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JAKOB MATTHIAS BUEHLER: CONSERVATIVE  
MISSIONARY AND THEOLOGIAN

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
Elden R. Stohs  
May 1956

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Another parable put He forth unto them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.<sup>1</sup>

"Pioneer of the Lutheran Church on the Pacific Coast!"

This phrase has often been used to honor the late Rev. Jakob Buehler. How many people realize what it meant to be a pioneer of the Lutheran Church during the latter half of the nineteenth century on the Pacific slope?

If someone were to tell you that the first missionary to the West Coast for the Missouri Synod was never ordained into the holy ministry, and that his commissioning is a debatable question, yet this same man, for many years, placed his hand on most of the men on this coast, ordaining them to the work of the ministry, you would begin to question the cause for this irregularity.

This same missionary lost part of his membership only three years after his arrival on this coast. Seven years after his arrival he lost his entire congregation and a newly dedicated church because he would not abide by the wishes of the congregation.

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<sup>1</sup>Matt. 13:21, 23.

During his entire ministry Rev. Buehler was confronted with the "lodge-problem." After forty years on the West Coast he still had lodge members in his church.

Two years ago Mr. Theodore Moeller called the author's attention to some of these incidents in Rev. Buehler's life. Mr. Moeller had come upon him while doing research for his Bachelor of Divinity thesis on "The Development of Lutheranism in the Pacific Northwest . . . ."

The information available to the writer was limited. Most of it had to be taken from secondary sources. Rev. G. E. Kirchner, emeritus, informed the writer:

We have absolutely no letters of Buehler here, as all the records which Buehler had were removed from the house by a son-in-law who lived with the Buehler's at the time of his death; and we happen to know that much of that material was stored in the basement of an old book store which his son-in-law had for many years; and when he gave up the business the old books and papers were crated out and destroyed, without knowledge of our church members. This accounts for the loss of all personal material.<sup>2</sup>

The old issues of the "Botschafter," which Rev. Buehler edited for a number of years, are the only reliable source of information regarding events prior to 1906. This paper is a result of working with the "Lutheraner," "Synodal Bericht," anniversary books, letters, a biography of Rev. J. M. Buehler, and articles written by Rev. J. M. Buehler.

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<sup>2</sup>Rev. G. E. Kirchner, emeritus, Letter to Eldon R. Stohs, Feb. 9, 1955.

To write a complete history of Rev. Buehler's forty-one years in the ministry would be an arduous task. This paper emphasizes the first ten years of his ministry on the West Coast. Rev. Buehler had most of his difficulties during these early years. To get an insight into Rev. Buehler's theology, the writer will review several of the doctrinal essays which Buehler delivered at the California-Oregon District conventions from 1887 to 1901.

The purpose of this paper is not so much to sketch a history, as to see whether the difficulties Rev. Buehler encountered were a result of his liberalism or conservatism.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE SITUATION IN THE SYNOD AND THE SENDING OF THE MAN

#### Situation in Synod

"Gold!"--this news sounded forth throughout the states in the middle of the last century, and the rush for the West Coast was on. In that great stream of people desiring to get rich quickly were a few German Lutherans from the East and Middle West, and also from Germany. Inexhaustible gold fields lured many people to California. Where formerly there was barren desert, in which only some Indian tribes and a few Mexicans were found, flourishing and populous cities arose. A hundred thousand people moved to California in 1849.<sup>1</sup>

Synod should have been aware of the responsibility of the church, in particular among people whose hearts were set on the material things of life. She should have been busying herself with the sending of strong men. Men were needed who would preach the Word of God with power in all its pristine purity. The hearts of so many people desired to find the pot of gold. There would be the urgent need to turn such hearts to the higher, nobler, secure things of life. Such hearts needed to be reminded that they were bought with a price, not with gold or silver, but with the

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<sup>1</sup>August R. Suelflow, The Heart of Missouri (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 55.

precious blood of Jesus.

Certainly, we dare not say that Synod was not aware of the possibilities and the need of sending missionaries along with these gold seekers. As early as 1852, at the convention of Synod in Ft. Wayne Dr. Walther announced that he had correspondence from Germany. Two men were willing to come to St. Louis and place themselves at the disposal of Synod to work on the West Coast. Nothing more was ever heard of this plan.<sup>2</sup>

Some men in Synod were greatly concerned about sending missionaries to California. The absorbing demands of her own territory in the Middle West and East kept Synod from giving aid to these immigrants.<sup>3</sup> It had again come time for Synodical and District Conventions. Rev. H. Fick, in 1856, published a list of propositions in Der Lutheraner. Each church should consider these propositions before convention time. The following are the propositions:

1. We begin a mission to the forsaken German Lutherans in California. We establish the church of the pure Word and "Bekenntnisschriften."
2. If all the districts approve it then we shall send two men to California as soon as possible.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>B. W. J. Lange, A Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast under District Organization 1887-1937 (Oakland: California Concordia College, 1937), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>W. H. T. Dau, editor, Ebenzer (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 350.

3. Nominate a committee at the next Synod which shall look into and further this matter.
4. All congregations shall accept responsibility in this matter.
5. Through Der Lutheraner we inform the people of the situation of the church that we might enliven and awaken a concern for this work.
6. All congregations of Synod should take this opportunity to decide on this matter in their meeting.

Already at this time there were Lutherans in California who read the Lutheraner. In 1859, after waiting three years for an answer to this article, a lady in California wrote a letter to Synod's officials inquiring further concerning missionaries to this coast. It was toward the end of the year that Prof. C. F. W. Walther received this letter which presented the following plea:

I cannot refrain from addressing a few lines to you after I have been in California now for four years and have made observations in a number of places. But I must let you know that things look bad among the Christians and in particular among the Lutherans. By these the good old Lutheran doctrine is being totally forgotten because there is no orthodox church here. There are many English churches here, but whether there is an orthodox church among them I do not know. The number of German churches is five, one in Sacramento, one in Stockton, and two in San Francisco. These four are Methodist churches, but they do not have many members, about 15 to 20 here, elsewhere still fewer; but many people have their children baptized there and send them to their Sunday School, since they can have nothing better. Recently a man by the name of Rahn from the United Church came from Philadelphia to San Francisco. The people now think they have something better. Seventy-five people have already joined. The salary is twice that of a man working for monthly wages. Next year this (Rev. Rahn's) congregation intends to build a church. The Methodists already have newly built churches. It hurts me when I see that so many sects have the upper hand and my dear mother church must stand

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<sup>5</sup>From a letter in Der Lutheraner, XII (March 25, 1856),  
123.

back. I am surprised that she, who calls herself The Church of the pure doctrine and in part (!) is, does not, in the name of her Shepherd, seek that which is lost, also in California. The lost coin cannot seek itself, nor can the lost sheep find its shepherd if it does not hear His voice. My comfort is the promise of the Lord that He Himself will have compassion on His flock where the shepherds are negligent. The Lutheraner once brought the item that two missionaries were to be sent to California if provision could be made for their maintenance. But does that not mean consulting with flesh and blood? If they only work faithfully, they will have a living; the Lord always provides for His faithful servants. The poet Hiller says:

Who like Elijah will serve the Lord;

Like him in food sufficient will find his reward.

Dear Sirs, over yonder, there are many Lutheran people here, at least in name; but they see nothing here but United (unierte) churches. Dear Sirs, if the Word applies also to you: Go into all the world and teach and baptize, you ought to send a man into the Californian world; and have no doubts concerning his maintenance. Our God is rich enough and has all hearts in His hand and can direct them like a stream of water. This you know full well. We . . . , I wish that a man would soon come who would seek not his own, but the things which are Jesus Christ's.<sup>6</sup>

Rev. Bushler later states that he met the woman who wrote this letter. Her name was Elizabeth Schreiber, a god-fearing woman.<sup>7</sup>

Synod's response to this letter was: "If this is a divine call, then we must answer it." Two young men were selected to consider this challenge. They found themselves willing to go but still lacked the funds for their travel. Another plea was sent out to the congregations for funds that these men might be sent to California. Shortly before

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<sup>6</sup>P. E. Kretzmann, "The Beginning of Lutheran Church Work in California," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IV (April, 1931), 25-26.

<sup>7</sup>Der Lutheraner, XVII (Oct. 30, 1860), 44.

sailing for California sufficient funds came in to pay for his passage.<sup>8</sup>

Thus it was that student Jakob M. Bühler accepted the challenge to go to this far off land, leaving father, mother, and all behind. By himself he would explore for blood-bought souls and give them the precious message of redemption through Christ. His mission was to minister to men whose hearts sought gold and silver. He would offer them something far more precious, something which would last eternally, the message of Christ placing the red coin of His blood on the counter of Calvary for their personal redemption.

#### Sending the Man

The sainted Pastor Jakob M. Buehler was born August 8, 1837, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was the fifth child of a family of fourteen. His father, Franz, was an immigrant of the 1820's, a "hot-tempered" but honest Württemberg. His mother, Charlotte, a construction builder's daughter, was born in America of an old Pennsylvania family. His parents were members of First Lutheran Church in Baltimore already at Rev. F. Wyneken's time. Father Buehler died in 1870, and mother Buehler entered the larger life in 1886.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Der Lutheraner, XVI (May 15, 1860), 157.

<sup>9</sup>J. H. Theiss and J. W. Theiss, Lebenslauf und Charakterbild des seligen Fräses J. M. Buehler (Oakland, Kal.: Druck und Verlag des "Lutherischen Botschafters," 1902), p. 1.

Jakob Matthias attended public and private grade schools, and an English high school. It is said that his father spoke a Swabian dialect and his mother spoke a Pennsylvania-Dutch, but young Jakob understood neither. Baltimore was an English-speaking city, and Jakob was reared wholly in English.<sup>10</sup>

The relation between Rev. F. Wyncken and the Buehler family was a joyous and intimate one. Frequently Jakob's father would go to conference with Rev. Wyncken, when he would say: "Der kloine Jakob ist ein wilder Junge, nicht gerade schlecht, aber ausgelassen und voller 'tricks.'" Baltimore was a rowdy city and was not a good place to rear children. A few too many of Jakob's tricks, such as sitting around the fire-station all day instead of going to school, brought his father to the decision to send Jakob to the "Gymnasium" in St. Louis. He wrote to Dr. Walther: "Da haben Sie meinen Schlingel, machen Sie mit ihm, was Sie wollen, und wenn Sie ihn halbtodt schlagen."<sup>11</sup>

Young Buehler had not been sent to St. Louis to prepare for the holy ministry, but rather to be reformed and to learn Christian doctrine. Later Pastor Buehler himself stated that he would have beaten anyone who would have told him that he would become a pastor. Even his parents

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

were resolved that he should return to Baltimore and become a business man, a lawyer like Luther, or perhaps go into the business which his father had established.<sup>12</sup>

In the fall of 1851 Jakob was sent to St. Louis. He had not yet been confirmed in the Christian faith. Dr. Walther took it upon himself to instruct him personally. Certainly this was the foundation for his rich knowledge of God's word.<sup>13</sup>

While at the "Gymnasium" Buehler had little use for the German language. During the early years he and several other students formed an English Club. Later Buehler did study the German diligently.<sup>14</sup>

After seven and one-half years at school, Buehler vicared a half year in an English church in Baltimore. In the fall of 1859 he returned to complete his final year of study at the "Gymnasium."<sup>15</sup>

In December of 1859 the letter from California appeared in Der Lutheraner appealing for missionaries. Dr. Walther asked for volunteers from the graduating class. Since no one volunteered Walther selected two men, Buehler and

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>G. A. Bernthal, Kurzgefasste Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen St. Paulusgemeinde zu San Francisco, California, p. 12. This is the fiftieth anniversary book of the church.

<sup>14</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>H. B. Hemmeter, "Early Mission Efforts in the Missouri Synod," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XI (Oct., 1938), 67.

another candidate. It is said that Buehler's knowledge of the English language played a decisive role in this selection ("wass allerdings schweres Gewicht in der Wagschlege sein musste"). Before the close of the school year Dr. Walther took sick and was sent off to Germany to regain his health.<sup>16</sup>

The assistant who had been selected to accompany Buehler in his work in California travelled as far as Baltimore. There he accepted a call to a congregation in Maryland. Now Jakob Buehler was without a helper and companion. Later he himself stated: "Shortly after that I decided, since there was nothing left for me to do, to travel alone in the name of the Lord."<sup>17</sup>

On August 1, 1860 at twelve noon Buehler was on the steamship Ariel sailing for the land of gold. With a sick and heavy heart he was travelling by himself. He was to find that these experiences were a preparation for the tasks which lay before him.<sup>18</sup>

It did not take long until the other passengers aboard ship knew that Buehler was a pastor. How strange he must have looked among these men who were following the lure of newly discovered gold. Cold and ruthless, they must have

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<sup>16</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

looked with mocking eyes at this "optimistic" fellow, whose ambitions were for spiritual gain only. In fact, we are told that some of them advised young Buehler to return on the next boat. San Francisco was definitely under the rule of the devil. With bold courage young Buehler answered: "He is the one I want to meet."<sup>19</sup>

The trip to California was via Panama. At the express desire of the passengers, Buehler conducted two services on board ship. Already on board ship Buehler was to experience, but only slightly, the difficulties the world offered. Two days before arriving in San Francisco, \$350.00 were stolen from him. Because of the concern of the captain \$52.00 were collected from the passengers. This brought his holdings up to \$112.00. This happened on Wednesday. On Friday morning, August 24, 1860, they arrived in San Francisco. Buehler exclaimed:

Praise be to God, glory and thanks for His gracious protection. He has permitted me to experience a wholesome punishment, but only that He might make me more careful for the future.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Martha Schaller, "Pioneer." A brief historical sketch of Rev. Buehler in the files of the Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Mo.

<sup>20</sup> Theiss, op. cit., pp. 16,17.

## CHAPTER III

### DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS

After twenty-four days of travel, Buehler set foot on this strange land. Not a soul was there to greet him on his arrival. He later stated that his soul was as heavy as the fog over San Francisco. Taking up quarters in a hotel, he began looking up the people whose names had been given him by friends in the East.<sup>1</sup>

On board ship a Rev. Moschake had been mentioned to him. This Moschake was a rationalist preacher and a pastor of a so-called Lutheran congregation. He had been recently defrocked because of his immoral practices.<sup>2</sup>

Pastor Moschake declared his willingness to have Buehler take over his church. Buehler could not accept this offer. The congregation had already taken steps to call another man out of the East. He didn't want to act too hastily in a strange land. He first wanted to become acquainted with the particular situation.<sup>3</sup>

The first Sunday he visited the morning service of Rev. Rahn, a pastor of the United (unierte) church. In the after-

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<sup>1</sup>G. A. Bernthal, Kurzgefasste Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen St. Paulusgemeinde zu San Francisco, California, p. 14. This is an anniversary book.

<sup>2</sup>Der Lutheraner, XVII (Oct. 2, 1860), 22.

<sup>3</sup>G. A. Bernthal, op. cit., p. 15.

noon he heard a sermon by the Rev. Moschake, who still occupied the pulpit of his church. The impression Buehler received from these two services he put into words:

I went to bed with my head full of thoughts of all kinds. I had thoroughly convinced myself that the bright and refreshing light of the Gospel has for us Germans been totally extinguished, except for some faint glimmering of it in the churches of the sects, and I went to sleep calling on the Lord for wisdom and power to proclaim the faithful Savior.<sup>4</sup>

It became known that the preacher who had been called out of the East to Moschake's church would not come. Because of the deplorable condition of the church, Buehler could not wait any longer to proclaim the pure Word of God. On the following Sunday, Sept. 2, 1860, the first Missouri-Synod Lutheran church service was held on the West Coast. Buehler conducted this service in Moschake's church.<sup>5</sup> He immediately sounded forth the true evangelical message. He let the erring see the light of the truth. His text was John 1:12. This was the same sermon which he had preached on board ship.<sup>6</sup> Buehler said later that his words had "made an impression on the hearts of his listeners."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>P. E. Kretzmann, "The Beginning of Lutheran Church Work in California," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IV (April, 1931), 25.

<sup>5</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>J. H. Theiss and J. W. Theiss, Lebenslauf und Charakterbild des seligen Präses J. M. Buehler (Oakland, Kal.: Druck und Verlag des "Lutherischen Botschafters," 1902) p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 15.

## Spiritual Conditions of the People

Bayard Taylor writing for the New York Tribune reported the "Spirit of San Francisco" thus:

Every newcomer to San Francisco is overtaken with a sense of complete bewilderment. The mind, however it may be prepared for an astonishing condition of affairs, cannot immediately push aside its old instincts of value and ideas of business, letting all past experience go for naught . . . . There is a period when it wears neither the old nor the new phase, but the vanishing images of one and the growing perceptions of the other . . . . These blend in painful and misty confusion.<sup>8</sup>

People began to locate themselves more permanently. Communities were being established. During the previous years the people had lost much of their religious practice. Spiritual conditions of the people were at a low ebb. When Buehler arrived in 1860 he observed: "Almost all the German people here live without God in this world."<sup>9</sup> In most churches Christ crucified was not proclaimed as the chief thing, but admonitions for virtue and morality had replaced this message. Among the many churches, there were Roman Catholics, Methodists, Evangelicals (unierte), and so-called Lutherans. Among the 16,000 <sup>German</sup> inhabitants in San Francisco, Buehler felt the light was brightest among the Methodists. Rev. J. M. Buehler's own observations were:

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<sup>8</sup> Bayard Taylor, "The Spirit of San Francisco," Time, LXVI (Jan. 3, 1955), 17.

<sup>9</sup> W. H. T. Dau, editor, Ebenezer (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 350.

Only a few people show concern for the church. Most of them rejoice for Sunday, not to come to the temple, but to serve the god of this world - how eager and busy they are with their voluptuousness. If anyone did learn and read God's Word, it would be torn from him by the preachers.<sup>10</sup>

The Lutheran church of which Rev. Moschake had been pastor, extended a call to Rev. Buehler. He declined this call because the congregation did not want to provide for his livelihood. They refused Rev. Buehler the right to exclude the free-thinkers and the rationalists from the church. Since this church also wanted Rev. Buehler to be ordained by a popular English preacher, he declined this call.<sup>11</sup>

Though Buehler did not accept the call, the congregation permitted him to use their church. Here Buehler continued to preach. Each Sunday the number of hearers increased.<sup>12</sup>

Buehler now had a preaching place and an audience. His work continued to be very difficult. Men on all sides were not anxious to hear him preach. They tried to get rid of Buehler with derogatory remarks in the paper. Buehler states: "The enemy makes me very thankful. Through an article in the paper against me and other pietists, he has made me known in larger circles and has affected more listeners."<sup>13</sup> The enemy spread rumors that Buehler did not at all desire

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<sup>10</sup> Der Lutheraner, XVII (Oct. 30, 1860), 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

to remain in San Francisco. Another report was spread that Buehler desired a salary of \$2,000.<sup>14</sup> The group behind these attacks were the free-thinkers and rationalists of the Moschske church.

Buehler continued to preach regularly on Sundays in this church on Greenwich Street. On Nov. 8, 1860, he was able to organize a German Lutheran congregation. This group immediately called Buehler to be their pastor. The church had forty members. This group consisted of the remainder of the members of the original church and a group of new members. On the basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions St. Markus Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized.<sup>16</sup>

A short history of the Lutheran church in San Francisco was placed in the cornerstone of the 1863 church. In this history Rev. Buehler sums up the first year with these words:

During the first year there was not only an increase in attendance but also in the number of members who joined. A witness of the growth during our first year is the improvement of the church structure. The church was closed for four weeks while it was being renovated.<sup>17</sup>

While the church in San Francisco was being renovated,

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<sup>14</sup>Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 27.?

<sup>15</sup>Der Lutheraner, XVII (Oct. 30, 1860), 44.

<sup>16</sup>B. W. J. Lange, A Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast under District Organization 1887-1937 (Oakland: California Concordia College, 1937), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 18.

Buehler travelled to Sacramento, a city of twenty-five thousand. Here he organized a congregation. Fifty-two families formed the nucleus for the First German Lutheran Church in Sacramento. Since there was such a dearth of pastors, the congregation did not ask Synod for a candidate. They sent a call to a Rev. Bartling in Illinois.<sup>18</sup> Bartling did not accept the call. The congregation then decided to wait until Synod would send a man or until a man came by accident. Buehler could not take care of this congregation in addition to the one in San Francisco. The congregation soon fell into the hands of preachers with no particular creed.<sup>19</sup>

With all of these difficulties, it seemed as though the devil was working overtime to frustrate the work of Buehler. B. W. J. Lange in his Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast . . . states:

Many hearts warmed to him, and success came to him with his affable and winning way. A few of the promising Lutherans who had come from the Eastern and Middle Western congregations had remained loyal to their Lutheran profession. They saw with the coming of Pastor Buehler a new day dawning. But most of the German Lutherans in San Francisco did not take kindly to Pastor Buehler's fearless preaching of the Bible truths. Many turned a deaf ear to Pastor Buehler's

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<sup>18</sup> Brief History of Trinity Lutheran Church, Sacramento, California, 1915-1940. Compiled from the Church records by the pastor. From the files of Concordia Historical Institute.

<sup>19</sup> Der Lutheraner, XX (Nov. 1, 1863), 84.

Gospel invitations.<sup>20</sup>

The attacks that Buehler endured were not easy for him to bear. He writes: "This week I have had such attacks of despondency and hopelessness, that several times I entertained the thought of leaving this state and attempting it another place." Buehler's experiences in San Francisco were very similar to those of the Apostle Paul in Corinth, Acts 18:6.<sup>21</sup>

In a letter to Der Lutheraner Rev. Buehler mentions some of the difficulties which he encountered the first year: poor location of the church; the accepted thing is not to attend church because of the many scoffers; convincing the people that he is not another tramp preacher who would be expelled because of immoral actions; convincing the people that he is preaching the Gospel because of Christ and His cross. In all this the Gospel was showing itself as the power of God in gathering many of the worst unbelievers.<sup>22</sup>

During this first year a United pastor, Rev. Rahn, felt constrained to resign from the ministry. During this vacancy, many of the former Lutherans, who had felt it necessary to join this United Church merely because no Lutheran Church was available, returned to the Lutheran

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<sup>20</sup>Lange, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>21</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>22</sup>Der Lutheraner, XVII (April 30, 1861), 146.

Church.<sup>23</sup>

The second year is briefly told thus in his short history:

Not only did we witness God's blessings during the first year with a large attendance, but because of the large attendance a new building will soon be needed. Since the members come from all over the city, a new site is also needed. The members decided to erect a school at some central place, so that those members living farther from the present church will not have such a difficult time reaching it. Later the church will be erected next to the school. The committee found a good site. They are unanimously agreed to buy it for \$5,000.<sup>24</sup>

The second year was in particular a joyful one. On Aug. 31, 1862, Buehler's bride-to-be arrived in San Francisco. Louise Wyneken was the oldest daughter of his father's friend, the sainted President F. Wyneken. Louise arrived on Sunday morning, but Buehler could not meet her until five o'clock that afternoon because of his Sunday tasks. On Sept. 14, 1862, they were joined in marriage. No mention is made as to who performed the ceremony. This union was blessed with five children.<sup>25</sup>

During the third year some difficulties arose within the congregation. The small church which the congregation had bought was not well located. At this time, the city found it necessary to level and move the street on which the church was located. This meant closing the doors of the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>25</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 26.

church until the city had completed her work. The congregation decided to sell the old church and relocate. Several men were opposed to this. They did not want to sell the old church and have services in a Presbyterian church in the afternoon as they formerly had. This group would not go along with the majority, therefore they separated themselves from the congregation.<sup>26</sup> Despite all pleas and admonitions this group of about ten members held fast to their convictions. Though this split was bad, the majority decided to continue with the original decision. A plot of ground was bought on Geary Street. This was in the heart of the business section of San Francisco. On Oct. 31, 1863 the cornerstone was laid.<sup>27</sup>

They now went under the name of St. Markus Church, although its corporate name seems to have been "German Evangelical Lutheran Church."<sup>28</sup> This was to distinguish themselves from the departed brethren who had retained the original name of "First German Evangelical Lutheran Church."<sup>29</sup> The departed group soon accepted as their pastor a man by the name of Hansen.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dau, op. cit., p. 350.

<sup>27</sup> Bernthal, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Kretzmann, op. cit., IV (April, 1931), 27.

<sup>29</sup> Bernthal, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 28.

At first only the basement of the church was built and covered with a temporary roof. Later when more funds would be available, they would complete the structure. On Dec. 30, 1866, the church was dedicated. The total cost of this new house of worship was \$30,000.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Dau, op. cit., p. 351.

The first "evangelical" Lutheran church resulted from the union of a conservative pastor called Hansen. They were sought for a union of the two churches. The plan was to build one large German congregation, in which both Hansen's members and Hansen's members would join into one. Both traditions, the strong Lutheran and the free rationalist, could worship together.<sup>3</sup> One of the members stated:

On the Sunday pastor Hansen could conduct such an evensong service, that the house would crack, and on the following Sunday pastor Hansen could preach in his usual and usual way. Each person then could go and

Dr. J. Herthel, Konfessionsgeschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in den Vereinigten Staaten, California, 1882.

## CHAPTER IV

### ATTEMPTS AT AN IMPOSSIBLE UNION

#### Freethinkers and Pure Doctrine

For three years Buehler held services and Sunday School in the basement of this uncompleted church on Geary Street. The Lord continued to add members and everything seemed to be going well. But the more the congregation grew outwardly the more it showed that the members were not of the same heart and soul. The devil had a new plan to destroy the wonderful work of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

"The First Evangelical Lutheran Church" resulted from the small group which left in 1863. This group was under the leadership of a rationalistic pastor called Hansen. They now sought for a reunion of the two churches. The plan was to build one large German congregation, in which both Buehler's members and Hansen's members could join into one. Both factions, the strong Lutheran and the free rationalist, could worship together.<sup>2</sup> One of the members stated:

On one Sunday Pastor Buehler could conduct such an orthodox sermon, that the beams would crack, and on the following Sunday Pastor Hansen could preach in his sweet and mellow way. Each person then could go and

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<sup>1</sup>G. A. Bernthal, Kurzgefasste Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen St. Paulusgemeinde zu San Francisco, California, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

listen to the one or the other pastor, as he desired.<sup>3</sup>

In 1865, an article appeared in *Der Lutheraner* concerning the "Albrechtsleute" (Methodists) in California. All their attempts at getting money from the East to continue work on the West Coast had been in vain. If they didn't build a church soon, they would have to leave the field. They set up a plan by which they hoped to sell 1100 shares at \$5.00 each, and thus gather money for the new building. Each pastor of the church was an agent. The agent selling the most shares would receive a gold "Taschenuhr."<sup>4</sup> This may have been one of the reasons why the Hansen faction was so anxious to unite with Buehler's group. They needed a church, but they couldn't find the funds.

At the suggestion of uniting the two congregations into one "Gemeinschaft," Buehler remarked that it was impossible for him to have pulpit fellowship with a preacher who was not agreed with him in teaching and practice. He was willing to have a discussion on this matter.<sup>5</sup> Since many of his members had been taken in and were prejudiced in favor of the plan, it was necessary to enter such a discussion.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>J. H. Theiss and J. W. Theiss, Lebenslauf und Charakterbild des seligen Fräses J. M. Buehler (Oakland, Kal.: Druck und Verlag des "lutherischen Botschafters," 1902), pp. 32,33.

<sup>4</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXII (Nov. 1, 1865), 37.

<sup>5</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>6</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 22.

### The Great Debate

Committees from both congregations were chosen and a joint meeting was held to discuss the matter at hand. For this meeting Buehler produced the following script as an explanation of his congregation's position:

In regard to an invitation to share in a free gathering of twelve members of the two German Lutheran congregations of this city to deliberate over the question: Whether a union of the two groups is possible. We as representatives of St. Markus Church present the following as our views on the matter under consideration.

We express our joy to all over the suggestion of such a weighty question. Both congregations consider themselves as representing the Evang. Luth. Church. Are we in confession, in aim, and practice one, then both congregations must strive to give expression to this inner unity through outward expression. To us this desire is a holy one because the Scriptures expressly command: Is it possible as within you lies, to be at peace with all men? We believe, according to the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions, the following points:

1. Both congregations accept the Evangelical Lutheran faith as it is expressed in the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and as we have proclaimed it during the past five years. We find it necessary to demand this, because of the wide-spread rumor that the present pastor of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church (Rev. Hansen) is not true to the Lutheran Confessions, but does homage to free principles.
2. Revocation of the summons of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, because free principles were practiced by her in opposition to true Christian belief. We must demand this also.
3. Elimination of the Reformed Songbook of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, since the use of the same is in conflict with the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions.
4. One view on the use of the church by the pastors, and accordingly, both pastors should use the same agenda.

5. Participation of this congregation in the pastoral district meetings, so that the members of the congregation are united with the pastors of the district in which they live. Adherence to this point is necessary to guard against possible misunderstanding and confusion in the congregation as well as among the pastors.<sup>7</sup>

When it came to a decision on these points, the two congregations could not agree. Since a union was impossible the meetings were discontinued.<sup>8</sup>

Not only in this section of the country were there disturbances over the union question. For a number of years attacks had been directed against Missouri Synod because of her conservatism. In 1849 a missionary spoke of her "exclusiveness and unpardonable onesidedness, which in many instances is the cause why they and their church are evil spoken of and their usefulness is materially hindered."<sup>9</sup> The Lutheran Observer of 1864 called it "bigotry" and said: "They err in declining to enter into an intimate ecclesiastical communion with the American Lutheran Church and its General Synod." The General Synod declared:

Our principles not merely allow, but actually demand, fraternal relations with all Evangelical Christians. The Missouri Synod protested in the words of Luther: A man who knows that his doctrine, faith, and confession is true, correct, and certain cannot stand together with those who teach false doctrine or who side with

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<sup>7</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., pp. 22-25. This is the author's translation of the German.

<sup>8</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>9</sup>W. H. T. Dau, editor, Ebenezer (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 110.

such . . . . I am shocked to hear that in one church, at one altar, both parties should take and receive the Sacrament, one party believing that they are receiving mere bread and wine, and the other, that it is the true body and blood of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Krauth says that:

True unity is oneness in faith. And in order to win them back to the one faith, there had to be a body which clearly taught this one faith, which in doctrine and practice stood squarely on the Confessions, and by refusing to stand with errorists, refused to countenance the error. Nor could Missouri have preserved the faith if she had united with such as persisted in error or suffered them to unite with her. Faith cannot dwell in error.<sup>11</sup>

#### Buehler Forced to Leave his Church

Everything seemed to be settled after this debate. The congregation accepted Buehler's explanations, and the pure doctrine was victorious. They were now financially able to complete the erection of the church. The congregation presented Rev. Buehler with a purse of a \$1000 and an eight month vacation. Confident that all was in order, Buehler preached his farewell sermon on I Thess. 2:13, "The joyous confidence with which I leave you."<sup>12</sup> During his absence a young pastor from the St. Louis Seminary, Pastor F. Ebert, supplied the pulpit of St. Markus Church.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Theiss, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> B. W. J. Lange, A Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast under District Organization 1887-1937 (Oakland: California Concordia College, 1937), p. 12.

Buehler had been deceived. The congregation, or rather the rationalistic element, had sent him on an eight month leave because they needed his absence to make some decisions against him.<sup>14</sup>

During Rev. Buehler's absence enemies were actively plotting ways to limit the pastor's powers or else to rid themselves of "this orthodox" man. When Pastor Buehler returned in December of 1866 he experienced a cool reception. On Christmas Day members of the congregation approached him with the demand that he discontinue his uncompromising loyalty to the Scriptures and make certain concessions.<sup>15</sup>

The church had now been completed and was dedicated by Pastor Buehler. He says, the dedication took place "with sad misgivings on my part and amidst unrest in the congregation."<sup>16</sup> The dedication took place on the last Sunday of the old year. He wrote to Der Lutheraner, "It may not look too churchly, but over the front is a shield, 'St. Markus-Kirche der evangelisch-lutherisch Gemeinde.' This can be easily seen."<sup>17</sup>

The demand that Pastor Buehler follow a more liberal policy became more insistent. A group of men secretly drew

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<sup>14</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>15</sup>Lange, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>16</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>17</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXIII (April 15, 1867), 127.

up a document in which they stated their demands. After a number of the members had signed it, this writing was laid before Pastor Buehler. They asked that he also sign his name to it.<sup>18</sup>

They demanded that the pastor henceforth should be liberal in his office (seinem Amt). He should not be too concerned with the leading and ruling part of the congregation; he should not even be an advisory member. He should preach God's Word, but not too sharply, and administer the Sacraments. Buehler was to preach that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he should not preach that he who does not believe shall be damned.<sup>19</sup>

Rev. Buehler explained to his congregation that it would be against his conscience to sign this document. He refuted each demand with God's Word. As a pastor he was a member of the congregation. He was entitled and bound to take part in the affairs of the congregation. His place was to watch over the church that everything would be done honestly and orderly. The congregation could not tell him what to preach. The Word of God alone could dictate this. It was his sacred duty to proclaim both the Law and the Gospel. Many of the members now retracted their signatures from this document. They had misunderstood the entire matter.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>19</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Buehler wrote to Der Lutheraner:

We had barely celebrated the dedication when the quarrel broke out. It was concerned with nothing else than: Whether God's Word should be the rule and guide of faith and conduct, or whether the free tendencies (freien Tendenzen) should not be considered among us. The quarrelsome question was not as simple as that. That was actually the last thought of the whole battle. The opposition wanted to hold firmly to the Lutheran religion according to their Scriptural interpretation (worin sie geboren und wie sie darin erzogen sind). The others would not acknowledge any other teachings than those which are acknowledged in the Small Catechism and in the Augsburg Confession.<sup>21</sup>

Shortly after the storm had subsided, a lodge member died. When Buehler refused to bury him, the battle started again. The people demanded that henceforth Buehler refuse burial to no one whether he belonged to the lodge or not. He was to conduct his service together with the burial rite of the lodge.<sup>22</sup>

Buehler tried to show the people that if he practiced with the lodge he would have to deny the pure Gospel of Christ. Of Jesus, the Savior from sin, the lodge religion knew nothing and didn't want to know anything. The religion of the lodge was a religion of natural man or better yet, of the flesh, which wants to stand before God in its own righteousness.<sup>23</sup> When Buehler could not bring the members to a withdrawal of these demands, he resigned from his office.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXVI (March 1, 1870), 99.

<sup>22</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>23</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>24</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXVI (March 1, 1870), 99.

Dejectedly Buehler came home that evening. It was during Holy Week, 1867. He sank into his chair with the words: "So jetzt ist es vorbei; ich bin meiner Gemeinde los!"<sup>25</sup> Seven years he had labored on this coast. He had recently dedicated a new church in San Francisco. Outwardly it was a beautiful church but inwardly disorder, yes, hatred and enmity against God's Word. Many years later in his anniversary sermon he stated: "That was a step which was so hard for me that I had rather died."<sup>26</sup>

#### The Lodge Question

Berntal states in his Kurzgefasste Geschichte . . . that because of Buehler's great following he dared not see everything at first.<sup>27</sup> Buehler's son-in-law also states that Rev. Buehler was maligned in Synod because of his lodge practice.<sup>28</sup> The writer was unable to find any further data on this matter, except that the lodge difficulties were with Buehler during his entire ministry. In 1887 Buehler states that his members were still in the quarreling church. The quarrel against the lodges was still

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<sup>25</sup>Berntal, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>26</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>27</sup>Berntal, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>A. R. Suelflow, "Notes on Rev. J. M. Buehler of California," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXV (Jan., 1953), 191.

going on both within and without the church.<sup>29</sup>

Since the Lutherans in California to a large extent held membership in the lodge, Rev. Buehler wrote Dr. Walther for advice. The Rev. M. Henry Tietjen, emeritus, a son-in-law of Pastor Buehler gives us this information:

Walther advised him to ignore the lodge for the present and to saturate the people with the Gospel as a sponge is saturated with water; then they would leave the lodge, but no sooner. Unfortunately, I do not know where this letter is, but after Buehler had installed me in Crockett and after the reception, he said: "Let's take a walk," and placing his hand on my shoulder he said: "Henry, I see what you are up against, namely, the same problem that confronted me, and I give you the same advice that Walther gave me," and he repeated the advice quoted above.<sup>30</sup>

Two weeks before Buehler died, the last member told him that he was quitting the lodge. He was P. Spreckels, a relative of the millionaire sugar-king, Claus Spreckels. After Mr. Spreckels had told Rev. Buehler of his decision, Buehler breathed: "Endlich, nach einundvierzig Jahren, ist meine Gemeinde frei von Logengliedern."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>30</sup>Buelflow, op. cit., p. 191. A letter by Dr. Walther giving similar advice is in the possession of the Concordia Historical Institute. It was addressed to the Rev. G. Kuechle, pastor at Columbus, Indiana, and dated Oct. 16, 1864.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER V

### GROWTH WITHOUT UNION

#### Return of the Faithful

The evening of Rev. Buehler's resignation, several members came to him confessing that they had misunderstood the mischief of the other members. They didn't want to have any more to do with such a congregation. Pastor Buehler should perform his duties of office among them as he formerly had done. The faithfulness of these few gave Buehler fresh courage. On the following Sunday, Holy Easter, in a rented hall on Busch Street, Pastor Buehler made another new beginning.<sup>1</sup>

At this first service, a sizable group of people overjoyed Pastor Buehler. The remnant which returned was large enough that already on May 17 of that year Buehler could organize a new congregation.<sup>2</sup>

The constitution again contained the customary uncompromising confession of the Word of God and adherence to the Lutheran Symbolical Books. They tried to close as many gaps as possible that the former might not happen again;

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<sup>1</sup>G. A. Bernthal, Kurzgefasste Geschichte der evangelisch-lutherischen St. Paulusgemeinde zu San Francisco, California, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>A. R. Suelflow, The Heart of Missouri (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 57.

such as making the pastor an ex officio member of the congregation, and no meeting could be held without at least thirty members present.<sup>3</sup>

The other faction which had retained possession of the new church had also kept the name of St. Markus. This church had a sad history during these years. A Rev. Nanns came whom they let go after several months. Rev. Herring was chosen as a substitute while Hansen was in Germany. After Hansen's return both men were to be pastors of the church. Since they couldn't agree, both men resigned. Rev. Heischmann also left after three months. Buehler wrote to the Lutheraner in 1870:

A Rev. Brenzen has been called to be vacancy pastor until another man can be called. May this man who is to come be a believing, true proclaimer of the Crucified. May he also help this unfortunate congregation.<sup>4</sup>

A note in Rev. Kirchner's letter reads thus:

As for the records of St. Mark's Church, they would help you little since they had a series of bad years, ten pastors during the following twenty years, many of them very shady characters as I have learned from a son-in-law of Pastor Buehler, a former pastor, who is ninety years old and was married to the oldest daughter of Buehler. He often speaks of some of those shady incidents about which Buehler told him. That, of course is unwritten history.<sup>5</sup>

Buehler's congregation was again growing. A larger hall

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<sup>3</sup> Bernthal, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Der Lutheraner, XXVI (March 1, 1870), 100.

<sup>5</sup> G. E. Kirchner, emeritus, Letter to Eldon R. Stohs, Feb. 9, 1955.

had to be rented. At the first opportunity they purchased a church of their own for \$24,000. On the first Sunday in Advent, 1869, St. Paulus Lutheran Church was dedicated. The new church was named after the great apostle who had endured so much for the cross of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

This congregation became the focal point of all Synodical activities on the West Coast. Most of the candidates entering the mission fields in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington were ordained here. St. Paulus is still considered as the mother church of the Missouri Synod on the West Coast.<sup>7</sup>

Rev. J. M. Buehler served the St. Paulus Church until his death. The times continued to be difficult. Mockery was still leveled against the church and her pastor. Only one other time, in 1894 when the congregation again relocated, did they experience a loss in membership. Those people who refused to change location identified themselves with sectarian churches in their community, but the misunderstanding was not as great as it had been in the past.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Suelflow, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>P. E. Kretzmann, "The Beginning of Lutheran Church Work in California," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IV (April, 1931), 29.

<sup>8</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., p. 43.

## Faithful to the Church

Not too much is known of the second decade of Pastor Buehler's efforts on this coast. There was more work than one man could undertake. In 1861 efforts were made to call a second pastor. Money was gathered by the congregation for this purpose, but it was not until 1878 that another full-time pastor came to San Francisco. With all the duties of a pastor, Buehler took time to take mission trips to various sections of the state so that he might serve the needs of as many people as possible.<sup>9</sup>

Buehler came in contact with many scattered Lutherans. He was soon known over a large area. From all sides the company of the faithful came for baptism, confirmation, and marriage. Rev. Bernthal in his Kurzgefasste Geschichte . . . states:

When one pages through the church records of St. Paulus, one must marvel over the great number of official acts. For example, the annual baptisms and marriages went into the hundreds. Most of them were outsiders.<sup>10</sup>

For an idea of the extensive work that Pastor Buehler was doing, see the table below. This table shows the church records of 1887 and 1900, the first year of district organization and the last year of Rev. Buehler's life.

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<sup>9</sup>W. H. T. Dau, editor, Ebenezer (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 352.

<sup>10</sup>Bernthal, op. cit., pp. 33, 34.

TABLE I

Congregation	<u>1887</u>	<u>1900</u>
Souls	1300	1420
Communicants	475	645
Voting members	95	97
School	1	1
Teachers	3	3
Children	135	70
Baptized	25	95
Confirmed	87	41
Communions		
Private	14	23
Public	835	830
Total	849	853
Marriages	133	63
Burials	79	77

in 1887 St. Paulus had a Sunday School enrollment of 730. In December of that year a new congregation had again branched out from the church.<sup>11</sup>

Pastor Buehler's first full-time assistant, Rev. L. Wagner, was installed in 1880. Both pastors now made mission trips as time permitted. The first daughter congregation started by the St. Paulus Church was in Oakland.<sup>12</sup>

After twenty years of labor there was one faithful German Lutheran and one Norwegian Lutheran church in San Francisco. By 1883 there was one in Idaho, one in Oakland, one in Stockton, one was being started in Los Angeles, and Orange had one. Altogether there were thirteen congregations in California with a whole list of mission stations.<sup>13</sup>

The pastors of the San Francisco area felt a need for fellowship and an exchange of ideas. They organized the California Concordia Conference for the purpose of Lutheran loyalty and Christian confession. Deriving a great benefit from such a conference, they invited the distant brethren to a "Gemeinschaftliche Konferenz." On April 6, the first

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<sup>11</sup>Statisches Jahrbuch der deutschen evang.-lutherischer Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten für das Jahr 1887 (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia Verlag, 1888), p. 57. The same publication was used for the year 1900, but its publisher was, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1901), p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>Kretzmann, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>13</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXXIX (March 1, 1883), 34.

"Gemeinschaftliche evang.-luth. deutsch-norwegisch-englische Konferenz und Predigt Versammlung" was held on the West Coast.<sup>14</sup>

Of the fourteen men located on this slope, all but two came to this gathering. They organized a free conference with Rev. Buehler as their president. They met five days. Twelve sessions were held- -five morning, five afternoon, and two evening. One of the men commented: "We seem to be very hungry for sessions;" one of the other men answered: "he has been here only a short time. After a few years he will be just as hungry."<sup>15</sup>

While more permanent communities were being formed, new streams of people were still coming in. Colonies of fifty to one-hundred families would move from the mid-west and form entire communities of their own. As these communities increased the pastors felt a greater need for organizing the church.<sup>16</sup>

In the past they had not been able to keep in contact with the officers of the district. They were part of the Western District of Synod. The Western District covered everything west of and including Missouri. On Sept. 27, 1887, ten pastors, two teachers, and four lay delegates met at St. Paulus. They put into effect a district organization

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>15</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXXIX (June 1, 1883), 84.

<sup>16</sup>Der Lutheraner, XLI (April 15, 1885), 61.

which was called the California-Oregon District. Rev. Buehler had been the force behind the conferences. He now was duly honored by being elected as the first district president.<sup>17</sup>

These first years St. Paulus of San Francisco served as host to the district conventions. During the early years Rev. Buehler delivered the main essays on such topics as: Church Union, The Right and Holy Use of Scripture, The Task of the Christian Church over against the Materialism of the Times, and What is Necessary for the Upbuilding of our Church on this Coast.

Men were travelling eight hundred to one thousand miles from the north and five hundred miles from the south to San Francisco for district conventions. In 1899 the men from the north decided to organize their own district. That year the Oregon-Washington area formed a district of its own. The mother district continued as the California-Nevada District of the Missouri Synod.<sup>18</sup>

Rev. Buehler had done much for the church on the West Coast. At the 1901 district convention Rev. Buehler stated what he felt was the chief purpose of these conferences:

Our work is in doctrinal matters. In dealing with any doctrine, our aim must always be: the teaching of

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<sup>17</sup>B. W. J. Lange, A Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast under District Organization 1887-1937 (Oakland: California Concordia College, 1937), pp. 8, 9.

<sup>18</sup>Der Lutheraner, LVI (Aug. 21, 1900), 263.

the Gospel as the only doctrine for salvation. Always discerning it more ably and witnessing to it more clearly.<sup>19</sup>

This was the last convention that Rev. Buehler attended.

The Lord had used him for forty-one years on this coast;

his work was now completed. Rev. Hansen summarizes the work of Buehler:

This church (St. Paulus) Rev. Buehler served until the day of his death thirty-four years later. Rev. J. M. Buehler was a lone Missouri Synod worker on the Pacific Coast from 1860 to 1876; "Botschafter" editor for seventeen years, which he started in 1882; district president of the Oregon-California District for fourteen years, he organized this district in 1887. Mission board chairman for fourteen years; essayist at district conventions nine times; San Francisco Bay local conference chairman during the long years of membership in that body. He conducted a large correspondence, also with the laity. His home was an open house for all who desired to visit it, clergy and laity alike.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Der Lutheraner, LVII (May 28, 1901), 167, 168.

<sup>20</sup>A. Hansen, "Jakob Matthias Buehler, Synod's Pioneer on the Pacific Coast," n. d. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

## CHAPTER VI

### BUEHLER'S ORDINATION

There is some doubt as to whether Rev. J. M. Buehler was ever commissioned or ordained. The Synodical publications and the minutes of Synodical conventions make no mention of this matter. Allusions have been made that he was commissioned, but these references are in secondary sources.

Rev. A. R. Suelflow in his centennial publication of the Western District of Synod, The Heart of Missouri, states: "After a brief, informal commissioning service he travelled via ship for twenty-four days, arriving in San Francisco on August 24, 1860."<sup>1</sup> The same writer states in the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly: "The candidate for the holy ministry J. M. Buehler of Baltimore, Maryland, who was recently commissioned to be a missionary and sent to San Francisco on August 1, 1860."<sup>2</sup>

Theiss in his "Buehlerbuch" states:

Der Kandidat des heiligen Predigtamtes, J. M. Buehler von Baltimore, Maryland, der seine theologischen Studien soeben vollendet hatte, wurde zum Amt eines Missionars erwählt und verordnet und am 1 August, 1860,

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<sup>1</sup>A. R. Suelflow, The Heart of Missouri (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>A. R. Suelflow, "Notes on the Rev. J. M. Buehler of California," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXV (January, 1953), 189.

nach San Francisco gesandt.<sup>3</sup>

The Rev. A. Hansen, archivist of the California-Nevada District, makes the following observation:

To date no material is in my hands that records the official "commissioning" of the sainted father, and no effort has been successful to obtain facts about it, if or not he was "ordained" in the sense the term ordination is used among us in Synod. According to my way of thinking - and others share in it - Rev. Buehler never was ordained and until I learn otherwise I'll also believe that his "installation" at San Francisco was nothing more than an allowable manner of transfer of the pulpit and ministrations of the Means of Grace by his congregation in a manner which it chose and which Rev. Buehler could find acceptable even without another pastor being in attendance and functioning for the congregation.<sup>4</sup>

The Lutheran church of which Rev. Moschake had been pastor, extended a call to Rev. Buehler. He declined this call because they wanted him to be ordained by a popular English preacher. Buehler must not have been ordained at this time. The usual practice in the Missouri Synod is not to ordain men who go forth as missionaries but to commission them.<sup>5</sup>

A history of St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church of San Francisco, "One Hundred Golden Years, 1849 - 1949," written by the congregation's present pastor, Rev. G. Dorn states that Buehler was elected and "installed" as

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<sup>3</sup>J. H. Theiss and J. W. Theiss, Lebenslauf und Charakterbild des seligen Präses J. M. Buehler (Oakland: Druck und Verlag des "Lutherischen Botschafters," 1902), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Rev. A. Hansen, Letter to Eldon R. Stohs, Jan. 18, 1955. p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Der Lutheraner, XVII (Oct. 30, 1860), 44.

pastor on Oct. 21, 1860, as successor to Rev. F. H. Moschake. Moschake had "resigned" from the First German Evangelical Lutheran Church on June 15, 1860. If that "installation" took place, it could not have been by a Missouri Synod pastor, there being none on the coast at this time.<sup>6</sup>

The installation mentioned above is debatable, because Buehler reported that the congregation which he served had been gathered:

Durch die Überreste einer schon früher gegründeten Gemeinschaft von deutschen Lutheranern und durch neue hinzukommende Glieder wurde eine deutsche Gemeinde auf Grund der evang.-luth. Bekenntnissen gesammelt und obiger Prediger am 8. November 1860, zum Pastor derselben erwählt und berufen.<sup>7</sup>

The most reliable source of information that we have is a letter sent by the son-in-law of Rev. Buehler. Rev. N. Henry Tietjen, emeritus, in answer to Rev. A. R. Suelflow's question, "Was J. M. Buehler Ordained?", writes:

From her [Rev. Buehler's wife, Louise] (truly an unimpeachable source) I have it that Buehler was never ordained. This fact was kept a secret during his ministry, but I see no reason for doing so any longer. . . . I never heard that Buehler was commissioned to go to California. Had this been the case, Mother Buehler would certainly have mentioned it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Hansen Letter, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>8</sup>A. R. Suelflow, "Notes on the Rev. J. M. Buehler," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, (Jan., 1953), p. 190.

How did this happen? In 1860 after Dr. Walther had personally selected two men for the California mission, he took sick. Because of his health Dr. Walther was forced to leave for Germany before the end of the school term. The duties of the president changed hands. Since a new man was now acting as president, an oversight might have been the cause that Buehler was not commissioned.<sup>9</sup>

The general attitude of men in Synod at that time toward mission work in California had been, in part, the cause for delay in sending a man to the West Coast. The money needed to send Buehler to California came during the summer while Buehler was visiting at home. Many people, including a number of pastors, tried to discourage Buehler. With such little interest on the part of Synod, the commissioning might have been overlooked through indifference.<sup>10</sup>

Quite naturally, Buehler's ordination would have taken place on the West Coast after he organized his first congregation. But who would have ordained him? There were no Missouri Synod pastors on this coast. The first pastor arrived sixteen years later. The only time that Buehler could have been ordained was in 1867 when he came through St. Louis while on his vacation.

Dr. Walther carried on a private correspondence with

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<sup>9</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

Buehler for a number of years. He must have known that Buehler had not been ordained. We can only quote Dr. Walther's view of the ministry and leave these questions unanswered:

The office of the ministry is conferred (uebertragen) by God through the congregation as possessor of all Church power or the keys, and by the congregations' divinely prescribed call. The ordination with the laying on of hands on those called is not a divine institution, but an apostolic, ecclesiastical rite and only a public solemn attestation of such a call.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>W. H. T. Dau, editor, Ebenezer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 152.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN MATTERS OF DOCTRINE

#### The Early Years -- Buehler's Sermons

A number of Rev. Buehler's sermons are available in printed form. A select number are here considered to see what Rev. Buehler's doctrinal views were. Both the sermons and the essays, which will be considered later, are in German. All the translations are by the writer of this paper.

The first sermon of Rev. Buehler on record was preached on board ship while enroute to California in 1860. Buehler states: "In order to have a real evangelical sermon, I selected John 1:12 for my text, 'As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, to those who believed on His name.'<sup>1</sup> This same sermon was the first one that Buehler preached on the mainland. The content of the sermon follows:

- I. Wherein does the right acceptance of Christ consist?
  - A. Not that we accept Christ as a worldly Lord and King as the Jews.
  - B. Not that we accept Christ as an outstanding teacher and a virtuous man, as the rationalists.
  - C. Not that we accept Christ as the Son of God, to

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Theiss and J. W. Theiss, Lebenslauf und Charakterbild des seligen Präses J. M. Buehler (Oakland, Kal.: Druck und Verlag des "Lutherischen Botschafters," 1902), p. 15.

whom we must bring adoration as the rationalists.

II. What should move us to a right acceptance of Christ?

A. We accept Him as the Savior, the Redeemer from sin, death, and the devil.

1. We are assured that Christ takes us and helps us miserable creatures.
2. He promises sonship to us -- this great good must be enough of a motive. This relation to God results in a spiritual life.

Buehler states that the people listened with rapt attention. He believed that the compliments which he received on this sermon were "only superficial and actually mere productions of rhetoric."<sup>2</sup>

Young Buehler was concerned about presenting the truth of God's Word as clearly as possible. By 1864 he had been attacked for his Scriptural position. He probably was opposed because he spoke too clearly and uncompromisingly.

At the cornerstone laying of St. Markus in 1864, Buehler preached on, "The True Cornerstone of an Evangelical Lutheran Congregation,"

A church can praise God only when she is founded on the only true foundation, which God Himself has laid. If God has not laid the foundation it is better to disorganize and not lay this cornerstone. . . . We continue with this Foundation which was proclaimed by the apostles and the prophets and perpetuated by Dr. Luther.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after Pastor Buehler had shown to his members that a union between the Lutheran Church and the Reformed liberal group was impossible, they granted him an eight month vacation. For his farewell sermon Buehler preached

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Der Lutheraner, XX (Feb. 1, 1864), 85.

on I Thess. 2:13,

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye receive the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. The theme for this sermon was, "The joyous confidence with which I leave you."<sup>4</sup>

This is founded on the joyous certainty,

- I. That nothing else than the pure Word of God is proclaimed among you.
- II. That this Word has been accepted by you.
- III. That the faithful Lord will continue to keep His Word among you.<sup>5</sup>

Buehler had no more than returned from his vacation, when the congregation attempted to limit his position.

Under great difficulties the new St. Markus Church was dedicated. Buehler selected Psalm 27:4 as his text.

His sermon in outline form was:

When is this Church Building in Deed and in Truth a Christian House of Worship?

- I. When nothing but the pure Word of God is preached within her walls.
- II. When our adoration proceeds from a penitent faith.<sup>6</sup>

During Holy Week, 1867, Buehler resigned from his office as pastor of St. Markus. On Easter Sunday, he preached to a faithful few who had returned. His text was Mark 16:1-8,

From whence the Triumphant Joy of Christians over the Resurrection of the Lord? We answer, The Resurrection Shows Us:

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<sup>4</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>6</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXIII (April 15, 1867), 127.

- I. That the Lord Jesus still possesses the victory.
- II. The victory has been won also for us.<sup>7</sup>

A few statements from this sermon are:

How can we rejoice on a day like this when everything seems to be going against us? . . . The disciples were so filled with the joy of the resurrection they could have endured any kind of mistreatment. . . . Not only then but also now is Christ the victor for us. Can we doubt? . . . It is not possible to be a two-sided Christian. We are either for Christ or we are against Him.<sup>8</sup>

#### The Latter Years -- Buehler's Essays

At the first gathering of the Lutheran pastor's free conference in San Francisco, Buehler presented a paper. The topic was: "Building the Lutheran Church on This Coast." He cast out the false motives for mission work as strange fires before the Lord. Some of these strange fires are:

The itinerant preachers, the preachers interested in personal gain, and those who are only concerned with increasing their numbers either by stealing other members, or by deceiving people into believing what they are not.<sup>9</sup>

The right motives for mission work are: (1) A firm conviction in the universality of God's gracious will; (2) The express command of God; (3) Love for the brethren and an assurance of God's blessings.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Theiss, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 43,44.

<sup>9</sup>Der Lutheraner, XXXIX (June 1, 1883), 84.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

This free conference had been formed that "purity of doctrine and unity of spirit might be fostered, and the church on this coast might be built with united effort."<sup>11</sup>

At the organizational meeting of the California-Oregon District in 1887, Buehler presented a paper on, "The Necessity and Expediency that Christian Congregations Unite." The churches which profess faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ, and serve the one true God would naturally seek a union among themselves. These churches combine their efforts in promoting the work of the Synod. This is not only practicable but is imperatively demanded by God.<sup>12</sup>

Buehler's ten theses on "Church Union" are summarized thus:

The most important matter is the salvation of one's own soul. The personal union with Christ through faith brings one into the closest inner union with all believers. The Christian, therefore, never stands separately, but he is united through the bond of faith and love with all the believers in the world. Christians unite with the communion of saints through the visible or local church. Though there is no express command from God that this be carried out, yet as the inner union of faith flows forth from the individual, the outward confession of faith is evident.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>B. W. J. Lange, A Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast under District Organization 1887-1937 (Oakland: California Concordia College, 1937), pp. 7,8.

<sup>13</sup>"Lehrverhandlung," Erster Synodal-Bericht des California und Oregon-Districts der deutschen evang.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten (St. Louis, Mo.: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1887), p. 6.

Since Satan, the world, and the flesh have brought in false teachings, the congregations must make certain that they are united by the right bond, namely, the faith which once was given to the saints. The Word of God is and remains the only rule and norm for church union. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has laid down her expression of God's Word in her confessions of faith. These confessions (Bekennnisschriften), especially the Augsburg Confession, are the true bonds which bring individual Lutheran churches into one communion. Such unions into synods are a natural expression and contain rich blessings. It is necessary that the congregations on the West Coast unite themselves. As a district we should enter into confessional union with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other states.<sup>14</sup>

At the second district convention in 1889, Bushler again presented the main doctrinal essay. His thesis dealt with, "The Right and Holy Use of Scripture." Only he has the Word who accepts it as God's Word. Overwhelmed by every word which he hears and reads, the individual must say: "Here is God speaking to me; His 'yes' is my 'yes'; His 'no' must be my 'no'." The Word grasps the heart. It becomes a conviction, an experience that God, out of unfathomable love, has laid down His revelation in both the Old and New Testaments for all men for all time. We use this Word in the right way when we use it for the salvation of souls.<sup>15</sup>

The summary of the seven theses of this dissertation is:

One can rightly believe only what one rightly knows.  
There is enough evidence that the Bible is God's Word.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Der Lutheraner, XLV (Feb. 12, 1889), 29.

He who accepts the Bible as God's Word, knows the true God and the right way to God. The right use of God's Word is that of saving souls. This saving use of God's Word is a personal matter. Each man takes for himself all that he needs to learn, experience, and enjoy salvation. From this personal use flows the right use of it in gathering a church. We try to appropriate it better, to win and affirm a right union of the spirit, to uncover false teachings and in its place spread the saving faith. The knowledge of the Bible as God's Word should be a powerful force to everyone. The Word should move us to use it with ever greater zeal in our room, in our family circle, as well as in our schools, congregations, and in synod.<sup>16</sup>

At the third district convention in 1891, Buehler again had the main paper. The theme of his essay was: "The Task of the Christian Church Facing the Materialism of our Time." The summary of his five theses is:

The church dare not be indifferent toward materialism. She has the task, with the right sword of the spirit, to oppose this terrible might of darkness more zealously. The materialistic spirit has penetrated all the layers of society and is taking the upper hand. We can be successful only when we do not limit our attack with mere words. We must know the enemy and lay bare her lying tools. We must replace her with the light and power of God's eternal truth. We must warn against the manifold causes out of which the error of the human spirit rises. By grasping the grace of God in Christ we have the true protection and the right cure for this error.<sup>17</sup>

At the fourth California-Oregon District Convention in 1892, Rev. J. Buehler presented a paper on: "What is Required for the Building of the Church on this Coast?" This same paper had been presented in 1883 at the first

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<sup>16</sup>"Lehrverhandlung," Zweiter Synodal-Bericht des California und Oregon-Districts der deutschen evang.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten (St. Louis, Mo.: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1889), pp. 7, 8.

<sup>17</sup>Der Lutheraner, XLVII (Feb. 17, 1891), 28.

free conference of Lutheran pastors in San Francisco.

At the anniversary convention in 1897 Buehler emphasized the real cause for celebration. It consists not only in thanking for past blessings, but also that we lay hold of the important teachings. The important teachings he enumerated as follows:

1. The precious Word of God is the true unshakable foundation on which the Lord Jesus has placed the Church.
2. Union because of geographical territory does not make a strong outward unity, but the unity in spirit and in truth gives strength.
3. A person in the kingdom of God dare never despise the small and insignificant things, because by God's blessing these can become important.
4. Self-denial for the Lord is a virtue which contains a great promise and a rich blessing.
5. Standing up for the faith which was given to the saints is immeasurably full of blessing.
6. Outward success should not be the aim of our efforts in the Kingdom of God. We can be certain that God will in His own time give blessings.<sup>18</sup>

A summary of Rev. J. M. Buehler's theological attitude is the statement he made at the last District Convention which he attended in 1901:

Our main work is in matters of doctrine. Our aim must always be: teaching the Gospel as the only doctrine for salvation. Always discerning it more ably and witnessing to it more clearly.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Der Lutheraner, LV (Oct. 3, 1899), 180, 181.

<sup>19</sup>Der Lutheraner, LVII (May 28, 1901), 167.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Rev. Buehler entered Synod's mission work when things in California were shaping up more after the conventional picture of American life following the turbulent Gold Rush years; when in civic, school, church, and business more settled conditions had to be striven for and required reliable leadership; when the Civil War was upon the country; when Buehler could not begin with a nucleus of Missouri Synod people; when even in Lutheranism many variant opinions had to be dealt with; when circumstances called for discretion and decision, situations for which there was no Synodical precedent. Had Buehler not been the giant that he was, his efforts would not have been as successful as they proved to be under God's mercies. His was heroic work in a decidedly complex period of California history.<sup>1</sup>

At the organization of the district in 1887 it was said:

The most notable personality in that convention was the Rev. J. M. Buehler. He was the pioneer of sound Lutheranism on the West Coast. To his faith, courage, ability, and industry the Lutheran Church owes her firm position on the Pacific slope.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rev. A. Hansen, Letter to Eldon R. Stohs, Jan. 18, 1955. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>B. W. J. Lange, A Half-Century of Lutheran Church Work on the Pacific Coast under District Organization 1887-1937 (Oakland: California Concordia College, 1937), p. 14.

Rev. Buehler was a close adherent to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. At the same time he remembered that he was dealing with weak and sinful humans who had been affected by the materialism of the times. The process of replacing this with the Gospel message in all its pristine purity took time and patience. It was accomplished only through persistent preaching and teaching of the Gospel to men of all classes. His courage, faith, loyalty, and industry provided for him a monument far better than "sculptured stone or storied urn."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

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