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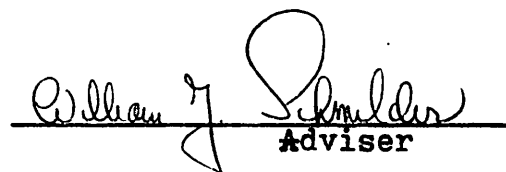
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THE WAUWATOSA THEOLOGY:
J.P. KOEHLER, HIS EXEGETICAL METHODOLOGY
AND THE PROTE'STANT CONFERENCE

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective
H-200

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	v
CHAPTER I	
THE WAUWATOSA YEARS	1
Pragmatic Pedagogy	1
A Man And A Method	4
Wauwatosa Pedagogues	9
The "Theologische Quartalschrift"	12
CHAPTER II	
THE WAUWATOSA METHODOLOGY	17
The "Natural" Method	19
Weltanschauung And Lebenanschauung	22
The Author's Sense	24
Dogmatics In Perspective	28
Churchianity And Christian Life	31
Christ's Method	32
CHAPTER III	
THE WAUWATOSA CONFLICT	34
Thievery, "The Teachers," And A Professor	34
The Beitz Paper	41
The "Gutachten"	45
CHAPTER IV	
THE WAUWATOSA DEBACLE	50
The War of Word	51
The Eleventh Hour	53
Wauwatosa To Thiensville	54
Koehler's Verstöckung	56
The Prote'stant Conference	57
Amalgamation and Disintegration	61
Significant Later Events	64
APPENDIX I	
DOCUMENT STUDY OF "WITNESS, ANALYSIS AND REPLY"	67
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	76

FOREWORD

Given the limited secondary resources available on the Wauwatosa Theology, this paper intends to provide a brief summary of issues involved in the activity and fall of the Wauwatosa Theology. The aim of the paper is to provide an alternative viewpoint to Leigh Jordahl's Master's Thesis entitled "The Wauwatosa Theology" and the summary of the same found in the Introduction to The History of the Wisconsin Synod by John Philip Koehler.

However, this paper is not to be considered a polemic directed against Jordahl. Rather, it endeavors to evaluate the historical background of the Wauwatosa Theology including facets not treated by Jordahl.

Finally, because of its brevity, it is hoped that this paper might be useful to others as a point of departure and bibliographical resource for further research.

CHAPTER I
THE WAUWATOSA YEARS

Wauwatosa sounds more like a medical term for a mouth disease than an adjectival designation for a particular brand of theology. However, between the years 1900 and 1929 the exegetical methodology of three men in the Wisconsin Synod of the Lutheran Church was identified by that unwieldy appellation: the Wauwatosa Theology. Short-lived and generally scorned, the Wauwatosa Theology bears a fascinating history. Its rise and fall is contemporaneous with the rise and fall of its framer, John Philip Koehler. The account of the reign and repudiation of the Wauwatosa Theology bears out the maxim that lessons are seldom learned from history.

Pragmatic Pedagogy

The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin was founded on December 8, 1849 with three congregations and three pastors. Organized along the "united" principles of its parent German Mission Societies, it was dependent upon these non-Confessional organizations for a supply of pastors. Having established a relationship with the Pennsylvania Ministerium, one Wisconsin pastor was trained at the Gettysburg Seminary. Early in its history Wisconsin recognized the advantages of training its own men in line with its growing confessionalism. In 1863 Synod resolved to es-

tablish its first college and seminary in Watertown, Wisconsin.

After fraternal relations were established with the Missouri Synod in 1868, serious thought was given to amalgamating Wisconsin's seminary with Missouri's St. Louis seminary. A Wisconsin chair was established at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1870 but was never filled during the eight years of its existence. Dr. Adolph Hoenecke was called to fill the vacant professorship, but the nascent Wisconsin Synod was unable to solicit the necessary funds for his support. Wary of being swallowed-up by Missouri, the Wisconsin convention of 1878 re-established its own clergy-training institution. This brought the association with Concordia to an end. Again, Synod extended a call to Dr. Hoenecke to become sole theological professor. St. Matthew's of Milwaukee where Hoenecke served as pastor refused to release him to full-time professorial duties. It was decided to establish the campus for the seminary in Milwaukee rather than at Watertown so that the learned professor could continue his parish duties as well as lecture to the candidates. Men were called to assist Hoenecke, but Synod's lack of support for the seminary insured frequent changes in the faculty during its early years.

When the student body outgrew the limited size of the seminary, property was acquired and a new seminary constructed in 1893 at Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Hoenecke continued to serve

as director (president) and began to devote fulltime to his teaching duties. At various times, Hoenecke taught all classes employing the dogmatical lecture style, dictating notes which were transcribed verbatim by the students.¹ Primarily a dogmatist, Hoenecke's mode of teaching exegesis was by reading verbatim from a German commentary.²

During these formative years in the life of the Wisconsin Synod and its seminary Hoenecke was a vital force in directing Wisconsin's flow into the stream of "Old Lutheranism". Ironically, although Missouri's staunch Lutheranism influenced them, Wisconsin men tended to be more strongly bonded together by anti-Missouri sentiments than pro-Wisconsin. They had no intention of becoming Missouri foundlings. As a result, the Wisconsin men took pride in their rugged individualism.³ There was no veneration of theological professors or synodical presidents. The seminary was often left in near desolation. Rather than a source of scholarly theological opinions, the seminary was merely a pragmatic necessity. Earned or honorary degrees were spurned.

An understanding of these attitudes is vital if one is to grasp the minimal response elicited by the advent of a new approach to doing theology at the seminary. It was an ap-

¹John Philip Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, edited and with an introduction by Leigh D. Jordahl (Faith-Life: The Protestant Conference, 1970), p. 210.

²Ibid., p. 232.

³Ibid., p. ix.

proach which could have shaken Lutheranism to its very core. But because of Synod's stark individualistic pragmatism, the Wauwatosa Theology, promising to make Wisconsin a power in Lutheranism and aiming to rescue it from its purported dogmatic quagmire, rose and fell in a 30 year period. And hardly anyone cared or even noticed.

A Man And A Method

John Philip Koehler, the son of a German immigrant pastor, was called to a professorship at Wauwatosa in 1900. In view of later developments it is one of the biting ironies of history that Koehler was nominated to this post by a Milwaukee parish pastor, August Pieper, who lobbied assiduously for his election.⁴

Educated at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis under Walther, Schaller, Stoeckhardt and Francis Pieper, Koehler upon graduation in 1880 served as his father's assistant in Hustisford, Wisconsin for two years. Since his birth in 1859 Koehler had been groomed by his father, Philip, for service in the ministerium of the Lutheran Church. After six years of pastoring his own flock the youthful, self-taught historian assumed a teaching post at his alma mater, Northwestern College in Watertown. Trained in the classical gymnasium tradition, he was called upon to give instruction in religion, German, Latin and, his greatest love, history. For a portion of his twelve year sojourn in Watertown Koehler served in the capa-

⁴Ibid., p. 235.

city of "inspector" or dean of students. Always a man of resourceful innovation he sought to alleviate some of the rigors of his position by establishing a system of upper-class assistants to aid in overseeing the resident student body. However, as evidence of the general synodical mistrust of its professors and of Koehler in particular when trouble arose among the students ten years after his departure, blame was laid at Koehler's feet.⁵

The call to Wauwatosa was to the chair of church history and New Testament interpretation with additional tasks in hermeneutics, liturgics and music. With no formal education beyond the "system" college and Missouri seminary Koehler proved a remarkably able scholar and a prolific writer in all fields of theological pursuit. In addition, he cultivated an avid interest in art and literature.⁶ A man of remarkable self-discipline, he was largely self-taught. As a result he was an independent thinker who found it advisable to constantly challenge his own opinions as well as those of his church. At the heart of this theological and historical perspective was self-criticism. He saw it as a necessary part of any ecclesiological, dogmatical or rational system. This ability to objectively evaluate itself Koehler perceived as

⁵Ibid., p. 226.

⁶John Springer, "A Bibliography of the Published Works Of John Philip Koehler," Faith-Life 44(November/December 1971 Supplement): 1-12. It lists all of Koehler's works in German and their English translations, and lists the location of some of his paintings.

absent from his own church as well as from all of mid-western "Old Lutheranism".⁷

According to Koehler, the historian, mid-western Lutheranism was failing to grasp its historical roots. Rather than tracing its heritage to Scripture and the theology of the Reformation, "Old Lutheranism" was content to halt at the Golden Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy during the late 16th century. When Koehler arrived at Wauwatosa, he was appalled at the antipathy to historical study in conjunction with exegesis and dogmatics manifested among the students. This lack of historical perspective, Koehler suspected, led to the imperious attitude of the future pastors overagainst dogmatics. The perpetually self-critical innovator set out to remedy this attitudinal maladjustment. "The dogmatician must be at home in history and the historical method; and the historian has more to do than merely set down the so-called facts."⁸

Koehler's magnum opus, his Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte, reflects exactly this philosophy of historical study. It is not a book of facts but an overview of human life, its emotions, its culture. Moreover, it sets out to analyze the influences which these factors have brought to bear on the life of the Christian Church. Koehler offered an outline which allowed his students to develop naturally according to their

⁷John Philip Koehler, "Faith the Quintessence of Christian Life on Earth," trans. Emil John and Kurt Zorn, Faith-Life 28(July 1955):9.

⁸Koehler, History, p. 232.

own skills and interests.⁹ In order to understand where the Church is today and how it got there, "the historian must follow-up the development, growth and decline that goes on in the Church on earth and in the world."¹⁰ Such analytical study of history placed emphasis not on how things came about, rather, on why things came about as they did.

Analysis revealed to Koehler that the history of the Church is almost deterministic or at least pessimistic. Certain factors will surely lead to certain ends. He arrived at conclusions, frequently proved correct, on the basis of objective historical observation.¹¹ One such conclusion was his historical premise of "verstöckung" or hardening of heart. He saw it as an inevitable factor in the development and demise of any organization.¹² Namely, that at some point in its history every organization ceases to be sufficiently critical of itself to prevent the onset of dogmatic traditionalism. As an organization aged and matured it would suffer arteriosclerosis, ceasing to be open and innovative. Eventually a kind of senile satisfaction with the status quo would envelope every organization, secular or spiritual.

It was Koehler's considered opinion that the reign of

⁹Joel Hensel, "A Brief Study of John Philip Koehler," Faith-Life 35(July 1962):4.

¹⁰Koehler, History, p. 232.

¹¹John Philip Koehler, "Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns," trans. A. Hillmer, Faith-Life 25(July 1952):9.

¹²Koehler, History, p. x.

dogmatics at St. Louis and its parallel rise in the Wisconsin Synod would lead to precisely that kind of stagnation in both church bodies.¹³ Likewise, given the historical premise of "Verstöckung", Koehler was not surprised at the inevitable repudiation of his theology and himself.¹⁴

Change at Wauwatosa was immediately discernible upon Koehler's entrance into the classroom. "The new teacher did not follow the custom of dictating the subject-matter but expected the students to review the ground covered in the daily lectures with the help of a text-book and be prepared for a quiz the next day. In exegesis, the students themselves had to deliver weekly essays."¹⁵ Synod was running true-to-form, Koehler's innovations met with open distain from his students.

Plunging into an immediate revision of the curriculum, Koehler refused to countenance the domination of dogmatics at the seminary. A parallel exists, according to Koehler, in the study of theology between dogmatics and history. "The former presenting the inner connection of the divine purpose of salvation and its revelation in the Word of God, the latter telling the story of the working-out of the divine plan on earth thru the ages. The center of study is the exegesis of the Scripture which forms the basis both for doctrinal

¹³Koehler, "Gesetzlich Wesen," p. 9.

¹⁴Koehler, History, p. x.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 210.

theology and the teaching of history and itself deals with both."¹⁶

Wauwatosa Pedagogues

Two years after Koehler's election to the faculty of the Wauwatosa seminary he was joined by his long-time friend and colleague, August Pieper. "Koehler stood shoulder to shoulder with Pieper."¹⁷ Not the Renaissance Man that Koehler was, Pieper was nonetheless an original thinker gifted with a personality that drew students and pastors alike into his camp. Koehler, never a popular teacher, admired Pieper's congenial collegiality with the students.¹⁸ Definitely in sympathy with Koehler's theology, Pieper tended to discipline himself through a somewhat more traditional dogmatic interpretation of the premises outlined by his colleague. A younger brother of Missouri's respected dogmatician Franz Pieper, August tempered his attitude towards the role of dogmatics via his Old Testament exegetical work.¹⁹ His only published book is an exposition of the second half of the book of Isaiah, Isaias II. Although his contributions to the Wauwatosa theological journal, "Theologische Quartalschrift", are numerous as Koehler's.

Even though Pieper was loved by his students and many

¹⁶Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁸Ibid., p. xviii.

¹⁹Joel Hensel, "Brief Study," p.6.

pastors as well, he shared with Koehler the scorn and mistrust of the Synod in general. When upon the death of Adolph Hoenecke the Synod searched for a new director Koehler and Pieper were scarcely considered. At this early date, 1908, charges of false doctrine and malfeasance were already being leveled against Koehler and Pieper respectively.²⁰

In 1904 Koehler and Pieper launched the "Theologische Quartalschrift" as a much needed link between the seminary and Synod's ministerium. However, typical of Wisconsin's anti-intellectual attitude, Koehler's maiden article on the "Analogy of Faith" met with bombastic criticism from those few clergymen who availed themselves of this theological journal.²¹ Surely, neither the author of nor the collaborator in such a theological venture critical of Synod's sacred position could be entrusted with the oversight of Synod's struggling theological seminary. The Board of Control of the seminary chose to call the President of the teachers college in New Ulm, Minnesota, John Schaller, as the Director and professor of dogmatics. Not as innovative and forthright as Koehler and Pieper, Schaller served as a stabilizing force on the faculty. On the other hand, Pieper and Schaller were astute ecclesiological politicians; whereas, Koehler's forthright honesty tended to make his positions untenable to many. Koehler lacked the ability to deal

²⁰Koehler, History, pp. 218-219.

²¹An analysis of Koehler's article follows below.

solicitously with people in the hope of gaining their support.²²

Nonetheless, when death abbreviated Schaller's career in 1920, Koehler was elected the Director of the seminary. John Meyer was called to fill the vacant post of professor of dogmatics. Meyer, however, never played a significant role in the unique historical-exegetical theology practiced at the seminary from 1900-1929 which is called the Wauwatosa Theology.

As the history of the Wauwatosa Theology unfolded, Koehler increasingly assumed the role of protagonist to Pieper's role as antagonist. Somewhere around the year 1920, after a trip to Europe, there is a noticeable shift in Pieper's theology. A rift between Koehler and Pieper surfaces to the view of Synod. Several points were at issue. One was the Doctrine of Church and Ministry. Pieper posited his brother's traditional Missouri interpretation. Later he adopted Koehler's view which is the present Wisconsin Synod position and claimed that he was the author of it. In addition, Koehler was lobbying for a broader classical course offering at synodical schools. Pieper, the traditionalist, resisted.²³

Finally two issues smack of pure envy. Koehler, an avocational student of art and architecture, was in the process of drawing-up plans for a new, direly needed seminary

²²Koehler, History, p. 235.

²³Joel Hensel, "Brief Study," p. 6.

campus. Pieper contended that Koehler intended to make the new Thiensville institution a monument to himself. Koehler on the other hand suspected Pieper of some clandestine political machinations among the "free churches" of Europe.

Prior to the disintegration begun in 1920, the three men on the Wauwatosa faculty were striking out against what they perceived as the prevalent methodology of Lutheran orthodoxy "in which the dominance of dogmatics actually put historical and the connected study of Scripture out of business. Even where Scripture study was practiced it bowed under the tyranny of dogmatics."²⁴ The faculty set out with the presupposition that theology was not a task that was to be involved in compiling an impressive system of pure doctrine. "Theology, rather exists solely to assist the Church in its proclamation and pastoral ministry."²⁵

The Wauwatosa Theology saw Lutheranism at a dead-end, failing to critically evaluate itself in the light of history. Koehler, Pieper and Schaller wanted Lutheranism to return to the source of life, namely the Scriptures. One cannot fail to recognize that the Wauwatosa Theology had virtually no lasting effect upon the Wisconsin Synod. However, before it passed out of the life of the Wisconsin Synod it was blamed for a rift which has lasted for over 50 years.

The "Theologische Quartalschrift"

²⁴Koehler, History, p. x.

²⁵Ibid., p. xvii.

Until 1904 the members of the theological faculty of the Wisconsin Synod were responsible for the official synodical periodical the "Gemeinde-Blatt." A memorial to Synod calling for a more scholarly journal aimed at a narrower readership coupled with some attacks against articles by Koehler and Pieper in the "Gemeinde-Blatt" led to the establishment of the quarterly theological journal which we have already mentioned above which is published today as the "Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly."²⁶

Obviously, this journal was to reflect the theological position of the Wauwatosa faculty who edited it. The bulk of the writing done by Koehler was for publication in the "Quartalschrift". Most of his articles have been translated and republished in "Faith-Life" as documentation for the Wauwatosa Theology.

True to his reputation as an independent thinker, Koehler's first article on the "Analogy of Faith" examining Romans 12:6 exegetically caused a raucous stir. The article was precipitated by a discussion at an inter-synodical conference when a question was raised on a point of doctrine applying the "analogy of faith". Much to Koehler's surprise there was no consensus on what the "analogy of faith" was,

²⁶Ibid., p. 211. Koehler recounts the involved, behind-the-scenes maneuvering which became the hallmark of intra-synodical relations during the first quarter of the 20th century. He shows again that he and Pieper were less than popular figures. They were accused of Pro-Missourianism, a most loathesome appellation for Koehler.

much less on what was meant by the term in Romans. Therefore Koehler set out to do a thorough exegesis of the Romans text.²⁷

The viewpoint which held sway among Synodical Conference churches was that "the analogy of faith" is the doctrine of justification with which every teaching must be in harmony. However, Koehler believed that on the basis of the text, Paul never intended that this should be used as a principle of interpretation.²⁸ "There is no specific authority in Scripture for the expression 'analogy of faith' as a rule of interpretation nor for its special application in this sense."²⁹ However, in spite of this misinterpretation of the text, Koehler maintains that the essence of understanding all doctrines from the viewpoint of justification was correct. But Romans 12:6 was not a proof-passage for that viewpoint, nor is the use of "analogy of faith" in that sense a proper one. "If we take the passage Rom. 12:6 as it has been explained, [by Koehler] it furnishes no rule of interpretation and also offers no parallel for one. The expression was taken into the textbooks of hermeneutics because of an erroneous interpretation."³⁰

On the other hand, it is Koehler's contention that

²⁷Ibid., p. 212.

²⁸John Philip Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," trans. E.E. Sauer, Faith-Life 24(October 1951):5.

²⁹Ibid., p. 6.

³⁰Ibid., (December 1951):16.

St. Paul would surely have agreed with the essence of the Synodical Conference position. He avers that one must hold fast to the doctrine of salvation through Christ in order to fully understand the rest of the doctrines of Scripture.³¹

Tracing the history of "analogy of faith" Koehler arrived at conclusions which proved most unpopular among his contemporaries.

Thus the theology of the seventeenth century reveals the following unsound elements:

1. The development of the term "analogy" is partly the symptom, partly the cause of the decline of exegesis.

2. This development reveals the increasingly rationalizing manner of the theology of that time.

3. It reveals the part played by orthodoxy, too, in rearing subjectivism. Pietism is only one kind of subjectivism. Pietism and orthodox subjectivism are both incapable of offering the necessary resistance to the oncoming of rationalism.³²

Koehler's History of the Wisconsin Synod includes an evaluation of the reaction which his article received. He describes it charitably as "various". Protests were forthcoming from all quarters. But Koehler's loyal friend August Pieper faced the barrage of criticism and stood beside his confederate.³³

Actually, Koehler's article was read by very few people. Even fewer altered their convictions as a result of having read it. Reactions to this first public airing of the

³¹Ibid., 25(February 1959):16

³²Ibid., (April 1952);11.

³³Ibid., History, pp. 211-213.

Wauwatosia Theology was a barometer of the kind of apathetic response that would haunt it throughout its existence. The importance of this article cannot be minimized for in it are delineated all the major premises of the Wauwatosia Theology. Even more important, Koehler gives us an unparalleled example of how he put the tenets of his theology to work in the actual exegesis of a passage of Scripture.

CHAPTER II
THE WAUWATOSA METHODOLOGY

During the Wauwatosa years, mid-western Lutheranism was attempting to recuperate from the devastating effects of the Election Controversy. Concerned voices were raised regarding the preservation of the true faith, "die reine Lehre", for posterity. Because of this concern for orthodoxy it was the opinion of some that the Synodical Conference bodies had over-reacted to the threat of heresy. Among those urging more cautious responses to "weaker brethren" was the Wauwatosa faculty. Although genuinely interested in preserving the faith, Koehler and company believed that faith is not preserved by dogmatic conceptualism. It was their understanding that mid-western Lutheranism was attempting to preserve an orthodox conceptualization of pure doctrine rather than simple faith in the Gospel.

The hazard in such a conceptual understanding, according to the Wauwatosa Theology, is not impure or heterodox doctrine, but rather the loss of living faith which is subordinated to human rationalization. For them the important fact was that the Gospel is life. Overemphasis on doctrinal conceptions of the living Gospel might lead to a subtle rationalism. It was a new approach to theology, and it did not meet with an enthusiastic response from the dogmaticians

of "Old Lutheranism."

Before delineating the principle tenets of the Wauwatosa Theology a few general observations are in order. Koehler recognized the need to turn attention away from dogmatics and focus on exegetical study in the seminary curriculum. The goal of exegetical study is "to understand Scripture, to find its meaning."³⁴ Such exegesis should emphasize the grammatical and the historical sense of Scripture. Because of Koehler's emphasis on history and exegesis, the Wauwatosa Theology is often referred to as the historical-exegetical method.³⁵

Given the emphasis on pure doctrine and study of the Catechism in Lutheran Churches, Koehler was particularly conscious of the need to direct the laity back to Scripture rather than to a dogmatics text.

For the preacher the obligation to interpret Scripture assumes additional and special significance, owing to the Office of the Ministry. However, because the members of the congregation search the Scriptures in accordance with the Word of the Lord and following the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) to discover whether these things are so, whether they can actually find Christ in the Word, it is therefore not at all unimportant also for them to learn how to interpret correctly.³⁶

For the Christian, "study is life" and for the preacher "life is study" implying a constant return to God's

³⁴Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," (February 1952):16.

³⁵Ibid., (May 1952):13.

³⁶John Philip Koehler, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Scripture," trans. Philemon Hensel, Faith-Life 38(May/June 1965):21.

Word.³⁷ True, living Christianity involves a testing of one's perceptions and teaching according to the norm of the Word of God. This, the Wauwatosa theologians felt was absent from their contemporaneous Lutheranism. Therefore, they set out to open the Scripture anew following a path radically different from the dogmatical methodology each had experienced in his seminary days and different from that employed by the late Hoenecke.

The "Natural Method"

The Seminary Catalog for 1912-1913 outlines for two courses the material to be presented by Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics" and "Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics."³⁸ The former is an historical study of the science of the interpretation of Scripture through the ages; the latter is the most cogent, extant example of an exposition of the Wauwatosa exegetical methodology. Hermeneutics is the science of ascertaining the meaning of the Holy Scriptures via the application of specific interpretative rubrics. "These laws are the same as those of general hermeneutics. They suggest themselves to unbiased persons when they hear someone's words or read a piece of writing. The only difference is

³⁷ John Philip Koehler, "The Coherent Study of Holy Scripture Is the Essence of Theological Pursuit," trans. M.A. Zimmermann, Faith-Life 23(December 1950):9.

³⁸ John Philip Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," trans. E.E. Sauer, Faith-Life 28(August 1955):4-6; (September 1955):4-7; (October 1955):8-10; (November 1955):19-20; 29(January 1956):13-16. Thorough study of these outlines is vital for gaining a firm grasp on Koehler's approach to the Scriptures.

that in Biblical hermeneutics the peculiarities of the Bible must be considered.³⁹

Frequently referred to as the "natural" method of interpretation, Koehler stressed the importance of a simple, natural approach to the Scriptures. Three elements necessary for the understanding of any written message apply equally to Scripture, namely: understanding the language being employed; background knowledge of the subject-matter; and familiarity with the author's idiom and his point of view.⁴⁰ These Koehler perceived as necessary and natural concomitants of communication and understanding.

Exegesis must remain a natural and pure science unencumbered by any pre-conceived dogmatical formulations. "We must be able to hold the commentator to the principle that the meaning is to prevail which is discovered without many self-invented helps, by means of the most simple understanding possible of what is contained in the text."⁴¹ To arrive at this simple understanding, Koehler recommended utilizing the "simplest equipment possible."⁴² A natural starting point was thorough facility in the original Scriptural languages.

The natural method implied allowing Scripture to speak

³⁹Ibid., (August 1955):4.

⁴⁰Ibid., (September 1955):4.

⁴¹Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," (December 1951):15.

⁴²Ibid., (January 1952):14.

on its own. Exegetes make no effort to force their pre-conceived interpretation upon a text.⁴³ "We say that the exegete simply has no other duty than to say: 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.' He must repeat absolutely nothing else than what he has heard."⁴⁴

In summary, Koehler recommended that Scripture be approached as any other piece of literature. Its words had to be understood, based upon the rules outlined above, simply and naturally. But, wary of being identified with Historical-Criticism prevalent among his European contemporaries, Koehler, his colleagues and students testified to an unmistakable reliance upon the inerrancy of Scripture. "A teacher of Biblical hermeneutics has, of course, learned to know Holy Scripture and from it has gained the conviction that it is God's Word. This fact gives him in his exegesis a special position toward Scripture."⁴⁵

Fully cognizant of the Lutheran "Formal and Material Principles", the Wauwatosa Theology shunned efforts to arrive at inspiration through a process of logical deduction. Rather, it revered inspiration as a self-evident matter to the believer in Christ.⁴⁶ Sola Gratia led the believer to Sola Scriptura.

⁴³Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," (September 1955):5.

⁴⁴Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," (January 1952):14.

⁴⁵Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," (September 1955):5.

⁴⁶Karl Koehler, "The Prote'stant Creed," Faith-Life 37

Weltanschauung And Lebensanschauung

Before one can hope to arrive at an unadulterated and natural grasp of the message of a text, Wauwatosa methodology maintained that one needed to be fully acquainted with its historical background.⁴⁷ Let us recall that for Koehler, history involved not only a tabulation of facts but an incisive analysis as to what factors brought about a particular historical event.

This approach to history was then applied to the Scriptural text under scrutiny. "The character of the people among whom the writing originated must be considered in working out an exegesis."⁴⁸ Karl Koehler elaborated upon this point. "The Wauwatosa Theology, as governed by the historical point of view, has offered a complete Weltanschauung and Lebensanschauung...a full Gospel view of all the world, of history and life..."⁴⁹

Life conditions, historical developments, cultural peculiarities all play a role in proper exegesis. The thorough biblical scholar will acquaint himself with these fac-

(November/December 1964):14. Karl Koehler was the oldest son of John Philip. A devoted student of the Wauwatosa Theology, Karl ranks second only to his father as a proponent of the tenets of historical-exegetical methodology. For further documentation of J.P. Koehler's correct understanding of the Formal and Material Principle see Appendix I, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁷Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," (September 1955):4.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁹Karl Koehler, "Our Master Mission," Faith-Life 4 (March 1931):12.

tors in connection with each text which he wishes to apprehend. "The individuality of each writer must be taken into account..We understand a writer's words when we know him personally in his origin, his mentality, the circumstances of the present writing..."⁵⁰ These factors must be considered in order to understand how the text took on the particular form in which we find it.

The Author's Sense

Having come to grips with the author's background and cultural milieu, the exegete can make an honest effort to sit in the author's place and attempt to read the text in the sense intended by the author. "The simplest and, at the same time, the most complete way to explain or to interpret anything said or written is to show how the author comes to use precisely the words that are to be interpreted."⁵¹ The exegete must develop a sensitivity to an author's peculiarities, subject, his audience and objectives. "Behind every assertion in word or writing stands a personality which exerts an influence upon the hearer or reader."⁵²

The Wauwatosa Theology's preoccupation on this point will be explained more fully below, but for now let it suffice to point out that it was a built in stop-gap to prevent

⁵⁰Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," (September 1955):6.

⁵¹Koehler, "Interpretation of Scripture in Scripture," (May/June 1965):21-22.

⁵²Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," (October 1955):9.

the exegete from imposing his own dogmatically pre-determined interpretation upon a passage. "If we do not know the author's sense and his manner of expression, we shall again make our own manner authoritative to the detriment of the correct understanding."⁵³ Koehler warns repeatedly of the danger of failing to read the text the way the author intends it to be understood, a warning which he directs against the "experts" in particular.⁵⁴

Dogmatics In Perspective

Were one to specify a particularly outstanding characteristic of the Wauwatosia Theology, its emphasis on the proper perspective on dogmatics and its vehement opposition to dogmatism would certainly be named. Koehler contended against the "ecclesiastical authority" which he saw manipulating and enslaving exegetical study.⁵⁵ Calling his approach "free exegesis", Koehler questioned the "porcelainized premises of the dogmatists which inhibited and even intimidated the exegete."⁵⁶ The Wauwatosia Theology called for a declaration of independence on the part of the exegete.

In his last significant "Quartalschrift" article, Koehler in 1927 displayed himself as an historian of prowess and outlined the process by which healthy and legitimate dogmatics

⁵³Ibid., (September 1955):4.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁶Philemon Hensel, "Free Exegesis," Faith-Life 46(July/August 1973):31

ventured into dogmatism. Dogmatics intended to carefully outline doctrines of Scripture for students, but gradually it developed into a rationalistic system intended to prove various points of doctrine employing the rules of logic. This conceptualization of faith and doctrine Koehler could not countenance.⁵⁷

Based on his historical research it was Koehler's considered opinion that dogmatics, misapplied, fostered party-spirit which in turn stifled a whole host of creative activities in the Church. Orthodox conceptualization was dead and restricting.⁵⁸ Even more disturbing to Wauwatosans was ✓ the fact that orthodox but conceptualized dogmas allowed unrighteousness to run rampant in the Church. There was no proper integration of faith into practice.⁵⁹

Under such a cloud even preaching becomes a presentation of what doctrines are necessary to salvation outlined with mathematical precision. It was Koehler's apprehension that this kind of preaching would lead to faith in faith or worse, faith in "pure doctrine" as opposed to faith in Christ. The aim of proclamation is faith, eliciting saving faith in Jesus Christ. Secondarily, there must be

⁵⁷ John Philip Koehler, "Faith the Quintessence of Christian Life on Earth," trans. Emil John and Kurt Zorn, Faith-Life 28 (June 1955):8-9.

⁵⁸ Koehler, "Gesetlich Wesen," (September 1952):10ff.

⁵⁹ Philemon Hensel, "The Scripture Closed and Open," Faith-Life 48 (March/April 1975):18.

concern for the purity of that faith, but that concern arises chiefly when there is overt evidence that saving faith has been misunderstood. Wauwatosa perceived the place of dogmatics in this light. Dogmatics is to correct error; it is not to preserve an artificial purity.⁶⁰

Dogmatics was no pariah for the Wauwatosa faculty. In fact Luther's systematic presentations of Scriptural truth were accorded great respect. Venerable also were the 16th century dogmaticians of Lutheranism. Objectionable was the "harping on orthodoxy".⁶¹ Right faith was necessary, but the Wauwatosa Theology stressed the "faith" over the "right". Harping on orthodoxy inevitably led to traditionalism and petty parochialism. Historically, the principle of "Verstöckung" is manifested within orthodoxy.

Early in his career Koehler voiced "opposition to doctrinal discussion that centers in the abstract reasoning and definition of the mind to the use of the Bible as a code of proof texts."⁶² The Wauwatosa Theology insisted upon the study of Scripture in a connected not an atomistic, proof-text form. Scripture is to be viewed primarily as the message of and history of salvation and guide to the life of faith. The appeal of this message is carried directly to

⁶⁰Koehler, "Gesetlich Wesen," (September 1952):10ff.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 9.

⁶²G.A. Zeisler, "Our Sainted Teacher," Faith-Life 24 (November 1951):6.

the heart of the hearer.

Koehler espoused "Confessional writing" as the model for dogmatic activity.⁶³ The devout student of Scripture should be able to synthesize the various thoughts advanced by the Holy Writers, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, filter these thoughts through history and experience; refine them in faith; "digest them so that he gains a vivid picture"; set forth the things which "he has seen and heard just as did the witnesses in Scripture."⁶⁴ Dogmatics, as the Confessional writings, was to be born out of strife and controversy, to correct aberrations, not out of a purient desire to concretize orthodoxy.

The Wauwatosa Theology never denied the need for dogmatics, it was simply intent upon mollifying the excesses and abuses of dogmatics.

The exegete, it is true cannot get along without dogmatical activity, just as the dogmatician cannot do his work without being skilled in exegesis. As soon as the exegete meets with the second passage of the same doctrine, his dogmatical activity begins and it accompanies his exegesis to the end. But dogmatics here acts only as a servant... Doctrine must be learned and further exegesis proceed.⁶⁵

Koehler viewed dogmatics as simply "a thorough study of Holy Writ" which retains the directive that doctrinal understanding is arrived at through a thorough understanding of Scriptures

⁶³Koehler, "Faith, the Quintessence," (July 1955):8.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Koehler, "Analogy of Faith" (May 1952):12) - (September 1955):5.

lest exegesis be "warped by the dogmatical work."⁶⁶ "The work of dogmatics, when properly recognized and handled, consists in this that the sum total of the doctrines of Holy Scripture, as it has become the product of faithful study of the Scriptures, is presented in a closer connection of the doctrines with each other."⁶⁷

Faith Life

Intimately related to the question of doctrine and the interpretation of Scripture is that of the efficacy of Scripture. As has been shown, the Wauwatosa men were concerned by the fact that dogmatic conceptualism had negated some of the life-changing efficacy of the Word. Not that the preaching of the Gospel was no longer salutary, but "right doctrine" had virtually become a substitute for Spirit-led "right living".

In the interpretation of Scripture a divine operation is the matter at issue, in the first place in the interpreter, and the same operation occurs in those who are to benefit from interpretation... 'Whoever hears you hears me.' But even Christ's Word remains fruitless if the hearer, [though] he senses its force...has by faith come out of death to life, fails to foster and nourish as a treasure the art of the interpretation of Scripture in sanctification, that is, in the existence of faith and love.⁶⁸

August Pieper displayed a particularly strong antipathy to the lack of faith-in-action in his Synod. In a 1919

⁶⁶Koehler, "Faith, the Quintessence," (June 1955):9.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁸Koehler, "The Interpretation of Scripture in Scripture," (March/April 1966):9.

Convention report he speaks of the Synod's ministerium as "spiritual mechanics", "prefabricated assembly-line products." Preaching had become a rehash of "the same old stale stuff." Proclamation consisted of using "the same treadworn speeches and phrases Sunday for Sunday, year in and year out." He accused Synod of "spiritual stagnation." "There are young pastors, teachers, and professors who are spiritually walking with a cane tired and tepid...there is scandalous public comportment, dishonesty, underhanded dealing, speculation, gross neglect of the divine call."⁶⁹ Hensel also quotes 1918 and 1923 "Quartalschrift" articles by Pieper castigating pastors for officially upholding the pure doctrine but failing to have their personal lives in order.

Koehler carefully distinguished between a genuine life of faith and mere do-goodism displayed among secular humanists. He is most insistant that the Gospel is the force which be-

⁶⁹Throughout this study reference has been made to the Wauwatosa position with most documentation coming from the pen of Koehler. There is no doubt that until 1920 Pieper was in sympathy with the Wauwatosa Theology. However, since almost none of his works has been translated into English, we have been content to represent the Wauwatosa Theology through the words of its father and chief proponent, J.P. Koehler. It is most appropriate that in these two concluding sections, some comments from Pieper should be included since the issue of confusing justification and sanctification was a major item in the fracas of 1929-1930. The next section will deal with "legalism", a subject which Pieper had strong words for. Yet only a few years later, he himself engineered the ouster of Koehler, employing the very legalistic machinations which he had previously scorned publicly. Pieper's 1919 Convention report is quoted in Paul Hensel, "The Gutachten in Light of the Wauwatosa Gospel," trans. Alex Hilmer, Faith-Life 33 (September/October 1960):7. Note Pieper's harsh language, compare it with the language for which Beitz was later condemned by Pieper.

comes rooted in the life of the Christian and produces the faith-life.⁷⁰ Sinful man continues to resist the prodding of the Holy Spirit but the "rearing in righteousness" outlined in Scripture "is not merely an attempt, but it is actually accomplished."⁷¹ Koehler battled the notion that faith-life was a "system of life" which man could view objectively, evaluate and then choose or reject at will. Rather, the Wauwatosa Theology sought to instill in its students the truth that God's Word is a power to convert, that is, not only turn in faith to Jesus Christ, but a power to change the sinful life into one shaped and molded by God. This power comes not from the esoteric formulations of dogmaticians skilled in logic. The changing power comes from the living Word. "God's Word is to be applied to life..."⁷² Sanctification should be a part of the believer's daily life. "We cannot separate faith and life in a dogmatic fashion."⁷³

One could conclude that the Wauwatosa Theology was merely a 20th century revival of Franckean pietism if one were to stop at this point. But we must remember that a

⁷⁰John Philip Koehler, "Sanctification is Not Hurrah," trans. A. Meier, Faith-Life 24(July 1951):4-7; (August 1951): 11-15; (September 1951):11-14. Koehler's definitive excursus on the faith-life principle draws attention to sanctification which includes cross-bearing as opposed to the post-war lift which included much humanitarian activity. The piece appeared in the "Quartalschrift" as "Die Heiligung geschieht nicht mit Hurra" in 1920.

⁷¹Koehler, "The Coherent Study," (January 1951):13.

⁷²Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," (November 1955):20.

⁷³Joel Hensel, "Brief Study," p. 6.

major premise of the Wauwatosa philosophy is the practise of self-criticism. Koehler and Pieper were painfully aware of the possibility of being labeled as pietistic fanatics who were legalistically enforcing ascetic Christian piety. Confronted with legalistic dealings in their own church body, an innate antipathy towards legalism was displayed in the Wauwatosa Theology. Within its own system of checks and balances the Wauwatosa Theology opposed the legalism which could have resulted from over zealous application of the faith-life principle.

Churchianity And Christian Life

According to the Wauwatosa adherents, Synod had followed exactly the opposite course. Instead of imbuing people with the life of the Living Word and then imposing them with legalistic strictures, which Wauwatosa would view as a single transgression, Synod had "closed Scripture...and this sin has inevitably been compounded by a ruthless and asinine legalism."⁷⁴ Dogmatism's failure to teach the faith-life principle had resulted in legalism. Pieper opined, "We have already begun [in 1919] to make our whole Churchianity and Christian life a matter of form, inherited with no effort from the fathers."⁷⁵

The Wauwatosa Theology's opposition to this formal, ecclesiological legalism was most articulately voiced by

⁷⁴Philemon Hensel, "Scripture Closed and Open," p. 18.

⁷⁵Paul Hensel, "Gutachten in the Light," p. 9.

Koehler in his "Gesetzlich Wesen" which he defines as Christian action motivated by the law through forms and structures as opposed to works of faith-life flowing from the Gospel. "In the Lutheran churches this [Gesetzlich Wesen] manifests itself first of all and primarily in the noisy self-sustained to-do about pure doctrine. Paralleling this is a clamorous insistence on sanctification that exerts itself especially in Church government regulations."⁷⁶

Although the charge of antinomianism was leveled against Koehler, a careful reading of his "Gesetzlich Wesen" shows beyond doubt that he had a thorough Scriptural, Lutheran view of Law and Gospel. Fully cognizant of the Third Use of the Law, Koehler merely sought to inculcate the understanding that this use of the law is born out of the Gospel and not out of legalistic stricture. The life of faith flows out of love, but if the love is not there neither will the faith-life be there. A Synodical resolution is no replacement for the vivifying power of the Gospel.⁷⁷

Christ's Method

According to Koehler, the means and result of exegesis is Christ. Koehler endeavored to capture in the Wauwatosa Theology the spirit of interpretation which Christ displayed as He expounded the Old Testament to His disciples.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Koehler, "Gesetzlich Wesen," (July 1952):9.

⁷⁷Koehler, "The Coherent Study," (December 1950):9.

⁷⁸Koehler, "The Interpretation of Scripture," (July 1965):17.

Two elements were distilled from Christ's interpretation which were incorporated into the spirit of the Wauwatosa Theology: "moderate sobriety and deep inner warmth."⁷⁹

[Christ] deepened the understanding of Scripture by reducing everything to the attitude of the heart which on the one hand learns the knowledge of sin, on the other, finds inner peace in salvation and with it love toward God and neighbor. So his interpretation gained the character of originality and freshness, instinctively opposed to all traditional, imitational, mechanical, ungenue pother.⁸⁰

To use the Scripture as Christ did, one began by making Scripture basic to one's conduct. Out of this well-spring of life would gush the Living Water of all spiritual truth. From these Living Waters could be absorbed spiritual understanding, comfort and hope, faith-strengthening power, and life-guiding direction.

⁷⁹Ibid., (November/December 1965):18.

⁸⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE WAUWATOSA CONFLICT

"Our entire church, fragmented in its fellowship as it is, lies under divine judgment of the hardening of the heart (Verstöckung) because of her intestine boredom with the Gospel."⁸¹ As suddenly as the Wauwatosa Theology burst upon the scene through the pages of the "Quartalschrift" in 1904, just as suddenly it was obliterated in 1929 giving rise to the condemnation above penned by Philemon Hensel. From 1924 to 1930 the Wisconsin Synod was involved in a series of relatively minor scandals. Unfortunately, the temperament in Synod was such that these scandals snowballed into one of Synod's most devastating theological civil wars, making the Wauwatosa Theology one of its casualties.⁸² A series of three semi-related incidents set the stage for the conflict and the death of the Wauwatosa Theology.

Thievery, "The Teachers",

And A Professor

The spring of 1924 brought the shocking news to the Wisconsin Synod that 24 students at Northwestern Prep and College had been apprehended for theft and shoplifting a

⁸¹Philemon Hensel, "The Scripture Closed and Open," p. 18.

⁸²Theological civil war was not a new phenomenon for the Wisconsin Synod in 1929. Nor was it the last such phenomenon. Even in 1979, all is not quiet on the Wisconsin front.

substantial amount of merchandise.⁸³ Assuming customary disciplinary authority, the faculty expelled or suspended 16 of the offending students. Despite precedence for such action the Board of Control nullified the faculty action and recalled the students, lifting the expulsions and suspensions.⁸⁴ Kurt Köhler and another faculty member resigned, claiming that the Board of Control had acted legalistically in undermining the authority of the faculty. Attempting to circumvent the Board's ire, the two men offered to finish the academic year under the authority of the faculty. The faculty agreed to the arrangement. Infuriated by the faculty's recurrent insubordination, the Board of Control enforced the immediate resignations of the two professors.

Faced with an ever widening gulf between faculty and Board of Control, Synod appointed a committee to weigh the principles involved and recommend procedures for a settlement. Meanwhile the suspended students finished school and the vacated professorships were filled. Very soon forces began surfacing in Synod who would complicate this and future incidents until 1930. These forces, on the one hand, were those who felt compelled to abide by Synod's regulations; on the other hand, were those who viewed such action as

⁸³A detailed account of the "Watertown Case" and the other two incidents is to be found in Claus Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," Faith-Life 11 (January 1938):5-11.

⁸⁴M.A. Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," Faith-Life 3 (March 1930, Supplement):1-12.

legalistic officialdom contrary to the spirit of the Wauwatosa Theology.⁸⁵

Within a few months of the WaterTown incident, a handful of pastors began reacting via conference papers to the "judgmental action of the Board overagainst the faculty."⁸⁶ Although many felt that the faculty had likewise dealt unjustly with the students, chief concern was voiced over the heavy handed action of the Board.

Discussion continued at various levels for over a year, but no settlement was reached. Rather, volleys of charges and counter-charges were fired. Kurt Koehler declared the Wisconsin Synod under the judgment of "Verstöckung," hardening of heart. It was the opinion of a minority group of pastors in Synod that the faculty had acted in good faith in suspending the students as a "preachment of the Word of God to the suspended student body and to the entire world."⁸⁷ It was the contention of this group that the Board of Control acted, not out of concern for the spiritual welfare of the suspended students, but, out of vindictiveness because the faculty had usurped authority contrary to official guidelines.

Although Synod's attention was diverted to a new fray by this time, the Joint Synod of 1927 discussed Kurt Koehler's

⁸⁵Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," p. 5.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," p.1.

attitude overagainst the legally constituted Board. Identifying himself with a group of pastors protesting Synod's legalistic handling of its conflicts, Koehler was suspended from the ministerium of the Wisconsin Synod in 1928.⁸⁸

Before the Watertown incident had even reached its zenith, a new incident diverted Synod's attention. The roots of this incident involving two matronly teachers and a hypersensitive pastor dates to 1923. Gerda Koch and Elizabeth Reuter were teachers at the Wisconsin Synod's St. Paul's Congregation in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. Their pastor, A.F. Nicolaus, who imperiously held sway over the congregation and its school staff, rebuked the two teachers for collecting money in their classrooms for charitable contributions without his permission. The Fort Atkinson incident took on a retaliatory air as the teachers, in 1924, protested against the Reverend Nicolaus' advising the joint choir of his own church and St. John's, Watertown (a Missouri congregation) to sing at St. Paul's in Oconomowoc (also a Missouri congregation).⁸⁹ In turn, Pastor Nicolaus accused the teachers of

⁸⁸ Another one of the ironies of this whole era in Wisconsin history is that because of J.P. Koehler's initiatives Wisconsin had just finished a series of discussions on the question of Church and Ministry. Out of these discussions arose the doctrine which Wisconsin has since espoused; namely that Synod has the rights and privileges accorded by Scripture to the local congregation. Therefore, Synod possess the right of suspension which is in essence excommunication. Koehler and his son Kurt were two of the pastors who fell victim to Synod's newly discovered authority of suspension.

⁸⁹ W.P. Hass, "Adieu to St. Matthew's," Faith-Life 5 April 1932, Supplement):1-8. St. Paul's had in 1922 ousted

legalism implying that they had called bazaars, suppers, sales, socials and bobbed hair sin. To this they responded that they had taken "the middle way, leaving it to the conscience of the individual."⁹⁰ In January of 1925 the two teachers sent a letter to a number of pastors and teachers. President Thurow of the West Wisconsin District concurred with the judgments of the teachers and advised Nicolaus that it would be unwise for a Wisconsin choir to sing at St. Paul's.⁹¹

Shortly thereafter the two teachers took "calls" out of Fort Atkinson without being given honorable dismissal, thinking that this might solve the problem. But the matter had gone too far. In May of 1925, Nicolaus protested to

its Wisconsin Synod pastor--W.P. Hass. Until that time it had been one of those numerous "independent" congregations served by Wisconsin Synod pastors. In 1922, St. Paul's was accepted into membership in the Missouri Synod and called a Missouri pastor. A new Wisconsin Synod congregation--St. Matthew's--was formed by Hass and was given mission status within the Wisconsin Synod. In 1930, Hass resigned over the Protestant Controversy. St. Matthew's was reorganized in 1932 as a Wisconsin mission with Pastor Norbert Paustian serving until his death in 1977. The St. Paul's incident caused many hard feelings between Missouri and Wisconsin. It was considered a "Rottengemeinde", a rabble congregation. That is why the Fort Atkinson teachers were prompted to express displeasure over their pastor allowing the choir to sing in this church. An outline and bibliography on the St. Matthew's - St. Paul's story is to be found in Faith-Life volume 49:3. The present writer was a member of St. Matthew's from 1969-1973. Tension still exists between the two congregations. The most recent incident occurred in 1978 over a Wisconsin organist playing the St. Paul's organ for a dedication concert.

⁹⁰Gerda Koch, "Miss Koch's Appeal," Faith-Life 8 (July 1935):8-12.

⁹¹Hass, "Adieu to St. Matthew's," p. 3.

President Thurow who had undergone a change of heart. Although no longer serving under his jurisdiction, Thurow prompted the teachers to write a letter to the Fort Atkinson congregation acknowledging their wrong and asking for pardon. Negotiations were begun between the teachers and their former pastor and congregation which resulted in more charges and counter-charges. Finally the Wauwatosa faculty was called upon to render a "Gutachten", opinion, in the matter.⁹² The opinion states that the faculty decision was unanimous, although Koehler submitted a personal protest to Thurow only weeks later. Nonetheless, the faculty opinion declared that "the teachers' protest was slander and must be retracted."⁹³

Under the circumstances, Nicolaus and the Fort Atkinson congregation were not too pleased that Koch and Reuter were teaching in other synodical schools. In May of 1926, Thurow declared the ladies ineligible for "calls" and thereby nullified the "calls" under which they had been teaching for over a year in Milwaukee.

On April 7, 1926, Koehler protested the proposed suspension of the teachers. Not defending their actions ~~per se~~, he outlined eight points at which the case had been improperly handled.⁹⁴

⁹²Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," p. 6. This was a paradoxical action considering Synod's low opinion of Koehler and company.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴John Philip Koehler, "Letter to President G. Thurow," Faith-Life 32 (May 1959):15-16.

At this point those pastors who had protested the Watertown incident were again alarmed at the inept handling of the Fort Atkinson incident. They met to formulate an official response. Out of this meeting in June of 1926 was born the Prote'stant Conference. Their conclusion was that the Koch-Reuter accusations were indeed legalistic, but the handling of the matter by congregation and Synod was even more legalistic. A Synodical Committee, appointed to deal with their protest, concluded that it was a matter for the congregation to decide and that the Prote'stants erred in not following Matthew 18 in offering their protest.⁹⁵

The third incident was precedent setting and paved the way for future action perpetrated against J.P. Koehler. Professor G. Ruediger, a member of the Wauwatosa faculty, came under attack in 1926 for his efforts at amelioration of the Watertown case. "Ruediger was asked to resign unless he were willing to sign a confession drawn up by Pieper."⁹⁶ Even though some members of the Board of Control of the Seminary doubted the propriety of this procedure, Ruediger was suspended from the classroom for one year.

Upon submission of his own written confession, the Board decided to reinstate him, but Pieper refused to accept this compromise. After negotiations, Pieper agreed to sign

⁹⁵G. A. Zeisler, "Another Moratorium," Faith-Life 4 (September 1931):11-15.

⁹⁶Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," p. 6.

a written absolution of Ruediger.

However, the Joint Convention of Synod doubted that confidence could be restored in Ruediger's aptness for office. Therefore, Synod on January 31, 1927 removed him from office. Printed copies of Ruediger's confession were sent to all clergymen and teachers in the Synod.

The Beitz Paper

The protestations of the pastors, meeting in June 1926, might have gone unnoticed and unanswered had it not been for a paper delivered by Pastor W.F. Beitz entitled, "God's Message to Us in Galatians--The Just Shall Live By Faith." Read at the Chippewa Valley Conference of the West Wisconsin District in September of 1926, the paper drew sharply divided reactions from pastors and District administrators. Having been widely disseminated, the paper was the topic of numerous heated discussions. District President Thurow withdrew Beitz's name from further inclusion on the programs of West Wisconsin Pastoral or Teacher's Conferences.⁹⁷ Discussion continued on the paper till Thurow requested a "Gutachten", theological opinion, from the Wauwatosa faculty. By July of 1927, Beitz had been suspended from the ministerium of the Wisconsin Synod.

What was the content of a paper that history has shown to be the most controversial document ever produced in the Wisconsin Synod? Paul Hensel, a leader of the Prote'stants

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 7.

saw it as a "virile proclamation of the Word of God...neither rounded out as to form nor is it symmetrical in structure."⁹⁸ To be sure, one senses "a certain naive recklessness" in the writer, nor did he "calculate the ultimate effects his words might have."⁹⁹

Beitz first seeks to point out the sin concerning which St. Paul is admonishing the Galatian Christians. "They forgot that Jesus is not only the author (beginner) of faith, but also the finisher. They were trying to separate justification from sanctification, a process that will only work havoc in every case. The law cannot bring about justification nor sanctification."¹⁰⁰ Certainly in line with the Wauwatosa Theology's emphasis on faith-life, Beitz states, "We find both justification and sanctification at the foot of the Cross." (1)

The natural man wants to approach the Christian faith rationally, walking "partly by faith and partly by reason, by law, to get into empty formalism." (4) Not satisfied with attempting to live by God's law, man adds his own laws to God's law. Synod has attempted to substitute for the Gospel a bureaucratic system of legalistic strictures and dogmas

⁹⁸Paul Hensel, "The Gutachten in the Light of the Wauwatosa Gospel," p. 5-6.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰W.F. Beitz, "God's Message to Us in Galatians: the Just Shall Live by Faith," Faith-Life 33(May 1960):1. Henceforth, citations from the "Beitz Paper" will be noted in the text using parentheses () following the citation.

making Christianity "mostly head matter." (4)

Our preparatory and college courses are usually only a rehashing of the husks of the Catechism course. Our dogmatical stress at our seminaries only serves that same purpose. It is only the advanced Catechism course and bleeds the life of faith in Christ of the life-giving Blood, till we finally have the skeleton, the forms, the dogmas, the doctrines, the shells, the husks left; but the Spirit is departed. (4)

Beitz accuses pastors of essentially teaching work-righteousness. "We make a law out of the Gospel...as though Christianity were a number of things that he [the Christian] had learned by rote...laws to follow...instead of life by faith...a sharp bargain with the Lord...Getting by with as little as possible." (4)

Language decidedly strong and unpleasant punctuates Beitz's tirade against the Synod. "And you Wisconsin Synod, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell...It shall be more tolerable for the Masonic Order in the Day of Judgment than for you." (5)

We know that for years the Lord has been looking for fruit on our fig tree of Christianity and found nothing but leaves; empty forms, to cover our nakedness and fruitlessness...No amount of keeping up appearances will help us...No amount of stressing forms will remedy our evil. No amount of ritual, liturgy, societies, bazaars, kitchen equipment, socials, good mixing, social calls, prestige before men, organization, constitutions, laws, and enforcement of them, no amount of Matthew 18 as form, as law--nothing man-made will ever be able to remedy the evil...no amount of institutionalism will do it...No love of salvation, no joy in our work-hell, because no living by faith. (5)

It is true that some of the more stringent adherents of the Wauwatosa Theology tended to abuse the faith-life con-

cept and the living power of the Gospel and force it into a pietistic mold. Traces of this can be found in the Beitz Paper. "Only in the proportion that I realize the depth of sin into which I have fallen will I appreciate the salvation out of that depth." (5)

Formalism is a predominant evil which Beitz attacks, "repentance is not a cold formal thing. [a doctrinē] to assent to with our heads; to go through the liturgical confession of sins and absolution in a formal way ever after in services." (6)

Picking up on the Wauwatosa Theology's distain for dislocated dogmatics, Beitz asserts that dogmatics has cut up the "Body of Life" and destroyed it. (7)

We studied the Bible from the various angles of study at the seminary, but we often failed to realize that God was speaking to us through our teachers and professors. That may have been the teacher's fault... the message becomes facts--knowledge we must have to run our pastoral machinery later on...We dealt with our courses wholly or in part as so many pieces of machinery we needed for our work later on. (7)

Approaching the Bible from the angle of dogmatics presses a form upon the Word. Beitz likens this to grabbing hold of God and clenching Him under our arm so that He is not free to move. (7) Rather, Beitz suggests reading the Word, free of preconceived ideas, as a love letter from God to man. (8)

Synod's preaching, according to Beitz, had become dull lifeless and unmoved by the Spirit.

We study our Bible for sermonizing instead of building ourselves up in Christ...We preach year after year and our brothers and sisters in the pews remain babes in

Christ for time and eternity. If we would study our Bible for our own personal growth and life by faith we would have a message of Sunday for the people entrusted to us, either from that which we have found as life for ourselves or something else from the vast fund of a life by faith seeking expression. (8)

Given the tenets of the Wauwatosa Theology and the petty disputing rampant in the Wisconsin Synod, Beitz indeed had a hard word for these early twentieth century Christians. But one can surely question the severity with which he chastizes the Synod. Even in the face of the bureaucratic bungling in the Watertown and Fort Atkinson incidents, was such a loveless rebuke in order? Considering the outcome of the affair, one is led to say either: yes, it was because the legalistic largess grew even worse; or no, it wasn't because it only served to amputate the arm of the Synod which might have brought about a positive new direction in Synod, namely the Wauwatosa Theology.

The "Gutachten"

Responding to the request of District President Thurow, the Wauwatosa faculty issued a theological opinion, "Gutachten", concerning the Beitz Paper on June 7, 1927. Signed by the faculty, including Koehler, it was sent to all pastors and teachers of Synod. Koehler, however, had signed with the proviso that the "Gutachten" not be released until he had discussed its contents with Beitz, hoping to avert the publication of the "Gutachten."

Comments included in the faculty's harsh retort were:
The essayist commits the fundamental error of turning

the text into a sanctification demand...the result is that he throws justification and sanctification together into one thing against which...he tests our faith at to its genuineness...In the further course of his essay he assumes the role of John the Baptist preaching repentance to us, as to people who have lost Christ and are fallen from grace...he has fallen into antinomianism...He also sponsors a method of making unprepared sermons.¹⁰¹

Questioning whether or not there is actually any "Christianity-by-the-law" the "Gutachten accuses Beitz of "an insufferable judgment of hearts." (6) "Yes indeed, there is no question that much on which the essayist passes judgment may, here and there, be true of individual teachers and listeners and may be true, to a certain degree, of all of us." (6) But Beitz's condemnation is far too severe and too generalized to be believed.

The faculty calls Beitz to task for violating the spirit of Matthew 18 if indeed he knows of pastors guilty of the offenses he enumerates. His charges are viewed as slander and ignorance arising out of fanaticism. "He does not at all know what dogmatics is." (8) Beitz's equating of the use of the Catechism with dogmatism is rebuffed. "Only an ignoramous can talk like that." (8) The faculty then defensively sets out to present the discipline of dogmatics in a positive light.

Picking up on Beitz's statements about head and heart Christianity, the "Gutachten" accuses Beitz of placing ex-

¹⁰¹"The Opinion ('Gutachten')," trans. Otto Gruendmann, Faith-Life 33 (July/August 1960):5-6. Henceforth references will be noted in the text in parentheses.

clusive stress on emotion, of "sentimental fanaticism", of "a diseased emotional Christianity." (10) Alledging a confusion of Law and Gospel, it is the faculty's opinion that "the essayist's offense against this self-evident rule of interpretation thrusts him into direct denial of the clear Word of God." (15)

The spirit in which this opinion was written becomes obvious from the concluding paragraphs.

We believe that we have properly disposed of the matter without enlarging on all the essayist's absurdities individually. For example: that he, off. hand, regards all church forms as an indication of dead law-mongering; that he looks upon Martha as being without faith who, of course, was still a pious Christian woman, her legalistic inclinations notwithstanding, etc. etc. We do hope that his publication will be of assistance in making possible the essayist's return from his utterly insufferable heresies in the church, and that others will remain immune to them. Therefore we here once again summarize the essayist's most serious errors. They are:

1. That he twists a justification text into a preaching of sanctification, as a result of which he mixes and intermingles justification and sanctification, Law and Gospel throughout his essay and perverts the way unto life.
2. That on the basis of his erroneous conception of the Epistle to the Galatians, he condemns the majority of hearer and teachers among us as people living in the dead works of the Law and that he describes the Lutheran church, the Synodical Conference, and especially our Synod as ripe for the Judgment of God, because of their legalism.
3. That his teaching of repentance is fanatical Antinomianism, beclouding the way to peace and everlasting life for Christian and non-Christians.
4. That he fanatically condemns the teaching methods cultivated among us, particularly the Catechism instruction, dogmatics, and homiletics, as leading to spiritual death and recommends fanatical teaching methods of his own.

Finally, the author of this essay must be given corrective instruction not only concerning his insufferable heresies, but must also be admonished concerning his

horrible judgment of hearts and the ghastly public slander of his brethren in office and the teachers. Concerning both of these duties, we entreat those especially called thereunto to act with unstinted love but with uncompromising earnestness according to the direction laid down in the Word of God, so that peace among the brethren and unity of doctrine be restored. (17-18)

There is no denying that the language of the Beitz Paper is very strong, accusatory, bordering on slander. However, the "Gutachten" falls into these same errors. It is obvious that we are at the beginning of a monumental name-calling battle. As the conflict spread, the infractions against the principles of Christian brotherhood became increasingly rampant and indignantly crude.

Departing from its previous suspicions overagainst the Wauwatosa faculty, Synod readily recognized the faculty "Gutachten" as its official response to the Beitz Paper.¹⁰² Prote'stants charged that Synod had elevated the "Gutachten" to equal status with the Lutheran Confessions.¹⁰³ Even the procedure by which the "Gutachten" was prepared was called into question. Each of the four members of the faculty was to write a private review of the Paper. Pieper assumed editorial responsibility for the project, giving rise to the charge that Pieper alone was responsible for its inflammatory tenor.¹⁰⁴ Since the Synod was already aware

¹⁰²G.A. Zeisler, "Another Moratorium," p. 12.

¹⁰³M.A. Zimmermann, "The Thiensville Theology," Faith-Life 2(June 1929):3. Koehler does the same, Appendix I, page 8.

¹⁰⁴Paul Hensel, "A Brief History of the Gutachten," Faith-Life 33(July/August 1960):5.

of a developing rift between Koehler and Pieper, it is assumed that the irenic Koehler acquiesced to this procedure to pacify Pieper.¹⁰⁵

Koehler was displeased with the idea from the outset, for it flew in the face of everything the Wauwatosa seminary had stood for during the preceding twenty five years, to wit: Scripture is the only authority we recognize in the Church in the light of which all questions as to doctrine and practice can, and should be settled on a local level.¹⁰⁶

Even though Pieper published the document, over Koehler's protest, Koehler did eventually meet with Beitz in an effort to settle the dispute peacefully. Koehler released his own "review", "Beleuchtung", of the Beitz Paper and the "Gutachten". It was at this time that Koehler requested officially that his name be removed from the original "Gutachten". Koehler's succinctly worded summary of the transgression he found in the Beitz Paper is, "Clarity is lacking."¹⁰⁷

Karl Koehler recorded Beitz's response to the "Gutachten" as it was presented on the floor of the Joint Synod Convention of 1927. "That he [Beitz] agrees with the teaching of the Symbolical books. That he does not deny anyone's Christianity nor condemn the weakest Christian as an unbeliever in his paper. That he does not judge anyone's heart."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷John Philip Koehler, "The Beleuchtung" Faith-Life 38(March 1965):8.

¹⁰⁸Karl Koehler, "Who's Through?" Faith-Life 1(Easter 1928):5.

CHAPTER IV

THE WAUWATOSA DEBACLE

Paul Hensel, highly respected Prote'stant pastor, came to know John Philip Koehler very well after 1930. Concerning the events preceeding Koehler's suspension, Hensel gained many insights. It is his opinion, and probably correct, that "the campaign against Prof. Koehler was inaugurated immediately upon Ruediger's removal."¹⁰⁹

Prote'stants maintain that this brewing controversy really arose from conflict between the theology and personality of August Pieper and Koehler, beginning sometime around 1920.¹¹⁰ The Beitz Paper merely served as a catalyst in bringing about the inevitable Armageddon of the Wauwatosa Theology. Koehler continued to have misgivings about the Beitz Paper. He spent a summer with Beitz. After this meeting Koehler grew sympathetic to the outcry against the "Gutachten" raised by the Prote'stants. Meyer and Pieper seem to have feared betrayal by Koehler, believing that Koehler would throw his full support behind the Prote'stant movement.¹¹¹ They set about turning Koehler against the Pro-

¹⁰⁹Paul Hensel, "Why I Am a Prote'stant," Faith-Life 7(August 1934, Supplement):29.

¹¹⁰"No Need for Booster Engine Tactics in Christian Writing," Faith-Life 31(June 1958):15.

¹¹¹Paul Hensel, "Why a Prote'stant," p. 29.

te'stants, meanwhile the Prote'stants began to exploit his name.¹¹²

The truth is that inspite of the fact that his beloved son Karl was a Prote'stant, Koehler continued to deal sternly with them.¹¹³ He was a perceptive enough student of history to realize that such rump groups seldom succeed and tend to destroy themselves in self-pitying reactionism. "Koehler was highly critical of the Prote'stants and insisted that in their methods of polemics they went too far."¹¹⁴

The War Of Words

The Beitz Paper was read in the fall of 1926; the "Gutachter" was released in June of 1927. Koehler ordered, at his own expense, the printing and mailing of the following letter by Northwestern Publishing House:

Wauwatosa, Wis. July 2, 1927

My Dear Pastor:

The "Faculty-Gutachten" was published without my knowledge or consent.

I had a different conception from my colleagues as to what the "essayist" actually wished to say. Consequently I offered to discuss the contents of the Gutachten and the Message with the essayist and ap-prize the assembly of the General Committee of this fact.

The publication of the Gutachten acutely disturbed these private deliberations, and in my opinion, as matters now stand, must mislead, agitate and eventually slander. Do your part in helping us arrive at an

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴"The Lie Concerning Prof. J.P. Koehler's Resignation," Faith-Life 26(November 1953):9

understanding, which must be our constant endeavor, so that our efforts be not frustrated.

With cordial greetings,
Joh. Ph. Koehler 115

However, through the clandestine scheming of Prof. Pieper, relying on Koehler's irenic political naivete', the letter was never published. But, because he even dared to consider such a course of action, Koehler was remanded to the Seminary Board of Control, the College of Presidents and the Joint Committee, which consisted of about twenty prominent pastors.

Words continued to be exchanged and in October of 1927 Koehler was summoned before the Committee to read his "Beleuchtung" of the "Gutachten." The Committee could find no fault with the paper delivered by the President of their seminary. However, Pieper attacked, "Koehler has laid aside the chief principle of the Reformation concerning the value of the text. As of yet he has not uttered any false doctrine. But what is in his heart? God keep him pure in his doctrine."¹¹⁶ Pieper attacked Koehler's view of history as peculiar and insisted that this view coupled with his age (Pieper was two years older than Koehler) precluded any harmonious outcome.

Denied any satisfactory settlement, Koehler published his "Beleuchtung" on August 1, 1929. Within eight days Pieper and Meyer published their "Antwort", "answer", to

¹¹⁵Paul Hensel, "Brief History of the Gutachten," p. 18.

¹¹⁶Paul Hensel, "Why a Prote'stant," p. 30.

Koehler's "review". The War of Words ended in July of 1930 when the ousted Koehler published his "Witness, Analysis, and Reply" in the pages of "Faith-Life". It was Koehler's last official pronouncement on the bizarre series of incidents which led to his suspension.¹¹⁷

The Eleventh Hour

Koehler met with various Boards and Committees entrusted with the disposition of his case. The incidents were rehashed time and time again. At one point Koehler offered to resign if the Board of Control would exert its influence to have the expelled Prote'stants reinstated. Through a grave misunderstanding, it was reported to the Convention of Synod that Koehler had acquiesced to the position of the "Gutachten".¹¹⁸

Koehler had pleaded with Beitz to withdraw his paper for the sake of harmony. But Koehler announced to a meeting of the Committee that Beitz refused. In spite of the fact that Koehler made no plea of mercy for Beitz, the Committee which included Pieper was not satisfied until Koehler was expelled. President Thurow's vitriolic, "He won't be my

¹¹⁷John Philip Koehler, "Witness, Analysis, and Reply," Faith-Life 3(July 1930, Supplement):1-8. Only the Reply has been translated from the German, in spite of its English title, the work is in German. The present writer has prepared a translation of significant portions of the Witness and Analysis as a document study in the course Studies in American Lutheranism for Dr. August Suelflow. See Appendix I.

¹¹⁸Paul Hensel, "Why a Prote'stant," p. 30.

son's teacher," left Koehler in stunned silence.¹¹⁹ As a result the Committee reported as follows:

Professor Koehler has consistently refused to discuss his case with the Gesamtkomitee and therefore has made it impossible to settle the difference between himself and his former colleagues and their leaders. And henceforth Professor Koehler can no longer properly function in the capacity of director of and professor at the seminary.¹²⁰

In its final form, this suspension was recorded in August of 1929 as a one-year furlough for reasons of ill health.

Pieper announced this fact in a "tearfilled" speech to the student-body of the seminary with the hope that the Lord would restore Koehler's health.¹²¹ Koehler, on the other hand, maintained that he had discussed the situation ad nauseam. Prote'stant pastors who offered to testify in Koehler's defense were barred from all meetings.¹²²

Wauwatosa To Thiensville

On August 13, 1929, the following letter was delivered by messenger to the home of J.P. Koehler:

Honorable Professor,

It is my grievous duty to communicate to you the following decision arrived at by the local board on August 13, after they had read your document and the answer of Professors Pieper and Meyer in answer to Professor Koehler's "Die Beitzche Schrift und das Gutachten beleuchtet," and therefore declare that

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Kurt Koehler, "A Report on the Meeting of the Seminary Committee," Faith-Life 3(October 1930):11.

¹²¹Paul Hensel, "Why a Prote'stant," p. 31.

¹²²Claus Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," p.11.

Professor Koehler cannot continue in office at our seminary and expect God to bless his efforts.

On behalf of the Board,
W. Hoenecke, Secretary¹²³

To this day the Wisconsin Synod maintains that Koehler retired.

On August 15, 1929, Koehler responded with a letter to the Synod. "I cannot participate in the synodical discussions which normally would be my privilege."¹²⁴ Just 12 days before his suspension Koehler offered this advice to the Synod, "...we must here call a halt and take stock of ourselves... The entire Synod can indeed go wrong and may not presume that it can do whatever it pleases. I maintain that we should stop all bickering and celebrating."¹²⁵

Choosing not to appeal the decision, Koehler was formally dismissed from office on May 21, 1930. His house was to be vacated by August 1. After 50 years of service to the Wisconsin Synod, Koehler was replaced by August Pieper as Director of the seminary. That spring the seminary moved from Wauwatosa to Thiensville. The structure of the new campus had been built to resemble the Feste Koburg, designed by J.P. Koehler. Koehler's working drawings saved the Synod a substantial sum in architectural fees. But, Koehler was never permitted to teach on the campus.

¹²³"The Lie," p. 9.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 11.

¹²⁵J.P. Koehler, "Beleuchtung," p. 8.

Koehler's Verstockung

Protestant maintain that the actual reason for Koehler's ouster was "the hatred and jealousy of August Pieper, as well as the rebellion of the entire clergy against his method of instruction."¹²⁶ Be that as it may, Pieper took the first step toward reconciliation twelve years later. Pieper and Koehler were both approaching their ninetieth year when August Pieper addressed a letter to Koehler at his home-in-exile. The correspondence is preserved in the pages of "Faith-Life" the 1972 volumes.

Although neither of them discuss the heart of the dispute between them, Pieper suggests that since they were once dear friends, and since both of them are approaching the end of their lives, they should put the past aside and reconcile themselves. It seems that Pieper even planned to trek to Neilsville to personally confront Koehler, but the death of a mutual friend and his own weakness prohibited that.

Koehler seems to have fallen victim to the ailment which he most despised, Verstockung, hardness of heart. His reply is perfunctory and sharp. They have nothing to discuss! Pieper died in 1946 unreconciled to Koehler.

A few years later John Meyer made a similar overture toward reconciliation.¹²⁷ Koehler again rebuffed the pro-

¹²⁶"The Lie," p.9.

¹²⁷"Meyer's Move for Reconciliation," Faith-Life 36 (May 1963):12.

posal insisting that there was nothing left to discuss. True, Koehler had been badly abused, but this man who insisted upon thorough self-criticism and proved himself a peace-maker again and again now closed his mind to the peace overtures he so desired in the past.¹²⁸ It seems that Koehler's historical judgment was proved correct: all persons and institutions eventually lose their perspective and suffer *Verstöckung*. Koehler died in 1951. No member of the Wisconsin Synod was present at his funeral, only a handful of Prote'stants.

The Prote'stant Conference

Although Koehler had passed from the scene and the Wauwatosa seminary too had passed out of existence, the Wauwatosa Theology was essentially preserved for a time. The title page of the Prote'stant Conference's paper, "Faith-Life" declares emphatically its determination to preserve and promote the principles of the Wauwatosa Theology. Questioned some years ago as to how it could justify its existence in light of the fact that it did no mission work nor opened any new churches, the Conference responded that God has chosen different groups to perform various tasks. Theirs is the preservation of the Wauwatosa Theology.¹²⁹

The genesis of the Prote'stant Conference arose out

¹²⁸John Philip Koehler, "From His Ledger," Faith-Life 43(July/August 1970):20,26.

¹²⁹Karl Koehler, "Our Master Mission," pp. 10-11.

of the joint protest of a group of pastors at the West Wisconsin District Convention held at Beaver Dam in June of 1926. The Beaver Dam Prote'stants objected to the suspensions of Professor Ruediger and Pastor G. Koch, whose congregation had called one of the Fort Atkinson teachers.¹³⁰

Having noted Thurow's reaction to the Beitz Paper, this group of Prote'stants met again in November of 1926, "and discussed the advisablility of having the paper printed. The plan was finally dropped for the time being."¹³¹ Following Thurow's action against the Fort Atkinson teachers, the growing number of pastors met in February of 1927, their first meeting with divine services and communion.

Suspension of pastors began in June of 1927. Three were suspended in two weeks. A special meeting of the West Wisconsin District was called in November of 1927 to deal with the burgeoning Prote'stant problems. At this meeting the legend was contrived that in reality Synod had done nothing, rather the Prote'stants had severed their connection with Synod.¹³² The legend persisted till 1961 when Synod acknowledged the possibility of error on its part.

Shortly after the meeting, the Prote'stants assembled again to discuss the possibility of validating the legend by withdrawing from the Synod. In addition to deciding to

¹³⁰Claus Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," pp. 6-7.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid., p. 8.

publish the Beitz Paper, the group prepared the "Elroy Declaration," which is in essence a "declaration of freedom and declaration of allegiance to the theological thrust of the Beitz Paper."¹³³ It answered the suspensions, but refused to accept responsibility for severing relations.¹³⁴ The blame was laid upon Synod.

Yet another special Meeting of the West Wisconsin District was held in February of 1928. The tiny district nearly suspended itself out of existence. Five previously enacted suspensions were ratified. Eleven additional pastors were suspended. One congregation was removed from Synod. Two more pastors and four congregations were placed on notice that they would be dealt with at the regular District Convention that summer. The usual formula for these and future suspensions was publication in the "Gemeinde-Blatt" and "Northwestern Lutheran" in a manner like this:

Inasmuch as all attempts to carry out the resolution of Synod; that the officers of the District and the Theological Faculty deal with Pastor Hass were frustrated through his continued opposition to the calling of a congregational meeting for this purpose, in utter disregard of the conscience of these members, who demanded such a meeting, the undersigned officers of the West Wisconsin District herewith publicly declare that brotherly relations between Pastor Hass and us are severed.¹³⁵

¹³³Paul Hensel, "What about the Elroy Declaration?" Faith-Life 2(August 1929):5.

¹³⁴Let us recall that thanks to Synod's reinterpretation of the Doctrine of the Church, these suspensions were in actuality official excommunications.

¹³⁵E.E. Sauer, "Suspension," Faith-Life 1(November 1928):4.

Others were simply "suspended for cause."

Since the Synod was still not clear on the parameters of its new interpretation of the Doctrine of the Church, these parameters too were dealt with at the February Meeting. August Pieper (although not a member of the District) wielded a great deal of influence at this and future District conclaves. Questions arose over the exact nature of the suspensions. Professor Kowalke of Northwestern raised the question whether suspension from Synod meant simply that or was it a denial of the man's Christianity. Pieper responded: "These people that confess to be in accord with and continue to adhere to the Beitz Paper are not only adhering to false doctrine, but also are committing the grave sin of slander. They have attacked the Holy Spirit, They are blaspheming. They have trampled our Lord Jesus Christ under foot, We therefore also deny them all their Christianity."¹³⁶

Ironically, at its regular Convention in 1928, the District thanked its chief hatchetman, President Thurow, for his efficient work; approved his interpretation of the Beitz Paper; and voted him out of office.

Again, within months of the Convention, two more pastors were suspended by the West Wisconsin District and one by the North Wisconsin District. Other districts were not as willing to accept the accusations of false doctrine, requiring more

¹³⁶Fred W. Krohn, "Wild and Woolly West Wisconsin," Faith-Life 2(August 1929):9.

proof of false doctrine.¹³⁷ Two seminary students anticipating placement by the College of Presidents in 1929 were refused calls because of Prote'stant leanings.

Between 1934 and 1937 those Prote'stant who remained in Synod either recanted, resigned from Synod, or were suspended. The final appeal of Gerda Koch was rejected. The Fort Atkinson case was declared settled. The 1937 Convention of Synod was termed "blessed and peaceful."¹³⁸

Amalgamation And Disintegration

"The Watertown Thievery Case, the Fort Atkinson Affair, and the Beitz Paper were the culmination of a series of clashes...These conflicts were basically struggles between faith and unbelief."¹³⁹ Although the Prote'stants did not absolve themselves of all blame, they placed the burden of guilt with Synod. The charge of the Prote'stants against the Synod was and remains "Popery."¹⁴⁰ This they define not as a one-man affair but as a system fostered by ignorance, indifference and incompetance coupled with jealous guarding of self-interests.

Prote'stants wished to portray themselves as a sort of society for public defense. Claiming that they did not

¹³⁷Claus Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," p. 9.

¹³⁸Claus Gieschen, "The New Administration," Faith-Life 11(February 1938):9-12.

¹³⁹Marcus Albrecht, "Conference Report," Faith-Life 31(September 1958):8.

¹⁴⁰Karl Koehler, "Who's Through?" p. 7.

wish their own exoneration, they fought for exoneration of those who had been wronged by ignorant Synodical officials. "We have been pilloried and publicly branded as slanderous and false teachers...Then we become furious with the thought of our adversaries who do this all in the sacred name of the Word of God...most of them never yet have undertaken the study of the Scriptures that today is expected of every high school student."¹⁴¹

It is the contention of the Prote'stants that, in view of the overall history of the Wisconsin Synod, this controversy was inevitable. "Truth and righteousness are driven from the synagogue and their place is taken by the enemy, now ironically, assuming the guise of truth and righteousness...ecclesiaticism repeatedly asserted itself against the free course of the Gospel."¹⁴² Synod, it is purported by the Prote'stants, has sought to preserve itself by ridding itself of those who were the least bit critical of its manner of dealing with dissent.

The chief aim of the Prote'stant Conference, never incorporated as a church body, is the preservation of the message of the Wauwatosa Gospel: "Forgiveness of sins through our Blessed Savior, coupled with the warning of the hardening of hearts and of the judgment upon those who reject this message and its implications."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Karl Koehler, "The Confessional," Faith-Life 11(July 1928):2.

¹⁴²Marcus Albrecht, "Conference Report," p. 18.

¹⁴³Ibid.

Over 50 years of "registering a protest against official falsity functioning under the guise of a concern for correct doctrine has had two effects upon the Conference."¹⁴⁴

One effect is a strong, hostile suspicion of anyone who expresses interest in their activity or challenges their inactivity. One must read the regular "Conference Reports" recorded in the pages of "Faith-Life" to fully appreciate the spirit of the group. Many a visitor has attended the conferences with cordial feelings toward the group only to be verbally torn to shreds by the group. The exclusivist nature of the conference precludes growth or expansion.

In 1968, a group of Lutheran High School students enquired of Paul Hensel for material for term papers on the Prote'stant Conference. The editor of "Faith-Life" responded: "You do not state in your letter how you came to be assigned this topic...and from what attitude, whether of curiosity or of concern for your own salvation this interest proceeds."¹⁴⁵ Karl Koehler once conceded that "our polemics are distasteful."¹⁴⁶

The Prote'stants still claim that the Wisconsin Synod belongs to them. For that reason they continue to

¹⁴⁴Philemon Hensel, "Your Spirit is Different From Ours," Faith-Life 48(November/December 1975):17.

¹⁴⁵"The Now Generation in the Contemporary Wisconsin Synod 'Church' and the Prote'stant Cause," Faith-Life 41 (May/June 1968):19.

¹⁴⁶Karl Koehler, "The History of It," Faith-Life 33 February 1960):8.

publish the vitriolic attacks on the Synodical administration, pretenders to the throne.

The second effect is a series of splits which began almost immediately and have continued throughout its history. A split in November of 1964 left the Conference with two parochial schools and four congregations. An occasional pastor or teacher will still join the Conference, but most of their members no longer serve as pastors or teachers.¹⁴⁷

Significant Later Events

From time to time Prote'stants have sent their children to Northwestern with mixed reactions from the faculty. They were accepted as students but under protest.¹⁴⁸

Philemon Hensel was accepted as a "guest" student at Thiensville for one year but was dismissed during his second year by John Meyer because he was scheduled to preach for his Prote'stant father. The seminary maintains that he withdrew.¹⁴⁹

Since more than a generation had passed since the formation of the Prote'stant Conference, the Synod at its 1961

¹⁴⁷In 1951 a "little" Norwegian Synod pastor was ousted because of his Prote'stant involvement. Leigh Jordahl now serves at an ALC college, holds membership in the LCA and remains involved with the Prote'stants. In 1968 an LC-MS teacher was dismissed for Prote'stant involvements.

¹⁴⁸This state of protest is interesting in light of the fact that between 1963 and 1965 a student from the ALC was permitted to do his college work at Northwestern Prep with no "protest".

¹⁴⁹Philemon Hensel, "Farewell to Thiensville," Faith-Life 25(June 1952):7-10.

Convention urged the West Wisconsin District to patch-up the 30 year old rift.¹⁵⁰ The District made a fraternal gesture toward pacifying the Conference. At its 1962 Convention, the District "took significant action in its resolution lifting its suspension of 1927. Notice of this was given to the Prote'stant Conference."¹⁵¹ A delegation from West Wisconsin attended the next meeting of the Prote'stant Conference. "The reaction of the Prote'stant Conference was sadly disappointing."¹⁵²

The faithful remnant of the Wauwatosa Theology is to be questioned as to its faithfulness. Its stern reactions have become almost dogmatic in nature. Clearly, "Verstöckung" has set in. There is no self-criticism, only criticism of

¹⁵⁰Wisconsin Synod, Reports and Memorial of the 36th Convention (Milwaukee, WI: n.p., August 8-17, 1961), pp.103-104.

¹⁵¹Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings of the 37th Convention (Milwaukee, WI: n.p., August 7-14, 1963), pp. 214-215. Synod acknowledged the fact that it was indeed a suspension.

¹⁵²Ibid. The 1959 Convention of Synod finally acknowledged the District actions as suspensions rather than self-exclusions. In spite of the Synod's conciliatory overture in 1961, a Wisconsin Synod pastor was dismissed that same year because of his involvement with the Prote'stants. The case of Pastor G. Hinz is a striking paradox in the face of the Synod's conciliatory mood. Hinz's case is documented in Faith-Life 35(February 1962):5-16; (March 1962):5-13. In 1971 a Thiensville student was allowed to vicar on the condition that he stay away from Prote'stant meetings (Faith-Life September/October 1971). A case can be made for the premise that Wisconsin's conciliatory effort arose out of a need to strengthen its alliances in 1961 in the face of its termination of fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Wisconsin needed to make friends on all fronts.

others. Wauwatosa's Gospel love-letter is squelched by a spirit of retribution and anger.

Observing the Prote'stants one is struck by their failure to integrate a message of forgiveness into their theology, neglecting to recognize the fallibility of those who perpetrated the debacle. In spite of the evil, there must also be a spirit of forgiveness. The passage of time must heal some wounds. After 50 years, the Prote'stants will not forgive even when asked to do so. Their only mission is the perpetuation of a 'jihad,' a holy war. That is not what the Wauwatosa Theology represented.

APPENDIX I

Document Study of John Philip Koehler's

"WITNESS, ANALYSIS AND REPLY"*

Charles Werth

During the period of 1900-1929 the faculty of the Wisconsin Synod seminary at Wauwatosa, Wisconsin employed a methodology for interpreting Scripture which, in some practical aspects differed from the norm of mid-western Old Lutheranism. Most responsible for the development of this methodology, called the Wauwatosa Theology, was John Philip Koehler. Upon his installation as professor at the seminary Koehler endeavored to inculcate in his students an appreciation for the historical background of the various books of Scripture.¹ Involved in this concern for history was Koehler's fear that the rise of dogmatics in Old Lutheran seminaries had atomized Scripture into a series of proof-passages documenting specific doctrines. The Wauwatosa Theology was determined to take theologians back into Scripture, viewing it as a whole; to read Scripture as a vital Word from God which directed Spirit-led Christian living; to abolish the abuses of dogmatics; to wage war against the growing legalism per-

* Although bearing an English title, the article, found in Faith-Life 3 (July 1930 Supplement):1-6, was written in German.

¹ John Philip Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, edited and with an Introduction by Leigh D. Jordahl (Faith-Life: The Protestant Conference, 1970) pp.208,210, 226,232,235. Koehler was called as professor of history and biblical interpretation.

ceived in the Wisconsin Synod.²

During roughly the same period of time there occurred a number of minor skirmishes within the Synod which developed into a major divisive controversy. The result was the eventual expulsion of a number of pastors, congregations and professors.³ A group of pastors who viewed the action of the Wisconsin Synod as heavy-handed legalism protested Synod's actions. One of those Protestant pastors, W.F. Beitz, presented a paper to a district pastoral conference in 1926 entitled, "God's Message to Us in Galatians; The Just Shall Live by Faith."⁴ Attacking the Synod Beitz used the Wauwatosa Theology as the basis for leveling his charges.

Shocked by its content, the Synod in June of 1927 called upon its Wauwatosa faculty to produce a theological opinion, "Gutachten".⁵ Although J.P. Koehler originally signed this opinion, the proviso was attached that it not be published until Koehler had conferred privately with Beitz. Koehler hoped by this strategem to avoid publication of the document altogether, surmising that Beitz might withdraw

²John Philip Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," Faith-Life 1951 (10:4)-1952 (5:10); "Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns," Faith-Life 1952 (7:9)-1953 (1:9); "Biblical Hermeneutics," Faith-Life 1955 (8:4)-1956 (1:3).

³Claus Gieschen, "Ten Lively Years," Faith-Life 1938 (1:5-11)

⁴W.F. Beitz, "God's Message," Faith-Life 1960 (5:4-12).

⁵"The Opinion (Gutachten)," trans Otto Gruendemanss, Faith-Life 1960 (7:5-18). See also Paul Hensel, "A Brief History of the 'Gutachten'" Faith-Life 1960 (7:5,18-21).

When this trust was violated by his faculty colleagues Koehler responded on August 1, 1929 with his own review, "Beleuchtung", of the Beitz paper and the "Gutachten". On August 9, the other faculty members responded with an answer, "Antwort". Because of his attitude expressed in the "Beleuchtung" Koehler was suspended and expelled from the presidency of the seminary and from his position as a professor.

Following his expulsion in 1930, Koehler prepared one last treatise in defense of his position. Although written in German, Koehler gave it an English title, "Witness, Analysis and Reply - - concerning the Beitz Paper, Gutachten and Antwort." Only the 'Reply' has been previously translated.

THE WITNESS

A CLARIFICATION OF THE PERTINENT SECTION OF THE "BEITZ PAPER", AS A WITNESS AGAINST ITS INTERPRETATION IN THE "GUTACHTEN" AND THE "ANTWORT", PREPARED FOR THE CONGREGATIONS OF SYNOD, WHO AS KINGS AND PRIESTS BEFORE GOD HAVE THE RIGHT OF FINAL JUDGMENT. (Page 1)

Hoping to disseminate this article throughout the Synod, Koehler submitted it to the editorial board of Northwestern Publishing House. It was his intention to have it printed in the official Synodical publication the "Gemeindeblatt."

NOTE: THIS ARTICLE, WHICH THE MEMBER CONGREGATIONS OF SYNOD

HAVE A RIGHT TO READ, WAS REJECTED BY THE "GEMEINDEBLATT" THROUGH THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE WHICH IS ATTACHED TO THE SEMINARY BOARD OF CONTROL. (Page 1)

This was not the first time that publication of a Koehler missive was rejected. A letter disclaiming his connection with the "Gutachten" was also rejected through the machinations of August Pieper, a member of the Wauwatosa Faculty.⁶

The first section of this article entitled THE WITNESS deals with the "Gutachten's" accusation that Beitz in his opening paragraph confused justification and sanctification. Skipping to the end of this section, Koehler provides a five point summary of his findings.

FROM THIS THE FOLLOWING IS CLEAR AND CERTAIN:⁷

1. THE TEXT FROM HABAKUK⁸ IS NOT THE THEME OF THE BEITZ PAPER, RATHER A BIBLICAL AXIOM IN LIEU OF WHICH HE COULD HAVE SAID: 'I KNOW NOTHING AMONG YOU EXCEPT CHRIST CRUCIFIED.' SANCTIFICATION IS HIS THEME AND HE PROVES IT WITH A SCRIPTURE PASSAGE GIVEN FOR JUST THAT PURPOSE. (Page 2)

2. BEITZ DOES NOT TURN THIS JUSTIFICATION TEXT INTO A DEMAND FOR SANCTIFICATION, BUT THE PASSAGE IN QUESTION IS A

⁶See a letter by Koehler to Synod's ministerium dated July 2, 1927 in Paul Hensel, "Brief History," p. 18.

⁷Thirteen paragraphs of explanation interpose between the last quotation above and this summary. The summary gives sufficient information to understand the thrust of the WITNESS.

⁸Habakuk 2:4 quoted in Galatians 3:11.

PROMISE OF GRACE FOR HIM WHICH IS GRASPED BY FAITH ALONE; HE USES IT AS A CRITERION FOR ALL THINGS WHICH CONCERN US IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, AS IS PAUL'S CUSTOM. (Koehler here refutes the charge made against him that he had confused the Formal and Material Principles of Lutheran theology.)

3. THEREFORE ONE CANNOT CONCLUDE THAT BEITZ CONFUSES JUSTIFICATION WITH SANCTIFICATION.

4. WHAT THE "GUTACHTEN" TOGETHER WITH THE "ANTWORT" STATES CONCERNING THIS PARAGRAPH IN THE BEITZ PAPER IS IN EVERY INSTANCE INCORRECT, EVEN CONCERNING HIS SUPPOSED WEAKENING.

5. CONSEQUENTLY IT IS CLEAR THAT THE "GUTACHTEN" FROM THE OUTSET HAS DECEIVED ITSELF AND ITS READERS IN ITS EXAMINATION OF THE BEITZ PAPER. AND EVERY ATTEMPT TO COVER THIS FACT UP IS HYPOCRISY.

Koehler immediately turns to a comparison of the controverted documents in the second section entitled THE ANALYSIS.

A CLEARER ILLUCIDATION OF THE "GUTACHTEN" AND THE "ANTWORT" IN REGARD TO THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE SALIENT POINT OF THE BEITZ PAPER. (Page 2)

Beginning with a comparison of six excerpts from the "Gutachten", "Beleuchtung" and the "Antwort," Koehler draws the following conclusions on the basis of his comparison.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

THE BARE IMPRESSION GAINED FROM THE STATEMENTS QUOTED ABOVE WILL BE SUFFICIENT FOR THE AVERAGE READER OF THE PRECEEDING

ARTICLES TO REALIZE THAT THE "GUTACHTEN" IS INCORRECT IN ALMOST EVERY WORD CONCERNING THE ISSUE BEFORE US. IT WILL SUFFICE THAT WE HAVE PRESENTED A THOROUGHLY CORRECT REPRESENTATION OF THE BEITZ PAPER AS SUCH IN REGARD TO ITS CONTENTS AND TENOR. TO FURTHER Demean THE "GUTACHTEN" WOULD HAVE BEEN UNNECESSARY AND UNCHARITABLE. IN THIS MATTER OVER WHICH THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS BEFORE GOD IN HEAVEN ARE DISCUSSED, WE STAND IN A SANCTUARY NOT IN THE GRAVY. (in der Sasse.) FOR THAT REASON AT LEAST PERSONAL ATTACKS MUST BE AVOIDED. IT WAS ESSENTIAL FOR THAT REASON THAT THE "BELEUCHTUNG" OMITTED THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BOTH PAPERS. (Koehler wanted to get at the real issue and he knew that such historical background would merely have incriminated the faculty.) (Page 3)

The Wauwatosa Theology's view of history included an element called "Verstöckung" which in essence held that any organization eventually loses its ability to criticize itself objectively and becomes entrenched in blind dogmatism and restrictive legalism. Koehler feared that would happen to his own Wisconsin Synod and his next paragraph in the ANALYSIS embodies this fear.

HOWEVER NOW A TWOFOLD NUISANCE HAS INTERPOSED. FIRST OF ALL THE "BELEUCHTUNG" WAS WRITTEN ONLY AS A GUIDE. IT PRESUMES THAT THE PASTORS, TO WHOM ALONE IT WAS SENT, WOULD WORK THROUGH THE RESPECTIVE EXERPTS IN THE TWO PAPERS BEING COMPARED, IF THEY WANTED TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THE "BELEUCHTUNG". TO BE SURE, MOST OF THE READERS DIDN'T DO THAT AS WAS DE-

MONSTRATED BY THE RESPONSE IT RECEIVED. THEN COMES THE SECOND NUISANCE, THE "ANTWORT" WHICH NATURALLY IS PRESENTED MORE IN THE MANNER OF A DOGMATIC PRESERVATION (Festhalten) OF THE ONLY POINT OF VIEW THAN AS A REFUTATION OF ERROR. IT IMMEDIATELY ENGENDERS THIS SPIRIT IN THE READER AND CONTINUES TO ENGENDER IT. (One of the tenets of the Wauwatosa Theology was that a logical dogmatic presentation should be used to refute error only, not simply to entrench a particular point of view.) (Page3)

Koehler goes on to say that it is obvious to him that no one was really listening to what he had to say. It would seem from the large number of suspensions that Koehler was right.

THE PROCEEDINGS CONCERNING THE MATTER BEFORE US, NAMELY THE FIRST PARAGRAPH OF THE BEITZ PAPER, HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO A CONCLUSION WITHIN A CLOSED SYSTEM. ON THE BASIS OF CHARGES IN THE "ANTWORT" I HAVE BEEN DRIVEN FROM THEOLOGICAL PROFESSORSHIP AT THE SEMINARY. I CAUTIONED THE POWERS THAT BE IN FOUR LETTERS INSIDE OF A YEAR. THE BASIS OF THIS WARNING POINTS OUT THE FACT THAT THE "GUTACHTEN", AROUND WHICH THIS ENTIRE MATTER REVOLVES AND ON THE BASIS OF WHICH MANY PASTORS, PROFESSORS, TEACHERS AND CONGREGATIONS WERE SUSPENDED BY THE OFFICERS OF SYNOD, CONTAINS A DOMINANT FALSEHOOD IN ITS MAIN POINT. ONE LONGS TO EVALUATE THIS FALSEHOOD AT THE BEGINNING AS AN UNINTENTIONAL ERROR. BUT WHEN IT IS MAINTAINED AFTER YEARS OF CORRECTION IT MUST BE VIEWED AS SLANDER. THEREFORE, IT MUST BECOME COMMON KNOWLEDGE AND

THE ACTION RESULTING FROM IT MUST BE NULLIFIED.

THE "ANTWORT" AND MY REMOVAL FROM OFFICE ARE THEIR ANSWERS TO THIS CAUTIONING, ALTHOUGH THEIR BASIS IS ALEDGEDLY SOMETHING ELSE...IN THIS DISCUSSION THE MAIN POINT IS TO PROVE THE INCORRECT MANNER OF INTERPRETATION IN THE "GUTACHTEN" AND THE "ANTWORT". (Page 3)

Stressing that the Beitz Paper and the "Gutachten" were attempting to arrive at essentially the same conclusion, Koehler notes that the "Gutachten" has slanderously abused Beitz's viewpoint. Admittedly, Koehler was never enamored of Beitz's style of polemic, yet, he made every effort to defend the principle for which Beitz was striving, namely the defeat of binding legalism in the life of the Christian.

We have skimmed over the bulk of Koehler's lengthy ANALYSIS which details the event between 1926 and 1929. The point that he was making has been quoted above. He concludes with an expression of amazement that the Wisconsin Synod had allowed the "Gutachten" and the "Antwort" to be elevated almost to the status of the Lutheran Confessions.

AND THIS PIECE OF NONESENSE (Schreiberei) IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE CONFESSION OF THE WISCONSIN SYNOD? ALL THAT IS MISSING YET IS THAT THE "GUTACHTEN" WILL BE PASSED OFF AS THE AUGUSTANA, AND THE "ANTWORT" AS THE APOLOGY OF THE WISCONSIN SYNOD...

Because of his stand in defense of Beitz and fair-play, Koehler was swept out of Synod along with a group of pastors who chose to be called the Prote'stant Conference.

Although over 50 years have passed since the genesis of the controversy, reconciliation has not been reached. The Protestants claim to be the rightful heirs of the Wisconsin Synod and preservers of the Wauwatosa Theology.⁹

⁹The statement of purpose found on the first page of each issue of "Faith-Life" bears out these claims.

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