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### The Critical Evaluation of the Influence of William Sihler in the Development of the Missouri Synod

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**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE  
INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM SINLER IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSOURI SYNOD**

**A Thesis Presented to  
the Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Church History  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity**

**by**

**Lewis William Spitz, A.B.**

**Saint Louis, Missouri**

**1947**

Approved by:

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## Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	1
I. Sihler's Old World Development . . . . .	1
II. The New World . . . . .	16
III. Sihler the Theologian and Churchmen . . . . .	32
IV. The Founding of the Missouri Synod . . . . .	41
V. Sihler the Practical Churchman . . . . .	58
VI. Sihler's Social Consciousness . . . . .	71
VII. Relations with Other Lutheran Churches . . . . .	95
VIII. The German Church . . . . .	127
IX. Relation to Other Churches . . . . .	136
X. Concluding Estimate . . . . .	152
Appendix I . . . . .	155
Appendix II . . . . .	159
Bibliography . . . . .	168



## Introduction

The year 1947 marks the centennial of the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. It seems particularly appropriate at this time from the vantage point of many decades now past to review and analyze in the whole historical causal nexus active in the vigorous beginning and development of this Church body the contribution of the life and work of one of the leading men in the movement, the first Vice-president of the Synod, William Sihler, Ph.D.

A critical evaluation of the influence of a man like Dr. Sihler upon an active church body presents special difficulties. Of the three essential processes in the art of producing history: the gathering of data, the criticism of data, and the presentation of facts in a readable form,<sup>1</sup> the second in the present instance is particularly difficult for one standing within a certain tradition. "History is made," writes Robert W. McLaughlin -

by the person -- individual or collective, as he is interpreted through his recorded acts. These acts, in whatever form, constitute the

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1. Homer Carey Hockett, Introduction to Research in American History, p. xi.



material of history. As this material is understood the history is made. To do this the person must be found. Until he is found there can be no history. For history is interpretation--the person interpreted in his recorded acts.

Again he says:

History is rigidly impartial; the historian never is. The slant against Christianity in Gibbon's masterpiece, The History of Rome, was not a product of his historical research in the field covered by his great work, but was a product of his life which was encouraged by his research. A careful reading of his Autobiography will show this, for it illustrates, as Leslie Stephens reminds us, "how conclusions which are agreeable to the emotions can be connected with postulates which are congenial to the intellect." Yes, the recreating of the processes of the past is a perilous task because of the personal equation.<sup>1</sup>

With full awareness of the difficulty of the task and a true attempt to maintain a sensitive guard against an undue "leitmotif" we shall begin with a survey of Sihler's European background and activity in the American church. This sketch will be followed by a detailed study of the influence of Sihler on the various phases of Synodical origins and development.

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1. Robert W. McLaughlin, The Spiritual Element in History, Pp. 81. 115.



## Chapter I

### Sihler's Old World Development

Voltaire once said, "History is full of the sound of wooden shoes going upstairs and the patter of silken slippers coming downstairs." The life story of William Sihler is the story of wooden shoes. It is the story of a man of strong religious conviction, of German military background, building a church on the fresh rough soil of America's middle border.

William Sihler in the course of his life in Germany became possessed of strong conservative Lutheran conviction and during the years of his activity in America, from the very beginning, he was one of the leaders in the founding and development of the largest conservative Lutheran Church body in America, the Missouri Synod. He has been characterized as the practical man of the church. As Walther was the head of the Synod in its organization, as Wyneken was the enthusiast, the heart of the Church, so Sihler, the third party to this noted triumvirate in the building of the Missouri Synod, was the hand, seizing every opportunity for ways and means<sup>1</sup> successfully to carry on the business of the Church.

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1. W. Broecker, Ebenezer, p. 65.



Sihler by preeminence of both endowment and achievement was a preacher and as such has been placed as a great Lutheran preacher in the galaxy of American Lutheran divines.<sup>1</sup>

As we shall have occasion to observe in the course of our study, Sihler's character was one of great steadfastness, unity of purpose, dogged determination and persistence. In his views and ideas he was given to a minimum of vacillation and to a maximum of consistency. He was dogmatic rather than speculative. It is therefore no surprise to find that once he had to his satisfaction made his theological commitments, he held to these views absolutely without a thought of compromise or reconsideration.

The story of Sihler's work as a churchman is the story of a man who having made final and definite decisions on the message to be proclaimed, bent every energy to the end of building a church dedicated to the support and promulgation of this dogmatic structure. Leopold Von Ranke's maxim of history, "Wie ist alles gewesen und geworden," finds a singularly simple application in the life of William Sihler. The story of how he became what he was leads us from the time of his early years to the end of his stay in the land of the Reformation. During the course of these years

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1. J. C. Jenson, American Lutheran Biographies, Pp. 724-725.



he developed into the churchman which upon his arrival in America he became and remained. The narrative of his life is readily divided into the two periods up to his forty-second year and his arrival in New York, followed by his subsequent work in America. He follows this division himself in the two volumes of his autobiography, Lebenslauf von W. Sihler bis zu seiner Ankunft in New York and Lebenslauf von W. Sihler, als lutherischer Pastor u.s.w. A study of Sihler's family background, early years, and development provides a good understanding of his later activities which so profoundly affected the course of American Lutheranism.

William Sihler was born November 12, 1801, at Bernstadt, near Breslau, Silesia. Sihler's father (1752-1828) was born in Stuttgart. He served thirty-six years in a Prussian Hussar regiment and finally became an advanced officer. In 1804 he had entered the Civil Service in Schwidniz, Schlesien, and was finally retired on a Government pension of eight hundred dollars and given the golden service medal. Sihler was born while his father was stationed at a military garrison at Bernstadt. The army tradition was strong in the family. His mother, a Wiener of a devout Roman Catholic Polish family, was forty years of age at the time of his birth, pampered him, and in general provided at best a poor home training. His oldest brother had at the age of twenty-three become a lieu-



tenant in the Prussian army. Two other brothers were in the army. His sister Fredericka at the age of seventeen married a Silesian nobleman, Herr von Ohlen. The youngest sister was Henriette, nine, his closest family companion, with whom, Sihler reflects in his memoirs, he quarreled constantly.<sup>1</sup> As a child he early developed a sanguine choleric temperament. His first contacts with religion were almost exclusively negative. His father an Evangelical and his mother a Roman Catholic, no plan of religious instruction was ever agreed upon. His mother's confessor, Prillmeyer, was to William an insincere, smiling, epicurean to whom he took a violent aversion. He developed a complete disregard for things religious at an early age and was more interested even in early youth in the stage, the imaginative stories of the neighbor lady, and sports, including skating on the Oder. He was gifted as a lad, learned to read at five, and entered the gymnasium at the age of ten.

The curriculum at the gymnasium included modern languages, history, mathematics taught with the usual pedagogical aids of the time, hair pulling and face slapping. The religious instruction was under a deaconess of the State Church, a rationalist. During this period he attended services in the State Church where the sermonizing centered chiefly on morality themes. He read adventure stories with relish and his reading of

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1. Lebenslauf, I, p. 9.



Kampe's Discovery of America early awakened an interest in this country.

At the age of fifteen he was ready for the University, but with the strong military tradition in the family and the precedent of father and brothers, he entered the army instead. Here he received a typical Prussian army training. His superior officer was a rugged veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, 1812 to 1815. In two and a half years he passed the examination and was promoted to become a second lieutenant in the twenty-second infantry regiment. His contacts in the armed forces were for the most part the usual ones, though he associated less with members of rank. A few of his closer friends were Major Pochhammer, Lieutenant Forster, who later taught mathematics in Berlin, Major v.d. Osten Starrwitz. In 1823 he entered the military school in Berlin where his time was devoted to a study of geography, German and world history, and a history of literature. Lieutenant von Moltke entered the academy with him later to become the famous general of the Prussian army. The famous Karl Ritter, geographer, Spilleke of the Frederick Wilhelm Gymnasium in German literature, and other instructors of note provided inspiration for further study. Simultaneously with the broader studies and the new interests, his interest in the military life waned. He decided finally to leave the army and take up further studies at the University of Berlin.



Sihler next went to Breslau where he prepared for and passed language examinations in the ancient languages as prerequisite to entrance to the University. His father promised him twenty dollars a month support during his time of study and finally upon the death of his father in 1828 Lieutenant Werder, a friend at the Berlin military school, financed his last year at the University in addition to such revenue as he enjoyed from the tutorship which Spilleke, now at the University, provided for him. He received the liberal arts training of the day including the classics, Tacitus and Sophocles, Logic with H. Ritter, more geography with K. Ritter, a lecture with Hegel, whom he considered offensive because of his heavy style and Swabian accent, and the belles lettres including a study of Jean Paul, Goethe, Shakespeare, Cervantes, etc. In music he had little understanding of the difference between secular and religious songs, though Händel's Oratorio and Bach's Passion according to the Gospel of St. Matthew impressed him considerably. He had occasion to hear Felix Mendelsohn at the home of his banker father, Moses. He also met Schleiermacher and visited on several occasions in his circle of friends. He enjoyed little of the usual carefree student life, but worked energetically, sleeping only five hours a night for three years. He finally



received his degree, Doctor of Philosophy, after a strenuous student career. His University education may be described as careful and thorough, conforming to the German University tradition of scholarship.

His religious life during this entire period conformed to the prevailing theological tradition of the time. German rationalism, with its merciless criticism of Lutheran orthodoxy, had run a notable course from Fermen Reimarus to David Strauss. The neological views of Johannes R  hr, Heinrich Paulus, Johann G. Eichhorn, Julius Wegscheider, Heinrich Gesenius, and Johann Semler were already entering the current of thought. It was the period from which developed Strauss' Leben Jesu (1836) and Ludwig Feuerbach's Wesen des Christenthum (1841). It was not until closer to the middle of the century that a revivalistic spirit evidenced itself among Lutheran and Reformed churches throughout Germany which later became so forceful through the sponsorship of such men as Baron Ernst von Kottwitz and Johann J  nicke of Berlin, the three Below Brothers of Pomerania, and Martin Stephan of Dresden.<sup>1</sup> This was also the period following the Prussian Union of October, 1817, in which the spirit of indifference to doctrine and the general spirit of union was the prevailing attitude. The King had called for a union service in

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1. Carl Schneider, The German Church on the American Frontier, pp. 6. 7.



Berlin and only a few, like the Rev. Claus Harms who posted ninety-five theses against the Union, dared to oppose. A Book of Common Worship was published with such changes as the use of the formula "Unser Vater" instead of "Vater Unser" and other alterations offensive to Lutherans. Lutheran dissenters were accused of insubordination and during the years following with anti-sectarian legislation developing non-conformity<sup>1</sup> into separatism and exclusive Lutheranism. This was the religious spirit of the time. It was in this atmosphere that Sihler developed through the years of his childhood and early manhood. Most of his friends were religiously of the same views. The pastor of his garrison while he was still in the service was a rationalist. His friend Forster was influenced by Schleiermacher's presentation of Christ as "Idealmensch."<sup>2</sup> He himself thought that philosophy held the answers to life's problems. While at Berlin he attended Schleiermacher's services for three years and, as already noted, had occasion to meet him in his private circle of friends. He found Schleiermacher sprightly, pleasant, spiritual, keenminded, well informed in politics, ethics, aesthetics. In his Monologen and Reden he had attacked

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1. Ibid., pp. 11. 12.

2. Cf. F. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith.



rationalism and spoken of religion as the dependency of man upon God, moving the basis from reason to feeling. Schleiermacher spoke of Spinoza as a religious man and praised Novalis and Schlegel, in all of which Sihler at this time concurred.

Due to his rigorous schedule in Berlin he was afflicted with a nervous ailment and went to live with a friendly pastor, Siebert, in Silesia for a few weeks' rest. He tutored in Breslau for a year. At this time he was to experience an incident which had a sobering effect upon his life, the serious illness of his good friend Werder.

In the year 1830 he secured a position teaching in Dresden at Director G. Blochmann's Institute. Blochmann was a student of Pestalozzi and the institution was organized in accord with the latest ideas, each teacher being the chief tutor of six to eight pupils and teaching all in the field of his specialization. The instructors alternated in supervising the meals, play, and study periods. His colleagues were able teachers of high morality. There was Philippi, who later became a sound Lutheran exegete and dogmatician at Rostock, Dr. Peters, who later taught mathematics at Hannover, Dr. Bezzenberger, the instructor in ancient languages, Herr Mueller, who taught history with a pagan orientation, and Netusch, the instructor in Latin. Sihler therefore enjoyed the privilege



of associating with able teachers and learning the latest in educational method. During the shorter vacations the instructors would take the boys for hikes and extended vacation trips. On these occasions the instructor took complete care of the boys, an ability which Sihler later was to employ as President of the academy in Ft. Wayne.

It was there as instructor of the Institute that Sihler underwent what he later described as his conversion experience.<sup>1</sup> It is to be remembered that he had for years been living in an atmosphere dominated for the most part by a rationalistic way of thought. Nevertheless, it was even in the violence of the controversy between orthodoxy and rationalism a time of interest in things theological and not a time of secularization. For three years Sihler had been a member of Schleiermacher's assembly. Beyond a doubt he was influenced even more than he himself at the time or later conceded by the stress upon feeling and the subjective relation of man to God which Schleiermacher consistently used as the basis for his preaching and writings.\* In addition the affect of the sympathy and assistance rendered him by his kind friend the pastor of Silésia who had aided him during the period of his nervous disorders must have been a factor in tempering his religious leanings.† Sihler himself finds a parallel between his own conversion and

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1. Lebenslauf, I, p. 82.



that of Paul's in that no man or book served as an intermediary and because it took place "suddenly and powerfully." After he had displayed great anger in the classroom, violently railing at the pupils, upon his return to the privacy of his room, "God struck him as with a club to his knees and on his face to the floor and with the hammer of the law struck him in such a manner that his sight and hearing left."<sup>1</sup> He received the powerful conviction that "he was a sinner under the law, a poor, lost, cursed, damned sinner worth nothing but pain and suffering in hell." Immediately, as in a moment, he thought of Christ, his Redeemer. The Holy Spirit, he relates, tore the "Schleier" (veil) of the Schleiermacher from his heart and he saw only the image of the redeeming Christ and not the Christ as example.

Coincident with this sudden change in Sihler's spiritual life the circumstances of subsequent events and contacts seemed designed to reinforce his new found conviction. Immediately upon this dramatic development, Sihler felt constrained to persuade his colleagues to his new faith, and was repulsed on every occasion. He consequently moved away from the Institute and stayed at the home of a Mrs. Kugelgen, the widow of a noted portrait artist and a devout Christian. He read the Sermons of Ludwig Hofacker, an orthodox preacher of

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1. Ibid., p. 82.



repentance, sin and grace. He repeatedly read these sermons during subsequent years. He continued attendance at the services of the court preachers Ammon, Schaeffer, and Käufer, attending half out of the sense of duty to the boys. He now found their discourses on ethic and reason with a Christian source quite unpalatable and in his brusque way recalls that he would gladly have torn them from the pulpits and driven them out of the church.<sup>1</sup>

It was during his stay at the widow's house that the sister-in-law of Martin Stephan was a regular visitor at the home. He never attended Stephan's church, however, because of the rumors of his unseemly conduct with young people and his neglect of the family. During this time, too, he made friends with Baron v. Wirsing, also of conservative theological conviction. These two visited a friend, Herr v. Heinitz at Hermsdorf, seven miles distant and on Sunday morning heard the conservative Rev. David Roller, whose sermon made a lasting impression upon Sihler, and on that occasion also met Prof. Scheibel who had been a pastor at St. Elisabeth and professor at Breslau and had so strenuously opposed the united Agenda Prussian State-church. It was Scheibel's earnest concern for the confessions which attracted Sihler more than any interest of his own in the purity of doctrine. He came to appreciate the sincerity and earnest purpose of the

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1. Ibid., p. 91.



many Lutheran preachers who served the dissenting factions even though they themselves were consequently poverty stricken. In visiting the homes of two students, homes also of the Lutheran tradition, he had an opportunity to hear Pastor Kretzschmar and partook of communion for the first time since his confirmation. On this trip he also met a tutor, Lehman, in the household of the Count of Lippe in Teichnitz who had also experienced a rather sudden and complete conversion. He introduced him to other believers in the village. Sihler was asked to address a gathering (not a conventicle, Sihler stresses, p. 102) and spoke for two hours on the twenty-third Psalm without feeling the least weariness.

His contacts with people of the conservative party continued largely through Sihler's own provision. He visited three Bohemian brethren settlements and was deeply impressed by their hard work, consecration, personal faith, and mission interest. The noted Pastor Rudelbach, author of Reformation, Lutherthum, Union, visited Dresden and as the leader of a conference of evangelical pastors in Glachau made a deep impression on Sihler. Rudelbach was later to become instrumental in expediting Sihler's adventure as missionary in America. He now accepted an invitation to become tutor on Oesel in the Baltic, an island near the coast of Livonia and later to moved to Riga, the capital of Livonia. (Here as house tutor to a Merchant Lüsewitz in 1840 he had



occasion to study the confessions, the symbolical books, though he had no occasion to hear Lutheran preaching.] The daily family devotions, prayers, Scripture reading, and songs nurtured his personal spirituality. He gradually saw the evil and learned to hate the Union as the work of the devil. His theological position was further delineated when he came to the conviction on the basis of 2 Thess. 2 that the pope was the Anti-Christ and when he crystallized a hatred for the emotional enthusiasts.<sup>1</sup>

✓ Soon he developed a strong desire to enter the ministry and serve the Lutheran Church, which Church he now felt to be the true visible Church on earth. While visiting Dr. Philippi in Dorpat he met Prof. W. Engelhardt who further promoted this desire. He was sufficiently emboldened to write an article for Dr. Busch's Church Paper on Luke 16, the first literary child after his conversion.<sup>2</sup> While visiting an evangelical pastor in Riga he was given a copy of Wyneken's appeal for men to work among the German immigrants in America. He heard the message and felt as though he heard God saying to him, "You must go across!"<sup>3</sup> He had no special feeling of kindness toward America as such. As he recalls, he considered the Declaration of Independence

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1. Ibid., pp. 128. 131.
  2. Ibid., p. 140.
  3. Ibid., p. 142.



a weed grown of Rationalistic seed and conceived of American democracy as a wild political miscarriage.<sup>1</sup> He wrote no one of his experiencing the call and yet he received a letter from several pastors on the Isle of Oesel asking him to answer Wyneken's call and promising financial support for the venture. And upon Wyneken's visit, 1841-1843, he received a call from the Dresden Society. He carried a gift of two hundred rubels from the brethren of Riga to the Dresden Society and they later allocated it for his own trip across. Sihler then revisited many friends, as Wirsing and Dr. Sartorius. He called on Pastor Løhe of Neuendettelsau whom Wyneken had won for the support of the North American Mission. He found him to be an energetic, loving man who droned his farmers to sleep each Sunday morning. Løhe had a plan of sending men and money for the expansion of the work in America. Løhe's support in following years was to mean much to Sihler and American Lutheranism. At last with a copy of Chemnitz's Examen and Loci and credentials from Dr. Rudelbach, Sihler set sail literally in the Sailboat Caroline from Bremen, September 17, 1843, never again to return to the land of his youth.

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1. Ibid., p. 143.



## Chapter II

### The New World

The good ship Caroline arrived in New York November 1, 1843, bringing to America a thoroughly convinced conservative Lutheran missionary, Doctor of Philosophy of Berlin, a <sup>1</sup>the man, determined here to serve the cause of orthodox Lutheranism against all tendencies toward unionism or deviation of doctrine. Sihler never swerved from this determination. He traveled from New York through Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Zanesville to Columbus, Ohio which was a center of the Ohio Synod, the location of its Seminary. Through the instrumentality of Prof. Lehman he was soon engaged in caring for the congregation in Pomeroy, Ohio, where he preached his inaugural sermon January 1, 1844. It was here that he first became an official member of the Ohio Synod. He found that the members of his congregation were of mixed church background, some were of Lutheran abstraction and some of Reformed, and he determined from the very beginning to instruct in the true Lutheran doctrines and then force the issue of an absolute Lutheran confession by all members. He read Luther's polemical writings. He

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1. Lebenslauf, II, p. 21.



carried the issue and was soon satisfied that this phase of his work in the congregation was completed. He directed his attention to conditions in the other churches of the Ohio Synod.

At the beginning of the 18th century there had been a large emigration of Lutherans from the Palatinate because of the oppression of the French and the spirit of the Jesuits. These emigrants passed through Holland, England, and through inexpressible hardships through New York and had eventually settled in Pennsylvania. From there they spread out over the neighboring states west and south and when the whole territory north of the Ohio was designated as the Northwest territory in 1787, the sons and daughters of the Pennsylvania Germans streamed into the Ohio valley.<sup>1</sup> Though at times there were bloody fights with the Indians, on the whole the work of these pioneers was one of peaceful construction. In the year 1802 Ohio was made a state. The counties of Fairfield, Pickaway, Montgomery, Columbia, Stark, Jefferson, and several others were for the most part settled by Germans. The settlers suffered frost, hunger, sickness. But the settlers suffered also spiritual need, for many of the settlements had no pastors. At first they had thought of the black earth and fresh water with little consideration for things spiritual. With no pastors there were no services.

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1. P. A. Peter and W. Schmidt, Geschichte der Allgemeinen Ohio Synode, pp. 1. 2.



Most of the families had Bibles, hymnbooks, and many of them also Arndt's Wahres Christenthum and the Starke-Buch. During this period of the early years two alternatives were followed. Some gave up all interest in things of the Church. Others were intrigued by the innovations of the enthusiastic Methodists, the penitence bench and camp meetings and soon joined other communions. Some, however, looked to their former preachers in Pennsylvania for aid and in the year 1804 the Lancaster Conference of the Synod set forth a plan for sending out traveling preachers. In the year following the Pennsylvania Ministerium sent out a petition to its congregations for support of the training and sending of missionaries. The year following George Forster was sent into Ohio as the first traveling preacher with headquarters in Fairfield County.<sup>1</sup> Forster was followed by Joh. Stauch who worked at Columbus. By 1812 there were twelve, most of them sent by the Pennsylvania Ministerium and still attached to it. Most of them served eight to ten congregations. They lacked theological books with little but their Bibles in their saddle bags and the Lutheran catechism in their heads. The most noted of these early preachers was Father Henkel, who preached also at Lancaster, Ohio, where Sihler later worked. Others, as Father Leist, combined a homespun medical career with their ministry.

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1. Ibid., p. 4.



The oldest Lutheran body west of the Allegheny Mountains was the "Allgemeine Synode von Ohio und andern Staaten." From 1812 to 1817 the Lutheran pastors in Ohio held free conferences and finally on September 14, 1818 the Synod was founded with seventeen members at Somerset,<sup>1</sup> Ohio. The group of ministers were not well trained theologians nor well indoctrinated Lutherans. They had little feeling for the distinctive doctrines of Lutheranism, were not overly concerned with expanding the church into the far west, and limited themselves to the service of the German immigrants. Father Leist preached only in German, for example, and in the congregational constitutions which he wrote may be found sentences as, "As long as the moon shines and the water flows, nothing but German may be preached in this church."<sup>2</sup>

The synod early introduced practices which were not in parallel to the practice of the Lutheran Churches of Germany.<sup>3</sup> Most of these were dictated by expediency. One such practice was that of the double licensing before a candidate could administer the sacrament. First the missionary was to receive the so-called catechetical license which would enable him to preach with the endorsement of the synod. Then after he had proven

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1. Edmund J. Wolf, Die Lutheraner in Amerika, pp. 341 ff.

2. Peter and Schmidt, op. cit., p. 8.

3. J. L. Neve, Kurzgefasste Geschichte der Lutherischen Kirche Amerikas, p. 292.



himself worthy and had had a sermon approved, he was finally licensed for ordination as a minister. This was done, of course, to protect the work of the Synod from the "Vagabond Preachers" who preyed on the settlers by serving as preachers until they had accumulated a few funds with which to buy land.<sup>1</sup>

The Seminary had been established at Columbus in 1830 and the Synod had grown with the addition of several more ministers, but on the whole the picture of the synod as just sketched was substantially the way Sihler found it upon his arrival and during his early years in Ohio. As was to be expected when the influx of L  he men with their very circumscribed views of doctrine and practice was sufficiently influential, considerable strife over the innovations into the Lutheran pattern by the Ohio Synod resulted. Sihler, the acknowledged leader of the "old Lutherans" from Germany, lost little time in attacking the loose practices of his fellow churchmen. He held the double licensing practice to be a poor and unorthodox practice, since the single ordination dependent upon the divinity of the call was theologically the preferred practice. He had no appreciation of the frontier conditions which had made the unusual practice followed the advisable one. He opposed the party which favored the introduction of English instruction in the Seminary on

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1. Chr. Hochstetter, Geschichte der Allgemeine Evan. Luth. Missouri Synode, p. 110.



the grounds that orthodox theological literature in the English language was unobtainable, though an earlier start in the English work might have prevented the large and continued defection of the Anglicized Germans to the frontier Methodist and other churches. His criticism was not well taken although in many instances it was applicable from the viewpoint of orthodox Lutheranism. On one occasion when Sihler had scored the unionistic practice of joint Lutheran and Reformed Services, Pastor Lehman responded: "You wish to urge on us principles which come from the old country. We cannot use them here."<sup>1</sup>

The Synod decided to alter errors in the new catechism regarding a free presentation of the Sacrament of the Altar, however, it was decided to use the General Synod's Hymnbook. Since 1842 the Ohio Synod employed an agenda with the words of institution of the Sacrament of the Altar which duplicated that in the agenda of the Prussian Union of 1817: "Christ says: This is my body." Sihler, Ernst, Selle, Richmann, A. Schmidt protested in writing to the Lancaster, Ohio, assembly.<sup>2</sup> The conflict finally came to a decision at the Synodical meeting in Zanesville in 1844. Almost every issue raised was controverted. The first question, "Which Synods are Lutheran?" was put on the order of the day. The matter of using the unionistic

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1. Ibid., p. 124.

2. Ibid., pp. 127-129.



"Spendeformel" was made mandatory. Then a whole series of decisive questions followed for discussion. The first concerned the Synod's stand on the symbolical books. The second dealt with an opinion on the Ohio Synod's doctrine of Communion. The third issue was about a reform of the Examination method. A fourth was a resolution that mixed Reformed and Lutheran congregations should not be served by the Lutheran pastors of the Synod. The position on the symbolical books was tabled for a total of three years. The group of new arrivals from Germany lead by Sihler withdrew from the Synod. At the next session in 1848 the Synod took a stand for the Confessions and made an oath upon ordination a requisite for the office.<sup>1</sup> When the General Synod in the Lutheran Observer attacked them for this step, Sihler took pen and defended them.<sup>2</sup> It took several years before any semblance of fraternal relations between the Ohio group and the group later organized by the conservative leaders actually developed or took concrete form.

A parallel development was taking place in different areas of the country. Wyneken, the man who had been instrumental in bringing Sihler to America, was also a man of orthodox confessional principles. In Germany he had read in Mission papers of the great need for the church of the German Lutherans in America. He had come

1. Ibid., pp. 129-131.

2. "Der Lutheran Observer und die Ohio Synode," Lutheraner, vol. 5, no. 2.



to America with C. W. Wolf landing in Baltimore in the year 1838. He has been called the father of German-American missions.<sup>1</sup> On October 2, 1838, Wynken began his first missionary journey covering western Ohio, southern Michigan, northern Indiana, and back to Ft. Wayne by November 16. Three weeks before Christmas he wished to undertake another journey, but his horse was lame and he was unable to go farther than South Bend, Indiana.<sup>2</sup> This is illustrative of the man's conviction and energy. In one year, after holding services in the Court House in Ft. Wayne, the congregation built a frame church building. In 1841 Wynken was obliged to return to Germany for treatment of a throat ailment and it was there that he recruited a large number of volunteers among men of his theological position to do the work of gathering the Germans into Lutheran congregations.<sup>3</sup> This effort in behalf of North American missions was greatly aided and directed from the German side of the Atlantic by Löhle who in 1843 printed a monthly paper for missions in 8,000 copies.<sup>4</sup> These men called by Wynken and sponsored by Löhle were with the later Stephan emigration to form the backbone of the conservative development of

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1. Hochstetter, op. cit., pp. 91. 92.

2. Ibid., p. 96.

3. Wolf, op. cit., p. 377.

4. Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und über Nord America.



Lutheranism in America.<sup>1</sup> On March 9, 1845, Wyneken was installed as successor to Pastor Haesbart in Baltimore. Here he found a Lutheran-Reformed congregation using the Communion formula of the Union Agenda. He fought for strict Lutheran practice. Some Reformed left the church. Pastor Weyl of Baltimore called him an "Alt-Lutheraner," a Jesuit, who would lead the church back to the pope, because he wore a gown and made the sign of the cross in pronouncing the blessing.<sup>2</sup> In May, 1845, at the General Synod meeting in Philadelphia, Wyneken presented the Synod with a twofold plan of ridding itself of un-Lutheran practices. Either the Synod should allow Dr. Rudelbach and Dr. Harlesz to proofread the books of Drs. Schmucker and Kurz, or the Synod itself should deny the false doctrines which they contained. His suggestion failed to find a sympathetic reception and he felt thoroughly ill at ease as a member of that assembly.<sup>3</sup> It was in those days that he received his first copy of Der Lutheraner published by C. F. W. Walther and the Saxon Lutherans of St. Louis and Perry County. After he had read it through he shouted, "Gott sei Dank! Es gibt noch mehr Lutheraner in Amerika!"

A similar development occurred simultaneously in the territory of Michigan. August Crdmer had spent

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1. J. Deindörfer, Geschichte der Iowa Synode, p. 10.

2. Hochstetter, op. cit., p. 115.

3. Ibid., p. 124.



several years in England during which time he served as tutor in the home of Lord Lovelace whose wife was Lord Byron's sister. He returned to Germany and on April 20, 1845, led a group of settlers from Bremerhafen to settle among the Michigan Indians. Løhe had corresponded with Pastor Schmidt of Ann Arbor and had already made plans for this work. The Chippewas near Frankenmuth was selected. Others settled at Frankenlust. A prosperous Indian mission was begun at Pine River, Bethany station. But once again the immigrant Løhe men found the church practice and teaching of the American Lutherans too loose to suit their ideas and so on June 25, 1846, on the day of the Augsburg Confession celebration, four of Løhe's missionaries, W. Hattstaedt, A. Grämer, Lochner, and J. Trautmann left the Michigan Synod declaring that<sup>1</sup> they had come to America to do Lutheran Mission work.

Sihler, therefore, fits into the general pattern of the conservative German missionaries newly arrived who found the looser practice of American Lutheranism unpalatable. He fits into the main stream in the revival of confessionalism first in Germany and then in America towards the middle of the nineteenth century.

Wyneken had visited Sihler at Pomeroy on his way to his new charge in Baltimore. In the spring of the same year, 1845, Sihler received the call to Wyneken's former

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1. Ibid., p. 138.



congregation in Ft. Wayne, and although he had returned five calls during the preceding year because he felt that his congregation was not sufficiently indoctrinated, he now felt free to accept this call for one of L  he's recently arrived missionaries, the Candidate Romanowsky,<sup>1</sup> was available to take his place. He found the congregation in Ft. Wayne in excellent spiritual condition, but regretted that as a Silesian he was unable to speak Plattdeutsch with the three quarters of the congregation of Westphalian and Hannoverian extraction. It was during the following year that the first steps were taken toward organizing all these widely scattered but resolute groups of conservative Lutherans into one churchbody.

Walther had published the first issue of Der Lutheraner on September 1, 1844, with his concern for the "orphanned Germans of the West" and the pure Lutheran doctrine. Sihler and the others of the nine who had left the Ohio synod read these first issues and Sihler corresponded with the editor. After the meeting of the L  he men at Cleveland, September, 1845, they decided to meet with the Saxon brethren and so Pastors Ernst and Lockner, also a L  he man of Toledo, traveled to St. Louis and there met with the Saxons Walther, L  ber, Keyl, Gruber, F  rbringer, and Schieferdecker.<sup>2</sup> Walther deeply impressed Sihler with

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1. Lebenslauf, II, p. 46.

2. Ibid., p. 52.



his learning, sincerity, and spirituality. During the subsequent discussion it was found that the men present were of one mind and interest. They expressed a common desire to organize for a common endeavor to win the West for conservative Lutheranism. A constitution was to be prepared and submitted to any congregations wishing to join the new Synod. The organizational meeting was in Chicago April, 1847. Walther was elected president and Sihler vice-president, overseer of the Eastern district, and finally upon a later division of Synod, the president of the Central district. During his years as overseer he was always capable in settling disputes in the congregations, controverting opposing doctrine, seeing new opportunities for mission establishments, a most zealous and active churchman. The story of his activity in his own parish is one of constant work and activity. The thirty years following saw the beginning of many small churches in the countryside around Ft. Wayne. Through his efforts the church in Ft. Wayne grew, divided, and today the city has at least ten churches of Synodical affiliation.

Another broader field of his work lay in the part he played in the founding and development of the Academy and Seminary which supplied the urgent need for pastors by providing a minimum essential training for theologians on this side of the Atlantic, thus relieving the pressing



need for constant reinforcement from Germany. Sihler completed the training of the two students whom Wyneken had chosen to study with him, Jaebker and Frincke. It was customary for young men to stay with experienced pastors, use their libraries, study under their tutelage, and pass a test in a colloquium to demonstrate their readiness for the cloth. Sihler envisioned a bigger plan. To supply the many men needed in the West, he thought of establishing a Seminary of a more practical nature which would turn out men in the minimum of time. He wrote to L  he who had outlined a plan for such a school in their conference in Neuendettelsau. L  he complied with his request and sent funds ample for buying a tract of land and erecting a building for the purpose. In addition he sent eleven youths ready to study at the newly founded school.<sup>1</sup> Sihler was made president of the institution.<sup>2</sup> He lodged some of the boys in his home and made a contribution of one dollar a week to the indigent student's fund no matter how badly things were for himself financially. We shall note in the course of our study of his writings how he worked for this school, arranged for its transfer to St. Louis and then to Springfield. Not satisfied with having done so much for the ministerial office, Sihler in 1867 also founded a Seminary in Ft. Wayne for the training of teachers in

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1. Ibid., p. 78.

2. Ibid., p. 133. For \$500 which L  he sent over he bought 95<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> acres of land outside of downtown Ft. Wayne. Boys used wood for fire until forty acres were cleared.



the parochial school. This was later transferred to Addison, Illinois. We shall have occasion to observe in a study of his contributions to church periodicals how his efforts were always directed in a most practical way toward fostering the interests of these institutions. He was assisted during these years by able men as Candidate Wolter who shared the teaching load, Prof. Grämer who worked in the Practical Seminary, and Pastor Stubnazy, and finally Pastor Jox who succeeded him in St. Paul's Church during his last years.

His ministry in Ft. Wayne was interrupted for only one extended period of time during all these years. During the years 1851-1852 he substituted for Wyneken who had since moved from Baltimore to St. Louis while Wyneken and Walther went to Germany to confer with Löhe who seemed to have drawn somewhat away from the confessional position and closer to the Bavarian Union Church, and who had censured the Missouri Synod for its democratic congregational organization and its doctrine of the office of the ministry in relation to its view of the universal priesthood of all believers. During the course of this conference Sihler was in charge of the congregation and of editing the <sup>1</sup>Luthersner. He was so constantly active in all synodical endeavors that it is impossible to determine how far reaching the influence

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1. Ibid., pp. 138-148.



of his views and activity on the growth of the Missouri Synod have been.<sup>1</sup> How far reaching his interests were in scope may be in part indicated by a study of his written contributions to church periodicals.

Sihler's private life was no less vigorous than his activity as a churchman, the father of a large family, of poor income, he nevertheless was known for his hospitality and many friendships. He had come to Ft. Wayne a bachelor of forty-four and had set up quarters with the two students. His friend Pastor Ernst of Neuendettelsau, Ohio, however had plans for Sihler. There was a young maid "fit to be a pastor's wife, of Christian mind, of good understanding and a 'soft quiet spirit'- very homelike and used to work."<sup>2</sup> In spite of the age differential of twenty-eight years the arrangement worked out well. Sihler traveled to Neuendettelsau with Ernst after their conference in St. Louis and visited the home of the young girl. Miss Susanna Kern was in the field at the time they arrived, but when she returned, Sihler was favorably impressed, for though she would hardly have inspired an artist, her disposition and bearing immediately attracted Sihler to her.<sup>3</sup> He and his bride returned within a matter of days to Ft. Wayne where they were received with tears

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1. He never missed a synodical meeting for thirty-three years, Ibid., p. 72. He was a representative at both colloquies with Buffalo and Iowa, Ebenezer, p. 75.

2. Lebenslauf, II, p. 58.

3. Ibid., p. 62.



of joy by his housekeeper over his new found happiness.<sup>1</sup>  
 The years following saw the arrival of eleven children.  
 The house was always full of guests and poor students.  
 Somehow his frugal wife managed to make the money reach,  
 although for a long time his income was only three  
 hundred dollars annually.<sup>2</sup> Sihler was in good health  
 and active until the very last years and months of his  
 life. Finally, advanced in years he appeared before his  
 congregation to deliver a Communion Address, June 5, 1885,  
 but he almost swooned and was taken to the house where  
 he was nursed during the ensuing weeks.<sup>3</sup> During this  
 period he called on the spiritual resources of the faith  
 which he had preached and for which he had labored. He  
 repeated words of Scripture as, "For me to live is  
 Christ" and "God was in Christ reconciling the world  
 unto Himself." Sunday, October 25, he knew the end to  
 be near and asked for the Sacrament. He then repeated  
 the words of Christ, "Father into Thy hands I commend  
 my spirit." In answer to his wife's last question as  
 to what she should tell the children, Sihler replied,  
 "That they abide in Christ." With these words closed  
 the life of William Sihler, the "practical Dr. of  
 Philosophy" of the early years of the Missouri Synod.

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1. Ibid., p. 70.

2. Ibid., p. 72.

3. Lutheraner, vol. 42, nos. 4-12.



### Chapter III

#### Sihler the Theologian and Churchman

From the days of Augustine's The City of God to the days of Santayana's Reason, men have postulated philosophies of history, intellectual devices to explain the sequence of historical events.<sup>1</sup> Within the narrower matrix of natural causes, the influence of the strikingly individualistic character of William Sihler on the development of the Church doctrine and practice of the Missouri Synod presents an interesting illustration of the ideas of a strong willed man influencing the course of a growing organization. The biographical sketch and survey of the religious situation in the first half of the nineteenth century just completed has suggested the nature of Sihler's religious convictions and his reaction to the prevailing ecclesiastical tendencies of his day. A closer characterization of the man as a theologian and a churchman will serve to point up the areas of special importance in which Sihler's influence was expressly evident.

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1. Richard McKeon, Lecture on the Philosophy of History, University of Chicago, August, 1945.



As a religious man, there can be no doubt of Sihler's genuine spiritual convictions. His life of strong conviction, the experience of sudden conversion, his early university training, his extended missionary travels, his work in the organization of a church, and his interest in the training of the clergy has inspired the comparison of his career with that of St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> A spirit of real sacrifice was evident in the life of these early Midwest clergymen. A. Ernst, for example, taught school and preached in a congregation for a whole year without pay, sharing only the food of the parishioners. Sihler's self-negation was just as apparent during those long early years when Crämer lived in a sod house and he in a small frame shack. He always emphasized the need for a pastor to make a daring thrust of faith for his own welfare and look upon the parishioners as redeemed children of God, a two-fold method which summarizes quite well his principles of ministerial practice.

Sihler, as we have noted, after concurring in the rationalism of his day through many years of military service and advanced studies, had come under the influence of Schleiermacher. He never acknowledged any approval of Schleiermacher's theological method, but was no doubt influenced by his emphasis on the personal

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1. W. G. Polack, "Four Early Leaders of Our Synod," The Concordia Pulpit, 1938, p. 365.



relation of man to God and his attacks on the dry heartless rationalism of the schools and many churches.

We have traced his shift toward the dissenting Lutheran faction and the orthodox theological position. He now taught the doctrines distinctive of Lutheranism with its emphasis on the antithesis of sin and grace and the entire confessional stand. His aim was to present "law and gospel, without mixing the two in the least detail." In his introduction to a book of sermons he explains that "insofar as he made this separation between law and gospel, an art which according to Luther's testimony is never fully learned, he had those believing fathers to thank especially from the line of the blessed Reformation and above all the Lutheran scholars, as Chemnitz and Gerhard. . . . At their feet he sat and learned. . . . He could thank his heavenly Father who led him from pietism to this correct Lutheran position."<sup>1</sup> In this introduction he presented in detail the theological considerations which guided him in his sermonizing: "The first consideration was according to St. Paul's admonition (2 Tim. 2, 15) rightly to divide the word of truth, law and gospel. Secondly, in the gospel I took utmost pains to present clearly the justification of sinners before God alone by grace, for Christ's sake. Thirdly, in teaching the correct

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1. Predigten über die Sonn und Festtages-Evangelien des Kirchenjahres nebst einem Anhang, p. IV.



Lutheran doctrine of justification, I considered it of great importance of faith and conscience to oppose Papism and enthusiasts (his usual designation for the "New Light" revivalists and reformed in general). Fourthly, I took it to heart to study the fathers on the gospels, especially their homilies. Fifthly, I tried not to cater to the spirit of the times nor treat of lofty things, but as Luther put it, to hold to the lower simpler things. <sup>1</sup> His attempt to pattern his work after Luther and his theology is evident all through many of his sermons which are studded with references to the Reformer and thoughts derived from the 16th and 17th century dogmatists. This is evident, for example, in one of his printed sermons "Am Gedächtnistage der gesegneten Reformation" in which he divides his theme into two parts: 1. What darkness before the breaking of the blessed Reformation. . . 2. How through Luther's testimony did the light of the gospel arise? In theology, then, Sihler now stood in the tradition which Charles Porterfield Krauth has called the conservative reformation.

In church practice, Sihler promoted the cause of the orthodox Lutheran groups of his own country. We have observed how during the last years of his stay in Germany he was continually associated with the scattered groups of dissenters from the state church

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1. Ibid., pp. IV-VII.



of the Prussian Union of 1817. [He was not concerned with a large church body, but rather with uniformity of doctrine.] L  he had key-noted this frame of mind when he exclaimed upon the formation of the Union between the Michigan men and the Saxons: "One can well say: But to what a small number the Lutheran Church of North America has melted!" Dr. Sihler wrote regarding the second synodical meeting to L  he: "What does a growing number benefit, if the unity of spirit does not grow with it bringing the builders of the Christian Church ever closer together?"<sup>1</sup> As a parson, he carried into his parish in America all the usages of the dignified pfarer, overlord of the German Kirche. His liturgical practice was the formal Lutheran order observed in Germany. For years nothing but German was used. He was, as Schleiermacher would have described his former congregation member, a prince of the church. (Kurze Darstellung.)

As a theologian, Sihler stands in marked contrast to the highly trained and meticulously exact scientific theologians of the old German school. His exegetical treatises anticipated Zahn's running commentary method,<sup>2</sup> rather than a glossary method as that used by Myer. What a marked contrast between Sihler and Walther, whose

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1. Hochstetter, op. cit., pp. 148. 162.

2. Cf. "Klarer Erweis, dass R  m. 7, 14-25 nur von dem wiedergeborenen handelt," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 76, no. 4.



doctrinal presentation was always formal! Walther was frequently as formal as Aquinas himself with his

A) Thesen, with a compendium of doctrinal opinion and

B) Anti-thesen, buttressed by another battery of dogmatic expositions. Sihler as a theologian stands in the same contrast with other writers of early American Lutheranism with their German University training. We might compare him also with Grämer with his formal organization of his Compendium der Theologie der Väter. He himself wrote a revealing explanation of his own exegetical method in one of his most extended exegetical undertakings, his brief commentary on the pastoral epistles.<sup>1</sup> He writes:

It is not the intention in the following article to treat these Epistles in the manner of the new scientific, theological, and learned exegesis. The writer does not have the necessary training nor skill. He writes much more in regard to our present church practices and needs giving comments to these letters. As far as God allows we will apply the comfort of this Scripture to the ministers of the Word.

*Sihler's own style*

In spite of his terminal degree and broad training, his interest was truly practical, the distinguishing feature of all his work.

His theological thinking was not at all original. He would have considered reevaluation as surrender and novelty as a superfluous gesture, even harmful. His

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1. "Die Briefe St. Pauli an Timotheum und Titum oder das apostolische Pastorale," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 10, no. 6, pp. 181-186.



expositions were not exceptional, often, in fact, very ordinary. But his effectiveness was due in the main to two features of all his theological exposition. The one was his rigorous consistency of aim and exposition. The other was his vigorous conviction which enabled him to write with a contagious enthusiasm.

He was in his historic situation a key figure in the Christian Church. He was one of those outstanding men who managed the transition from the European church to the church of the American Frontier. Perhaps his chief significance lay in the fact that he effected the continuity between the church of the past with the fresh growing church of his day and between the church of the old country and the church of the new. As though to caricature this important feature of his career, Sihler all his life maintained an active and extended correspondence with leaders of the Lutheran churches of Germany and through constant study, never lost his appreciation of the historic tradition of Lutheranism of the past. His broad scholarly training, outstanding administrative ability, and intimate contact with the L  he foundation in Germany helped to bridge the gap between Lutheran<sup>1</sup> orthodoxy in Germany and America.

The story of his contributions to the literature of American Lutheranism is largely the story of the application

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1. Carl Manuelshagen, American Lutheranism Surrenders to Forces of Conservatism, University of Minnesota Doctorate Thesis, 1936, p. 74.



of these principles acquired in the bosom of the church of Germany to the new conditions of 19th century American frontier life. This required a steady and understanding mind, a ready and practical hand. We shall make a special and extensive study of how this man through his writings for periodicals and his publications played an important role in shaping the destiny of the Lutheran church in America. His doctrinal statements were repeatedly directed toward reaffirming and elaborating the convictions of orthodox Lutheranism. By way of illustration of his great unwavering and consistent loyalty to the position which he had embraced one need only refer to a writing of 1861 at the height of his career in which he elaborates the doctrine of justification by faith treating of its essence, its relation to other articles of Christian doctrine, and on the danger of diminishing the glory of this doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Again, as late as 1882, at the end of his life he wrote another article aimed at synergism and the advocates of Melancthon's facultas se applicandi ad gratiam and conversely in support of sola fidei and sola gratia.<sup>2</sup> This indicates his great constancy in theological position, to which only one exception was ever alleged, that is, his expressions on the dogma of election, which will be discussed later.

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1. "Referat über die Predigt der rechten Lehre von der Rechtfertigung," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 43 and no. 3, pp. 75-92.

2. "Welche Haupt und Grundlehren der heiligen Schrift werden durch den Synergismus wesentlich verderbt und gefälscht?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 145-148.



A striking illustration of his adaptation and genius for solving problems of church organization is found in his application of the Lutheran emphasis on the universal priesthood of all believers and autonomy of the local congregation to the problem of church government in America. Though at first he seems to have favored an organization favoring more power for the clergy, upon contact with Walther he changed in favor of the congregational form and concurred in the famous article seven in the Missouri Synod constitution which declares that the synod is merely an advisory body and later wrote such articles as "Ein Ernstes Bedenken" in which he discussed the executive power of Synod, as well as its judicial power, and the expressions of the confessions<sup>1</sup> on the matter of congregational government. Because his views, spawned in the same spiritual bed as other American conservative Lutherans, concurred so consistently with those of Walther and the other founders of the Missouri Synod, it is difficult to distinguish his individual contribution and influence. His many writings, however, testify beyond doubt to the importance of his task in bridging the gap between the old European Church and the new Church of the American frontier.

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1. Lehre und Wehre, vol. 13, no. 12, pp. 358-361.



## Chapter IV

### The Founding of the Missouri Synod

After this preliminary measure of Sihler's stature as a theologian and a churchman, we shall study the impact which he made upon the church body which he helped organize and later his influence upon the Church at large. We can do no better than at this point to sketch the religious situation of the period in which Sihler began his work in America. We have already noted conditions in the German Church, the repercussions of the Prussian Union on church organization with the pietist groups, the dissenting orthodox groups, the overwhelming majority in the new official state church. We have also considered the theological trends of that day in German thought, the rationalism evident everywhere with its stifling effect on the spiritual life of the church, the romanticist influence evident in Schleiermacher's theological thought which was to see further development and extensive acceptance through the mediation of the Ritschlian school, and the new aggressive spirit of the dissenting Lutheran groups and their interest in North American missions.

The Dean of American church historians, William



Warren Sweet, gives a succinct description of the situation in America during the restless thirties and forties of the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> The national era, ended about 1830, and the period from 1830 to the Civil War was rightly called the era of sectionalism. Likewise the trend in church affairs resulted in divisions and subdivisions of the churches, while each denomination began to emphasize its own peculiar interest. Loyalty to a denomination now became the great emphasis. An individualistic attitude dominated the whole nation. Emotionalism prevailed everywhere, especially in religion.

The American Lutherans contributed a full share to the strife and controversy of these years. This was the period of the great struggle between the party in the General Synod which attempted to "Americanize the Lutheran Church" by a liberal interpretation of the Confession and the Conservatives. This party was headed by the outstanding leader Samuel S. Schmucker who was a prominent man of the church figuring the founding of Gettysburg Seminary and Pennsylvania College. He was opposed by a growing conservative party insisting upon the strict adherence, not only to the Augsburg Confession, but to the symbolical books associated with it. In the great wave of immigration

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1. The Story of Religion in America, pp. 373 ff.



which began about 1830 and continued until long after the Civil War, the conservative Lutherans grew in strength and the Lutheran Church veered toward the confessional position. Between 1830 and 1870 the Lutheran increase was three times that of the general population. In the decade just previous to the Civil War nearly a million Germans came to America. Many of these German immigrants<sup>1</sup> were Roman Catholics but a majority were Lutherans. This move was due to an economic depression in Germany corresponding to a prosperous era in America, as well as to the oppression of dissenting Lutherans by the State Church. Many were peasants, since the post-Napoleonic period groaned with oppressive taxation and in addition a series of crop failures interspersed with terrifically cold winters wrought untold misery. In the years 1816-1817 a veritable state of famine existed in Southern Germany. The industrial aristocracy was overwhelming the craftsmen and small traders. From 1815 to 1830 the average exodus from Germany was estimated as over 12,000. The revolution figuring the Burschenschaften movement with its slogan "Honor, liberty, fatherland" failed and many German political liberals were obliged to leave the country. From 1830 to 1845 the average annual<sup>2</sup> emigration rose to about 40,000.

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1. Ibid., p. 387.

2. Carl E. Schneider, The German Church on the American Frontier, pp. 1-5.



Many of these Germans were hostile to all religion. It would not be correct to say that only the educated university-trained Germans were anti-religious. A variety of types, ranging from sentimental pietists to abandoned infidels, congregated on the frontier. The least influential cultural factor was the pietist peasant and the common laborer. Nor were the indigent peasant groups always spiritual minded. Propagandists and imposters had also penetrated their ranks and stirred up antagonism to religion. Frequently the frontier farmers succumbed to materialism and their settlements became<sup>1</sup> hotbeds of infidelity.

On the other hand, the many Lutherans of the farming and small trades class had come from the small hard-pressed dissenting churches, often because of oppression, had learned to expect hardship and difficulty in maintaining their ties with the church. They often lived far apart. In worldly goods they were poor, but as a rule they were ready to receive preachers of their own church. These preachers were entirely different from most of the protestant frontier missionaries and typical circuit riders in their theology and in their approach to the settlers. They held to the orthodox confessional tradition. They did not accept the "new measures" of the revival frontier churches, reminiscent of Finney, et.al.

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1. Ibid., p. 32.



They sought out people of their own language and religion and made little attempt to win the English. These preachers received no money and little honor. They could figure on the bare essentials only. It was men of this kind who laid the ground for the first Lutheran synod of the Middle Border. The endless rides, mostly on horseback, brought great discomforts and dangers. Missionary journeys lasted usually six or seven weeks. In theological learning they were perhaps not so proficient, though a university trained minister giving all for the church was not an infrequent exception. Their library consisted often of a handful of books and there was little opportunity for study. What the head lacked, the heart supplied in warmth.<sup>1</sup> These were the ministers of the frontier and the Lutheran people of the Midwestern soil whom Sihler was to influence and guide in the formation and growth of the Missouri Synod.

Sihler together with Ernst and several pastors and one teacher had left the Ohio synod in 1845 because they considered the laxity in adherence to confessional principles on the part of the synod as a distinct debilitating factor in the work of the church.<sup>2</sup> They felt that especially here where the state does not support or guide the church, a clear confession is necessary unless all, to quote an oft used phrase, was to sink into a "Verschwommene

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1. Wolf, op. cit., pp. 342-344.
  2. Lebenslauf, II, p. 52.



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Masse," in which the unwholesome "enthusiasm" had the upper hand.<sup>1</sup> We may get an idea of Sihler's ministerial ideals from his eulogy of one of the most active confessional Lutherans in Germany during those decades. In his obituary of Karl Ströbel, licentiate in Zeitz and assistant to Dr. Rudelbach and Dr. Guericke in writing for the Zeitschrift für lutherische Theologie und Kirche, he commended him for those virtues which he no doubt recommended to his fellow clergy. For one thing, he was proud of his scholarly achievements noting that Dr. Delitzsch had found his comments and criticisms "characterhaft und frisch." They were of the right Lutheran spirit in teaching and in guarding. No one was more spirited in denouncing the corrupting unionism in the State Church, the unchristian papism, the false pride of false-Lutheran papers, the mixing of church and state, and warring for God's Word and on the ground of the Lutheran confessions. Sihler thanked God that his witness was better received by those on this side of the Atlantic than on that and prayed that his memory might remain a blessing!<sup>2</sup> Sihler himself endeavored in his own ministry to attain to this pattern of ideals which he lauded in Ströbel. He endeavored, moreover, to mold

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1. John P. Koehler, Geschichte der Allgemeinen ev.-luth. Synode von Wisconsin und anderen Staaten, p. 98.

2. "Nekrologisches," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 57-58.



the ministerial candidates whom he trained in the Seminary he was to help found and the many frontier clergy whom he was to influence in his writings to this form.

As we shall note presently, Sihler was of immense influence in the organization of synod, the composition of the synodical constitution, the formulation of the practical application of the doctrines of the church and related matters, and in his work of training seminary students and teachers for the parochial school system. Our main interest, however, will be to study the impress which he made upon the church in general through his contributions to the literature of the church. He early began to articulate his strong views in the periodicals, monographs, and full volumes of sermons and practical theological treatises. It is these writings which command special attention. Next to the editors themselves, he was one of the most zealous contributors. For the Lutheraner he wrote over eighty articles and for Lehre und Wehre, the theological journal of the Missouri Synod, he wrote more than thirty longer articles and many shorter statements. He also wrote many articles for the Zeugen der Wahrheit. It was Der Lutheraner which W. W. Sweet characterized as such a powerful influence in maintaining Lutheran orthodoxy. That periodical and the Lehre und Wehre, the official theological magazine

1. Op. cit., p. 387.



end often the only theological journal which the frontier pastors could afford for subscription, were highly influential in maintaining and developing the theological thinking of the pioneer theologians. It is there that we must go for an evaluation of Sihler's influence on the development of the Synodical position on many points of teaching and practice.

First, however, a brief sketch of Sihler's participation in the organization of Synod and his work as founder and instructor of the practical seminary will prove helpful in delineating Sihler's status in ecclesiastical affairs.

Sihler was responsible in large part for the impetus which lead to the formation of the union of all the widely scattered conservative churchmen of American Lutheranism who finally joined into the union designated as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. We have previously related how the Ldhe men had been attracted to Walther and the Saxon immigrants of St. Louis and Perry County through their reading of the Lutheraner and how the other groups from Michigan had also been drawn to them. [In a letter of Walther's addressed to Sihler, January 2, 1845, we read: "We are strongly convinced that without an external union of the true Lutheran ministers and their congregations the unity of the Spirit and therewith the purity of doctrine cannot be maintained, and even less will the talents of the individual be devoted to the common good." ]

Sihler  
role  
Synod

See  
notes  
on  
Lutheran



Upon Sihler's question, "Would it not be possible to form a union together with our brethren?" Walther replied: "I hold that not only possible but most desirable and rich in promise for our mutual welfare; indeed, I consider it essential, for conscience's sake, if it can be achieved. . . . I for my part am willing to make any possible sacrifice in order to bring such a union into being." In this conviction, three conferences were arranged. The L he men met in Cleveland, Ohio, in September, 1845, and dissolved their connections with the Ohio Synod.<sup>1</sup> The next step was a meeting in Walther's St. Louis home for the discussion of the plan of union and drafting a tentative constitution. Walther was no doubt the undisputed leader in organization. In his autobiography Sihler writes:

Pastor Walther welcomed us heartily to his home and his good wife was most cordial. Walther impressed us most of all. He was not as yet thirty-five, but he seemed much older. . . . He was full of spirit and life. He was the enlivening and formative influence, outlining principles for a union of congregations, a synod. He showed special talents for organization, of which I possess very little.<sup>2</sup>

The organizational meeting was finally held in Chicago, April, 1847, at St. Paul's Church. Dr. Sihler preached on Acts 2: 42 in the afternoon service of the opening day's meeting. The acceptance of the Scriptures

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1. W. G. Polack, The Building of a Great Church, p. 65.
  2. Lebenslauf, II, pp. 52-53.



as the Word of God and the acceptance of all of the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church was made requisite to acquire and hold membership in the new Synod. The renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description was required. There should be no joint services and sacramental rites with heterodox congregations or of such of mixed confession. There should be exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymn-books, and catechisms in church and school. Children should be provided with a Christian school education.<sup>1</sup> Sihler was chosen vice-president and examiner and collocator.

That these men lived in a very real friendly spirit and were most intimately attached to each other and interested in each other is evident throughout their writings, exchanges of letters, as well as in the more formal church notices. Sihler in his obituary of his friend Wyneken who had been instrumental in overcoming his antipathy for America and in winning him for service in this country, for example, praised him as a man long to be remembered in the church and expressed most genuine sorrow at his death.<sup>2</sup> From these beginnings in which Sihler was so active the Synod grew into one of the largest Lutheran bodies in America.

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1. Polack, The Building of a Great Church, p. 74.

2. "Lebensabrisz des am 4. Mai in einem alter von nahe 66 Jahren in San Francisco in dem Herrn entschlafenen Ehrw. Weiland Herrn Driedrich Wyneken, treuverdientedn Ev. lutherischen Pastors der Gemeinde in Cleveland West, Ohio," Lutheraner, vol. 32, no. 14, pp. 105-108.



By 1872 relations with other synods had progressed to such an extent that it seemed practicable to attempt a joint organization of some sort. Accordingly a historic convention met at Milwaukee, June 10-16, composed of representatives of the synods of Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, and the Norwegian Synod. The second of two preliminary meetings had met in Dr. Sihler's church in Ft. Wayne. Sihler was now one of the Missouri Synod delegates to the joint convention of synods. At this convention the new body was called the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. Sihler's hand in relations with other synods within and without the synodical conference will constitute a special study below.

The original plan devised by Löhe, the great sponsor of North American church expansion, the pastor at Neuendettelsau, Bavaria, called for the preliminary preparation of ministerial candidates in Germany and the completion of the training at the Seminary at Columbus, Ohio. In order to provide more at least partially trained students a preparatory school was founded at Nürnberg which later grew into a self-supporting mission seminary and in 1853 was moved to Neuendettelsau, from where the work was continued. The founder was candidate Friedrich Bauer, a friend of Löhe. When, in the eyes of these German benefactors, the seminary at Columbus became doctrinally unsound, the move was made



to rearrange the program. The school at Ft. Wayne was opened and from 1846-1848 nineteen students came from Nürnberg, Auernheim, and Neuendettelsau to the Ft. Wayne Seminary. This support furnished through man power sent from this German academy continued until 1849 when Löhe formed the "Gesellschaft für innere Mission im Sinne der lutherischen Kirche in Bayern." Bauer continued his work<sup>1</sup> until his death in 1874.

In August, 1846, Candidate C. A. W. Roebbelen brought over eleven students from Germany and assisted Sihler in instructing them. Sihler opened this school in October, 1846, and in November, 1846, Prof. A. Wolter came to help him. In an appeal for donations for the support of this school published that year in the Lutheraner, Sihler described the school as serving the following purposes:

1. We wish to train men full of faith and learning in God's Word--
2. Men who will have nothing to do with the so-called Lutheran synods given to false unionism.
3. Men who have a good knowledge and experience of this truth.
4. Men able and strong in teaching the law and the gospel.
5. Men who will serve the church in love and humility.
6. Men who will suffer every cross for the precious confession.

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1. Deindörfer, op. cit., pp. 13-15.

*school  
described  
in Lutheraner  
1846*



7. Men who will take heed to self and all the flock.
8. Men who will be diligent in preserving the unity of spirit in the bond of peace.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the organization of the new Synod, Sihler was able to persuade Löhe to transfer this property to the constitutionally orthodox group as a gift. This document, dated September 8, 1847, contained the following interesting conditions: "That the school forever serve the Lutheran Church and train ministers for it; that the sole medium of instruction in the Seminary be, and unalterably remain, the German language; that the Seminary remain what it is, namely an institution which has as its purpose the best possible, but also the quickest, preparation of preachers and pastors for the countless forsaken German brethren in the faith and for the newly immigrating congregations of our blood and confession; that should the need arise, the Seminary will serve also for the training of missionaries to the heathen natives of North America.<sup>2</sup> Repeatedly through the years Sihler wrote for the support of this Seminary and other schools, holding it incontrovertible that next to the support and promotion of the individual congregations, there is no more noble work than supporting the schools of higher learning, for godly and learned

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1. "Das lutherische Seminar zu Ft. Wayne," vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 29-30.

2. W. G. Polack, The Building of a Great Church, p. 57.



instructors in church and school are the noblest gifts of God.<sup>1</sup> Until the time of its removal from Ft. Wayne, the Seminary was largely under the guidance of Sihler. He supported, served as pastor, and taught in the Seminary.<sup>2</sup> An increasingly large number of men arrived for study. The enrollment required expansion of buildings. The school was to serve yet another purpose.

Pastors F. Lochner, S. L. Dulitz, and P. Fleischmann, together with Mr. Diez in 1855 had undertaken to establish a teachers' college in Milwaukee. They were not satisfied with the location and in the year 1857 synod resolved to arrange a special department in Ft. Wayne for teacher candidates. Fleischmann, Crämer, Sihler, and his assistant taught all classes. This arrangement continued until 1863 when synod resolved to transfer the Teachers' College<sup>3</sup> to Addison and provide it with new buildings. This was the second protestant teachers' college for parochial schools to be opened in America, the first having been founded by the Lutheran group in Saginaw in 1853.<sup>4</sup> Sihler, who already in Germany had been an instructor and knew the power of education, was throughout his career an active supporter of church-school education.

In 1857 an English academy was established in

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1. "An Unsere lieben Synodalgemeinden," Lutheraner, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 27-28.

2. "One Hundred Eventful Years under Sihler 1846-1850," The Springfielder, vol. 10, no. 2, November, 1945, p. 3.

3. E. A. W. Krauss, Ebenezer, p. 216.

4. Deindörfer, op. cit., p. 28.



connection with the seminary in Ft. Wayne. Mr. S. Sutermeister, formerly of Boston, was put in charge of the academy which opened on November 16. Sihler's congregation erected a new building for the academy. This adventure, however, was discontinued after a year for lack of students and funds.

Sihler and other synodical leaders decided in favor of combining the Practical Seminary with the school founded in 1839 by the Saxon immigrants and now located in St. Louis, Concordia Seminary, and at the same time, move the college department of the St. Louis compound to Ft. Wayne. Sihler published a monograph urging this step for various reasons. Again he showed his practical insight in the actual problems of the church. The committee of which he was a member finally printed the following statement:

We acknowledge that, under present circumstances, hardly either school is well supplied with teaching power, and the union of the two schools, through a greater number of teachers which will work together in one place, will greatly promote the confession of pure doctrine and the provision against false teaching.

The second reason is: Through such a union, the various gifts of the teachers would be available for the students.

The third reason is: That at the installation of new Seminary instructors, it is of most importance that they find colleagues preceding them who can initiate them into office.

The fourth reason is: Supervision over the gifts of the youths would be easier, allowing weaknesses to be corrected which otherwise could not be done.

The fifth reason is: So that the older men could have a salutary influence on the



younger and the younger would keep the older from becoming too onesided.

The sixth reason is: The combined faculty would have new and more influential avenues to the outside as newspapers, and one voice on theology and things of the day in church publications.<sup>1</sup>

In 1861, by resolution of Synod, the transfer described was made. The "practical" seminary was combined with the "theoretical" seminary in St. Louis. There Walther and Grämer worked together for fourteen years. In 1873 the building of the so-called Illinois State University in Springfield, Illinois, was offered for sale. Rev. F. Buenger of St. Louis and several prominent laymen bought the property for a ladies' Seminary. On October 12, 1873, this group, "The Evangelical Lutheran Female College and Normal School Association," officially organized and purchased the property. The project was not carried out and the building was offered to Synod for relief of the crowded housing. In October, 1874, at the first Delegate Synod in Fort Wayne, the resolution was passed to purchase the Springfield property from the association and move the "practical" seminary to that city, in spite of the six advantages of the union cited by the committee in 1860. We may be sure that Dr. Sihler, still active in

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1. W. Sihler, Denkschrift zur eingehenden Darlegung der Gründe für die Vereinigung der beiden theologischen Lehranstalten in St. Louis und für die Verpflanzung des Gymnasiums nach Fort Wayne, laut einmüthigen Beschlusses der vom 10. bis 20. Oct. A.D. 1860 zu St. Louis abgehaltenen Versammlung der allgemeinen Synode, St. Louis: Synodaldruckerei von Aug. Wiebusch und Sohn, 1860.



his large parish and as instructor in the academy, took an active part in all of these transactions. The amount of work Sihler actually produced during those busy days enables the reader to appreciate the touch of weariness evident in his Lebenslauf which is more than the feebleness of age. How well might the frequently quoted remark of Lord Morley about Gladstone apply to him, "His industry was more than half his genius."



## **Chapter V**

### **Sihler the Practical Churchman**

Sihler, the practical churchman, concerned himself early with the many problems of church practice, ministerial qualifications and conduct, parish education, and the many social questions of ethical and political philosophy. He was first and foremost the practical ecclesiast, the preacher rather than the scientific technical theologian. Throughout the formative years in the development of the Missouri Synod, he gave continual expression to his philosophy of the Christian faith and life.

His chief concern was always the welfare of the Church in its practice. He recognized the character of the clergy as the pivotal determinant in this respect and continually addressed himself to the question of sound practice in the training for and exercise of the ministerial office. It was the impact of his trenchant thinking on the affairs of the church that influenced the standards and objectives in the training and selection of men for the ministerial office.

He was responsible, of course, for the selection of students in the Practical Seminary, which was in his



charge. He suggested also that pastors choosing boys for the preparatory schools and for the theological seminary in St. Louis should be guided by certain essential criteria. The first consideration of the pastor in selecting theological tyros was the religious disposition<sup>1</sup> of the youths. The first thing, he always maintained, was the inner attitude toward God and man. Next came the evaluation of the gifts particularly necessary for the work of a minister. He should consider his family background, his character, the opinion of older experienced men. The preparatory academies should consider the formal training less than the ability to know people and to be of a good personable disposition. Thirdly, in the case of those who have the intellectual gifts, but lack the character and temperament, since it is impossible that this should not come to the attention of the instructors in the course of training, they should be advised to discontinue, for many of these take three congregations<sup>2</sup> in rapid succession and resign after the fourth. How interestingly close these qualifications approximate Sihler's contemporary, Horace Bushnell's, conception of the necessary gifts of the minister. Bushnell summarized the ministerial aptitudes briefly as a strong moral consciousness, the responsibility toward God and man, as

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1. "One Hundred Eventful Years," The Springfielder, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 3.

2. "Was ist zu thun, dass nicht zu dürftig begabte junge Leute ins Amt kommen, die sich später als unmögliche Pastoren erzeigen?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 25, no. 7.



an atmosphere of spirituality rather than of literary or intellectual accomplishment, and as including the necessary practical talents, as the administrative ability.<sup>1</sup> Both of these coinciding conceptions seem explicitly reminiscent of the descriptions in the Pastoral Epistles. That, at least, is the avowed source of Sihler's ideal presentation. He was, at any rate, as his many articles evidence, quite unfamiliar with the literature of the contemporary American protestantism.

As administrator of the practical Seminary for so many years, Sihler was well acquainted with the many ethical questions posed by the ministerial profession. Since nepotism and desire for promotion were not nailed to the church door together with the ninety-five thesis, he knew the harm which preferred positions in the church might work among clergymen. He was insistent and plain spoken in opposing this evil. He, as a Lutheran theologian, of course, opposed any proposition for control of ministers by a bishop or any system of rotation or appointment by the ministerium. The Congregational principle was embodied in the synodical constitution and, although it occasioned a divisive controversy with Löhe, supporting the Iowa Synod, it was maintained as the scriptural and God-pleasing form of church organization.<sup>2</sup> This system

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1. Harry C. Howard, Princes of the Christian Pulpit and Pastorate, vol. I, p. 168.

2. W. Sihler, "Herr Pfarrer Löhe's Bericht über uns und dessen Beurtheilung nach Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit," Lutheraner, January 30, 1855, pp. 89-94.



of congregational autonomy, with the synod as an advisory and cooperative body, meant that the congregations should also be supreme in choosing their own ministers. In this connection Sihler observed that a right-believing shepherd is a gift of God. He is appointed by God for the common good through the call. It is the same God who in the same way calls a man to a greater common good at another congregation.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on his keen insight into human nature, Sihler suggested the following aids in overcoming the temptation to look for material advantages in accepting new positions in the church: The minister should be especially careful in case:

1. the congregation to which he has been called is larger.
2. he would have less work at the new charge.
3. there will be special crosses at the new place.
4. the call is to a big city.
5. he will have better associations with neighboring pastors or in the congregation.
6. only the larger size of the congregation attracts him.
7. the wife is inclined to determine the call.<sup>2</sup>

In accepting a call the minister should reconsider the idea of the divine call, pray, ask the counsel of an older man, and finally present the call to his own congregation. These principles still represent the

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1. "Wie soll es vor und bei Annahme eines neuen Berufs nicht hergehen und wie soll es hergehen?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 25, no. 5, p. 137.

2. Ibid., p. 137.



accepted ethic in the Synod today.<sup>1</sup> It is characteristic of Sihler that during those years, when Walther and other church leaders were highly involved in doctrinal and theological issues in the discussions and controversies in American Lutheranism that was swinging the church in the 19th century toward a conservative position, he should be chiefly concerned with the practical problems of pastoral theology and ministerial ethics and etiquette.)

He never vacillated a moment in his pronouncement of the message of the Christian pastor. His duty, of course, was to preach the simple truths of God's Word.

Ministers should humble themselves to bare the sword of the Spirit in the Word. Pretty sermons and illustrations, shining firewords, and impressions are no substitute for God's Word. The preaching should not be done in the manner of a Methodist who attacks the individual sins, but the law should be directed against the fundamentally sinful heart, man's natural pharassism. Sermons should not be directed against the "court sins," but at such common vices as covetousness. The message should be founded on Scripture and work faith through the power of God in the promise made in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The chief concern of the pastor should be the spiritual health of the people, not all sorts of extraneous social programs. Among his duties are those of the teacher of the unlearned, correcting the erring, punishing the unrighteous, and comforting the sorrowful. Church discipline

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1. John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology, p. 68 ff.

2. "Was haben wir lutherischen Prediger zu thun um immer kräftiger und eindringlicher zu predigen?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 36-41.



should be modeled after the pattern of Matt. 18.<sup>1</sup>

In the matter of church government, Sihler, after discussion with Walther, favored the congregational arrangement. He conceived of church government as the midway between priest-rule and people-rule. He was altogether set against theories of the "historic right" of princes and bishops in ruling positions. He conceived of the church as the congregation or the gathering of believers who by the Holy Ghost in baptism have been united and bound in the body of Christ. The teaching office and the responsibilities of the hearers must always coincide. The extreme democratic spirit is not the principle determining congregational government, but the stand of God's Word which in the description of the New Testament church gives a picture of the proper congregational arrangement as well as of the duties of the respective offices. Congregational affairs are to be directed with a true respect for the Word, for the consciences of others, and, in general, in concern for the common good.<sup>2</sup> We easily recognize this conception of the Church as that of the Lutheran Reformers, as well as the Calvinist scholastics in large part.<sup>3</sup>

In 1870, with the synodical organization not yet

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1. "Wie Werden wahrhaft lutherische Gemeinden gegründet und erzogen?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. I, nos. 6. 9, vol. II, no. 11.

2. Ibid., vol. III, nos. 2. 6. 8., vol. IV, no. 1.

3. John T. McNeill, "The Church in Post-Reformation Reformed Theology," The Journal of Religion, vol. XXIV, no. 2, pp. 96-99.



twenty-five years old, Sihler thought he detected signs of spiritual decadence. Nor was he at a loss for suggested remedy. The Synod had grown from ten congregations and fifteen pastors in 1847 within twenty-three years to over three hundred and fifty pastors with two hundred assistants. Sihler directed his fellow churchmen against recourse to the many devices available for stimulating interest in church affairs, but which frequently prove detrimental in the course of time. For one thing, the reintroduction of the old Lutheran ceremonies, fine as he thought they were, would not help overcome spiritual apathy, but might materially increase it. For another thing, the multiplication of societies and clubs will not overcome a fundamental indifference to the Christian message. The evil will not be checked by new building beautification and expansion programs. The true remedial measure was the preaching of the Word, the spirited application of the anti-thesis of law and gospel to the lives of men. This required love, wisdom, patience, and prayer. A device for maintaining personal contact with the laymen was the insistence on personal communion announcement.<sup>1</sup>

One of the first innovations Sihler made when he took charge of the parish at Pomeroy, Ohio, and again at

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1. "Was haben wir lutherischen Prediger bei der beginnenden Erschlaffung, Sathheit und Verweltlichung in unsern Gemeinden auch innerhalb unserer Synode vornehmlich zu thun, um, was an uns ist, diesen Uebeln möglichst zu wehren und das hin und her ermattende Gemeindeleben durch Gottes Gnade und Segen wieder Aufzufrischen und zu heben?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 16, no. 8, pp. 225-242.



Ft. Wayne, Indiana, was to insist upon the practice of announcements for the Communion service. Closed Communion was insisted upon and the announcement for attendance at the Lord's Supper gave him an opportunity to meet intimately with the members of the congregation for discussion of matters of their faith-life. He found it an effective arrangement in his work and constantly through the years, wherever opportunity afforded, he urged this practice upon the Synod until it became practically the universally accepted procedure. He regretted that in many Lutheran synods the practice was not carried out. "The fashionable preachers of the so-called General Synod," he observed, "allowed Christians in good standing of all churches to attend freely. . . ." The practice of announcement was at that time also not carried out in the General Council. He lamented the fact that in many of the larger eastern congregations of the Synod the Reformed, the lodge brothers, and unionists could participate as freely as others of professed Lutheran conviction. These men who do not promote private confession must be without knowledge or without conscience. He suggested Luther's Christian Questions and a fatherly method of address in these private interviews prior to the Communion. He is largely responsible for making the recitation of Bible verses and catechism portions during this announcement occasion customary for the newly confirmed, young people, and servants. He upheld this



practice in preference to house calls for several reasons. In giving instructions in the private homes the pastor may not have enough time for instruction, since the household affairs constantly interfere. Those visited may not be in the mood for such discussion, but in the announcement practice, they can choose the time for the interview. And finally, in large congregations the pastor is too busy making calls on the sick and erring to make calls on those in good standing.<sup>1</sup> This system of announcement with the pastor before attendance at Communion became standard practice in the Missouri Synod and is generally continued to the present. It is a necessary concomitant to the practice of closed Communion which has a doctrinal basis.

Sihler had an eye also to the parsonage. He had a word of advice for choosing a shepherdess for the parsonage. She should not be a "philistine," but a believing, discreet, well-mannered, good housekeeper. A man who above other difficulties must countermand the influence of his own wife will hardly be successful. All of this sounds an interesting note, coming from the man who married his wife the day after meeting her. The children are the object lessons for the laity and should be the pastor's primary concern.<sup>2</sup>

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1. "Zur Beichtanmeldung und ihrer seelsorgerlichen Benützung," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 65-76.

2. "Was ist der Wille Gottes in Hinsicht auf das eigene Hausregiment der Diener der Kirche?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 24, no. 6, pp. 161-168.



The number of churches in his own town, due largely to Sihler's own efforts at church expansion and the constant mitosis of his own congregation, increased from one to ten. His experience and counsel in the matter of the founding and support of new churches became the normative synodical principle for many years, though it has since been quite reversed. [He felt that the small congregations who seek help in building just because they are small and poor, should often in love be refused. They could do as rich large congregations did when they were small and poor--build small log churches.] The members in caring for their own churches should learn to love and appreciate them the more. There are, however, he held, certain cases in which the older churches should help the younger churches. One case is that when a union or evangelical church group comes to the pure doctrine, leaves the large church and needs help for a building. Another case is in the coast towns where a small congregation must serve many immigrants besides and cannot accommodate them. A final case is that of a small Lutheran church next to a large lodge filled church, striving with a debt burden to serve the pure doctrine.<sup>1</sup> In general, his principle was to subsidize the small congregations wherever it is in a special sense the church militant. This principle was followed as the

1. "Welche Gemeinden soll man in ihrem Kirchbau unterstützen?" Lutheraner, vol. 23, no. 21, p. 161.



operational basis for church expansion until the relatively recent period of a substantial church extension fund and a more elaborate system of mission boards in charge of the home mission effort. In a practical way, Sihler voiced constant appeals for aid throughout the years, requesting everything from money to horses and saddle bags. He was building a great frontier church.<sup>1</sup>

Today the Missouri Synod has well over 1,100 parochial schools in addition to the academies and colleges. Sihler, himself a former teacher, well aware of the importance of indoctrination during the formative years of child growth, was constant and energetic in his promotion and support of the parochial schools of Synod from the very beginnings. Until the teachers' training school was removed from Ft. Wayne to Addison, Illinois, from where it was subsequently removed to River Forest, Illinois, Sihler took a direct interest in teacher training. He viewed children as "the hope of the future" and urged the more complete control of their environment such as the parochial school supplies. He was ready with suggestions to the parents for pre-school training. Parents should practice constant family devotions. Efforts should be made to bring the teachers into close acquaintance with the family circle and after the child has begun school the parents should cooperate with the teacher and not

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1. "Herzliche Bitte an die Gemeinde der Synode," Lutheraner, vol. 19, no. 6, p. 45.



fight for their own flesh and blood. The most important factor in home training, Sihler repeatedly emphasized, is that the lessons of Christianity be lived.<sup>1</sup>

The teacher in return should hold up to the child the high office of the parent in accordance with the fourth commandment. He should be as a father to the children, take the parents into his confidence, and himself associate with good Christian people, and above all "avoid being saddled with a worldly woman."<sup>2</sup> Sihler continued his pedagogical instruction with sound warning against becoming a "stick-master," because when the fear of the stick is lost, all is lost. In contrast, a personable approach of a loving Christian man was the desired stature of the teacher.<sup>3</sup>

As previously observed, it is impossible to delineate in any specific way the exact impress of Sihler's own ideas on those of the Synod. It is impossible to evaluate the extent of his influence with any great degree of accuracy. This is true because many of the church workers who came to America and joined this new Synod in the Middle West had come from orthodox Lutheran groups in Germany and so already there had formed the convictions for which Sihler stood. The leading men of the Missouri Synod, as Walther, Crämer, Wyneken, and

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1. "Von dem heilsamen Zusammenwirken von Haus und Schule zu Nutz und Frommen der Kinder." Lutherner, vol. 20, no. 10, pp. 73-74.

2. Ibid., pp. 75-77.

3. "Ueber das evangelische Verhalten eines christlich gesinnten Gemeindegemeindeführers, theils gegen seine Schulkinder, theils gegen die Gemeinde, theils gegen den Pastor," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 8, no. 12, pp. 353-364.



others, were all of the so-called "alt-Lutheraner" position and this factor makes it additionally difficult to evaluate Sihler's individual contribution. Nevertheless, because the outstanding men of the early days confined their writing largely to theological treatises and Sihler was one of the three main contributors to the Synodical periodicals, therefore his practical articles were all the more important. His opinions on all practical matters are of value not only for being representative of the common opinion held by the membership of the Synod, but also as highly influential as a formative factor for the growing number of new members. In this larger way, he was most influential in the development of doctrine and practice in the Missouri Synod.



## **Chapter VI**

### **Sihler's Social Consciousness**

William Sihler, though a churchman of the European tradition with a strong bend toward the bearing of the staid German pfarrer, nevertheless possessed an active social consciousness. A survey of the titles of various articles which he submitted to the most widely circulated periodicals in the Missouri Synod during the 19th century, as cited in Appendices 1 and 2 below, will indicate his wide range of interest in social problems. He conceived it to be his primary task, however, to build the church constituency first of all by recruiting the many immigrants and then by organizing those German Lutherans in the widely scattered settlements of the Midwest into congregations. Without an organized group, it would have been impossible to embark on any extensive program of social work, because of the poverty of the many and the lack of any cohesive or centripetal force to promote group action. His interest, prompted in part by the needs of the time and in part by his own background and predisposition, was primarily in the ministry of the Word, in schools for the training of preachers and teachers. He was no Passavant or Flieckner to make a sustained effort



in the promotion of charities.

It is by no means possible to exhaust the wide range of social questions which did come to his attention and prompted him to articulate his views in church periodicals. These varied from socialism and strikes to nihilism and the future of the country.<sup>1</sup> We may examine more closely some of the representative ethical and political problems current in that day with a view toward an insight into Sihler's position and the subsequent development of characteristic attitudes in the church which he represented.

The most active years of Sihler's ministerial career fell into the tumultuous period around the Civil War, when the sectionalism that had been developing since the close of the national period around 1830 finally culminated in its logical extreme. During these years of political unrest, Sihler gave expression most frankly to all the censure one man at one time could heap upon conditions as they prevailed at the time. He produced a whole battery of articles and monographs flaying all those contributing to a party spirit, demagogues, extremists of every sort. He did not hesitate to chastise the public for docility and indifference with such connotative expressions as "Herr Omnes following like sheep," etc. He gave occasion more than once for the editor to append the notation:

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1. "Etwas über Socialdemokratie, Communismus und Nihilismus," Lutheraner, vol. 40, nos. 15. 16.



"When the editor receives this article, he does so not to bring the purely political expressions to the fore, but rather because of the critique included concerning the moral condition of our people. We hope that the latter aim will be pleasing also to such as do not agree with the former."<sup>1</sup>

Sihler not infrequently succumbed to the fault against which he had with regularity warned others, looking at political and social conditions through the dark glasses of pessimism. This fault not only occasioned many gloomy predictions as to the future of the nation, but distorted his historical perspective as well. Here is a typical picture of conditions during and after the Civil War as Sihler saw them:

Anyone who has lived in this land ten years or longer has seen how God has increasingly blessed it, woods are removed, land cleared, many immigrants, especially Germans, have by diligence and work, used to sparing and self-sufficiency, blessed the land with financial and labor power. Even the poor through hard work and planning can come to own something of their own. Especially we German Lutherans in this land have a special blessing of the pure Word. What is lacking? On God's part, nothing. On man's part--misuse of temporal gifts and thanklessness for the spiritual gifts. Consequently, also the civil affairs are in a lamentable condition.

If we consider the ruling spirit of the people and compare it with that of the time of the establishing the Union, we see greater retrogression. At that time there was more

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1. "Was haben wir lutherische Christen, wir seien eingeborene oder eingewanderte, Angesichts der furchtbaren Schäden und Verderbnisse, wie im bürgerlichen Gemeinwesen, so in den gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen und der bedrohlichen Zukunft unseres Vaterlands, jetzt vornehmlich zu thun?" Lutheraner, vol. 28, no. 16, pp. 121-124.



fear of God, ethical simplicity, real love of the Fatherland and pursuit of righteousness in the land. At that time there was no such an unfortunate, carnal, party spirit, but people elected moral, honorable, patriotic, wise and experienced men who had the common good in heart and mind. Even in the State from Governor down to town constable men were chosen for their wisdom and virtue.

The true picture of the wisdom and virtue in Colonial America, however, was one of a small percentage of church members, poor morals, drunkenness, vice, frequent robbery, smuggling and port running, anything but the idealism here described.<sup>1</sup>

In this article written in 1859 on the eve of the Civil War, Sihler characterized the times as a period in which private interests were carried into the election of public officials, slanders against public men were violent and common, fraudulent voting was the practice, popular representatives betrayed the common good of the United States, rowdies actually strengthened despots abroad by making the democratic system the laugh of Europe. All these public evils were complemented by the disintegration of private morals, forgery, adultery, remarriage after divorce, laziness, and the like.<sup>2</sup>

All of Sihler's ethical thinking and political

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1. Cf. W. W. Sweet, Religion in Colonial America. For a description of the heavy drinking, cf. Alice F. Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 308 ff.

2. "Was haben rechtschaffene evangelische Christen, sonderlich die Lutheraner, Angesichts der bedrohlichen Zukunft dieses ihres alten oder neuen Vaterlands zu thun?" Lutheraner, vol. 15, no. 13, pp. 97-99.



philosophy had a theological orientation. It was to theology that he looked for causes of the current misfortunes and it was there that he found the proposed remedial measures. God's judgment would surely fall on the United States, as it did on ancient Rome, unless men turned once more to Him. These predictions must have made curious reading during the years of the Civil War which followed so soon after. He proposed an eight point program of action for the church to avert the judgment of God:

1. Men must repent, as Jeremiah said in chapter 8, 21. 22; 9, 1.
2. Men must follow Ezra and Daniel's example of humility.
3. Men must pray God to move us to contrition.
4. Men must testify against corruption.
5. Christians must do their civic duties diligently.
6. Christians must in their household duties pursue the call of God and so aid the common good.
7. Christians must open more schools for the training of the young.
8. Christians must support fair papers and not party papers with their gross slanders.<sup>1</sup>

It is characteristic of Sihler as a churchman to advocate religious motivation and the homely virtues as the answer to national problems. The arrangement of the eight suggestions represents a curiously organized thought progression. This, too, was characteristic of

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1. Ibid., no. 15, pp. 113-115.



Sihler's method, impulsive and spirited rather than methodical and thorough. This is perhaps the inater omnium of the approach of the Synod to the more extensive social problems. To the present time the approach of the Church has been individualistic, indecisive, and at times ineffective. This by way of contrast to the efficient decisions and closely integrated plans and campaigns of the Roman Communion in larger social and political action programs, as well as by way of comparison with such Protestant groups as are keenly aware of current issues and which by promptly crystallizing opinion through study and debate are more prompt, and therefore more timely and effective, in molding public thought. This situation has no doubt in large part been due to the very democratic arrangement, with the Synod as the advisory body and each congregation sovereign. The need is to bend the energy of a Wyneken and the thoroughness of a Walther toward a more extensive effort in solving the social problems pointed up by the practical men like Sihler.

The major issue of both social and political import of that day was, of course, the slavery question. Sihler was quick to outline the approach of the Christian to the problem. His operational basis for his conclusions was the same as for all his theological and ethical dispositions, the Scriptural basis. Living in Ft. Wayne, near Ohio, the heart of the anti-slavery movement, it was



with his usual decision that he made a firm stand against the abolitionists.

All protestant churches found the question of slavery a major issue during the decades prior to the Civil War. This was especially true of the great people's churches. The Great Revival of 1830 had been a great stimulus to the growth of anti-slavery sentiment.

Charles G. Finney's movement soon found recruits, such as Theodore Dwight Weld and other Lane Seminary graduates, who were eager not only to be active in the interest of the gospel, but to work for the anti-slavery cause.<sup>1</sup>

The Presbyterian Church was drawn into the maelstrom of divided opinion in a dramatic way. In the General Assembly of 1818 the delegates had gone on record as opposing slavery. Then around 1830 the anti-slavery movement had reached a new height with Arthur and Lewis Tappan and others active in the cause. The Assembly of 1836 tabled the question and soon the issue became divisive.<sup>2</sup> The sudden rise of feeling and conflict during this period was due to two changes in the national life which had an important bearing on the slave question. In 1792 the invention of the cotton gin had made the growth of short fibered cotton on poor land once more practicable and with cotton, slavery once more became popular. The other factor was the Abolitionist Movement

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1. Gilbert Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, pp.3-16.

2. W. W. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. II, pp. 99-125.



which effected a change almost like the physical law that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. The violence of the campaign instigated by Garrison and popularized by Wendel Phillip's orations and Whitier's poems provoked a strong reaction and the trend toward a gradual emancipation of the negro was sharply arrested.<sup>1</sup> Methodism, of course, with William Wilberforce, Hopkins, and the British advocates of emancipation had long been involved in the movement. In this country the Methodists had organized an Anti-Slavery Society already in 1834. Sunderland and Scott had published the True Wesleyan. In the foreground of developments, the Methodists had expelled Bishop Andrew for owning slaves and by 1844 had drawn up the Plan of Separation.<sup>2</sup> The issue was clearly delineated, the divines on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line searched Scriptures for support of the truths for which they stood.

By way of comparison with the position which Sihler took, we might cite the opinions of some of the more eminent theologians of the day. Dr. Thornwell said that although the Church had no authority to interfere with slavery as a political institution, yet it did have a definite duty to perform in regard to the personal relationship of master and slave. Bishop Elliott held

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1. Sidney Mead, Notes for "Christianity in the Americas," CH 303, University of Chicago, 1945.

2. W. W. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 235 ff.



that the Church must 1) expound the duties of masters toward the slaves and 2) do mission work among the slaves. The Biblical case made by the anti-slavery theologians usually involved a dependence on general principles derived from Scriptures as a whole. The contention was that the Scriptures as a progressive revelation presented also progressive legislation, as in the case of polygamy which was at first allowed and then condemned in the New Testament by Christ. The exegetes discovered that the word "servant" in the epistle of James means a "hired servant" and not a slave. Dr. Paley had said that Christ did not condemn slavery, for it would have been inexpedient for the gospel to interfere with political institutions immediately. The golden rule was fundamentally opposed to slavery. Dr. Channing found that the conscience informed by Christianity was opposed to slavery.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to see that most of these deductions did not square with the strictly literal interpretation of the Scriptures as held by the large majority of the 19th century clergymen.

The Biblical argument for slavery usually centered in two contentions, that slavery was given 1) by divine decree and 2) by divine sanction. The divine decree cited was usually the reference in Gen. 9, 25 to

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1. William Sumner Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South, pp. 200-241.



the curse on Canaan. Divine sanction for slavery was found in the Old Testament in the practices of the Patriarchs, Ex. 21, 2-9; Lev. 25, 44-46; Deut. 15, 12; Joshua 9, 27. Moreover, the tenth Commandment had even forbidden the coveting of slaves. The argument for divine sanction in the New Testament was usually found in the comforting passage which speaks of Christ coming not to break the law but to fulfill it, in the fact that Christ did not free the servant in Luke 7, in the silence of the Apostles in not condemning it, and in the return of Onesimus to Philemon.

William Sihler appreciated the moral implications of the question. He was not the man to side-step even an extremely controversial issue. He had a fine insight with respect to the close relation of religion and practical ethic.<sup>1</sup> During the most excited period of acrimonious charges and counter-charges also among the churchmen of the land, Sihler took occasion to write a series of four essays considering the question of slavery in the light of Scriptures. This series was subsequently published in a bound folio for general distribution. Once more the editor of Der Lutheraner had occasion to append an apologetic note which was reprinted on page one of the folio:

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1. Cf. "Über den nothwendigen Zusammenhang zwischen der Religion und der Moral, nebst einem geschichtlichen Anhang und einer Nachweise aus der Gegenwart, wie mit der Religion nothwendig auch die Moral dahinfällt." Lutheraner, vol. 28, no. 21, pp. 163-166.



"It goes without saying that the following consideration of the slavery question has nothing to do with political questions and also is not concerned with what rules a slave state in this political crisis should establish with respect to the present or a later suspension of slavery from the standpoint of its particular household." (The following page references are to the printed folio described above.)

Here again, Siewer was first and foremost the theologian. Nothing in his European background would have made him predisposed in favor of slavery. The institution had no significance to the German state of that time. In America most Germans had settled in the northern states and when the issue of union or secession was finally drawn, the German Americans made up a solid part of the Union army. The reasons for his position were largely theological. His analysis and exposition were basically religious and his conservative stand put him on the side of the pro-slavery men who reasoned along the lines described by Jenkins in his discussion<sup>1</sup> of the moral issues of the slavery question. He advanced the argument along eight lines of reasoning.

In the first place, he held that slavery is a consequence and punishment of sin, but that it is not in itself sinful, that is, it is not contrary to God's

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1. Op. cit., pp. 200-241.



express commandments, although there are many evils and abuses in it. A person cannot make it a sin to hold slaves, as long as the attendant evils, which Sihler felt were not inherent in the institution, were not present.

Secondly, all should be done to convert both the slaveholder and the slave to faith in Christ and to love of God so that both see emancipation from the slavery of sin and the devil.

Thirdly, by such a regeneration of both, their mutual relation is changed and placed in the service of Christian love without thereby necessarily effecting a bodily emancipation of the slaves.

Fourthly, as history shows, the gospel of Christ in time first alleviates slavery in its harsher forms and then mightily works to abolish it.

Fifthly, the old and the new abolitionism opposes this wholesome work of the Gospel, as stemming from an altogether different spirit. Although this abolitionism has the sign of Christianity, it is opposed to it and makes the plight of the slaves worse by fomenting ill-will and causing dissatisfaction.

Sixthly, here in this land after the removal and overwhelming of the persistent storming emancipation-enthusiasts, the Gospel and the Gospel-wrought faith in Christ will do its work of converting the slave-holder so that finally he will see the importance for Christian



and ethical usage for the freedom of the body.

Seventhly, the customary means used for the conversion and the usual method of freeing slaves is hardly fit for them, because out of contact with white people and in their own state as in Nigeria they show themselves of inferior material and natural powers and so here in this country would not make progressive worthwhile citizens.

Finally, let it be expressly noted that this whole essay, cautioned Sihler, coming from God's Word and from it superintended and guided, has nothing to do with slavery from a political standpoint.<sup>1</sup>

This concluding explanation was not exactly an expression of quietism or fear of making political commitments, in general, as it was an attempt to express the desire not to elaborate controversial political views in what should be a theological journal. This whole essay was more a discussion on the basis of the Christian moral philosophy rather than an attempt to influence political decision directly. It is in this sense that Sihler thought it best to describe the purpose of his writing.

We recognize in his stand his theological premises. He follows to the letter the outline in defense of slavery as a morally justifiable institution by recourse to

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1. "Die Sklaverei im Lichte der heiligen Schrift betrachtet," pp. 33-34.



precisely those Scripture passages which Jenkins describes the conservative churchmen as using. He cites the divine institution of slavery, Gen. 9, 25-27. He was evidently unaware that anthropology had failed to establish any connection between the sons of Canaan and the Negroid peoples. He continued by citing Lev. 25, 44-46; 1 Pet. 2, 18-20; Titus 2, 9. 10; Col. 3, 23-24; 1 Cor. 7, 22; and finally, of course, the story of Onesimus and Philemon.

The issue did not create so serious a problem in the Midwestern synods as in the Eastern synods because<sup>1</sup> the constituency was almost exclusively in the North. In Missouri, a border state, there were local differences, as the opposing views of Walther and one of the instructors, Dr. Seffarth, who was to return to Concordia Seminary causing him to withdraw from the faculty. Similarly, Andrew Baepfer, later to become Dr. Baepfer, the instructor at St. Paul's College, Concordia, Missouri, left his own home in Maryland to fight for the Southern cause. But on the whole the church as an organization did not suffer schism. In spite of the fact that the leading theologians of the Missouri Synod, as Dr. Sihler, held to the Biblical justification for the institution of slavery, nevertheless, when the issue was finally joined in battle, the Lutheran constituency swung to the cause of the Union, as the divinely instituted

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1. Neve, op. cit., p. 142.



authority, also in accordance with the Biblical principle that every soul be subject unto the higher powers. Rom. 13, 1. Characteristically, Sihler did not fall in line with the Zeitgeist of the time, but controverted the opinions of the majority churches of America, the high anti-slavery feeling in the North, the opinions of the many Lutherans of German descent who had no interest in slavery. His own view was rather unenlightened. His appreciation of the influence of race on cultural potentialities did not precisely correspond to present day findings on the equality of the races. It seems necessary to conclude that in many phases of social improvement, Sihler and his colleagues rather hindered progress than provided constructive leadership. But with the changing of the times, the Church which they began has developed a quickened social consciousness stimulated in part by a true appreciation of the implications of the Christian gospel and in part by the example and influence of other groups.

A social problem which also reached a high peak in the agitated middle decades of the 19th century was that of women's rights. Ever since the days of Tertullian's Ad Uxorem and Cyprian's De Habitu Virginum, the position



of women in the church and society has at infrequent intervals caused renewed discussion and agitation. During the 19th century the question of the rights of women centered particularly in the rights of women to the suffrage and the rights of education and other social benefits. It was the refusal of the World's Antislavery Convention meeting in London in 1840 to seat eight American women delegates that led two of them, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, eight years later to call together the first Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York. Here a "Declaration of Sentiments" was outlined, declaring that all men and women were created equal and launching a seventy years' battle for the suffrage. But while many spirited suffragettes were active in adiabatic crusades, as Lucy Stone asserting that women should keep their maiden names even after marriage and Amelia Bloomer was styling new pants and dresses for the newly "discovered" gender, others were busy making a reality of the equality of the sexes, by providing schools for the women so that they could actually equip themselves for their coveted position. In 1821 the first seminary for young ladies was opened at Troy, New York, by Emma Willard and Mount Holyoke Seminary at South Hadley, Massachusetts, opened its doors in 1837. Oberlin, founded in 1834, was the first to introduce coeducation. Those were the decades featuring names like Ernestine Rose, Margaret Fuller, and Angelina



and Sarah Grinke.<sup>1</sup>

In the church, too, this spirit of equal rights between men and women sought the application of this ideal to the matter of suffrage in the congregational and synodical governments. The Lutheran Church in America held the view that woman suffrage in ecclesiastical matters had no warrant in the Scriptures. It taught that as spiritual members of the church, men and women had equal rights in the spiritual priesthood of all believers, but that in regard to the external organization<sup>2</sup> and temporal corporation men and women were not equal. In ecclesiastical government the administrative powers<sup>3</sup> belonged to the male membership alone. This was the position among all the synods of the Lutheran communion<sup>4</sup> in the past century. Sihler took this position with its Scriptural basis so much for granted that its certainty seemed to preclude discussion. He held unqualifiedly for this position of the woman in the church.

The acceptance of this view as the correct practice is affirmed at the present time by the Missouri Synod. The ideal sphere of the woman is in the home. In the church the woman has definitely a subsidiary position. This conclusion is based on the apostolic injunction that a

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1. Harold Underwood Faulkner, American Political and Social History, pp. 276-277.

2. W. H. T. Dau, Women Suffrage in the Church, pp. 5-9.

3. Lutheran Witness, vol. 51, no. 9, pp. 161-162.

4. W. Loy, The Rights of Women in the Church, p. 509.



women should keep silence in the churches, in all subjection, not assuming the authority over men. 1 Cor. 11, 3. 8. 9; 1 Cor. 14, 34. 35; 1 Tim. 2, 11. 12.<sup>1</sup> This position rests upon the Scriptural principle and is held, therefore, to be beyond alteration by changing social<sup>2</sup> theory.

The most contested issues of woman's rights, however, during Sihler's lifetime centered in the problems of their political status and their social privileges, as we have indicated in our brief survey of the woman's rights movement during the middle and latter decades of the 19th century. Sihler had a profound appreciation of the great benefits worked by Christianity for the women of the world. Nevertheless, he was not possessed of very enlightened sentiments with respect to the capabilities and potentialities of womanhood. His cultural background of conservative European society caused him to look with suspicion on such a popular program as the suffrage movement, aside from such more reasoned considerations as he found opposed to the advisability of promoting the public prominence of womankind. He perhaps read too much of his own predisposition on the matter of woman's relations toward man into his theological conclusions as well.

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1. P. E. Kretzmann, "The Position of the Christian Woman in the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, vol. 1, p. 351.

2. John H. C. Fritz, Pastoral Theology, p. 314.



He held, on his characteristically consistent Biblical premises, that the true call of the woman can hardly be understood from the light of natural reason. For the heathen, it seems proper to beat their wives as beasts of burden and machinery. This he found axiomatic in the conduct of Mohammedans, Mormons, and other heathen. Because Eve was the initiator of Adam's fall she was made subject to him. In America, he found, this natural order is often inverted. Instead of being next to him, the woman often towers above him. Instead of being the gentlemen of the house and respected, the man often plays only the lamentable role of fool and slave, for his Delila holds him in hemp ropes and leads him, through flattery and compliment, through sobbing and crying, until she has her way. All these aberrations in proper domestic life as evident in the new aggressiveness of women have their implications for the political situation. <sup>1</sup>

If women are given new political privileges the party-sympathy and the opposing carnal and hateful strife will be strengthened and made worse; for womankind is admittedly not equipped with concrete, temperate, and practical understanding, nor with a persevering will-power for political affairs and the public life. It cannot possibly fail that the emotional and easily swayed women will either become their own enthusiastic

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1. "Über den Beruf des Weibes und seine Entartung," Lutheraner, vol. 28, no. 9, pp. 65-67.



speech makers for their own political platform or else they will give their heart, tongue, and purse to any smooth-tongued demagogue. Then, he adds, with an ironic touch, the welfare of the land and of the people will be well provided for while at home the poor children meanwhile will be shamefully neglected and spoiled. "This land is confessedly a land of humbugs, in many respects a large house of fools with only the roof missing," concludes Sihler.

He held concomitant opinions with respect to the possibilities of professions or careers for women, education, and social activities. He deplored the tendency which he perceived toward the middle class and poor imitating the idleness and vices of the rich. He declared it to be no secret that girls increasingly did not desire motherhood. With small families, the older children do not learn to care for their younger siblings. After learning all sorts of things at schools for higher learning, which they cannot use later in their motherly callings, they waste their time. Sihler enjoyed caricaturing the activities of what he considered the life of the "modern" woman in a way that would have provided raw material for many a Benchley essay. Women, instead of rearing children, sit in the rocker, play a little at the piano, embroider, read a light novel, preferably romance, sing love songs, chat with frivolous girl-friends about dresses, games, young men, concerts



or theaters, cosmetics. Their first idolatry was primping<sup>1</sup> and slaving to fashions.

As far as the education of women is concerned, he was dismayed to hear that at Ann Arbor in 1870 twenty ladies were studying for a profession. As alternatives to professional work and careers, Sihler suggested that the woman take some work in line with household duties so that she should be better fitted for marriage should opportunity arise. The possibilities of desirable employment include work as house-servants, sewing women's clothes, teaching in a parochial school, deaconess work and nursing. But above all, motherlove is the greatest<sup>2</sup> blessing.

This sketch of his conception of the status and duties of women gives a comprehensive view of the attitudes which Sihler endeavored to impress upon his church-fellows. Many of his views, as, for example, the benefits to society of good home-makers, are certainly sound and laudable. It is a matter of record, however, that Sihler had no conception of the social rights and benefits of women which at this time seem self-evident. Though he was quick to foresee the abuses possible and the evils of extremists, he did not provide constructive leadership in meeting the social

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1. Ibid., p. 66.

2. Ibid., p. 67.



problems of the day. The leadership was assumed by men of the popular churches. Coeducation began at Oberlin, the child of Charles G. Finney. Luther's treatises on education, as well as his promoting education for girls, are too well known to leave any doubt that the somewhat negative attitude toward education for women had no organic relation to his theology. It was an attitude no doubt more closely related to his German background than to his Lutheran conviction. At any rate, as the Missouri Synod lost its cultural isolation, the opinion of Sihler on the advantages of female advanced training lost dominance. Lutheran education associations served as auxiliaries to the Synodical group in promoting coeducational high schools, academies, and colleges. That the strong will of a man like Sihler was directed against progress in this respect was no doubt a detrimental factor during the entire last century.

Sihler, however, also with respect to such a social problem as women's rights was not as exceptionally reactionary as his expressions might indicate. His views were shared, it is safe to say, by the majority of his contemporaries. His was the average and thoroughly acceptable point of view. In November, 1853, Harper's New Monthly Magazine asserted that the new women's suffrage movement had an "intimate connection with all the radical and infidel movements of the day. . . . It is avowedly opposed to the most time-honored proprieties



of social life; it is opposed to nature; it is opposed to revelation. . . . In this respect no kindred movement is so decidedly infidel, so rancorously and avowedly antibiblical."<sup>1</sup>

Though Sihler was no crusader for social progress and often in his strict conservativeness tended more toward reaction than positive leadership, the fact is that he was a practical man, keenly aware of social problems, right or wrong. His many private charities indicate his genuine concern for meeting human need. His many articles on innumerable questions of political and ethical philosophy prove that he was not reticent to articulate his views and mold public opinion. As a churchman, he worked at a time when his own church group was in no position for organized social work of any kind because of lack of numbers and poverty. Men who were busy conquering the frontier had neither time nor money for organized charitable enterprises. The Synod which Sihler helped build has with the passing years constantly increased the range and value of its concern for the needs of society. At present the property owned singly in the Synod for charitable purposes as orphanages, schools for deaf children, old people's homes, hospitals, and the like exceeds \$10,000,000 according to the 1945 evaluation. This total

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1. H. U. Faulkner, op. cit., p. 277.



in addition to the many projects operated jointly with Synodical Conference interests and in cooperation with other Lutheran synods indicates that the evangelical faith as Sihler held it has produced "the fruits of a good tree."



## Chapter VII

### Relations with Other Lutheran Churches

An extremely important aspect of William Sihler's work as a leading clergyman in the early decades of the Missouri Synod is the influence which he exercised in directing synodical relations with other Lutheran bodies in America. He was a powerful force, not only in influencing the policy of his own body, but in the influence he exerted on the trend in church affairs among the other Lutheran groups.

In 1792 the constitution of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, Muhlenberg's great achievement in organization, was changed eliminating all the references to the Lutheran confessions. There was a tendency to eliminate the points of difference between Lutheranism and Episcopalianism in the East and individual pastors of the Pennsylvania Synod considered a union with the Reformed Church though the leaders and the Synod as such never broached such a move.

The New York Ministerium which had been organized in 1775 through the work of one of Muhlenberg's sons passed at the death of its great leader, Dr. Kunze, a Lutheran of Muhlenberg's stripe, into the hands of Dr. Quitman of Rhinebeck, New York. Quitman, an



intellectual giant who received his D.D. degree from Harvard, was a disciple of Teller and of Semler in Halle and a determined protagonist of German rationalism. In 1807 this outspoken and consistent Socinian was elected president of the New York Ministerium, remaining in office until 1825. In 1814, in his own catechism which was likewise published with the approval of the Synod, he omitted and denied such fundamental doctrines as those of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the vicarious atonement, justification for the sake of Christ, and other doctrines, not only those peculiar as distinctive doctrines of Lutheranism, but also those held by historic Christianity. In this book Quidman and the New York Ministerium declared: "The Gospel teaches us that Christ suffered and died in order to seal with his blood the doctrine which he had preached." Two years later a "Lutheran Hymnbook" appeared containing an un-Lutheran order of service, the union formula of distribution, a rationalistic order for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, rationalistic prayers to the "great Father of the Universe," and the like. Throughout the Ministerium there was no complaint against this new catechism. "From Dan to Beersheba the Philistines and Tyreans were permitted to work destruction in Israel."

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1. F. Bente, American Lutheranism, vol. 1, p. 40.

2. A. L. Gräbner, Geschichte der Lutherische Kirche in America, p. 535.



When the General Synod was projected in 1819 the Tennessee Synod did not join because it was opposed to the non-confessional nature of the Synod. The Synod of Ohio did not join for practical reasons, the distance and an interest in a joint seminary with the Reformed. It seems evident that in the first decades of the 19th century, the whole position of Lutheranism was non-confessional, in portions altogether socialian and rationalistic, in most cases tending toward union with other church bodies. As the 19th century advanced, the Lutheran Church in America underwent the strain of two diametrically opposed developments theologically and in consequence, organically.

During the 19th century one current of thought was to lead Lutheranism toward a new type of theology labelled "American Lutheranism" and another current of thought, "confessional Lutheranism," was to come to grips with the new theology and eventually effect its complete dissolution. The two possible attitudes toward the confessions are representative of the varied theological approaches of the two opposing views. The problem is an old one and reminds us of the neat discussion by Johnson long ago in answer to Boswell's question: "Is it necessary, Sir, to believe all the thirty-nine articles?" Johnson replied: "Why, Sir, that is a question which has been much agitated. Some have thought it necessary



that they should all be believed; others have considered them to be only articles of peace, that is to say, you are not to preach against them.<sup>1</sup> The situation in America hardly lent itself to such understatement. The "American" Lutherans made an all out attack on the confessions of the Lutheran Church and the confessionalists insisted upon complete conformity to them. The stage was set for one of the most dramatic struggles in the history of the Lutheran Church in America.

American Lutheranism had been developing under the new trends in American religion. Quitsman's rationalism found its counterpart in Tom Paine's Age of Reason. It was the spirit of the times. The adoption of revival methods, Arminian theology, Puritan conceptions of piety was also insinuations of the religious tendencies of the times upon the Lutheran churches of the General Synod. In 1841 the General Synod sent Drs. S. S. Schmucker, Benjamin Kurtz, and J. C. Morris as representatives to the Evangelical Alliance in London to plan for an "Apostolic Protestant Union." This aim was endorsed by the General Synod in 1848. When Dr. J. W. Nevin wrote his book The Anxious Bench against the use of revivalists expedients for conversion which he saw as based on a low "Pelagianizing theory from beginning to end" and utilizing artificial means as sensational sermons, enraptured

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1. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Globe Ed., p. 209.



prayers, hysterical songs and stirring appeals, Dr. Kurtz in the Lutheran Observer <sup>1</sup> opposed him and promoted the use of these methods. The concern for personal piety tended toward a puritanical theological approach.

The leaders in this movement were especially B. Kurtz (1795-1865), S. S. Schmucker (1799-1873), and Sprecher (1810-1906), President of Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio. Schmucker was influential as the theology professor at Gettysburg Seminary and as author of many books and tracts, notably his Popular Theology. Kurtz was especially influential in his work as editor of the Lutheran Observer, an unofficial but powerful paper in the General Synod. These three men were the outstanding leaders in this new movement.

In September, 1855, a document circulated through the mails called the Definite Synodical Platform containing an American Recension of the Augsburg Confession. Schmucker had written this document with the approval of the other two men. It changed the essentially Biblical character of the Augsburg Confession, eliminating everything the authors considered objectionable to the religious men "of this latitude." Articles as Article II stating that new birth takes place through Baptism and the Holy Ghost, Article X regarding the real presence in the Sacrament, and Article XI commending private confession

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1. Neve-Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America, p. 86.



were deleted.<sup>1</sup>

Schmucker in his book, The American Lutheran Church Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, gave a fair summary of the program for American Lutheranism as he visualized it. He found satisfaction in the fact that for the first thirty years of the century the great body of the American Lutheran church had no human creed at all binding upon them.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of historical record he refers to the rejection of the Formula of Concord by Denmark, Hussia, Pomerania, and many free German cities.<sup>3</sup> He cites further that the Smalcald Catechism was rejected in Sweden and that the Smalcald Articles, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, and the Larger Catechism were rejected in Sweden and Denmark.<sup>4</sup> Thus he concludes that symbols are not essential to the historic character of Lutheranism. In his treatise on the Sacrament of the Altar he indicates that the objections to Luther's "first figurative interpretation" of the Lord's Supper is almost as objectionable as the Roman Catholic's transubstantiation. His objections show clearly the nature of his theological method and premises. Luther's interpretation must be rejected he argued, because

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1. Ibid., p. 98.
  2. Op. cit., p. 161.
  3. Ibid., p. 164.
  4. Ibid., p. 166.



- a) it contradicts the clear and indisputable testimony of our senses. .
- b) it also contradicts the observation of all ages and nations, that every body, or that material substance must occupy a definite portion of space and cannot be at more than one place at the same time.
- c) the glorified body, which is said to be received with the elements, had actually not yet any existence, and therefore could not have been given to His disciples at the Lord's Supper.
- d) the eucharist could not have conferred the broken body to the disciples at its institution, because it was not yet broken, crucified, dead.
- e) the old Lutheran theory cannot be correct, according to the language of Christ, because he says, Luke 22, 19: This do in remembrance of me, but we perform an act in remembrance of any person or event only when it is past and absent.
- f) those passages controvert it which represent Christ as having left this world, as having returned to the Father, and as being seated at his right hand in heaven.
- g) the supposition that the believer is to eat the actual flesh of his best friend and drink his real blood is a gross, repulsive, and unnatural idea, which nothing but the clearest evidence would authorize us to adopt.

These citations serve to indicate Schmucker and the American Lutherans' in general views on the symbols and the kind of procedure employed in deriving their doctrinal formulations. It is quite evident that this trend known as "American Lutheranism" was nothing new .

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1. Ibid., pp. 125-127.



and distinctively American or peculiar to the frontier spirit, but found its close ally in the rationalism and the confessional indifference of the union party in Germany in 1817. Clearly the theological battle in America would follow the same patterns of argumentation as the corresponding controversy in Germany.

Dr. B. Kurtz in 1857 founded the Melancthon Synod heralding its stand for American Lutheranism as its chief attraction and even deleting more articles from the Augsburg Confession than the Platform had done in 1855. The Synod was accepted into membership by the General Synod. In the same year the liberal Franckean Synod was admitted to the General Synod although it, also, had failed to acknowledge its consent to the Augsburg Confession as the norma normata of the faith though it intended to do so at its next session.<sup>1</sup> Affairs were moving toward a swift climax.

Meanwhile a series of circumstances culminated in the development of that party to which Schmucker contemptuously referred as the "symbolists." The Tennessee Synod had for some time been a provocative element refusing to join the General Synod. The founding of conservative synods outside of the larger body had a decided affect. The Buffalo Synod was founded in 1845

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1. Neve, op. cit., p. 103.



and the Missouri Synod in 1847. Walther editing the Lutheraner caused many to realize that the church had abandoned the historical platform of Lutheranism.<sup>1</sup> L  he's publication, the Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und   ber Nord-Amerika, 1842-1866, related the activities of missionaries like Wyneken and also criticized the un-Lutheran character of the General Synod with more or less telling affect. Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth later compiled his many essays in the Conservative Reformation which had a great influence in developing a "Lutheran Consciousness." The reaction against the Prussian Union in 1817 with its center in Breslau directed by Prof. Scheibel had a telling influence on the German-reading American Lutheran ministers. The writings of Hengstenberg, Sartorius, Guericke, Thomasius, Harless, Rudelbach and other dissenting Lutheran clergymen and scholars were spread among the American clergy by the spirited newly-<sup>2</sup> arrived missionaries from Germany. There was a growing unity of purpose among the younger theologians, especially the newly arrived German Seminary students. They held that the problems of disunion and confessionalism are strictly theological problems, and not merely questions of organization, not even merely of order, and were prepared to work on a common basis of Scripture and under its authority without feverishly rushing into ill

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1. Neve-Allbeck, op. cit., p. 91.

2. Ibid., p. 92.



considered plans of intercommunion, without even necessarily looking with any great favor on plans for union with other protestant groups which were the fruit of policy and piety rather than theological thinking. This is the group known as separatists or symbolists.

In the General Synod the Ministerium of Pennsylvania had for the most part through the use of the small catechism and through the maintenance of the German Lutheran hymns remained characteristically Lutheran in tone acknowledging the "collective body of the symbolical Book as the historico-confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church."<sup>1</sup> The trend toward conservatism in the Pennsylvania Ministerium led finally to its withdrawal from the General Synod at the York Convention in 1864. Dr. Schmucker resigned in February, 1864, from his position in the Gettysburg Seminary. On October 5 a new Seminary was opened at Philadelphia. It stood for the unconditional acceptance of all the symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Prof. C. F. Schaeffer of Gettysburg accepted the chair at Philadelphia. Dr. Krauth as editor of The Lutheran and Missionary made a continued attack upon the theology of the American Lutherans. In the Ft. Wayne meeting of the General Synod in 1866 the Pennsylvania Ministerium left the General Synod and the following year sent out a call for a new organization to be known as the General Council.

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1. Ibid., p. 105.



In the year 1860 the General Synod comprised two-thirds of the Lutherans in America and ten years later only one-fourth. Clearly the power favored the confessional forces of Lutheranism.

Throughout this period of the greatest development and the subsequent dissolution of the General Synod, William Sihler and his colleagues in the Missouri Synod were constantly active in extending their influence in favor of the confessional Lutherans within the General Synod. Sihler was intimately associated with the very central figures in this whole movement. His attitude coinciding with those of Walther, Wyneken, Cr  mer, and other leaders in the Missouri Synod was taken as the natural course in Synodical circles. That his views were felt beyond the confines of his own Synod may be seen from the subsequent survey of his activities.

In 1845, at the convention of the General Synod in Philadelphia, Wyneken, a delegate of the Synod of the West, made a bold, determined, and consistent stand for genuine Lutheranism against the prevailing unionistic and Reformed tendencies of the leaders of the General Synod. Wyneken, who in his pamphlet, "The Distress of the German Lutheran in North America," had characterized the General Synod as Reformed in doctrine, Methodist in practice, and Lutheran only in name, demanded at Philadelphia that the Synod should either drop the name Lutheran, or else reject as utterly un-Lutheran Schmucker's



Popular Theology, Portraiture of Lutheranism, and other writings, as well as Kurtz's tract on Infant Baptism, Why you are a Lutheran, and his many loose statements in the Lutheran Observer, as well as the Hirtenstimme of Weyl. No one on the floor of the convention, however, heard him with a sympathetic ear.<sup>1</sup> The General Synod was at this time altogether given to the idea that it was impossible to build a confessional church on the Reformed American soil. In an address delivered March 10, 1864, Dr. Philip Schaff declared that it was impossible to build a confessional Lutheran Church. He said it would be easier to divert the course of the Mississippi to Bavaria and convert the Chinese through German sermons.<sup>2</sup> This was the view and Wyneken was given no encouragement or even acknowledgement.

Sihler, as previously observed, was during the years the associate and successor of Wyneken and shared both his points of view and his place of exit. Sihler, of a family of militarists, was well groomed for polemics. Throughout the course of the following decades, it was Sihler who breastst the attack on the editorial position of the Lutheran Observer and engaged in many an editorial duel. These exchanges of verbal sallies did not in themselves influence either editorial board to change its views, but it does indicate that the interchange

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1. F. Bente, American Lutheranism, vol. II, p. 153.  
 2. Ibid., p. 154.



of ideas was actually a force to be reckoned with and that a sally from Sihler's pen had to be met with a counterthrust. This is perhaps a barometer of the extent of the interaction and influence of the new conservative movement on the liberal stand of the American Lutheran promoters.

In response to Kurtz's Why are you a Lutheran? Sihler undertook to write a counter-pamphlet on confessional grounds entitled Warum bist du ein Lutheraner?<sup>1</sup>

In November of the year of the organization of the Missouri Synod, 1947, Sihler, the first vice-president, had occasion to countermand a disparaging article in the Lutheran Observer. He was frank to the point of bluntness and grasped immediately the chief ground for difference as he saw it, the stand on the Confessions. The article referred to had been published in the Lutheran Observer, no. 1, vol. 15 and discussed the first meeting of the Missouri Synod held in Chicago that April. The contributor of the article, a Mr. Hermann, introduced his essay with these words:

"This new Synod is composed of narrow 'Alt-Lutheranern,' the true, perfect, orthodox, whose theology is so straight and perfect as the symbolical books can make them, and whose services are so stiff as any thorough-bred old-school people could wish them."

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1. Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, vol. 7, no. 1, February 27, 1945, p. 8.



To this Sihler objected that there is no such thing as "alt-Lutheranism" but only confessional and anti-confessional Lutherans. The General Synod should rather examine their doctrine of the Lord's Supper for example, to see whether it is founded in Scriptures. He encouraged Hermann, and the whole General Synod including Kurtz and Schmucker at the head to see whether or not the Missouri Synod's doctrine is grounded on Scripture. That the services are stiff, the contributor could hardly know, since he had by admission never attended one.<sup>1</sup>

Various members of the Missouri Synod at the first meeting were assigned to follow various Lutheran periodicals and Dr. Sihler was assigned to the Lutheran Observer.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar discussion on the symbols and the confessional position, this time in the theological journal of the new Synod, Sihler flayed Schmucker for opposing the acceptance of any who hold his doctrinal position to be unlutheran in the Observer of September 21. He found that although the statutes of the Seminary at Gettysburg hold the Augsburg Confession to be the norm of teaching, there was actually no symbolic authority ascribed to this proviso. He therefore saw the symbol of the General Synod as insufficient as a doctrinal basis, but a confession of complete indifference in

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1. "Der Lutheran Observer über unsere Synode," Der Lutheraner, vol. 4, no. 7, November, 1947, pp. 50. 51.

2. Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, vol. XIX, no. 3, p. 104.



matters of doctrine and godly truth, a confession of error and lying, a falsifying of the truth, an indication that they had "another spirit."<sup>1</sup> Criticism was highly pointed, often unfortunately personal.

During the first years of the Lutheraner many editorial expressions were merely initialed so that it is difficult to determine definitely who the writer was without access to the original manuscripts which are not available. Many other contributors, as Stelthorn and Schaller during the course of time, may well have written many of the articles initialed "S." Some, however, are characteristically in Sihler's pungent style and can hardly be mistaken. One article in the Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches, a column of observations on current events in the church, initialed "S" describes an article in the Observer praising Dr. Schmucker for his good appearance, friendliness, brilliance, and the like: "How fortunate, Achilles, that you have found a Homer" is the closing caustic remark.<sup>2</sup> This is illustrative of a type of personal affrontery which occurred with regularity in the columns of both opposing periodicals. Small wonder that many controversies grew acrimonious beyond the point of expectation.

The question of church fellowship and unionism was a

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1. "Die Generalsynode," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 6, no. 12, pp. 353-360.

2. Lehre und Wehre, vol. 6, no. 12, pp. 331-334.



natural outgrowth of the divergent views on the authority of Scriptures and the importance of the confessions as normative documents. The position of the General Synod with respect to the question of unionism was well delineated in the letter addressed by a committee appointed in 1845 by the Philadelphia convention to the Evangelical Church of Germany in order to defend herself against alleged detractors of her Lutheranism. The authors of this letter were Schmucker, Kurtz, Pohlmann, Morris, and H. I. Schmidt, then professor at Hartwick Seminary. The letter states that the General Synod requires only essential agreement in doctrinal views, strict conformity being impossible in America. Peace could be maintained only by an eclecticism, which adheres to essentials and passes over non-important matters. . . . "In most of our church-principles we stand on common ground with the Union Church of Germany. . . . The peculiar view of Luther on the bodily presence of the Lord in the Lord's Supper has long ago been abandoned by the great majority of our ministers, though some few of the older German teachers and laymen still adhere to it." <sup>1</sup> At the same convention the General Synod declared itself as "cordially approving the practice, which had hitherto prevailed in their churches, of inviting communicants in regular standing in either church (Lutheran and Reformed) to partake of

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1. F. Bente, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 58. 59.



the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the other, and of the dismissal of church-members, at their own request, from the churches of the one to those of the other denomination." <sup>1</sup> Also on this point of church union the issue was squarely joined.

Sihler explained carefully to the men of the General Synod in an open letter on the Lutheran Observer's comments on Missouri's position the reasons why he felt unable to fraternize with a clear conscience with all "Lutherans of the land." To do so would be 1) against God's Word which says that Christians are to a) avoid the heterodox and b) strive for the faith; 2) against our church for which we must strive to maintain purity of doctrine as a precious heritage; 3) against our consciences which oppose compromising a truth held as God's will for the sake of church polity; 4) against the true believing brethren everywhere who might be lead to indifference by an example of laxity; and 5) against the false brethren who <sup>2</sup> will be lead to further security in their error.

Throughout the subsequent years Sihler was active with spoken and written word developing and expanding this <sup>3</sup> thesis.

Another point of controversy especially pronounced

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1. Ibid., p. 55.

2. "Der Lutheran Observer über unsere Synode," Der Lutheraner, vol. 4, no. 7, p. 58.

3. Op. Thesen über Kirchengemeinschaft, Synodal Bericht, July, 1873, pp. 5-20; July, 1874, pp. 5-13; July, 1875, pp. 5-29; July, 1876, pp. 6-44; July, 1877, pp. 6-28; July, 1879, pp. 5-26.



later in the differences between the Missouri and the Buffalo Synods but cited also in connection with the General Synod's criticism was the matter of church government. The Missouri Synod had adopted the strictly congregational system of church government. The Synodical constitution of 1847 had in Article VII declared that the function of the Synod in relation to the congregation was and should remain merely advisory. This seemed a radically democratic organization to men of the General Synod.<sup>1</sup> As late as 1873 the Observer termed the congregational principle radical and lauded the early American Lutheran fathers for establishing the presbyterian form of government where the office of the ministry holds its proper powers. Sihler saw the so-called "conservative" theory of office as a useful bridge to episcopalian succession theory, even for a Roman hierarchy and the whole papal organization.<sup>2</sup> He consistently supported ministers in the General Synod who were fighting for congregational autonomy against what they conceived to be the usurpation of powers by the Synod.<sup>3</sup>

In the light of the present Protestant movement back to the use of the historic vestments and church decorations, an interesting clash of opinions centered

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1. Cf. Javelin, pp. 290-292.

2. "Der Observer auf dem Wege nach Rom," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 19, no. 1, p. 28.

3. "Auf welche Weise wurde die in dem New York Ministerium vorhandene Streitsache bei seiner diesjährigen Versammlung zu Utica verhandelt?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 24, no. 10.



in the introduction in a certain General Synod congregation of the altar and the crucifix. Dr. Kurtz had roundly attacked the particular minister involved for driving people into Methodism and had taken the occasion to score the "old-Lutherans" for their whole stand. Sihler objected that the outward forms, of course, had nothing to do with Lutheranism of any sort, but that the adherence to Biblical doctrines was important.<sup>1</sup> All this is illustrative of the constant exchange of opinions and interaction largely due to Sihler's aggressive spirit.

Gradually conservative sentiment gained ground and finally when the Pennsylvania Ministerium left the General Synod, Walther exclaimed, "Scarcely any event within the bounds of the Lutheran Church of North America has afforded us greater joy than the withdrawal of the Synod of Pennsylvania from the unionistic so-called General Synod. . . . The plan to give prominence and supremacy in this land, by means of the General Synod to a so-called American Lutheranism which ignores the distinctive doctrines of the Lutheran Church, and to compel the truly Lutheran Synods to occupy a separatistic isolated and powerless position, is completely frustrated by this step." Dr. Krauth, in an address delivered before the Pittsburgh Synod, in 1866, called it "the conflict of truth against error, truth against force, truth against

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1. "Der Lutheran Observer und die deutsch, lutherische Kirche zu Detroit," Lutheraner, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 25-28.



false compromise." Krauth was a leader in the General Council.<sup>1</sup> The defeat of American Lutheranism signified, according to the sincere belief of the church, "that Lutheranism can live and flourish in this country without giving away its own spirit or adulterating its own original life and character. The future of the Lutheran Church in America was to belong to the conservative type of Lutheranism."<sup>2</sup>

The General Council issued an invitation to all synods which confessed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, asking them to join hands. This call was prepared by Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth and is known as the "Fraternal Address." At the preliminary meeting held in Reading, Pennsylvania, December 11-14, 1866, delegates were present from thirteen synods, among them the Ohio, Iowa, and Michigan Synods. The Missouri Synod sent the Rev. J. A. F. W. Mueller as representative.<sup>3</sup> Sihler had advised against the organization of a new body at that time, deeming such an action altogether premature and arguing in favor of free conferences at which differences in doctrinal views might be discussed and unity of doctrine might be achieved. The Reading meeting did not

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1. S. E. Ochsensford, Documentary History of the General Council, pp. 91. 92.

2. A. R. Wentz, History of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Maryland of the U.L.C. in America, p. 210 as found in Paul W. Spaude, The Lutheran Church under American Influence, p. 286.

On United Lutheran confessional position cf. Remensnyder, The Lutheran Manual, p. 184.

3. W. G. Polack, Building of a Great Church, p. 108.



approve and replied: The synods represented in this convention which prefer a free conference to an immediate organization be and hereby are invited to send representatives to the next meeting, with the understanding that they have in it all the privileges of fraternal comparison of views.<sup>1</sup>

Sihler and his colleagues were not fully satisfied with the position of the General Council on questions of church practice, though the confessional stand was satisfactory. They almost immediately articulated their criticism in church periodicals. The Iowa and Ohio Synods had posed certain questions to the General Council, as the admittance of lodge members, open communion, pulpit fellowship with unbelieving pastors. The committee couldn't reach a unanimous decision and so it was hardly to be expected that the entire group would reach unanimity in convention. Sihler took occasion to belabor the practice of open communion and the points on which the open questions had been addressed to the Council. He felt that the Council's failure to make an open statement on these matters would hardly inspire trust on the part of others.<sup>2</sup> The Lutheran Missionary had described Lutheranism as divided into three parts. On the right was the Missouri Synod. On the extreme left was the General Synod. Between the two stood the General Council

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1. S. E. Ochsenford, op. cit. p. 144.

2. "Das Schweigen des General Council auf vorgelegt kirchliche Lebensfragen und die offene Erklärung aus seinem Heerlager über seine normale Stellung zwischen Missouri und der so. Generalsynode," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 43-50.



which clearly and honestly maintained the Lutheran Faith. Sihler was quick to reply that the Lutheranism of the extreme left was no Lutheranism at all, but rather methodistic-reformed, and it would be better if the strong practice of pure Lutheranism were adhered to in the General Council, for true Lutheranism combats all false doctrine. He lauded plans for liturgy in the General Council which would introduce the creed, antiphonies, and Amens patterned after Krauth's Church Book. For the further doctrinal development of the Council Sihler suggested 1) Lutheran teachings in Seminary and pulpit; 2) guarding against false doctrine; 3) practice of private confession as in communion announcements; 4) care of souls by pastors; 5) continued emphasis on the Word in all instruction.<sup>1</sup>

The matter of open questions was still further contended when Dr. Krauth, as chairman of a committee to answer certain questions posed by the Rev. Sieker of the Minnesota Synod, made some rather subtle and not too logical distinctions between the various kinds of heterodox. He distinguished between the heretics, those who oppose the catholic Christianity and the fundamental errorists who erred in certain important documents, but held to the central doctrine. The first objection which Sihler raised was whether this distinction is not

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1. Ibid., vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 78-85.



contradictory, for those who deny the chief doctrines are not in but outside the church with the Mohammedans, heathen, and Jews. But errorists are really rank heretics if they deny fundamental Christian doctrines and are also not in the fold, though in the church, 1 Cor. 11, 19. The second objection which he raised was whether the Reformed churches, as the Presbyterian, was a sister church or a fundamental errorist in view of its false teaching on predestination, the personal union, and the like. The natural conclusion, if that were allowed, would be that pulpit fellowship should follow. But a thousand times no, that should not be done for it would 1) harm the people, 2) injure the Word-bound conscience of the Lutheran preacher, 3) harm and sin against the love of the neighbor a) against the church, b) against fellow ministers, c) and against the presbyterian himself. We recognize in this formula Sihler's original argument against unionistic practices previously considered.

Criticism included also in its scope the stand on the Millenium taken by Dr. Krauth, Dr. Seiss and other Chiliasts in the Council. He described these leaders in the words of the German adage, "Das Maulthier sucht<sup>1</sup> im Nebel seinen Weg."

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1. "Dr. Krauth und das Millenium," "Das neueste Num Num des Councils," "Die Missouriier. . .," "Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 52.



In 1872 Sihler declared that the Missouri Synod was perfectly satisfied with the doctrinal basis of the General Council and the General Synod of the South and could have entered into affiliation with them on that basis but that they were obliged to hold themselves aloof from them because of certain fundamental practices<sup>1</sup> contrary to their strict doctrinal basis. Actually, however, Sihler felt so strongly on these points of doctrinal variation and practice that the thought of union never entered his mind. His own words were: "It has been five years since this organization was founded. It has meanwhile become evident that this General Council is by no means founded in zeal for pure evangelical, that is, Lutheran doctrine and confession and the accompanying practice." He took exception to the unionism still evident and the ambiguity of expression on the main doctrinal statements. He also felt the lack of poor churchmanship in the Council. For example, he observed that McGuffey's fifth reader used in the public schools was opposed in part to the Scripture. Instead of worrying about the establishment of the Church Book, the leaders should take definite steps for the establishment of the parochial schools.

Sihler purposed no compromise in meeting in union

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1. Carl Maueshagen, American Lutheranism Surrenders to the Forces of Conservatism, pp. 190-191.



with the General Council. His attitude was largely responsible, with that of Walther and the other leaders of the Synod, for leading the churches which held membership in the Missouri Synod away from fellowship with the Council in those days when the Council had made a material change toward confessional theology. Sihler held to his principle of no compromise with non-confessional positions throughout his ministerial career.

Sihler was particularly influential in regard to relations between the Missouri and the Ohio Synods. He had left the Ohio Synod because of his opposition to the loose doctrinal position and unionistic practices. Later historians of the Ohio Synod attribute this situation to the fact that the ministers lacked books, to the long tradition of faulty practice on the frontier, and reaction to the aggressive tactics of the critics, notably Dr. Sihler, commenting upon his controversial way, charging that he openly spoke of a congregation which had returned from Missouri to Ohio as a "Kloake, einen Abzugskanal."<sup>1</sup> These same writers concede that from a Lutheran standpoint the strife had driven the Synod to take a wrong position on both the matters of<sup>2</sup> language and regarding the confessional question. The Ohio men felt deeply the effrontery of these men who had so recently entered the Synod and immediately began so severe a critique. Father

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1. Peter and Schmidt, Geschichte Der Synode von Ohio, p. 96.

2. Ibid., pp. 95. 96.



Spiehlmann wrote: "A person might hold that such advances were a bit hasty and imprudent on the part of those who had been in the country so short a time and who had done nothing for the Seminary nor for the upbuilding of the church."<sup>1</sup> At any rate, as we observed previously, upon the ascendance of the "unionistic English" party in the Lancaster meeting in 1845, Sihler and his group left the Ohio Synod.<sup>2</sup>

The trend in the Ohio Synod also was definitely towards the confessional stand. In 1830 the celebration of the writing of the Augsburg Confession had inspired the founding of a new seminary at Columbus, Ohio, dedicated to the teaching of the Confession to the many ministers<sup>3</sup> needed to care for the huge demand in the West. Promptly upon the defection of Sihler and his group, the Ohio Synod hurried to make definite confessional commitments. At the General Synod meeting in Columbus, Ohio, June 17-24, 1848, much attention was paid to the Lutheran Confessional writings. In the ministerial session without debate they unanimously decided "that theministerium recognize the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church and promises to teach according to them, because they set forth Holy Writ correctly, and that in the future all applicants and ordination candidates should be tested according to them."<sup>4</sup> The Ohio Synod chroniclers add the observation:

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1. Ibid., p. 91.
  2. Deindorfer, op. cit., p. 12.
  3. Peter and Schmidt, op. cit., p. 40.
  4. Ibid., p. 115.



"We wonder whether Dr. Sihler and his companions' hearts did not beat a little faster as they read this specific confession of all Lutheran Symbols presented by the same Synod which three years previously they had left as being too English and too unlutheran?"<sup>1</sup>

The interaction between the Ohio Synod and the members of the new Missouri Synod, especially Dr. Sihler, was continuous during subsequent decades until the time of union in the Synodical Conference. Sihler never failed to comment on the proceedings of Ohio Synod assemblies. He never failed to score abuses such as the mixture of Lutheran and Reformed churches, the lack of loyalty to confessions, as in specific cases, for example, those of Pastors Gogelen, Heid, Heinicke, and others.<sup>2</sup> Rev. Lehman, editor of the official Lutheran Standard submitted a reply which was reprinted with Sihler's comment in a parallel column.<sup>3</sup> Sihler was quick to complain of irregular activities in the Synod.<sup>4</sup> A striking instance of this type of polemic was the defence made by Sihler against charges raised by the

1. Ibid., p. 116.

2. "Denkwürdigkeit aus der letzten Versammlung der West Ohio-Synode," Lutheraner, vol. 7, no. 14, pp. 109-111.

3. Lutheraner, vol. 7, no. 20, pp. 153-159.

4. "Das ehrw. Ministerium der lutherischen Synode von Ohio, westlichen Distrikts," Lutheraner, vol. 10, no. 16, pp. 121-126.



Ohio Synod against the Central District of the Missouri Synod for accepting a certain Rev. Eirich who had left the Ohio Synod. Sihler maintained that Eirich had left for reasons of conscience, because although the Synod had passed a resolution condemning lodges, Pastor Henkel himself belonged to one. He then listed eight reasons why the Ohio Synod dealt unfairly with Eirich. <sup>1</sup> Party spirit was strong in many instances. <sup>2</sup>

Sihler felt that he had acted in a true spirit. In 1851 he said: "God is my witness that my testimony against the Ohio Synod sprang from honest zeal for the honor of God and the welfare of the Church. If Synod had received our first request with only the same measure of good will, <sup>3</sup> the whole situation today might be different. The actual impact of the consistent attention devoted to Ohio affairs by the Missouri brethren was telling. The editor for many years of Ohio's Lutheran Standard in a brief history of his Synod relates, "Also during this time the Lutheraner, edited with zeal by Prof. Walther, a mighty warrior and promoter of pure Lutheranism, appeared, as a herald, in the far West, as a new life

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1. "Verhandlungen der zwanzigsten Versammlung des westlichen Districts der Evang.-luther. Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten, gehalten in der St. Paulskirche zu Dayton, Ohio, vom 20. bis 28. Juli, 1860," Lutheraner, vol. 17, no. 13, pp. 97-102.

2. Cf. the regrets of the Ohio men that by not accepting the Concordia Synod they lost the West to the Iowa and Missouri Synods: Peter and Schmidt, op. cit., p. 172.

3. Theodore Engelder, "Why Missouri Stood Alone," Ebenezer, p. 46.



in Zion. The Lutheran Standard under my editorial supervision received at times good ideas and wholesome teaching from this terse paper, which I acknowledge gladly at this time in retrospect. . . . So the Ohio Synod, as also several other synods of the West, under the mighty leadership of God, through many trials and battles, step by step were lead to a correct understanding and true holding to the Confessions under the influence and leadership of the Missouri Synod joined as a member of the Synodical Conference, founded in 1872, in complete doctrinal unity, and a great church body."<sup>1</sup>

For our present purposes we may note that the shift of the many Lutheran synods under the influence of Missouri as indicated by Lehman had another effect. Sihler and the other leaders in writing for the benefit of the other churchmen, also, conversely, consolidated the position of the Missouri Synod both as to its own doctrinal and practical stand, but also in pointing up to it its own mission as a guide and watchman.

By the time of the subsequent Predestinarian Controversy which disrupted the Synodical Conference, Sihler was too far advanced in years to participate very actively.<sup>2</sup> He did find it necessary to explain some statements on doctrine he had made twenty-five years

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1. W. F. Lehman, Abriss der Geschichte der evangelischen Synode v. Ohio und anderen Staaten, pp. 172 173.

2. For an account of this controversy, cf. Hochstetter, op. cit., pp. 365 ff.



previously which were used by Ohio to show that Missouri<sup>1</sup> had two doctrines of predestination at one time. The opposition to Walther was bitter and he was accused of double dealing and deliberate misleading.<sup>2</sup> Ohio left the Conference and later, in 1930, joined the Iowa and Buffalo in the American Lutheran Church. These later developments were largely beyond the influence of Sihler, for his days of leadership were spent.

In the earlier days when Missouri was developing its ultra-democratic synodical system, its chief European sponsor, Pastor Löhe, sided with the opposing views of the Iowa and Buffalo synods. Sihler in the official publication explained that Löhe was wrong in his views on the office of the ministry, the universal priesthood, and the synodical powers. The school at Ft. Wayne, he wrote, never had more pupils than when Löhe stopped sending them over.<sup>3</sup> He closed with a prayer for Löhe's friendship. Dr. Fritschel wrote in the Dorpater Zeitschrift in which he maintained that the Iowa Synod in matters of church government was the mean between the democratic Missouri Synod and the Buffalo high churchism. Sihler made continued elaborate defences of the scriptural authorization of the congregational system and eventually also this view

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1. "Eine Kurze Erklärung," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 58.

2. Peter and Schmidt, op. cit., p. 190.

3. "Herr Pfarrer Löhe's Bericht über uns und dessen Beurtheilung nach Wehrheit und Gerechtigkeit," Lutheraner, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 89-94.



came to prevail in the various Lutheran Synods of the land.<sup>1</sup> He was active in the negotiations and inter-synodical discussions of the doctrinal basis for church government, church discipline, the ministerial office, ordination,<sup>2</sup> and related questions. After the Colloquium in Milwaukee showed that Iowa wished to hold to her Neuen-dettelsau views in preference to Paul's, Dr. Sihler opined: "Afterward, as before, this apparently Lutheran Synod, from which at any rate several members left, remained in its vacillation, in its slippery "yes and no" theology, in its lax position on the confessions and its acceptance, contrary to Scripture of the so-called 'open question'. She remains the case of L  he's later errant views."<sup>3</sup>

The present church situation exists today substantially as Sihler and his colleagues of the early years left it, as far as relations with other synods are concerned. The Synodical Conference has made no substantial increases through the addition of large synods. The total movement of the Lutheran bodies toward conservatism is perhaps best summarized by the statement of long-lived Professor

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1. "Was von uns Wahres und Falsches berichtet wird," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 7, no. 8, pp. 232. 235.

2. Protokoll   ber die Verhandlungen des Colloquiums gehalten in Buffalo, New York vom 20. November bis 5. December, 1866.

3. Hochstetter, op. cit., pp. 256. 309.



Samuel Sprecher who had with Schmucker and Kurtz sponsored American Lutheranism. In 1891 he wrote: "It is true that I did once think the Definite Synodical Platform - that modification of Lutheranism which perhaps has been properly called the culmination of Melancthonianism - desirable and practical, and that I now regard all such modification of our creed as hopeless. In the meantime an increased knowledge of the spirit, methods and literature of the Missouri Synod has convinced me that such alterations are undesirable; that the elements of true Pietism - that a sense of the necessity of personal religion and the importance of personal assurance of salvation - can be maintained in connection with a<sup>1</sup> Lutheranism unmodified by the Puritan element."

Within the Missouri Synod the doctrinal position formulated by the founders has continued as the accepted stand of the church. In church practice, those statements formulated by Sihler with respect to unionism, basis for church fellowship, the rights and powers of the Synodical organization, and the various criticisms of high churchism previously discussed remain the normal practice of the Synod. Truly Sihler's influence, with that of his colleagues, was one of great power.

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1. Neve-Allbeck, op. cit., p. 113.



## Chapter VIII

### The German Church

The Lutheran Church of America was largely isolated socially and intellectually from American Protestant Church life for the greater part of the preceding century by language and racial barriers. Consequently, the ties with the Church in Germany seemed particularly important to the young church in America. The stress laid on this feature of church interest is graphically illustrated in the news column of the Lutheraner. There the column, Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches, was divided into two sections, the one for America and the other for the "Ausland."

The Confessional Lutheran Church of America felt itself bound to the confessional element in Germany. It supported the non-conformist and anti-Union independent churches wherever it was possible. We have seen that, after his conversion, Dr. Sihler associated for the most part with men of definite Lutheran consciousness, as Dr. Rudelbach and William Löhe. Also in this country he determined to guide his church away from unionism on the pattern of the Evangelical Church of Germany and to direct all the encouragement and support possible to the



German independent or free churches. His written commentaries on the situation in the German church are extremely numerous and voluminous. We may select characteristic references representative of the attitudes which he helped instill in the membership of his own church in America.

By way of attitude, Sihler professed the independence of the Church in America. He would have nothing to do with any suggested organic connection with the German church. At one time Pastor Munkel, editor of the Hecklenburger Gotteskasten, denounced the Lutherans of Missouri for having acquired American ways, seeking to look self-sufficiently at the mother-church while still in its learning years. Sihler raised the question as to who the mother-church was. He held the church in Germany to be that mother-church only insofar as it preached the pure doctrine, the confessions, and opposed false teaching. But where was such a church at whose breasts the newborn church could receive the sincere milk of the Word? The church of Germany he felt to be so permeated with philosophy that Father Luther would abhor it. The mother-church would not hear the voice of her true sons,<sup>1</sup> but romanized in practice and liberalized in doctrine.

Sihler was altogether opposed to the work of the Church Union of 1817. He called it the "blinding work

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1. "Das neue Zeitblatt über uns arme Missourier," Lehre und Wehre, vol. VIII, no. 2, pp. 43-49.



of the devil."<sup>1</sup> The first of the two major issues of variance between the Missouri Synod and the church of Germany was that of church government. The Synodical Constitution of 1847 had provided for a congregational system with advisory powers for the Synod. Walther reiterated this position as the scripturally sound and therefore as the God-pleasing form of church government in his writing Kirche und Amt. This position, also held by Sihler after his contacts with Walther, was diametrically opposed to the whole philosophy behind the church government of the State Church of Germany and he was not slow in articulating his opinion. Dr. Huschke maintained that any order of church government of human institution was as divinely instituted as the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments and that the government set up over more congregations is as sacred and God-pleasing and given to the Church forever as the rule of the pastor and the congregation. Pastor Diederich criticized the Prussian arrangement and Dr. Sihler was quick to take up the argument against Huschke. He maintained that on the basis of the New Testament and its precedent, Huschke's sanction of government and men-dominated churches was inexcusable and altogether against the right of the universal priesthood of all believers to be supreme in

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1. "Zur kirchlichen Lage in Deutschland," Lutheraner, vol. 33, no. 22, pp. 169-170.



the church, the original Lutheran principle.<sup>1</sup>

This servility and submission of State Church clergymen reached its most reprehensible depth in the sermon of the court preacher Dr. Hoffmann on the text, "We ought to obey God rather than man." He preached as follows: "To the end of time obedience to the State is the same as obedience to God. To be able to say I do not obey the government but I obey God, one would have to have the office of an apostle and the holiness of an angel. And even then he would have to say, I have a command of the Government and in earthly things this for me is compelling." Sihler countered: "This may sound good in the ears of the earthly princes, but how does it sound in the ears of the true King? Court preachers should follow the example of John the Baptist."

The second major issue which Dr. Sihler found to criticize in the Prussian State Church was the absolute lack of doctrinal uniformity on the one hand and of confessional loyalty on the other. He noted with particular alarm the trend toward philosophic conceptions of Christian doctrines and the swing toward free thought in Germany. Pantheistic atheism ruled with overwhelming power in Germany. This spirit was aided within the church by the critical protestant theology. Dr. Schenkel

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1. "Eine seltsame Behauptung des Herrn Dr. Husehke," Lehre und Wehre, vol. VIII, no. 5, pp. 138-142.



of Heidelberg had sided with Renan's Life of Jesus in his Characterbild Jesu. Professor Rothe had defended him in this thesis and all that within the bounds of the German State Church. Sihler felt that pride was the dominant sin in the State Church as manifested by desires for organic union of all elements and the resultant large numbers in the church and by the acceptance of modern philosophy and rejection of Redemption-theology.<sup>1</sup>

Sihler felt that the Union had contributed to the doctrinal corruption of the churches also of the various provinces. For about a hundred years after the Reformation, the churches of Hessen had been most viril and active, but the Prussian Union and the doctrinal dissolution had led the Church finally to the formation of the State Synod of 1873 which represented a weak and ineffective combination of all elements into a lifeless mass. Similar trends had developed in Breslau, in Gleszen, and other provinces of Germany. So opposed to the State Church was Sihler that he classed it with the Roman Catholic Church in his esteem. He characterized Emperor Frederick William IV as a soft-feeling man, no Lutheran, who supported the union of the Reformed and Lutheran, allowing many Roman practices in the Church. This pleased the Jesuits. The Catholics were becoming active in the

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1. "Geht's vorwärts oder rückwärts?" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 83-88.



political field, since Bismarck did not show the same dexterity in discerning religious views as he did political. In the Reichstag the State Church was opposed by the Catholic Church and the poor people were being "ground between two millstones."<sup>1</sup>

For this reason Sihler could see no hope for Lutheranism within the confines of the State Church and supported rather the effort at the maintenance of free churches. The confessional Lutheran pastors of the Berlin conference had stated their determination to act as a leaven within the State Church. Sihler replied by stating his apprehension that this effort to act as a leaven would remain only a pious wish. He held it to be impossible for the Lutheran Church to remain with the Reformed because the Reformed Church was "no sister church, but a spoiled and unbelieving church communion and the State Church the work of the Devil."<sup>2</sup> The practical result of remaining within the State Church would be the repression of a frank scriptural confession and the witness of the Lutheran Church so that this indifference results partly in unbelief and partly in papistic practices. The Consistories and superintendents are frequently rationalists and they made it impossible for those confessional Lutherans under them in the

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1. "Die römische Kirche in deutschen Reich," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 23, no. 1.

2. "Die Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung über die Berliner Augustconferenz," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 20, no. 4, p. 97.



hierarchical set up to make any progress in their protestations. The only course of action open to confessional Lutherans was to declare the doctrine openly and fight the false teachers.

Sihler looked to the free churches of Germany for such support as they could give the young church in America. After the difficulties with Ldhe already referred to previously, the Synod turned to another confessional Lutheran for aid, Pastor Brunn. He established a preparatory school at Steeden after Wyneken's visit in 1860. Pastor Hieronymus also supported this school. The fraternal relations with the German Church therefore was limited to intercourse with the free and independent churches.<sup>1</sup>

An interesting instance of the interaction between specific personalities of the American and the German churches is afforded by the exchange of compliments by the noted scholar Dr. Hengstenberg and Dr. Sihler. Hengstenberg in 1828 became a full professor of theology at the University of Berlin. By his work of the interpretation and defense of the Old Testament he became the staunchest defender against rationalism, unionism, and the mediating theology of his day. As a mouthpiece of his testimony he founded in 1827 the Evangelische Kirchenzeitung and

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1. W. Wöhling, Geschichte der Ev. Lutherischen Freikirche in Sachsen und a. St., pp. 18. 19.



for forty-two years was its chief contributor. Author of many works including Christologie des alten Testaments, Beitraege zur Einleitung ins Alte Testament, and Offenbarung Johannis, he was one of the stauncher Lutherans within the State Church. Nevertheless, his position did not satisfy Sihler and he was not slow in apprising him of the fact. At infrequent intervals Sihler published his observations on Hengstenberg's work.

On one occasion Hengstenberg had made some acrid comments on the Missouri Synod. He had been sent to America by the Prussian Church and subsequently wrote that the "poor Lutherans of Saxony, Stephan's emigration, after some time in retirement had become vocal in a sharp, bitter, and inimical manner." Sihler held that not one of the church papers of the Saxons had this tone, nor did anyone believe that outside of Trinity Church in St. Louis "only devil's chapels" exist. He criticized Hengstenberg's judgment that the Ohio Synod represented the true Lutheranism, for that Synod erred in ordination,<sup>1</sup> unionism, lack of witness, and in the examination system.

He did not fail to praise Hengstenberg's contribution to Biblical theology, however. He lauded him highly for his stand against rationalism, his constancy during the outbreaks of 1848, and his promotion of a conservative

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1. "Ein deutsche Unionsmen über uns arme Lutheraner," Lutheraner, vol. 4, no. 17, pp. 131-133.



view of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, he regretted that Hengstenberg sanctioned the Union and did not appreciate the Confessions fully. He believed that when 14,000 State Church pastors signed the Augsburg Confession it was merely an enthusiastic and dramatic gesture without significance, since the Reformed could not possibly accept Article III.<sup>1</sup> This exchange of opinions by Hengstenberg and Sihler is typical of the interaction of this churchman with many men of the German church.

Sihler represented a point of view which he assisted in imparting to the Synod and which is the dominant point of view in the Synod today. The Missouri Synod today prefers the Free Church to the State Church and is in fraternal relations with several such free church conferences. It is opposed to union churches in Germany, for reasons of doctrine and church government, as is evident from its opposition to the newly formed Evangelical Church in Germany.<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Synod is not a member of the Lutheran World Convention.<sup>3</sup> Sihler's background and policy have had a decided influence on Synodical relations with the German Church.

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1. "Einige Bemerkungen über etliche Stellen des Vorworts der evang. Kirchenzeitung des Hrn. Prof. Hengstenberg vom Jahre 1867 unter der Ueberschrift: 'Die lutherische Kirche und die Union,'" Lehre und Wehre, vol. 13, no. 5, pp. 137-149; no. 6, pp. 171-180; no. 7, pp. 196-200.

2. Cf. review by F. E. Mayer of Stewart W. Herman's The Rebirth of the German Church, Concordia Theological Monthly, vol. 17, no. 11, pp. 876-878.

3. Cf. Lutherischer Weltkonvent zu Paris, Berlin: Offizin Haag-Drugulin, 1939.



## Chapter IX

### Relation to other Churches

The 19th century was religiously as well as politically one of turbulence. Just as sectionalism grew stronger toward the middle of the first century of America's political history, so the first century of the National Period among the churches was marked by a growing sectarianism. The accent was on individualism. The religious scene was one of disunity and divisions, sharp competitive spirit, and lack of understanding. It was truly freedom's ferment.

With the rapid progress and development of the frontier sectarian churches, new problems were posed for the older communions. William Sihler was typical in his reactions to the new developments of frontier religion. A point of special interest is the interaction at that point where the young protestant churches breached the language barrier and entered the arena of German language work. This will be considered in some detail.

Sihler as a Lutheran possessed all the animus against the Roman Catholic Church which the tradition required. In 1871 he exulted in the deposition of the papacy from the papal estates through the rising of Italian national



sentiment under Cavour and King Victor Emanuel of  
 Piedmont.<sup>1</sup> To him, as to protestantism in general  
 during the 19th century, the pope was the very anti-Christ.  
 This opinion was never altered. He belabored the papal  
 ambitions for temporal power and sounded constant warnings  
 against the growing strength of the Catholic Church  
 citing such expressions printed in the Catholic World as  
 the Bishop of Charleston's prophecy that "the man is  
 already born who would see the majority of this land  
 catholic."<sup>2</sup>

Sihler's views of the Church and of the churches  
 were in the main not directed by a party or sectarian  
 spirit. Rather they were the result of a genuine concern  
 for what he considered the essential Christian faith.  
 He believed that the Lutheran Church observed the "pure  
 ecclesiastical form of the Christian church in antithesis  
 to the Romish-papistical Church on the one hand and the  
 Reformed church and all the sects which had developed from  
 it on the other hand."<sup>3</sup> Upon arrival in America he had  
 addressed a series of eight letters to Herr Schmidt,  
 the editor of the Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, an unaffiliated  
 conservative paper, in which he set forth the best features

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1. "Das Papstthum und die Unionisten," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 107-112.

2. "Ziele und Pläne der römisch-päpstischen Kirche in America," Lehre und Wehre, vol. 25, no. 10, pp. 233-293.

3. "Achter Brief" to the editor of the Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, vol. 6, no. 15, August 8, 1844, pp. 116-118.



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of Lutheranism. He wrote that the Lutheran Church is the correct church in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church because it accepts God's Word pure and simple and not a) tradition, b) semi-pelagianism, c) good works for justification, d) nor impure sacraments.

The Lutheran Church is the correct church, he maintained, in antithesis to the Reformed Church with its rationalistic and unbelieving errors as a) the reduction of the sacraments to a symbol, b) the denial of the genus majestaticum, c) trying to explain the secret of predestination, and d) the wrong form of the church government. It is, therefore, opposed to false union, all errorists, all enthusiasts, and all rationalists. Sihler engaged in many disputations. He roundly condemned theologians for suggesting innovations in church order such, as allowing the congregation to vote for a new minister once a year.

At times apologetics became polemic true to the best Flacian tradition. Typical is the following excerpt from the Lutheraner:

"In the missionary paper The Western Missionary of

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1. Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, vol. 6, no. 2, February, 1844; vol. 6, no. 3, February 15, 1844; vol. 6, no. 6, March 23, 1844; vol. 6, no. 7, April 11, 1844; vol. 6, no. 8, April 25, 1844; vol. 6, no. 9, missing from Passavant's volume kept in the libraries of Gettysburg Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; vol. 6, no. 10, May 23, 1844; and vol. 6, no. 15, August 8, 1844.

2. "Merkwürdiges Zeugnis des Miethspredigers W. Suhr in Cincinnati," Lutheraner, vol. 6, no. 7, pp. 52-54.



the German Reformed Church, Columbus, Ohio, December 15, 1849, a certain Mr. Adam tells of the Rev. Sihler preaching in Huntington, who asked all true Lutherans to arise and about ten or twelve stood up. 'These are Lutherans,' he said, 'and all the others are lost.' On another occasion Rev. Sihler preached in Pfaff's settlement, refused to baptize a child in the Reformed faith, stating that all are lost." Sihler continues by denying the charge, relating the actual occurrence in Huntington, denied ever hearing about a Pfaff's settlement, and admonishes Mr. Adam to subdue his old Adam which beguiles him into  
<sup>1</sup>  
 falsehood.

In general, however, the lances were broken over matters of dogma and church practice, rather than indulgence in personal affronts. The Roman Catholics and the Evangelicals he had met with in Germany. The latter he frequently scored for their "enthusiastic" unconfessional position a) not opposing attacks on Scriptures, b) not defending the confessions, c) lax and lazy in spreading the truth,  
<sup>2</sup>  
 and d) unionistic.

Dr. Sihler was in general even more intently and energetically opposed to the many other protestant churches which were growing more numerous and stronger in Middle America. Letters of the missionaries located in northern

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1. "Nothgedrungene Widerlegung und Berichtigung," Lutheraner, vol. 6, no. 18, pp. 141-142.

2. "Was waren Evangelische und was sind Evangelische?" Lutheraner, vol. 2, no. 17, April 18, 1846, pp. 65-67.



Illinois to the Home Missionary Society contain much information regarding the rapid flow of population into this region after 1829. The foundations of Presbyterianism in this area were largely laid by New England men. Many of them were of the type that Dr. Sihler could not appreciate. An example of these frontier missionaries was Flavel Bascom who graduated from Yale as one of the New Haven band. In 1833 he went to preach in Illinois for the American Home Missionary Society. He married, conceded this to be a mistake, divorced his wife on the ground that this was the lesser of two evils. Such a procedure would have been unthinkable to Dr. Sihler. Yet Bascom writes in his autobiography that his first text was "Unto you that believe he is precious," since this enabled him to strike what he intended to be the keynote of his whole ministry, viz., "Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup> and him crucified."

The Congregational Church was at a disadvantage in the German language work. Most of the ministers were recruited from Germany and Switzerland. Congregationalism as church polity was not known among the Germans. The stress on relating a conversion experienced as a prerequisite for church membership also made the German work difficult for the Congregational Church and men like

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1. William W. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1850, pp. 231-234, 252.



Peter Fluery, the first German Congregational missionary,<sup>1</sup> were rather rare.

The language problem worked conversely in favor of the sectarian churches as a later Lutheran chronicler relates: "The Lutheran Church instead of advancing in members and strengthening itself by the training of its successive generations lost incalculably much by the exodus of each successive generation from its borders, and for many years had to fall back again upon the material furnished by new arrivals from abroad. It was always beginning and always behind."<sup>2</sup> The Lutheran Church was still a foreign church in contrast to a church such as the Disciples or Christians with founders as Stone who was a native American of old colonial stock born in Maryland, educated in North Carolina, after spending his boyhood in Virginia. The ideas of such a church<sup>3</sup> were union and restoration.

The great church bodies of Protestantism during those decades were the Baptist and Methodist conventions. Their growth during the decade from 1830 to 1840 was particularly large. In Illinois the Methodists grew<sup>4</sup> from 6,000 to 30,000 in ten years. Methodism was directly

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1. George J. Eisenach, A History of the German Congregational Church in the United States, pp. 4. 14.

2. C. W. Schaeffer, Early History of the Lutheran Church in America, p. 142.

3. W. E. Garrison, An American Religious Movement, p. 10. Cf. also, Garrison, Religion Follows the Frontier.

4. W. W. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1850, p. 232.



the fruit of a religious awakening which began in England a little before the middle of the 18th century, the evangelical revival.

As Dr. George Croft Cell used to say to his classes in Boston University School of Theology, Wesley stood on the shoulders of Martin Luther, just as Martin Luther stood on the shoulders of the Apostle Paul.<sup>1</sup> The theology of 19th century Methodism was still evangelical.<sup>2</sup>

The Methodist Church had also made aggressive expansion movements on the Continent. By the year 1869 the Methodist Church in Germany numbered 6,956. It was scattered over the whole land and was especially active in Saxony and Wuerttemberg. It had 321 preaching stations with fifty-six ministers. The printing house in Bremen had in the preceding nineteen years printed 251,069 books and 311,900 tracts, Bibles, and Testaments.<sup>3</sup> Methodism had entered the German language arena in force.

The man who is called the father of German Methodism, Wilhelm Nast, had a singularly striking development. It paralleled Sihler's in many respects. Wilhelm Nast was born on June 15, 1807, in Stuttgart, the capital of Württemberg. For three centuries his ancestors had been scholars and clergymen in the Evangelical Lutheran Church

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1. Charles Edwin Schofield, We Methodists, p. 7.
  2. Henry C. Sheldon, "Changes in Theology among American Methodists," American Journal of Theology, vol. 10, pp. 31-52.
  3. Oskar Böttner, Die ev. Freikirchen Deutschlands, p. 115.



of that province. At an early age his upbringing was intrusted to his oldest sister, Wilhelmina, who like his other two sister, had married a Lutheran clergyman. At the seminary at Blaubeuren he was under the influence of Rationalists who were dominating German thought. His companionship there with David Friedrich Strauss was most important. Professor Kern and Professor C. F. Bauer infused into him a deep love of the classics. He lost his conviction in the original Lutheran faith, became a rationalist. In America through a remarkable series of coincidences, as his biographer relates, as though directed by God, he was lead to the Methodist Church and experienced conversion.<sup>1</sup> He became the leading figure in German Methodism. Promoter of The Christian Apologist, translator of Wesley's sermons in the books Sammlung auserlesender Predigten, 1856, editor with P. Schmucker of the German Methodist hymnal, Sammlung von Geistlichen Liedern, which gave translations for hymns with such tunes as Conflagration, Mystery, The Old Hundred, and Will Ye Go? An example of his preaching may be found in the final sermon of Kopp's Die Deutsch-Amerikanische Kanzel, a volume which was dedicated to him. This sermon has for its theme: The threefold relationship of Christ to his Church. The text is: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church." Dr. Sihler would

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1. Paul F. Douglass, The Story of German Methodism, pp. 1-21.



surely approve of the parts stressing the Lordship of the divine Savior, His activity in building the Church,<sup>1</sup> and, thirdly, that therefore the Church belongs to Him.

Spiritually Nast and Sihler were brothers. Both had found the rationalism of German schools spiritually unpalatable. Both had undergone great emotional crises concomitant to their conversion. Both embraced a fundamentally identical view of man, his spiritual condition, the person of God, the work of the Redeemer, and the origin and authority of the Scriptures. But this affinity did not serve as a centripetal force. There were other factors which lead these two men away from each other and caused them to lead their church bodies on opposite paths. The Lutherans had stoutly opposed the "new measures" of frontier Methodism.<sup>2</sup> Sihler's friend and colleague Wyneken had been the first who not only in America but also in Germany opposed Methodism. Wyneken had been opposed by many pastors of the State Church who advised emigrants to join the Methodists in this country. Pastor Mallet in Bremen was one such an advocate of close relations with the Methodists. But Sihler had broken with the state church and, as might be supposed, he broke also with this position. The Lutheraner in the first three issues took up the gauntlet

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1. Pp. 579 ff.

2. Oehsenford, op. cit., p. 55.



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against Methodism.

Sihler joined the issue with Methodism squarely. There was never to be traffic with this "sect." One of the longest and most thorough critiques of Methodism which Sihler produced was published in the Lutherische Kirchenzeitung in 1844. It presented all of the major differences between the two communions and served as an anti-sectarian platform in Conservative Lutheran circles for many years and according to Hochstetter was reprinted by Concordia Publishing House in folio form.<sup>2</sup> The study takes the form of a dialogue between two Lutherans, Martin and Philipp, concerning the Methodist church and doctrine.

The first conversation discusses the "hauptsitz der Krankheit." Martin explains to Philipp, the foil, that he had been inwardly a Methodist for ten years, but that it was a "law-school" to him. The stress of the FEELING of sorrow and anxiety more than on an appreciation of the love of God results a) in the promotion of a subtle form of inner work-righteousness and consequently b) to legalism. When the emotional uplift has worn off, the preachers can do little but advise the people by special prayer and struggle to regain their former feeling.

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1. Hochstetter, op. cit., pp. 98. 142-146.
  2. Op. cit., p. 146.



Only the exceptional people get beyond this level of theology, a) beyond the impressions of God's word to the Word of promise itself and the truth and faithfulness of God, b) lose the pride of that first human effort with its idle self-viewing and introversion, c) direct themselves to the bald naked obedience of faith to the Scriptures.

It is, of course, not possible to give the development of the entire lengthy narrative, but the following provides an interesting sample of his method of developing the dialogue in a most intriguing style.

Martin narrates: "One time I asked a Methodist preacher who had preached for twelve years what was meant by what I had read in the Apologist (Nast's paper) in the printed essay of the Rev. N.H., 'Yesterday (at turning to the anxious bench) ten souls came to the glorious freedom of children of God!'"

Answer: "Well, they felt the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins in Christ powerfully in their hearts and testified aloud in their mouths."

I: "But suppose by morning they don't feel it anymore, what then?"

He: "Well, then they must pray solemnly and struggle so that they may feel it again."

I: "What if this does not help and the dryness increases rather than decreases?"

He: "They must pray more earnestly and strenuously."

I: "Suppose they cannot do this, yes, even the law and conscience opposing them and the hardness becomes fear,

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1. Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, vol. 6, no. 18, September 19, 1844.



- then what?"
- He: "Then they are not thoroughly converted."
- I: "But they were on the anxious and grace bench and in the Apologist it was printed that they came into the glorious freedom of the children of God."
- He: "Yes! But there are many who fall away."
- I: "Then you should at least be a bit more cautious and not always immediately put so hurriedly and cautionless the exact number in the Apologist as though you could count hearts and knew precisely what was in man's heart. . . ."
- At last he rejoined: "God is still greater than our heart."
- I: "Right, but where is all that others spoken of in Scriptures? The fearful and anxious sinner must be lead to the Scriptures to read of the Savior and the new law of admonishing to prayer must not be laid upon him. . . . Thereupon he said nothing more and I went on my way."

One speech by Martin develops into a full five column monologue elaborating six evil results of the wrong doctrine requiring the original emotional uplift. The second speech (vol. 5, no. 19) discusses church polity, ordained bishops, etc., confessional stand, liturgy or lack of it. He condemns the Methodist handbook, the "Lehre und Kirchenordnung der Bischöflichen Methodisten," produced by the General Conference of 1841 in Cincinnati, because the book contained two hundred and twelve pages of which only twelve were devoted to doctrine and two hundred to church regulations.

In the third conversation (vol. 6, no. 23, pp. 177ff) he gave a summary of the main points of difference with the Methodists and the dogmatic grounds on which the Lutheran Church was not to seek fellowship with the



Methodist communion. A summary of the sickly and enthusiastic ways of Methodism:

1. The overelaboration of "church rules" and underrating of their doctrine.
2. The omission of important articles in their teaching (which is practically only a derivation of the Thirty-nine Articles of the ecclesiastical church of England), for example, the office of the ministry, the means of grace and conversion.
3. The unclear and empty presentation of certain articles, for example, in Article 7, "of original sin," as well as Article 17, "of baptism."
4. The excess of feeling or emotional stress and the lack of sound wholesome teaching and the correct division of the Word of truth (i.e. Law and Gospel) in their preaching.
5. The legalistic adoption of artfully unevangelical and unchurchly pressure methods and the false trust in cooperation or main activity in conversion. These self-contrived means of converting (new measures) which artfully and powerfully work the revivals and conversions as they were worked without all these additions by the Spirit of God through John Wesley's and Whitefield's preaching are primarily the following:
  - a. camp meetings
  - b. protracted meeting with a succession of sermons by many preachers
  - c. the anxious seat or mourner's bench with all the



accessories.

6. The open contempt of the Holy Sacraments, and especially of Baptism as in no. 5, as a good "enthusiastic" way, against Matt. 28, 19; Mark 16, 16; Titus 3, 5, not seeing in it the ground and source of the rebirth.

7. The setting up of their quarterly meetings in spite of the church's celebration of Christian festivals, mostly for the purpose of the so called awakenings.

8. The continuous change of preachers in the Methodist Church in one or at the most two years.

9. The despising of true individual repentance and the insistence on a pleasant feeling of conversion and grace and the delusion that this feeling of conversion is already the true repentance and faith.

10. The great number of unlearned preachers and the failure to acknowledge this condition as a necessary evil.

11. The despising of a thorough catechism school and a fundamental knowledge of the way of salvation which goes with it.

12. The neglect of their children in reference to a true and fundamental instruction in Bible History and Catechism.

The result of all these abuses Sihler summarized in his dialogue under four points:

1. The production of a subtle spiritual pride.



2. The production of a sick and effeminate feeling-Christianity.

3. The production of an immature and enthusiastic conversion zeal.

4. The production of an unwholesome use and twisting of Scriptures.

In the last article of the series, he sounded a final aggressive note: "It is more important that the heathen become Lutheran Christians than that Lutherans do not become 'enthusiasts' not to say 'heathen.'" (vol. 6, no. 24, p. 135.)

In reviewing the attitude of Sihler toward the protestant churches of America, several factors are immediately apparent. It seems obvious from his unsympathetic expressions that Sihler, like men of the older ministeriums, did not understand the psychology which gave rise to the development of the "new measures" as well as he analyzed the psychology at work in them. Sihler failed to grasp the spirit of the frontier church, the burning desire of the woodman and plainsman for an emotional release. The churches well adapted or indigenous to the American spirit were the churches which met this need.

His condemnation of the church organization and practice must also be mitigated in view of certain extenuating circumstances. The circuit riders were necessarily uneducated men for two reasons. The new church body did not have the



facilities for training men and the need was so great on the frontier that untrained men could serve to great advantage even though there were many attendant evils. The growth in the church was so rapid, an increase of 500% in ten years in some cases, that church government and discipline was certain to fall far short of the desired standard, all of which fell under the severe criticism of Dr. Sihler.

On the other hand Dr. Sihler showed that he had penetrated to the very center of the weakness in Methodism theological emphasis. The subjectivism and stress on the emotional paved the way in the Methodist Church for the development of the modern theology with Schleiermacher's subjectivism, Ichtheologie, and for the whole idealism stemming from Kant which Dr. Sihler had learned to know so well during his years at the University of Berlin. Though its flamboyant expressions of devotion to the Christian gospel were deeply emotional, that very basis in Methodism was to prove its undoing. The activism of Methodism lead to the blue-law legalism so familiar to New England and America's Middle West.

The changing emphasis of protestant preaching makes a reevaluation of the relation of Lutheranism to protestantism at large necessary. For the decades now past, Dr. Sihler was among the most influential in directing that relationship.



## Chapter X

### Concluding Estimate

The facts reviewed and presented in the detailed study of various phases of his life and work allows the presentation in general outline of Sihler's influence as a formative force in American Lutheranism.

Theologically the influence of Sihler was directed toward the building and maintenance of a confessional church. Through his contacts subsequent to his turn to Christianity Sihler had come to formulate a definite dogmatic structure. It was the structure of conservative confessional Lutheranism. He had spent long years under the influence of rationalism dominant in the Universities. During his stay in Berlin, as we have noted, he attended the services of Schleiermacher faithfully and spent some time in his circle of acquaintances. He was familiar with the subjective emphasis of the "father of modern theology." His "theologische Werdegang" made of him a true theological sophisticate. His conversion experience, however, and contacts rooted him to a fundamental evangelical message embracing the whole of orthodoxy. He was no scientific theologian either, in the continental conception, for his advanced studies had been in the field of the arts and sciences.



Scholastically he met the high standards of a continental protestant clergyman, university trained, highly cultured and very influential in elite circles. This influence was also keenly felt in the church which he organized and the goal of ministerial training always required a background in the liberal arts. Within his own family circle this cultural spirit and intellectual rigor dominated. His son, E. G. Sihler, became professor of classical languages at New York University and an author of many volumes as Testimonium Animae, From the Naumee to the Tiber, and St. Paul and Seneca.

The writings referred to in this present study are representative rather than exhaustive. A contemporary churchman, the Rev. A. Biewend of Washington, D. C., found Sihler's approach "earnest and forceful, Scriptural, quiet and patient, a thinker, clear and thorough." <sup>1</sup> This is not true in all cases, but in general is a satisfactory appraisal of Sihler's method.

Sihler's main influence on the development of the Missouri Synod was his practical church leadership. He was, with all his academic proficiency, still primarily the "hand" of the church. He presents the paradox as the man among the founders of the Synod with the highest academic degree and the greatest degree of practicality as well.

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1. Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, vol. 7, no. 16, p. 124.



At the time of his death a man who had assisted him in teaching at the Seminary and had succeeded him at St. Paul's Church during his last years paid him this tribute:

He was a wonder of God's grace, a spiritual son of Paul and Luther, a learned man, a gifted energetic preacher, diligent for truth and God's honor, a restless worker, earnest prayer, a friend and helper of the needy, a loyal spouse and worthy father, a sinner living by grace, an upright soul, a rich blessing to the Church. . . .

His influence goes with that church into its second century.

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1. J. H. Jox, "Obituary," Der Lutheraner, vol. 42, no. 12, June 15, 1886, p. 92.



## Appendix I

Sihler's main contributions to the literature of the Synod were the articles contributed to the Lehre und Wehre, the official theological journal, and to Der Lutheraner, the official church paper. Another source of information is the material which he supplied in essay form to Synodical and district conventions found in the official Synodal Berichten. The following is a compilation of his various contributions to Lehre und Wehre. Editorials merely initialed are either not cited or else are designated by an S. Those on the Lutheran Observer and the Ohio Synod and General Synod are very likely by Sihler since at the first Synodical Convention he was assigned as reader of the Observer for exchange articles. Articles merely initialed in the Journal may also have been written by F. A. Schmidt, Stellhorn, or Schaller who also contributed extensively to the periodical.

"Wie werden wahrhaft lutherische Gemeinden gegründet und erzogen?" vol. 1, no. 6, June, 1855; no. 9, September, 1855; vol. 2, no. 11, November, 1856; vol. 3, no. 2, February, 1857; no. 6, June, 1857; no. 8, August, 1857; vol. 4, no. 1, January, 1858.

"Einiges über Anschluss an die sogenannte lutherische General-Synode und über kirchliche Politik und expediency." vol. 4, no. 5, May, 1858, pp. 137-146.

"Die Generalsynode," vol. 6, no. 12, December, 1860, pp. 353-360. S



"Kirchliches-Zeitgeschichtliches," vol. 6, no. 12, December, 1860.

"Referat über die Predigt der rechten Lehre von der Rechtfertigung," vol. 7, no. 2, February, 1861, pp. 43-54; vol. 7, no. 3, March, 1861, pp. 75-92.

"Was von uns Wahres und Falsches berichtet wird," vol. 7, no. 3, August, 1861, pp. 228-235.

"Das neue Zeitblatt über uns arme Missourier," vol. 8, no. 2, February, 1862, pp. 43-51.

"Eine seltsame Behauptung des Herrn Dr. Haeckel," vol. 8, no. 5, May, 1862, pp. 132-142.

"Über das evangelische Verhalten eines christlich gesinnten Gemeindeschullehrers, theils gegen seine Schulkinder, theils gegen die Gemeinde, theils gegen den Pastor," vol. 8, no. 12, December, 1862, pp. 353-364.

"Die Briefe St. Pauli an Timotheum und Titum oder das apostolische Pastoralie," vol. 10, no. 6, June, 1864, pp. 181-186; no. 8, August, 1864, pp. 246-248.

"Geht's vorwärts oder rückwärts?" vol. 11, no. 3, March, 1865, pp. 83-88.

"Hoftheologische Auslegung der Worten 'man muss Gott mehr gehorchen als den Menschen,'" vol. 11, no. 3, March, 1865, pp. 98-99.

"Einige Bemerkungen über etliche Stellen des Vorworts der evang. Kirchenzeitung des Hrn. Prof. Hengstenberg von Jahre 1867 unter der Überschrift: 'Die lutherische Kirche und die Union,'" vol. 13, no. 5, May, 1867, pp. 137-149; no. 6, June, 1867, pp. 171-180; no. 7, July, 1867, pp. 196-200.

"Ein ernstes Bedenken," vol. 13, no. 12, December, 1867, pp. 358-361.

"Das Schweigen des General Council auf vorgelagte kirchliche Lebensfragen und die offene Erklärung aus seinem Heerlager über seine normale Stellung zwischen Missouri und der sog. Generalsynode," vol. 14, no. 2, February, 1868, pp. 43-50; no. 3, March, 1868, pp. 78-85.

"Einige unschuldige 'offene Fragen' an das General Council, resp. Herrn Dr. Krauth, nebst Bitte um offene Antwort, ob er unserer Antwort beistimmt," vol. 16, no. 4, April, 1870, pp. 114-122.



"Was haben wir lutherischen Prediger bei der beginnenden Erschlaffung, Satttheit und Verweltlichung in unsern Gemeinden auch innerhalb unserer Synode vornehmlich zu thun, um, was an uns ist, diesen Übeln möglichst zu wehren und das hin und her ermattende Gemeinde leben durch Gottes Gnade und Segen wieder aufzufrischen und zu heben?" vol. 16, no. 8, August, 1870, pp. 225-242.

"Das Papstthum und die Unionisten," vol. 17, no. 4 April, 1871, pp. 107-112.

"Einige Gedanken über die Gefahren Deutschlands in der Gegenwart und Zukunft," vol. 18, no. 1, January, 1872, pp. 9-16.

"Einige Denkwürdigkeiten aus der letzten Sitzung des General Council zu Rochester nach dem 'Lutheran and Missionary' vom 16. November, 1871," vol. 18, no. 2, February, 1872, pp. 41-53.

"Der 'Observer' auf dem Wege nach Rom," vol. 19, January, 1873, p. 28. S

"Was für Beobachtungen der 'Observer' machen kann," Ibid., p. 29. S

"Das negative Lutherthum der American Lutherans," Ibid. S

"Dr. Krauth und das Millenium," vol. 19, no. 2, February, 1873, p. 52.

"Das neueste Mum Mum des Councils," Ibid.

"Die Missourier und die Modern lutherische Theologie," Ibid., p. 62. S

"Die Allgemeine Evangelisch 'Lutherische Kirchenzeitung' (No. 46) über die Berliner August Conferenz," vol. 20, no. 4, April, 1876.

"Die römische Kirche im deutschen Reich," vol. 23, no. 1, January, 1877, pp. 5-8.

"Zur Beichtanmeldung und ihrer seelsorgerlichen Benützung," vol. 24, no. 3, March, 1878, pp. 65-76.

"Was ist der Wille Gottes in Hinsicht auf das eigene Hausregiment der Diener der Kirche?" vol. 24, no. 6, June, 1878, pp. 161-168.



"Aug. welche Weise wurde die in dem New York Ministerium vorhandene Streitsache bei seiner Diesjährigen Versammlung zu Utica verhandelt?" vol. 24, no. 10, October, 1878, pp. 289-295.

"Einige Gedanken über die letztjährige Versammlung der Generalsynode der preussischen Lutheraner unter dem Regiment des Oberkirchencollegiums zu Breslau gehalten daselbst im Monat September," vol. 25, nos. 1. 2. 3., January-March, 1879.

"Wie soll es vor und bei Annahme eines neuen Berufs nichts hergehen und wie soll es hergehen?" vol. 25, no. 5, May, 1879.

"Was ist zu thun, dass nicht zu dürftig begabte junge Leute ins Amt kommen, die sich später als unmögliche Pastoren erzeigen?" vol. 25, no. 7, July, 1879, pp. 196-201.

"Berichtigung," vol. 25, no. 7, July, 1879.

"Ziele und Pläne der Römische-päpstischen Kirche in America," vol. 25, no. 10, October, 1879, pp. 289-296.

"Nekrologisches," vol. 26, no. 2, February, 1880, pp. 57-58.

"Eine kurze Erklärung," vol. 27, no. 2, February, 1881, p. 53.

"Einige Gedanken über den Fanatismus," vol. 28, no. 1, January, 1882, pp. 15-25.

"Welche Haupt- und Grundlehren der heiligen Schrift werden durch den Synergismus wesentlich verderbt und gefälscht?" vol. 28, no. 4, April, 1882, pp. 145-146; no. 9, September, 1882, pp. 407-412; no. 12, December, 1882, pp. 550-556.

"Was haben wir lutherischen Prediger zu thun, um immer kräftiger und eindringlicher zu predigen?" vol. 31, no. 2, February, 1885, pp. 33-47.



## Appendix II

### A compend of Sihler's contributions to Der Lutheraner

"Was waren Evangelische und was sind Evangelische?" vol. 2, no. 17, April 18, 1846, pp. 65-67.

"Gibt es alt und neu Lutheraner?" vol. 2, no. 19, May 16, 1846, pp. 74-76.

(No, just Lutheran and unlutheran, i.e. unbelieving, p. 79) vol. 2, no. 20, May 30, 1846, pp. 77-78.

"Das lutherische Seminar zu Fort Wayne," vol. 3, no. 5, October 31, 1846, pp. 29-30.

"Todesnachricht," (Death of J. G. Bürger, Van Wert, Ohio) vol. 3, no. 18, May 4, 1847, p. 99.

"Notice of books available in Ft. Wayne for sale," vol. 3, no. 25, August 10, 1847, p. 140.

"Der Lutheran Observer über unsere Synode," vol. 4, November 30, 1847, pp. 50-52; vol. 5, December 14, 1847, pp. 57-60.

"Ein deutscher Unionsmann über uns arme Lutheraner," vol. 4, no. 17, April 18, 1848, pp. 131-133; vol. 4, no. 18, May 2, 1848, pp. 137-139; vol. 4, no. 19, May 16, 1848, pp. 145-147.

"Der Lutheran Observer und die Ohio Synode," vol. 5, no. 2, September 19, 1848, pp. 13-15; vol. 5, no. 3, October 3, 1848, pp. 15-19.

"Der Lutheran Observer und die deutsch-lutherische Kirche zu Detroit," vol. 5, no. 4, October 17, 1848, pp. 25-28.

"Gottes Wort zu der Menschen Thun in Hinsicht auf den Stand der Dinge in Deutschland," vol. 5, no. 12, February 6, 1849, pp. 89-92.

"Predigt gehalten von Dr. Sihler vor seiner Gemeinde in Fort Wayne, Ind.," vol. 5, no. 13, February 20, 1849, pp. 97-99.



"Zweite Predigt von der heiligen Taufe," vol. 5, no. 19, May 15, 1849, pp. 145-147.

"Herzliche Ermahnung an lutherische Väter gottesfürchtiger und begebter Jünglinge und Knaben, sie dem Dienste der Kirche und Schule nicht zu entziehen," vol. 5, no. 20, May 29, 1849, pp. 153-155.

"Der Satan wider Christum in Deutschland," vol. 5, no. 21, June 12, 1849, pp. 161-163.

"Todesnachricht," (Death of Pastor A. Wolter) vol. 6, no. 2, September 18, 1849, pp. 15-16.

"Was ist Wahrheit," vol. 6, no. 5, October 30, 1849, pp. 35-37.

"Merkwürdiges zeugnis des Miethspredigers Hrn. W. Suhr in Cincinnati," vol. 6, no. 7, November 27, 1849, pp. 52-54.

"Bekenntnisstreue des Kurfürsten Johann Friedrich von Sachsen," vol. 6, no. 17, April 16, 1850, pp. 129-132.

"Nothgedrungene Widerlegung und Berichtigung," vol. 6, no. 18, April 30, 1850, pp. 141-142.

"Denkwürdigkeit aus der letzten Versammlung der West-Ohio Synode," vol. 7, no. 14, March 4, 1851, pp. 109-111.

"Die zur Selbstverklagung gerathene Vertheidigung der West Ohio Synode, durch Herrn Prof. W. F. Lehmann in Columbus," vol. 7, no. 20, May 27, 1851, pp. 153-159.

"Kurze nothgedrungene Erwiederung auf den in No. 5 des Informatoriums enthaltenen Aufsatz: 'Die Irrlehren des missourischen Lutheraners und der missourischen Synode,'" vol. 8, no. 13, February 17, 1852, pp. 102-103.

"Freundliche Bitte und Erinnerung der Gemeinden der Synode in Hinsicht auf Unterstützung des Seminars zu Fort Wayne," vol. 8, no. 17, April 13, 1852, pp. 134-135.

"Stimme der Kirche Gottes wider die verführerischen Gottesleugner und Fleischvergötterter unserer Zeit," vol. 8, no. 24, July 27, 1852, pp. 185-188. Initialed "Dr. S."

"Unionistisch kirchliche Anschauungen des Herrn Professor's Ph. Schaff," vol. 9, no. 14, March 1, 1853, pp. 86-88; vol. 9, no. 18, April 26, 1853, pp. 114-115; vol. 9, no. 23, July 5, 1853, pp. 154-156.



"Nachtrag," Beilage, vol. 9, no. 14, pp. 26-27.

"Das Ehrw. Ministerium der lutherischen Synode von Ohio, Westlichen Distrikts," vol. 10, no. 16, March 28, 1854, pp. 121-126.

"Denkwürdigkeiten uns der letzten Versammlung der allgemeinen Synode von Ohio in Thompson township, Seneca Co., Ohio im Juni, 1854," vol. 11, no. 7, November 21, 1854, pp. 49-51.

"Herr Pfarrer Löhe's Bericht über uns und dessen Beurtheilung nach Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit," vol. 11, no. 12, January 30, 1855, pp. 89-94.

"Kirchliche Nachrichten," vol. 12, no. 2, September 11, 1855, p. 15.

"Die beiden Herrn Pastoren Romanowski und Habel," vol. 12, no. 22, June 17, 1856, pp. 172-173.

"Kirchliche Nachricht," vol. 13, no. 3, September 23, 1856, p. 22.

"Kirchliche Nachricht," vol. 13, no. 6, November 4, 1856, p. 47.

"Kirchliche Nachricht," vol. 14, no. 3, September 22, 1857, p. 23.

"Empfangen," vol. 14, no. 17, April 6, 1858, p. 136.

"Zum Ehrengedächtnisz unsers am 8. Juni beim Baden verunglückten lieben Bruders, weil Past. J. P. Kalb, geboren den 4. Juli A. D. 1828, entschlafen den 8. Juni, 1858," vol. 14, no. 25, July 27, 1858, pp. 193-196.

"Kirchliche Nachricht," vol. 14, no. 26, August 10, 1858, p. 208.

"Was haben rechtschaffene evangelische Christen, sonderlich die Lutheraner, Angesichts der bedrohlichen Zukunft dieses ihres alten oder neuen Vaterlands zu thun?" vol. 15, no. 13, February 8, 1859, pp. 97-99; vol. 15, February 22, 1859, no. 14, pp. 105-107; vol. 15, no. 15, March 8, 1859, pp. 113-115.

"Empfangen," vol. 15, no. 13, February 8, 1859, p. 103.

"Zur Nachricht," vol. 15, no. 23, June 28, 1859, p. 183.



"Verhandlungen der Zwanzigsten Versammlung des westlichen Distrikts der evang.-luther. Synode von Ohio und andern Staaten," vol. 17, no. 13, February 5, 1861, pp. 97-102.

"Schmähliche Handlungsweise der Herren Prof. Lehmann, Präses Past. Schulze, und die Pastoren Reichert und Groth, Glieder der Ohio Synode, westlichen Distrikts," vol. 17, no. 14, February 19, 1861, pp. 108-110.

"An die lieben Gemeinden unsres Synodalverbands," vol. 17, no. 17, April 2, 1861, pp. 135-136.

"Zum Ehrengedächtnisz des am 6. Mai hieselbst in Christo selig entschlafenen weiland Herrn Georg Wolfs, treuverdienten Schullehrer an hiesiger Gemeinde," vol. 18, no. 22, June 11, 1862, pp. 169-171.

"Herzliche Bitte an die Gemeinde der Synode," vol. 19, no. 6, November 12, 1862, p. 45.

"Die Sklaverei im Lichte der heiligen Schrift betrachtet," vol. 19, no. 12, February 1, 1863, pp. 89-93; vol. 19, no. 13, February 15, 1863, pp. 97-101; vol. 19, no. 14, March 1, 1863, pp. 105-107; vol. 19, no. 15, March 15, 1863, pp. 113-115.

"Welches ist die Gestalt unserer Zeit und welche Zukunft haben wir zu erwarten?" vol. 19, no. 20, June 1, 1863, pp. 153-155; vol. 19, no. 21, June 15, 1863, pp. 161-165; vol. 19, no. 23, July 15, 1863, pp. 177-179; vol. 19, no. 24, August 1, 1863, pp. 185-189; vol. 20, no. 1, September 1, 1863, pp. 3-7; vol. 20, no. 3, October 1, 1863, pp. 19-21; vol. 20, no. 8, December 15, 1863, pp. 57-61.

"Von dem heilsamen Zusammenwirken von Haus und Schule zu Nutz und Frommen der Kinder," vol. 20, no. 10, January 15, 1864, pp. 73-77.

"Nekrolog," vol. 20, no. 12, February 15, 1864, pp. 88-90.

"Falksteine," vol. 20, no. 20, June 15, 1864, pp. 156-157; vol. 21, no. 2, September 15, 1864, pp. 14-15; vol. 21, no. 5, November 1, 1864, pp. 38-39.

"Kirchliche Nachricht," vol. 21, no. 1, September 1, 1864, p. 7.

"Geschichtlicher Abrisz von den Auszerlichen und innerlichen Ergehen des Concordia College's seit seiner Verpflanzung von St. Louis nach Fort Wayne vom Herbst



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