate offices, that is auxiliary offices, not ordained by God but branched off from the pastoral office by the church."¹²⁶

But it was during Schaller's tenure as seminary president (1909-1920) that he, Koehler, and Pieper "threshed out" the doctrine of church and ministry "over against the muddled or erroneous ideas that had been current for thirty years or more."¹²⁷ Contrary to the approaches usually advanced—that the teacher's call was either "an auxiliary of the pastor's office and hence subordinate to it," or "an auxiliary of the parents' office, not endowed with the peculiar divineness of the ministry" but like "any secular calling and with no greater obligations"¹²⁸—Koehler asked, "Why detour through the office of the pastor in order to establish the divine character of the teacher's call?" The teacher, just as surely as the pastor,

¹²⁴ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 230-231.

¹²⁵ Cited by Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 233-234.

¹²⁶ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 232.

¹²⁷ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 230; see also Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 407-408.

¹²⁸ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 187.

was called by the congregation “to labor in word and doctrine” in a public manner and in an official capacity in the congregation. “The very texts cited to substantiate the divine institution of the pastorate in distinction from other offices [were] thereby given a wrong slant.” Traditional views on church and ministry had arisen from a “falsely so-called dogmatical method of determining a doctrine by citing doctrinal statements of the Scriptures without paying attention to the historical context and its way of presenting things.”¹²⁹

In 1912, in a review of Walther’s *Die Stimme Unser Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*, Pieper charged that because of “Walther’s style of mainly submitting quotations from the fathers, there is much room for misunderstanding the fathers or Walther himself,” and that sometimes Walther himself may have misunderstood the church fathers.¹³⁰ In another 1912 article, Pieper asked, “Is the Wisconsin Synod church or congregation in the strict sense of the word?” His answer was, “Yes. The Christians who form our local congregations and the congregations that form our synod do not cease to be *Christians* and *Christian* congregations because they unite to proclaim together the praises of the Lord.” What then “makes a multitude of people into the congregation of God, *congregation* in the proper sense of the word? Answer: *Not the outward organization into an outward local congregation, but faith or being sanctified in Christ Jesus through faith. A believing synodical assembly is congregation in the proper sense of the word.*”¹³¹

Summarizing the twentieth-century development of the views of the two synods on church and ministry, Brug considers it an oversimplification merely to contrast “Wisconsin” and “Missouri” views. The division “was never strictly along synodical lines.” Theologians in both synods were students of Walther and subscribed to Walther’s theses. For decades many in Missouri even “publicly endorsed the ‘Wisconsin Synod view.’”¹³²

¹²⁹ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 232.

¹³⁰ Pieper, “Review of Walther’s *Die Stimme Unser Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*,” 237–238. Koehler was quick to add, however: “At the same time, [Pieper’s] article offers a testimonial to the great appreciation of [Walther’s] book all over the Lutheran world and therewith offers a contribution to the Walther centennial celebration that had just taken place the October before (238).”

¹³¹ August Pieper, “Die Lehre von der Kirche und ihren Kennzeichen in Anwendung auf die Synode,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 9 (April 1912): 83–106; trans. Floyd Brand, rev. James Langebartels in *The Wauwatosa Theology* 3:66–67; emphases in the original. For an extended discussion of the ensuing debate between the synods on the doctrine of church and ministry, see Brug, *Ministry of the Word*, 408–425.

¹³² Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 398.

One could, in fact, construct an excellent summary of the "Wisconsin" view using only Missouri sources.¹³³ Missouri has typically described the "Wisconsin view" of ministry by saying that Wisconsin rejects Luther's and Walther's belief that the pastoral office exists within the church "by divine right and mandate," and that while Luther and Walther identified "public ministry" as synonymous with "parish pastor," Wisconsin "does not recognize them as signifying the same thing."¹³⁴ Yet in many cases, "Missouri's practice seemed to be Wisconsin's and Wisconsin's practice was quite Missouri."¹³⁵

Wisconsin Professor Armin Schuetze has reflected on the obvious question asked by many in both synods: how could such differences regarding church and ministry continue for decades, while the two synods remained in church fellowship? Schuetze answered:

The fact is that the practice within the synods was not all that different. The Missouri Synod functioned in many ways as a church, even though the Communion service at its convention was conducted under the auspices of a "divinely ordained" local congregation. The Wisconsin Synod did not become a super church, which some feared would happen if it were recognized as church in the same way as a local congregation. Professors called to the Wisconsin Synod educational institutions were considered to be in the public ministry by divine call no less than the pastor in a congregation. The fact that in Missouri a professor might be called as assistant (without many practical duties) by a local congregation because it alone could issue a divine call seemed more like an unnecessary action than a false practice that needed correction. The differences often seemed more theological than practical. There was also the view that the differences were not doctrinal but in application. What is more, the differences crossed synodical lines and were being worked on by the seminary faculties and not simply ignored. Whatever the reasons, the fact is that the church/ministry controversy did not become divisive until its ramifications became evident in other troubling issues.¹³⁶

¹³³ See Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 443–452.

¹³⁴ Eugene F.A. Klug, *Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 150–152. For the contrasting Wisconsin view, see Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 363–380.

¹³⁵ John F. Brug, *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 49.

¹³⁶ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference Lutherans*, 239; see also Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 66–74; Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 434–440.

Even today, "it is likely that the way church life operates in everyday practice according to the 'Wisconsin' view is probably not much different in most cases than according to the 'Missouri' view," and "one may even conclude that the differences between the 'Wisconsin' view and the 'Missouri' view are a matter of terminology."¹³⁷ But today, disagreement between the two synods—and even disagreement within the Missouri Synod itself—is far greater than it was in the days of Pieper and Koehler, or even during the 1940s and 1950s. "If the difference between the so-called Wisconsin and Missouri views [used to be] 5 and 6 on a scale of 1 to 10, the views held by some parties within the Missouri Synod today are at least 3 and 8."¹³⁸

One area of debate centers on the meaning of the term *Predigtamt*.¹³⁹ While Missouri authors have said that Luther and Walther identified *Predigtamt* with "pastoral ministry," Wisconsin considers the English translations of some of Walther's major writings "problematic" when *Predigtamt* is rendered "pastoral ministry," even in passages in which it has a wider meaning.¹⁴⁰ "We do not consider Walther's identification of the public preaching office with the pastoral office as a happy one," August Pieper wrote in 1917. "From this some people who have not thought or studied independently have drawn the conclusion that the public office, that is the office of the Word which is transmitted from the church to an individual person, and the pastoral office are equal and exchangeable concepts and that therefore only that form of the preaching office which we call the pastoral office (*Pfarramt*) is of divine origin."¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Thomas P. Nass, "The Revised *This We Believe* of the WELS on the Ministry," *Logia* 10 (Holy Trinity 2001): 37.

¹³⁸ Brug, *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 49; see also Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 470–479.

¹³⁹ For an extended discussion of this question, see John F. Brug, "The Meaning of *Predigtamt* in Augsburg Confession V," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 102 (Winter 2005): 29–45; Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 332–352. See also John Schaller, "The Office and Development of the New Testament Ministry," first published in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary catalogue, 1911–1912, 1917–1918; trans. Roger Fleming, Mark Jeske, and Daniel Schaller; rev. Wilbert R. Gawrisch, *The Wauwatosa Theology*, 3:73–94; Lawrenz, "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry," 126–136.

¹⁴⁰ See Lawrenz, "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry," 133.

¹⁴¹ August Pieper, "Luthers Lehre von Kirche und Amt," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 14 (July 1917): 211–241; 15 (January 1918): 65–80 and (April 1918): 101–126; trans. Harold R. Johne, "Luther's Doctrine of Church and Ministry," in Jahn, ed., *The Wauwatosa Theology* 3:193.

J.T. Mueller's translation of Walther's Thesis VIII on the Ministry reads: "The pastoral office [*Predigtamt*] is the highest office in the church, and from it stems all other offices in the church." Mueller's translation of *Predigtamt* as "pastoral office" implies "that the pastor of a congregation is the only one who really holds the office of the ministry," yet this appears to contradict Walther's own explanation of the thesis. In explaining Thesis VIII, Walther said that the *Predigtamt* contains other offices beside the office of pastor.¹⁴² But as translated by Mueller, Walther says:

The highest office is that of the ministry of the Word [*Predigtamt*], with which *all other offices are also conferred at the same time*. Every other public office in the church accordingly is *part of the same or a helping office* that supports [stands beside] the ministry of the Word [*Predigtamt*], whether it be the elders who do not labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim 5:17) or the ruling office (Rom 12:8) or the deacons (the office of service in a narrow sense) or whatever other offices the church may entrust to particular persons for special administration.¹⁴³

Wisconsin Professor Wilbert Gawrisch, reviewing Mueller's translation, wrote that "the error of those who assert that Walther claimed that the pastoral office is the highest office in the church in distinction to other forms of the ministry of the Word is not supported by the text. The inaccuracies of the translator contribute to this misconception."¹⁴⁴

Wisconsin considers it a "terminological problem" that Walther sometimes used *Predigtamt* in a wide sense to refer to all aspects of the ministry of the Word, but at other times as a synonym for *Pfarramt*, the pastoral ministry. *Predigtamt* "is first of all the activity of proclaiming God's Word." *Amt* "is not limited to an office or position," but "often refers to a task or action, or, if you will, a function." Confusion over the meaning of the word *Amt* apparently "had developed already in Walther's day even among native speakers of German, since Walther warned against misreading the Confessions on the basis of this confusion."¹⁴⁵ Walther cautioned against "coming to conclusions concerning the doctrine of the Lutheran church on

¹⁴² Brug, "Recovering Walther," 6.

¹⁴³ C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry: Witnesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*, trans. J.T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 289-290; emphasis added. Regarding this translation, see Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry and Governance* (Fort Wayne: International Foundation of Confessional Lutheran Research, 1990), 143, notes 72 and 73.

¹⁴⁴ Wilbert R. Gawrisch, review of C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry*, in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 90 (Fall 1993): 314.

¹⁴⁵ Brug, "Recovering Walther," 8.

the ministry as found in the Confessions when looking at our individual symbols in which the words *Amt* [office], *Predigtamt* [preaching office], and *Schlüsselamt* [office of the keys], etc., are found." Walther said that "the presumption must be that where the word 'office' occurs in such texts, it is being used in the simple sense of 'commissioned work' (*aufgetragenen Tuns*) without any other additional meaning because this alone is the essential idea of office in the use of the German language as we have proven above."¹⁴⁶

Wisconsin understands Walther in "Church and Ministry" to say that *Predigtamt* in Augsburg V "is not concerned with ministry in the concrete or the *Pfarramt*," but instead the topic is "the *Amt in abstracto*" through which God gives the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ "This is an important matter," Walther wrote,

because of those who make the *Pfarramt* into a means of grace and equate it with the Word and sacraments, and who assert that this office would be absolutely essential to each person for salvation, so that a person without the service of an ordained *Pfarrer* can neither come to faith, nor can receive absolution for his sins. But our church teaches this necessity only in regard to the spoken or physical [*mundlich und leiblich*] Word in opposition to a supposed inner Word and to every type of enthusiasm.¹⁴⁸

In a similar way, in his essay "The True Visible Church," Walther wrote that in Augsburg V:

[O]ne can also recognize very clearly what those of old frequently understood by the office of the ministry [*Predigtamt*], namely, that they often took 'office of the ministry' as entirely synonymous with 'gospel.' The Apology does not have Grabau's understanding according to which the office of the ministry [*Predigtamt*] is always equivalent to the office of pastor [*Pfarramt*]. . . . When our old teachers ascribe such great things to the office of the ministry, they thereby

¹⁴⁶ See Mark Nispel, "Office and Offices: Some Basic Lutheran Philology," *Logia* 6 (Trinity 1997): 10, note 9. Walther reproduced an article from the *Erlanger Zeitschrift*, entitled "Bemerkungen ueber das Amt," in *Lehre und Wehre* 7 (1861): 295-296.

¹⁴⁷ Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche* (1862), 198; Brug, "Recovering Walther," 8. See also Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume IV*, trans. Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tackmier (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 187.

¹⁴⁸ Walther, *Die Stimme Unserer Kirche*, 199.

mean nothing else than the service of the Word [*den Dienst des Wortes*] in whatever way [*Weise*] it may come to us.¹⁴⁹

Again, in an 1862 sermon, Walther objected to those who insisted that “the preaching office [had] its basis in a particular estate in the New Testament like that [priestly estate] of the Old Testament,” passed from one generation to the next “through the laying on of hands” at ordination “in unbroken succession,” so that only men thus ordained “can validly and efficaciously administer God’s gifts to the laity.” Walther called this a “great, dangerous—indeed, anti-Christian” error that “renders Christians uncertain” because “the salvation of those redeemed by Christ is placed in the hands of erring men” and “the preacher is put in [Christ’s] place and made an absolute pope.”¹⁵⁰

Walther’s understanding of the teacher’s call as a part of the ministry of the Word was also evident in his correspondence with J.C.W. Lindemann, instructor at the teachers’ seminary in Addison, Illinois. Lindemann had derived the office of teacher from the parent, but Walther disagreed, insisting that the school teacher belonged to the *Predigtamt* and that most Missourians did not embrace the Lindemann view,¹⁵¹ a claim further supported in an article by C.A. Selle in the *Ev. Luth. Schulblatt* in 1869.¹⁵² Though again recognizing that Missourians were not all in agreement, Walther nonetheless wrote, “We are convinced that only when the principles presented here concerning the mutual relationship of church and school, of the school teacher and the preacher, come into play will school and church remain here in indissoluble association and bring the

¹⁴⁹ C.F.W. Walther, “The True Visible Church,” Theses I-III, 13th Synodical Convention, St. Louis, Mo., beginning October 31, 1866, in *Essays for the Church, Volume I: 1857-1879* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 102.

¹⁵⁰ C.F.W. Walther, “Sermon on the Office of the Ministry, 1862,” trans. Matthew C. Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod’s Great Era of Unity and Growth* (Lutheran Legacy, 2009), 151.

¹⁵¹ C.F.W. Walther to J.C.W. Lindemann, September 27, 1866, trans. William M. Ewald; in Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Walther Speaks to the Church: Selected Letters by C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 56-57; Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 12-13.

¹⁵² C.A.T. Selle, “Das amt des Pastors als Schulaufseher,” *Evangelische-Lutherische Schulblatt* 4 (January 1869); trans. Mark Nispel, “The Office of a Pastor as School Overseer,” <http://www.wlssays.net/files/SellePastor.pdf>; accessed January 17, 2011; Brug, “Recovering Walther,” 13.

first of the other gifts which this association should bring according to God's will and order."¹⁵³

Disagreement between Wisconsin and Missouri on the meaning of *Predigtamt* was confirmed in the 1981 LCMS Statement on the Ministry, which defines the "Office of the Public Ministry" as "the divinely established office referred to in Scripture as 'shepherd,' 'elder,' or 'overseer,'" called "equivalent to 'the pastoral office,'" while Auxiliary Offices include "those offices established by the church" in which "those who are called to serve in them are authorized to perform certain function(s) of the public ministry" but are "auxiliary to that unique pastoral office," and "the most common auxiliary office today is the office of the teaching ministry."¹⁵⁴ In Wisconsin's view, "Walther's distinction between helping offices that are *part of* the one ministry of the Word (such as preaching deacons or teachers) and those that are *beside* the ministry of the Word (such as deacons that administer charity) has been lost."¹⁵⁵

At the other extreme on church and ministry views was Johann W.F. Hoefling, who did not recognize the divine institution of the pastoral ministry.¹⁵⁶ The Wisconsin Synod has been accused—increasingly, it seems—of holding Hoefling's view of the ministry, and that its doctrine of ministry is dependent upon or derived from that of Hoefling.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Walther, *Der Lutheraner* 25 (February 1, 1869).

¹⁵⁴ *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures and Nomenclatures: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis, 1981).

¹⁵⁵ Brug, *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 49.

¹⁵⁶ See Brug, *Ministry of the Word*, 387–393; emphasis original.

¹⁵⁷ One can detect the annoyance of some Wisconsin writers in response to this charge who consider Missouri's linking of Wisconsin's church and ministry doctrine to Hoefling as being done in a dismissive, even cavalier fashion. Joel Pless, for example, recalled a 1995 incident at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in which Robert Preus "blithely stated" that "the Wisconsin Synod got its doctrine of the ministry from Hoefling." Challenged on this assertion—apparently by Pless himself—"Dr. Preus replied that while he had not studied the issue in-depth, he had learned about the Hoefling/Wisconsin connection from others." Joel L. Pless, "Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling: The Man and His Ecclesiology. Part 4—What Connection Exists Between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 106 (Fall 2009): 248.

In more direct language, Brug, *WELS and Other Lutherans*, 51, charged David Scaer with repeating the "Hoefling/Schleiermacher innuendo at the 1996 Congress on the Lutheran Confessions," which has had the effect of preventing "meaningful discussion of the issue." Such a caricature, Brug wrote, gives little evidence that Missouri critics have actually read or understood either Hoefling or Wisconsin formulations on the ministry. Brug's reference is to David P. Scaer, "The Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and a Few Extra Thoughts on Hoefling," in *The Office of the Holy Ministry*, papers presented at

It comes as something of a surprise, then, to learn that Walther himself was accused of being in agreement with Hoefling. "Regrettably" it had come to this, Walther wrote in 1858, "that now everyone who rejects the Romanizing doctrine of the ministry is reckoned to be a Hoeflingite." Walther characterized the views of Hoefling and of Romanizing Lutherans as "opposite extremes, between which in the middle lies the pure Lutheran doctrine, in which alone our Synod has confessed itself and still confesses itself."¹⁵⁸

Francis Pieper devoted six pages in his *Christian Dogmatics* to describing and then refuting Hoefling's doctrine of the ministry, but he did not address Hoefling's doctrine of the church at all.¹⁵⁹ Likewise Kurt Marquart, in *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, treated Hoefling's understanding of the ministry in greater detail but not his teaching on the church.¹⁶⁰ David Scaer summarized Hoefling's theology by listing eight key teachings gleaned from Walter W.F. Albrecht's index of Pieper's *Dogmatics*. Scaer then referenced the alleged Hoefling/Wisconsin connection again, citing two others who "noted that Hoefling's position

the Congress of the Lutheran Confessions, Itasca, Ill., ed. John R. Fehrman and Daniel Preus (Crestwood, Missouri: Luther Academy, 1996), 130-149.

¹⁵⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *Lehre und Wehre* 4 (1858): 354; cited by Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 392.

¹⁵⁹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:443-449.

¹⁶⁰ "It was Hoefling who, in his reaction to Loehe, framed what may indeed be called a particular *theory* of 'conferral,' or even 'transfer.' According to him, the only divinely established office is that of the priesthood of all believers. The concrete office of Word and Sacrament does not arise out of a direct divine command and institution. Rather, it emerges by an inner necessity out of the priesthood itself, that is, by the [priesthood's] delegation [*Uebertragung*] of its individual members' spiritual rights and powers to one of themselves, for the sake of good order. Hoefling's later attempts to make this scheme add up to a divine institution of the concrete preaching office [*Predigtamt*] after all were really only cosmetic. The real point at issue was whether the church's concrete office of Gospel proclamation rested on a direct divine institution, or whether it arose simply out of the needs and decisions of the priestly community, the church." Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, vol. 9, ed. Robert D. Preus and John R. Stephenson (Fort Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 113. Marquart's complete discussion of Hoefling is on pp. 112-119. So also Klug, *Church and Ministry*, 329: "Hoefling, and so also the Wisconsin Synod, held that the pastor's office evolved out of the general priesthood, according to Matthew 28."

was strikingly similar to that of August Pieper¹⁶¹ and Schleiermacher¹⁶¹—John Wohlrabe¹⁶² and Erling Teigen.¹⁶³

Marquart also wrote in an excursus that “the chief impetus towards ‘New Wisconsin’” came from Koehler, “who held that in the 19th-century-German disputes over church and ministry, only Hoefling’s position was completely free and correct according to Scripture.” Though Marquart granted that Wisconsin’s official Church and Ministry statements “formally reject Hoefling’s stand,” he insisted that “materially” Wisconsin’s statements “suggest Hoefling’s influence, for instance, in the virtual identification of priesthood and ministry, and the apparent failure to distinguish the one Gospel ministry from auxiliary offices.”¹⁶⁴

Joel Pless of the Wisconsin Synod has done both synods a valuable service by studying Hoefling in greater detail. Hoefling “believed that the means of grace—the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments—were instituted by God, as described in Article V of the Augsburg Confession.” Hoefling understood the concept of *ministerium* (ministry) as “strictly functional” and seemed to regard Augsburg V as describing the ministry “only in an abstract sense,” and did not mention persons exercising the office until Augsburg XIV. His strong emphasis on the application of the means of grace “compelled him to be skeptical of the establishment of a specific pastoral office,” though he did not disavow that

¹⁶¹ Scaer, “The Augsburg Confession . . . and a Few Extra Thoughts on Hoefling,” 137; “The Lutheran Confessions on the Holy Ministry With a Few Thoughts on Hoefling,” 39.

¹⁶² John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri until 1962. An Historical Analysis of the Doctrine of the Ministry in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*. Th.D. Diss., 1987, privately published by the author.

¹⁶³ Erling Teigen, “The Universal Priesthood in the Lutheran Confessions,” *Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter*, Letter No. 25 (Advent 1991): 1–7.

¹⁶⁴ Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, 220. Commenting on Wisconsin’s doctrine of the church, Marquart wrote, 220–221: “A related and very basic difficulty is the [WELS] Statement’s concept of ‘various groupings in Jesus’ name for the proclamation of His Gospel,’ of which ‘all lie on the same plane. They are all church in one and the same sense’ [1967 WELS Proceedings, 287]. These ‘groupings’ are not only local congregations and synods (‘larger groupings’), but also ‘other groupings,’ of all of which it is said: ‘The specific forms in which believers group themselves together . . . have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church.’ Church, ministry, means of grace, marks of the church, all seem to float about too abstractly here, tied too loosely to concrete divine instituting mandates.” Marquart later added, however: “As for Walther and [Francis] Pieper, it is not too much to say that they could not have imagined the Missouri Synod as a non-church.”

"the ecclesiastical office also includes the pastoral office itself." Hoeftling opposed any established forms of the ministry because he saw in them "a return to ceremonialism and legalism, i.e., Roman Catholicism, or at the very least, a Romanist view of the ministry." Further, "in describing the relationship between the universal priesthood of all believers and the public ministry, Hoeftling championed the former, seemingly at the expense of the latter." He "saw the church as being the originator of the public ministry, largely from necessity and expediency." The means of grace themselves and the functions of the ministry were, in his view, "divinely instituted, but not the actual ministerial office itself—at least not in the concrete sense." Because Hoeftling believed that the concrete office of the ministry was a human institution and because he denied the divine institution of the public ministry, his view of the ministry is clearly "an aberration from biblical truth and sound Lutheran doctrine."¹⁶⁵

Joel Pless suggests, perhaps optimistically, that Hoeftling's views on ministry were a work in progress, recalling Hoeftling's "lively conversation with Walther on ecclesiology during Walther's trip to Germany after Walther's *Kirche und Amt* was accepted as the public doctrine of the Missouri Synod in 1851 but before the publication of *Church and Ministry* in 1852."¹⁶⁶ Pless characterizes the surviving evidence of a connection between Hoeftling and Wauwatosa as "slim and subjective." True, Wauwatosa professors Koehler, Walther, and Schaller were probably familiar with Hoeftling's writings on ecclesiology; page 100 of Koehler's then unpublished *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* contains a "cryptic line" in which Koehler paired Walther and Hoeftling in opposition to a "catholicized doctrine of church and ministry." Sometime, then, between 1900 and 1917 Koehler saw Walther and Hoeftling standing (though not necessarily together) in opposition to a Romanist view of church and ministry, in favor of a distinctly congregational ecclesiology.¹⁶⁷

The explanation most commonly offered to explain this "cryptic line" in Koehler's draft is that while he appreciated some things about Hoeftling's ecclesiology, he was neither well-read in all Hoeftling's ministry positions nor in full agreement with every aspect of them. "Some of the conclusions that Koehler took on the ministry—and [some conclusions

¹⁶⁵ Joel L. Pless, "Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoeftling: The Man and His Ecclesiology. Part 3—His Doctrine of the Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 106 (Summer 2009): 165–169.

¹⁶⁶ Pless, "Hoeftling, Part 3," 171.

¹⁶⁷ Joel L. Pless, "Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoeftling: The Man and His Ecclesiology. Part 4—What Connection Exists between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 106 (Fall 2009): 251–252.

taken] later [by] the WELS in general—obviously contradicted Hoeftling's position. If Koehler had further criticisms of Hoeftling's position, they have not come to light."¹⁶⁸ Koehler's opposition to Romanist views on the ministry must be understood in the context of his general disdain for all forms of ceremony. Victor Prange, reviewing Koehler's *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, wrote that Koehler "shows an appreciation for Protestantism," but "one misses an equal appreciation for that which is catholic. Koehler speaks of how the life of the church so easily 'becomes materialistic.'" Prange imagined that Koehler would have felt entirely at home in an unadorned church building, "cleansed of all distractions so that in the plain and bare setting the Word alone could impact the soul."¹⁶⁹

Pless concludes that it is "simply not accurate to assert that the WELS doctrine of church and ministry is really an American version" of Hoeftling's ecclesiology. "If Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller conducted their studies in church and ministry the way they confessed doing it and the way history has recorded them doing it," Hoeftling's views would have had little effect on them. By their own account, the Wauwatosa men sought to "return to performing the theological task by momentarily laying aside systematic theology and going back to the source of Christian theology—the Scriptures themselves." Pless acknowledges—as must we all about our synodical fathers—that "gifted as they were," the Wauwatosa men "were not infallible in always making definitions and distinctions in the theological task." It is important to maintain that not everything written by Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller has become part of the public doctrine of the Wisconsin Synod.¹⁷⁰

What that public doctrine states is contained in *The Doctrinal Statements of the WELS* in its "Theses on the Church and Ministry." Statement II, A, says: "Christ instituted one office in His Church, the ministry of the Gospel." Statement II, D, says: "These public ministers are appointed by God. Ac 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Co 12:28. It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency (Hoeftling)."¹⁷¹ Recent Wisconsin publications have agreed in rejecting Hoeftling's view of the public ministry as "mere expediency." One says: "Where Christians are

¹⁶⁸ Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 238; Pless, "Hoeftling, Part 4," 252–253.

¹⁶⁹ Victor H. Prange, "Review of J.P. Koehler's 'The History of the Wisconsin Synod,'" *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 1 (Spring 1983): 40.

¹⁷⁰ Pless, "Hoeftling, Part 4," 256–258.

¹⁷¹ Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 48–49. See also Lawrenz, "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry," 131–132; Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics, Volume IV*, 188–190.

assembled, God wills that there be servants who shepherd them with the means of grace as Christ's representatives. The public ministry is not optional."¹⁷² Says another: "It is important to know that God himself instituted the public ministry for the church."¹⁷³ Says a third: "The origin of the public ministry is with God himself. God has brought it into existence. The public ministry is not a human innovation, created by people to fill a need."¹⁷⁴

Allow me to add a personal recollection. Each year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on Assignment Day, the Conference of District Presidents and the Synodical Praesidium meet on our Mequon campus. On those Tuesdays in May in 1975, 1976, and 1978 when I was a student, I heard then-Wisconsin Synod President Oscar Naumann address the graduating seniors who would soon be entering the pastoral ministry. Each year he began by surveying the students seated before him and declaring, "You are God's gifts to the church." The biblical referent, of course, was Ephesians 4:11-12, in which the ascended Savior gives apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers to His church. Any man who fancies himself as "God's gift to the church" would rightly be dismissed as arrogant, and anyone who would say about another man, "*He thinks* he is God's gift to the church" would be understood to be speaking sarcastically. But upon hearing President Naumann's words each spring, we felt no pride and certainly no sarcasm—only great humility and thankfulness. I cannot imagine any seminarian hearing those words, only to regard his ministry as the result of mere human expediency. God calls through the church.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 571.

¹⁷³ Armin W. Schuetze, *Church—Mission—Ministry* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995), 99.

¹⁷⁴ Nass, "The Revised *This We Believe* of the WELS on the Ministry," 33. See also Brian R. Keller, "Church and Ministry: An Exegetical Study of Several Key Passages with Reference to Some Contemporary Issues," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 93 (Fall 1996): 267; John F. Brug, "Current Debate Concerning the Doctrine of the Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91 (Winter 1994): 33; Brug, *The Ministry of the Word*, 349–350.

¹⁷⁵ See also Schaller, "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," 92: "The only things that can really be proved with regard to the question before us is the very important fact that God recognized the bishops, elders, pastors and teachers, who were admittedly chosen by the *congregations*, as *divinely* called, as gifts given to the congregation by God. That is also clearly shown by comparing the verbs that are used: Acts 20:28 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 say, 'He has *made* or *set* them' [ἐθετο]; in Ephesians 4:11, however, we read, 'He has *given* them' [ἔδωκεν]. Insofar as the

Brug summarizes: "Walther and his contemporaries placed Missouri in the scriptural middle between Grabau and Hoefling." In the early 20th century, "a narrowing of Walther's view on ministry" occurred in Missouri in which some of "the balance of Walther's position" was lost as focus was placed "too narrowly on the pastor as the only divinely established form." Later in the 20th century, "a counteraction in Missouri" moved back to a "more nuanced view of Walther, but in some cases moved too much away from a strong affirmation of the pastoral ministry toward a minimalist view of the pastorate." Still others are being drawn further into "the Hoefling and Grabau fringes," some even openly repudiating Walther. In their respective eras, Walther and Wisconsin's Wauwatosa faculties were equally "willing to reexamine every detail of their position [on the church and ministry] in light of Scripture alone," and if their study had "revealed areas in which they had been operating with assumptions or interpretations not supported by Scripture, they were ready to correct their view." Such an "*ad fontes* method" provides "a good model for us in the early 21st century."¹⁷⁶

VI. "We have all been 'Missourians'"

The Wisconsin Synod, celebrating its 161st anniversary in 2011,¹⁷⁷ gratefully acknowledges that its past fellowship with Walther and the Missouri Synod and its ninety-year participation in the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference has brought many blessings.

Walther strongly supported a Lutheran elementary school system which instilled Lutheran teaching in generations of Missouri's sons and daughters. "Without Christian schools the children of the church cannot be brought up to be good Christians," August Pieper wrote. "In every [Missouri] parish a parochial school was organized, and Walther proclaimed the motto: Next to every Lutheran church a Lutheran school!" Walther "became the founder of the Lutheran parochial school in this country," and "we see something that was never seen in the church before—hundreds of pastors teaching school," even "to the end of their

passages are parallel, we have according to this explanation of the Holy Spirit himself that the verb 'set' is to be understood not of the institution of the offices mentioned *in abstracto*, not therefore of a command of God to establish such offices, but of the placing or giving of the individual *persons* who carry out the activity that the title of the office indicates." Emphases in the original.

¹⁷⁶ Brug, "Recovering Walther," 15–16.

¹⁷⁷ That is when this article was presented at the Symposium at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

lives" conducting congregational schools "in addition to doing their pastoral work in one or more congregations."¹⁷⁸

Under Walther's influence the Missouri Synod developed a ministerial education system that became the envy of other church bodies. "With his colleagues, Walther immediately founded an institution that was at once an elementary school, high school, college [the German *gymnasium* was a combination of the latter two] and seminary."¹⁷⁹ That educational system produced pastors who labored in the tireless, selfless manner of Walther. It was in his "so-called Luther hours," Pieper remembered, that Walther "addressed himself directly to the hearts of his students" and with his testimony of God's grace "changed hearts and produced preachers of grace. He communicated something of his own spirit to many of his students, filled them with love for Christ and his Word, with zeal for God's house, and for the purity of the gospel. Here he made them willing joyfully to put their lives into Christ's service wherever they might be sent without asking, 'What's in it for me?'"¹⁸⁰ Walther's theological writings became the primary reading for two generations of Wisconsin Synod pastors until Wisconsin established its own *Quartalschrift* in 1904.¹⁸¹

For decades, Missouri and Wisconsin pastors went to school together, served side by side, and found spouses in each other's synods. "You could write a book about all the evidences of Christian love members of the two synods once felt among and displayed among themselves," one Wisconsin Synod pastor remembered. "Ministers met in mixed conferences, socialized, preached at each other's festivals, accepted calls interchangeably." Pastors of these sister synods were "bound together powerfully in love and fellowship" especially around Walter A. Maier's *Lutheran Hour* broadcasts. "At two o'clock on every Sunday afternoon it was broadcast on countless radio stations across the country and beyond." In its "palmy days the program was called 'Bringing Christ to the Nations,' and nobody laughed."¹⁸² Another Wisconsin Synod pastor recalled that as a high school student he "came and went" in the parsonage of an area Missouri Synod

¹⁷⁸ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 241–242.

¹⁷⁹ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 241.

¹⁸⁰ See Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 238. In Pieper's teaching at Wisconsin's seminary, his students reported that "he would on occasion lay aside the day's work" and "spend the class period inspiring them for the work of the ministry—something he undoubtedly learned from Walther."

¹⁸¹ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 48.

¹⁸² Clayton Krug, "Shifts of Fellowship Teachings in WELS, 1860–1996: A Personal View" (paper presented to the Winnebago Pastoral Conference, Northern Wisconsin District, Wisconsin Synod, September 17, 1996), 5–6; in Braun, *Tale of Two Synods*, 58.

pastor "almost as though it were my own," and he added, "The farthest thing from anyone's mind was that this could all one day come to an end."¹⁸³

Most striking, considering Walther's great stress on pure doctrine, was his equally strong emphasis on growth. Wisconsin Professor Edward Fredrich used to tell his students 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."¹⁸⁴ Lutherans beyond the Synodical Conference took note of this. The Ohio Synod's R.C.H. Lenski (a great friend of neither Missouri nor Wisconsin) remarked in wonder at how Missouri's "strict conservatism" was coupled with her remarkable growth: "Here is a historical fact that refutes all talk trying to persuade us that we must be liberal, accommodate ourselves to the spirit of the times, etc., in order to win [people] and grow externally. The very opposite is seen in the Missouri Synod. Missouri has at all times been unyielding; it is so still." Yet Missouri's "enormous achievements" stood for all to see. "What so many regard as Missouri's weakness has in reality been its strength."¹⁸⁵

This was the strength the Wisconsin Synod and others saw in Missouri, and what drew them to Missouri. "For three-quarters of a century we have been virtually identified with what is now known as 'The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,'" wrote Wisconsin's Frederic Blume in 1952. "To those on the outside we of the Synodical Conference have all been 'Missourians,' since we shared Missouri's convictions." Wisconsin admired and echoed Missouri's opposition to "wrong-thinking and wrong-headed trends and movements that have troubled the Lutheran Church."¹⁸⁶ Today, the Wisconsin Synod would owe Walther a debt of gratitude even "if the only thing he ever did was give his thirty-nine evening lectures on the proper distinction between the law and gospel."¹⁸⁷ Wisconsin's (formerly Missouri's) Siegbert Becker urged us that "every

¹⁸³ Theodore A. Sauer to Mark Braun, April 18, 1997; in Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 59.

¹⁸⁴ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 48.

¹⁸⁵ [R.C.H.] Lenski, "Editorielles: Missouris fuenfundsiebzigjaehriges Jubilaeum," *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 63 (May 20, 1922): 305; cited with approval by [W.H.T.] Dau, "The Theological Observer: Ohio Synod," *Theological Monthly* 2 (July 1922): 204-205.

¹⁸⁶ Fredric E. Blume, "A State of Confession: A Study of Its Implications on the Basis of II Thess. 3:14-15," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 39 (November 2, 1952): 345.

¹⁸⁷ Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 239, said that Walther "emphasized, taught, and dealt with the distinction between law and gospel as no one had since Luther," and "there can be no more careful and thorough work than Walther's *Law and Gospel*."

Lutheran pastor ought to read through this volume once a year for his first ten years in the ministry."¹⁸⁸

The beginnings of the Missouri Synod were different from those of the Wisconsin Synod because Missouri had Walther and Wisconsin did not. But the Wisconsin Synod has become what it is through the teaching, preaching, friendship, influence, and good example of C.F.W. Walther. We honor Walther's memory best "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."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 50.

¹⁸⁹ Brenner, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," 51.