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SHORT TITLE

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WALTHER AND LOEHE

IN THE AREA OF ECCLESIOLOGY

Walther And Loehle On Ecclesiology

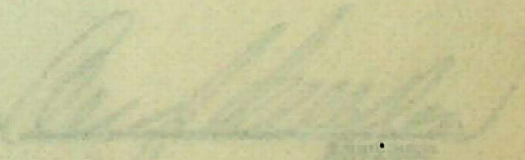
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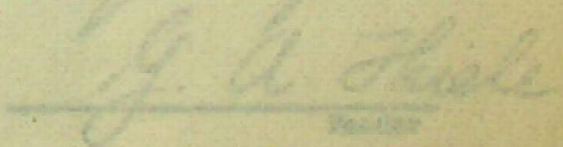
by

William J. Schneider

June 1957

Approved by





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IN THE AREA OF ECCLESIOLOGY**

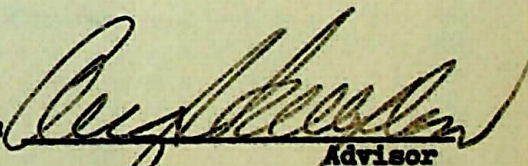
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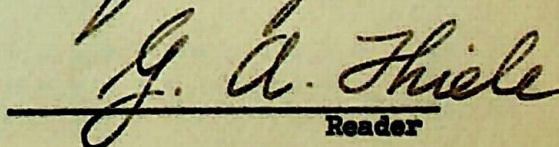

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

The Purpose of the Study

C. F. W. Walther and J. K. W. Loehe were two of the great founders of the Missouri Synod. Until 1853 they worked together in a spirit of harmony and cooperation. In that year Loehe withdrew his support of the Missouri Synod and centered his attention upon the Iowa Synod.

This study is an attempt to understand why this break in relations took place. What happened between these two men that they could no longer work together? Why could they not reach an agreement on the issues involved? Could the reason lie in their divergent backgrounds and experiences? Or does the reason lie in their different attitudes toward the binding force of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church? These and many other questions enter the mind of the student of the early history of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod when he ponders the controversy between Walther and Loehe.

However, the main purpose of this study is an attempt to analyze what the writer considers the main issue involved in the controversy, the doctrine of the church. The conflict between Walther and Loehe was an ecclesiological one. It is from this standpoint that this study was prepared.

The Limitations of the Study

The student of church history is always faced with the problem of

knowing how much he should include. This problem also was faced in the preparation of this study. Since this study is limited to the ecclesiological conflict between Walther and Loehe, it includes only those items which are considered necessary for an understanding of this problem.

For this reason a detailed discussion of the conflict concerning the doctrine of the ministry has not been included. When it seemed necessary to the purpose of the study, reference was made to this conflict. However, in the main the study of this issue must be left to some future work.

This thesis is limited to the controversy that existed between Walther and Loehe and thus excludes, except where necessary, any discussion of the controversies which either of these men had with other theologians.

In the same manner a complete discussion of the ecclesiology of either of the participants could not be given. Such a task, for either Walther or Loehe, would constitute a complete study in its own right. This study merely attempts to summarize the ecclesiological thinking of both men to give the reader the necessary information for an understanding of the controversy.

Wherever necessary, references have been made to other works which the reader might consult for further study. By adopting this method it is hoped that the subject has been kept to the point and at the same time that some helpful guides have been provided for the interested reader.

However, this study does not presume to be an exhaustive treatment

of the resources available to the researcher. Many of the German resources were not consulted. The many volumes of Lehre und Wehre, Der Lutheraner and Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und fuer Nord Amerika contain a wealth of vital information for the understanding of this controversy. The same is true of the other books on the doctrine of the church, besides Walther's Kirche und Amt and Loehe's Drei Buscher von der Kirche, which come from the pens of these men. These were not consulted in the preparation of this study.

Furthermore, Concordia Historical Institute contains a wealth of primary sources which certainly are basic to an understanding of the conflict between Walther and Loehe. However, it seemed beyond the scope of this study to begin the tapping of the primary resources which are deposited at Concordia Historical Institute.

The Scope of the Study

It has already been indicated that this study considers the controversy from the vantage point of ecclesiology. Since both Walther and Loehe appealed to the Holy Scriptures as the basis for the doctrine of the church, this study was begun with a brief examination of the doctrine of the church in the Holy Scriptures, based upon two expressions used for the church, ἐκκλησία and σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Walther and Loehe were both confessional theologians. However, Loehe considered the doctrine of the church as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions an open question. He argued that any doctrinal expression in the Symbols which had not received the approval of the great Lutheran teachers could not be considered binding. Walther maintained that the

doctrine of the church as expressed in the Symbols was binding on the Lutheran Church. Therefore, the doctrine of the church as it is contained in the Lutheran Confessions demanded brief examination.

Loeche and Walther were also in disagreement as to the authority of Luther on the doctrine of the church. Walther was a great student of Luther. He argued that Luther's teaching was the same as the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. Since Luther was the greatest teacher of the church body that bears his name, Walther contended that his extra-confessional writings must be accepted as having authority. Loeche, on the other hand, agreed with Walther that Luther's doctrine of the church was different from his own; but at the same time, he thought that the Lutheran Church had not followed Luther on this point. Because of the importance which Luther received in this controversy, a summary of Luther's ecclesiology has been included in this study.

Personalities always play an important role in any controversy. Walther and Loeche were no exception to this rule. Therefore, the highlights of the career of each man has been examined. In order to carry out this purpose those portions of each man's life which might have had a direct bearing on the position which each man took were selected. Furthermore, the part which F. C. D. Wyneken played in the lives of both men, as well as the part he played in bringing the two men together, needed to be demonstrated.

Finally, the details of the controversy itself needed examination. In this section the events which led to the controversy, the teachings which Loeche espoused in opposition to Walther, the reactions to Loeche's teaching in the Missouri Synod, and the visit of Walther and Wyneken

with Loehe in 1851 were analyzed. In order to show the divergent views held by each man, the most important ecclesiological writing of Walther and Loehe was studied.

It may be of help to the reader to cite the more useful resources which were consulted in the preparation of this study. Many of the works used in this thesis were of great help, but two works deserve special mention. Walter O. Forster's Zion on the Mississippi is without a doubt the best available history of the Saxon immigration. Carl S. Mundinger's Government in the Missouri Synod is the best study of the polity of the Missouri Synod and of the formation of this polity. Any student of the history of the Missouri Synod is indebted to the patient research of these two men.

Conclusions of the Study

The last chapter of this study is a discussion of the effect which this controversy had on the Missouri Synod. Although many effects could be listed, this study is limited to four which are the most important.

In the first place, the controversy marked the end of Loehe's support of the Missouri Synod and the beginning of the Iowa Synod, now a part of the American Lutheran Church. An understanding of the ecclesiological conflict between Walther and Loehe is basic to an understanding of the future relations between the Missouri Synod and the Iowa Synod.

Secondly, the controversy had a direct effect on the polity of the Missouri Synod. Even if Loehe's views of church polity had been accepted, it is doubtful whether his views would have remained dominant. However, the controversy helped consolidate the teachings of the Missouri

Synod in the polity which Walther had advocated.

Thirdly, the controversy consolidated the thinking of the Missouri Synod on the relation of the ministry to the local congregation.

Walther's Uebertragungslehre, or transference of authority, became the accepted teaching of the Missouri Synod.

Fourthly, the liturgical influence of Loehe in the Missouri Synod definitely belongs to a discussion of the relations between Loehe and Walther. Certainly, this area is in need of further study. This study merely endeavors to highlight its existence; the extent of this influence must be left to some future study.

With these points in mind it is evident that the controversy between Walther and Loehe in the area of ecclesiology deserves to be studied.

In this spirit this study has been prepared.

Explanatory

In the New Testament the term *ekklesia*, is used to designate the Christian meeting.¹ In the Corinthian St. Paul writes, "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it."² In the Pseudo, one of the earliest extra-biblical writings of the early church, the place where con-

¹ Walter F. Arnold and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 242. Hereafter this work will be cited as *Lex.*

² Cor. 1:12.

CHAPTER II

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

The Terminology of the Church

The doctrine of the church is expounded by the sacred writers in a number of terms and concepts. Many of these terms are common to both the chosen people of God in the Old Testament and the saints of the New Covenant. Those who have been called by God in His grace and mercy have been called the flock of God, His people, the family of God, His building, and a number of other terms. In the New Testament two terms are used to describe the church more frequently than any of the others. The people of God are called members of the ἐκκλησία and the σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. On the basis of these two terms the doctrine of the church in the New Testament will be briefly examined.

Ἐκκλησία.

In the New Testament the term ἐκκλησία is used to designate the Christian meeting.¹ To the Corinthians St. Paul writes, "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it."² In the Didache, one of the earliest extra-Biblical writings of the early church, the place where con-

¹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 240. Hereafter this work will be cited as BAG.

²1 Cor. 11:18.

profession of sin is made is designated as ἐκκλησία.³ Ἐκκλησία is used, therefore, to describe the gathering of Christians together as a group. Ἐκκλησία is the term employed for the local congregation, for the totality of believers living in one place.⁴ In dealing with an erring brother the Christian is to "tell it to the church."⁵ Quite obviously, the local church is meant by Jesus. After Ananias and Sapphira had been exposed by Peter, St. Luke comments, "And great fear came upon all the church."⁶ After the martyrdom of Stephen the same writer says, "As for Saul, he made great havoc of the church."⁷ When St. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth, he wrote the following commendation, "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church."⁸ Concerning the charity of the Philippian congregation, St. Paul wrote, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only."⁹ The word ἐκκλησία is further used in the singular referring to the local congregations which were established at

³Didache 4:14, quoted in BAG, p. 240.

⁴BAG, p. 240.

⁵Matt. 18:17.

⁶Acts 5:11.

⁷Acts 8:3.

⁸1 Cor. 4:17.

⁹Phil. 4:15.

Jerusalem,¹⁰ Cenchrese,¹¹ Corinth,¹² Thessalonica,¹³ Colosse,¹⁴ and for the seven churches in Asia Minor.¹⁵ In the plural the word is used to designate the churches in a given area: Judea,¹⁶ Galatia,¹⁷ Asia,¹⁸ and Macedonia.¹⁹ From this it can be seen that the term ἐκκλησία is used by the writers of the New Testament when referring to the local congregation.

The term is also used to describe the meetings of Christians at the homes of prominent members of the early church. St. Paul sent greetings to the church which assembled at the home of Priscilla and Aquila in Rome.²⁰ It seems to have been the custom until the third century for Christians to gather at such houses to worship. Some have thought that St. Paul implied that the group which assembled at this home was a meeting of all the Roman Christians. Sanday and Headlam see no reason for this and believe that the apostle refers to similar house

¹⁰ Acts 8:11; 11:22.

¹¹ Rom. 16:1.

¹² 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1.

¹³ 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1.

¹⁴ Philemon 1.

¹⁵ Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14.

¹⁶ Gal. 1:22.

¹⁷ Gal. 1:2.

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 16:1.

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 8:1.

²⁰ Rom. 16:5.

churches in verses fourteen and fifteen.²¹ Thus the group which met at the home of Priscilla and Aquila would be a local congregation. In writing to the Colossians the apostle evidently has the same type of house church in mind when he sends greetings to Nymphas and the church which is at his house.²²

Ἐκκλησία is employed by the New Testament writers for the entire assembly of God's New Covenant people, the church universal.²³ The first occurrence of this term in the New Testament, in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, is a reference to the universal character of the church. Speaking of Peter as the foundation stone upon which the new people of God would be built, Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church."²⁴ In the plural Ἐκκλησίαι is used for the church universal by St. Luke. After the conversion of St. Paul, he writes, "Then had all the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied."²⁵ This universal church is headed by Christ. St. Paul writes, "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church which is His Body,

²¹William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans, in The International Critical Commentary (Fifth edition; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902), p. 421.

²²Col. 4:15.

²³BAG, p. 240.

²⁴Matt. 16:18.

²⁵Acts 9:31.

the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."²⁶ On these verses

Stoeckhardt comments:

It is of paramount importance to keep in mind that the words *καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκε κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῆ ἐκκλησίας*, v. 22 b, constitute the chief statement of this entire section. God has set and given Him--Him who is the Head over all things--to be the Head of the Christian Church. Hofmann states correctly that the Christian Church has received as its Head Him whose personal activity cannot be thwarted. And now, since the Church of Christ is so closely united with Him, as is stated in v. 23, she can be perfectly sure and confident that He will use His entire power in her favor and for her protection. That is the link which unites these thoughts. The Christian Church is as closely united with Christ as the body is with its head, she exhibits the fullness of the graces and gifts of Christ. Therefore also we may be sure that Christ will employ His heavenly power and dominion which He now possesses, will call to arms His angelic hosts and armies of which He is the Head and Leader, in order to protect His Church against all dangers which threaten her from without, will guard and protect her against all powers of the foe, whether they be of the earth or of hell itself, yes, He will call upon all things which are in His power to serve Him in this His purpose. The omnipotence of Christ and of God is our guarantee not only for the preservation of the faith--that truth was elaborated before--but also for the continued existence of the Christian Church against the world filled with enmity against God and against His Christ.²⁷

This confidence and hope belongs to the Christian and to the church because Christ as its Head guarantees the universality and the power which He has given to His church.

Lastly, the term *ἐκκλησία* is used in a number of New Testament passages for both the church universal and the individual congregations as the church of God, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.²⁸ In the superscription to the Corinthians St. Paul writes, "Unto the church of

²⁶ Eph. 1:22-23.

²⁷ Georg Stoeckhardt, Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, translated by Martin S. Sommer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), pp. 113-14.

²⁸ BAG, p. 240.

God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, both their's and our's."²⁹ Here the individual church at Corinth is united in faith with the church universal, all who call upon Jesus in every place, in the bond of fellowship centered in the Lordship of Christ over them. Thus, for the apostle, the important element is the reign of Christ over the hearts of the members of the church. St. Paul's confession also bears out the character of the church as the redeemed of God when he writes, "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."³⁰ The church, therefore, is both the individual congregations which Saul persecuted and the whole as a unit. This church is the pillar of truth.

It is noteworthy that in writing to Timothy the apostle speaks of the church as the pillar of truth and the mystery of godliness in Christ Jesus almost in the same breath:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.³¹

The centrality of the atonement in the life of the church is further shown in the farewell message of St. Paul to the elders of Ephesus,

²⁹1 Cor. 1:2.

³⁰1 Cor. 15:9.

³¹1 Tim. 3:14-16.

"Take heed, therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood."³²

Thus the term ἐκκλησία is used in the New Testament to describe the local congregation, the gathering of Christians, and the church universal. The membership of the church is composed of those who have come to and remain in faith in Christ as their Redeemer and who acknowledge His Lordship over them.

Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ

The second term used with great frequency by St. Paul to describe the church is σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.³³ The oneness of the church and the relationship of Christians one to another is described by St. Paul in a body relationship, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another."³⁴ All Christians have come into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ by having been baptized into this one body. This is what St. Paul is driving home when he writes, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free: and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."³⁵ The entire twelfth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians describes the relationship of the Christian

³² Acts 20:28.

³³ BAG, p. 807.

³⁴ Rom. 12:5.

³⁵ 1 Cor. 12:13.

church as a body. The climax of this chapter is reached with the words, "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."³⁶ The ministry exists for the purpose of building up this body in the faith. St. Paul writes:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.³⁷

One of the most complete descriptions of the church as the body of Christ is given by St. Paul in his instructions to husbands and wives.

He writes:

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.³⁸

Stoeckhardt's comment on this section is very pertinent:

Christ, who even at the time of His sacrificial death and His atonement for sin intended this as a fruit of His sacrifice, He, as the exalted God-Man, as the exalted Head of His Church, bestows upon her also this service, namely, to sanctify His Church continuously through Word and Spirit, to cleanse her from all vices,

³⁶ 1 Cor. 12:27.

³⁷ Eph. 4:12-13.

³⁸ Eph. 5:23-32.

spots, wrinkles, and to adorn her and to embellish her with His own virtues. That is what Paul had said 4:16, that all the movements of the body of Christ, namely, the spiritual movements of the spiritual body, all growth of the Church, proceed from the Head of the Church, Christ.³⁹

Thus, the Apostle Paul uses this expression, *σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, as a description of the church of Jesus Christ. By the use of this phrase the apostle shows the unique Lordship of Christ over the church, the purpose of the ministry in the church, and the mutual responsibility of Christians toward each other in the fellowship of the church.

The summary of the doctrine of the church as it is presented in the Holy Scriptures is very necessary for an understanding of the ecclesiological controversy between C. F. W. Walther and J. K. W. Loehe. Both of these men appealed to the testimony of Holy Scripture; both were convinced that their understanding of the doctrine of the church was the correct Scriptural position.

³⁹Stoeckhardt, op. cit., p. 243.

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

The Church as the Congregation of Believers

With a remarkable degree of consistency the Symbols of the Lutheran Church describe the church as the congregation of believers in Christ. Against the emphasis placed on the organizational structure in the Roman Church, the confessors maintained that the church was people gathered around the Word and Sacraments. The Augsburg Confession teaches thus:

Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.¹

In Article VIII the term "congregation of saints" (congregatio sanctorum) is equated with the term "true believers" (vere credentium).²

Dr. Bretscher's comment is significant:

What, then, is the ecclesia referred to in Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession? It is the church of the believers. It is the church which is united by a common faith in the Lord of the church, the Savior Jesus Christ, who is in the midst of His

¹AC, VII. The editions of the Lutheran Symbols used in this study are: Book of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952) and Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (2. verbesserte Auflage; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952). The following abbreviations will be used: AC, Augsburg Confession; Ap., Apology of the Augsburg Confession; SA, Smalcald Articles; LC, Large Catechism.

²AC, VIII.

church to the end of time.³

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession explains what is meant by the church as the congregation of saints in the following words:

Wherefore we hold, according to the Scriptures, that the Church, properly so called, is the congregation of saints (of those here and there in the world), who truly believe the Gospel of Christ, and have the Holy Ghost.⁴

The confessors understood the phrase communione sanctorum of the Creeds as the people in the church. The church, in their interpretation, was the gathering of people who had the same faith and the same Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

The Symbols of the Lutheran Church which come from the pen of Martin Luther are very explicit in their insistence that the church is the communion of saints. Against the Roman Catholic concept of the church, Luther writes very plainly:

For, thank God, (today) a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd. For the children pray thus: I believe in one holy (catholic or) Christian Church. This holiness does not consist in albs, tonsures, long gowns, and other of their ceremonies devised by them beyond Holy Scripture, but in the Word of God and true faith.⁶

³Paul M. Bretscher, "The Unity of the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (May, 1955), 324.

⁴Ap., VII and VIII.

⁵Although many scholars, such as Werner Elert, have shown that the phrase communione sanctorum of the Apostles' Creed can be understood as the communion of holy things, meaning the Eucharist, it did not seem advisable to enter into this discussion since this study is concerned with reproducing the thought of the Lutheran Symbols. In the Lutheran Symbols this phrase is consistently understood as the communion of holy people. Despite the merit which further discussion might have, it is outside of the scope of this study to include it.

⁶SA, Part III, Art. XII.

From this statement it is quite obvious that Luther could not conceive of the church apart from the gathering of the holy believers around the Word and the Sacraments. Perhaps nowhere does Luther state this more pointedly than he does in his comments on the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed:

But this is the meaning and substance of this addition: I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it. For formerly, before we had attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Thus, until the last day, the Holy Ghost abides with the holy congregation or Christendom, by means of which He fetches us to Christ and which He employs to teach and preach to us the Word, whereby He works and promotes sanctification, causing it (this community) daily to grow and become strong in the faith and its fruits which He produces.⁷

The Lutheran Confessions are in accord that the church is viewed in Holy Scripture as the congregation of believers. They could not accept the organizational view of the church as it was espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. The papal party had vigorously maintained that the church was an organic structure with a visible human head. Against this the Lutherans maintained that the church was the gathering of the faithful under the Lordship of Christ.

The Marks of the Church

The church, according to the Lutheran Confessions, can be recognized by the marks which Christ has given to His church. By the Word

⁷LC, The Creed, Art. III.

and the Sacraments one can discern the church. In the Augsburg Confession the church is defined as the communion of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.⁸

This same thought is dominant in the Apology:

But the Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, as other governments, but it is originally a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost in hearts. (The Christian Church consists not alone in fellowship of outward signs, but it consists especially in inward communion of eternal blessings in the heart, as of the Holy Ghost, of faith, of the fear and love of God); which fellowship nevertheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ. (Namely, where God's Word is pure, and the Sacraments are administered in conformity with the same, there certainly is the Church, and there are Christians.) And this Church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews (Christ is its Head, and) sanctifies and governs by His Spirit, as Paul testifies, Eph. 1, 22 sq., when he says: And gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.⁹

Dr. Piepkorn comments:

The Apology discusses the "signs" or "notes" of the church quite extensively in Article VII. These notes are the Word, the public profession of faith, and the Sacraments; hypocrites and evil persons are members of the church according to the external association of these signs (4, 19, 28). These notes identify the church as being a real society of true believers and righteous people scattered throughout the world; it is not a mere Platonic state (*Platonica civitas*), which has only ideal existence (20). In this connection, it may be noted that the Zwinglians made out the chief role of the Sacraments to be a means of identifying Christians; the Lutherans made this a minor function of the Sacraments (AC XIII 1). Some argued that to assign to the Sacraments a constitutive function in relation to the church prejudices the unique role of faith; the Apology answers that faith does not exclude the Word of God and the Sacraments, that faith is conceived out of the Word in the words of the Gospel and in the Sacraments and that accordingly we are to adorn the sacred ministry of the Word to the maximum ex-

⁸ AC, VII.

⁹ Ap., VII and VIII.

tent (Ap IV 73).¹⁰

The Roman Catholic Church had tried to find the marks of the church in the outward acts of the church, in her ceremonies, in her hierarchy, and in her visible, human head. The Lutheran Confessions vigorously deny that traditions must be the same everywhere.¹¹ The important things to the mind of the confessors was not the external order or arrangement, not the human rites and ceremonies, but the Word of God and the Sacraments. In the Apology they said:

And it says Church Catholic, in order that we may not understand the Church to be an outward government of certain nations (that the Church is like any other external polity, bound to this or that land, kingdom, or nation, as the Pope of Rome will say), but rather men scattered throughout the whole world (here and there in the world, from the rising to the setting of the sun), who agree concerning the Gospel, and have the same Christ, the same Holy Ghost, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions.¹²

In the Lutheran Confessions, therefore, the church is viewed as the congregation of believers in Christ who are gathered around the Word and the Sacraments. These are the marks of the church, the distinguishing elements which set apart the people of God from the people of the world.

The Purpose of the Church

It is conceivable that the church exists upon earth for a number of reasons. It could be postulated that the church exists as a moral force in an immoral world, as a power for right in a world bent in upon

¹⁰ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "What the Symbols Have to Say About the Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (October, 1955), 742-43.

¹¹ AC, VII.

¹² Ap., VII and VIII.

itself. Furthermore, one could claim that the church exists to bring judgment upon an unregenerate world, to arouse the world from its spiritual lethargy. Whatever merit such a discussion might have, it is totally foreign to the purpose of the church which is summarized in our Lord's words to His disciples, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them."¹³ The church exists to impart the forgiveness of sins.

For the Lutheran confessors the imparting of the forgiveness of sins is the purpose of the church. Luther's words in the Large Catechism are noteworthy:

Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the (grace of the) Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but (continuous, uninterrupted) forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other. But outside of this Christian Church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness (sanctification).¹⁴

In his masterful style Luther pushes everything else out of the way, and in so doing he shows the prime purpose of the church in all its glory. The church exists to impart the forgiveness of sins; outside of the church there is no forgiveness, and inside the church there is mutual forgiveness among brethren.

Since the church exists to impart the forgiveness of sins, it is important that the church belongs to the office of the Holy Ghost.

¹³John 20:23.

¹⁴LC, The Creed, Art. III.

Luther confesses:

Behold, all this is to be the office and work of the Holy Ghost, that He begin and daily increase holiness upon earth by means of these two things, the Christian Church and the forgiveness of sin. But in our dissolution He will accomplish it altogether in an instant, and will forever preserve us therein by the last two parts.¹⁵

Without the office and work of the Holy Ghost upon the hearts of men there would be no forgiveness of sins. Without the work of the Spirit there would be no church. Against the views of the church as a world power with an earthly head Luther held up the church as the office and work of the Holy Ghost.

Because human nature is what it is, this grand doctrine of the forgiveness of sins must be continually preached in the church. The consolation and the comfort which this doctrine brings must be held out to people constantly. Luther writes:

We further believe that in this Christian Church we have forgiveness of sin, which is wrought through the holy Sacraments and Absolution, moreover, through all manner of consolatory promises of the entire Gospel. Therefore, whatever is to be preached concerning the Sacraments belongs here, and, in short, the whole Gospel and all the offices of Christianity, which also must be preached and taught without ceasing. For although the grace of God is secured through Christ, and sanctification is wrought by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God in the unity of the Christian Church, yet on account of our flesh which we bear about with us we are never without sin.¹⁶

The church exists to hold out this promise of the forgiveness of sins through Christ. Whatever else may be said about the church, this doctrine remains central.

Dr. Bretscher's remarks are worth noting:

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

The vera unitas ecclesiae is indeed entirely the creation of the Holy Spirit. He achieves this unitas through the means of grace, which Jesus Christ entrusted to the church and which the church employs. In performing this task, the church always fights on two fronts. 1. It must place the Gospel of forgiveness into the center of all its preaching, teaching, and other activities, and it must studiously seek to avoid falling a victim to a doctrina of rites and ceremonies, Law and good works, reason and philosophy. The church lives only by the forgiveness of God in Christ. 2. The church must be concerned to preserve the Gospel with all that this Gospel presupposes (sin, guilt, Law, God's wrath, death); all that it implies (the sola gratia, the propter Christum solum); and all that it achieves in the hearts of sinners (faith, the fruits of faith, the hope of eternal glory).

It is possible to sentimentalize the Gospel and so to deprive it of its God-intended purpose. It is possible also to adulterate the Gospel by mixing Law into it. It is possible to transform the Gospel into Law. But it is also possible so to stress the consensus de doctrina evangelii that the Gospel is strangled. It is possible to fall under the judgment of Lehrgerechtigkeit and not only under the judgment of Werkgerechtigkeit. To keep the heart of the Gospel in the center of all Christian preaching and other activities of the church, but at the same time to preach the whole Gospel with due recognition of all its Scriptural implications must be the constant aim of the vere credentes. The vera unitas ecclesiae gets its life from the proclamation of the remissio peccatorum. But this unitas is at the same time one of loving obedience to all the directives of Him who purchased the church with His own blood and who keeps His promise that His church "perpetuo mansura sit."¹⁷

These words of Dr. Bretscher summarize the thoughts of the Lutheran Confessions in a very simple, yet profound, way. The centrality of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, is the charge to the church. At the same time it is the sole purpose which the church has as it waits for the coming of the Lord of the church.

The Continuity of the Church

Before Charles V at Augsburg the Lutherans confessed that the church

¹⁷Bretscher, op. cit., pp. 337-38.

would remain as long as the world stands.¹⁸ In the Apology the position taken at Augsburg was defended. The continuity of the church is a doctrine of comfort to the Christian as he faces the daily assaults of the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh. When everything else fails, the confidence of the believer in Christ is bolstered by his membership in the church. The words of the Apology are clear and plain, showing a pastoral concern in the defense of the Lutheran faith:

Therefore, in order that we may not despair, but may know that the Church will nevertheless remain (until the end of the world), likewise that we may know that, however great the multitude of the wicked is, yet the Church (which is Christ's bride) exists, and that Christ affords those gifts which He has promised to the Church, to forgive sins, to hear prayer, to give the Holy Ghost, this article in the Creed presents us these consolations. And it says Church Catholic, in order that we may not understand the Church to be an outward government of certain nations (that the Church is like any other external polity, bound to this or that land, kingdom, or nation, as the Pope of Rome will say), but rather men scattered throughout the whole world (here and there in the world, from the rising to the setting of the sun), who agree concerning the Gospel, and have the same Christ, the same Holy Ghost, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions.¹⁹

In these words the catholicity and the continuity of the church are connected to show the deep concern of the confessors in the hope and trust which belongs to the Christian. When everything about him seems to be tearing down his hope in a loving Savior Who has sent His Holy Spirit to preserve the church, then the Christian can take heart. Christ will never leave the church and His gifts remain in the church until He comes.

Dr. Piepkorn summarizes the thoughts of the Lutheran Confessions on this point in the following way:

¹⁸ AC, VII.

¹⁹ Ap., VII and VIII.

The church has its existence in time. It existed in the past, for the holy fathers wrote in the church (Ap IV 400). The church exists now. It will exist as long as the world stands (perpetuo, glossed by the German alle Zeit, should not be translated "for ever"; AC VII 1). The things that were done among the people of Israel were examples of those things that should take place in the future church (Ap IV 395). No matter how infinitely great the number of her wicked members may be, the church exists, and Christ will give her those things that He has promised (Ap VII 9); one of these promises is that the church will always have the Holy Ghost (21).²⁰

The church for the Lutheran confessors is never a static concept, never merely an outward organization, never a group unified by human traditions and ceremonies. The church is the gathering of the redeemed people of God around the Word and Sacraments, imparting to one another the forgiveness of sins. This dynamic concept of the church implies an eschatological view, looking for the coming of Christ. But while it looks in eager anticipation of the return of its Lord, it does not despair, but comforts itself with the promises of Christ that His church will remain until the end of the world.

Thus the Lutheran Confessions reproduce the doctrine of the church as it is given in the Holy Scriptures. The importance of the ecclesi-
ological teaching of the Lutheran Confessions for an understanding of the controversy between Walther and Loehe cannot be underestimated. Walther based his ecclesiology on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Loehe refused to accept the statements of the Lutheran Confessions on the doctrine of the church. He insisted that the doctrine of the church must be considered an open question as far as the Confessions are concerned. Thus, the Lutheran Confessions play an important role in the ecclesiological conflict between Walther and Loehe.

²⁰ Piepkorn, op. cit., p. 744.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE EXTRA-CONFESSIONAL WRITINGS OF LUTHER

The Church as the Congregation of Believers

One of the basic contributions of Luther in the whole field of ecclesiology was his reiteration of the importance of viewing the church as the congregation of saints, as the gathering of the believers in Christ. The stress which is laid on this doctrine in the Lutheran Confessions which come from Luther's pen has already been pointed out.¹ Luther had more to say on this subject in his other writings. In fact, Luther's works are permeated through and through with this emphasis on the church. Vilmos Vajta's comment is pertinent:

Luther liked to speak of the church as invisible, spiritual, and inward. The invisibility of the church follows from its nature as the "communion of saints." The church is the people of God. However, though Luther developed his picture of the invisible church in opposition to the Roman dogma of a visible outward church, it does not follow that he rejected ecclesiastical ceremonies and laws as such and embraced a spiritualistic view of the church.²

Luther looked upon the church as the company of believers in Christ; any other interpretation was to him a violation of the Scriptural doctrine of the church. Carl S. Mundinger summarizes Luther's concept of the church in the following way:

The Church in the real sense of the word is the whole number of

¹Supra, pp. 17-8.

²Vilmos Vajta, Luther on Worship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 139. Dr. Vajta is Director of the Department of Theology of the Lutheran World Federation.

all believers. This community of believers is nothing external. The essence, life, and nature of the Church is not a bodily assembly, but an assembly of hearts. It is separate from all temporal communities, because it is not anything external. The Church is not bound to any city or to any place. Its boundaries cannot be fixed. Being in the Roman communion does not necessarily make one a Christian and part of the Church, nor does being outside that communion make one a heretic or a non-Christian. It is true that the Church has certain marks, namely, the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments, whereby one can tell where the Church is in the world. Nevertheless, the Church is not a visible body constituted after the fashion of the organizations of this world. There is no one above or under another. The differentiation of rank, so common to the organized bodies of men in this world, is absent from the Church. The true Church, the communion of believers, has no head on earth. Neither bishop nor Pope can rule over it; only Christ in heaven is the Head, and He rules alone.³

Luther could hardly conceive of the church without thinking immediately of the people in the church. The authority in the church is given to the people, to the congregation. No one can usurp the authority given to the congregation without usurping the authority of the church itself. Herman A. Preus gives the following passage from Luther:

Jesus says to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19: "Upon this rock I will build my church . . . and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Luther interprets this:

Now it cannot be said of any single person that he remains standing on the rock; for one falls today, another one tomorrow, just as St. Peter fell. Therefore the keys belong to no single person, but to the Church, that is, to those who stand on this rock. The Christian Church alone has the keys, otherwise no one. The Pope and the Bishops can freely use them when they are commanded by the congregation; the minister also has the office of the keys, baptizes, preaches, and distributes the Sacraments not for himself, but by the authority of the congregation. For he is a servant of the entire congregation even when he is a knave; for the keys are given to the congregation. For when he does it by the authority of the congregation, it is the Church that does it, and if the

³Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 7-8.

Church does it, God does it.⁴

Luther never expected anyone to attempt to analyze the doctrine of the church with reason. For him the church must be seen through the eye of faith. He could talk of the connection between the invisible and the visible church. Cyril Charles Richardson's comment is revealing:

Church, then, in Luther is the community of the saints. Thus Luther starts not from a basic distinction between individual and institution, but from their organic relation. Visible and Invisible Church in Luther have an organic unity, whereas in Calvin they have an essential difference of nature and purpose--indeed they are two distinct entities.

This doctrine is typical of Luther, whose theology is always simple and spontaneous, never erudite nor tortuous. He is not forced into elaborate theories, and he uses his learning as it should be used--to confound his opponents and not to expound his doctrines. It is interesting that, unlike Calvin, he takes up the organic metaphor of body and soul to describe the Church, but in contrast to the Catholic use of the terms his thought is not controlled by a rigid institutionalism. There is, he says, an external Christendom and an internal Christendom. By the former he means the material visibility of the Church (buildings, vestments, orders, etc.); by the latter he means the community of one faith all over the world. This community he sometimes calls invisible--not because it has no outward expression, but because "no one can see who is holy, who has faith." The experience of the Christian community is not a matter primarily of the eye of the body, but of the eye of faith. Thus belief in the Church, in Luther, is an article of faith. The community that is the expression of faith is, like revelation, something unique in experience, and hence Church can not be the subject of sociological inquiry. It is known from inside, never from outside. The sociologist can describe what Luther calls body--external Christendom, but this visibility is relatively unimportant, since all these social signs can exist without faith. The basic reality of Church is its soul--the community of faith, and while this must have material expression, to define the material

⁴Herman A. Preus, "The Christian and the Church," More About Luther (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1958), p. 135. Dr. Preus is professor of New Testament, Symbolics, and Liturgics at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul.

expression is not to define Church.⁵

The centrality in Luther's ecclesiology of the congregation of believers is marked by its stress upon real, vital religion. The congregation of believers is posited against the Roman institutional view of the church. For Luther, to say "church" was to say "congregation of saints." To say "congregation of saints" was to say "church."

The Authority of the Word in the Church

Against the Roman Catholic position that Scripture, tradition, reason, and the church could decide matters of doctrine and practice in the church, Luther vigorously maintained that the Word and only the Word was to be the supreme authority in the church. Preus makes the following observation:

The reverence with which Luther bowed before Scripture carried over to his attitude toward the Church. He pleaded with his people to approach Scripture humbly, "with hat in hand," listening in faith even though there were things they could not understand. Likewise he set an example of reverence for the Church which should humble the individualist and open his eyes to the glory of the Body of Christ into which he has been baptized and in which he is privileged to live in the fellowship of Christ and all the saints.⁶

Luther never presumed to add anything in the church which was not contained in the Scriptures. An understanding of sola Scriptura is basic to an understanding of Luther's ecclesiology.

The authority of the Word remained the supreme authority in the

⁵Cyril Charles Richardson, "The Idea of the Church: A Study in Luther," The Augustana Quarterly, XV (October, 1936), 295-96. Dr. Richardson is professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

⁶Preus, op. cit., p. 187.

church. Luther maintained that any perversion of this authority was a perversion of the Gospel and a perversion of the church. The Roman Catholic Church had built a monolithic structure of penance and the need of penance for the forgiveness of sins. In 1530 Luther championed the authority of the Word in the church in his writing on the office of the keys. His own words speak eloquently:

But tell me, dear asses, since one cannot suppose that such a supreme majesty can err, why should one presume to think that God's keys and his divine Majesty can be mistaken? Or is the key and God not as on the same plane with the pope? The keys, indeed, are not man's, but God's, Word and work above and for all mankind. It is for this reason that God did not command any human being to rule over his Christian church, but rather reserved this privilege for himself and commanded us to teach nothing but his Word. For he knows that if we teach by our own wisdom without his Word, the results are only error, lies, and sin. We are only to be God's instruments and to lend him our voices so that he himself alone may speak and govern through us. So be it. In opposition to this, these asses teach that the pope shall govern and not God, and that one should believe the pope and not the keys. Since the pope cannot err, one believes him readily. But because God's keys err, one cannot believe him. In this manner the Christian church is to be taught and governed so that it might be turned into a kingdom of Satan, full of lies, unbelief and all kinds of abomination. This is the part played by "men of sin and sons of perdition" (II Thess. 2:3) who corrupt with their sins the whole world.⁷

The church lives by the Word of Christ; without the supreme authority of the Word the church gives up its right to exist.

Luther went so far as to say that the decisions of the Christian congregation, working under the directives of the Word, is superior to that of any officer in the church. His comment is striking:

A congregation is not bound to put any faith in a slip of paper issued by an episcopal representative, nor need it be concerned about any bishop's letters. Indeed, it is bound not to give it

⁷Martin Luther, "The Keys," Church and Ministry II, Vol. XL in Luther's Works, edited by Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 352-53.

credence. One should not believe the word of men if it concerns the affairs of God. Consequently a Christian congregation is not to play the part of a servant girl in the court of the bishop's deputy, or of the jailer to the bishop, so that either one of them can say: "Hey there, Gretel and Hans, keep this or that person under the ban." The congregation need not respond, "At your service, dear deputy." This perhaps might make sense in secular government, but in this case, where souls are at stake, the congregation shall have a place as judge and helper. Paul was an apostle, yet he was not willing to excommunicate a person who was living in adultery with his stepmother (I Cor. 5:1). But he called on the congregation to act. And when the congregation did not take any action, he did not either, because he was satisfied with whatever punishment the congregation meted out to him.⁸

The Gospel is superior to the Sacraments in the life of the church. It is the Word which gives power to the Sacraments. Therefore, the Word is the mark of the church. Luther wrote to Ambrose Catharinus in 1521:

The Gospel is the one most certain and noble mark of the church, more so than Baptism and the Lord's Supper, since the church is conceived, fashioned, nurtured, born, reared, fed, clothed, graced, strengthened, armed, and preserved solely through the Gospel. In short, the entire life and being of the church lie in the Word of God, as Christ says: By every word that proceeds from the mouth of God man lives (Matt. 4:4).⁹

Luther also warned against looking for the church in external matters, in large numbers, or in influential individuals. Instead, he insisted that one must look only for the Word. In his sermon on the Gospel for Palm Sunday in 1537 he said:

Do not look at the crowd, at wealth, but where the Gospel is to be found. These shams are to be removed from sight, and regard is to be had only for the Word, even though the despised people who have it are not sharp. Though they are poor and ride on mules or travel afoot, nevertheless they are the church. No wealth and no poverty make the church, but the Word does.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., pp. 371-72.

⁹ Martin Luther, What Luther Says: An Anthology, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I, 263.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 264.

Many of the Roman Catholic theologians have claimed that the church makes the Word. Luther regarded this view as completely turned around. On the contrary, he maintained, the Word makes the church. In his writing on the Babylonian captivity of the church in 1520 he said:

The church has no power to make new divine promises of grace, as some prate, saying that whatever is established by the church has no less authority than what is established by God, since the Holy Spirit rules the church. But the church is born of the Word of promise through faith, and is nurtured and preserved by this same Word. This means that the promises of God make the church, not the church the promise of God; for the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church. In this Word the church, as a creation, has nothing to establish, ordain, or make, but is only to be established, ordained, and made. For who begets his own parent? Who first makes his own maker? The church is indeed able to do this: it can distinguish the Word of God from the words of men.¹¹

Many other passages from Luther's writings could be cited to show how central this doctrine was in his ecclesiology. The authority of the Word is one of his greatest contributions to theology. Luther based all the success which his work had on the Word. He desired no credit or honor for himself. The Word had done it all; he had done nothing. So it must be in the church; the Word and the Word alone must decide.

The Holiness of the Church

In the Creeds the church confesses that it believes in sanctam catholicam ecclesiam and in unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam. The Roman Catholic Church had attempted to find the holiness of the church in its externals. Luther recognized that the holiness of the church was not dependent on the holiness of the clergy, or the holiness of the ceremony, or the holiness of the people performing the cere-

¹¹Ibid., p. 267.

mony. For Luther the holiness of the church depended on Christ's holiness. In his exposition of Matthew 24:4-7 on October 26, 1539, he said:

The church is recognized, not by external peace but by the Word and the Sacraments. For wherever you see a small group that has the true Word and the Sacraments, there the church is if only the pulpit and the baptismal font are pure. The church does not stand on the holiness of any one person but solely on the holiness and righteousness of the Lord Christ, for He has sanctified her by Word and Sacrament.¹²

This theological fact has great significance for Luther's ecclesiological views. It is especially evident in his reform of the liturgy.¹³

The Roman Catholic Church had sought to find its holiness in external matters. Against this view Luther held that the holiness of the church is dependent upon the holiness of Christ and, therefore, it is hidden from the eyes of the world. In his Introduction to the Revelation of St. John in 1545, he wrote the following words:

This article: I believe one holy, Christian Church, is an article of faith as well as the rest. This is why reason cannot recognize it, even though it puts on all its glasses. The devil can cover it up with offenses and sects so that you are bound to be offended at it. God, too, can hide it with faults and all sorts of shortcomings so that you become a fool because of them and pass a false judgment on them. This article refuses to be discovered by sight, but must be attained by faith (erglaubt sein), and faith pertains to that which we do not see (Heb. 11:1).¹⁴

Thus, the church is holy because Christ is holy; it does not depend upon the holiness of its members or its clergy or its ceremony. This is

¹² Ibid., p. 263.

¹³ A study of Luther's ecclesiology could be developed from his many liturgical writings with great profit. Many of the viewpoints which he advanced in this area can be best seen in the light of their practical application. In all of his liturgical writings he shows a deep concern for the church. However, it is beyond the scope of this present study to include the liturgical reform of Luther.

¹⁴ Luther, What Luther Says: An Anthology, I, 270.

an article of faith which cannot be cut apart and examined in all its parts; it can only be believed.

The Supremacy of the Church

The Roman Catholic Church at the time of Luther had maintained that the church enjoyed a supremacy in all things, both temporal and spiritual. Therefore, the church not only legislated in the area of liturgical form and practice, morals and conduct, and everyday living, but it also took an active part in the political struggles of the day. To an astounding degree the Roman Church was intimately involved in political life, and it based her right to participate on the supremacy of the church. Against this view Luther held that the supremacy of the church is a spiritual supremacy. In his Commentary on Psalm 45 he says with reference to verse nine:

Therefore the things they used to sing in the churches about the blessed Virgin Mary might more correctly be sung about the church, and should be. The church reigns over death, sin, hell, the devil, and over all the terrors and evils in demons and in men, not by her own strength or merits but by her Bridegroom, Christ. He has placed all these very lovely ornaments about her neck and has trampled death underfoot for her, has given her life, and by His blood has freed her from all dangers. So she has all these things from her Bridegroom and rightly says to the heretics: Mine is the wisdom; to the Gentiles: Mine is the righteousness; to the Jews: Mine is worship and piety; to death: Mine is life; to sin: Mine is the remission of sins; to the Law: Mine is liberty; to fears: Mine is peace and joy, not by myself or my own strength but through Jesus Christ, my Bridegroom.¹⁵

From this we can see that Luther's concept of the church was quite different from the concept which was prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church of his time. The greatness of this difference can be seen in the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 277.

following series of contrasts in Luther's reply to Esser in 1521:

Compare them, the holy church of Christ, and the mad church of the pope. The holy church of Christ says: I believe a holy Christian Church. The mad church of the pope says: I see a holy Christian Church. The former says: The church is confined to neither this nor that place. The latter says: The church is here and there. The former says: The church does not depend on any person. The latter says: The church depends on the pope. The former says: The church is not built on anything temporal. The latter says: The church is built on the pope.¹⁶

In his ecclesiology Luther desired to purge the church of all the encrustations which the Roman Catholic Church had imposed upon it. He brought back to light the doctrine of the church as it is found in the New Testament. Yet, in so doing, he never lost sight of the continuity of the church through the ages. This is Luther's contribution to the study of ecclesiology.

The influence which Luther had on the ecclesiological thinking of Walther was very great. Walther accepted Luther's ecclesiology. Loehe, on the other hand, did not believe that Luther's ecclesiology had been accepted by the church that bore his name. Thus Luther and his ecclesiology played an important role in the conflict between Walther and Loehe.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 261-62.

CHAPTER V

JOHANN KONRAD WILHELM LOEHE

Loehe's Background and Early Ministry

During the three centuries between Luther's death and the controversy between Walther and Loehe the doctrine of the church received considerable attention in the writings of the dogmaticians of the Lutheran Church. It is beyond the scope of this study to present the ecclesiological thinking current in the Lutheran Church in these three very important centuries. Such a task would be quite removed from this thesis.

In order to understand the controversy between Walther and Loehe in the area of ecclesiology, it is necessary to understand the individuals involved in the controversy. Since personalities play an important role in any controversy, the background and the thinking of the participants must be known if their actions and positions are to be appreciated. Therefore, some attention must be given to the person and work of J. K. W. Loehe.

Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe was born in Fuerth, Bavaria, on February 21, 1808. The Loehe family belonged to the middle class; it was well spoken of and the family was interested in the church and in church affairs. Loehe attended the Gymnasium at Nuernberg, which according to German custom had a preparatory department in which children were received a few years before confirmation. C. L. Roth, the rector of the school, made a profound impression upon Loehe. In his later years Loehe acknowledged that he owed more to Roth than to any other of his

teachers.¹

Loeche was very liturgically minded. In his youth he showed his deep concern for worship. Theodore Graebner comments:

Even as a child, Loeche felt a deep attraction to the sanctuary. He never failed to attend the celebration of Holy Communion, which, according to Bavarian custom, took place in a special service early Sunday mornings. When, after the consecration, the solemn tones of the Sanctus sounded from the organ, the boy would chime in with a ringing voice.²

Loeche studied theology at the universities of Erlangen and Berlin. In 1826 he entered Erlangen; there the Reformed Professor Krafft became his spiritual father.³ In Berlin he had the opportunity to hear Schleiermacher, and he became acquainted with other Lutheran writers.

Graebner comments:

In Berlin, where he studied in 1828, he heard the famous Schleiermacher, who, however, made no deep impression upon him. He was made acquainted, however, with some of the old Lutheran writers--he mentions particularly Hollaz, and from that time onward he made the theology of the Lutheran Church the innermost⁴ possession of his heart and the pattern for all his activities.

Loeche began his ministry at the small village of Kirchenlamitz. Much of the preaching at this time was extremely rationalistic. Loeche regarded preaching as rooted and grounded in the Word of God; his attitude is reflected in the following illustration:

Erb directed the Dekan's attention to Candidate Wilhelm Loeche, who soon found in his mail a letter calling him to become the Dekan's private vicar. "It is said you are a Biblical preacher," the let-

¹Theodore Graebner, Church Bells in the Forest (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 15.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴Ibid.

ter read; "that is much to my liking. As a matter of fact, we are called to be such. I expect to receive in you an assistant who will not be sitting in a tavern five or six hours of the day, who will not gamble or attend balls. . . . Moreover, I like men of a disposition serene, content, and rejoicing in God and Christ. Such a man you doubtless will prove to be; otherwise my son-in-law would not have recommended you to me." Loehe, who had passed his theological examination the year before, had not sought this particular charge; he had not even been aware that the world held a place named Kirchenlamitz. In the way things had come to pass he recognized a divine ruling and accepted the call. The position was anything but attractive. The contract signed by both himself and his superior under date of October 24, 1831, imposed a burden of duties. He was to assume all the functions of the senior pastor of the parish, pulpit work, the catechetical instruction of confirmands, the visitation of the schools in Kirchenlamitz and the surrounding villages, and also the adjustment of matters pending in court, for which services he was to receive, in remuneration, free board, light, laundry service, and seven guilders the first, eight the second year. But ease and income were of no importance to Loehe. The Lord called him. His bidding must be willingly obeyed with all the energies at his command. There followed a richly blessed pastoral activity that was in line with the spiritual awakening going forward in Bavaria at this time. Loehe was then in his twenty-fourth year, aflame with the holy zeal to impart to the young as well as to the old the treasure of their Savior, to proclaim the sovereign truth of the Sacred Scriptures, to "fill the hungry with good things" in place of the husks Rationalism offered them. The spacious church could barely contain the worshipers intent on hearing the message; on weekdays his advice and instruction was sought with confidence; at his ministrations the sickroom seemed to light up, the Dayspring from on High having visited it. In later days he said that the two years he spent at Kirchenlamitz had been the happiest of his life. What was the attitude of the two pastors towards the zealous vicar? The old Dean was not blind to the uncommon qualities of his young helper; as time wore on, all the vicar's deeds won the admiration and love of his superior. But before that he told Loehe he could not understand why he would glorify justification by faith every Sunday. He desired his substitute to preach more on good works and a moral life and (his own favorite theme) the degrees of glory in heaven. "That favor," Loehe writes, "I could not do him." Georg, the second pastor was a great lover of horses and dogs. When he sat in the vestry, Loehe preaching, it was too bad sometimes that a rich carriage was driven past the church. He would cease listening and emerge from the vestry to appraise the excellence of the team. It gives pleasure, however, to add, that, thanks to the influence of the vicar, Pastor Georg soon found worthier studies to follow.⁵

⁵Wm. Schaller, "Gottlieb Schaller," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XVI (July, 1943), 36-8.

Loeche then became assistant pastor at Nuernberg. In 1837 he became pastor at Neuendettelsau.⁶ At this church he labored until his death in 1872; through him the village of Neuendettelsau became world famous.

Loeche's pastoral work is summarized by Graebner:

— The unfolding of his unique talent and energy began with his entrance into the ministry. To his congregation he dedicated the fullness of his gifts with unrestrained devotion. Loeche was one of the greatest preachers of his time. Some of his sermons were printed and even now are greatly admired on account of their power and beauty of expression. Yet they give only a weak inkling of the overwhelming influence which Loeche had upon his hearers. Even his catechetical instruction of the confirmed young people was so admirable that even when he was yet a young assistant pastor in Nuernberg, noted educators frequently attended to hear these instructions. At the altar, especially in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, he administered his office in a manner which caused the great theologian Zezschwitz to speak of a "liturgic majesty" of Loeche. Above all things, Loeche was a true shepherd of souls. Indeed, it is difficult to decide where he was greater, in the pulpit and at the altar or at the beds of the sick and dying and in the confessional. Very few have known how to make use of the institution of private confession as he did. Neudettelsau under him became a place of pilgrimage, whither souls that had been awakened came from afar, from the cultured as well as from the lower classes. Especially on festival days, Neudettelsau was crowded with strangers, among them often working people from distant villages, who had traveled from twenty to thirty miles in order to attend his services. There was a genuine awakening, a desire for the knowledge and assurance of salvation. But even at other times Neudettelsau was not without those who sought him when in trouble and who shared the blessing of his pastoral influence.⁷

What was the reason for this success? How did Loeche become such a commanding figure in the Lutheran Church? His great success must be viewed against the background of Rationalism and his insistence upon Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Polack's summary of these con-

⁶Graebner, op. cit., p. 16.

⁷Ibid., pp. 16-7.

ditions strikes the point:

To understand the true greatness of this man, a true picture of the religious conditions in Germany at this time must be given. Rationalism was rampant in all of Germany. Doubt and unbelief were encountered on all sides. The true doctrine of the Sacraments was being altered, and those who were interested in the preaching of the Gospel had on occasions to walk many weary miles to find a church whose minister still taught his people the Word of God. At a time like this, when the Lutheran Church of Bavaria had also come under the influence of rationalistic teachers, Loehe, in the small town of Neudettelsau, stood forth as a leader among those who were still preaching the true Word of God.⁸

In the light of this we can understand why many walked miles to hear this man preach. Graebner's comments are worth noting:

If ever the saying of Emerson came true that if you excelled in anything, even in making mousetraps, people would make a straight path through the forest to your door, it came true in the case of this preacher. From his insignificant village he exerted an influence that is felt to our day. His preaching was a true sensation. Some of those who heard him have left accounts of Loehe's great power as a preacher, for example: "At 6 o'clock in the morning he gathered men of all ranks about his pulpit, nobleman and peasant, learned and unlearned, to listen to his marvelous sermons. Like a prophet he lifted up his voice without a respect of persons." "It was such a preacher who stood in the pulpit of that village church, and when he preached, it was as if a flame of fire proceeded from his lips. He spoke with the majesty and authority of a prophet. He was also a keen observer of human nature, so that he could touch the inmost heart strings of his hearers and warn and plead and point them to the only refuge for fallen humanity. As might be supposed, the congregation of such a preacher soon contained others than the peasants of the village. Men of all ranks and stations crowded around that poor little pulpit, and for all, high and low, learned and unlearned, he had a message. But whatever the gifts of the preacher might be, who would suppose it possible that from this unknown and poverty-stricken corner, influences should go forth that would help to solve the social and missionary problems of the world?" Loehe had a heart of gold and the mind of a true pastor, as is shown in his saying: "Neudettelsau itself has no attractions for me. But the Lord has called me to this place, and that makes it attractive for me."⁹

⁸W. G. Polack, Jr., "The Loehe Missioners Outside of Michigan," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XII (July, 1939), 61.

⁹Graebner, op. cit., pp. 17-8.

Loeche was truly one of the most striking men of his day. He attempted to revive true Lutheranism in a world which was sorely in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But his concern for people extended far beyond his own parish. It is this aspect of his life which must now be considered.

Loeche's Interest in American Missions

Loeche first became informed of the conditions among the Germans in America through the "Appeal for Aid for the German Protestant Church in North America" by F. C. D. Wyneken. Wyneken had been traveling and lecturing throughout Germany, giving a description of the conditions as he had found them in America, with the hope that he would arouse concern and a missionary consciousness in the Church in Germany. Polack observes:

Perhaps we can best present his feelings concerning the situation in America if we quote his [Wyneken's] own words:

"You will find thousands of our people who . . . have cast off the fetters of the Church as well as of the State, do indeed live in outward decency, yet without the Church, without hope, alas! even without any desires for anything higher. . . . The ministers have enough, yea, more than enough, to do with those who voluntarily commit themselves to their spiritual care. But who goes forth to the dens of infamy, into the busy factories, where carnal minds are laboring merely for the bread of this present life? . . . Behold, here we need missionaries who are burning with zeal for the Lord and neither dread the pitying scoffs of the worldly wise nor the diabolical laughter of abject indecency."

He continues with a picture of the privations and sufferings of the settlers in the wilderness, how they are forced to struggle constantly in order to gain a simple and often meager livelihood. Their religion forgotten because of distaste resulting from the rationalism which they left behind when they emigrated from Germany, they continue their labor even on the Sabbath-day. He sums up the good that missionaries do with the words:

"Picture to yourselves thousands of families scattered over these

extended tracts of land: The parents die without hearing the Word of God, no one arouses and admonishes, no one comforts them. Now behold, young and old are lying on their death-beds; their soul perhaps does not as much as give a thought to preparation for the solemn Judgment; but a servant of the Lord would be able to direct the lost one to the holy God, who outside of Christ is a consuming fire but in Christ a reconciled Father; he might by the grace of God and the power of the Word lead the heart to repentance and faith, and the dying soul would be saved."¹⁰

Loehe was so moved by this appeal on the part of Wyneken that he published it and gave it wide publicity. In conjunction with this, Loehe printed his own appeal. One marvels at the magnificent and overpowering concern which he showed for individuals and for a place which he had never seen. Loehe responded:

Thousands of families, your brethren in faith, possibly your brothers and sisters according to the flesh, are hungry for the strengthening meat of the Gospel. They cry out and implore you: Oh, help us! Give us preachers to strengthen us with the Bread of Life and to instruct our children in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Oh, help us, or we are undone! Why do you not assist us? Consider the words: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Why do you not help us? Is that your love of Jesus? Is it thus you keep His commandments? . . . It is literally true that many of our German brethren in America thus complain. Besides, in many places there has arisen a new danger. In no other country are there so many sects as in North America. Some have even now directed their attention to the settlements of our German brethren and fellow-Lutherans. Strange laborers would harvest where the Lord would call His own. Shall our brethren no longer worship in the Church of their fathers and instead recline in the lazarettos of the sects? Shall German piety decay in the New World under the influence of human measures? I beg of you, for Jesus' sake, take hold, organize speedily, do not waste your time in consultation. Hasten, hasten! The salvation of immortal souls is at stake.¹¹

But Loehe was not content to let this appeal be his only endeavor to aid the Germans in America. Instead he set up a training system in

¹⁰ Polack, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

order to prepare men for service in America. The extent and the zeal of his work in this area has become almost legendary. Schaller, who can be a violent critic of Loehe, gives us this warm description:

This great servant of the Church, who, according to human thinking, was born to proclaim the oracles of God to multitudes Sunday after Sunday from the pulpit of a great cathedral, never was called to serve as pastor of a city congregation. He had to wait seven years before he received a permanent call, and then, 1837, it was a call to Neuendettelsau, a village bare of all charms of nature. However, just in this forsaken locality his special talent and power were to unfold themselves in an astonishing way. Through him the unpretentious village was to become "a source of blessing to three continents"; its importance presenting itself to view in the Missionsanstalt and the Diakonissenhaus. Loehe's wholehearted response to Wyneken's appeal in behalf of the spiritually neglected Lutherans in America is universally known and warmly acknowledged among our people. Without delay he began to train young men for missionary work among the shepherdless Lutherans in the United States. The need was urgent; therefore he limited the course of instruction to three years. Moved by the holy desire to give their all to the Lord, most of the students turned every hour of their schooling to account and proved their worth when placed into active service. Loehe's chief aim in this educational undertaking was that his young men should become good preachers. They must learn to express themselves intelligibly and fluently, in other words, the end they should strive to attain was a free command of the language. He pointed out to them pulpit speakers whom they would do well to hear, and a model he warmly recommended to them was the vicar in the neighboring parish of Windsbach. Accordingly, his students frequently went per pedes apostolorum to listen to Schaller's sermons and catechizations.¹²

It is most interesting to note the emphasis here on preachers.

Loehe's emphasis on the pastor as a preacher nullifies the more or less commonly accepted adage that most men who are interested in the field of liturgics are usually poor preachers. Loehe would hardly fit such a description. In fact, his emphasis upon preaching was one which was noted by example as well as pedagogically.¹³

¹²Schaller, op. cit., pp. 43-4.

¹³Supra, p. 40.

Besides this overpowering concern that the individuals sent to America would be able to communicate effectively to the people, Loehe was also very concerned that the laborers would be worthy of the name "men." He could not possibly picture an effeminate preacher of the Gospel. He knew the sorts and conditions under which these men would have to labor. He knew that the task before them was not easy; but the task of preaching the Gospel is never easy. The following gives a graphic description of the type of men necessary to gather the scattered Lutherans in America:

In his Kirchliche Mitteilungen aus und fuer Amerika, an organ which in every page breathes the joys and anxieties of the trans-atlantic mission, Loehe makes a great deal of his emergency men (Nothelfer) at work, their diligence, their devotedness to the cause of spreading the Gospel, their courage, their triumphs over hardships of a backwoods existence. And rightly so: through them the Lord gave to his Zion direct and tangible benefits and furtherance. But admitting that, the brethren would in no wise underestimate the value of academic training. Dr. Sihler wrote to the German friends: "It is highly desirable that some of the brethren who come over to us be regular theologians with dogmatical foundation and training, men who have the ability and skill to make that training count with vigor and address before the assembled synod to the welfare of the Church. Should there be no such in Erlangen at this time?" Then Sihler goes on to show how a faithful servant of the Lord and his family was always sufficiently supported by the people to whom he ministered. Conditions were not quite so primitive as the Europeans viewed them. To which Loehe adds comment. "That is all good and well. Ernst's letters report about the same. It sounds splendid, but splendid it is not. For over there everything is so different, and it requires a contented disposition to get along with those contributions your people give even when augmented by help from the homeland. I concede, one could be satisfied. Are there, then, no theologians to be had for America? The reader will let us confide something to his ear. A student or candidate fresh from the university is always, but especially in our time, more erudite than twenty pastors in office. Well, let that pass. But--what does that and the sense of great erudition help here? Synods meet once a year, and then many questions of a more practical nature call for deliberation, about which students do not know much, because they are learned men. And topping it all, when they come to their home in the bush, among the colonists--their undigested, untried knowledge counts for nothing at all there. Furthermore, not just anyone who is unfit for anything else is good

enough for America. America needs persons of character, rough-and-ready workers, MEN--not the best as to scholastic standing and degrees, but the best personalities who will be able to pass an examen rigorosum in forests and under manifold miseries and yet be happy withal. It is of such that we are in need. Men whom the home country does not wish to release are the ones that the Church needs overseas. Such, yes such theologians! God be merciful to us, we can give neither to the heathen nor to the emigrated Germans what would help the most."¹⁴

It was Loehe's purpose primarily to remember what the apostle had said; namely, that Christians are to help especially those who are of the household of faith. This was Loehe's prime objective. In his pastoral concern he desired that the German Lutherans in America should not revert to a prebaptismal state, back to paganism. Nor did he desire that they should go over to one of the many sects common and popular in America at the time. But as a true shepherd of souls he saw the emigrants as a part of the Christian flock, some who had gone astray. But this did not mean that he was only concerned with the German Lutherans in America. On the contrary, he wanted them to bring the Gospel to the American Indians. But his warning was that they should not be so zealous to convert the pagan that they permit their own fellow-Christians to fall into paganism.

¹⁴Schaller, op. cit., pp. 44-5.

CHAPTER VI

CARL FERDINAND WILHELM WALTHER

Walther's Background and Early Ministry

Walther, the other participant in the important ecclesiological controversy in the early history of the Missouri Synod, was a personality very different from Loehe. His background and his early experiences were so unlike those of Loehe that the controversy between these two men cannot be understood without some appreciation of Walther's life and early work. Walther's experiences with Pietism and Stephanism played a vital role in his theological development. Without a knowledge of these experiences Walther's position cannot be evaluated. Therefore, some consideration must be given to the life and work of C. F. W. Walther.

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born on October 25, 1811, at Langenschursdorf in Saxony. He came from a long line of Lutheran clergymen; both his father and his grandfather were pastors of the congregation at Langenschursdorf.¹ Until Walther was eight years old, he received his training from his father and from the local schools. From 1819 to 1821 he studied at the city school in Hohenstein. From Hohenstein he went to the Gymnasium at Schneeberg, where he remained

¹Walter A. Baepfer, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 41. For further information on Walther's family and early life the reader is referred to D. H. Steffens, Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), pp. 9-23; and W. G. Polack, The Story of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), pp. 1-6.

until 1829. On February 8, 1829, Walther wrote in his diary that he felt himself "born for music." Walther was a capable musician and loved music, but his father's opposition and the impetus given his religious interests at that time dissuaded him from adopting a musical career.²

During this period of time Rationalism was still exerting its force in Germany. Steffens gives the following description of the effect which this movement had on the worship life:

That the liturgical forms of our Common Service, in which the heroic faith of the sixteenth century had given expression to its trust and emotions were bound to be exceedingly distasteful to these disciples of prosaic enlightenment hardly needs to be said. Where there was no faith in grace and a denial of the possibility of its reception, there were, as a matter of course, no means of grace. The sacraments were held to be nothing but empty ceremonies, to be performed by the enlightened minister only in deference to popular prejudice and emptied of their content and import. Since baptism was a superannuated institution, the enlightened minister felt himself free to sprinkle or pour water upon the head of an infant in the name of "liberty, equality and fraternity," instead of baptizing it in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. At the administration of the Lord's Supper, it was proposed that he use these words: "Enjoy this bread; may the spirit of worship rest upon you with full blessing. Enjoy a little wine; no virtuous power lies in this wine; it lies in you, in God's doctrine, and in God," etc. (Hufnagel, Liturgische Blaetter.)³

Walther's education was not unaffected by this movement. He never forgot his experiences. Steffens gives the following:

"I was eighteen years old when I left the gymnasium," he tells us, "and I had never heard a sentence taken from the word of God out of a believing mouth. I had never had a Bible, neither a catechism, but a miserable 'Leitfaden' (guide or manual), which contained heathen morality."

It was impossible that the boy should altogether escape the influ-

²Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 46.

³Steffens, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

ence of such a religious environment. Still he never lost the childhood faith of his early home training in the Holy Scriptures as being God's revealed word, although, as he himself tells us, he had neither knowledge nor experience of that living faith which overcomes the devil, the world and the flesh.

He speaks of this with affecting frankness. In an address, delivered in 1878, speaking of the historical faith which holds the Bible to be God's word, he says: "Through this, that a man holds the Holy Scriptures to be God's word merely because he was so taught by his parents, namely, through a purely human faith in the same, certainly no man can become righteous before God and saved. Nevertheless, such a purely human faith is an inexpressibly great treasure, yea, a precious, costly gift of the prevenient grace of God. I may in this respect present myself to you as an example. My dear, God-fearing father taught me from childhood that the Bible is God's Word. But I soon left my parental home--in my eighth year--to live in unbelieving circles. I did not lose this historical faith. It accompanied me through my life like an angel of God. But I spent my more than eight years of gymnasium life unconverted."⁴

In October, 1829, Walther began his studies at the University of Leipzig. Soon after he entered the university, he joined a pietistic circle of friends who met regularly for prayer and Scripture reading.⁵ The leader of this group was Candidate Kuehn, who had come to the full assurance of his salvation only after a long period of struggling with the agony of sin and the terror of the Law.⁶ Kuehn attempted to lead the students who joined his circle to the surety of their salvation along the same path which he had traveled. Baepler comments on Kuehn's position:

He insisted that a person's Christianity did not rest upon a firm foundation unless, like himself, one had experienced the keenest sorrow for sin and had known the very terrors of hell in agonizing struggles of repentance. Consequently, a joyful, evangelical

⁴Ibid., pp. 20-1.

⁵Baepler, op. cit., p. 42.

⁶Ibid.

Christianity developed into one of gloom and legalism in these young hearts.⁷

As an aid to find this personal assurance, Kuehn suggested various books to the students. Concerning the type of books read by this group, Baeppler writes:

The books chiefly read by this circle were of the pietistic school, whose weakness consisted in disregarding pure doctrine and espousing a religion of emotion and practical benevolence. "The less a book invited to faith," says Walther, "and the more legalistically it insisted upon contrite brokenness of heart and upon a complete mortification of the old man, the better we held it to be. Even such writings we read only so far as they described the griefs and exercises of remorse; when a description of faith and comfort followed, we usually closed the book, for, so we thought, this is as yet nothing for us."⁸

Walther struggled under Kuehn's severe discipline in an effort to gain the surety of his salvation. The effects of this strict behavior and consumption forced Walther to suspend his studies during the winter of 1831--1832.⁹ During this period of rest he plunged himself into a study of Luther's writings.¹⁰ This marked the beginning of his lifelong study of Luther. Walther returned to the university and completed his courses. Returning home once more, he prepared for his first examination, which he passed at Leipzig in September, 1833.¹¹

In 1834 Walther accepted the position offered him to serve as private tutor at the home of Friedmann Loeber in Kahla; he remained there

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., pp. 42-3.

⁹Forster, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 47.

until November, 1836.¹² On January 15, 1837, he was ordained and installed as pastor of the church at Braeunsdorf, where he served until the emigration to America.¹³

The Influence of Martin Stephan

Martin Stephan¹⁴ had a profound influence on Walther. As pastor of St. John's Church in Dresden Stephan became famous throughout Germany for his stand on the Lutheran Confessions¹⁵ and for powerful preaching and his pastoral advice which many sought.¹⁶ Walther's connection with Stephan dates from the early thirties. On the advice of Theodore Brohm he wrote to Stephan seeking advice. The reply gave him, at least for the time being, the peace and assurance he had been seeking.¹⁷ Steffens cites the following incident to show Walther's attitude toward Stephan:

That Walther was inexpressibly grateful to Stephan appears from an incident also related by himself. About half a year later Konsistorialrath and Superintendent, Doctor Rudelbach, asked Walther to call on him at Glauchau, and informed him that he intended to propose him as tutor for his godly count. Doctor Rudelbach demanded that he break off all relations with Stephan. Walther told him at length what had led him to Stephan and what he owed him, asking, "Shall I forsake a man who, by God's grace, has saved my soul?" Deeply moved, Doctor Rudelbach replied, "No, my dear Walther, you must not forsake him; in God's name maintain

¹²Ibid., p. 48.

¹³Ibid., pp. 48-9.

¹⁴For a complete history of Stephan's activities from 1810 to 1837 the reader is referred to Forster, op. cit., pp. 27-59.

¹⁵Forster, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 47.

your relations with him, but guard against all worship of man."¹⁸

Forster demonstrates the reasons for the rise of Stephan very pointedly:

It may quite plausibly be argued that the first impulse in the wrong direction came not from Stephan himself, but from the more enthusiastic of his adherents, some of whom elevated his personality over his teaching and practice. People as deeply and emotionally religious as, for instance, C. F. W. Walther, who felt himself transported "from hell to heaven" through Stephan's instrumentality, naturally had an extremely high regard for him and were submissive to him without any effort on his part to produce such an effect.

Yet the primary responsibility remains with Stephan. His mistake, of course, if he really did not desire such a relationship as developed, and if he was "innately modest," lay in his failure to make known his aversion for the adulation heaped upon him and effectively to discourage it. In fact, such speculation is hypothetical in the extreme. It requires unusual credulity to think that Stephan attained the position he did against his wishes. On the contrary only people who were subservient to Stephan succeeded in getting along with him. At least all the people who were allowed to advance in the Stephanite hierarchy and to play important roles stood in an intimate relationship of this kind to him. Later, during the emigration, there were many in the group who were unacquainted with Stephan. But such people seldom attained any prominence; in any event they usually came from the congregations of men implicitly devoted to him. Their relation to their pastors resembled their pastors' relation to Stephan; hence the general effect was much the same.

In the eyes of his followers Stephan became the champion of orthodoxy, the defender of the faith. They firmly asserted that the means of grace were dependent upon his person and that, if he were silenced, the Lutheran Church would cease to exist in Saxony. Stephan's doctrine was unerringly true, his solution of a question inevitably correct. Any criticism of or opposition to the Dresden pastor was condemned in the harshest terms. Stephan became an oracle, and all who disagreed with him, or with whom he disagreed, were wrong. Since Stephan eventually disagreed with almost everyone, the simple conclusion was that all other views represented in the Church were false; only Stephanism was right. In fact the claim was finally made not only that Stephanism was the only right Church ("die wahre Kirche im Extracte," as Marbach phrased it), but

¹⁸Steffens, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

that it alone was a Church. The Stephanites were the Church!¹⁹ Walther was a part of this group which gave their allegiance to Stephan; he remained a loyal member until after the emigration to America.

Under the influence of Stephan, Walther joined the group which planned to emigrate to America.²⁰ Walther resigned his pastorate at Braeunsdorf and with nineteen members of his parish left for America.²¹ In his farewell sermon he decried the conditions existing in the church in Germany and castigated all who did not join the emigration. He held forth "in such a legalistic manner that some people ran out of the church in terror and tears."²²

Because Walther was involved with illegally taking the orphaned Schubert children, he had to sail earlier than he had planned.²³ His departure has been the subject of many pious, but unhistorical tales. We agree with Forster:

It is on this point, the departure of C. F. W. Walther, that fancy has at times run wild. Martin Guenther, in his biography of C. F. W. Walther, said:

(Walther) was supposed to go on the Amalia; but--O wonderful dispensation of God!--when he arrives in Bremen, he is no longer admitted. On the ship Johann Georg, to which he then goes, there is no room either (!); so a young man (a footnote implies it was Goenner) offers to make room for him and goes on another ship, while Walther remains under his (Goenner's) name.

¹⁹Forster, op. cit., pp. 62-4.

²⁰For the details of the planning of the emigration and the reasons given for such a move the reader should consult Forster, op. cit., pp. 83-170.

²¹Forster, op. cit., p. 200.

²²Ibid., p. 178.

²³Ibid., pp. 194-95.

Janzow, another of Walther's biographers, gave a different version of the story. He erroneously stated that the Amalia left before the Johann Georg and that Walther, "not arriving in time" to take the former vessel, sailed on the Johann Georg. J. A. Friedrich, in Ebenezer, gave the following explanation:

He (C. F. W. Walther) had been booked to sail on the ship Amalia; but when he arrived in Bremen, he was refused passage on that vessel and was forced to take the Johann Georg. The Amalia never reached port, and nothing was ever heard of her again. Truly, "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

If C. F. W. Walther was ever "booked to sail on the ship Amalia," there was no possible reason for his not finding "room" or being "refused," because only fifty-eight or fifty-nine of the seventy places on the Amalia were ever taken. But it is rather unlikely that any portion of the Amalia phase of the legend is true. C. F. W. Walther was probably supposed to go on the Olbers with his brother and Stephan. As late as October 29 E. F. A. Froehlich was scheduled to go on the Johann Georg. Between that date and November 3 he was shifted to the Olbers, on which he finally sailed. It was Froehlich's place which C. F. W. Walther took, and Froehlich was transferred not to the Amalia, but to the Olbers. That Walther sailed under an assumed name, as Guenther implies, is doubtful but possible. At any rate, his right name was used at the port of entry, New Orleans. Finally, Walther could not have missed the Amalia, which sailed a fortnight after his departure on the Johann Georg. His brother stated the reason for a change correctly when he wrote of the danger of Ferdinand's arrest. By the maneuver C. F. W. Walther was spirited out of the country fifteen days sooner than if he had waited for the Olbers (or, for that matter, the Amalia), as originally planned.²⁴

Another point which has evoked the same kind of storytelling concerns the establishment of the episcopacy among the emigrants. That Walther was still under the spell of Stephan cannot be disputed. ✓

Steffens tries to exonerate Walther:

Ferdinand Walther was not greatly impressed by these strange doings. He refused, for reasons of conscience, to subscribe to this act of allegiance and homage which Keyl, who had subscribed to it, afterwards very correctly declared to have been a piece of blasphemous folly. He also stood ready to openly oppose Stephan the moment he set up the claim that he held his episcopal office by divine right, and was, therefore, the occupant of a higher order

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 195-96.

of the ministry than the other pastors.²⁵

The episcopacy was a part of Stephan's plan for his new colony. O. H. Walther demanded that the pastors inform their people that they must fall in line and give their approval of the episcopacy. Forster's documented research shows that C. F. W. Walther did not hesitate:

The four other clergymen--Loeber, Keyl, Buerger, and Ferdinand Walther--responded nobly to O. H. Walther's appeal. February 24 was a Sunday. Unleashing a barrage of sermons to their people on the question of the episcopacy and the necessity for electing Stephan, they upbraided the people for their thanklessness and sinfulness, reproved their disobedience to Stephan and the other pastors, and held forth on Stephan's great saintliness, great service to the Gesellschaft, and his eminent qualification for the office. The pastors expressed discouragement in extremely harsh terms; leaving the Gesellschaft they denounced as a great wrong. From their remarks it was easy to reach the conclusion that some of the people were not even Christians. Only one example of such an address is still extant, and it appears to be in C. F. W. Walther's handwriting. Its closing words are: "I will now read to you . . .," and then there evidently followed one of the various documents the people were expected to sign, although in this case the specific document was not included in the manuscript.²⁶

Walther was still under the influence of Stephan. Forster comments:

One indisputable fact remains--C. F. W. Walther did sign the document cited above as the Confirmation of Stephan's Investiture. This act alone is sufficient to deprive him of any serious claim to a special independence of Stephan or to a clarity of perception not enjoyed by the others.²⁷

Any attempt to deny the influence of Stephan at this point is meaningless. With Forster we must say, "In any case, however, the emphasis upon Walther at this point is misplaced. It was not yet his day. The

²⁵Steffens, op. cit., p. 115.

²⁶Forster, op. cit., p. 298.

²⁷Ibid., p. 303.

Bishop was now in complete control of the group."²⁸

The Break with Stephan

After the establishment of the episcopacy Stephan became more and more aloof; he received the adulation of the people by law; he demanded obedience to the slightest detail. Carl S. Munding comments:

Neither in Oriental literature nor in comic opera has the present writer met with anything that surpasses this "Erklaerung" in submissiveness and servility. The immigrants promise to submit themselves absolutely to every ordinance of the Bishop, whether it concern an ecclesiastic or a secular matter ("in kirchlicher sowie in communlicher Hinsicht"), and to do so in the conviction that such ordinance and command on the part of the Bishop would promote their temporal and eternal welfare.²⁹

But Stephan's rule was to be short-lived. On April 26, 1839, Stephan left St. Louis for Perry County. On May fifth a young woman confessed to Pastor Loeber that she had had illicit relations with Stephan.³⁰ On the same day two others followed her example; during the same week several more made the same confession.³¹

After Loeber had recovered from the initial shock of these confessions, he called together his fellow pastors to discuss with them the entire affair. For the time being the laymen were uninformed of their Bishop's conduct. After considerable deliberations the clergy decided to send C. F. W. Walther to Perry County to prepare for the re-

²⁸Ibid., p. 304.

²⁹Carl S. Munding, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 85-6.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 86-7.

³¹Ibid., p. 87.

moval of Stephan.³²

By May 29, 1839, everyone who could possibly make it journeyed to Perry County for the big event. The entire act of excommunication, however, was carried out by the clergy. The pastors did everything; they were the final court of appeal. Munding says:

The whole procedure was based upon the medieval assumption that the Church consists of the clergy and that the laymen have no part in the government of the Church. So completely had Stephan schooled these men in centralized church government that the simple principles enunciated by Luther in the early fifteen hundred and twenties were completely ignored. When some laymen talked about getting the entire group together and investigating the affair, they were severely criticized and roundly condemned by the clerical leaders. The first thing that had to be done, so they said, was to excommunicate Stephan. This could be done only by the clergy, since they only had the power of excommunication. Thus did the Saxon fathers demonstrate their utter obedience to hierarchical beliefs and their profound confusion on the most simple procedures of Lutheran church government.³³

By the unanimous vote of the clergy Stephan was excommunicated, deposed, and removed from the colony all on the eventful day of May 30, 1839.³⁴ The whole procedure seems a bit hasty and almost unnatural in view of the previous submission to the Bishop. Although most of Stephan's followers were shocked by the charges against him, yet not a single person seems to be convinced of his innocence.³⁵ Forster's comments are worth noting:

In fine, all immediately assumed Stephan's guilt, and almost every one of any consequence was anxiously employed in making assertions in some form or other that he--the individual in question--cer-

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁵ Forster, op. cit., p. 395.

tainly knew nothing of all this in Germany. The practice quickly took hold among both leaders and people, especially the former, of blaming Stephan for everything possible--and impossible--by shouldering upon him responsibility for all the ills that had, did now, and would in the future beset the Gesellschaft. Everyone, without exception, of course, claimed that he had been duped. All were now quite clear that they had not really approved of the very policies and measures which virtually all had countenanced, voted for, helped to execute, and sealed with their signatures. Later numerous "confessions" and admissions were made, but at first the tendency was toward an effort to avoid as much blame as possible.³⁶

The result of Stephan's expulsion from the colony was appalling. Although political and economic chaos swept over the colony, the major disturbance was spiritual. The colonists had placed all their hope in the person of Martin Stephan. They had left Germany because they believed that they could no longer preserve their faith under the prevailing conditions. Overnight the man in whom they had placed their hope was cast into disrepute. C. F. W. Walther and others lost their congregations and as a result had to resign; O. H. Walther died in St. Louis of a broken heart.³⁷

In the midst of the confusion which resulted from Stephan's deposition, two factions developed, one of the clergy and the other of the laity.³⁸ For two years the controversy raged before the light broke on the colony.³⁹ This event, which marked the dawn of a new day for the colony, must now receive consideration.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 395-96.

³⁷ Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 94-5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For a description of the period from Stephan's expulsion to the Altenburg Debate the reader should consult Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 95-108; and Forster, op. cit., pp. 443-506.

The Altenburg Debate

To settle the questions which had weighed heavy on the hearts of all the colonists, a public debate was scheduled for April 15 and 20, 1841, in Altenburg, Perry County. Mundingger assesses this event correctly when he states:

This public debate is a definite milestone in that it marks a turning point in the development of church polity in the colony. At all events, from that time on the colonists knew where they were headed. Whether it was really the "Easter Day" of the be-deviled colony, as one of the participants, the exuberant Schieferdecker, later called it, may be questioned. This much is certain: it did help to clarify the people's thinking, and it was definitely the making of C. F. W. Walther.⁴⁰

Walther's opponent in this important debate was Dr. Adolf Marbach.

Steffens summarizes Marbach's position very well:

The Altenburg debate was held in April, 1841, two years after God, by the exposure of Stephan's sin, had deprived the Saxon emigrants of every human authority and support upon which they had once so confidently relied. Walther was opposed by Doctor Adolf Marbach, a learned and adroit jurist, who took the position that the colony, by separating itself from the Church of Germany, had ceased to be a Christian congregation, and become a disorderly group of people, absolutely lacking all power and authority to perform any ecclesiastical function whatsoever. As the only proper solution of the difficulty, he urged a return to Europe, especially of those emigrants who still had natural duties to fulfill at home; without, however, being able to suggest any way by which their return might be accomplished.⁴¹

Walther, on the other hand, maintained that the colonists were a part of the church, that they did have the right to call pastors, that they were not a disorderly group lacking ecclesiastical authority. By his tact, his ability to approach the problem in a somewhat impersonal

⁴⁰Mundingger, op. cit., pp. 113-14.

⁴¹Steffens, op. cit., pp. 166-67.

way, and by his profound knowledge of the Confessions, Luther, and the great Lutheran theologians Walther emerged as the new leader of the colony. In fact, Walther was so convincing that even Marbach came around to his way of thinking.⁴²

The theses advanced by Walther are very important to an understanding of his ecclesiology and of the subsequent works which he wrote on this subject. We quote his theses in full:

I

The true Church, in the most real and most perfect sense, is the totality (Gesamtheit) of all true believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world from among all peoples and tongues have been called and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Word. And since God alone knows these true believers (2 Tim. 2:19), the Church is also called invisible. No one belongs to this true Church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

II

The name of the true Church belongs also to all those visible companies of men among whom God's Word is purely taught and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. True, in this Church there are godless men, hypocrites, and heretics, but they are not true members of it, nor do they constitute the Church.

III

The name Church, and, in a certain sense, the name true Church, belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the truth; provided they possess so much of God's Word and the holy Sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born. When such companies are called true churches, it is not the intention to state that they are faithful, but only that they are real churches as opposed to all worldly organizations (Gemeinschaften).

IV

The name Church is not improperly applied to heterodox companies, but according to the manner of speech of the Word of God itself. It is also not immaterial that this high name is allowed to such communions, for out of this follows:--

1. That members also of such companies may be saved; for without the Church there is no salvation.

⁴²Mundinger, op. cit., p. 124.

V

2. The outward separation of a heterodox company from an orthodox Church is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian Church nor a relapse into heathenism and does not yet deprive that company of the name Church.

VI

3. Even heterodox companies have church power; even among them the goods of the Church may be validly administered, the ministry established, the Sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised.

VII

4. Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed.

VIII

The orthodox Church is chiefly to be judged by the common, orthodox, public confession to which its members acknowledge and confess themselves to be pledged.⁴³

The effect which this debate had upon the immigrants can hardly be underestimated. Forster concludes, "If there was any single factor which saved the colonists from complete dissolution and from the corrosive forces of further internal controversy, it was the Altenburg Debate."⁴⁴

The effect which the debate had on Walther was equally important. Forster believes that this victory was Walther's greatest contribution to American Lutheranism.⁴⁵ As a result of this victory Walther became the leader of the colony. Forster says:

For this was what he now became, the leader of the clergy and of the colonists in their subsequent development. Other factors, such as his transfer to St. Louis, were also instrumental in changing his station. But his prestige rested upon the fact that he emerged from the chaos of two years of controversy with the most lucid presentation of what the majority of the people felt to be a Scriptural solution for their emotional-doctrinal dilemma and the only plan for a church polity which was workable under the circumstances. These achievements raised him immeasurably in the

⁴³Forster, op. cit., pp. 523-25.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 525.

⁴⁵Ibid.

eyes of all of his associates.⁴⁶

This victory marked the definite end of Stephanism in the colony. It cleared away the dark clouds which had hung over the Saxons for two years like a pall. It re-established the confidence of the people in their pastors, and it made the pastors sure of their office. Walther emerged as the champion of the day. What Walther upheld at Altenburg remains the polity of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod to the present day.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 525-26.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRIUMVERATE

Wyneken and Loehe

Walther and Loehe were the two important participants in the ecclesiological controversy in the early history of the Missouri Synod. But a third man also played a vital part in the controversy. He was an intimate of both Walther and Loehe. More than any other individual he was responsible for Loehe's interest in American missions and for Loehe's activities in behalf of the Lutheran Church in America. He was drawn to Walther by the latter's confessionalism. He brought Walther and Loehe together and attempted to heal the differences which eventually separated them. This man, F. C. D. Wyneken, deserves earnest consideration in the study of the ecclesiological conflict between Walther and Loehe.

Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken was one of the most outstanding men in the early history of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. He was born in a parsonage in a small village near Verden, Hannover, on May 13, 1810.¹ Wyneken studied at the village school, the Gymnasium in Verden, and at the universities of Halle and Goettingen.² Although he had studied theology, yet he admitted that he had acquired nothing of which

¹Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 53. For a more complete picture of Wyneken's life and work the reader should consult Edward J. Saleska, "Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, 1946).

²Ibid.

he could boast.³ However, at the parsonage of Pastor von Hanfstengel in Hannover Wyneken began his intense study of the Scriptures; this study marked a decided change in his life.⁴

In his search for literature which was soundly Christian he came upon some journals which described the miserable spiritual conditions among the German settlers in America.⁵ These accounts made such a profound impression on Wyneken that he decided to go to America as a missionary. In a letter to Biewend in 1842 he confessed his reasons for going to America:

With deep regret I must confess that as far as I know myself, neither love for the Lord nor for the orphaned brethren drove me to America nor a natural desire. Rather I went contrary to my will and after great conflicts, from a sense of duty, driven in, and by, my conscience. As much as it saddens me that I did not have and still do not have more love for the Lord and that He had to drive me like a slave, still in times of spiritual trials and temptations, doubts and tribulations, which came over my soul during my ministry, this was my comfort that I could say: I had to come to America. Thou, O Lord, knowest how gladly I would have remained at home, but had I done this, I should not have been able to look up to Thee and pray to Thee; so I simply had to come.⁶

Shortly before he sailed in the early summer of 1838, he passed his final examinations for the ministry. During the course of this examination, Wyneken took a firm stand on the Holy Scriptures. Even though the examiners were not content with his Scriptural position, he was given a certificate of high merit.⁷

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., pp. 54-5.

In July of 1838 Wyneken landed at Baltimore. After several disillusioning contacts with German Methodists who claimed to be Lutherans Wyneken became acquainted with Pastor J. Haesbaert. Although Haesbaert at first looked upon Wyneken with mistrust, Wyneken soon won his confidence; during Haesbaert's illness Wyneken occupied his pulpit for six weeks.⁸

At Wyneken's request Haesbaert communicated with the Pennsylvania Ministerium's Mission Committee. Wyneken received instructions to proceed to Indiana where he was to gather the "Protestants" into congregations.⁹ After traveling for a while through Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan, Wyneken arrived at Fort Wayne. He had heard of the death of Pastor Jesse Hoover of the Lutheran congregation at Fort Wayne. On October 1, 1838, he wrote to Haesbaert:

Eight days ago I arrived in Fort Wayne. Here as well as in two neighboring settlements I have already preached five times, baptized children, and read burial services. And now these people want me to stay--I advised the vestry of the church to write to the committee of their church body about this. Tomorrow I intend to continue my journey, and I expect to return in four weeks to receive the answer. I am ready to do the Lord's will, and I shall leave it to Him to direct the hearts of the members of the committee as He sees fit. I am satisfied with everything as long as I am certain that the Lord wants me to work here.¹⁰

Wyneken returned from his missionary trip to Fort Wayne on November sixteenth. When he arrived, he found a letter informing him that he had been granted a release from his call as a missionary and that he had permission to take charge of congregations in Fort Wayne and vicin-

⁸Ibid., p. 55.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 56.

ity.¹¹ Using Fort Wayne as his center of operation, he made numerous journeys to the settlements. The spiritual conditions which he found were appalling. In 1841 he wrote his famous appeal for help which was described earlier.¹²

Wyneken's description of the conditions which he had encountered on his missionary travels had far reaching results. In May, 1841, the General Synod decided to send Wyneken to Germany to appeal personally for help in America.¹³ Wyneken was more than happy to accede to the wishes of the General Synod. He entrusted his parish to Pastor G. Jensen and set sail from Philadelphia in October of 1841.¹⁴

Wyneken's trip to Germany had far-reaching results. The high esteem which his relatives enjoyed in church and government circles opened many doors for him.¹⁵ But the contact which brought the greatest results was the one with Wilhelm Loehe. Loehe's role was already discussed above.¹⁶ Through Wyneken's visit Loehe decided to devote his time and energy to the upbuilding of the Lutheran Church in America.

After his return to America Wyneken resumed his pastorate at Fort Wayne. When Haesbaert resigned from his charge in Baltimore, Wyneken was called as his successor; he was installed at his new parish on

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Supra, pp. 41-2.

¹³ Baepler, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Supra, pp. 41-5.

March 9, 1845.¹⁷ Wyneken soon discovered that his congregation was composed of Lutheran and Reformed members. He attempted to make the congregation completely Lutheran, and he insisted that he was a Lutheran pastor. A vehement controversy resulted, and more than eighty members left the church and organized another.¹⁸

Wyneken's staunch confessionalism was soon brought before the General Synod. The General Synod had been accused of forsaking true Lutheranism. To clarify the issue, Wyneken suggested that either the writings of Schmucker and Kurtz, the cause of the charges, be examined by recognized Lutheran theologians or that they be repudiated. Steffens comments:

The General Synod did neither, whereupon Wyneken went back to Baltimore and promptly withdrew to stand alone. He had already gone through similar experiences in "the Synod of the West," where, for lack of arguments, they smiled at his poor English. Nothing daunted, Wyneken simply told them: "You have heard so much poor stuff in good English that you can well stand hearing something good in poor English"; which was no doubt correct.¹⁹

When his proposals were rejected by the convention, Wyneken severed his connections with the General Synod, and his congregation followed him.²⁰ Loehle remarked, "Wyneken is herewith beginning a war which he may carry on with the deepest peace of soul, a war in which all true children of the Lutheran Church will have to join him."²¹ Others were

¹⁷Baepler, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹D. H. Steffens, Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), p. 240.

²⁰Baepler, op. cit., p. 63.

²¹Ibid., p. 64.

to join him, and he was to join others in this war.

Wyneken and Walther

In 1844 Walther began the publication of Der Lutheraner. Through the publication Walther was to gain wide attention, and many were to be gathered around him in the cause for true Lutheranism in America.

It was through the pages of Der Lutheraner that Wyneken first became acquainted with Walther. The reading of this periodical was to make a remarkable change in Wyneken's life; the fact that he came upon it quite by chance makes it even more interesting. He had already heard of the Saxons in Missouri when he was in Germany.²² When he read the first issue of Walther's paper, he exclaimed, "Thank God, there are yet more Lutherans in America!"²³ As the years went on, he was to become a great fellow-worker of Walther.

After the Ohio Synod in 1845 refused to heed the advice of Dr. W. Sihler, one of the men whom Loehe had sent to America, he and his companion withdrew from that body.²⁴ Dr. Sihler requested clarification on two issues. First, he and his companions demanded that the Ohio Synod cease its use of the unionistic formula in the distribution of the Lord's Supper, a practice by which both Lutheran and Reformed were permitted to commune at the same table. Secondly, they insisted that true Lutheranism could only be preserved through the use of the German lan-

²² Ibid., p. 62.

²³ Steffens, op. cit., p. 238.

²⁴ Baepler, op. cit., p. 85.

guage; in this they were in accord with Walther and the Saxons. Their desire was to form a confessional Lutheran body. They agreed to meet with Wyneken at Cleveland in August of the same year.²⁵

Walther was informed of this proposed meeting by Pastor Adam Ernst, one of the Loshe men. Walther expressed his regret that he and the other Saxons would not be able to attend this meeting, but he urged that a meeting be held with the Saxons after the Cleveland meeting.²⁶ At the Cleveland meeting the delegates decided not to form a new body, but to wait until after they had conferred with the Saxons.²⁷ Dr. Sihler and Pastor Ernst were chosen to meet with Walther and the Saxons.²⁸

This was the first of a series of meetings which were to result in the founding of the Missouri Synod in 1847.²⁹ Wyneken was not present at the meeting, but he and his congregation joined the synod at the second meeting in 1848.³⁰

Walther to Loshe through Wyneken

Had it not been for Wyneken, one could only guess whether or not

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 86-7.

²⁷Ibid., p. 87.

²⁸Ibid., p. 88.

²⁹For a discussion of the other meetings and the founding of the Missouri Synod the reader should see Baepler, op. cit., pp. 83-106; Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 163-98; and W. G. Polack, How the Missouri Synod Was Born (Chicago: Walther League, 1947), pp. 3-40.

³⁰Steffens, op. cit., p. 259.

Walther and Loehe would have ever come together. As the result of Wyneken's written appeal for help and his visit to Germany, Loehe became intensely interested in work among the Germans in America.

Many men whom Loehe sent to America became members of the Missouri Synod. In fact, Loehe was kept informed of all the preliminary meetings which were held between his men and the Saxons.³¹ When the preliminary constitution of the Missouri Synod was published in Der Lutheraner, Loehe published it in Germany, he expressed his approval of the actions which his men had taken, and he showed his delight over the progress which had been made.³² He endorsed the Missouri Synod and its constitution at its first convention in 1847.³³ The importance of Loehe in the founding of the Missouri Synod cannot be overlooked. The Saxons were in the numerical minority; Loehe's men acted under his instructions.³⁴ Without his blessing many of the staunch founding fathers of the Missouri Synod never would have joined with the Saxons. In 1848 Loehe presented the seminary at Fort Wayne, which had been founded by Loehe, to the Missouri Synod; for several years the relations between the Missouri Synod and Loehe were most cordial and intimate.³⁵

From these facts it seems fair to say that Wyneken, more than any other single man, was responsible for Walther and Loehe coming together.

³¹Baepler, op. cit., pp. 91-4.

³²G. E. Hageman, Sketches from the History of the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 246.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 247.

The importance of this contribution on the part of Wyneken cannot be underestimated.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE CONTROVERSY

Missouri's Controversy with Grabau

In order to understand the nature of the controversy which was to disrupt the cordial relations which existed between Walther and the Missouri Synod and Loehe, it is necessary to examine briefly the controversy which existed between Walther and his followers and J. A. A. Grabau of the Buffalo group.¹

J. A. A. Grabau had emigrated to America with a considerable following near the end of 1839, eight months after the Saxons had arrived in St. Louis.² Grabau had vigorously opposed the "Prussian Union," by which King Frederick William III had attempted to merge the Lutheran and Reformed churches into one State-controlled church body.³ He and his followers left Germany in order to preserve true Lutheranism among themselves. But Grabau seriously believed that when he and his followers

¹For a complete description of Grabau and his work the reader should consult the biography written by his son, Johann A. Grabau, "Johann Andreas August Grabau," translated by E. M. Biegner, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXIII-XXV (April, 1950 - July, 1952), passim. For a complete discussion of the ecclesiological conflict between Walther and Grabau and Walther and Loehe, as well as a systematic presentation of Walther's ecclesiology, the reader should see Waldemar B. Streufert, "The Doctrine of the Church and Ministry According to Dr. Walther, in Relation to the Romanizing Tendencies within the Lutheran Church (1840-1860)" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, 1942).

²W. H. T. Dau, "Walther's Church and Ministry, Walther and the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 47.

³Ibid., pp. 47-8.

had left Germany, so did the church.⁴

It was Grabau's teaching on the doctrine of the church and ministry that stirred up the bitter controversy between his group and the Saxons in Missouri. The theology which he espoused and the methods which he employed contributed to the opposition which he met among the Saxons. Polack gives the following summary of Grabau's teaching:

Grabau's views may be summarized as follows: "That the Lutheran Church is a visible Church, outside of which no one can be saved; that a minister not called in accordance with the ancient Kirchenordnungen (church forms) was not properly called; that ordination by other clergymen was by divine ordinance essential to the validity of the ministerial office; that God would deal with us only through the ministerial office; that a minister arbitrarily elevated by the congregation was unable to pronounce absolution, and what he distributed at the altar was not the body and blood of Christ, but mere bread and wine; that through her Symbols and constitutions and synods the Church at large must decide what is in accordance or at variance with the Word of God; that the congregation is not the supreme tribunal in the Church, but the synod as representing the Church at large; that the congregation is not authorized to pronounce excommunication; that Christians are bound to obey their minister in all things not contrary to the Word of God, for instance, in building a church, schoolhouse, or parsonage."⁵

The first contact which Grabau had with the Saxons came through his Hirtenbrief of December 1, 1840. In this letter he explained in full his views on the Lutheran Church in America.⁶ Because the Saxons were engaged in their own attempt to solidify their position, which we

⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁵W. G. Polack, The Story of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), pp. 93-5.

⁶For a full discussion of the Hirtenbrief, as well as the complete history of the relations between Missouri and Buffalo, the reader should consult Roy A. Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXVII (April - October, 1954), passim.

described above,⁷ they did not answer Grabau until 1843.⁸ Their answer was penned by Pastor Loeber; in his letter he asked for clarification of a number of Grabau's views.⁹ The Saxons did not join Grabau in the organization of his synod. Dau offers the following:

They [the Saxons] did not join in organizing Pastor Grabau's "Synod of the Lutheran Church Emigrated from Prussia," or Buffalo Synod, and were charged with catering to the popular American idea of democracy by teaching that all authority in the Church of Christ lodges in the hearts of His believers and all church power is exercised by them, jointly and severally, whether they be clergymen or laymen. This position was denounced as unscriptural and un-Lutheran and as fostering a dangerous independistic spirit among church people. In the ranks of the followers of Pastor Grabau dissension arose owing to arbitrary acts of the dominating ministerium. The Missouri Synod, which had been organized in 1847 on the basis of congregational sovereignty and autonomy, not only had to operate at times in the same territory with the Buffalo Synod but was also appealed to by dissatisfied followers of Grabau for counsel, direction, and service. For this they were not only branded as proselyters, but the validity of their ministry was denied. They and those whom they served were publicly pilloried as "mobs," "rebels," "renegades," and "apostates from the faith" once delivered unto the saints.¹⁰

Walther was extremely disturbed by the views which Grabau espoused. He and the Saxons had experienced the same type of thinking with Stephan. Steffens records the following:

In his [Walther's] first letter to Sihler, written in 1845, he says that even under Stephan their one aim had been to give evidence of the most perfect faithfulness to the true Lutheran Church, and that nothing had made them miss this more than their stubborn exclusiveness. "The more dangerous and pernicious this became for us, the more we long for a most careful preservation of true catholicity and an avoiding of all separatism" (Vol. I, p. 6). He writes to Brohm in 1846: "I hate the sectarian exclusion and self-inclusion

⁷Supra, pp. 55-61.

⁸Dau, op. cit., p. 48.

⁹Ibid., pp. 48-9.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 49.

(Abschliessen und Sicheinschliessen) of the Grabau-minded" (Vol. I, p. 7). He resents Grabau's having declared himself and his adherents to be the Church, when he called the Synod he organized, "The Synod of the Lutheran Church emigrated from Prussia" (Vol. I, p. 88). This position reminds him of Stephan's teaching, and he does not hesitate to say: "Grabau with his adherents is nothing but the second, unimproved edition of Stephan and his adherents" (Vol. I, p. 88). Convinced of that fact, controversy was inevitable.¹¹

In 1861 Walther expressed his concern over the controversy with Buffalo in a letter to Brunn, "Our controversy with Buffalo is a cross which would again and again almost crush us to the ground."¹² Walther's answer to Grabau appeared in the form of treatise under the title Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt.¹³ Of this monumental work we shall say more in the next chapter.¹⁴

Briefly, then, this is the background against which the controversy with Loehe must be viewed. It is to the controversy with Loehe that attention must now be given.

Loehe's Entrance into the Controversy

Loehe was drawn into the heated controversy between Buffalo and Missouri when his views began to agree with Grabau. Hageman gives the following:

It is apparent that Loehe living in State Church surroundings regarded the democratic ideals of America with suspicion. Hochstetter

¹¹D. H. Steffens, Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), p. 268.

¹²Ibid., p. 247.

¹³C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Dritte Auflage; Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1875).

¹⁴Infra, pp. 91-100.

writes: "Pastor Loehe, as his articles show, now only had in mind to unite the scattered and separated German Lutherans in North America. His aim was also a union of all Lutherans of America, of Australia, in fact, of all Lutherans of all parts of the world into one church body. Though he approved the withdrawal of his emissaries from unionistic synods and expressed his pleasure at the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Missouri Synod, he is not fully satisfied with the new turn church affairs took in America. He fears that he permitted his emissaries to gain independence too soon. There is also too much change in pastorates. In the main such changes should be controlled by the ministry or by a superintendent. Strict constitutional forms ought to be introduced, etc. Frequently Loehe expresses his opinion that American political freedom and acquaintance with American sects must have a contagious effect upon the dominant democratic tendency of the Lutheran Church or upon the popular rule prevalent in Lutheran congregations". Loehe thus misunderstood American conditions. And the controversy between the Buffalo and Missouri Synods seems to have confused him more. He endeavored to apply German State Church ideas to an American Lutheran free church.¹⁵

At first Loehe looked at the main difficulty separating the Missourians from the Grabau group as one of emphasis. Grabau placed his emphasis on the rights of the ministry as opposed to the rights of the congregation; therefore, he was accused of hierarchical tendencies. The Saxons placed their emphasis on the rights of the congregation as opposed to the rights of the ministry. Loehe felt that neither side was correct. He tried to assume a mediating position between these two viewpoints; he believed that a reconciliation could be effected if both parties would agree to his position.¹⁶

As the controversy developed Loehe found the Saxon view of the ministry completely contrary to his thinking. The Saxons believed that the ministry derived its rights and duties from the local congregation.

¹⁵G. E. Hageman, Sketches from the History of the Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 247.

¹⁶Tietjen, John H., "The Ecclesiology of Wilhelm Loehe" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1954), pp. 90-1.

Against this position Loehe wrote:

The claim that the holy Ministry derives from the congregation rests, so far as I can understand, on no single clear word of Scripture, and for that reason can hardly be held for long in the Lutheran Church. But the claim that the office of Christ is a special institution of Christ within the Church and for the Church, that this office propagated itself . . . through those who possessed it, can not only be demonstrated quite easily without any exception from the text of the Scriptures but also justifies itself in the general history of the Church and in the continued use by the Lutheran Church in particular.¹⁷

Loehe firmly believed that the Saxon view placed too much power in the hands of the congregation. He was convinced that this could lead to nothing but chaos; the pastors would never be able to be sure of their positions; splits and schisms would be the natural result.¹⁸ In fact, he called it "Americkanische Poebelherrschaft (American mob rule)."¹⁹ Against the Saxons Loehe argued for a church government which he considered to be based on apostolic practice:

On my part, I believe . . . that the apostolic practice is the wisest of all, that in all of church history nothing wiser, better, or more useful has appeared, yes, that the apostolic practice is quite natural for congregations that are building themselves up, that the practice had to perpetuate itself and ever again must perpetuate itself. Yes, it has perpetuated itself everywhere, even in the Lutheran Church in so far as its bondage to a state church would permit it. Wherever on earth a Church increased and prospered, it either had apostolic regulations or at any rate approximated them. May one then not dare to say, the truer we remain to the apostolic image, the better?²⁰

The controversy became further involved through the distinction between visible and invisible church. Tietjen comments:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁹ Steffens, op. cit., p. 285.

²⁰ Tietjen, op. cit., p. 93.

The question of the relation between visible and invisible aspects of the Church also entered the controversy. Missouri took exception to Loehe's view of the visible Church as the corporeality of the invisible. It considered the Church to be visible only "in so far as it builds huts in the corporeality of the visible world."²¹

Where did Loehe stand in the controversy? Tietjen assesses his position thus:

Loehe describes his position in the controversy in the following terms:

that the Ministry of the New Testament is not only the spiritual priesthood in operation but a special calling within the spiritual priesthood, which, to be sure, is especially related to the works of the universal priesthood;

also that the congregation does not deliver up her powers to the bearers of the Ministry but that she is the instrument of Christ for conferring the Ministry;

that the individual congregation should deliver up the Ministry without assistance from the bearers of the Ministry only in extraordinary cases, that generally, as the matter itself demands, the bearers of the Ministry are to be included in the conferral of the Ministry;

that the visible Church is not only a way of concealing or even of hiding the invisible Church but that according to the Lord's intention she is to be a revelation and a manifestation of the invisible Church in the world, through which the Lord calls and gathers His saints.²²

During the course of the controversy the Saxons appealed to the writings of Luther. They contended that in his writings Luther had advocated a doctrine of the church and the ministry which was the same as theirs. Loehe agreed that the Saxons were faithfully reproducing Luther's ecclesiology. [However, he did not think that the Lutheran Church agreed with Luther on this point. Although he offers no substan-

²¹ Ibid., p. 94.

²² Ibid., p. 95.

tiating evidence, Loehe was of the opinion that the great teachers of the Lutheran Church had not espoused Luther's ecclesiology.²³ Here Loehe was in complete agreement with Grabau, who also criticized Walther and the Saxons for their appeal to Luther's writings as a standard of orthodox teaching.²⁴

But the question concerning the authority of Luther was not the one which created the greatest reaction. Loehe disagreed with Walther on the relationship between the Scriptures and the Confessions. Tietjen attempted to defend Loehe and in so doing has given us an excellent description of Loehe's position. He argues:

The question of the relation of the Lutheran Church to the Scriptures and the Confessions figured strongly in the controversy. Loehe felt that Missouri's position was one of overbearing orthodoxy, which sought to prove everything by a reference to the Confessions of the Church. He insisted on proofs from the Scripture. He described his own position and that of Missouri on the relation of the Scriptures to the Confessions in the following way:

Now if we are to characterize briefly and simply the two schools of thought here and there, it can be done very simply this way: Here one reads the Scripture according to the Symbols.

He goes on to say that Missouri, to be sure, means only that there can be no other explanation of the Scriptures than that of the Symbols. All Lutherans agree with them on that; that is why all Lutherans insist on a guia subscription to the Confessions. But he says Missouri applies the guia to everything in the Confessions, not just to the Symbolical decisions. By reading the Symbols according to the Scripture Loehe says he does not mean that the Symbolical decisions are not true to Scripture. He is certain that any investigation of the Scripture will vindicate the Symbols; but, he goes on,

we also do not consider the Symbols and the doctrine of the dogmatists of the sixteenth century as so complete that a faithful inquiry . . . cannot lead to a purer, fuller, and more harmonious

²³ Ibid., pp. 96-7.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

presentation of the doctrine of the Symbols which is more worthy of the Scripture.²⁵

Walther could never see eye to eye with Loehe in his position.

Walther maintained that the Scripture must be interpreted according to the Confessions. Walther evidently had Loehe in mind when he said in 1858:

Again, some say that there can be no better interpretation of the Symbols than that which is according to Scripture. That is a fallacious proposition. Only that can be interpreted according to Scripture which is essentially the same as Scripture. No human writing can therefore be interpreted according to Scripture; this applies only to Scripture. As Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture, so every human document must be interpreted according to its own content. If one interprets a man-made document according to Scripture, he equates the two and declares a priori that any dark statement in the Symbols must agree with Scripture, a fact which would be true only of a new immediate revelation. No, a human document must be tested and, if necessary, improved, but not interpreted, according to Scriptures. A subscription to the confession is the Church's assurance that its teachers have recognized the interpretation and understanding of Scripture which is embodied in the Symbols as correct and will therefore interpret Scripture as the Church interprets it. If the Church therefore would permit its teachers to interpret the Symbols according to the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures according to its Symbols, the subscription would be no guarantee that the respective teacher understands the Scripture and interprets the Scripture as the Church does. In fact, the Church would make the personal conviction of each teacher its symbol.²⁶

The controversy on the Lutheran Confessions did not stop on this point. Loehe did not think that the Confessions could be used to settle differences concerning "Open Questions." Since there was disagreement concerning the doctrine of the church, he argued that this doctrine must

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 97-8.

²⁶ C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church," translated by Alex. Wm. C. Guebert, Concordia Theological Monthly, XVIII (April, 1947), 246.

be viewed as an "Open Question."²⁷ Furthermore, Loehe refused to be bound by the entire doctrinal content of the Confessions and argued that one must distinguish between those sections which are binding and those which are not.²⁸

Again Walther must have had Loehe in mind when he contended in 1858:

Again some say: Ought not those points be considered as open questions on which even the most loyal and most positive Lutherans have differing opinions? This is a petitio principii, i.e., begging the question, for loyal, positive Lutherans believe what the Lutheran Church teaches in its confessions. A doctrine does not become an open question when supposedly loyal Lutherans are not in agreement. And whoever permits such doctrines to be treated as open questions surrenders the fortress of the confession of our Church and is in reality no loyal Lutheran.²⁹

Loehe's description of the theology of the Missouri Synod is quoted by Tietjen:

Here we find genuine Lutheranism, an orthodoxy of purest water, consistent in doctrine and life and carried out with rare strength and unity; that is, a Lutheranism which identifies itself as closely as possible with Lutheranism as it characterized itself distinctly in its best age, a Lutheranism which is viewed from the standpoint of a unique norm and a highest ideal, the sixteenth century . . . and the majority of the distinguished teachers of that time; a Lutheranism which brought into existence the one teaching of Luther, that of Church and Ministry, which otherwise received no practical acceptance in the Lutheran Church anywhere or at any time. The peculiar feature of this school of thought lies in this, that it views all doctrinal developments as complete, and as fixed and deposited in the Symbols of the Lutheran Church. All questions that perhaps are to be viewed as not yet completely determined, as "open questions," are either already determined, in that the Symbols express themselves about them even if only in passing or in that in

²⁷ Steffens, op. cit., pp. 283-84.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 287.

²⁹ Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church," p. 247.

doubtful cases the most excellent teachers are consulted about them as authoritative expositors of the intent of the Confessions, or else they can easily be determined by logical conclusions derived from the system.³⁰

Loehe could not accept the type of Lutheranism which was dominant in the Missouri Synod, the type of Lutheranism so cherished by Walther. Loehe believed that Missouri was static; he thought his viewpoint the dynamic expression of Lutheranism. Obviously, such a divergent theological orientation was bound to produce a shout from the Missouri Synod.

Reaction in Missouri

The shout in Missouri became a war cry. As is true in every controversy, harsh words were produced on both sides. However, in fairness to Walther and Loehe it must be said to their credit that they remained gentlemen throughout the controversy; their supporters must be held responsible for the harsh words. By the end of 1850 Loehe seriously considered moving to another area to carry on his work.³¹ He compared himself to a father whose grown children had deserted him.³²

In 1851 the difficulties mounted. Letters from pastors of the Missouri Synod accused Loehe of being a heretic; other letters informed him that this feeling was quite general among the Missourians.³³ Wyneken and Sihler wrote to Loehe in an effort to calm the troubled waters until more information could be had or some discussions could take

³⁰ Tietjen, op. cit., p. 99.

³¹ Ibid., p. 100.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

place.³⁴

Already at the opening of the fourth convention of Synod on October 3, 1850, Walther felt constrained to point out the threatening danger of false doctrine on the part of Loehe to the assembled pastors and delegates.³⁵ At this same convention Wynken, the man who was most responsible for Loehe's work in America, was elected president of Synod.³⁶

The thought that the doctrinal differences between Loehe and the Missouri Synod might cause a rupture filled Walther with alarm. Walther always had a warm place in his heart for Loehe. Steffens comments:

Walther always spoke of Loehe with respect and esteem. Thus, in a letter to Fick, he writes: "It is my opinion that Loehe's frankness is just as honorable, as it renders his error harmless for all those who wish to see; while the sanctimonious hypocrisy of the Grabauites is just as contemptible as it serves to seduction" (Vol. I, p. 95).³⁷

Yet Walther knew that a church body can never sacrifice its theological position for friendship.

Like the previous conventions, the convention of 1850 "cordially and urgently" invited Loehe to visit America and to attend the convention of 1851.³⁸

Walther's Visit to Loehe

Loehe found it impossible to accept the invitation to attend the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Steffens, op. cit., p. 283.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 290.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 297.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 290.

convention of 1851. Acting upon the suggestion presented by the St. Louis District Conference, Wyneken, Sihler, and others, the convention resolved to send Walther and Wyneken to Neuendettelsau for a conference with Loehe.³⁹ The two men were instructed to make every effort to remove the existing difference and to avoid a possible break with Loehe.⁴⁰

It was not by accident that the convention chose Walther and Wyneken for this important task. Walther was the leading theologian of the Missouri Synod; Wyneken was an intimate friend of Loehe. It was probably hoped that Wyneken's previous associations with Loehe would help to overcome the situation. Secondly, it was hoped that the personal acquaintance of Walther and Wyneken with some of the leaders of the German churches would be beneficial both to America and Germany.⁴¹

The trip to Germany gave Walther and Wyneken the opportunity to meet with many individuals and groups. They visited with Guericke at Halle, Kahnis at Leipzig, and Harless at Dresden.⁴² Walther met with his friend, Franz Delitzsch at Erlangen, through whom he met the other members of the faculty.⁴³ He also had occasion to meet with Marbach, his opponent at the Altenburg Debate and to visit Langenschursdorf and Braeunsdorf.⁴⁴ At this time Walther and Marbach renewed their friend-

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 290-91.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 291.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

ship; they remained cordial friends for the remainder of their lives.

After this series of visits Walther and Wyneken traveled to Neuendettelsau to carry out the main purpose of their trip to Germany, the discussions with Loehe. Steffens gives the following interesting description:

At Neuendettelsau they [Walther and Wyneken] were welcomed most heartily by Loehe, who dedicated a special number, beautifully gotten up, of his paper, Kirchliche Mitteilungen, to his two visitors. It almost seemed that a perfect understanding had been reached. After this first conference Loehe met the two delegates twice in Nuernburg, and they called on him twice at Neuendettelsau. After making several visits in Northern Germany, they returned home, reaching St. Louis February 2, 1852. Sihler, whose judgment in these matters was apt to be correct, writes in his autobiography: "Unfortunately, they had not attained the main object of their journey. Pfarrer Loehe, it is true, was unable to oppose anything valid to the convincing arguments of Professor Walther, still he clung to his vague assertions that the Confessions of our Church had no such binding force as we held them to have." Walther tells his wife why: "One finds one thing almost everywhere with all this cry of Lutheran Church; namely, one is not minded to seat one's self with childlike simplicity at the feet of our old teachers, and before one attempts to seek everything out of the Scriptures, to first hear these teachers who have spoken unto us the word of God following their faith and considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7) (Vol. I, p. 78).⁴⁵

Although Walther and Wyneken did not reach full agreement with Loehe, Loehe was, in the words of Tietjen, "happy about the outcome and looked forward to continued good relations with the Missouri Synod."⁴⁶ Polack is more correct when he states that the conferences with Loehe did not settle the question.⁴⁷

The break with Missouri eventually came, as Tietjen admits, because

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 291-93.

⁴⁶ Tietjen, op. cit., pp. 100-01.

⁴⁷ Polack, op. cit., p. 97.

Loeche could not accept the position of Missouri on the doctrine of the church and ministry.⁴⁸ But this will be considered under the discussion of Loeche's part in the formation of the Iowa Synod.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Tietjen, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴⁹Infra, pp. 102-4.

CHAPTER IX

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Loeche's Drei Buecher von der Kirche

At this point in the study it seems necessary to examine briefly the main ecclesiological writings of the two participants in the controversy. The study of Loeche's ecclesiology will be based on his great work which appeared in 1845, Drei Buecher von der Kirche.¹ Until very recent years most scholars have thought that Loeche's ecclesiology grew out of the controversies which he had with the Bavarian State Church and with the American Lutherans. However, Siegfried Hebart² has demonstrated that Loeche's ecclesiological views were well established and formulated before the controversy with either Walther or the State Church. Because of the work by Hebart it is possible to give a summary of Loeche's views apart from the controversy.³

Drei Buecher von der Kirche is a carefully developed work in which

¹Wilhelm Loeche, Drei Buecher von der Kirche (Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching, 1845). This work has also appeared in English: Wilhelm Loeche, Three Books Concerning the Church, translated by Edward T. Horn (Reading, Pennsylvania: Pilger Publishing House, 1908). For much of the material in this section we are indebted to John H. Tietjen, "The Ecclesiology of J. K. Wilhelm Loeche" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1954), pp. 14-37. The translations from Drei Buecher von der Kirche which appear in this section are from Tietjen's work.

²Siegfried Hebart, Wilhelm Loeche's Lehre von der Kirche, ihrem Amt und Regiment (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1939). This work is a complete analysis of Loeche's writings on this subject.

³For a discussion of the controversy see supra, pp. 71-85.

Loeche shows the doctrine of the church as it is expressed in the New Testament in relation to the church as one views its existence on earth. In particular, Loeche is interested in the Lutheran Church, but his discussion includes more than a restatement of Lutheran ecclesiology. Loeche submitted this work to his friends for consideration and discussion. He has no "ax to grind" in this work; it is not a polemical essay. Rather, it is his sober reflection on the doctrine of the church which he desired his friends to ponder. However, this does not mean that he was unsure of his position when he wrote this work. It appeared as his view and he defended its contents. In this light Drei Buecher von der Kirche must be examined.

Basically Loeche thinks of the church as communion. He develops this concept of communion from the fact that communion, or fellowship, is essential to all life. Man sees his fundamental desire for communion in the fact that he views himself in all manner of social relationships and in the fact that natural man has a longing for communion with God. From this he draws the analogy to the Christian faith, the church, which is the highest form of fellowship. Loeche writes:

There is born in every human being, as bad as we are, a longing for the Lord of lords, our God; "we have been created for Him, and our heart has no rest until it rests in Him." But there is also a longing for fellowship with other people born within us. And it becomes most evident after we have already found the Lord. Conversion to the Lord makes the isolated man sociable.⁴

The church then becomes the highest form of fellowship. It is the one fellowship from which all others are derived. Loeche says, "The church is the divinely established external communion and fellowship of

⁴Tietjen, op. cit., pp. 16-7.

elected souls with one another and with God."⁵

This fellowship is a fellowship of life, a fellowship not limited to time, space, race or nationality. Loehe's own words express this thought:

The Church of the New Testament, no longer a national church but a Church of all people, is a Church which has children in all lands and gathers them out of all lands. She is the one flock of the one Shepherd, gathered together out of many different stalls. She is the universal, the true catholic Church, which flows through all ages and has an influx out of all peoples. She is the great thought still in the process of realization, the work of God in the last hour of the world, the most precious thought of all saints in life and in death, for which they lived and still live, died and still die, the thought which must motivate missions.⁶

Loehe was willing to accept the traditional terminology which described the church as visible and invisible. However, he did not believe that the terms could be used to separate the church into two sections. He stressed the unity of the invisible and the visible church to the point that he conceived of the visible church as the corporeality of the invisible church, and that these two are one.⁷ Even Tietjen, who strongly defends Loehe, must admit:

Another implication for Loehe is that the unity between visible and invisible aspects makes it necessary to strive to make the visible Church conform as closely as possible to the features of the invisible Church. Here his pietist emphasis on the importance of externals influences his ecclesiological views. Then, too, the concept of the invisible Church affords him comfort in the midst of the deficiencies and mistakes of the visible Church. And he reflects that the corporal-spiritual relation in the concept of the Church is an assurance of a corporal-spiritual fellowship with the Lord after the final resurrection.⁸

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁷Ibid., p. 23.

⁸Ibid., p. 24.

This distinction on the part of Loehe was one which brought serious objections from the Missouri Synod.⁹

For Loehe there was only one constitutive element of the church, that is, the Word of God. It is through the Word that the Holy Ghost makes men believers; it is through the Word that men share in Christ and in His blessings; it is through the Word that men share in Christ through union and communion with Him in the church. Tietjen comments:

The Word which constitutes the Church needs no clarification or supplementation. It is itself perfectly clear and understandable. The Scripture needs no interpreter. It was understood without an interpreter when it was written, and the meaning of its words can be understood today, too. One need only interpret unclear passages in the light of clear passages. People arrive at erroneous interpretations not because the Scripture is unclear but because they themselves are evil and corrupt. Since the Scripture is perfectly clear by itself, it does not have to be supplemented by tradition. Any tradition must either be the same as the Scripture, and so unnecessary, or different, and so to be rejected because contrary.¹⁰

Loehe believed that order was one of the important aspects of the church's life. He believed that there was both an order of salvation and order in the church. The order of salvation is God's plan of salvation as revealed in the work of Christ. Church order is the ordering of the life of the church so that it fully partakes of God's order of salvation. Loehe comments:

Therefore also the life of the invisible as well as the visible Church has been subjected to order according to the will of God, and order is necessary and indispensable to the invisible as well as to the visible Church. What would become of the life of the invisible Church without that order in which its life began, continues, and ends--without the order of salvation? And what would become of the life of the visible Church without the order which is proper to it, without the church order? As certainly as God

⁹Supra, pp. 76-7.

¹⁰Tietjen, op. cit., p. 27.

has given man a bodily and a spiritual life and has willed a visible and an invisible Church, just as certainly He also has willed salvation and church orders. At the gate of the heavenly kingdom the words appear large and sublime: "God is the God of order."¹¹

Although Loehe earnestly contended for the unity of the church, yet he also believed that the Lutheran Church was the truest expression of the church. He writes:

We admit that the so-called Lutheran Church is only a particular church, a part of the visible Church. But we claim that, though many a defect still clings to her, she nevertheless above all other churches has the distinguishing marks of the pure particular Church, the Church $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\chi\eta\nu$.¹²

Because Loehe believed that the Lutheran Church was the purest expression of the church, he opposed the view that a person should remain in fellowship with a heterodox church body.¹³ For the same reason he opposed altar fellowship of Lutherans with members of other church bodies.¹⁴ He further believed that there could be no joint work with other church bodies by Lutherans in the area of preaching the Gospel; any compromising of the Gospel on one point could lead to a compromising of the entire Gospel.¹⁵

Loehe's attitude toward Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions has already been discussed.¹⁶ Here it is necessary merely to summarize three points. [In the first place, Loehe believed that the Confessions

¹¹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹² Ibid., p. 33.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 33-4.

¹⁶ Supra, pp. 78-81.

must be interpreted according to the Scriptures. Secondly, he would not concede that the Confessions had spoken the last word on any doctrine; he looked for further development, especially in the doctrine of the church and ministry, from a study of the New Testament. Thirdly, he believed that one could not appeal to the Confessions with finality on doctrines which had not been held with equanimity by Lutheran teachers. These, he claimed, must be viewed as open questions; the doctrine of the church and ministry must be considered as an open question.

This, briefly, is Loehe's teaching on the church as he expressed himself in Drei Buecher von der Kirche. Certainly much more could be said, but enough has been given so that Loehe's teachings may be compared with those of Walther on the doctrine of the church.

Walther's Kirche und Amt

Walther's definitive work on the doctrine of the church, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt,¹⁷ appeared as an answer to the charges brought against the Missouri Synod by Pastor J. A. A. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod.¹⁸ However, in this work Walther went beyond the provocation of Grabau and sought to emphasize the position of the Missouri Synod against the position held by numerous American

¹⁷C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Dritte Auflage; Erlangen: Verlag von Andreas Deichert, 1875). Hereafter this work will be cited as Kirche und Amt. This work has been translated into English by W. H. T. Dau and appeared in Wm. Dallmann, W. H. T. Dau, and Theo. Engelder, Walther and the Church, edited by Theo. Engelder (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), pp. 47-86. Hereafter this work will be cited as Walther and the Church. The translations will be given from this edition.

¹⁸Supra, pp. 71-4.

Lutheran bodies.¹⁹

The draft of Walther's work was submitted to the fifth convention of the Missouri Synod in session at Milwaukee in 1851.²⁰ It was thoroughly discussed by the assembled delegates at eight sessions and was given unanimous approval by the convention.²¹ Acting upon the decision of the convention that the work be published, Walther engaged Andreas Deichert's firm in Erlangen on his trip to visit with Loehe.²² The first edition appeared in 1852; the third edition of 1875 is Walther's last manu propria edition of this work, and it contains the quotations of the Greek Church Fathers in the original.²³

When the book came off the press, it appeared, in the words of Dau, "not as an erudite elaboration of the learned Walther but as 'a testimony of the faith of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States.'"²⁴ Except for the title page Walther has completely removed any reference to himself in the work. Evidently, he no longer regarded the work as his own, but as the official teaching of the Missouri Synod, as a witness to the world of the answer of the Missouri Synod to the questions concerning the church and the ministry.²⁵

¹⁹Walther and the Church, p. 48.

²⁰Ibid., p. 50.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

Kirche und Amt is a polemical essay, but Walther only once refers to his immediate opponent, Grabau, and that reference is on the title page. Throughout the work Walther moves in a spirit of love and concern. He displays a remarkable knowledge of the New Testament; he is thoroughly at home in the Lutheran Confessions; he amazes the reader with his numerous citations from Luther and the great teachers of the Lutheran Church.²⁶

Walther follows a method of argumentation which has become traditional in the Missouri Synod; it is also the one used by the great writers of Lutheran Orthodoxy. He discusses the doctrine of the church on the basis of nine theses. After each thesis he gives proof from the Scriptures, proof from the Lutheran Confessions, and proof from the private writings of the teachers of the Lutheran Church.

In the first thesis Walther defends the view that the church is the congregation of saints, the sum total of believers in Christ:

The Church, in the proper sense of the term, is the communion of saints, that is, the sum total of all those who have been called by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel from out of the lost and condemned human race, who truly believe in Christ, and who have been sanctified by this faith and incorporated into Christ.²⁷

For his proof Walther quotes from St. Paul, St. Matthew, St. John, and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.²⁸ He argues that the Lutheran Confessions have also held that the church was the communion of saints.

²⁶For a listing of the number of quotations from Luther and the great teachers of the Lutheran Church see Walther and the Church, p. 54; and Kirche und Amt, pp. xvii-xx.

²⁷Walther and the Church, p. 56.

²⁸Kirche und Amt, pp. 1-2.

He quotes from the Apostles' Creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology and the Smalcald Articles.²⁹ To prove that this is the view held by the great teachers of the Lutheran Church, he cites quotations from Luther, Gerhard, Quenstedt, Baier and several of the ancient church fathers.³⁰

In the second thesis Walther shows that the church is made up of believers and only of believers, "To the church in the proper sense of the term belongs no godless person, no hypocrite, no one who has not been regenerated, no heretic."³¹ For the Scriptural proof of this statement he depends upon St. Paul and St. John.³² This truth is also taught in the Apology.³³ Luther, Gerhard, Quenstedt, Calov, Augustine and Jerome also contended for the same truth.³⁴

Because the church is composed only of the true believers, Walther maintained in the third thesis that in the proper sense of the term the church is invisible.³⁵ On the basis of the Scriptures, especially St. Paul and St. Peter, Walther maintained that because only the Lord knew who constituted the church and because only true believers are members of the church, therefore no man can see the church.³⁶ Quoting from the

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 2-4.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-10.

³¹ Walther and the Church, p. 57.

³² Kirche und Amt, p. 10.

³³ Ibid., pp. 10-1.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-4.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 14-5.

Apology, he argued that the Lutheran Church has always taught the same thing.³⁷ In order to show that this doctrine has always been upheld by true Lutherans, he cites quotations from Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Meisner, Menzer, Huelsemann, Dannhauer, Calov and Quenstedt.³⁸

In the fourth thesis Walther maintained that only the true church of believers and saints possess the rights which Christ has given to the church:

This true Church of believers and saints it is to which Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore this Church is the real and sole holder and bearer of the spiritual, divine, and heavenly blessings, rights, powers, offices, etc., which Christ has gained and which are available in His Church.³⁹

This thesis is of particular importance since here Walther is laying down the principle of congregational rights. He demonstrated conclusively from numerous quotations from the Scriptures that the power of the church rests with the congregation.⁴⁰ He further maintained that this same truth was confessed by the Lutheran Church; for his proof he cites from the Augsburg Confession and from the Smalcald Articles.⁴¹ Since many, including Loehe and Grabau, had maintained that this view was only advocated by Luther and not by the rest of the Lutheran Church, Walther not only quotes from Luther,⁴² but also from Chemnitz, Heshusius,

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 15-7.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-29.

³⁹ Walther and the Church, p. 58.

⁴⁰ Kirche und Amt, pp. 29-31.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 31-3.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 34-8.

Menzer, Balduin, Gerhard, Dannhauer, Quenstedt, Meisner and from the ancient church fathers.⁴³ Without a doubt Walther marshals a host of authorities to prove his point.

In the fifth thesis Walther argues that the invisible church is perceivable by the marks of the church, the Word and the Sacraments:

Although the true Church, in the proper sense of the term, is invisible as to its essence, yet its presence is perceivable, its marks being the pure preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the holy Sacraments in accordance with their institution by Christ.⁴⁴

After citing the passages from Holy Scripture which describe the marks of the church, Walther concludes that the church exists where the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered.⁴⁵ This the Lutheran Church has always believed according to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.⁴⁶ Luther and the ancient church fathers also upheld the same view.⁴⁷ Without the Word of God and the Sacraments there can be no church; accordingly, Walther argued, where you see the marks, there you see the church.

Walther vigorously maintained that the term "church" can be applied to the sum total of all believers, but with the same vigor he defended the invisibility of the church, as well as the visibility of the church. This is the subject of the sixth thesis:

⁴³Ibid., pp. 38-52.

⁴⁴Walther and the Church, p. 60.

⁴⁵Kirche und Amt, pp. 53-4.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 54-6.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 56-63.

In an improper sense the term "Church," according to Holy Scripture, is applied also to the visible sum total of all who have been called, that is, to all who profess allegiance to the Word of God that is preached and make use of the holy Sacraments. This Church (the universal [catholic] Church) is made up of good and evil persons. Particular divisions of it, namely, the congregations found here and there, in which the Word of God is preached and the holy Sacraments are administered, are called churches (particular churches), for the reason, namely, that in these visible groups the invisible, true Church of the believers, saints, and children of God is concealed, and because no elect persons are to be looked for outside of the group of those who have been called.⁴⁸

The distinction which Walther makes between the visibility and the invisibility of the church can best be illustrated from his comments on portions of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. He writes:

Hence to the visible Church, which comprises good and evil persons, true and false Christians, orthodox and such as are erring in faith, the name "Church" can belong, and can be accorded, only in an improper, synecdochical sense; that is to say, the whole bears this glorious name merely on account of a part of it, to which alone this name belongs in the proper sense. Accordingly, the entire visible group of all who have been called bears the name of "the universal Church" and the individual parts of this group the name of "churches," or "particular churches," on account of the true members of the true Church who are found among them, even though they were only baptized infants.

However, to the entire visible group who have among them the Word of God and the Sacraments the name "Church" is accorded, not by a misuse of the term but by right. That it must be accorded to them is shown by Holy Scripture, which clearly teaches that only the true believers are real members of the Church; and yet it accords the name "church" also to such mixed visible groups. Thus we read in Matt. 18:17: "Tell it unto the church." Manifestly the reference in this passage is to a visible particular church, consisting of true and false Christians.⁴⁹

The same view is upheld by the Augsburg Confession and the Apology⁵⁰ and by Luther, Hunnius, Gerhard, Zeemann, Dannhauer, Carpzov, Baier and the

⁴⁸ Walther and the Church, p. 62.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁰ Kirche und Amt, pp. 65-6.

ancient fathers.⁵¹

The power which Christ has given to His church is the possession of the particular churches by virtue of the true believers in those churches. Walther defends this in the seventh thesis:

Even as the visible communions in which the Word and the Sacraments still exist in their essence bear, according to God's Word, the name of CHURCHES because of the true invisible Church of the true believers contained in them, so likewise they, because of the true, invisible Church concealed in them, though there be but two or three, possess the POWER which Christ has given to His entire Church.⁵²

Walther argued that this is demonstrated by the Scriptures,⁵³ the Lutheran Confessions,⁵⁴ and the orthodox teachers of the Lutheran Church.⁵⁵

The eighth thesis is the one which received the greatest development from Walther. The discussion of this thesis covers some sixty-five pages of Kirche und Amt. For the sake of completeness the thesis is quoted in full:

While God gathers for Himself a holy Church of the elect in places where the Word of God is not preached in entire purity and the holy Sacraments are not administered altogether in accordance with their institution by Jesus Christ,--provided the Word of God and the Sacraments are not utterly denied but essentially remain in those places,--still every one is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee from all false teachers and to avoid all heterodox churches, or sects and, on the other hand, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 66-77.

⁵²Walther and the Church, p. 64.

⁵³Kirche und Amt, p. 78.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 78-80.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 80-95.

A. Also in erring, heretical congregations there are children of God; also in them the true Church becomes manifest by means of the remnants of the pure Word of God and the Sacraments that still remain in them.

B. Every one is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to flee all false prophets and to avoid fellowship with heterodox churches, or sects.

C. Every Christian is obliged, for the sake of his salvation, to profess allegiance, and adhere, to orthodox congregations and their orthodox preachers wherever he finds such.⁵⁶

For his Scriptural proof Walther quotes a host of passages.⁵⁷ His reference to the Lutheran Confessions show his profound knowledge of these writings, as well as his complete comprehension of their content on this important issue.⁵⁸ However, it is his knowledge of the great teachers of Lutheranism which fills the reader with amazement.⁵⁹ That Walther was completely at home in the writings of these men is ably demonstrated in this thesis. The principles which Walther outlined in this thesis are still the doctrine and practice of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

In the ninth and last thesis on the doctrine of the church Walther concludes that salvation can be procured only through membership in the invisible church. He writes, "The only indispensable requisite for obtaining salvation is fellowship with the invisible Church, to which all those glorious promises that concern the Church were originally given."⁶⁰ Walther's own interpretation can be seen from his comments on Romans

⁵⁶Walther and the Church, pp. 64-5, 68.

⁵⁷Kirche und Amt, pp. 95-6, 113-15, 144-46.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 96-7, 115-16, 146-47.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 97-113, 117-44, 147-60.

⁶⁰Walther and the Church, p. 70.

3:28 and Acts 4:12:

According to these texts the unconditional and sole requirement for salvation is fellowship with Christ through faith. The maxim "Outside of the Church there is no salvation," "Whoever has not the Church on earth for his mother has not God in heaven for his Father," is true only in this sense, that outside of the invisible Church there is no salvation and no state of grace for a child of God. For this has no other meaning than that "there is no salvation outside of Christ"; for whoever is not in inward fellowship with the believers and saints is neither in fellowship with Christ. On the other hand, whoever is in fellowship with Christ is in fellowship also with all those in whom Christ dwells, that is, with the invisible Church. Accordingly, he who restricts salvation to fellowship with any visible Church therewith overthrows the article of the justification of a poor sinner in the sight of God by faith alone in Jesus Christ; although this also is true, that outside of the visible Church there is no salvation if by visible Church is understood not any particular church but the gathering of all those who have been called. For outside of the group of those who have been called we are not to look for any elect, since without the Word of God, which is only among the group of those who have been called, there is no faith, hence neither Christ nor salvation.⁶¹

For further proof of this principle he cites the Apology, the Large Catechism and the Smalcald Articles.⁶² Of the great Lutheran teachers he quotes from Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Quenstedt, Baier and Hollaz.⁶³

The purpose of this synopsis of Kirche und Amt is to show Walther's teaching on the church. But a little more than that was desired. This study has tried to demonstrate that the teachings which Walther defended were not at variance with Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions or the great teachers of the Lutheran Church. For this reason the proofs which Walther himself used were included.

Kirche und Amt has remained the monumental answer of the Missouri

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 70-1.

⁶² Kirche und Amt, pp. 161-62.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 163-72.

Synod to the questions concerning the church and the ministry. In the words of Dr. Dau:

Let Walther's synodical posterity take notice of this fact: In Walther's Kirche und Amt spoke--and still speaks!--not a single, deservedly revered individual but the entire God-blest Missouri Synod, whom this treatise of Walther helped to make into a sound, staunch, faithful herald of genuine Lutheranism.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Walther and the Church, p. 51.

The first effect of the controversy between Loche and the Missouri Synod was the establishment of a school in Detroit. In order to understand how the school came about, we must turn our attention to the founding of the teachers' college in the Central Valley of Michigan. When Walther and Lyndon visited with Loche in 1851, they discussed the shortage of workers in America and suggested that Loche open an institution for the training of teachers in America.¹ Loche was agreeable to the proposal and decided to open such a school in Detroit. Because of the great expense involved in opening a school in Detroit, Loche decided to open it in Saginaw, where he had planned to establish a hotel for German immigrants.² In 1853 Georg Grossmann arrived from Philadelphia with five students to open and take charge of the school.³

Grossmann and the students of the school became members of Pastor Eliezer Elester's congregation in Saginaw. Elester's congregation was a member of the Missouri Synod. Elester and the rest of the Missouri

¹ Walter S. Mueller, A Century of Strife (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1907), p. 105.

CHAPTER X

THE EFFECT OF THE CONTROVERSY ON THE MISSOURI SYNOD

The Break between Loehe and the Missouri Synod

The first effect of the controversy between Loehe and the Missouri Synod was the break in the cordial relations that had existed between the two. In order to understand how the actual disruption came about, we must turn our attention to the founding of the teachers' college in the Saginaw Valley of Michigan.

When Walther and Wyneken visited with Loehe in 1851, they discussed the shortage of teachers in America and requested that Loehe open an institution for the training of teachers in America.¹ Loehe was agreeable to the proposal and decided to open such a school in Detroit. Because of the great expense involved in opening a school at Detroit, Loehe decided to open it in Saginaw, where he had planned to establish a hostel for German immigrants.² In 1853 Georg Grossmann arrived from Neuendettelsau with five students to open and take charge of the school.³

Grossmann and the students at the school became members of Pastor Ottomar Cloeter's congregation in Saginaw. Cloeter's congregation was a member of the Missouri Synod. Cloeter and the rest of the Missouri

¹Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 145.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Synod clergy, with the exception of John Deindoerfer of Frankenhilf, insisted that the Missouri Synod doctrine of the church and ministry was Scriptural.⁴ Grossmann refused to accept Missouri's doctrine as Scriptural; instead he agreed with Loehe that Missouri had no Scriptural basis for its doctrine of the church and the ministry.⁵ Pastor Cloeter threatened to discipline Grossmann if he continued to accept Loehe's doctrine. Grossmann withdrew from the congregation.⁶

Meuser says that because Grossmann refused to give up Loehe's teachings, the Missouri Synod considered the founding of the school schismatic; the school must either be closed, be given to Missouri, or be moved to a state in which Missouri had no congregations.⁷

In the dispute Deindoerfer sided with Grossmann.⁸ Grossmann requested permission from Loehe to move the school; he desired to relocate in Iowa.⁹

In 1853 J. A. A. Grabau and Heinrich von Rohr visited with Loehe in Germany. As a result of their visit Loehe became more and more con-

⁴Ibid.

⁵Fred W. Meuser, The Formation of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958), p. 24.

⁶Baepler, op. cit., p. 145. On this point Meuser, op. cit., p. 24, claims that Grossmann was excommunicated. August R. Suelflow, "The Life and Work of Georg Ernst Christian Ferdinand Sievers," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXI (April, 1948), 39, makes the observation that Grossmann never joined the Missouri Synod. However, whether he was a communicant member of Pastor Cloeter's congregation cannot be ascertained.

⁷Meuser, op. cit., p. 24.

⁸Baepler, op. cit., p. 145.

⁹Ibid.

vinced that he could no longer work with the Missouri Synod. In a letter written on black-bordered paper, dated August 4, 1853, Loehe spoke his farewell to the pastors and congregations of the Saginaw Valley.

Commenting on this event, Baeppler writes:

This ended the fraternal relations of Loehe and the Missouri Synod. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of his mission endeavors in America Loehe said: "Nothing has gone as we wanted it to go; still all has gone in such a way that success and blessing has attended our work down to the present hour."¹⁰

After Grossmann had received permission from Loehe to relocate the school, he, Deindoerfer, and about twenty others migrated to Dubuque, Iowa, in September of 1853.¹¹ There they and others organized a Synod based on Loehe's doctrine of the church and the ministry.¹² This marks the end of Loehe's support; from 1853 onward Loehe's American interest centered in the Iowa Synod.¹³

The Polity of the Missouri Synod

The second effect of the controversy which will be examined is the effect which it had on the polity of the Missouri Synod.

Loehe had feared that the polity adopted by the Missouri Synod would lead to chaos. He believed that the pastors would become merely the servants of the local congregation. Two years after the organization of the Missouri Synod Loehe wrote:

¹⁰Ibid., p. 146.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³For the history of the Iowa Synod the reader should see Meuser, op. cit., pp. 21-6, 37-71.

Look at the composition of our congregations. How can it be said that they are competent to judge the ability and worthiness of candidates for the holy ministry? The candidates do not even come from their midst, to say nothing of the fact that the spirit of our times might drive laymen to apply the same pernicious tactics in the selection of a pastor which they now use in the election of a representative in the legislature. No; the unlimited right of suffrage on the part of the congregation is not only nonapostolic but also downright dangerous.¹⁴

But it was Walther's, and not Loehe's, teaching that prevailed.

Walther laid down the principle of the sovereignty of the local congregation at the Altenburg Debate. Throughout the rest of his life Walther defended this view. The adoption of Walther's teaching on the church and the ministry is one of the great factors which contributed to the growth of the Missouri Synod. Mundingger concludes his study of the polity of the Missouri Synod with the following words:

By putting real power into the laymen's hands the founders of the Missouri Synod nurtured and developed a sturdy and informed laity. The laymen learned by doing. The difficult problem of teaching men and women who had been brought up in the State Church of Germany the task of paying for the maintenance of the Church was solved by giving laymen the privilege and the duty of making important decisions in the Church. The problem of getting laymen interested in the education of ministers was solved by giving laymen something to say about the institutions in which an indigenous ministry was trained. The problem of generating interest in the well-being of the Church at home and abroad was brought nearer to solution by giving the laymen a voice in making decisions which affected this well-being. The zeal which the early Missouri Synod laymen showed for their Church in that they attended meeting after meeting was produced, no doubt, in part by the fact that these men knew that their decisions were final.

The power and authority given to the laymen, on the other hand, was not permitted in any way to undermine or affect adversely the authority and dignity of the holy ministry. The principle of pastoral leadership was honored. The provisions of congregational and synodical polity not only made effective leadership on the part of the pastor possible, but probable. Thus, the polity initiated by

¹⁴Carl S. Mundingger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 200.

the Saxon laymen in the isolation of the frontier amidst trial and struggle a few months after their arrival on American soil was an important factor in the growth of the immigrant Church.¹⁵

Even if Loehe's views on church polity had been accepted, it is doubtful whether his views would have remained dominant. This has been ably demonstrated by Conrad Bergendoff.¹⁶ He concludes:

In the course of its reconstituting itself in this country it has found the individual congregation to be the basic unit, and its congregations are today the strongest foundation of the church in America. From Europe, Lutherans brought a hierarchical idea of the ministry, though the universal priesthood of believers had begun even there to have a new meaning through the influence of Spener and Francke, Hauge and Rosenius, and Beck. In America the ministry was given a place not above the laity, but either alongside or within the congregation, so that a congregation included both minister and laity. The most unique contribution of American Lutherans is seen in its system of synods, by which the congregations exercised fuller capacity of Christian witness and life than the local congregation could develop in isolation.¹⁷

However, the controversy helped consolidate the teachings of the Missouri Synod in the polity which Walther advocated. This contribution on the part of Walther cannot be underestimated.

Walther's Transference of Authority

The third major effect of the controversy between Walther and Loehe was that Walther's doctrine of the ministry became the accepted teaching of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

Briefly, we may summarize Loehe's teaching on the office of the

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 218-19

¹⁶ Conrad Bergendoff, The Doctrine of the Church in American Lutheranism (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1956).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

ministry. Loehe believed that the authority in the church was vested in the clergy. He based this conclusion on the practice of the Apostles in the New Testament. Although he conceded that Luther had taught that the authority was vested in the congregation by virtue of the priesthood of all believers, yet he believed that the Lutheran Church had not followed Luther on this matter.

Walther, on the other hand, followed Luther and the Lutheran Confessions and maintained that the authority in the church was vested in the congregation. Therefore, the congregation had the right to call pastors, to preach, to administer the Sacraments, and to exercise church discipline. When a congregation called a pastor, the members of the congregation transferred their authority to preach, administer the Sacrament, etc., to the pastor. This teaching is known as the Uebertragungslehre or the transference of authority. The individual member of the congregation transfers his rights as a priest before God to the office of the ministry. He has not given up his rights; he has merely transferred them to the pastor.¹⁸

Because Walther's teaching, and not Loehe's, prevailed in the Missouri Synod, the Uebertragungslehre has become the accepted teaching of that body to the present day. If Loehe's teaching had prevailed, the ministry in the Missouri Synod would have been vested with greater glory. Thus, the controversy between Walther and Loehe consolidated the thinking of the Missouri Synod in its acceptance of the Uebertragungslehre of Walther.

¹⁸Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 213-14.

Loeche's Liturgical Influence on the Missouri Synod

The fourth major effect of the controversy between Walther and Loeche is the most difficult to measure because it is the influence which Loeche exerted on the liturgical life of the Missouri Synod. In order to understand this influence, we must look into the work which Loeche did in the area of liturgics.

In order that the churches organized and led by the men whom Loeche had sent would be able to carry on a worship program fitting and suitable for Lutheran congregations, he prepared a massive Agenda.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that he dedicated this Agenda to Pastor Wyneken, at the time when Wyneken was president of the Missouri Synod.

Loeche was fully capable of undertaking such a momentous task. It seems almost incredible for a person who already was involved in so many endeavors which reached far beyond the scope of his work as parish pastor at Neuendettelsau to have the time, the interest or the background necessary for such an undertaking. But Loeche was a liturgical scholar of the finest order. A study of Loeche as a liturgist and a liturgiologist will not be attempted here. This has been most admirably done by Hans Kressel in his monumental study Wilhelm Loeche als Liturg und Liturgiker.²⁰ It is beyond the scope of this paper even to attempt to

¹⁹Wilhelm Loeche, Agende fuer Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses (Zweite vermehrte Auflage; Noerdlingen: C. H. Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1853). The second edition was used because it gives more complete information than the first.

²⁰Hans Kressel, Wilhelm Loeche als Liturg und Liturgiker (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1952).

analyse this aspect of Loehe's life. Undoubtedly he impressed this liturgical interest upon his students. Of Gottlieb Schaller, one of his greatest students, it is said:

He was therefore also a distinguished liturgist. To hear him sing the liturgy at the celebration of the Lord's Supper was a high enjoyment disposing the heart to solemn devoutness.²¹

Undoubtedly, it was Loehe who imbued this spirit in Schaller. It is fair to assume that this influence was also felt among his other students who later served as pastors in the Missouri Synod.

The Agenda which Loehe dedicated to Wyneken is an extremely interesting volume. The title which Loehe gives to this work is itself noteworthy. He calls it: Agende fuer Christliche Gemeinden des Lutherischen Bekenntnisses. By this title he definitely points out that this Agenda is intended only for those congregations which adhere to the Lutheran Confessions. It is quite distinct from the Church Orders which had been produced in America prior to his time. This was an Agenda which grew out of a strong confessional position. It did not desire to be anything less than strictly Lutheran, strictly confessional and strictly historic.

This work was not the haphazard compilation of a worship program. Instead it was a scholarly endeavor to compile from the best Lutheran traditions an Agenda which could in every instance have thorough historic backing for all its contents. Loehe consulted no less than two hundred Agendas from the period of the Reformation up to his day as a basis for this work. As Luther D. Reed²² has pointed out, Loehe was

²¹Wm. Schaller, "Gottlieb Schaller," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XVI (July, 1943), 36.

²²Luther D. Reed, The Lutheran Liturgy (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), passim.

incorrect in some of his judgments, but seldom has anything of this magnitude been written without minor errors. While scholars are prepared to point up minor errors in some of his historical attestations, there is hardly a liturgical scholar worthy of the name who is prepared to give anything but praise and gratitude to Loehe for his work.

In his introduction²³ Loehe points out two basic reasons for his preparing the Agenda. In the first place, he desires that the Lutherans in America should remain Lutheran. He has heard of the sects and of their anti-formal type of worship and of their opposition to a liturgical type of worship. Secondly, he complained that he had heard that the sermon was given a central position in the worship services among the Lutherans in America. He betrayed a deep concern that the pastors were spending so much time on their sermons that they had forgotten the unity of the service of worship, they had forgotten the importance of the Eucharist, and they had forgotten the value of the liturgical form of worship. Loehe strongly felt that any gross elevation of the sermon could easily make the Lutheran Church in America as sectarian as the sects which it was fighting.

He makes another thing quite plain and clear in his introduction. He realizes that many in America who call themselves Protestants are opposed to any liturgical type of worship. He is also fully aware that such worship would immediately be called Roman. He goes to great pains to show that the liturgical worship of the Lutheran Church is no more Roman than is the confession of the Lutheran Church Roman. He points

²³Loehe, op. cit., pp. v-xvi.

out that the major differences doctrinally between the Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Church of Rome are as well defined as are the differences in liturgical practices between these two. Just as the framers of the Augsburg Confession employed the language and the terminology which the Church of Rome used, so the liturgical scholars borrowed forms and ceremonies which were current in that church. But, Loehe asserted, the essence of Lutheran worship is distinctively worship in harmony with the doctrines of the Lutheran Church.

The Missouri Synod adopted no single liturgy; thus its pastors either used the Saxon Agenda or the agenda prepared by Loehe. Probably as a result of the controversy, the Missouri Synod published a revision of the Saxon Agenda in 1856. In 1895 Friedrich Lochner, who was sent to America by Loehe, published Der Hauptgottesdienst der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche.²⁴ This fuller form of liturgical worship gained wide acceptance in the Missouri Synod.²⁵

Thus Loehe exerted a wide liturgical influence in the Missouri Synod. If it had not been for the controversy on the church and the ministry, his influence might have dominated that church body.

Many other examples could be cited to show how the ecclesiological controversy between Walther and Loehe effected the future of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. This study has called attention to these four to demonstrate the far-reaching results of this controversy.

²⁴Friedrich Lochner, Der Hauptgottesdienst der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1895).

²⁵Reed, op. cit., p. 175.

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