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Doctrinal Emphases in the Missouri Synod

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The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has had the same doctrinal basis for 125 years. It is remarkable that within that period of time the loyalty of no group in Synod to that basis as given in the constitution could be seriously challenged. This, however, does not mean that there were no variations in emphases. This study is a brief synopsis of such variations. It is not concerned with difference, uniformity, contradiction, or inconsistency in doctrine (although some of these factors may be present) but with coordinating stresses. Examination of consistent adherence to basic insights is also beyond the scope of this brief study.

The rapid growth of the Missouri Synod during the early decades of its existence was undoubtedly to a large extent due to emphasis on justification by grace through faith.[1] On the very first page of *Der Lutheraner* Walther approvingly quotes Luther:

> This one article reigns and should only reign in my heart, namely, faith in my dear Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only beginning, middle, and end of all the spiritual and divine thoughts which I may ever have by day and by night. . . . This article is the one firm rock and the eternal, firm basis of all our salvation and blessedness, namely, that we, not through ourselves, much less through our own works and accomplishments (which certainly are much smaller and less than we ourselves), but that we through foreign help, namely, through the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil and brought again to eternal life.[2]

Walther himself indicates the event which led to a change in his thinking from pietism to emphasis on justification. He and some of his fellow students in Germany had endeavored to gain assurance of salvation through spiritual activities and exercises without success. Finally, almost in despair, he wrote to Stephan, from whom he received a letter of absolution. This absolution made a profound impression on Walther. He describes the experience as follows:

> When the writer finally received the answer [from Stephan] he did not open the letter before he had fervently asked God to preserve him against accepting false comfort, if the answer which he had received contained such. But after he had read it, it seemed as though he had suddenly been translated from hell to heaven. The tears of anguish and distress, which had so long been shed, changed to tears of genuine heavenly joy. He could not resist; he had to go to Jesus. Stephan showed him that he had long ago experienced the

[1] E. L. Lueker, "Justification in the Theology of Walther," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXII, 10 (October 1961), 598 to 605.

[2] *Der Lutheraner* (hereafter *Luth.*), I, 1 (Sept. 7, 1844), 1. The early copies of *Der Lutheraner* did not have page numbers and the pages of the reprints do not correspond exactly to the original. In this study the early volumes are cited by number and page of the given edition (not page of volume) until volume pagination begins with III (1846).

> penance of the Law which he was seeking; that he now lacked nothing but faith, nothing, except that he, like the man fallen among thieves, now yield himself to the heavenly, merciful Samaritan. So the peace of God came to dwell with him. Then he had a real experience of the meaning of private absolution for the deeply terrified sinner.[3]

This experience of Walther has been compared with John Wesley's experience of peace and joy on the evening of May 24, 1738, which Wesley describes as follows:

> In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldergate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.[4]

Wesley's experience led to greater emphasis on spiritual exercises. Walther retained his adherence to piety, as is apparent from many of his sermons and his love for Arndt's *Wahres Christentum*. His experience, however, is probably a primary point of departure for a development which caused him to insist more and more that justification by grace through faith in Christ was the all-inclusive center of theology. Certainly the letter led to his emphasis on private absolution. Walther makes absolution and justification almost synonymous.[5] Walther's emphasis on Law and Gospel also centers on two factors in the Lutheran concept of confession or absolution: contrition and faith.

Justification by grace through faith in Christ was not only the beginning of Walther's theology, but its centrality in his thought increased. He wrote in the 15th volume of *Der Lutheraner:*

> When *Der Lutheraner* 15 years ago first began publicly to serve the church, the first stone which it contributed toward the re-erection of the fallen walls of Jerusalem was the publication of several magnificent testimonies of Luther regarding the chief article of Christian doctrine, namely, the justification of a poor sinner before God through faith in Jesus Christ. *Der Lutheraner* thereby intended to remind itself and its readers immediately at its first public appearance that the erection of the Lutheran Zion, and the defense of its fortification, depended primarly on the preservation in its purity of this article, which Luther called the article whereby the church stands and falls.[6]

This quotation also gives one of the primary sources for Walther's doctrine on justification, namely, Luther. His Western District essay, May 5, 1859, has quotations like the following from Luther:

> Therefore everything concerns this article of Christ and depends on it; the person who has it has everything. . . . For everything depends and is founded on it, and it draws all the others along with itself.

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[3] C. F. W. Walther, *Kurzer Lebenslauf des weiland ehrwürdigen Pastor Joh. Friedr. Bünger* (St. Louis: F. Dette, 1882), p. 29 fn.

[4] F. E. Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 285—86.

[5] Compare titles of sermons in Walther's *Lutherische Brosamen* (St. Louis: Barthel, 1876), p. 140, and *Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille,* 2d ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n. d.), p. 211.

[6] "Vorwort der Redaction . . . ," *Luth.,* XVI, 1 (Aug. 23, 1859), 1.

> . . . If someone errs in another [doctrine], he certainly does not understand this one correctly; and even if he holds all the others but does not have this one correct, then all is still in vain.[7]

It is interesting to note that S. S. Schmucker emphasized a different approach to theology, namely, a form of biblicism. This had been developing in Europe for some time in opposition to rationalism (especially in Germany and Scandinavian countries) and became prominent in America after the Revolutionary War. In this movement the Scriptures, including the Gospel, became a code for thought, principles, and actions as a few quotations of prominent Lutherans of the period demonstrate. Christian Endress (1775—1827):

> Christ is my master, the Bible my code of religious instruction; in this I shall always be a Lutheran. There is in Luther's Works much that I cannot assent to, much in which the Lutheran church has never gone with him.[8]

> For by this shall the Lutheran Church forever distinguish itself from all other religious connections, that the Bible — the Bible alone shall remain the only sum in Christ Jesus.[9]

George Lochman (1773—1826) states that it is a leading principle of the Lutheran Church that "the Holy Scriptures are the only source whence we are to draw our religious sentiments, whether they relate to faith or practice." [10]

The new constitution of the New York Ministerium likewise considered the Bible a book of regulations and opposed binding anyone to the symbols:

> And we establish as a fundamental rule of this association, that the person to be ordained shall not be required to make any other engagement than this, that he will faithfully teach, as well as perform, all other ministerial duties, and regulate his walk and conversation according to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as contained in the Holy Scriptures.[11]

The most prominent exponent of "American Lutheranism" was S. S. Schmucker, whom A. R. Wentz correctly characterizes as a biblicist or Biblical supranaturalist.[12] Walther was very critical of this form of Lutheranism:

> What was the situation here a few years ago and what is it now? Very few of those who called themselves Lutherans knew the true Lutheran doctrine and still fewer accepted and defended it. The name of the Book of Concord, which contains the public confessions of our church, was hardly known by Lutherans here, to say

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[7] "Referat . . . ," Western District *Proceedings*, 1859, pp. 15—16. Quoted from Luther (Walch Edition), VIII, 502—6.

[8] *The Evangelical Lutheran Intelligencer, Containing Historical, Biographical and Religious Memoirs: With Essays on the Doctrines of Luther: And Practical Remarks and Anecdotes, For the Edification of Pious Persons of all Denominations*, ed. committee of clergymen, appointed by the Synod of Maryland and Virginia, I (September 1826), 161

[9] S. S. Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Occasional Discourses* (Springfield: D. Harbaugh, 1851), pp. 205 f.

[10] *Principles of the Christian Religion, in Questions and Answers, Designed for the Instruction of Youth of Evangelical Churches* (Harrisburg: John S. Wiestling, 1822), pp. iii—iv.

[11] A. L. Graebner, *Geschichte der Lutherischen Kirche in Amerika* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), pp. 655.

[12] A. R. Wentz, *Pioneer in Christian Unity: Samuel Simon Schmucker* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 53.

> nothing of its content. Only very few had any of Luther's writings. Most of the pastors who called themselves Lutheran espoused Zwinglian-Reformed errors (e. g., on the Lord's Supper, on Holy Baptism, on absolution, on original sin, etc.) and, at least a large number of them, had accepted Methodistic practices or New Measures.[13]

While others might emphasize that the faith of the Christian church depended on the trustworthiness of the Bible, Walther with Luther stressed a Christocentric approach:

> If the article which teaches how a person becomes sinless and righteous before God is lost, then the whole Christian doctrine disappears with it.[14]

Walther's scholarly ability as well as his deep insight into the nature of justification, the Word of God, and the church caused him to see the dangers not only of liberalism but also of conservatism:

> People thought that after withdrawing from the left there was no possibility of erring in the other direction. Thus it has come to pass that no one has departed farther from true Lutheranism than those who want to be the strictest Lutherans. They did not consider that also the way of truly pure doctrine is everywhere a narrow way, on which only he remains who with holy earnestness is intent on turning neither to the right nor to the left. It was assumed that the praise of being strictly orthodox was easy to obtain; that it required no earnest study, searching deliberation, prayer, struggle, and the conquering of many temptations. Every unconverted man had only to attack every apparent heretic and everything which had the appearance of being ecclesiastical laxity with utmost ferocity and to press and urge everything which had the appearance of being churchly; then the deed was accomplished, the prize of orthodoxy won, and the Great Inquisitor had established himself, and all now had to fear his citation to judgment. Thus it has come to the stage that no teacher stands more in the way of the so-called strict churchly Lutherans than — Luther.[15]

Walther's emphasis on justification is closely related to his confessionalism. In the final analysis it was the unfalsified Gospel (not a Lutheran church polity, synod, or Lutheran confessions) which was his highest concern.[16] He accepted the confessions because they presented the faith in Jesus Christ in its simple purity rather than from a desire to be traditional.[17] He loved to quote such statements from the confessions as:

> In this controversy the main doctrine of Christianity is involved; when it is properly understood, it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need. (Apology IV: 2-4)

And:

> Nothing in this article can be given up

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13 "Vorwort des Herausgebers . . . ," *Luth.*, III, 1 (Sept. 5, 1846), 1.

14 "Referat . . . ," Western District *Proceedings*, 1859, p. 13. Quoted from Luther (Walch Edition), VIII, 1552.

15 "Ueber die Lehre von der Kirche," *Luth.*, XIII, 8 (Dec. 2, 1856), 58.

16 "Antwort auf die neueste Vertheidigung der Union," *Luth.*, I, 25 (Aug. 9, 1845), 4.

17 "Von dem Namen 'Lutheraner'," *Luth.*, I, 2 (September 1844), 1. For Walther's attitude toward the confessions see E. L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856 to 1859," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XV, 8 (August 1944), 529—63; A. C. Piepkorn, "Walther and the Lutheran Symbols," ibid., XXXII, 10 (October 1961), 606—20.

> or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "And with His stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.[18]

By a careful study of the confessions, Walther became convinced that all the articles centered in justification.[19] He did not conceive of the later confessions as adding to the Augsburg Confession, thus presenting an additional list of doctrines which must be held, but as further development and apology of that which is in the Augustana.[20] He held that also such Lutherans as are loyal to the Augsburg Confession but do not yet subscribe to the other confessions "are, without a doubt, our brethren" and endeavored to establish a Lutheran fellowship on that basis.[21] He was opposed to drafting theses for discussion and adoption.

Walther also used a Christocentric approach to purity of doctrine by making the doctrine of justification central. He freely admitted that no one was inerrant; he freely admitted his own errors:

> We, only a short time ago, were held captive by many errors, and God had patience with us and with great long-suffering led us unto the way of truth. Remembering that, we also will show patience with our erring neighbors and, by God's grace, will refrain from all sinful judging and condemning.[22]
>
> We do not hereby mean to indicate that we are among those who believe that their understanding requires no development or correction. It is rather our constant, serious endeavor to make progress in the recognition of truth and, with the help of God, to free ourselves more and more from the errors which still cling to us.[23]

Walther points out that Luther erred;[24] it is wrong to say that the true preacher cannot err.[25]

Since theological activity is primarily concerned with preaching and administration of sacraments, Walther views purity of doctrine from that angle and finds that frequent error is found also in the true church:

> The purity of the word, as far as its preaching in the church is concerned, has indeed varied at different times so that the church has been compared in Scripture with the changing moon (Song of Solomon 6:9); even the members of the true church, that is, Christians, often build on the correct foundation, that is, on Christ and the faith, on which they are founded, not pure "gold, silver, and precious stones" of proved doctrine, but also "wood, hay, and stubble" of

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18 "Referat . . . ," Western District *Proceedings*, 1859, pp. 11—12. See also Piepkorn, op. cit.

19 C. F. W. Walther, *Der Concordienformel Kern und Stern* (St. Louis: Barthel, 1877), p. 32. Cf. *Luth.*, XVI, 1 (Aug. 23, 1859), pp. 1—2.

20 Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences . . . ," p. 535.

21 Ibid., pp. 535—36.

22 "Vorbemerkungen über Ursache, Zweck und Inhalt des Blattes," *Luth.*, I, 1 (Sept. 7, 1844), 1.

23 "Vorwort der Redaktion . . . ," *Luth.*, XIII, 1 (Aug. 26, 1856), 1.

24 "Von dem Namen 'Lutheraner'," *Luth.*, I, 1 (Sept. 7, 1844), 3.

25 "Antwort auf die neueste Vertheidigung der Union," *Luth.*, I, 21 (June 18, 1845), 3—4.

human, erroneous thoughts (1 Cor. 3:11-15), so that the church must also daily pray: "Forgive us our debts." But these her errors are of such a nature that they not only do not overthrow the foundation but are also not stubbornly held; as we see in the case of the apostles who often erred but were always ready and willing to be instructed. For where errors are not only preached, but also stubbornly held, there Christ's church is not; there not the true but a false church becomes visible. . . . Therefore the blessed Luther writes: "How can a person otherwise decide which is the true church of Christ and which the devil's except by the obedience or disobedience toward Christ, especially if the disobedience is openly recognized and understood but nevertheless maliciously and impudently defends itself and claims to be right. For the holy church indeed sins and stumbles or errs as the Lord's Prayer teaches; but it does not defend and excuse itself but humbly prays for forgiveness and makes amends as it is able; therefore it is forgiven, so that its sin is no longer reckoned as sin. If I am no longer permitted to distinguish the true church from the false by an attitude of obedience or stubborn disobedience, then I can't talk about a church any more." [26]

Walther also shows that Luther agrees with the principle of Augustine: *Errare potero, haereticus non ero* (I may err, but I will not be a heretic).[27]

Although much study is still required to establish the details of differentiation in Walther between theological opinions, fundamental doctrine, nonfundamental doctrine, Scriptural dogma, article of faith, there is no doubt that an article of faith in Walther's thought was often a confessional article and so differentiated from Scriptural doctrine which is not confessional:

> Let Mr. X. X. and everyone who so desires understand that we know how to distinguish between articles of faith and Scripture doctrines which are not articles of faith. We insist indeed that no Scripture doctrine, may it appear great or small, may be regarded as an open question; but while we consider it necessary to contend most strenuously for every article of faith (on each one of which our faith and hope depend), to condemn the error that opposes it and to deny the hand of fellowship to those who stubbornly contradict the article in question, we by no means believe it necessary under all circumstances to contend to the utmost for other Scripture teachings that are not articles of faith, much less to pronounce a sentence of condemnation on the opposing error, although we reject it, and to deny fellowship to those who err in nothing but that point. If in a controversy the debate concerns itself with teachings that do not belong to the articles of faith, then it is of greatest concern to us to see whether the opponents indicate that they contradict because they refuse to obey the Word of God, that is, whether they, while apparently not attacking the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God, nevertheless destroy the foundation itself on which these teachings rest, the divine Word.[28]

The relation of justification to the doctrine of Scripture is set forth in an article by Ottomar Fuerbringer.[29] One whole sec-

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[26] Ibid. p. 4.

[27] Ibid.

[28] "Herr X. X. und die Missouri-Synode noch einmal und zum letzten Male," *Luth.*, XXVII, 17 (May 1, 1871), 131.

[29] "Der Rationalismus und die Bibel," *Luth.*, II, 1 (Sept. 6, 1845), 2—4; II, 2 (Sept. 20, 1845), 1—2; II, 3 (Oct. 4, 1845), 1—3; II, 4 (Oct. 18, 1845), 3—4; II, 5 (Nov. 1, 1845), 3—4; II, 6 (Nov. 15, 1845), 1—3. Hereafter quoted by volume, issue, page.

tion is devoted to Christ and His work.[30] Fuerbringer quotes a statement of Ernst Wilhelm Christian Sartorius (1797—1859) on justification approvingly:

> If we understand this article correctly and purely, then we have the right heavenly sun; but if we lose it, then we have nothing else but vain hellish darkness.[31]

In harmony with this quotation, Fuerbringer points out that acceptance of the Scriptures depends on a proper attitude created by the Holy Spirit (hence justification):

> If I have already experienced the divine wisdom and grace, truth and goodness of the higher revelation in my soul *(Gemüth)*, then I have the happy conviction that also that which is not comprehensible or only known in part corresponds to the heavenly rule.[32]

The portion of the essay from which this quotation is taken is devoted to constructing a bridge between natural and special revelation which involves remarkable insights into concepts made prominent by earlier, contemporary, and later theologians and philosophers (e.g., Schleiermacher's feeling of dependence; Kierkegaard's leap of faith; nihilism; existentialism, ontical [fallen] being; ontological [potential] being). Scholarly evidence for the truth of the Christian religion and the divine nature of Scripture may be beyond the competence of the ordinary man, but he has a more important evidence which is also essential for the scholar and which makes all other evidence superfluous, namely, the spiritual experience of the power of the Word through faith, whereby a person has been translated from death to life, servitude of sin to the freedom of righteousness.[33] The Word is the only means toward this goal, as has been established by prophetic Word, by the harmonious testimony of Old and New Testament, and by many witnesses (often martyrs) in the church who testified to this power.[34]

In a large section,[35] Fuerbringer discusses such topics as analogy of faith, historicity of Scripture, language and literary types of Scripture. In harmony with linguists of our day, he points out

> that all words are always signs of our thoughts which are directed at concepts of things that impress themselves on the soul from the outside. Since the sacred writers are to instruct us regarding mysteries that lie hidden in the unfathomable God, these were ineffable truths even for them. They must have then, just as they received the concepts of heavenly things in images, also have received words in their mouth which in a measure portray the mysteries.[36]

These depths of God are revealed together with other truths which reason by its own power can ascertain. The Spirit gives the proper understanding. So great men of various periods of the church, led by the Spirit, have agreed on the chief points and their differences concerned only secondary matters.[37]

Fuerbringer holds a conservative position over against rationalistic attacks on the trustworthiness of Scripture, but it is a conservative Lutheran position which has emphases that differ from those of the

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30 Ibid., II, 6, 1—3.
31 Ibid., II, 6, 1.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., II, 3, 2.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., II, 2, 1—2.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., II, 2, 2.

so-called American Lutherans, a Calvinist theologian like Charles Hodge (1797 to 1878), and fundamentalists. He does not stress the infallibility of long-lost original manuscripts, but accepts as the final norm for doctrine and life the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible as established by scholars:

> Through the remarkable industry and natural and gracious gifts of interpreters from Origen to the present we are able to prove every article of faith of the only holy and catholic church with unshakable certainty from the basic Hebrew and Greek text.[38]

The possibility of establishing articles of faith from Scripture is the chief concern in the discussion of variant readings. Instead of appealing to the originals, Fuerbringer faces the problem of variants as follows:

> If God had wanted to preserve the text of the holy books, whose parts are numbered by Him as the hair of our head (cf. Matt. 5:18), from all textual variations, He would have had to remove the greatest miracle of all from the world, and faith would no longer have been faith. A careful comparison of all textual differences show not the least effect on the doctrine of faith; these [variants] were lofty and wise purposes in the rule and judgment of God; they will certainly become more apparent in the course of time.[39]

The readers of *Der Lutheraner* (including laymen) are urged to study writings of rationalists and outstanding textual critics, especially Bengel.[40]

It is interesting in passing to note the goals which Fuerbringer feels the interpreter of Scripture should have: (1) That he understand the exact meaning of words and expressions in accordance with the peculiar usage of the given language, and that he understand its power and impact on the human heart; (2) that he observe carefully the connections, not only within the book which he is reading, but also the connections between Biblical books from Genesis to Revelation as well as in every other treatment of the writer's system of doctrine *(analogia doctrinae);* (3) that he take note of circumstances surrounding persons, time, and place; and finally (4) that he be able to detect the false and the abuse of false interpretations.[41]

Whereas Reformed Confessions from the beginning insisted on adherence to all canonical books,[42] the constitution of the Missouri Synod simply pledges the subscriber to the "Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice." That this statement is intended to allow for an open canon, and that scholarship is to be involved in determining the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments is set forth in an article by Walther written in 1856.[43] He holds that a person may deny the apostolicity of New Testament books known as *antilegomena.* That the preservation of articles of faith is still his

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38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., II, 1, 4.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., II, 2, 1.

42 E. g., *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), Chap. I. *The Westminster Confession,* Chap. I, lists the 66 canonical books.

43 "Ist derjenige für einen Ketzer oder gefährlichen Irrlehrer zu erklären, welcher nicht alle in dem Convolut des Neuen Testaments befindlichen Bücher für kanonisch hält und erklärt?" *Lehre und Wehre,* II, 7 (July 1856), 204—23.

primary concern is indicated by the following statement among others:

> May God the Lord grant that the above testimonies serve the purpose of causing everyone to strive to become really certain of his faith in these last sad times and to recognize that this can often occur only after conscientious and earnest investigation. But may everyone also be warned thereby against the serious sin of immediately placing those under the suspicion of challenging the Word of God who, with the most faithful teachers of our church in its most blessed days, adhere to all articles of faith and acknowledge those sacred books which were accepted by the whole church in every age as the divine rule and norm of faith and life, but have scruples about attributing equal authority as Scripture to those which were opposed and whose origin and authority were doubted time and again by honest and loyal teachers of the church.[44]

In the thought of early theologians of the Missouri Synod, all doctrines are contained in the doctrine of justification. They held that if "that doctrine is pure and upright, then all the others are in proper shape," [45] If it is held with "firm and sure faith, then others like that of the Trinity gradually follow." [46] Thus it is the center of all doctrine.

Walther pointed out that Luther gave excellent advice on how to determine whether a doctrine is true or false:

> A person must first of all determine whether the doctrine is in harmony with the article of justification before God alone through faith in Christ by grace or not.[47]

This Lutheran approach to doctrine caused the early theologians of the Lutheran church to emphasize the sacramental aspects of the public ministry and to locate the office where these aspects are especially apparent, namely, in the local congregation.[48] O. Fuerbringer expresses this excellently:

> Again it is a matter of properly dividing the gold of pure doctrine and in that way allowing it to penetrate ever more deeply into one's consciousness. Because of an inner inseparable connection between the article on church and ministry and the foremost one, namely, justification by grace in Christ Jesus through faith, the whole Reformation struggle next to the latter [justification] had to do chiefly with the former [church and ministry]. Let us always strive to perceive more clearly in our minds what our fathers have left us as an inheritance and accept it with ever greater enthusiasm of the heart, not out of blind faith *(Köhlerglaube)* but from a conviction created by the Holy Spirit on the basis of His Word in the Bible.[49]

Walther insisted that his primary concern in developing his doctrine on the church was to keep justification central and not make membership in any specific denomination a cause or prerequisite for salvation. If such membership were made necessary, then a person would be saved

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[44] Ibid., p. 215.

[45] "Referat . . . ," Western District *Proceedings*, 1859, p. 14. Quoted from Luther (Walch Edition), VIII, 2180.

[46] Ibid. Quoted from Luther (Walch Edition), XXII, 751—52.

[47] "Ueber die Lehre von der Kirche," *Luth.*, XIII, 8 (Dec. 2. 1856), 58.

[48] E. L. Lueker, "Some Concepts of Church and Ministry in the Nineteenth Century" (Commission on Mission and Ministry, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, 1971, mimeographed).

[49] "Zur Lehre vom heiligen Predigtamt," *Lehre und Wehre*, I, 1 (January 1855), 1.

not only by faith in Christ, but also by membership in a certain church, thereby erecting a supplementary Savior *(Nebenheiland)*.[50]

The centrality of the doctrine of justification is well established in the thought of the leaders of the Missouri Synod before that church was organized. Thus Walther held that the chief defect in Reformed doctrine is its doctrine of predestination because that doctrine prevented Christ from being the Savior of all men.[51] Walther early stressed the importance of private absolution, undoubtedly because of his experience at the time he received the letter from Stephan mentioned above.[52] Absolution, he held, must be properly arranged in a Law and Gospel structure, thereby becoming justification in action.[53]

Walther and his contemporaries held that pure doctrine is a matter of properly relating all parts of a doctrinal structure to its center, which is justification by grace through faith. After presenting his doctrine of the church and his refutation of false views, he urges his readers to examine his theses on the basis of Scripture and thus reach "a clear insight of its orientation within the complete Christian doctrinal structure." [54]

Walther's treatment of Law and Gospel is one of his best-known contributions to theology. Law and Gospel is the presentation of justification. Walther held that in preaching it was not enough to merely present "all the articles according to Scripture," but in the presentation Law and Gospel must be properly distinguished.[55]

Since the Augsburg Confession was regarded as the doctrine of justification properly structured and interrelated, that confession was often designated as the proper form of Lutheran doctrine.[56]

Emphasis on the doctrine of justification waned in the Missouri Synod in the 1870s. Numerous factors led to its decline. The theme, however, had not been exhausted because it is brilliantly presented by somewhat younger non-Missouri contemporaries of Walther like Martin Kaehler[57] (1835—1912) and Einar Billing[58] (1871 to 1939).

The essay of the first convention of the Synodical Conference emphasized the cen-

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50 "Ueber die Lehre von der Kirche," *Luth.*, XIII, 8 (Dec. 2, 1856), 58—59.

51 "Von dem Namen 'Lutheraner'," *Luth.*, I, 3 (October 1844), 2.

52 See fn. 3.

53 "Die heilige Absolution gerettet gegen die Lästerungen der Methodisten," *Luth.*, II, 18 (May 2, 1846), 3.

54 "Antwort auf die neueste Vertheidigung der Union," *Luth.*, I, 21 (June 18, 1845), 4.

55 "Verhandlungen über die 17. Thesis des Referats, 'dasz die ev. luth. Kirche die wahre sichbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden sei'," Western District *Proceedings*, 1868, p. 33; *Der Concordienformel Kern und Stern*, p. 35; C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929). For a concise treatment see R. C. Schultz, "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXII, 10 (October 1961), 591—97.

56 Th. Brohm, "Von ordentlicher Berufung zum Predigtamt," *Luth.*, I, 16 (April 5, 1845), 2.

57 M. Kaehler, *Die Wissenschaft der christlichen Lehre von dem evangelischen Grundartikel aus im Abrisse dargestellt*, reprint of 3d (1905) ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966).

58 For a brief summary of Einar Billing and his writings see *Nordisk Teologisk Uppslagsbok*, I (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag, 1952). See *Försoningen* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1908).

trality of justification.[59] It contained such statements as the following:

> All other doctrines lose their significance if the doctrine of justification is not correct. It can be a matter of indifference to us whether the essence of God is in three or six persons as a God jealous toward us sinners. It is only when we know and believe that we poor sinners are reconciled with God the Father by grace and that we obtain righteousness only through that faith which the Holy Spirit alone works that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity becomes a doctrine filled with comfort and blessedness.[60]

> If only the person who stands in the pulpit keeps this article pure, if only all his preaching is permeated by the thought that a person is saved alone through Christ, then it would do no harm if here and there he missed the proper form or even erred in expression; another, however, who does not live in this article may preach beautifully and in proper form but fail to bring the congregation the proper comfort and necessary joy. Perhaps the congregation even wonders with him why the proper fruit fails to follow; but certainly [it is because] this article is lacking. In sum: where this article is, there certainly is Christ; there are Christians; there is Christ's church; where it is not, there also is no church.[61]

> The Reformed hold that the Gospel is a narrative, a historical account of that which God has done. But they deny that God also offers grace in this word. Our church, however, teaches that he who hears the Gospel and believes becomes righteous.[62]

The essay stresses the *vis dativa* and *vis effectiva* of Word and Sacrament as in accordance with the article of justification:

> He who denies that the Gospel is the absolution of the world denies the Gospel of Christ; then it is not a happy proclamation, but instruction concerning it.[63]

The use of the work of the classical dogmaticians in the classroom may have gradually led to a shift of emphasis from doctrine as proper relationship to doctrine as correct classical formulations. The shift undoubtedly takes place in the 1870s.

Beginning with the second convention of the Synodical Conference (1873) and continuing through the eighth (1879), theses prepared by W. Sihler were discussed. In these theses and the discussions of them it was emphasized that complete agreement in doctrine and practice is necessary for Christian fellowship. Thesis five reads:

> He who denies the binding nature of deductions which are properly drawn from the words of this confession [Augsburg Confession] is not a true member of the Lutheran Church even though he illegally holds on to the Lutheran name.[64]

The discussion of this thesis employs supporting rational and logical approaches to doctrine:

> Either we must grant the consequences

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[59] "Ueber die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung," Synodical Conference *Proceedings*, 1872, pp. 20 to 68. This essay brings many thoughts from Luther and Walther printed in *Der Lutheraner*. F. Pieper bases his discussion of Walther's doctrine of justification to a large extent on this essay (*Lehre und Wehre*, XXXVI). The essay appears anonymously in the *Proceedings*. It was prepared by F. A. Schmidt (*Luth.*, XXVIII [1872], 162). Walther praises the essay highly (*Luth., XXVIII* [1872], 184).

[60] Ibid., p. 21.

[61] Ibid., p. 25.

[62] Ibid., p. 56.

[63] Ibid., p. 57.

[64] "Thesen über Kirchengemeinschaft," Synodical Conference *Proceedings*, 1873, p. 6.

> [deductions, implications] or deny the organ God has given us to deduce truths from truths, namely, reason.[65]

The essayist and discussants insist that there must be agreement not only on "articles of faith" but on all doctrine:

> If a doctrine is not contained in the Augsburg Confession, but, on the other hand, can be clearly established from Scripture, it must be believed just as much as any other expressly named in the Augsburg Confession.[66]

These principles were undoubtedly assumed by many who participated in the predestination controversy. That controversy broke with such violence that much of the time of the ninth convention of the Synodical Conference (1882) was devoted to it with the result that there was no time for further discussion of Sihler's theses.

That the doctrine of conversion and election became a primary concern for theologians of the Missouri Synod hardly needs formal verification. Its effects on theology may be studied in the earliest "second generation" theologians: F. Pieper, G. Stoeckhardt, and A. L. Graebner. Pieper's first theological article in *Lehre und Wehre* (1879) finds fault with Pastor D. Zahn for teaching man's ability to convert himself and for his rationalistic view of faith and redemption.[67] In another article the following year he finds synergism in an expression of G. Thomasius.[68] A major article on predestination appeared in 1881. T. Graebner makes the following comment on that article and others of the same year:

> Professor Pieper's power as a writer, who could speak clearly and with profound knowledge on a difficult subject, became clear to all those who followed the argument. For a man in his early thirties [actually 29] the force and ripeness of the articles which appeared in this volume of *Lehre und Wehre* were truly amazing.[69]

There is no doubt that concern to avoid synergism is found throughout Pieper's subsequent work. He hesitates to attribute anything really significant to faith. He hesitates to say that "faith justifies," "faith saves" or "makes righteous" (except when quoting the confessions). He tends to make faith belief in the doctrine of God's forgiveness:

> . . . there is full accord among Christians on the doctrine of justification. All Christians are at one in believing that God forgives their sins by grace, for Christ's sake, without any merit of their own. For it is this faith which makes the Christian.[70]

Most of the articles in *Lehre und Wehre* of 1880 on election were written by Walther and Stoeckhardt. These articles became fundamental to the entire controversy.[71] The effect of the emphasis on election on exegesis may be seen in Stoeckhardt's treatment of Ephesians. His outstanding exegetical ability is demonstrated

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65 Ibid., 1874, p. 7.

66 Ibid., p. 10.

67 *Lehre und Wehre,* XXV, 7 (July 1879), 207—12.

68 Ibid., XXVI, 3 (March 1880), 84—87.

69 T. Graebner, *Dr. Francis Pieper: A Biographical Sketch* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1931), p. 31. For some of Pieper's articles in 1881 see *Lehre und Wehre,* XXVII, 4 (April 1881), 97—120; 5 (May 1881), 167 to 169, 201—10; 6 (June 1881), 235—47; 7 (July 1881), 333—44; 10 (October 1881), 453—59.

70 *Christian Dogmatics,* II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 516.

71 T. Graebner, p. 30.

in his treatment of Rom. 1:18-23, 1 Peter 3:17-22, and many other places. It becomes apparent in his commentary on Ephesians that predestination is one of his primary concerns.[72]

A. L. Graebner also wrote on the doctrine of predestination. His greatest claim to fame, however, is in the area of history, where his chief works were unaffected by the controversy.[73]

The predestination controversy also changed Missouri's position on fellowship. Whereas formerly its members had practiced fellowship with those loyal to the Augsburg Confession, the election controversy led to prohibitions of fellowship with Missouri's opponents (who were loyal to the confessions). This prohibition was subsequently extended to all not in complete agreement in doctrine.[74]

In the early 20th century it seemed that the ravages of the controversy on election would be overcome. G. Stoeckhardt and G. Fritschel apparently reached agreement on the doctrine and F. Bente felt that unity had pactically been achieved.[75]

A series of events, which cannot here be traced, led to the rejection of the Chicago Theses[76] in 1929 and caused serious division within the Missouri Synod between those who favored fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and those opposing it. The struggle for uniform fellowship practices led to resolutions denying the right of pastors, congregations, and others to act independently.[77] In this struggle efforts were made to make the Brief Statement and other doctrinal resolutions of Synod binding on all members.[78]

In the first part of the 20th century greater emphasis was given to the "inerrancy" of Scripture. The phrase "also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical and other secular matters" is found in *A Brief Statement* of 1932 though not in Pieper's *Ich Glaube darum Rede Ich* of 1897. The gist, however, is found in Pieper's essay delivered at the Southern

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[72] "Exkurs über die Lehre von der Gnadenwahl nach Eph. 1:3-14," *Kommentar über den Brief Pauli an die Epheser* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1910), pp. 83—96.

[73] Early articles by Graebner include "Zur Bestimmung des Begriffs *prognosis*," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXVI, 3 (March 1880), 73—77; "Können und sollen wir unserer Erwählung gewisz sein?" ibid., XXVII, 3 (March 1881), 76 to 81.

[74] *Synodal-Bericht*, 1881, p. 45; F. Bente, "Warum können wir keine gemeinsamen Gebetsgottesdienste mit Ohioern und Iowaern veranstalten und abhalten?" *Lehre und Wehre*, LI (February, March 1905), 49—53, 97—115.

[75] F. Bente, *Was steht der Vereinigung der lutherischen Synoden Amerikas im Wege?* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917), p. 110.

[76] Theses unanimously adopted by representatives of the Buffalo, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin Synods April 15, 1925, in which the synods agreed on various articles including predestination and conversion. They were rejected primarily because Ohio and Buffalo had adopted the Minneapolis Theses with the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, with which the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church was not in fellowship.

[77] After 1947 the principle became widely accepted "that every member of Synod has foregone the right to establish fellowship with another church body independently" (*Proceedings*, 1947, p. 498). By 1970 many urged that synodical conventions should have legislative power over congregations.

[78] "Resolved: A. That Synod clarify its position by reaffirming that every doctrinal statement of a confessional nature adopted by Synod as a true exposition of the Holy Scripture is to be regarded as public doctrine *(publica doctrina)* in Synod; and B. That Synod's pastors, teachers, and professors are held to teach and act in harmony with such statements" (*Proceedings*,

Illinois District in 1921.[79] Pieper, however, did not remove the divine-human dichotomy and seems to prefer the word "true" in positive statements rather than "inerrant." The term "inerrant" became prominent in official literature after 1930; before the term infallible seems to have been preferred. In connection with "inerrancy" the role of historical and critical studies in connection with Scripture is debated.[80]

In the 20th century rules against lodge membership were also made more stringent.[81]

In the contemporary scene there are tensions between those who emphasize the position of Walther and those who hold the more rigid position of the Sihler theses.[82] Some agree with Bente that the predestination controversy has been overcome while others still look for traces of synergism and consider it a major hindrance to fellowship. There are some who emphasize the inerrancy of the original manuscripts while others are primarily concerned with the existing texts as norms for doctrine. The latter encourage devout, scholarly, historical, and critical (including textual) research.

May God grant us the humility, wisdom, grace, and patience to effectively work in Christ's kingdom.

St. Louis, Mo.

1959, p. 191). This resolution was declared unconstitutional in 1962.

[79] F. Pieper, *What Is Christianity,* trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1933), pp. 238, 240. For *A Brief Statement* see C. S. Meyer, "The Historical Background of 'A Brief Statement,'" CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXII, 7, 8, 9 (July, August, September 1961), 403—28, 466 to 82, 526—42. In 1880 Pieper discussed Walther's theses on Law and Gospel at the Iowa District convention. In connection with the first thesis he criticizes an erroneous use of the concept of divine and human in Scripture and states: "He who does not believe that Holy Scripture in its entirety is God's Word has given up the foundation of Christianity." *(Zweiter Synodal-Bericht des Iowa-Distrikts,* 1880, p. 15). At the Kansas District (1892) he bases orthodoxy *(Rechtgläubigkeit)* on two factors: the infallibility of Scripture and the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. He changes Walther's first thesis to contain both: "Although both Law and Gospel are God's Word, they are, nevertheless, two basically different doctrines and, therefore, to be sharply distinguished." *(Vierter Synodal-Bericht des Kansas-Distrikts,* 1892, pp. 7—9).

[80] For the word see A. C. Piepkorn "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXVI, 8 (September 1965), 477—93.

[81] J. W. Constable, "Lodge Practice Within the Missouri Synod," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXIX, 7 (July-August 1968), 476—96; G. F. Lobien, "A Sytematic-Historical Study of the Policy of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod with Respect to Fraternal Organizations in the Past Fifty Years" (Th. D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1971).

[82] While Walther highly regarded the classical dogmaticians for their rationalization of doctrine, he opposed throughout his life using them as rule and norm: "The principal means by which our opponents endeavor to support their doctrine consists in continually quoting passages from the private writings of our Church, published subsequently to the Formula of Concord. But whenever a controversy arises concerning the question whether a doctrine is *Lutheran,* we must not ask: "What does this or that 'father' of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?" for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary we must ask: "What does the public CONFESSION of the *Lutheran Church* teach concerning the controverted point?" For in her confession our Church has recorded for all times what she believes, teaches, and confesses, for the very reason that no controversy may arise concerning the question what our Lutheran Church believes." C. F. W. Walther, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination,* trans. A. Crull (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 5.