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An Examination of the Left, Right and Center Parties in the American Lutheran Controversy of the Mid-Nineteenth Century

A thesis presented to the faculty of
Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis,
Department of Historical Theology,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

by

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May 20, 2003

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I. Introduction

James Voelz recently published a two-part essay in *Concordia Journal* entitled, “Contemporary Americans Make Poor Confessional Lutherans.”¹ In his essay, Dr. Voelz points out that the rampant liberty that permeates American life is constantly at odds with the desire of Lutherans to remain confessional, doctrinal and liturgical. He states, “All of the factors involved in such a church, viz., doctrinal formulations, confessional statements, and uniform liturgical practices, are restrictive and non-libertarian. They rub against the grain of every contemporary American. Which means that to embrace them is to be truly counter-cultural.”²

This tension between being Lutheran and being American is nothing new. Since their first arrival in America, Lutherans have faced questions of change—whether and how much to change the practices and beliefs they brought from the old country, be it Germany, Norway or another homeland. America’s emphasis on religious toleration is part and parcel of the American ideal of liberty. People of all faiths who come to America have to decide how much to “Americanize.”

Eminent Evangelical scholar Mark Noll recently published a book detailing this process of Americanization across the spectrum of American Christian denominations.³ Baptist theologian William Estep makes a telling statement: “The Lutheran Church has been reduced to one of numerous competing confessional bodies, and some Lutherans are discernibly dissatisfied with the American experience.... However, most Lutherans, like

¹ The first part is in *Concordia Journal*, 28, 4 (October 2002): p. 358-359. The second part is in *Concordia Journal*, 29, 1 (January 2003): 4-5.

² James Voelz, “Contemporary Americans Make Poor Confessional Lutherans,” part 1, *Concordia Journal* 28, 4 (October, 2002): 359.

³ Noll’s book is Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*.

most Catholics, while they have maintained their own parochial schools, have become an integral part of the American experience, including the pluralism characteristic of American society.”⁴

This trade-off between Americanism and Lutheranism is a cycle that has repeated itself. Dr. Voelz’ viewpoint would indicate that it is repeating again. It is this author’s intention to look at the mid-nineteenth century in order to better understand our present situation. F. Bente, David Gustafson, Vergilius Ferm, and numerous others have published studies on this conflict which we will compare and contrast. This will enable us to better understand the major parties into which Lutherans in nineteenth-century America were grouped by several scholars, not least William Julius Mann (1819-1892), a Lutheran pastor of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and prominent leader of the confessional movement in the General Synod in the 1850s, and Philip Schaff (1819-1893), a leading German Reformed pastor in America and the dean of American church historians.

This study will look at where each party of Lutherans in nineteenth-century America stood on several issues: sources of authority, dogma, the sacraments, worship, revivals and the use of so-called “new measures,” catechesis, clergy, polity, rationalism, and language. The author sees, in the left, right and center parties of Lutherans in nineteenth-century America, some parallels to Lutheran parties in America today. The reader is left to draw his or her own comparisons.

A note here about terminology may help the reader. Throughout this study, the author uses the phrase “American Lutheran” as a technical term meaning the particular party of Lutherans who were called by this name in nineteenth-century America. This

⁴ William R. Estep, *Revolution within the Revolution*, 6.

party was led by Samuel S. Schmucker, among others, and is described in detail below. To avoid confusion, different terminology, such as “Lutherans in America” or “Lutheran Church in America,” will be used when referring generically to Lutheran Christians residing in America.

II. Nineteenth Century American Religious Setting

In the mid-nineteenth century, America witnessed a crisis of identity in the Lutheran Church. This crisis has come to be called the American Lutheran controversy, and the heart of the question was whether the Lutheran Church in America would give up being Lutheran in the process of becoming American. David Gustafson writes, “On the one side, the American Lutherans advocated that Lutheranism should accommodate itself to the American Protestant establishment. On the other side, confessional Lutherans maintained that Lutheranism should preserve its doctrinal and liturgical distinctiveness as a means of retaining the tradition’s Lutheran identity.”⁵

In this crisis Lutherans were not alone, as demonstrated by Mark Noll’s book already mentioned. During the eighteenth century a major portion of Protestant Christianity experienced a fundamental character shift. Noll explains, “The new element is usually identified as ‘pietism’ on the Continent or as ‘evangelicalism’ for Britain and North America. The essence of pietism or evangelicalism was a movement away from formal, outward, and established religion to personal, inward, and heartfelt religion.”⁶ Fueled by the itinerant preaching of George Whitefield and others, America was swept by a religious revival—or a religion of revivals, depending on one’s viewpoint. Methodism

⁵ David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis*, 1.

⁶ Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 51.

and other “low church” denominations fit nicely into this new style of religion. Abdel Ross Wentz summarized the impact this way: “The Great Awakening, usually associated with the name of Jonathan Edwards, served to invigorate the dissenters from the colonial establishments and to multiply the numbers of Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, etc.”⁷

As Charles Finney’s so-called “New Measures” were brought into church life, congregations were often torn between “old” and “new” factions. Noll writes, “Finney was a wholehearted advocate of ‘new measures,’ many of them taken over from the Methodists. He encouraged women to speak publicly at his meetings, he urged people who were sorry for their sins and who wanted to be converted to gather at an ‘anxious bench’ and pray for divine grace, and he often held ‘protracted meetings’ that lasted for weeks or even months at a time. These innovations were bitterly opposed by leaders of the older churches.”⁸ Churches were split, as shown in one example by the Old School and New School that developed within Presbyterianism.⁹ New denominations and sects were born. The emphasis in American Protestant religion had moved significantly away from the corporate body and centered on private expression.

This sort of individual expression had already found sanction on the Continent, for example, in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹⁰ But the movement in America became the Great Awakening. More than a specific event centering on Whitefield, the Awakening was “a general movement toward a more personal, emotional, inward, and

⁷ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 35.

⁸ Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 97-98.

⁹ For a discussion of Old and New School Presbyterians, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, vol. 1, 561-564.

¹⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher made a grand entrance onto the stage of Continental theology and philosophy in 1799 with his book, *On Religion: Speeches to it Cultured Despisers*. The author describes religion as originating from within the individual, emphasizing personal piety rather than systematized dogma.

experiential religion that fed upon dramatic preaching occasions.”¹¹ Other experience- and emotion-centered measures, such as the “anxious bench” (see note 8), were added with dramatic effect.

Another area in which American Protestantism underwent change was the understanding and use of the sacraments. Though the underlying source of American Protestantism was Calvinistic, its approach to the sacraments moved closer to that of Zwingli. After noting that both Luther and Calvin had rejected Zwingli’s views, David Gustafson observes, “In America, however, Zwingli’s views regarding sacraments gradually came to be adopted. Most of the groups that had been Calvinist became Zwinglian; yet they still thought of themselves as being loyal to Calvin and the Reformed tradition.” Gustafson discusses a mid-nineteenth-century debate that developed between Joseph Berg and John Williamson Nevin over the issue of “spiritual real presence.” According to Gustafson, Nevin, who supported the Zwinglian view, made the point “that American Protestantism had defected from the Reformation position, exemplified by Luther and Calvin, to the [sacramental] views of Zwingli. As a result of that development, Nevin saw no differences between the Reformed and the Baptists.”¹² In the American Protestant view Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper was seen as purely spiritual. The Protestants’ vehement anti-Catholic stance would allow no substantial presence. The meal was simply a memorial gesture. Similarly baptism, far from being an act of God upon the person, became rather a person’s testimony to the church that his or her faith was sincere. Thus infant baptism was renounced.

¹¹ Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World*, 52.

¹² David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis*, 16-17.

Prior to the arrival of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Lutherans in America had little clergy leadership and lacked ecclesiastical organization. Congregations, where clusters of Lutherans could even be called that, were loosely structured and most often lay-led. This loose ecclesiastical structure was in part caused by the religious freedom established in the newly-constituted United States of America, which allowed people to attend whatever church they wished and to freely move from one to another. Lutherans also faced a lack of clergy. Theodore G. Tappert described the situation in America in the late 17th and early 18th centuries¹³ as one where there was, at any given time, perhaps no more than one Lutheran pastor in the Hudson River area, one in the Delaware River area, and a few others farther south. Americans repeatedly appealed to Amsterdam, Sweden, and elsewhere to supply badly-needed pastors. Tappert wrote, “the vacuum created by the lack of ordained ministers was in some cases filled by self-appointed ‘pretenders’ who were lacking in competence as well as in ecclesiastical endorsement.”¹⁴

When Muhlenberg did arrive, his first few weeks in America were spent undoing the influence of Valentine Kraft who was acting as a bishop but without credentials. Muhlenberg’s journal entry for December 1, 1742 includes the following: “The purpose of the presbytery was to make it possible for Valentine Kraft and his assessor to travel around the country and carry on their trade with the holy sacraments. The consistory served the purpose of letting him ordain a few more lazy and drunken schoolmasters and place them as preachers in vacant places. He enjoys great respect because our poor,

¹³ E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America*. Tappert’s description comprises the first section of the book; our interest is especially in pages 3-20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

ignorant Lutherans are pushed into the corner by the Moravians on the one hand, and on the other are duped by his windy boasting.”¹⁵

Many Lutherans had little or no access to Lutheran worship or pastoral care. Often they attended whatever church gatherings they could find and became exposed to the individualist ways of American Protestantism. Without regular Lutheran care, their religious identity began to reflect their non-Lutheran neighbors. David A. Gustafson writes, “The influence of the Enlightenment rationalism and the surrounding Protestant groups gradually severed Lutherans from their confessional heritage. By the end of the eighteenth century, the name ‘Lutheran’ was retained, but Lutheran Confessions had no recognized authority.... The Lutheran Church in America, in its beliefs and practices, had become nothing more than a reflection of the Protestant churches that surrounded it.”¹⁶

Later a large number of Germans migrated to America in what Carl Meyer calls “the great influx of immigration in the 1840s and 1850s.”¹⁷ Mark Noll points out, “From 1850 to 1870, the number of Lutheran churches [in America] more than doubled from slightly over 1,200 to nearly 2,800, and the value of Lutheran church property multiplied nearly five times.”¹⁸ The numbers of immigrants from Germany to America are telling: in 1831-40, 152,454; in 1841-50, 434,626; and in 1851-60, 951,667.¹⁹ Many came for economic, social or political reasons. However, this migration also included many confessional Lutherans who came at least partly because their confessional stance was threatened by the Prussian Union.

¹⁵ Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, *The Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman*, 11.

¹⁶ David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis*, 31.

¹⁷ Carl S. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 196.

¹⁸ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 215-216.

¹⁹ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A History of the American People*, vol.1, 627.

Also at this time, a movement of increasing confessional awareness was taking place among some Lutherans both in America and in Germany. Celebrations of the 300th anniversary of key Reformation events were partly responsible for this renewed interest in the Lutheran symbols. Sydney Ahlstrom calls this process of theological recovery a “Lutheran awakening,” which, he says, was sustained during the entire nineteenth century.²⁰ Charles Arand calls the first third of the nineteenth century a period of “confessional revival.” He notes three stimuli for this revival: a sermon given by Franz von Reinhard, a Wittenberg professor, in 1800; Claus Harms’ “95 theses” of 1817; and (negatively) the 1830 Union Agenda, imposed by King Frederick Wilhelm III upon the Prussian churches, both Lutheran and Reformed.²¹

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 626-627.

²¹ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 22-23.

III. Dividing into Parties

By the mid-nineteenth century, Lutherans in America held a spectrum of positions. As I have just shown, the ends of this spectrum were radically conservative, confessional Lutheranism or complete Americanization. The end positions strengthened their opposition to each other, creating tension, while many Lutherans existed somewhere between the two extremes. For a while the “American Lutherans,” as the liberal side came to be known, were in the ascendancy, but the influx of conservative Germans, noted above, turned the tide in favor of the confessional movement. In the words of Lutheran historian Abdel Ross Wentz, “The movement towards historical Lutheranism encountered some stout resistance, and resulted in all kinds of internal discord, but whenever the issue was clearly joined, the result always favored the Lutheranism of the Augsburg Confession and the other symbolical writings. Conservative principles spread like a contagion, and the rising generation of ministers soon caught it.”²² The American Lutherans did not acquiesce, however.

Samuel S. Schmucker published his *Definite Synodical Platform* in 1855 and distributed it widely to Lutheran pastors. He hoped that it would be approved by the General Synod, a body established in 1820 by several regional Lutheran synods in America for cooperation in missions, clergy development, and other concerns. This caused Lutherans to take up sides in what became known as the American Lutheran controversy. The two opposing positions became clearly defined and periodicals became the voices for both positions. Sydney Ahlstrom gives examples: “After 1833, when

²² Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 129.

Benjamin Kurtz... made the *Lutheran Observer* an outspoken defender of the ‘new measures’ in revivalism, of Sabbatarianism, and of Schmucker’s point of view generally, the tensions increased.... The conservatives, however, were also gathering strength and developing greater intellectual depth; and by 1849 three journals were upholding its cause, including the scholarly *Evangelical Review* published by Professor Charles Philip Krauth and others at Gettysburg Seminary.”²³

Those who held the radically confessional position (the far right) came to be known as Old Lutherans. The liberal position of the far left was referred to as American Lutheranism. A third position developed, encompassing those in between the far left and far right. As it lacks a distinctive name, we will simply call this position the middle.²⁴ This study will examine these parties as they stood in the 1850s (although many of the writings that most clearly show their positions come from preceding or following decades of the nineteenth century). With the publication of Samuel S. Schmucker’s *Definite Synodical Platform* in 1855, the American Lutheran controversy reached its boiling point, although it would continue for decades.²⁵

Let us begin, then, by examining the American Lutheran party.

²³ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, vol.1, 628.

²⁴ Both Philip Schaff, whose *America* was published in 1855, and William Julius Mann, whose *Lutheranism in America* was published in 1857, use the term “Old Lutheran” to denote the conservative or right-wing, party. They both give “American Lutheran” as the name for the left wing, although Schaff, addressing a European audience, prefers the term “New Lutheran” to avoid confusion. Mann calls the middle party simply “the Center,” while Schaff calls it “Moderate Lutheran.”

²⁵ In two volumes entitled *American Lutheranism*, published in 1919, Frederick Bente tried to re-appropriate the name “American Lutheran” to mean simply “Lutherans in America.” He wrote about the American Lutheran controversy as if attempting to put it in the past. Yet he warned, “Nor is the assumption warranted that this spirit [American Lutheranism championed by Schmucker, et al.] died with its early protagonists.... As late as 1906 the *Observer* wrote: The General Synod is in possession of the American spirit in the greatest measure” (*American Lutheranism*, vol.2, 92-93).

IV. American Lutherans

In his discussion of the “left wing,” the American Lutheran party, William Julius Mann began by establishing the Puritanic character of Protestant piety in America. Then he, like Schaff, concluded that “the so-called American Lutheranism has its origin in the adoption of Puritanic views, as well as in giving up what was originally and peculiarly Lutheran in doctrine and worship.”²⁶ Philip Schaff said plainly, “The New Lutheran party is an amalgamation of Lutheranism with American Puritanic and Methodistic elements.... [It] prides itself on being emphatically the American Lutheran Church.”²⁷

The American Lutheran movement was championed by several leaders in the General Synod. However, throughout the conflict the synod would divide its support.²⁸ Wentz wrote, “The advocates of ‘American Lutheranism’ were a small group, always in the minority both in the district synods and in the General Synod, but they were exceedingly active and aggressive and their leaders were among the most influential men in the General Synod.”²⁹ The key proponent for this movement was Samuel S. Schmucker. He was assisted greatly by Samuel Sprecher and others.³⁰ Seminaries that generally supported the movement at that time were those at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Springfield, Ohio; and Springfield, Illinois.³¹ The *Lutheran Observer* and its editor, Benjamin Kurtz, also supported American Lutheranism and its leaders.³²

²⁶ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 19.

²⁷ Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

²⁸ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 25.

²⁹ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 131.

³⁰ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 25-26.

³¹ Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

³² David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis*, 90.

A. Authority

Regarding sources of authority, Schmucker claimed that the Lutheran Church in America had dropped the binding nature of all the Confessions and demanded only faith in the Word of God.³³ He was describing, of course, the position of American Lutheranism, not of all Lutherans in America. Schmucker asserted “that the holy scriptures are the only source, whence we are to draw our religious sentiments... and that these inspired writings are, in all matters that are essential to salvation, so plain, and so easy to be thoroughly understood, that their signification may be learned, without the aid of an expositor, by every person of common sense.”³⁴ Later in the same essay Schmucker wrote, “in all controversies about the proper doctrines, or duties, or forms of christianity, the bible, the whole bible, and nothing but the bible, must be the armor of the Protestant.”³⁵

Schmucker also referred to the confessions but minimized their importance, saying, “The bible and the belief that the *fundamental doctrines* of the bible are taught in a manner substantially correct in the Augsburg Confession, is all that is required.”³⁶ Regarding these confessions, Schmucker stated, “There are indeed certain formularies adopted by this church, which contain the principal points of its doctrine, ranged for the sake of method and perspicuity, in their natural order. But these books have no authority

³³ David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis*, 87. Gustafson describes Schmucker’s position as taken from Schmucker’s essay, “The Doctrinal Basis and Ecclesiastical Position of the American Lutheran Church”, in his 1851 book, *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*.

³⁴ Samuel S. Schmucker, “Portraiture of Lutheranism”, in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 49-50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60-61. Schmucker’s eccentric lack of capitalization of, for example, “bible” and “christianity,” is his own.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 68. See also note 35.

but what they derive from the scriptures of truth, whose sense and meaning they are designed to convey.”³⁷

Schmucker’s position was supported in a series of articles by Benjamin Kurtz, collected and published in 1843 under the title, *Why are You a Lutheran?* Kurtz described “The great fundamental principle of Lutheranism” as “that the inspired Writings, ‘without note or comment’ and apart from all human tradition, are the only unerring source of religious knowledge, and the only infallible rule of Christian faith and practice.”³⁸ Kurtz and two others submitted a report to the Maryland Synod in 1845 in which they asserted essentially the same position:

Of the Symbolical Books.—Luther’s Larger and Smaller Catechisms, the Formula Concordiae, Augsburg Confession, Apology, and Smalkald Articles are called in Germany the Symbolical Books of the church. We regard them as good and useful exhibitions of truth, but do not receive them as binding on the conscience, except so far as they agree with the word of God.³⁹

And again Schmucker wrote, “During the first thirty years of this century, the great body of the American Lutheran church had ... no human creed at all binding upon them, though they always did refer (as we still do,) to the Augsburg Confession, as a substantial expose of their doctrines.”⁴⁰

As Charles Arand asserts, this reliance solely on Scripture gives each individual the freedom of conscience to interpret scripture independently, as described by J.H.W. Stuckenberg. “Stuckenberg also enunciated what he understood to be the two principles

³⁷ Samuel S. Schmucker, “Portraiture of Lutheranism”, in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 50.

³⁸ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 158.

³⁹ Samuel S. Schmucker, “The Doctrinal Basis and Ecclesiastical Position of the American Lutheran Church”, in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 225-226.

⁴⁰ Samuel S. Schmucker, “The Doctrinal Basis and Ecclesiastical Position of the American Lutheran Church”, in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 161.

of Protestantism. First, the Scriptures are the supreme authority in matters of faith. Second, there must be liberty of conscience in interpreting the Scriptures. ‘Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture, and every believer is enabled to do this by the Spirit of God in him.’”⁴¹

In 1855 Schmucker further described his position in the *Definite Platform*, which rested on “first, the Old and New Testaments as the only infallible rule of faith and practice; secondly, the acknowledgement of the two historic symbols of the Christian church, viz., the Apostles’ Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, as testimonies and explanations of Christian faith; and thirdly, the avowal of the ‘American Recension of the Augsburg Confession.’”⁴² We will consider the “American Recension” in the next section, which concerns dogma.

B. Dogma

Schmucker had a strong ecumenical impulse. He wrote:

The visible church of Christ ... embraces not the members of any one denomination alone, but all of every land, of every name, and of every complexion, who love the Lord Jesus Christ. The members of this body of Christ sustain certain mutual relations of fraternity; and however in the providence of God, they have been permitted to adopt some diversities of external form and to entertain, as did the primitive disciples themselves, some minor differences of opinion, ‘they are bound to exercise holy fellowship and communion,’ not only toward those of their own house and denomination, but “as God offereth opportunity, unto all those in every place, who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus,” and hold the cardinal doctrines of our common Christianity.⁴³

⁴¹ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 35. Quoting J.H.W. Stuckenberg, *The History of the Augsburg Confession from Its Origin Till the Adoption of the Formula of Concord* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Board of Publication, 1896), 218.

⁴² Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 191. See also *Moving Frontiers*, edited by Carl S. Meyer. Pages 41-44 contain excerpts from the *Definite Platform*, which show more than once that the creeds are approved.

⁴³ Samuel S. Schmucker, “Portraiture of Lutheranism”, in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 41-42.

In his desire to Americanize the Lutheran Church and specifically in order to improve ecumenical possibilities with other Protestants in America, Schmucker created a version of the Augsburg Confession from which he had cleansed all remaining “Romish” and “unscriptural” doctrinal errors, which had, according to Schmucker, been troubling “the great mass of our churches” for a long time. He called his version the ‘American Recension of the Augsburg Confession,’ and published it in the *Definite Platform* as noted above. (see “Authority”) The five errors he identified were retaining the mass, private confession and absolution, the Sunday Sabbath not being observed as an obligation, regeneration in baptism, and the real presence in the Eucharist.⁴⁴

In a sermon of 1837, John Bachman also exhibited a willingness to reinterpret the historic confessions. He defended this as being in the spirit of the Reformation, and used Luther as his example, saying, “Let us deal as honestly with Luther as he dealt with himself. He renounced, towards the close of his life, several of the doctrines which he had advocated at an earlier period.”⁴⁵ Samuel Sprecher also argued for the liberty to change the confessions, citing Melanchthon as the example. “He argued that if Melanchthon made changes in the [Augsburg] confession, it demonstrates how susceptible the confessions of a church are of improvement.”⁴⁶

As it turned out, tampering with the Augustana was not the best way to win support for American Lutheranism. The *Platform* was soundly defeated by the Synod. However, the willingness of Schmucker and his supporters to promote a significantly-altered

⁴⁴ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 156-157. Quoting John Bachman, *A Sermon on the Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Preached at Charlestown, S.C. November 12th, 1837, by Appointment of the Synod of South-Carolina, and Adjacent States.*

⁴⁶ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 37.

Augustana shows that the American Lutherans' loyalty to the historic Lutheran Confessions was not very strong.

Schmucker was an advocate of minimizing the body of doctrine so that all Christians could agree to the corpus. These "prominent doctrines," he wrote, "are none other than those commonly termed the doctrines of the Reformation, the doctrines which, with few variations, are held in common by all the so-called orthodox churches."⁴⁷ We saw this tendency above, that Schmucker placed all authority in Scripture alone and would not bind the Lutheran Confessions on anyone's conscience. Rather, he emphasized only the "fundamental doctrines" of the Bible, which were "taught in a manner substantially correct in the Augsburg Confession."⁴⁸

Schmucker further defended his position by asserting that, since Luther was dead when the Formula of Concord was drafted, he could not be considered a member of a church that required subscription to it.⁴⁹ Yet "Schmucker did not propose a complete abandonment of confessional subscription. He recognized that there were times when it was needed within the church."⁵⁰ Still, as we have seen, he wanted confessions minimized.

Moving beyond the confessions themselves, Schmucker also rejected the use of the church fathers as authoritative. He promoted "the entire rejection of the authority of the Fathers in ecclesiastical controversy."⁵¹ As we have seen above, he wanted to rely only

⁴⁷ Samuel S. Schmucker, "Portraiture of Lutheranism", in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁹ Samuel S. Schmucker, "The Doctrinal Basis and Ecclesiastical Position of the American Lutheran Church", in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 163-164.

⁵⁰ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 37.

⁵¹ Samuel S. Schmucker, "Portraiture of Lutheranism", in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 60.

on Scripture. He considered the use of the fathers a Romish weakness. We see this also in the opposition to the Formula of Concord expressed by J.W. Richard, a professor at Gettysburg Seminary. "Richard regarded the Formula of Concord's appeal to Luther and Luther's writings as a virtual capitulation to the Roman manner of placing tradition on a par with Scripture."⁵²

Lutheran historian and professor Vergilius Ferm described the American Lutheran position of doctrinal liberty, Schmucker's position, in this way: "The Lutheranism which has been built around this American branch of Protestantism has taken to itself that freedom and independence which has ever been the ideal of those who came to these shores."⁵³ In a desire to categorize American Lutheran dogma, Mann wrote, "Were we to define the doctrinal character of American Lutheranism, we could not call it Puritanic, for the Puritans were Calvinistic in doctrine; but among all the various doctrinal system extant, it evidently resembles none more closely than that of the Swiss Reformer, [Zwingli]."⁵⁴

C. Sacraments

Mann declared the sacramental view of American Lutheranism "essentially Zwinglean [*sic*]."⁵⁵ To support this, he wrote, "Dr. Schmucker's views on this subject may easily be determined from the proposition he lays down, namely, that the observance of the sacraments is of far less importance than that of the moral law of the Gospel."⁵⁶ He also wrote, "The Lutheran dogma concerning baptism, which declares it the water of regeneration, is classed among other supposed errors of the Augsburg Confession, and in

⁵² Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 51.

⁵³ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 172.

⁵⁴ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

the 'Definite Platform,' expressly rejected," as are also the forgiveness of sins and the real presence in the Lord's Supper.⁵⁷

Schaff agreed. Regarding the Lord's Supper, he wrote, "Dr. Schmucker adopts the Puritanic, essentially Zuinglian [*sic*] theory prevalent in America, and... rejects not only the substantial, but even the dynamic or virtual presence of the human nature of the Redeemer, declaring that 'there is no real or actual presence of the glorified human nature of the Saviour, either substantial or influential, nor anything mysterious or supernatural in the Eucharist.' Anywhere in Germany this would not even be called Zuinglianism [*sic*], much less Lutheranism, but the purest Rationalism of common sense."⁵⁸ Ferm also substantiated this position, quoting Schmucker, "Another feature of improvement in the Lutheran church consists in her no longer requiring assent to the doctrine of the real presence of the Saviour in the eucharist."⁵⁹ Kurtz took Schmucker's position in *Why Are You a Lutheran?* According to Kurtz, "the great mass of Lutherans in the United States" believe that the eucharist "is a standing memorial... The bread and wine remain unchanged... they are merely symbolic representations of the Savior's body, but... a special spiritual blessing [*is*] bestowed on all worthy communicants."⁶⁰

Regarding baptism, the American Lutheran position was made plain in a sermon by John Bachman, then president of the General Synod. Bachman gave several arguments from Scripture to show that baptism does not bring about regeneration. He concluded,

Here then it is plainly declared that baptism is only the means of grace, and in conformity to these views, our churches, both in Europe and America, teach no other doctrine, and feel themselves authorized, from the

⁵⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 25.

⁵⁸ Philip Schaff, *America*, 154.

⁵⁹ Samuel S. Schmucker, "Portraiture of Lutheranism", in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 61.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 160. Quoting Benjamin Kurtz, *Why Are You a Lutheran?*

Scriptures, and the articles of their faith, to declare that baptism is not regeneration.⁶¹

Bachman argued that since Luther himself changed his mind on certain matters over time, the Lutheran Church can change its doctrine.⁶² This assertion of Bachman sounds similar to the example noted above, when Sprecher used Melanchthon's alterations to the Augustana as justification for making his own changes. To this author, the assertions of both Bachman and Sprecher are *non sequitur* arguments.

D. Worship

Regarding worship practices, Mann asserted that the American Lutherans followed Puritan examples. "In many places we find instead of the altar simply a table; instead of the gown and bands, a plain black coat; no baptismal font, no crucifix, no paintings, much less the symbol of light, frequently no steeple, no bells; in short, everything which is supposed to have the least leaning towards Romish custom or superstitions, however innocent, appropriate, and beautiful in itself, is carefully excluded."⁶³ Schaff referred to this as "Low-church American Lutheranism."⁶⁴

Schmucker considered it an improvement that American Lutheran churches relinquished what he called "Romish private confession" in preparation for communion.⁶⁵ Schaff noted that they also "incline to the Puritanic system of free prayer, the strict

⁶¹ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 156. Quoting John Bachman, *A Sermon on the Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Preached at Charlestown, S.C. November 12th, 1837, by Appointment of the Synod of South-Carolina, and Adjacent States.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 156. Quoting John Bachman, *A Sermon on the Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Preached at Charlestown, S.C. November 12th, 1837, by Appointment of the Synod of South-Carolina, and Adjacent States.*

⁶³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 26.

⁶⁴ Philip Schaff, *America*, 154.

⁶⁵ Samuel S. Schmucker, "Portraiture of Lutheranism", in *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses*, 63.

observance of Sunday, neglect of the church festivals, and of all symbolical rites and ceremonies; or they allow at most only a restricted use of liturgies.”⁶⁶

American Lutherans used a more “English” hymn style, promoting subjective expression of feeling over against the dogmatic assurance prevalent in the predominant imported German style.⁶⁷ In 1828, the General Synod adopted a new English hymnbook which had been compiled by a committee guided by Schmucker.⁶⁸ Requested by the synod to supplant Dr. Quitman’s rationalistic hymnbook of 1814, the new hymnbook, which gained widespread use, was rife with the new methods of revivalism. Schalk writes, “The ‘new arrangement’ for the hymnbook... was a clearly Reformed pattern... it was as far from a Lutheran pattern of hymnal organization as can be imagined.”⁶⁹ That this hymnal was popular is shown by the fact that by 1849 it had reached 56 editions or printings. The 1852 revision included sections of hymns for “revivals” and “temperance,” and even hymns on the millennium.⁷⁰ Schalk summarizes, “The common situation of the English Lutheran hymnbooks of the first half of the 19th century was that, judging by their content, they were something other than characteristically Lutheran.”⁷¹

E. Revivals and the Use of New Measures

The revival spirit, which calmed somewhat after the “Great Awakening,” was rekindled in America during the period of 1795-1810 and was felt in waves after that, in

⁶⁶ Philip Schaff, *America*, 158.

⁶⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 27. Though some German hymnody of this period also had Pietistic influences, the comparison here is to the hymnody of the more confessional recent immigrants.

⁶⁸ Carl F. Schalk, *God’s Song in a New Land*, 82-85.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 84. Schalk refers to the selection and arrangement of hymns topics. They follow a didactic layout that supports a Reformed dogmatic approach rather than a Lutheran liturgical/church year approach.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

what is somewhat loosely termed the “Second Great Awakening.”⁷² We have seen that the trend in America toward revivalism showed itself in American Lutheran worship life as exhibited in the content of the popular 1828 hymnal and its later editions.

The use of “new measures” among Lutherans is the topic of John Fuchs’ STM thesis.⁷³ Fuchs shows that revivals and “new measures” such as the anxious bench and protracted meetings were used to a significant degree among Lutherans in the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ Fuchs draws much of his support from the *Lutheran Observer*, whose editor, Benjamin Kurtz, was a major proponent of revivalism among Lutherans. However, Fuchs also shows that much of the support for revivalism among Lutherans had withered by the late 1840s.⁷⁵

Regarding “new measures,” Schaff wrote in 1855, “The [American] Lutherans used these, especially the anxious bench, from about the year 1830, to the greatest extent, and not rarely with the wildest hyper-Methodistic excess.”⁷⁶ Nevertheless, “the old yet ever new and effective measures of the Word and the sacraments ... [are] gaining the upper hand. The system of new measures has already outlived itself, and is almost confined to the Western States.”⁷⁷

Mann, however, still lamented in 1857 that “in place of catechumenical instruction, ‘revival seasons’ are periodically gotten up, on which occasions it not unfrequently happens that many, entirely destitute of a knowledge of the order of salvation, get the

⁷² Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 166.

⁷³ John G. Fuchs, *New Measures: An Analysis of an Argument Among Lutherans in the United States During the Fourth and Fifth Decades of the Nineteenth Century*. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1993.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁶ Philip Schaff, *America*, 158.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

notion of 'getting religion.'"⁷⁸ Yet he noted, "the views of some of the adherents of American Lutheranism, in reference to the means of promoting spiritual life, have undergone no inconsiderable change. It is true, protracted meetings are still continued to be held, reports of revivals... are still in high favor with some."⁷⁹ It is clear that Mann had also noted the change in climate. Most telling, however, was his comment, "There is still a prevailing disposition to fall in with whatever is, for the time being, popular."⁸⁰

F. Catechesis

As we have seen above, Mann noted among American Lutherans a lack of zeal for catechesis. He wrote, "Catechisation is no longer required as a standing part of religious exercises, is no longer treated in our theological seminaries as a distinct branch of study, and in place of catechumenical instruction, 'revival seasons' are periodically gotten up."⁸¹ Schaff also noted that this group "makes little of thorough theological education."⁸² This was regrettable to Mann, who emphasized in his description of the primitive (i.e. original German) Lutheran church, that "Luther also established Bible-classes, with a view to a systematic explanation of the Scriptures,... and catechization in churches and schools. He insisted particularly on family worship, and the religious instruction and education of children by parents, and all such as have the charge over them."⁸³ So the turn from catechetics to revivals was, to Mann, not a good one.

He saw signs of improvement, though. "In many things they are evidently returning to the good old ways. Thorough and systematic instruction of the young, in the truths of

⁷⁸ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 27.

⁷⁹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 29.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸² Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

⁸³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 64.

the Christian religion, hand-in-hand with the influences of a careful religious training, in our schools and families, is the only solid way of building up the church.”⁸⁴ He also saw among American Lutheran congregations some lay members who “manifest a very active interest in the affairs, cares, enterprises, and conflicts of the church. . . . They desire to see religion manifest its influence on private and public life.”⁸⁵

G. Clergy

Mann was concerned that this party, which, as we have seen, had given up much of what was distinctly Lutheran, was not preparing truly Lutheran pastors in its seminary at Gettysburg. He wrote,

Its ministers are, however, not expected to make themselves masters of a thorough classical education, or . . . go through a regular course of philosophical training, neither is it considered necessary, that they should possess a large amount of theological learning; on which account the fewest number of them have acquired even a superficial acquaintance with our symbolical books.⁸⁶

Mann expressed his concern over an incomplete education for clergy as he continued:

Many of these have been educated either under Dr. Schmucker himself, or under those who had received their theological training from him. And it is not to be denied that a goodly number of them are faithful and efficient men, . . . and yet they cannot be admitted as competent judges in reference to those questions which now agitate the church, simply because they have hitherto only seen and heard one side.⁸⁷

From 1826 to 1864 Samuel S. Schmucker presided at Gettysburg Seminary.⁸⁸ Mann cited an ironic quote from the address of Rev. D. F. Schaeffer at the inauguration of Schmucker as seminary president. Schaeffer charged Schmucker “to establish all students

⁸⁴ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 29-30.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁸⁸ Abdel Ross Wentz, *History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary*, 107.

confided to your care in that faith which distinguishes our church from others. If any should object to such faith,... they have their choice to unite with such of our Christian brethren whose particular views in matters of faith and discipline may suit them better.”⁸⁹

Schaeffer only mentioned specifically that the students should be grounded in the Augustana as a faithful exposition of the sacred Scriptures. However, as shown above, even this simple instruction was discarded.

Yet Mann expressed some hope:

There is no doubt that with some of them the suspicion has been aroused, and is gradually gaining ground, that “American Lutheranism,” by having incorporated into its system those very doctrines which Luther and his illustrious coadjutors so stoutly opposed, is occupying rather an awkward position. A spirit of inquiry as to what the doctrines of the Lutheran Church really are has gone forth.⁹⁰

Schaff remarked on the attitudes of the American Lutheran party toward the education of its clergy. “It makes little of thorough theological education, and much of oratorical talent, practical activity, and business tact.”⁹¹

H. Rationalism

As we have seen above, Schaff considered Schmucker’s view of the sacraments “the purest Rationalism of common sense.”⁹² And yet he noted that Schmucker “would feel highly insulted to be classed with the German Rationalists, since he holds the divinity of Christ, as well as the divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures, as fundamental articles of faith.”⁹³ Wentz called Schmucker and the left-wing party, “men who had sustained the General Synod in the [eighteen-] twenties as a bulwark of

⁸⁹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 21.

⁹⁰ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 29.

⁹¹ Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 154.

Lutheranism, a defence [*sic*] against unionism and rationalism.”⁹⁴ An illustration will demonstrate that rationalism did not take hold in the General Synod.

In 1814, Frederick Henry Quitman prepared and published a catechism “with consent and approbation” of the General Synod.⁹⁵ Quitman, then president of the General Synod, was a champion of rationalism. Jacobs called his thoroughly rationalist and logical catechism “a monument of the dominant tendency of the time.” According to Jacobs, this catechism, though officially sanctioned, was quietly ignored to the extent it caused its publisher financial loss. Jacobs remarked, “The synod was more orthodox than its president.”⁹⁶

While Schaff described Schmucker’s sacramental view as based upon reason, Mann also showed that Schmucker frequently defended himself using an approach that relied on reason. His writings appealed to the average person, not the learned theologian, and he adopted a tone that would “submit the matter to the reader’s decision.”⁹⁷ Mann wrote,

He treats subjects in a popular manner, and adapts his writings to the common sense of the multitude....Consequently, in perusing Dr. Schmucker’s writings on difficult points in theology, one feels almost inclined to wonder, why other profound scholars should expend so much time and research in the investigation and elucidation of points which by him are so summarily disposed of, as perfectly simple.⁹⁸

If we are not to consider Schmucker’s position rationalist, perhaps we should at least call it populist. But Nelson also shows that Schmucker translated some rationalist dogmatic works from Germany to use for instruction at Gettysburg.⁹⁹ Though Schmucker

⁹⁴ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 132.

⁹⁵ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 315.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 316-317.

⁹⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 22.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁹ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 150.

would object to the term, we have seen that there are aspects of rationalism in Schmucker and the American Lutheran position.

I. Language

In churches of the General Synod the language issue reached a heated peak in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, though the issue was not controversial everywhere. In 1807, English became the official language of the New York Ministerium.¹⁰⁰ Most congregations of New York had never shrunk from the use of English, debating only how much parallel use to make of German. Yet, in Pennsylvania, Germans, and the use of the German language, were more prevalent and more obstinate. Jacobs noted that the language issue in the 1810s in Philadelphia caused “[d]isorderly congregational meetings, and even blows.”¹⁰¹

But among congregations of the American Lutheran party, by the middle of the nineteenth century English was clearly the *lingua franca*. Schaff called this party “almost entirely English,”¹⁰² while Mann wrote, “among the American Lutherans almost nothing but English is necessary.”¹⁰³ One would expect English to be used in congregations whose goal it was to assimilate into the American mainstream.¹⁰⁴

J. Character

The general character of the American Lutheran party can be summarized by a few remarks. Philip Schaff wrote, “The New Lutherans... have, in reality, entirely given up all the points which distinguished the Lutheran theology from the Reformed, substituting for

¹⁰⁰ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 327.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁰² Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

¹⁰³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 86-87.

¹⁰⁴ While this does not necessarily hold true in multicultural twenty-first century America, it held true in the nineteenth.

the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, however, the still un-Lutheran, Arminian theory of free will; while they not only retain the Lutheran opposition to Romanism, but run it to a Puritanic excess.” We have seen that, in matters of sacrament and worship, the American Lutherans adopted methods and positions closer to certain other American Protestant groups (for example, those with a Puritan influence). This dovetails well with Schmucker’s strong ecumenical impulse.¹⁰⁵

However, a pitfall of giving up one’s own identity to adopt that of another—to “join the crowd”—is that one aims at a moving target, and must continually re-aim. This we have seen in the American Lutheran rush to adopt, and eventually discard, revivalistic “new measures,” and in Mann’s comment about “a prevailing disposition to fall in with whatever is, for the time being, popular.”¹⁰⁶

Let us now consider the Old Lutherans, whose agenda, as we will see, was anything but “joining the crowd.”

¹⁰⁵ See Schmucker’s 1838 publication of his *Fraternal Appeal to the American Churches, with a Plan for Catholic Union on Apostolic Principles*.

¹⁰⁶ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 29.

V. Old Lutherans

There is a bit of irony in the name “Old Lutheran,” since many in this group were among the most recent Lutherans to come to America. Under the title “Old Lutheran,” Philip Schaff included “more recent emigrants” who were “still entirely German.”¹⁰⁷ Unionizing efforts and decrees in Europe were the forces that drove many of these staunchly confessional Lutherans to seek a place where they could remain true to their beliefs. America, with her widely publicized religious freedom, was just such a place.

Many of these confessional Lutherans were disappointed when they arrived in America and found Lutherans who believed and worshipped very much like their Reformed neighbors. Nelson writes, “With them these immigrants brought a kind of confessional Lutheranism generally quite different from that which had developed in America over the preceding century-and-a-half, and laid the groundwork for more than another century of conflict, division, rivalry, realignment, and rapprochement.”¹⁰⁸

The Old Lutherans we have mentioned thus far comprised the synods of Buffalo and Missouri, led respectively by J.A.A. Grabau and C.F.W. Walther.¹⁰⁹ They had seminaries, however small, at St. Louis and Fort Wayne. Our examination of the Old Lutherans will primarily focus on these two immigrant groups. There were, however, other confessional Lutherans in America.

We have previously noted a confessional revival growing in Europe and America in the early 1800s. Fern writes, “Parallel with the controversies in Germany, and the return of many to the historic traditions of the church, is to be noted a similar turn of affairs in

¹⁰⁷ Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

¹⁰⁸ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 152.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Schaff, *America*, 151.

America in about the third decade of the nineteenth century.”¹¹⁰ This was true among Lutherans just as among other denominations. Several American leaders rose up both before and alongside the immigrant leaders already mentioned, to lead the confessional revival among Lutherans. Who were these American Leaders?

Paul Henkel traveled all of Ohio, participated in the formation of no less than three Lutheran synods (North Carolina in 1803, Ohio in 1818, and Tennessee in 1820), published catechisms and hymnals in German and English, and raised sons who became confessional Lutheran clergy.¹¹¹ Also notable were Charles Philip Krauth, his son Charles Porterfield Krauth, and men such as W.F. Lehman, W.M. Reynolds, J.G. Morris and C.F. Schaeffer.¹¹² What was the faith for which these men stood?

A. Authority

The name “Old Lutheran” was applied to this group because their primary goal was to hold faithfully to the Lutheran doctrines of old. Ferm wrote, “These two companies of immigrants pledged themselves unequivocally to all the historic symbols of the Lutheran Church.”¹¹³ Mann called this group, “Lutherans of a strictly symbolical tendency.”¹¹⁴

This confessional character is displayed in the constitutions of Old Lutheran congregations. One example is that of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Buffalo, New York, also known as “Old Lutheran Church”:

Sec. 2. This congregation holds itself to the pure doctrine of the Holy Scripture, Old and New Testaments, as to the infallible Word of the living God and therefore as the only divine precept and rule of faith and life for all of its members.

¹¹⁰ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 129.

¹¹¹ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 64-67.

¹¹² Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 129.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹⁴ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 38.

Sec. 3. Inasmuch as the pure doctrine of the Holy Scripture is set forth and contained in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, namely: in the Apostolic, Nicene, Athanasian creeds, in the U.A. (Unaltered Augsburg) Confession of the year 1530, its Apology, the Schmalcald [*sic*] Articles, both the Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord, therefore the congregation adheres also to these confessions and holds itself thereunto as to the sum of pure doctrine according to which all other writings must be judged.¹¹⁵

Similarly, Trinity Church in St. Louis:

Sec. 3. In our congregations shall be recognized all the canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments as God's revealed Word and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the extracted norm of the Word of God, according to which, since these are taken out of God's Word, not only the doctrines of our church shall be held and examined but also all occurring doctrinal and religious disputes shall be judged and regulated. These are: the three Chief Symbols [creeds], the unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the same, the Schmalcald [*sic*] Articles, Dr. Luther's smaller and larger Catechisms, the Formula of Concord and the Visitation-Articles.¹¹⁶

Writing as a non-Lutheran, Schaff's interpretation of this staunch confessionalism had the sound of one viewing a tight group from the outside. "Luther is their highest human authority; and indeed, not the free, bold, world-shaking reformer, but the reactionary, scrupulous, intolerant Luther, who at Marburg refused Zuingle's [*sic*] hand of brotherhood offered with tears."¹¹⁷ But he also wrote, "The Old Lutheran Synods of Missouri and Buffalo, of course, like the strict Lutherans in Germany, hold the whole Book of Concord, laying special stress on the Formula Concordiae, as the consistent logical continuation of the unaltered Augustana, and as precisely defining the pure Lutheran doctrine, both against the Reformed and the Roman Catholic churches."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 125. Quoting Walther, *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas*, as translated by Christian Otto Kraushaar.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125-126. Quoting Walther, *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas*, as translated by Christian Otto Kraushaar.

¹¹⁷ Philip Schaff, *America*, 151.

¹¹⁸ Philip Schaff, *America*, 152.

Mann made a clear summary:

They regard the dogmatical system of Christianity, as contained in [the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church] as being the true interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. They do not esteem these writings, because they emanated from Luther, or from some of the other fathers of the Lutheran Church, ... but because they cherish the conviction that a better and more correct comprehension of the principal doctrines of the sacred Scriptures has never been produced, nor can be.¹¹⁹

He continued,

If, therefore, these Lutheran brethren of a stricter symbolical tendency require the members, and among these especially the ministers of the Lutheran Church, to maintain its ancient creed, they are not only justified by the former universal custom of the Lutheran Church, but they do it to make the Word of God, and not, as some will have it, the word of man, binding on their consciences, the true interpretation of which they confidently believe to be contained in the confessional documents of the Lutheran Church. They challenge to a most open examination of the sacred Scriptures, and to the severest trial of the Symbolical Books by them.¹²⁰

And finally, “No one should receive the Lutheran Confession on the authority of another, but find it again and again, as the result of his own investigation, in the sacred Scriptures.”¹²¹ As we can see, the Old Lutherans’ belief was not simply blind adherence to a tradition, but a living faith that was well-defined in the timeless relevancy of the Lutheran Confessions.

B. Dogma

One would be hard-pressed to find a church that regarded doctrine more highly than the Old Lutherans. About this group Mann wrote, “They regard a confession of faith of absolute necessity to the Church...A church destitute of a fixed interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, which she regards as the true one, and adopts as her own, would be

¹¹⁹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 73-74.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

nothing but a confused mass of dogmatical and religious views of mere individuals.”¹²²

And why is this so important? Because “What she regards as essential is the true doctrine concerning salvation, and genuine faith in this doctrine; this concerns our immortal souls.”¹²³

“C.F.W. Walther contended that in the Lutheran Confessions one does not hear ‘the voice of a private individual but indisputably the voice of our dear church itself with regard to the most important articles of the Christian faith.’”¹²⁴ So notes Arand, who also says of Walther, “In these writings, he believed, the church spoke on matters of doctrine and scriptural interpretation.”¹²⁵ Walther emphasized the corporate nature of the confessions against those who would allow individuals to reinterpret them for themselves. Arand also points out,

The reason Walther emphasized the “entire” doctrinal content, not merely the “fundamentals” or “confessionally defined” doctrines of the Confessions as binding, is because in them the church has provided for its people an exposition of Scripture. Walther stressed that confessional writings are not human codes or additions to God’s word. Rather they are confessions concerning and a statement of God’s Word.¹²⁶

Mann believed that it is this sort of corporate doctrinal subscription that defines the Lutheran Church. “It is easy to perceive what an anomaly it would be to call any modern religious society the Lutheran Church, except it, at the same time, regards that as the Confession of its Faith, which was regarded as such by the Lutheran Church from the beginning.”¹²⁷ This body of doctrine, defined in the Lutheran Confessions, is an interlocking system of beliefs, each part dependent upon the other parts. “[T]he more

¹²² William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 74.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁴ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 94.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 74-75.

clearly I understand the intimate connection of all the different parts, the less shall I feel inclined to regard it as a matter of indifference whether I believe so or so in reference to any single doctrinal point.”¹²⁸

Thus it was in this spirit that Charles Porterfield Krauth offered a “testimony” to the Synod of Pittsburgh in 1856 in response to Schmucker’s *Definite Platform*. In this testimony he stated, “We declare that, in our judgment, the Augsburg Confession, properly interpreted, is in perfect consistence with this our testimony, and with the Holy Scriptures, as regards the errors specified [by Schmucker].”¹²⁹ This is the same Krauth who in 1871 would publish *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, wherein he “set out to draw once again the line of demarcation between Lutheranism and reformed Protestantism by setting before the Lutheran public the distinctiveness of Lutheran, confessional theology.”¹³⁰

It was also in this spirit that David Henkel, a theologian of the Tennessee Synod which his father founded, charged the General Synod with forsaking its Lutheran heritage and denying its Lutheran identity because it used only a qualified confessional reference in its constitution.¹³¹

It is no wonder Mann consistently referred to the Old Lutherans as “Lutherans of a strictly symbolical tendency.” The Lutheran Confessions, emanating straight from the Word of God, are the bold standard by which this army was identified.

¹²⁸ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 76.

¹²⁹ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 313. Quoting Charles Porterfield Krauth, *Testimony of the Synod of Pittsburgh*. Taken from *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Pittsburgh, Held at Zelenople, Butler County, Pa., from the 22d to the 28th of May, 1856*.

¹³⁰ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 63.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

C. Sacraments

As we have seen, the Old Lutherans drew their doctrinal positions from the Lutheran Confessions—the Book of Concord. Charles Porterfield Krauth, in his major work of 1871, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, explained the confessional Lutheran understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper at length. Regarding baptism, he began with a set of propositions taken directly from the confessions:

- I. We confess one Baptism for the remission of sins.
- II. The vice of origin—the inborn plague and hereditary sin—is truly sin, condemning, and bringing now also eternal death upon all that are not born again by Baptism and the Holy Spirit.
- III. The ministry has been instituted to teach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments; for by the Word and Sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given.
- IV. Unto the true unity of the Church it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.
- V. It is lawful to use the Sacraments administered by evil men—and the Sacraments and Word are efficacious by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, though the priests who impart them be not pious.
- VI. The churches among us with common consent teach concerning Baptism:
 1. That it is necessary to salvation.
 2. That by Baptism the grace of God is offered.
 3. That children are to be baptized.
 4. That by Baptism they are offered and committed unto God.
 5. And thus offered by Baptism, they are received into God's favor.¹³²

Krauth then went on (for forty pages!) to show that confessional Lutherans, like Luther before them, expressly refrain from demanding a particular mode of baptism. He showed that the efficacy of baptism comes from the Word of God, not the water. He also quoted from the confessions and from Gerhard's *Loci* to demonstrate the Lutheran belief

¹³² Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, 518-519.

that baptism regenerates, bringing the new life of faith. The only case where baptism does not bring regeneration is when the person has already been brought to faith through the Word of God. In this case, baptism confirms the regeneration which has already occurred.¹³³

In summary, baptism by water and the Word forgives sins, regenerates, and gives salvation. Let us now see what Krauth said regarding the Lord's Supper.

Of the holy Supper of our Lord, our Churches, with one consent, teach and hold

1. That the true body and blood of Christ are the sacramental objects.
2. That the sacramental objects are truly present in the Lord's Supper.
3. That this true presence is under the form or species of bread and wine.
4. That present, under this form or species, they are communicated.
5. That thus communicated, they are received by all communicants.
6. That the opposite doctrine is to be rejected.¹³⁴

Clearly, these confessional Lutherans believed in the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, and that they are communicated to the recipient through the meal.

And what are the benefits of the Lord's Supper? Luther put it most succinctly in the Small Catechism, which, as we have seen above, all Old Lutherans held dearly. Luther wrote, "forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation."¹³⁵

D. Worship

Regarding the worship practices of the Old Lutherans, Schaff commented, "the Old Lutherans have a more or less complete liturgical altar-service, even with the crucifixes

¹³³ Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, 559.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 599.

¹³⁵ From the *Small Catechism*, under the section "The Sacrament of the Altar." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord*, 362.

and candles burning in day-time; and in all such matters they cleave to historical tradition.”¹³⁶ Mann added the following observation,

As regards the forms employed in the Divine worship of strict Lutherans, we have but little to say. They, of course, maintain with the Symbolical Books, the principle... that in regard to this subject liberty is to be granted, and nothing is to be rejected, except what is contrary to the Word of God, and does not tend to the edification of evangelical Christians. But that uniformity in these things, though not absolutely necessary, is nevertheless desirable throughout the Church in general....¹³⁷

When, earlier, he described the primitive Lutheran Church, Mann provided a description of the essential elements of a worship service. Now as regards the Old Lutherans, he wrote, “They consequently observe in their public worship the same order which we introduced above, as that followed by Luther himself. They read every Sunday the Old Epistles and Gospels, sing antiphonies and chorals, and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, if not every week, yet much more frequently than other Lutheran Churches in this country are accustomed to celebrate it.”¹³⁸ Mann further reported, “The sign of the Cross is, as far as we know, by many a general custom... in commemoration of the sacrifice rendered by Christ on Golgotha,” and dutifully notes no traces of any “superstitions being connected therewith,” regarding this sign.¹³⁹

In 1842 Grabau published a new hymnbook for the Buffalo Synod. He compiled 491 hymns, plus prayers and various liturgical materials, from thirty-three old Lutheran hymnbooks and agendas. The most important among these was a reprint of the Babst hymnal of 1545—“the last hymnal for which Martin Luther had written a preface... the

¹³⁶ Philip Schaff, *America*, 158

¹³⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

most representative Lutheran hymnbook of the latter half of the 16th century.”¹⁴⁰ Walther also went to work on a hymnal for the Missourians, publishing his *Kirchengesangbuch* in 1847. The hymn selection criteria show the Old Lutherans’ concern for pure doctrine and continuity in the true church.

In the selection of the adopted hymns the chief consideration was that they be pure in doctrine; that they have found almost universal acceptance within the orthodox German Lutheran Church and have thus received the almost universal testimony that they have come forth from the true spirit (of Lutheranism); that they express not so much the changing circumstances of individual persons but rather contain the language of the whole church, because the book is to be used primarily in public worship; and finally that they, though bearing the imprint of Christian simplicity, be not merely rhymed prose but the creation of a truly Christian poetry.¹⁴¹

In practice this meant, as Mann wrote, “the Old Lutheran brethren of the Synod of Missouri admit none but the hymns composed by Lutherans into their collection.”¹⁴²

Walther took his hymns seriously, but he also insisted they be artistically worthy (notice his concern for a “truly Christian poetry”). And the tone of Old Lutheran singing did not follow the drab, “solemn” style of the Pietists. Regarding Old Lutherans, Mann noted, “Their choral singing is quicker and livelier than in most places in Germany and this country.”¹⁴³

It is well-known that Luther thought highly of music. Walther did as well. He knew the value hymns could have in reinforcing the preached Word. He wrote,

In a proper and pure public service of worship it is not only fitting and necessary that the preacher preach only God’s pure Word, but also that the congregation sing only pure hymns. This latter point is so necessary and is without doubt a matter of the greatest importance: that the preacher choose good hymns, and allow them to be sung, which properly prepares for the

¹⁴⁰ Carl F. Schalk, *God’s Song in a New Land*, 126.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 129. Quoting an unsigned article, “Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch,” *Der Lutheraner*, III (June 15, 1847), 84, which Schalk says was apparently written by Walther.

¹⁴² William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 90.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 78.

hearing of the Word of God and best serve[s] to preserve and seal the Word already heard.¹⁴⁴

So we see that concerning the form of worship, liturgical appointments, and hymn singing, the Old Lutherans made every effort to stay within the Lutheran tradition. They did this, however, not simply because it was tradition, but because these traditions guarded the doctrinal integrity and purity of their worship life for the sake of healthy souls.

E. Revivals and the Use of New Measures

As we have seen previously, revival measures swept over America during the early nineteenth century, and the use of these measures brought division among many congregations. If John Fuchs is correct that the use of “new measures” was most popular among Lutheran congregations during the 1830s and 1840s, we may observe that this coincides with the period when the Buffalo and Missouri Lutherans were becoming established in their new American homeland.

It would be surprising, then, to see such new immigrants rapidly embracing these religious techniques so foreign to them. In fact, they did not embrace the “new measures.” Schaff wrote, “the strictly symbolical Lutherans ... set themselves against [new measures] with the greatest decision.”¹⁴⁵ As usual, it was a desire for doctrinal purity that caused Old Lutherans to be repulsed by revivalism.

Henry Eyster Jacobs provided an assessment of the difference between the system of “new measures” and confessional Lutheranism. Arand says, “In assessing the revival system of Methodists, Jacobs highlighted its essential difference with Lutheranism, ‘It

¹⁴⁴ Carl F. Schalk, *God's Song in a New Land*, 130-131. Quoting C.F.W. Walther, “Concordanz zum Kirchengesangbuch,” *Der Lutheraner*, 41 (March 15, 1885), 48.

¹⁴⁵ Philip Schaff, *America*, 158.

was justification *per Christum propter fidem*, instead of the reverse. Faith, too, was emphasized as an act, not as an attitude or state of mind.’ This, he noted, harmonized with the entire revival system that aimed at bringing a person to conscious experience of faith, which then became the basis of one’s assurance of salvation.”¹⁴⁶

The proponents of “new measures” sought a “conscious experience of faith,” as Arand calls it. It is interesting to see, in contrast, what Mann said about the character of the religious life of Old Lutherans.

But what is the character of the religious life of these Lutheran brethren of a stricter tendency? If active zeal in the promotion of the kingdom of God, in the spirit of the Lutheran Church, may be regarded as an evidence of living piety, they are not surpassed by any part of that Church. They manifest the most lively interest in the cause of missions, having erected stations even among some of the Indian tribes of the northwestern part of this country. They are indefatigable in the building up of colleges, seminaries, churches, parochial schools, and congregations. These congregations are often very small in numbers, but always ready to do their utmost in sustaining their churches, schools, and public worship. Many of our German congregations especially would do well to imitate these brethren in their voluntary, self-denying labors for the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁷

According to Mann, a lack of revivals had not hurt the spiritual life of these Old Lutherans, as the fruit of their faith made clear. Perhaps their journey to America was itself a sort of revival. From their willingness to make the arduous trip, we can see at least that those who came were highly motivated.

F. Catechesis

We saw, concerning worship, that the Old Lutherans were just as concerned about the doctrinal purity of their hymns as of their sermons. They realized that both had value in teaching the faith. We have also seen how avidly they built schools. Schaff wrote, “In

¹⁴⁶ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 56-57.

¹⁴⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 80.

their congregations they... are zealous for the parochial school.”¹⁴⁸ Mann made this point also: “The religious education of children is another point upon which they most earnestly insist.”¹⁴⁹

The instruction of the young occurred both on school days and Sundays. “They also adhere very strictly to the Old Lutheran custom of catechizing the children on every Sunday.”¹⁵⁰ It was expected that the catechization of youth would occur in the home as well as at school and church. We see this in Jacobs’ suggested use for one section of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*.

As a book on spirituality and Christian living, Jacobs regarded the section on “Love and the Fulfilling of the Law” as a worthy predecessor to Johann Arndt’s *True Christianity* and thought that it should be distributed as a tract for families and used as a textbook in classrooms.¹⁵¹

The Missouri Synod charged its president, as part of his duty to visit congregations of the synod, to “inquire whether and how afternoon and weekday services are held and whether catechism sermons are being preached, which he is to recommend especially.”

And,

Where Sunday catechizations are already in vogue, he shall attend them and note whether the children and catechumens are held to memorize the text of Luther’s Small Catechism, to grasp the correct meaning of the words, and to prove the Catechism with the most necessary prooftexts.¹⁵²

Whether or not this may have gone beyond Luther’s original intent for the catechism, it still shows the concern Missouri Lutherans had for teaching their young the faith. Likewise, regarding Grabau and the Buffalo Lutherans, Mann wrote, “After all, it

¹⁴⁸ Philip Schaff, *America*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 80.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁵¹ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 67. Citing Henry Eyster Jacobs, “The Confessional Principle and the Confessions,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (January 1881), 28.

¹⁵² Meyer, Carl S. *Moving Frontiers*, 162. Quoting Karl Kretzmann’s translation, “Instructions for the President of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, in Regard to His Visitations,” from the Missouri Synod *Proceedings*, 1847.

must be confessed, that none can serve their congregations more faithfully and conscientiously, or be more attentive to the instruction of the young than [Grabau] is; a fact to which the brethren of the Synod of Missouri, &c., have repeatedly testified.”¹⁵³

We have seen that the Old Lutherans were very concerned with properly teaching their children the faith. In 1911 Theodore Schmauk wrote *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church*, out of his concern that confessionalism was waning among Lutherans. One of the chief uses he cited for the confessions sums up this Old Lutheran concern for pedagogy. “This is their most important use, They become the medium of instruction, or education, of one generation to the next, in their preservation, transmission and communication through all future ages of the one true faith of the Church.”¹⁵⁴

G. Clergy

Another tool used by God to pass the faith on to successive generations is the minister. As usual, the position of Old Lutherans on the clergy rested on God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions. In the constitution Walther drafted for the congregation of Trinity in St. Louis, we read,

Sec. 8. The incumbency in the congregation may be intrusted only to such a preacher who holds himself to all the canonical Books of the Old and New Testaments, as the revealed Word of God, and to all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church derived therefrom, of which sec. 3 has mentioned [the three creeds, Unaltered Augsburg Confession, Apology, Smalcald Articles, Small Catechism, Large Catechism, Formula of Concord and visitation articles].¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 72.

¹⁵⁴ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 59. Quoting Theodore Emanuel Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), 71. Irregular punctuation and capitalization are original.

¹⁵⁵ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 126. Quoting Walther, *Verfassungsformen der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas*, as translated by Christian Otto Kraushaar. See “Authority”, above, for sec. 3, including the list of symbolical books.

Furthermore, pastors were not simply expected to pledge adherence to the Confessions. Arand explains, “Krauth asserted that it was not enough to read about the Confessions, one must digest the confessional writings themselves in order to discover what it truly means to be a Lutheran.” And, “Even more than Krauth, Jacobs stressed the practical value of the Confessions for proper pastoral care.”¹⁵⁶ The Confessions were not to be lifeless, dogmatic snapshots from centuries gone by. They were to be living documents that shaped and informed the Christian’s spiritual life and daily walk.

The life and walk of their clergy were strengths of the Old Lutherans. Schaff wrote, “Their pastors are mostly well instructed, faithful, conscientious, and self-denying...” However, showing their weakness, he continues, “... though, except in cases of happy inconsistency, very exclusive, and narrow-minded.”¹⁵⁷

Another issue Schaff noted about Old Lutherans is that the synods of Missouri and Buffalo were divided against each other over the doctrine of the office of the ministry. About this dispute he wrote, “The office question, which has thrown even the strictly symbolical Lutherans of Germany into discord, in spite of all their boasted doctrinal compactness and unity, has arrayed them against each other in two parties,... which wage a newspaper war with a bitterness little creditable to Lutheranism and Christianity.”¹⁵⁸

Why such a bitter dispute?

Walther and the body of Saxon Lutherans in Missouri had just undergone the painful renunciation of Martin Stephan, the bishop who had led them over from Saxony. Stephan’s alleged conduct was such that his own removal was not sufficient. The

¹⁵⁶ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 65.

¹⁵⁷ Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

Missouri Lutherans were no longer willing to place themselves under the same kind of strongly hierarchical leadership.¹⁵⁹ Arand continues, “Moreover, shortly after settling the Stephan affair, they encountered a form of his hierarchical views of the ministry among fellow immigrants and confessional Lutherans in the attitudes of J.A. Grabau and the Buffalo Synod.”¹⁶⁰ Mann explained the doctrinal differences:

[Grabau] justly denounced the practice of individual congregations electing and installing pastors under any pretence whatsoever, without even the advice of an existing Ministerium, maintaining that men thus arbitrarily appointed by a congregation, should not be permitted to preach and administer the holy Sacraments. From this follows, by necessary inference, the principle, that ordination performed by the Ministerium is not simply an ecclesiastical custom, but a divine necessity. These views met with opposition, especially from the Saxon portion of the clerical members of the Synod of Missouri, &c., because they were apprehensive lest the ministry of the New Testament might gradually assume the character of the hierarchical priesthood of the Old, and become a caste, or separate and fixed order of men, who claim the exclusive right to minister in holy things. Grabau and his friends, on the other hand, feared the introduction of a too liberal and lax form of Church government, a democracy in the bad sense of the term.¹⁶¹

Thus the two major parties within Old Lutheranism were prevented by this issue from joining together to champion their confessional stance before the whole Lutheran Church. Yet their spirit did not dim, as we have seen.

H. Rationalism

Adherence to the Lutheran Confessions requires firm beliefs in doctrines such as the infallibility of Scripture, Christ’s real presence in the Lord’s Supper, the divinity of Christ and regeneration in baptism, all of which contradict elements of rationalism.

¹⁵⁹ For a full description of the Stephan incident, see chapters 15 and 16 of Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953).

¹⁶⁰ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 92.

¹⁶¹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 72.

Among the Old Lutherans, rationalism had no home. We can see an example of this in Walther's early life in Germany. Wentz gave a summary:

Walther was born in Saxony in 1811 of a long line of ministers. At the University of Leipzig, he belonged to a little band of students who refused to accept the popular rationalism of the day and who cultivated their spiritual lives by studying the Bible and various books of devotion, among them Luther's works, which he read with eagerness. He became pastor at Braeunsdorf, Saxony in 1837. Here his evangelical position soon involved him in difficulties with his rationalistic superiors. The oath of his office bound him to the Book of Concord, but the entire liturgy, the hymnbook and the catechism that he was compelled to use were rationalistic. So too were the textbooks in the schools. His conscience was sorely oppressed by the situation. His efforts to introduce Lutheran doctrine and practice met with determined opposition. The young pastor's position was intolerable. Accordingly he had welcomed most heartily the invitation to help establish an ideal church in America.¹⁶²

Although we see here some of the Pietist influence on Walther, we can also clearly see that rationalism had taken hold of the European establishment. This change had already taken place before Walther's day. C.J. Kunze wrote in 1805 expressing his fear about the rationalist clergy that the American church might receive from Germany: "Dreadful as it may seem, it is nevertheless the result of my continuing to read German publications and of my continued German correspondence that I assert, should we send for ten candidates to place them in our vacant congregations, it is highly probable that we would have... nine despisers, yea, blasphemers of Christ."¹⁶³

Yet Walther was so firmly set against rationalism that when his superiors and the culture around him continued to oppose his confessional efforts, he willingly boarded a ship and sailed off to a new homeland. This man soon became the leader whom God would use to grow the largest body of Old Lutherans in America—a body firmly set against rationalism.

¹⁶² Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 111.

¹⁶³ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 105.

I. Language

As we noted previously, Schaff called the Old Lutherans “still entirely German.”¹⁶⁴

Mann agreed, “Among the Old Lutherans, the German has thus far been exclusively required.”¹⁶⁵ With the phrase “thus far” we see anticipation that Old Lutherans in America would eventually change to English. Mann made this plain.

It [Old Lutheranism] will yet be subjected to some severe trials, among which the transition of the younger generation from the German mother Church to the English will not be the least. We hope that these brethren will be the less disposed to oppose any obstacles to a transition of the young, the more these will carry with them the old spirit and faith into the new language.¹⁶⁶

We can see in Mann’s hope a foreboding that the language issue would become divisive among the Old Lutherans precisely because they were the sort to hold on to old ways. History has shown that the fear behind his hope was well-founded. The language issue became divisive in the Missouri Synod during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.¹⁶⁷

Some, especially the assistants (“Sendlinge”) sent from Germany by Wilhelm Loehe, thought use of the German language was necessary to retain pure doctrine in the church.¹⁶⁸ (For the *Sendlinge* it was crucial, as most spoke little or no English themselves.) The transition to English was eventually made, encouraged by strong American prejudice against German identity after the First World War and moving into

¹⁶⁴ Philip Schaff, *America*, 150.

¹⁶⁵ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 87.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 85. (We see here as elsewhere that Mann’s German did not always translate into fluid English.)

¹⁶⁷ For a discussion of the “linguistic lag” in the Missouri Synod, see Carl S. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 355-369.

¹⁶⁸ Meyer, Carl S. *Moving Frontiers*, 355.

the Second.¹⁶⁹ But as usual, the primary concern among Old Lutherans was to preserve pure doctrine.

J. Character

We have seen that the general character of the Old Lutherans was staunchly conservative, especially as regards the Christian faith revealed in the Bible and presented in the Lutheran Confessions. This strong conservatism, however, carried with it a common complaint made against Old Lutherans. The main flaw Mann pointed out regarding the Old Lutheran party was its “frigid exclusiveness” and bitterness toward almost anyone who did not agree with them on all their doctrines and practices.¹⁷⁰

Vergilius Ferm gave an example of this spirit of exclusiveness. After stating that the immigrant groups of Buffalo and Missouri “pledged themselves unequivocally to all the historic symbols of the Lutheran Church,” Ferm was compelled to note, “They did not, however, join hands but carried on a most vigorous controversy in the interpretation of some of the doctrines in those confessions.”¹⁷¹ The Old Lutherans valued substance more than words; they required understanding in truth, not simply rhetorical agreement with the symbols.

Mann allowed that the persecution they suffered in Germany may have been the first cause of this bitterness. But the “immoderate, really foolish, hatred displayed by some Old Lutherans against the German Evangelical Union, and against whatever is even remotely connected with it... often borders on the ridiculous.”¹⁷² The radical degree of emphasis this party placed on orthodoxy sometimes went too far. Some went to the

¹⁶⁹ Meyer, Carl S. *Moving Frontiers*, 368.

¹⁷⁰ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 83.

¹⁷¹ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 125.

¹⁷² William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 83.

extreme of claiming that their beliefs, and only theirs, constituted true Christianity. Mann wrote, "Some designate the difference between Lutheran and not Lutheran, as identical with the difference between Christian and not Christian, as if only the Lutheran Church was entitled to the appellation of Church."¹⁷³

Though critical of hyper-orthodoxy, Mann praised the Old Lutherans' faithfulness in doctrine and practice. He wrote,

We only regard the *ultra* opinion as a mistake, and an act of injustice against the church and her members, and a misapprehension of the blessings of God.... That, however, these brethren lay too much stress upon the principle of sound doctrine, on mere orthodoxy, on the letter, does not appear from the actual condition, order, activity, and self-denying labors of their congregations.... They possess far too much spiritual vivacity to be easily brought into subjection to the mere letter....¹⁷⁴

We have seen praise for the congregational life and mission work of the Old Lutherans (see "Revivalism and New Measures"). We have seen that they placed great emphasis upon teaching the faith to the next generation (see "Catechesis"). The fruits of the Spirit were evident among them. Unfortunately, evident also were the fruits of arrogance—bitterness and exclusivity—which showed the fallibility of this group.

¹⁷³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 83.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

VI. The Middle

Of the various theologians and historians consulted in this study, only Mann and Schaff specifically identified a third party among mid-nineteenth-century Lutherans. Schaff described it as a moderate party which “strikes a middle course between these two extremes, which are bound together only by the accident of name.”¹⁷⁵ He referred to this moderate party as “Melancthonian.”¹⁷⁶

Mann simply called it “the Centre,” about which he wrote,

Whilst placing beside these two clearly distinct parties a third, which we denominate the Centre, we wish, by no means, to be so understood, as if we entertained the opinion that this third party intended to occupy a middle, much less a mediating position between the other two; but we call it the Centre, because, on the one hand, it neither sympathizes with the principles of the American Lutheran party, nor, on the other, has it come to a full agreement with the Old Lutherans.... Yet some portions of it approximate the Old Lutherans, maintaining only a few unimportant points of difference.¹⁷⁷

As we see by this last comment, Mann considered the middle party much closer to Old Lutherans than to American Lutherans. Schaff counted the synods of Ohio and Pennsylvania in this group, while Mann included Tennessee plus some other smaller parties.

A. Authority

The use of the confessions was raised in the 1850 convention of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, particularly as regards the unaltered Augustana, and the following resolution was adopted:

¹⁷⁵ Philip Schaff, *America*, 151.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁷⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 85-86.

The Conference desired that the Synod should give an expression of opinion in regard to the Symbolical Books, and especially with reference to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. This opened a wide field for discussion.... After the matter had been discussed for some time in a kind and harmonious spirit, the following resolution was unanimously adopted: *Resolved*, That, like our fathers, we regard ourselves as a part of the one and only Evangelical Lutheran Church, that we too acknowledge the word of God as contained in the Holy Scriptures as the only ground of our faith, and that we too have never renounced the confessions of our church, but continue to regard them as a faithful exposition of the divine word.¹⁷⁸

Mann added, "In like manner did this Synod, in resolutions passed in 1853, give special prominence to the Symbolical Books from the beginning, declaring, at the same time, the Confessional Books, the very means to bind ministers to the Scriptures, and guard them against misapprehension, error, and unbelief." But Mann's opinion was that their practice fell short of their rhetoric, as he noted, "The Synod does, however, not require its applicants for membership to subscribe the Augsburg Confession.... Their practice is accordingly very liberal, and far removed from exclusive measures."¹⁷⁹

A revised liturgy published in 1850 in a joint effort by the ministeriums of Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio, required candidates for ordination to pledge to "preach according to the true understanding of [Scripture] as is expressed in the Confessional Writings of our church."¹⁸⁰ In 1854, the Joint Synod of Ohio amended its constitution to require all members (individuals or congregations) to "adhere to the doctrines of the word of God as set forth in all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, or who in their own Constitution confess and maintain the unaltered

¹⁷⁸ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 144. Quoting *Proceedings of the One Hundred and Third Annual Session of the German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States, Convened in Pottsville, Schuylkill County, Pa., May 26-29, 1850*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 88.

¹⁸⁰ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 145

Augsburg Confession and Luther's smaller Catechism in the sense and spirit of the other symbols."¹⁸¹

That these revisions occurred in the 1850s shows the trend toward recapturing the confessional spirit in Lutheranism in America. The position of authority held by the Scriptures and the Confessions among the Old Lutherans was beginning to be accepted also among these synods which represented truly the oldest (i.e., longest tenured) Lutherans in America.

B. Dogma

As we have seen above, the middle party was made up essentially of Lutherans who did not find themselves in either the far left or far right camps. Schaff noted that some had forsaken the American Lutheran party and zealously grasped the historic symbols. Of these he wrote, "In the first zeal...they even inclined to the extreme of the exclusive Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord. But it soon appeared that this could never rightly take root among Christians...in...America."¹⁸² Although this trend toward confessionalism was growing among middle Lutherans, this fact did not make them Old Lutherans. Mann wrote,

But whilst the Synods in connection with the Joint Synod of Ohio agree, as far as the confessional documents are concerned, with the stricter Lutherans...there still exists, between both parties, some material differences. One of the ablest...Ohio brethren [said,] "There is a considerable difference in temper and practice between us...and Missouri and Buffalo....In practice we are less rigid, and in temper we endeavor to avoid their unnecessary severity and unkindness."¹⁸³

Mann also highlighted inconsistencies between the positions of individual clergy within the central party.

¹⁸¹ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 146.

¹⁸² Philip Schaff, *America*, 155.

¹⁸³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 91.

Some of these regard doctrines peculiarly Lutheran in the main correct, but they are far from desiring synodical connection only with such brethren as entertain views similar to their own, in every particular.... Others again are not fully convinced of the correctness of all the doctrines composing the Lutheran Creed, but hold to those principles of the doctrinal system of Christianity which are indispensably necessary to salvation, and accordingly occupy in this the stand-point of the New School [American] Lutherans.¹⁸⁴

In summary, this central party's stance on dogma was that they approved the Lutheran Confessions in general, although they were much less rigid than the Old Lutherans in requiring subscription of others with whom they had fellowship.

C. Sacraments

My sources made no specific mention of the middle party's position on the sacraments. We can infer that, in accordance with their other positions, the members of this amalgam held a variety of views regarding the sacraments, some more confessional than others. However, as a whole, the conservative nature of these Lutherans showed in the resounding defeat of Schmucker's *Definite Platform* when it came to a vote in the General Synod,¹⁸⁵ though they were not likely to mandate one sacramental view over another.

D. Worship

Members of the middle party used a wide array of liturgical practices—even members within a single synod, such as Pennsylvania. To show his displeasure toward this tendency, Mann emphasized a prime benefit of liturgical practice. “They [seminarians] should be taught how beneficially the use of the liturgy will operate as a preventive of those dangers which flow from the abuse of liberty.” He was encouraged

¹⁸⁴ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 94.

¹⁸⁵ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 136-137.

“that the church is returning to the consciousness of her peculiarity, and that she is, after years of misapprehension, learning to admire and love many of her ancient treasures—her ancient customs.” He added that some congregations used the liturgy, responses and collects in Sunday services, but others did not. He attributed this to young pastors who were “not accustomed to these ancient Lutheran usages” and were not “instructed according to correct Church principles, during their years of preparatory study.”¹⁸⁶

Mann continued his discussion of the center party’s worship practices by pointing out that many of their churches had given up typically Lutheran observances such as altar candles and crosses and had adopted “customs prevalent in the American Protestant churches.”¹⁸⁷ Mann also wrote, because of a shortage of clergy “they are satisfied with having public worship once in three or four weeks.”¹⁸⁸ The confessions do allow liberty in worship practice, but Mann obviously considered some of these changes to be symptoms of unhealthy worship life.

Many of the congregations of the middle party were among the oldest Lutheran congregations in America.¹⁸⁹ As such, they had a variety of hymnals from various times. The synods of this party undertook the compilation of new hymnals in the nineteenth century. The Pennsylvania Ministerium published a new hymnal in 1849 which was reviewed in the Missouri Synod publication *Der Lutheraner*:

But how dreadfully one is deceived in that, although a significant number of the old normative core-hymns may be found in this newly published “German-Lutheran Hymnbook”...nevertheless, many other principal hymns are not to be found but rather a hodgepodge of the same kind which one already found formerly in the “Common Hymnbook.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 89.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁸⁹ Philip Schaff, *America*, 151.

¹⁹⁰ Carl F. Schalk, *God’s Song in a New Land*, 135-136.

While Old Lutherans would prefer none but Lutheran hymns, Mann noted that this hymnal also contained “a goodly number of the best church hymns of German Reformed authors.”¹⁹¹ The hymnal was produced largely by C. R. Demme, and was, to Schalk, an improvement over Quitman’s rationalist hymnbook. However, the improper deletion of stanzas and other poor editorial practices were evident in this hymnal. Schalk calls it at best “a step in the right direction,” though not all a confessional church would want in a hymnal.¹⁹² Schalk says, “Demme made changes that frequently involved subtle alterations in doctrinal emphases. It was this practice that drew such criticism from the Missouri Synod. Demme’s practice, however, represented the generally prevailing view.”¹⁹³

According to Schalk, many churches in the Ohio Synod also used this German hymnal from Pennsylvania.¹⁹⁴ Ohio produced its own German hymnal in 1879 after an abortive attempt to work together with the Missouri Synod on a German hymnal. Schalk says of this hymnal, which came a little later in the confessional revival, “The publication of this book marked a decided return to the use of a significant portion of that normative core of 16th-century Reformation hymnody, and a turning away from the deletion of stanzas and the looser editorial practices that characterized much of 19th-century American Lutheran hymnody.”¹⁹⁵

The Ohio Synod also published hymnals in English. Their first, done in 1845, was soon replaced by an improved version in 1855. It was, according to Schalk, a small step

¹⁹¹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 90.

¹⁹² Carl F. Schalk, *God’s Song in a New Land*, 135.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

in the right direction of recovering Reformation hymnody, and was followed by a much more confessional hymnal in 1880.¹⁹⁶ Thus we can see that this century was a time of changing influences and renewal of the confessional impulse in worship as in doctrine.

E. Revivals and the Use of New Measures

Mann pointed out that those in the middle party “theoretically agree with [Old Lutherans] in their disapprobation in regard to the employment of what are known as ‘Methodistical new measures,’ which are more or less artificial.... In this they are also more especially strictly distinct from [the American Lutheran] party.”¹⁹⁷ Schaff noted though that “within the territory of Pennsylvania Synod there are an East Pennsylvania Synod and a West Pennsylvania Synod, divided on the subject of new measures.”¹⁹⁸ But he later softens this position, putting Pennsylvania Lutherans alongside the Old Lutherans against the “new measures” being accepted by the American Lutherans. In general, the conservative nature of traditional Lutheranism won out over revivalism’s “new measures.”

F. Catechesis

Schaff considered the older clergy of this central party less than vigorous, as we will see below. We have previously noted that the liturgy and worship practices among these Lutherans had reached a point of laxity. We have also seen that, while the synods expressed some degree of allegiance to the confessions, in practice individual congregations were not as particular. Mann noted that these churches even had a tendency to invite German Reformed pastors into their pulpits, “whenever a suitable

¹⁹⁶ Carl F. Schalk, *God's Song in a New Land*, 141.

¹⁹⁷ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 92.

¹⁹⁸ Philip Schaff, *America*, 156.

opportunity for so doing presented itself.”¹⁹⁹ Such ecumenical pulpit fellowship would never have been seen among the Old Lutherans.

G. Clergy

Schaff made a rather unflattering remark regarding this center party: “A considerable number of ministers in these and kindred synods, especially of the older men, have indeed very indefinite views, are uneducated and mentally indolent, and care more for their farms than for theology and the Church.”²⁰⁰ He saw promise in the better-educated young ministers in this party, and he hoped their generation would consolidate the entire Lutheran Church in America.

A member of the Ohio Synod told Mann, “In regard to the question about the Church and the ministerial office, our Synod never has given any special expression, as we have never had occasion to do so. But so far as I am acquainted with the views of the brethren, I think most of them look upon the Missouri and Buffalo positions... as extreme in the democratic and hierarchical directions.”²⁰¹ As usual, this middle party takes a position between two extremes.

Regarding the central party in particular, Mann discussed the effects wrought by “a great scarcity of ministers.”²⁰² He cited a lack of church discipline and said that church abuses had become ingrown, longstanding, and hard to abolish. Congregations showed insufficient interest in the Word of God and members had become satisfied with having public worship only once in three or four weeks.

¹⁹⁹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 90.

²⁰⁰ Philip Schaff, *America*, 151-152.

²⁰¹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 98.

Mann laid part of the blame for the clergy shortage on several synods' lack of support for seminaries. He also cited congregations' lack livable salaries for their ministers as a deterrent to young men considering the ministry. But chiefly he noted that the central party and many of its congregations lacked "that zeal, which characterizes the German Old Lutheran and American New Lutheran congregations." Still, he saw "some signs that a brighter day for the church is dawning."²⁰³

We have already seen that Mann desired these ministers be taught the benefits of the liturgy, concerning which they were not adequately prepared in seminary. He also expressed concern over their lack of continuing education, saying,

But with many, alas, the custom of relinquishing their studies immediately after having left the Seminary still prevails. They stop with whatever they have there acquired, and manifest not sufficient disposition to increase their knowledge in exegesis, dogmatics, Church history, &c. The consequence often is, that whilst these men yield up their entire strength to the performance of the practical duties of their office, this scientific stagnation becomes not unfrequently the hot-bed of the most dangerous onesidedness and prejudices....²⁰⁴

Where Schaff accused pastors of being too interested in their farms, at least Mann saw pastors interested in their flocks. Both, however, showed concern for a lack of growth among the pastors themselves.

H. Rationalism

As with the American Lutherans and the Old Lutherans, the middle Lutherans would not accept the title of rationalist. Those Lutherans who had been the longest in America had faced the rising tide of rationalism as it came over from Europe. But Wentz said that by the 1840s, "The older Lutheran elements, of the Muhlenberg line, had for the

²⁰³ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 99.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

most part solved their problems of rationalism.”²⁰⁵ As noted previously, Frederick Henry Quitman was a disciple of Halle professor Semler, considered the “father of rationalism.” Quitman brought the influence of rationalism to bear among the Lutherans in the early nineteenth century when he presided over the New York Ministerium.²⁰⁶ Wentz credited the organization of the General Synod with saving the Lutheran Church. “It operated as an emphatic protest against the rationalist tendencies in New York and other parts of the church, and presented an effectual barrier to the further importation into the church of European deistic theology. It saved the church from becoming rationalistic as it became anglicized and Americanized.”²⁰⁷

I. Language

“It is also worthy of remark, that it is precisely in this central party where both languages, the German and English, are particularly required for church service.”²⁰⁸ By saying this, Mann covered much of the language issue for the middle party. Regarding the Pennsylvania Synod, he pointed out “the principle laid down in her ministerial constitution, that the discussions should be conducted in the German language, has not been changed by a formal resolution of Synod, though in practice both languages are used.”²⁰⁹

In 1852 the New York Synod also showed a readiness to embrace English for its usefulness, as the following example shows.

²⁰⁵ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 109.

²⁰⁶ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 69.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁰⁸ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 86.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

I regret that for a year or two comparatively so little has been done amongst us in the work of church extension. One great difficulty is in the want of pastors, especially those who speak the English language.²¹⁰

However, it was not easy to teach the Lutheran faith in English when there existed what Arand calls, “a paucity of Lutheran literature available in the English language.”²¹¹

Mann supported this contention. He wrote,

If we examine the libraries of most of those among our ministers who have received an English education, and who officiate in the English language, we are surprised to find how few Lutheran works they really contain, whilst we, on the contrary, everywhere encounter the popular English works of such men as Dwight, Clark, Scott, and others. Now these, it is true, contain much that is good, but, at the same time, also much that is unlutheran; and the works of Dr. S.S. Schmucker, which are generally found along with them, are pervaded by this same heterogeneous spirit.²¹²

So we see that even if the use of English did not cause as much discord in the synods and congregations of the middle party as among the other parties, it still had an indirect impact by way of theological influences.

J. Character

As we have seen, Mann described the center party as largely embodying the confessional principles of the right wing but without its bitterness and exclusivity. However Mann confessed that the center was not a party that “intended to occupy a middle,” nor did it constitute an “organically connected whole,”²¹³ so its character was varied. This is in contrast to the unity seen among both the Old Lutherans, who willfully

²¹⁰ Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology*, 149. Quoting *Minutes of the Fifty-Seventh Session of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of the State of New York, and Adjacent States and Countries, Held at Red Hook, Dutchess Co., N.Y., August 28th to Sept. 1st, 1852*, 32.

²¹¹ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 63.

²¹² William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 96-97.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 86.

retained a staunchly conservative position, and the American Lutherans, who intentionally chose a liberal path.

An example of the spirit of this center party is seen in Dr. Schaeffer's inaugural charge to Schmucker "to establish all students confided to your care in that faith which distinguishes our church from others. If any should object to such faith,... they have their choice to unite with such of our Christian brethren whose particular views in matters of faith and discipline may suit them better."²¹⁴ Schaeffer showed a serious concern to lay a Lutheran confessional foundation in seminarians while still respecting the "Christian brethren" who hold different views. This is an example of the mediating position between American Lutherans and Old Lutherans.

The members of the middle party considered the American Lutheran position un-Lutheran, while the "rigid" and "extreme" position of the Old Lutherans they considered uncharitable. Their own spirit was one of conciliation and toleration. Practicality also entered into the picture, as we consider an example given by Wentz.

In 1857, Benjamin Kurtz decided to leave the Maryland Synod rather than acquiesce to its increasing confessional tendency. He formed a new body with several kindred spirits and called it the Melanchthon Synod. It consisted of only eleven pastorates. This new synod applied for admission to the General Synod. Even though it was not as confessional as the General Synod would have liked, Charles Porterfield Krauth, the leading theologian among the conservatives, advocated its admission "in order to maintain the numerical strength" of the General Synod.²¹⁵ Due largely to Krauth's influence, the Melanchthon Synod was admitted.

²¹⁴ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 21.

²¹⁵ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 137.

Thus the existence and numerical strength of the General Synod was considered more important than the consistency of its doctrinal stand. This is only one example, but it exhibits the tendency among the moderate Lutherans toward conciliation.

VII. Summary

This study has examined many areas of church life, and has shown in some areas a great difference between Old Lutherans and American Lutherans. Chief among these were their positions on the confessions. This difference of confessional view overflowed into different views of liturgy and worship life, the sacraments, the usefulness of revivalistic “new measures,” and the importance of catechesis.

Between these two parties there also existed a middle group, not as staunchly confessional as the Old Lutherans, but in no way ready to discard or distort the confessions as the American Lutherans did. As this group did not have a well-defined identity, however, they observed great variance in confessional adherence, worship practice, and other aspects of church life.

Certain other areas such as church polity exhibit variances that did not fall along these party lines.²¹⁶ Schaff states flatly that Germans “have never accomplished much anywhere in the matter of church government, being in fact accustomed to regard it as of very little importance.”²¹⁷

We have also seen that none of these Lutheran groups would readily accept the label “rationalist.” However, it is clear that Schmucker based many of his doctrinal positions more on reasoning from externals than on faith in the Word of God. This emphasis on reason led to the later invasion of higher criticism. Higher criticism was one of the perils facing the church which encouraged men like confessional Lutheran

²¹⁶ For example, within the Old Lutheran party, Walther’s Missourians and Grabau’s Ohioans engaged in a bitter dispute over the office of the ministry. See Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 72. At one point, Grabau excommunicated the entire Missouri Synod, some 200 congregations. See Carl S. Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 283.

²¹⁷ Philip Schaff, *America*, 156.

theologian Theodore E. Schmauk (1860-1920) to write for the purpose of building up the confessional resolve of the church. Arand writes, “Schmauk believed that if the church was to resist the impact of higher criticism and the right of the individual conscience over any authority, even Scripture, the church must continually wield its one and only weapon through which the power of truth would shine—it must confess its faith.”²¹⁸

Schaff encouraged the Lutheran Church to remain faithful to its calling, to remain true to its confessional heritage while not bristling at contact with other Christians.

The Lutheran Church has an important calling in the new world. This it cannot fulfill by being unfaithful to its genius and history, and casting away its doctrinal and practical peculiarities; nor by thrusting them forward in rough opposition to the Reformed and English communions, and thus depriving itself of all influence on them; but by faithfully preserving its gifts, and at the same time proceeding in wise and cordial accommodation to the circumstances of a new country and people, and so making itself available and profitable both for the emigrants from its old home, and for the whole development of Anglo-American Christianity. Confused and unsatisfactory as its condition may appear in general and in detail to an outside observer, yet its rapid progress in latter years, and its great number of excellent, laborious, and self-denying clergymen, and plain, virtuous, and substantial laymen, give promise of a fair future before it.²¹⁹

Mann pointed out “what an anomaly it would be to call any modern religious society the Lutheran Church, except it, at the same time, regards that as the confession of its faith, which was regarded as such by the Lutheran Church from the beginning.... The Lutheran Church is Lutheran, by virtue of its peculiar Lutheran creed, and not without it. As soon as it relinquishes this or any part of it, it forfeits its claim to the name.”²²⁰

²¹⁸ Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries*, 64.

²¹⁹ Philip Schaff, *America*, 159.

²²⁰ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 74-75.

Experience shows that it is not easy to convince people to relinquish their traditional name (e. g., “Lutheran”). This is true even when their beliefs and practices have come to contradict the very position their name denotes.

Mann wrote, “How can the Lutheran Church ever expect to command the respect of others, as long as she everywhere publicly denounces her own Symbolical Books as erroneous?”²²¹ Yet he gave this summary exhortation,

Blind zeal, a disposition to accuse others of heresy, and of acting from impure motives, does not impress them favorably with ourselves, or incline them to listen to our views and arguments, but sours and repulses them. Only declare the truth calmly and in love, and with the earnestness of Christ bear your testimony for it; as for the rest, it will make way for itself.

Mann saw that the church had become “a battlefield for different parties,” where some had “abandoned the faith of their fathers” and called it “erroneous.” Others viciously pursued old doctrines and usages, not “satisfied with the judicious moderation and tolerant spirit” of “Father Muhlenberg.” Still others “take no active interest in these questions,” but sought “outward tranquility... where there is no unity in the spirit.”²²² Both Mann and Schaff saw the need for the Lutheran Church to reach out and lovingly share the pure Christian Gospel, which is done best from the foundation of our confessions, but which can never be done with a mean spirit.

²²¹ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 135.

²²² *Ibid.*, 123.

VIII. Conclusion

Looking back at the American Lutheran controversy through the lens of history, Wentz wrote that, by the end of the 1850s

The issue was settled. "American Lutheranism" was definitely defeated. The leading advocates of a modified Lutheranism, or Melancthonianism, with all their great personal influence, were in a hopeless minority. After the incident of the "Definite Synodical Platform" their influence waned rapidly. It was the registered conviction of the great host of Lutherans in America that Lutheranism can live and flourish in this country without giving away its own spirit or adulterating its own life and character. The future of the Lutheran church in America was to belong to the conservative type of Lutheranism. It was worth much to have that decided so that the experiment of "American Lutheranism" might never be seriously undertaken again.²²³

Winthrop Hudson made a similar assessment of the Lutheran Church in America about one hundred years later, paying homage to the value of the conservative tradition which has preserved the Lutheran identity through times like the nineteenth century.

Hudson wrote,

The final prospect for a vigorous renewal of Protestant life and witness rests with the Lutheran churches which had overcome much of their fragmentation by 1960 and had grouped themselves into three main bodies. All had exhibited an ability to grow during the post-World War II years, with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod making the greatest gains. The Lutheran churches are in the fortunate position of having been, in varying degrees, insulated from American life for a long period of time. As a result they have been less subject to the theological erosion which so largely stripped other denominations of an awareness of their continuity with a historic Christian tradition. . . . Among the assets immediately at hand among the Lutherans are a confessional tradition, a surviving liturgical structure, and a sense of community which . . . may make it easier for them than for most Protestant denominations to recover the "integrity of church membership" without which Protestants are ill-equipped to participate effectively in the dialogue of a pluralistic society.²²⁴

²²³ Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, 137-138.

²²⁴ Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, 176.

The episode of American Lutheranism shows that we cannot, over time, redefine what in essence constitutes the Lutheran Church. If in doctrine or practice we depart from that which is characteristically Lutheran, and in particular the Lutheran Confessions, then it is not the Lutheran Church but we as individuals who have changed. If we give up those peculiarities which distinguish us as Lutherans, then we must also be willing to give up the Lutheran name.

Noll has stated that if Lutherans stop acting, believing and looking like Lutherans, we have no purpose for existing apart from other American Protestant churches.²²⁵ Schaff and Mann both emphasized that the Lutheran Church, though not the only repository of Christians, must yet retain and assert that which makes it unique. “The Lutheran Church does not say that in her only men can be saved, but the knowledge of the Divine mysteries, which she possesses, she does not relinquish, but still says, ‘Except I am refuted by the clear testimony of the Holy Scriptures, I neither can nor will recant. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen!’”²²⁶

²²⁵ Mark A. Noll, “The Lutheran Difference,” *First Things* (February 1992) especially 36-37.

²²⁶ William Julius Mann, *Lutheranism in America*, 124.

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