

The Wauwatosa Spring: The Flowering of the Historical Disciplines at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1900-1920)

Beginning in 1900, there was something decidedly novel about the Wisconsin Synod's Wauwatosa Seminary. About that everyone seems to agree.

Previous to the turn of the twentieth century, Professor Adolf Hoenecke had been the guiding light of the Wisconsin Synod's theological thought for nearly forty years, helping steer his young and burgeoning church body through tumultuous days in his own quiet and imitable way.¹ The synod had finally divested herself of the unionistic relationships that had led others to call her Lutheranism into question. After a brief overture with the General Council, Wisconsin quickly established formal ties with the vigorously-Lutheran Missouri Synod and became a charter member of largest Lutheran church union in America at that time, the Synodical Conference. Under Hoenecke's theological leadership, the synod had stood by the Missouri Synod during the tempestuous Election Controversy, with Hoenecke himself carefully refining and restating the Synodical Conference's public teaching on election when it was misunderstood and misrepresented by others.² These were indeed character-building years for the growing church body in Wisconsin, and Hoenecke's theological leadership throughout those four decades is easily recognized as a divinely-given gift.

Growth of any kind naturally requires energy and exertion, but when energy is exerted, it is only natural to seek rest, to fall back on what has been accomplished, and even to say with the rich fool: "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry" (Luke 12:19). That was the theological temptation the Wisconsin Synod and her seminary faced in 1900 when they found themselves in many ways straddling the confessional Lutheran hill in America. How easy it would have been simply to fall back on the intense theological plowing the fathers had done. How painless to repeat mindlessly the theological conclusions of the past without doing the same, original work others had undertaken.

Even before he arrived at the Wauwatosa Seminary in 1900, Professor John Ph. Koehler saw the fruits of that temptation cropping up within the Synodical Conference, within his own church body, and within himself. He observed, "A degree of mental inflexibility (*Geistesstarre*) has begun to assert itself, coupled with a hyperconservative attitude which is more concerned about rest than about conservation. ... This mental inflexibility is not healthy, for if it continues

¹ Throughout his *History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Publishing for the Prot stant Conference, 1981), John Ph. Koehler highlights the firm yet quiet approach of Adolf Hoenecke, especially in the time of controversy. In his *History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Third Revised Edition, Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), J.L. Neve commented on how "Dr. Hoenecke by gentle and conciliatory speech took the sting out of Missouri's offensive phraseology [during the early years of the Election Controversy], and accomplished much in the interest of peace in the church" (231).

² See Jonathan Schroeder, "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1688>).

it will lead to death. Both in the mental activity of an individual and of a community, fresh, vibrant, productive activity is a sign of health.”³ He went on to explain:

The inertia of which I am speaking shows itself in a lack of readiness again and again to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. For in the course of time, circumstances change and our views also change. ... And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that all of this can become mere empty form without spirit or life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.⁴

What Koehler and his seminary colleagues, August Pieper and John Schaller, would propose, promote and put into practice was a determined emphasis upon the historical disciplines of biblical exegesis and history in an effort to elude theological lethargy. The approach of these Wauwatosa theologians between 1900-1920 appeared to be new within the context of Midwestern Lutheranism, but in truth these men were simply following in the footsteps of Martin Luther and applying principles set forth in the days of the Lutheran Reformation. Koehler readily conceded: “There is only one Gospel, and no school or synod has a monopoly on it; but the historical exegetical approach to it of what has been called the Wauwatosa Theology has given the Wisconsin Synod a distinct educational character among its sisters. That needs to be recorded as a matter of its history.”⁵ And in so many ways, as we shall see, their approach brought about the theological flowers of a Wauwatosa Spring.

Some have disparaged the theological approach of the Wauwatosa professors, seeing it as a repudiation of the theology and theological method of Adolf Hoenecke specifically⁶ and of confessional Lutheranism in general. Even some within our fellowship have characterized the Wauwatosa emphasis especially upon biblical exegesis as being “myopic,” arguing that Wauwatosa’s “fresh, exegetical understanding” seems at times to overlook or simply discard what the Church has long believed and confessed.⁷

³ John Ph. Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 434.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 434-435.

⁵ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 191.

⁶ Among others, the Concordia Lutheran Conference makes this charge publicly on their official website.

⁷ This concern within our circles often revolves around determining the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions within confessional Lutheranism. Are the Scriptures to be interpreted by the Confessions or vice versa? The Wauwatosa theologians were not afraid to emphasize the importance of keeping the Scriptures (*norma normans*) and the Lutheran Confessions (*norma normata*) in their appropriate order, while at the same time understanding that confessional Lutherans have bound themselves with an oath completely to both. For instance, Koehler once wrote, “I respect ... the Lutheran

Most in the Wisconsin Synod, however, see the flowering of the historical disciplines that took place at the Wauwatosa Seminary, especially from 1900-1920, as a seminal period in our Synod's history. In his dedicatory preface to the *Wauwatosa Theology* volumes published in 1997 by Northwestern Publishing House, Pastor Wayne Mueller describes how "God raised up three men whose devotion to the Scriptures continues to define Wisconsin's approach," and how they "refreshed the church with a direct appeal to the Bible."⁸ In his *Continuing in His Word*, Professor Max Lehninger outlines "the influence of this Wauwatosa theology"⁹ within the Synod, and in his 1957 synod convention essay, "The Tie that Binds," Dr. Elmer Kiessling detailed how "our Synod's Lutheranism has a distinct quality of its own." Kiessling recalled how "our Seminary with its faculty of outstanding personalities developed what has been called the Wauwatosa theology or popularly the Wauwatosa gospel. Its essential feature was a fresh approach to the study of the Bible."¹⁰ Generally speaking, most Wisconsin Synod pastors today who know anything about the term "Wauwatosa Theology" would seem to understand it to mean that we are well-served to take an honest, exegetical approach to the Scriptures and to ask ourselves diligently: what does God's Word actually say?

It should be noted that the expressions "Wauwatosa theology" and "Wauwatosa gospel" seem to have been coined by members of the Protestant Conference of the Wisconsin Synod in the late 1920s,¹¹ but they have not always been readily acknowledged or enthusiastically employed by the pastors and theologians of the Wisconsin Synod. In a 1959 essay entitled, "The Theological Tradition of the Wisconsin Synod with Particular Attention to the Work of John Philip Koehler," Leigh Jordahl asserted that there was a difference of opinion among leading Wisconsin men.

concern to be loyal to the Confessions; it is evident, however, that this conception is clothed in the garment of legalism," since the Confessions have been twisted at times to argue that the Scriptures say something that they actually do not say ("Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music," *Faith-Life* 39, no. 4 [July/August 1966]: 7.

⁸ Wayne Mueller, "Dedicatory Preface," *The Wauwatosa Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997).

⁹ Max Lehninger, ed. *Continuing in His Word: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 148.

¹⁰ Elmer Kiessling, "The Tie That Binds" *Faith-Life* 37, no. 5 (May 1959): 8.

¹¹ To the best of this author's knowledge, the earliest printed record of the expression "Wauwatosa Theology" is found in an essay by Karl Koehler entitled "The Antinomian Controversy" (*Faith-Life* 1, no. 11 [August 27, 1928]: 7). Pastor Paul Hensel seems to have coined the term "Wauwatosa Gospel," with his 1928 "The *Gutachten* in the Light of the Wauwatosa Gospel." Karl Koehler would later comment, "Academically we speak of it as the Wauwatosa Theology. But no one has the right to take umbrage at the term 'Wauwatosa Gospel.' ... The term sprang into life with Paul Hensel's paper entitled thus. ... Since then the expression 'Wauwatosa Gospel' has taken on a wider significance, to wit: that the Wauwatosa Theology, outside of its doctrinal position, has a special message, a gospel (as everybody understands the term 'gospel' in its wider use)" (*Faith-Life* 4, no. 3 [March 1931]: 11). While the term "Wauwatosa Theology" may not have seen print before August 1928, the author suspects that at least some Wauwatosa students and graduates – if not some on the Wauwatosa faculty – had already adopted the term to signify the unique theological approach of the Wauwatosa professors.

...the term *Wauwatosa Theology* ... is generally objected to by Wisconsin Synod men who refuse to recognize that there was any peculiar point of view at Wauwatosa which is different from what now dominates the Thiensville Seminary. The writer has discussed the term with John Brenner, former President of the Wisconsin Synod, Oscar Naumann, present President and E.E. Kowalke, President of Northwestern College. Naumann has insisted that there was no specific approach at Wauwatosa that contradicted present position, although he feels that Koehler was "confused." Brenner disliked the term but confessed that under Koehler things were different and that Koehler was an "original and stimulating" teacher. Kowalke agreed with the writer that there was a specific theological approach at Wauwatosa, that this was not appreciated and that it no longer has any great influence in the Wisconsin Synod.¹²

More recently there has not been as much reticence about utilizing these terms to describe the theological approach of the Wauwatosa professors¹³ or to describe the Wisconsin Synod's current theological approach as being a continuation of the "Wauwatosa Theology," though some voices in our church body wonder how wise or beneficial it is to use the term at all. Be that as it may, it is exceedingly wise and beneficial to consider what these theological giants in Wisconsin Synod history espoused and to ask what was so unique about the Wauwatosa Seminary within American Lutheranism that it led many to attach special terms to its theological perspectives.

Breaking Up the Soil: Professor John Philipp Koehler

When the Lord of the Church called the prophet Jeremiah to proclaim his eternal Word, he explained to the young man that he was not being given an easy assignment. Jeremiah was appointed as a prophet "over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:10). He was faced with the prospect of breaking up the hardened soil of Israel's very heart and mind – baked by long years of often-mindless, religious routine – for the purpose of leading God's chosen people "to know our God aright," as Martin Luther put it so succinctly in his great Pentecost hymn, "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord" (CW 176). Indeed, the Lord had already said of them, "These people come near to me with their

¹² Leigh Jordahl, "The Theological Tradition of the Wisconsin Synod with Particular Attention to the Work of John Philip Koehler," (Luther Theological Seminary, 1959), 21, footnote 2. Pastor Carl Mischke, the Synod President one generation later commented, "I'll have to admit I never associated the music, the art, the literature, or any of that with [the Wauwatosa Theology]," (Michael J. Albrecht, "The Faith-Life Legacy of a Wauwatosa Theologian: Prof. Joh. Ph. Koehler, Exegete, Historian and Musician" [A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2008], 233). See also Albert Meier, "...Neither Bound Up, Neither Mollified with Ointment," *Faith-Life* 32, no. 5 (May 1959): 11-12. Meier reports on at least one district president who "made a study of the *Quartalschrift* and couldn't see ... what we meant by Wauwatosa Theology."

¹³ The Northwestern Publishing House effort to publish a three-volume anthology entitled *The Wauwatosa Theology* is ample proof of the term's growing use within the Wisconsin Synod.

mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13). The proclamation of godly repentance was altogether necessary.

The history of the Holy Scriptures and a study of New Testament church history show us how necessary this preaching of repentance continues to be for the Lord's people. No matter how faithful they are to Jesus, sinful human hearts are forever tempted to fall prey to easy and comfortable spiritual patterns that do not quite square with God's holy Word and will, as Jesus' recurrent "But I tell you ..." in his Sermon on the Mount so aptly demonstrates. Ironically, this temptation to hardened, spiritual thinking has proven to be most pervasive where the gospel predominates and the idea that we are "right with God"¹⁴ unwittingly leads to a deadly self-righteousness.¹⁵ Therefore, godly repentance in the light of God's holy Word will continue to be for us a necessary, daily exercise.

In many respects, this is what the Wauwatosa theologians and their approach exemplified. Koehler wrote, "The texts of the Advent season suggest an admonition, which in the form of a biblical term more clearly expresses what I have often and long sought to make impressive, namely, *Metanoia*, the renewal of the roots of thinking, the change of the heart's inner attitude."¹⁶ The Wauwatosa men asked the church of their day to critically examine on the basis of the Holy Scriptures whether or not their established forms and findings – whether their presentation of biblical doctrine and practice – really squared with the truth of God's Word. They also sought ways to develop and broaden their students' and church's understanding and appreciation for God's indelible fingerprint on all creation and for his ongoing gospel work through us and in us. Naturally, a call to godly repentance and a vigorous self-examination will be met with a measure of resistance, just as when farmers attempt to break up hardened ground with a hoe, yet how necessary is this preparatory work if sustainable fruits are desired.

¹⁴ The truth of the Gospel and the assurance of forgiveness in Jesus has sometimes served as a soporific in the hearts and minds of Jesus' disciples. Instead of placing confidence in the truth of God's Word (the proper object of faith), confidence is placed in *my grasp* of that Word, that I have the *reine Lehre*, the right teaching, which can lead to what Koehler called the "bravado of orthodoxy" (see his "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. III* [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 237-240). A classic biblical example of this phenomenon is Peter's failure to walk on the water as Jesus had commanded him. Peter ultimately placed confidence in *his faith* rather than in the truth of Jesus' words. As a result, Jesus deemed him to have "little faith" (Matthew 14:31).

¹⁵ Old Testament Israel is the most famous example of this frightening reality. They stubbornly resisted the preaching of repentance and persecuted the prophets of the Lord and even crucified Jesus, as St. Stephen details (Acts 7:2-53). It is interesting to note that when Luther and Philipp Melancthon organized the Saxon visitation of evangelical parishes in 1528, their chief concern was with those pastors who did not properly preach repentance or omitted the preaching of repentance altogether. "Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood without repentance. It follows that if we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. This would be a greater error and sin than all the errors hitherto prevailing" (AE 40:274).

¹⁶ John Ph. Koehler, "Book Review on Stoekhardt's Commentary on the First Letter of Peter," *Faith-Life*, 35, no. 9 (September 1962): 8.

The first of the so-called Wauwatosa theologians to undertake this painstaking labor was John Ph. Koehler. He had received a Divine Call to serve as the professor of church history, New Testament, hermeneutics, and liturgics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and was installed on September 4, 1900.¹⁷ The forty-one-year-old Koehler had long been recognized within the synod as a shining light among the second generation of Wisconsin pastors. His father, Pastor Philipp Koehler (1828-1895), had been a strong proponent of confessional Lutheranism from the time he entered the synodical ranks in 1855,¹⁸ and his son had gained the reputation of a studied and serious, if not always traditional, theologian.¹⁹ An 1880 graduate of the Missouri Synod's St. Louis seminary, Koehler had been called to serve as a professor and inspector at Northwestern College in Watertown already in 1888, after only seven years of parish ministry at St. John, Two Rivers, Wisconsin. He would later decline a Divine Call to serve as the director of Dr. Martin Luther College in 1893, a position eventually filled by Professor John Schaller, his future seminary colleague.²⁰

Already as a young pastor, Koehler expressed the concerns he would later champion with respect to the theological approach too often taken in treating matters of doctrine and practice. In a broken-English sermon he preached during his days as pastor in Two Rivers, Koehler asserted:

God has given his word to us & we have nothing else to do but listen what God says. It is not our buissness [sic] to tell the bible what it should say but it is our

¹⁷ Almost immediately, Koehler was forced to take a year's leave of absence due to a throat condition. He spent the year in the American Southwest. His son, Kurt, explains: "He had lost his voice and it was thought that he had tuberculosis of the throat. As it turned out, the vocal chords on one side of his voice-box had grown together and a surgeon in Denver was able to separate them" (John Ph. Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 [November/December 2002]: 16).

¹⁸ It seems best to describe Philipp Koehler as the "driving force" behind the Wisconsin Synod's turn toward a more confessional doctrine and practice. For instance, in his "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," Professor August Pieper writes: "Koehler was the most determined of the men opposing the terrible looseness of the unionists" (*The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 372). In his "Anniversary Reflections," Pieper adds: "The chief champions of strict Lutheran doctrine and practice were first of all Philipp Koehler and then Adolf Hoenecke" (*The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III, [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 276). In a *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* article, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," Professor John Brenner reported: "Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann, who has been working for years to transcribe and preserve the early correspondence of the Wisconsin Synod, once suggested to this writer that on the basis of the correspondence Koehler more than any one else ought to be credited with leading our synod to a solid confessional stand. A thorough study of Koehler's influence based on his correspondence would be a major contribution to understanding the early history of our synod" (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 104, no. 1 [Winter 2007], 23fn.).

¹⁹ Among other things, Koehler was brought up on charges during his professorship at Northwestern for suggesting that Job could possibly have been a poetic rather than a real, historical character. See John Ph. Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 18. Koehler seemed to find himself being questioned by leaders of the synod on a regular basis concerning some doctrinal point.

²⁰ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 224.

duty to accept all that what it presents to us. ... I don't think it to be right way to fix a doctrine or a dogma & then look into the scriptures to get proofs for what we have fixed before. In many cases it is then necessary to stretch [sic] and to press words & whole sentences, to turn them or separate their parts, so as to get out what we have fixed before already [sic]. ... No the right way to study it, is to read it as we read any other book. To take everything as it is written & when certain ideas come before us which seem somewhat out of the way, it is not the right thing to explain them as we think they might have been or as it seems to us to be more agreeable, but we should understand everything as it is explained by the bible itself. ... [This] is for us ... the first question always [sic], what is written? Wether [sic] that is agreeable to us, wether [sic] we like it, or wether [sic] we believe it that may be a second question, although [sic] it ought not be any question at all. For those things which are good enough for God to reveal them, may be surely good enough for [us] to accept & believe & follow them.²¹

It was with this same resolve and perspective that Koehler now entered upon his Wauwatosa professorship in the fall of 1900, replacing Gottlieb Thiele, who had been asked to accept an early retirement the previous Easter. Thiele had served alongside Adolf Hoenecke since 1887 upon the latter's recommendation, but according to one synodical resolution he was "not equal to his position." Koehler reports that his predecessor had made the study of history a "mass of detail" due to his "lack of mastery of the subject" and that Thiele admitted to others that he "had no faith in his theological or even pastoral ability."²²

Exegetical work had suffered as well, proven by the fact that Hoenecke felt compelled to dictate an exegetical commentary on Romans in his classroom, though Thiele was responsible for teaching exegesis. Koehler observes: "It was a stop-gap of a sort for the real exegetical work, but confined itself to the dogmatical systematizing of Paul's line of thought, without much attention to linguistics." Most students had simply "concentrated on copying and studying Hoenecke's dictated dogmatics and paid little attention to other subjects."²³

Dogmatics was clearly the queen theological discipline at Wauwatosa, as was the case generally within Lutheran theological training. The new professor lamented that "exegesis and history seem everywhere to have been considered secondary subjects ... from the mistaken notion that they require less practical ability and training but more independent judgment than doctrinal and pastoral theology."²⁴ The fact that the seminary's most capable teacher, Hoenecke, taught dogmatics only reinforced its principal position at Wauwatosa. That most synodicals continued to regard dogmatics as the chief seminary discipline even after the advent of Koehler and later August Pieper would be confirmed when Hoenecke died in 1908 and the opinion prevailed that the new seminary director should teach dogmatics.²⁵

²¹ Koehler Family Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, Folder 244.

²² Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207.

²³ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 219. John Schaller was eventually called to replace Hoenecke as director and professor of dogmatics. When Schaller died in 1920, it was once again expected that the new director should assume

The traditional approach that he found at Wauwatosa did not prevent Koehler from introducing new ideas to the seminary. The first innovation had to do with simple classroom procedure. Koehler recalled that some seminarians had the “mistaken idea” that each professor was “free to teach what he pleases and the student free to learn as and when he pleases.” Koehler countered this “academic freedom” by making clear from the beginning what kind of expectations he had of his students and what they could expect from him. “The new teacher did not follow the custom of dictating the subject-matter but expected the students to review the ground covered in the daily lectures with the help of a text-book and be prepared for a quiz the next day. In exegesis, the students themselves had to deliver weekly essays besides.”²⁶ As time went on, Koehler would himself write the textbooks for his exegetical course on Galatians and his survey of church history.²⁷

Koehler recounted how “his classroom requirements soon aroused dissatisfaction and individual rebellion.” He explained:

It was mainly those of the students who had not known Koehler as a teacher at Watertown, or had not attended there at all, who now offered passive resistance, but the disciplinary action provoked by the general apathy to effective teaching served to make it clear to the whole coetus that students at our church institutions who receive free tuition (and in many cases free room and board besides) are under definite obligations to the church and school to improve each shining hour, and to the teachers as well who, under-salaried as they are, at least may expect to have the satisfaction of not wasting their time. That is the best way, too, for seminarians to show that they are grown up and “no longer preps” and equipped, for their later ministry, with the necessary sense of responsibility.²⁸

Opinions about Koehler’s teaching and classroom procedure seem to have been mixed among the student body. Professor Martin Westerhaus maintained that Koehler “was quite formal in his classroom manner and kept students conscious of the difference in rank, learning, and experience. . . . He was demanding of his students and was not particularly popular with the majority of them. He probably was ‘over their heads.’”²⁹ Koehler himself would claim that he

the chair of dogmatics. When J.P. Koehler was called to replace Schaller, he declined to teach dogmatics. Professor John Meyer was then called to do so. See Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 252-253; also John Ph. Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 76, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 17.

²⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 210.

²⁷ Koehler published his *Der Brief Pauli an die Galater* in 1910. An English translation by Professor Ralph Gehrke was published by Northwestern Publishing House in 1957 and reissued by NPH, along with Koehler’s later commentary on Ephesians, in 2000. Koehler published his *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* in 1917. Both original German volumes were published at Koehler’s own expense.

²⁸ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 210-211.

²⁹ Martin Westerhaus, “The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 31-32.

lacked “the technique of teaching,”³⁰ perhaps leading some students to have little appreciation for him as a professor.

Other students were impressed after just one day in Koehler’s classroom. In September 1914, E. Arnold Sitz reported in his journal, “*Kirchengeschichte* [church history] with Prof. Koehler is a deep study; Hermeneutics with him also.”³¹ The following year Sitz would write, “A number of us called on John P. Koehler this evening. There is hardly another man of his calibre living I am sure, who seems to intuit all that is worth knowing in *Kunst* [art] and *Wissenschaft* [science]. His conversation is very instructive. His dissertations in music were especially interesting to me.”³² A month later he could confide: “Prof. Koehler is sure a great thinker. This morning in the church history time he gave us enough thoughts to work over for life in order to come to the bottom of it.”³³ By the time Sitz reached his final year at Wauwatosa he could not help but express himself boldly.

Every period we have with him is intensely interesting from start to finish. He is a master in analysis of history; he can grasp the controlling idea of a period in history covering centuries as, I almost believe, no other man of our time, certainly but few of our times can.³⁴

That man has a wonderful grasp of thots [sic] and ideas that pervade a time and can summarize in peerless fashion whole centuries.³⁵

I honestly believe him the greatest man of the times, not to say since Luther. Why? Because he is the only man of any outward importance who has [been] granted thought of the Gospel as he, and who has such a knowledge and insight into history as well as ... painting, music, literature. And he criticizes these things in the only true light, the light of the Gospel, the Gospel of which he has his understanding, not from church fathers nor dogmaticians, but from the Gospel itself, from Christ and Paul.³⁶

³⁰ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 235.

³¹ E. Arnold Sitz journal, September 10, 1914. It should be noted that from early on Sitz was quite generally impressed with the spirit at the Wauwatosa Seminary compared to what prevailed at Northwestern College, Watertown. He wrote on September 18, 1914: “I’d never exchange places with a senior at Watertown now. The purpose of a student there is diametrically opposed to that of a student here. There anything (e.g. sports, music) but study seems to be paramount reason for being at N.W.C.; here study takes first place in the student’s mind. This is illustrated thus: In Watertown one hardly ever hears students discussing their studies or what a professor had to say; here the conversation is mostly concerning studies and the lectures of the professors.”

³² Sitz journal, October 29, 1915.

³³ *Ibid.*, November 30, 1915.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1917.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, March 18, 1917.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, November 9, 1916. Sixty years later Sitz would recall in a letter to his grandson, “When I finished [Northwestern College] in 1914 I came out quite indifferent, not too far removed from heathenism. I more or less just drifted into the Seminary. But how glad I am that I got there! For that is where I learned under

Another former student, Pastor Immanuel P. Frey, summed up his impressions of Koehler with similar admiration.

Professor Koehler at first glance impressed the students as an austere man and as of a reserved nature, but at the same time he had a gift for talking with the students and influencing them privately. His chief talent seemed to be the laying down of the fundamental principles of the Gospel. It appeared at times that he intentionally did not make his statements too specific, so that the students would do their own thinking. Consequently they were not always likely to understand him at first but after months, perhaps even years, the fuller meaning would gradually dawn upon them. His lectures were never dull but always stimulating. He put great stress on the revelation of God's ways in history, pointing out that the formulations of theology are not static but represent a constant struggle of God's unchanging truth against the ever-changing attacks of error. This made also church history a vital subject at our Seminary and the study of history a prominent feature in the pre-seminary training of ministerial students in our Synod.³⁷

Just prior to Koehler's arrival, there had been debate as to whether or not it was time to introduce more English instruction at the seminary level since Wauwatosa graduates were facing the real prospect of serving English-speaking congregations in the years to come.³⁸ "In the early to mid 1890s seminary students seeing the need for English facility organized on their own an English theological debating society in the dormitory. At the monthly meetings a student would read an original essay on a theological topic and two teams would debate a theological problem. A general discussion rounded out the meeting. In this way the students familiarized themselves with English theological terminology."³⁹

Ultimately, it was decided that a fourth professorship should be established "to give the students at least some training in the use of English theological terms."⁴⁰ Pastor Reinhold Adelberg of St. Peter Church in Milwaukee served temporarily in this capacity from 1897-1901.⁴¹

wonderful teachers, among whom was your Great Grandfather, Prof. John Philipp Koehler, what Christianity really is."

³⁷ Immanuel P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (July 1963): 212.

³⁸ Koehler reports: "The move looking to more emphasis on the English originated in Minnesota, and [Philipp von] Rohr's and [August] Ernst's incumbency of the two main presidencies in the general body may also account for its support" (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207).

³⁹ John M. Brenner, "Forward in Christ: Doctrinal Challenges and Language Change," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 172.

⁴⁰ Frey, 198.

⁴¹ Adelberg seems to have been considered a full-time member of the faculty (still listed in the Seminary's yearly catalog), though he apparently was only an adjunct professor. His one-year replacement, Pastor John Jenny, was not considered full-time, and then the arrangement came to an end. Adelberg had

Professor Max Lehninger wrote, "This arrangement soon lapsed, and thereafter this work was done by the members of the regular three-man faculty,"⁴² but a former student recalled that English was rarely used in his day.

I have no recollection of any subjects being taught in English at the Seminary fifty years ago [the 1910s] except for one period of Dogmatics and the requirement of delivering one English sermon during the course at the Seminary. It was a blessing that the students had had a good English course at Watertown under Dr. [Henry] Ott. However, those who were later forced to preach in English in their congregations were often at a loss for the right theological term to use since practically all their theological training had been in German. The German language continued as a medium of instruction even after the transfer of the Seminary to Thiensville, yes, into the early forties.⁴³

Hoenecke was apparently not an advocate for English instruction at the seminary nor, it seems, English mission work in general. William Dallmann, a pioneer pastor in the English Synod of the Missouri Synod, recalled his request of Hoenecke that the Wauwatosa Seminary provide him with an assistant for English mission work in Milwaukee. Hoenecke replied that he would not object to such an arrangement, but he added: "I have no use for English Lutheranism." When Dallmann questioned Hoenecke's assertion, the seminary director claimed that "you cannot preach Lutheranism in English." When Dallmann charged Hoenecke with "rank heresy," the old professor's simple retort was, "Where is your English Luther?"⁴⁴

For his part, Koehler protested that "the concern for the English language at the Seminary in 1900 as a future medium for spreading of the Gospel ... was not genuine, in keeping with the truth, when the Gospel itself and the means of preserving it were not given due attention." Koehler suggested that "the sponsors of the English work were not alert to the greater need at

experience serving as an adjunct professor who taught his classes in English. He had also served in this capacity at Northwestern College during his pastorate at St. Mark, Watertown (1869-1873). The 1872 synod convention minutes report: "Religion instruction, and also instruction in the English language is given by Pastor Adelberg, to whom we offer our sincere thanks for his time and effort" (*WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 [April 2007]: 8). See also the 1979 church anniversary booklet of St. Mark, Watertown, "Hearing Him Gladly for 125 Years," 26.

⁴² Lehninger, *Continuing in His Word*, 146. In a report about the seminary's curriculum to the 1919 Synod Convention, it is reported that Professor Herman Meyer required one English catechetical lesson and one English sermon to be composed by each student. Meyer also taught his New Testament exegesis class on Matthew in English to familiarize the students with "English biblical language." See "The Goal of the work at the Seminary," (Philemon Hensel, Trans.), *Faith-Life* 62, no. 3 (May/June 1989): 16-17.

⁴³ Frey, 227. At least one Wauwatosa graduate, William Beitz, attended the General Council Seminary in Maywood, Illinois, from 1914-1916 for the expressed purpose of receiving theological training in English. Beitz would complete his final year of training at Wauwatosa during the 1916-1917 school year and be assigned to serve Grace Lutheran Church in Tucson, Arizona, an English-speaking congregation.

⁴⁴ William Dallmann, *My Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), 93. Dallmann reports that he did not back down, asking Hoenecke: "By the way, how long did the Lutheran Church really last in Germany in spite of the German Luther?" to which Hoenecke replied, "Yes, yes; I know what you mean."

all," which he believed to be the seminary's lack of a truly comprehensive theological training, grounded in the historical disciplines. While Koehler acknowledged that "to preserve the Gospel anywhere is wholly God's business, even as He alone has brought it into being," that did not excuse a seminary education that in his opinion lacked "an intensive study of the revealed word."⁴⁵ Koehler concluded that "our trouble is not only a matter of methods; it lies deeper than the plane of external methods. The spirit in us is sick, and you can't get at that except with Bible and hymnal."⁴⁶ Koehler also expressed a common concern in those days that a hurried transition to the English language could bring with it a Calvinistic confusion of justification and sanctification and a "preaching of the Gospel with secular and political aims and ideals."⁴⁷ Finally, Koehler also believed that having regular English instruction at the seminary level made little sense if the preparatory and college training at Northwestern was still done almost exclusively in German.⁴⁸ If a transition to English was going to take place in the training of the synod's future pastors, Koehler insisted that it begin earlier than Wauwatosa.

Another important issue that Koehler addressed in his first years at Wauwatosa was the matter of a seminary library. Already in 1897 the Seminary Board report to the synod called attention to the need for a library, prompting the convention to urge its pastors and teachers to remember the library with donations of money and books. In 1899 the convention appropriated \$200 for library expansion.⁴⁹ Finally, in the winter of 1903 Koehler began work on organizing a library for student use. After the untimely death of Professor E.W.A. Notz in 1903, the institution benefited substantially from the purchase of the deceased professor's personal library. Koehler recalled how a Milwaukee layman donated \$1,000 to purchase the books when the seminary librarian approached him about the matter. Koehler was told, "If we men of means had been shown such confidence before, Synod might have long since profited by our wealth."⁵⁰

Good church music, especially an emphasis on the Lutheran chorale, was another matter very close to Koehler's heart when he arrived for duty at Wauwatosa, and he worked diligently to secure its rightful place within the seminary curriculum and culture. Before Koehler's arrival, there was no seminary choir. In the 1890s a group of area singers had founded the A Cappella Choir of Milwaukee under the direction of William Boeppler, who had been a Reformed preacher overseas but now had established himself in Milwaukee as a teacher of music.

⁴⁵ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 208.

⁴⁶ John Ph. Koehler, "Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music Measured and Compared with the Forms of Scripture, of Luther, and the Lutheran Congregational Hymn of the Sixteenth Century" (Marcus Koch, Trans.), *Faith-Life* 60, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 12.

⁴⁷ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 208. See August Pieper, "Our Transition into English," for a further reflection upon these concerns (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1907>).

⁴⁸ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207. Instruction in English would not be undertaken in earnest at Northwestern College until the 1920s, when J.P. Koehler's son, Karl, asked the faculty's permission to teach all of his history classes in English (E.E. Kowalke, *The Centennial Story* [Watertown, Wisconsin: Northwestern College Press, 1965], 167).

⁴⁹ Frey, 198.

⁵⁰ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 211.

Whether any seminarians were members of his choir is unclear, but Koehler informs us that in addition to his directing Boeppler “was musical instructor at the Wauwatosa seminary,”⁵¹ perhaps even at late as 1902 when he relocated to Chicago.

Upon Boeppler’s departure a man named Franz Salbach took the baton and also gave music lessons at the Seminary, as well as Northwestern College. When he failed to measure up, Salbach sought relief. “Then Dr. Hoenecke, very likely at Salbach’s instance, prevailed on his colleague Koehler to assume the presidency of the organization, and at the latter’s instance the choir devoted itself to the *Volkslied* [German folk songs], the chorale, and the St. Matthew’s Passion by Bach.”⁵² Over the course of time, the A Cappella Choir disbanded, but “Koehler offered the Seminary board to take charge of the musical work, in order that it might be integrated more with the theological course of the students.”⁵³ The board assented, and in 1909 the original Seminary Choir was founded.

Koehler would not be shy about divulging his agenda: “the chorale was chiefly to be studied and practiced. It was to be sung according to the original settings, which in the Reformation period were not for the organ but for a *cappella* chorus.”⁵⁴ The new director was interested in bringing “the pearls of church music to the attention of a larger audience ... [especially] the old Lutheran congregational hymn, ... so that our people recognize more and more the beauty of these hymns and be roused to sing them.”⁵⁵ Between 1910 and 1914, the choir performed two annual concerts to benefit the Lutheran high school in Milwaukee. In addition to the concerts, Koehler would offer lectures on the history and significance of the Lutheran chorale.⁵⁶

As far as the vital relationship between this kind of musical training and a solid seminary education, Koehler expressed sentiments similar to Martin Luther, who argued that “next to theology there is no art that could be put on the same level with music”⁵⁷ and that “before a youth is ordained into the ministry, he should practice music in school.”⁵⁸ Koehler lamented the fact that “at our seminaries one [subject] has been altogether neglected,” namely, “a thorough study of the congregational hymn.” The reason for music’s necessary place in the seminary curriculum was self-evident to Koehler.

⁵¹ Ibid., 221.

⁵² Ibid., 221. In his “Retrospective,” Koehler offers a slightly different account, suggesting that he actually became the director of the choir at this point, not just the president. See *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 (November/December 2002): 18.

⁵³ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 221.

⁵⁵ John Ph. Koehler, *Perlen alter Kirchenmusik* (Milwaukee: Rohlfing Sons Music Company). Quoted in Albrecht, 62.

⁵⁶ Several of these lectures would later be printed in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, the seminary’s theological journal, and two are included in *The Wauwatosa Theology* anthology.

⁵⁷ AE 49:428.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Robin A. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 278.

The congregational hymn plays such a prominent role in the life of the individual congregation, and has also played it in the life of the church, that it ought to be obvious how little attention this fact has received in the training of our pastors. In the planting of the seed and in the sustenance of Christian growth among the people, the congregational hymn is of equal importance to the sermon, not merely because it takes in half the time of the church service, but because, having folk appeal [*volkstümliche Art*], which is timeless, it comes nearer the heart of the people than most sermons, and therefore its effect is more spontaneous and deeper. ... Therefore it is not necessary first to bring proof that a pastor should learn to know the hymn in all its parts, in the composition of its text and music, in its history and its effectiveness, because it is quite obvious that, since the congregational hymn is of the most vital importance for the life of the church, a proper or improper employment of the same will be proportionately of far-reaching consequences, for better or for worse.⁵⁹

Though there does not seem to be any mention of a formal seminary choir after 1915,⁶⁰ little by little Koehler was able to introduce the study and use of music into the seminary classroom. Eventually, "Koehler spent some time during the first period of each class day practicing the singing of four-part arrangements of these early German chorales. Because he had all the students first hour, this meant that all the students were involved, whether they liked it or not, in this practice session of Koehler's."⁶¹ The hour was known as the "Singstunde." A 1919 report to the synod convention tells us:

The whole student body participates in the instruction of liturgics. – Hymnology is closely allied with liturgics and pastoral theology. The pastor must be possessed of judgment in hymnology. The student choir sings chorales exclusively because the chorale represents the most sublime artistic product which the Gospel has achieved, and because the pastor should understand how to evaluate and take the lead principally in the congregational hymn.⁶²

Though Koehler fought valiantly for the place of music and especially hymnology in the seminary curriculum, he also seemed resigned to the idea that the vigor of the Lutheran chorale

⁵⁹ Koehler, "Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music," *Faith-Life* 60, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 11-12.

⁶⁰ James P. Tiefel, "The History of the Seminary Chorus: 75 Years – Singing New Songs to the Lord," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 20.

⁶¹ William Stuebs, "An Evaluation of Professor Koehler's Dealing with the Problem of Poor Singing and the Use of Poor Music in the Congregation with an Emphasis on How This Influenced the Musical Curriculum and Thinking of Our Seminary," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1872>), 12.

⁶² "The Goal of the work at the Seminary," 16. Not only did Koehler spend classroom time on the subject of music, but he discussed it with the students informally as well. One seminarian recorded in his journal, "J.P. took me aside to talk music to me: his especial topic was the music of the 19th century. Nineteenth Century literature amounts to nothing, so also its music" (Sitz journal, January 21, 1917).

would never again be matched. He maintained that “the era of the German Lutheran chorale is past. The church must create something new. For the time being, it is of paramount importance to rescue what can be rescued of the inherited and hitherto ignored treasure: distinctive melodies with marrow, principal hymns in translation, etc.”⁶³

Related to Koehler’s interest in promoting a proper understanding and practice of church music at Wauwatosa was his determined introduction of other arts – especially ecclesiastical painting, architecture and sculpture – into his church history and liturgics courses. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler expressed himself on the natural connection between history and cultural forms.

Indeed, the evaluation of art, in all its forms, as the most intimate expression of the human spirit is part and parcel of the study of history, especially from the Christian point of view. And as a matter of the Christian life, there is no escaping the fact that art, the expression of the beautiful or what is thought to be beautiful, in some form is practiced or employed by every one, if it be only in the dress and manners of our daily life. Hence, the appreciation of what is truly pure and lovely is not a matter of indifference in the Christian home, school, and church and certainly [is] a ‘must’ subject in Christian education. That is in line with the Scriptures too (Phil. 4:8).⁶⁴

Koehler had apparently included “a thoroughgoing consideration of the plastic arts ... in his history courses” since being called to teach at Northwestern College in 1888.⁶⁵ Beginning in 1917, “lectures on the history of art” also found their way into the seminary liturgics course.⁶⁶ Koehler asserted that a “detailed examination of ecclesiastical art forms is to be recommended in church history, because they represent a crystallization of the total life of the church, and their development and formation can be understood only in context with the general intellectual drift and the total intellectual activity of the period in which they came into being.”⁶⁷ The amateur-artist professor provided “2400 lantern slide reproductions of famous works of art, laboriously painted by Koehler himself on the small pieces of glass used for the projection. He dared not leave the slide in the machine too long lest the oils melt from the heat of the projection lamp.”⁶⁸

⁶³ “The Goal of the work at the Seminary,” 16.

⁶⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 220.

⁶⁵ Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 (November/December 2002): 23. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler writes: “The writer practiced [visual education] for ten years at the College, then also made use of negative slides that appeared on the screen like crayon drawings on a blackboard” (220).

⁶⁶ Keith Wessel, “A Brief Introduction to the Artistic Thought and Work of John Philipp Koehler,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/922>), 10.

⁶⁷ “The Goal of the work at the Seminary,” 15.

⁶⁸ “Conference Report, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, February 4-5, 1967,” *Faith-Life* 40, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 19. Koehler himself sets the number of slides at “between two and three thousand” (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 220). These slides currently reside in the “Koehler Family Collection” at the Concordia Historical Institute (<http://www.lutheranhistory.org/collections/fam-0017.htm>).

Not only did Koehler make use of these slides in his seminary classroom, he also offered “Illustrated Lectures on the History of Art” at Grace School, Milwaukee, under the banner of Philippians 4:8. In the prospectus he explained the purpose of these lectures.

Art is not a matter of indifference to the Christian. Being the most intimate revelation of the life of the spirit, art will at once engage the interest of the Christian whose own view of life centers around spiritual values. The architect, sculptor, and painter, the musician, poet, and writer have something to say to us, or not, as the case may be; in either case, however, we are confronted with the revelation of character and of a Weltanschauung [worldview]. In most cases, too, the artists of the world are the real spokesmen of their times and the prophets of the ideals of their people. Hence it cannot be a matter of indifference, in what way the Christian appraises art.

Nor is the practice of art by the Christian an indifferent thing. We all practice art, be it professionally or as amateurs or merely by the choice of the songs we sing or that our spirit responds to, by the choice of the decorations and appointments of our homes, the dress and manners of our every-day life. The question arises, whether our inward life that thus voices itself be ‘true, honest, just, pure, and lovely’.

With these premises, it is obvious that the Christian ought to ‘think of these things’ and see to it that his appraisal of art and his own practice of it be in tune with the Gospel. It is the purpose of these lectures to give impetus to such thought and endeavor.⁶⁹

It should be noted that Koehler’s definition of art went well beyond the idea of simply spending your days haunting art museums and touring old churches. Koehler discovered art in every sphere of God’s creation and understood true art to be everything that springs freely from God’s creative creation. For instance, he marveled at the true art of a baby’s babbling, when “the sounds the baby makes are filled with music. Just observe how all the laws of the tonal scale ...come into play. And observe not merely as a teacher of acoustics [as a scientist!] would, because then one would most likely not even notice the main point. But study it as a musician would. The sounds of the child and those of the mother, who learns from the child, make music as beautiful as any to be heard the world around.”⁷⁰ Koehler saw the “Wonderful” in matters that most would judge mundane, asserting that “this Wonderful is comprehended with the heart which rejoices in the truth and goodness and loveliness of God’s governance, and swells in appreciation for these things.”⁷¹

Later in life, Koehler would elucidate.

⁶⁹ John Ph. Koehler, “Illustrated Lectures on the History of Art,” Author’s Personal Collection.

⁷⁰ John Ph. Koehler, “The Wonderful in Luther’s Poetry,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 495.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 487.

Art is always true; it is never studied, but always a natural gift and therefore free in its unstudied movements. It loves order as a part of beauty and omits all pretenses and showy appearance. ... Art, in its wider and narrower sense, is of the natural spiritual gifts of God to man the greatest; of all the processes of the human mind and heart that which is at work in giving birth to art, and its relation to knowledge and understanding, comes closest to what Paul says [in] 1 Corinthians 8 and 13 about the relation between knowledge, love, and faith.

When a great thought, or truth, lays a compelling hand on the mind of man and makes his heart to burst with fullness and his soul to seek voice with whatever means of expression he has, and it then goes forth fair and free, honest and sincere, and great and true, to the honor of God and the edification of himself and of his followers: then you have art. And that is art, no matter by and in what occupation it be practiced, whether you rule men or serve in a menial position; whether you teach or learn; whether you deal with spiritual or mental or inanimate things; that is art, with whatever means, great and rich, or simple and lowly, it be uttered or acted.⁷²

Though Koehler's purpose was noble, his goal of inculcating an understanding and appreciation that art is a window into the soul of all human history and experience seems to have been largely unrealized. "Even with such advanced teaching methods and excellent material, Koehler's labor to open his underlings' young minds to the world of art went largely unappreciated. Rev. Phil. Hensel recounts that many of the students slept through the lectures."⁷³ Indeed, "it was a grief of mind to him that [members of the Protes'tant] Conference never took an interest in these slides to the point of asking him to show them"⁷⁴ after Koehler's removal from the seminary in 1930. Koehler would also later recall that these lectures allegedly left him open to criticism, even contempt, by his colleagues.

... when I, in my history course, introduced illustrated lectures on the history of the arts in general, including music, in order to demonstrate *ad oculos et aures* [to the eyes and ears] the development of the general mentality during the different periods of history, this was called *allotria* [non-essential]. These incidents go to show a lack of interest and of understanding of these vital educational matters, and it seems that this unintelligence is especially marked in our circles, while the outside world is at work energetically to revolutionize the arts in question and its educational methods.⁷⁵

⁷² John Ph. Koehler, "The Art of Making Books," *Faith-Life* 4, no. 4 (April 1931): 14-15.

⁷³ Wessel, 10.

⁷⁴ "Conference Report, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, February 4-5, 1967," 19.

⁷⁵ John Ph. Koehler, "As to Appreciation of Art," *Faith-Life* 4, no. 5 (May 1931): 4. Elsewhere Koehler would name the source of the "*allotria*" remark: "When Koehler declared his reluctance to give up the teaching of Art History and History, Pieper called these subjects *allotria*" ("*Retrospective*," *Faith-Life* 76,

Professor John Ph. Koehler had discovered the burden of every farmer. Breaking up the soil is challenging work.

Turning Over the Earth: Professor August Pieper

Had J.P. Koehler been a lone voice in the pursuit of promoting the historical disciplines of biblical exegesis and history at the Wauwatosa Seminary, his message may well have fallen completely on deaf ears, but within two years of his arrival Koehler received a very welcome and well-known ally, Pastor August Pieper, as his seminary colleague. Pieper had been a schoolmate of Koehler's dating all the way back to their prep years at Northwestern. They had been students together at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and had soaked up theological insight from the likes of C.F.W. Walther and Georg Stoeckhardt. After his graduation in 1879, Pieper served at Wisconsin outposts in Kewaunee and Menomonie, as well as at St. Marcus, Milwaukee. Like Koehler he was highly regarded among the group of younger pastors and had already declined a Call to serve at Northwestern College in 1900 when he was called to the Wauwatosa Seminary in 1902.

The circumstances of his Wauwatosa arrival were not happy. Professor Eugene Notz had suffered a debilitating fall in the summer of 1902, and Pieper was tapped to teach his courses. When Notz died on February 5, 1903, Pieper inherited his chair permanently. Besides Old Testament exegesis, he taught isagogics, symbolics and encyclopedia.

From every indication Pieper took up his new assignment with enthusiasm and vigor, and he soon became a student body favorite. "Pieper no doubt had a way with words. Whether expressing himself orally in a classroom or pulpit ... or in writing ... he was highly articulate, often eloquent. ... It is not surprising to hear that he easily established a good rapport with students in the classroom."⁷⁶ One former student recalled that Pieper "was a thorough extrovert. His was a dramatic personality, and he had a dramatic way of speaking and lecturing. The students often sat spellbound before him. One of his outstanding gifts was to inspire enthusiasm for the ministry."⁷⁷ Compared to the reserved and even distant Koehler, Pieper must have seemed like a breath of fresh air to many seminarians, in many respects the polar opposite of his seminary colleague. That being said, in their early years together at Wauwatosa, Koehler and Pieper worked side-by-side in a concerted effort to prepare the future

no. 4 [July/August 2003]: 17). Leigh Jordahl offers a thoughtful critique of Koehler's conception of art in "The Wauwatosa Theology, John Philip Koehler, and the Theological Tradition of Midwestern American Lutheranism, 1900-1930," (Unpublished Essay, 1964), 133-135. According to Jordahl, Koehler exhibited "a dangerous tendency toward anti-intellectualism and an overemphasis on intuitive judgments. ... What saved Koehler was precisely the fact that personally he never despised the careful intellectual task of scholarship, his conscious attempt to avoid overstatements, his realization of the tentative character of human judgments, his realization, too, that a criticism of the methodology of dogmatics is no guarantee against dogmatism."

⁷⁶ Westerhaus, 50.

⁷⁷ Frey, 212-213.

pastors of the Wisconsin Synod with a seminary education that was second-to-none in its day.⁷⁸ The ground that Koehler had staidly broken at Wauwatosa, Pieper now helped to overturn with zeal.

If there is one academic undertaking for which Pieper is best known during his years at Wauwatosa, it is his exegetical lectures and eventual commentary on Isaiah 40-66. "Mention of exegesis in connection with the name August Pieper must at once bring to mind for every Wisconsin Synod pastor his masterly commentary" on those chapters.⁷⁹ As one who sat in his classroom, Pastor Immanuel Frey simply described Pieper's lectures as "unforgettable."⁸⁰ Martin Westerhaus asserts, "Alongside a thorough mastery of the lexicology and grammar of the biblical language, there is a strong emphasis on the context, both immediate and broader. This, of course, is the historical-grammatical method put to use by a master."⁸¹ It was this shared emphasis upon biblical exegesis that now made Koehler and Pieper a powerful and unique twin force at the Wauwatosa Seminary.

It would be inaccurate, however, to imagine or suggest that biblical exegesis was non-existent in other American Lutheran seminaries when the Wauwatosa theologians were in their heyday. Most every other seminary included courses in biblical exegesis for its students and required them to do work in the original Hebrew and Greek testaments.⁸² In fact, the Lutheran historian J.L. Neve points out that, in contrast to the Missouri Synod, the Iowa Synod "declared that it represented 'the exegetical tendency' held by [Wilhelm] Loehe and other European scholars of the confessional side,"⁸³ especially the important Erlangen exegete J.C.K. von Hofmann.

Both Koehler and Pieper conceded that the men of the Iowa Synod, particularly the brother-theologians Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel, had been early pioneers of an exegetical emphasis in American Lutheranism.⁸⁴ The problem, they insisted, was that the Iowans employed Hofmann's "so-called positive modern theology,"⁸⁵ which was "rigorously

⁷⁸ In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler also reports that he and Pieper "stood shoulder to shoulder ... in the cause of sound pastoral and intersynodical practice" (211). They seemed to have expressed their criticism of pastoral decisions made by Wisconsin Synod men when it came to inter-congregational matters (accepting members who had been excommunicated by Missouri congregations for what the Wisconsin men deemed unscriptural reasons?). As a result, Koehler reports that they became open to the charge of "pro-Missourianism."

⁷⁹ Westerhaus, 50- 51.

⁸⁰ Frey, 213.

⁸¹ Westerhaus, 52.

⁸² For a summary of the theological courses offered at American Lutheran seminaries around 1910, see Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co, 1911), 357-365.

⁸³ J.L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, (Second Revised and Enlarged Edition, Burlington, IA: The German Literary Board, 1916), 286.

⁸⁴ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 432, and August Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," 403.

⁸⁵ A. Pieper, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke," 403. See Koehler's critique of Hofmann's approach in "The Analogy of Faith," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 258-259.

scientific,"⁸⁶ exhibited "the weakness which comes from a lack of doctrinal firmness,"⁸⁷ and finally allowed the interpreter to become "the judge as to whether something in Scripture is God's Word or not."⁸⁸ Simply stated, their exegetical methods "were employed in the service of a false doctrinal position,"⁸⁹ because, Koehler argued, they were not well enough grounded in dogmatics.

That conclusion will not come as any surprise to those who have spent time delving into the writings of the Wauwatosa men. They are often wrongly accused of denigrating the importance of dogmatics, but the charge is simply unfounded. J.P. Koehler wrote in no uncertain terms how "it is self-evident that dogmatics and pastoral theology must keep their old place of importance in the curriculum of our theological studies and that the preparatory work at our colleges which is done especially in the religion courses must be of such a nature that nothing is changed in it."⁹⁰ Later he would assert: "In the study of theology, dogmatics and history occupy parallel positions; the former presenting the inner connection of the divine purpose of salvation and its revelation in the Word of God, the latter telling the story of the working out of the divine plan on earth through the ages. The center of study is the exegesis of the Scriptures, which forms the basis both for doctrinal theology and the teaching of history and itself deals with both."⁹¹ Pieper would agree: "Dogmatics is altogether indispensable. Without it we cannot keep the gospel pure."⁹² These men could see in the Iowa Synod example what an overemphasis on the historical disciplines produced: "a skeptical uncertainty which cannot quickly come to firm opinions."⁹³ Koehler wanted to make the Wauwatosa position abundantly clear.

Certainly no one will misunderstand me so completely as to think that I am suggesting that the historical studies are a panacea for every possible evil, both theoretical and practical, in the theological world. ... Therefore it also became necessary to call attention to the dangers inherent in an overemphasis on [the historical disciplines].⁹⁴

It should also be noted how wrong it is to suggest that the Wauwatosa theologians somehow asserted that we are to come to our study of the Holy Scriptures with no preconceived notions, as some kind of blank slate (*tabula rasa*).⁹⁵ Instead, Koehler believed that

⁸⁶ Koehler, "Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music," *Faith-Life* 40, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 10.

⁸⁷ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 432.

⁸⁸ Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 259.

⁸⁹ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 433, and A. Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," 403-407.

⁹⁰ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 439.

⁹¹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 214.

⁹² A. Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 283.

⁹³ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 429.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 438-439.

⁹⁵ See John Ph. Koehler, "Holy Scripture as the Basis of All Theology," *Faith-Life* 42, no. 3 (May/June 1969):15-16.

when St. Paul writes, "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith" (Romans 12:6), the Apostle means to remind us that when we are reading and interpreting the Holy Scriptures, we will always do so mindful of the fact that we are approaching the very Word of God, stepping into his throne-room. In this task, we will not think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but rather think of ourselves with sober judgment (Romans 12:3). We will pray with Samuel, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9). In other words, we will seek to take a ministerial approach to the Scriptures, rather than a magisterial one; we will come to this study with all kinds of assumptions about ourselves who listen and him who speaks.

Scripture deals not with setting up a system of life that approaches us so that we may take it into consideration, ponder it, and finally, according to our knowledge, make up our minds about it; rather, Scripture deals with facts, which we are persuaded to acknowledge and embrace by the power of God, even by the power of God in these facts. ...

When Scripture talks about sin, then the Word is a hammer that breaks a rock to pieces (Jer 23:29) ... The acceptance of these thoughts does not depend upon our decision, but they are the truth, and God's Word convicts us of them even against our will ... [But then it] proclaims the salvation that God has prepared, and this truth in and of itself attracts, draws, and prevails and thereby creates the life that accepts salvation in faith, and thereby gives vitality. ...

The fact that God speaks in Scripture so that his truth attests itself to the heart ought to fill us with great seriousness, lest we use his Word wantonly, and again it ought to fill us with comfort and confidence when we recognize his grace. Thus the man of God is trained ... always immediately from the life of the Holy Spirit, who is working in him.⁹⁶

So what made the approach of the Wauwatosa theologians unique? It was not the fact that they employed biblical exegesis and promoted the historical disciplines. What made their approach unique was the *place* they attempted to give the historical disciplines, especially exegesis, in the seminary curriculum. Whereas Lutheran dogmatics and pastoral theology ruled supreme at almost every other American seminary because these studies were thought to be eminently practical, Koehler and Pieper sought to bring about a profound change of perspective at Wauwatosa with the Lord's guidance and blessing. They did not seek to jettison dogmatics and replace it with exegesis. No, they were determined to entrust to their students a "balanced combination of the two."⁹⁷ Koehler plainly stated: "They belong together. The exegete cannot

⁹⁶ Koehler, "The Connected Study of Holy Scripture, the Heart of Theological Study (2 Timothy 3:15-17)," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 105-107.

⁹⁷ Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 429.

get along without the dogmatical distinctions, nor the dogmatician without the exegetical proof.”⁹⁸

Our theological students dare not be satisfied with acquiring a knowledge of dogmatics together with the practical skills in homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral theology. Exegesis and history have their proper place in the course of study and deserve to be pursued in a deeply imaginative and earnest manner. ... Exegetical work ... leads the preacher deeper into Scripture and an understanding of God’s thoughts and their influence upon the heart of man ... History not only gives all kinds of valuable information concerning practical questions but also trains to observe how minds work and to trace historical connections. By this, but even more by the method which is peculiar to history and exegesis, it develops a mental attitude which is of importance for effective practical life. While dogmatics promotes sharp thinking and by directing attention to the precise definition of theological concepts leads to a clear, unambiguous presentation, both historical branches train the mind to probe, to criticize, to be cautious in judgment. They promote modesty, gentleness, and patience in judgment and thus in the mental attitude supplement what dogmatical study has produced.⁹⁹

Their goal, as Koehler put it, was to raise up a generation of theologians in “the great style of Luther,” as challenging as that might be.

I am under the impression that very rarely can one find the same person gifted with both aptitudes in an outstanding manner. I find them both in Luther and would like to consider him both the greatest exegete and the greatest dogmatician. Otherwise, however, it seems to me that either one or the other activity is always predominant, and in my opinion in the great period of our American Lutheran church it was dogmatics.¹⁰⁰

Both Koehler and Pieper had experienced firsthand a seminary education where dogmatics was considered the queen discipline. That had been the case within Lutheranism since the seventeenth century, and it certainly held sway when the two arrived for their own seminary studies in St. Louis under the able leadership of C.F.W. Walther. Pieper recalled:

Walther was the faculty. ... The special emphasis put on pure doctrine, which had now become a synodical emphasis, and the towering personality of Walther together with the impractical arrangement of the other subjects inevitably led to the result that only dogmatics and pastoral theology were actually studied and

⁹⁸ Ibid., 442.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 437-438.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 442.

little or nothing was learned in the other subjects. ... New Testament exegesis consisted mainly of dictated quotations from the Lutheran exegetes of the 16th and 17th centuries. Old Testament exegesis involved translation and quotations. When the writer of this article was in the seminary from 1876 to 1879, hermeneutics was taught by Walther himself in the first (!) year according to the Latin textbook of 1754 by the old Dr. C.G. Hofmann! ... In isagogics the Bible itself was seldom used in class. Actually, then, the students came out of the seminary without having the slightest ability in exegesis. In fact, they had not even studied a single book of Holy Scripture somewhat thoroughly.¹⁰¹

That being stated, both Wauwatosa men made clear that Walther himself was generally able to avoid the pitfalls of employing a theological method that leaned too heavily on dogmatics.¹⁰² Koehler asserted that his old teacher “opposed the presentation of many of the great teachers of the past and in our time independently championed the correct doctrine and proved it from Scripture.”¹⁰³

Walther could share with his students a directly scriptural theology that still presupposed a knowledge of the original languages, probably seldom realized. ... However, this training in the long run also has its dangers. Dogma is the word crystallized into an inflexible human form. It says so much and no more; it does not express the full content of Scripture. That is its essence. Scriptural truth is so living and refracting, so fresh and fluent, that one can turn it a thousand times, inspect it from a thousand situations, without its losing any content or power. It is like a nimble giant, growing to every new situation, need, and danger. It is spirit and it is life, God’s life. God’s mind and life’s blood for the saving of lost sinners. It remains eternally young and eternally new and makes everything new and anew.¹⁰⁴

This unbalanced approach to theological training persisted at St. Louis “until [Georg] Stoeckhardt, the exegete who had come from Germany, and other younger theologians who were thoroughly trained in the language of the New Testament – some of whom also came from abroad – broke through Walther’s ‘father theology’ in principle and practice and by means of Scripture won the victory for what was right.”¹⁰⁵ In Germany, Stoeckhardt had come under the influence of Erlangen’s Hofmann, even tutoring students under him in Old and New Testament

¹⁰¹ A. Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 264-265.

¹⁰² One exception was the *Gnadenwahlstreit*, the Election Controversy that erupted in 1877. August Pieper recalled Adolf Hoenecke’s critique: “Walther, in his zeal, let slip several sentences that said too much, and they will have to be set straight” (“The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke,” 417).

¹⁰³ Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines,” 443.

¹⁰⁴ August Pieper, “Stoeckhardt’s Significance in the Lutheran Church of America,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 423.

¹⁰⁵ A. Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 263.

exegesis before coming to America.¹⁰⁶ August Pieper, Stoeckhardt's brother-in-law, reports that the Concordia professor eventually "found the correct position among all the un-Lutheran circumstances that surrounded him ... [and] emancipated himself theologically from von Hofmann, his chief teacher at Erlangen, who had such a great influence on his exegetical methods."¹⁰⁷ Now he shared his exegetical insights with the Concordia student body, including Koehler and Pieper.

It should be noted at this point, however, that especially Koehler's approach to exegesis and biblical hermeneutics seems to have differed slightly from Stoeckhardt's. The elder exegete tended to take a more scientific approach than his student did. An interesting comparison between the two can be made by thumbing through their respective commentaries on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.¹⁰⁸ The reader will instantly notice a marked difference. Stoeckhardt has copious quotations from other exegetes; Koehler has practically none. Stoeckhardt spends much more time on the fine points of grammar and syntax; Koehler deals much more with the interrelatedness of Paul's thought and the application of its saving truths to our lives as Christians. Stoeckhardt reads as if he is delivering a lecture aimed principally at the mind; Koehler sounds like he is delivering a sermon aimed principally at the heart.¹⁰⁹

In Koehler's opinion, many people make biblical hermeneutics out to be more difficult and scientific than they really are. Biblical hermeneutics requires no special rules.

Biblical hermeneutics are nothing but the application of the natural art of interpretation to Holy Writ. The laws of understanding, which are nothing else than the laws of thinking and speaking, must be applied to the words of Scripture exactly as to all other words, and are practiced by the unbiased simple man just as by the scholar. It is only reserved for a later development of science to deviate from these self-evident thoughts, and to make of biblical hermeneutics an artificially mysterious edifice of rules that only the initiated can apply because it is a matter of God's Word. ...

We must understand that in the interpretation of Scripture no other principles prevail than those which every intelligent person uses when hearing or reading any word of man. There is only one special consideration; namely, that Scripture is God's infallible Word.¹¹⁰

Koehler insisted that it was "a matter of prime importance to bring the hermeneutical method back to its natural simplicity,"¹¹¹ commenting that a child uses the exact same method

¹⁰⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 161.

¹⁰⁷ A. Pieper, "Stoeckhardt's Significance," 420.

¹⁰⁸ John Ph. Koehler, *Paul's Rhapsody in Christ: A Commentary on Ephesians* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000); George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ Martin Westerhaus has also observed that in Koehler's own work as a "professional" exegete he strove for simplicity. See "The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message," 36-38.

¹¹⁰ Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 259-260.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 260.

“even before he can speak.”¹¹² In his 1925 opening address to the seminary student body, Koehler explained himself further on the subject of biblical hermeneutics.

[He assumed that his audience would] very likely expect a hermeneutical discussion in the usual fashion, in which one speaks of language and objects, or of biblical philology and biblical history writing and their mutual influence upon the understanding of Scripture. We omit that here, because there is, after all, only *one* hermeneutics, only *one* art of interpretation in the world. As far as these things are concerned, biblical exegesis is no different from the exegesis of any other writing.¹¹³

This was certainly not meant to disparage the science of biblical hermeneutics. The Wauwatosa men absolutely insisted that grammar and syntax are essential to good, Scriptural exegesis, but even they can become a wooden science apart from an historical appreciation of Scripture in which the history of God’s plan of salvation in Christ is the main theme (John 5:39,40). One must not make more out of this or any other science than is actually there.

That said, there was no dispute that the “professional” exegete “must be well versed in the languages of the original text,” though Koehler especially warned “against a specialization which easily strays from intensive knowledge of Scripture.”¹¹⁴

It would be awful, of course, if those who did not know Greek and Hebrew would not be able to grasp the message of the Gospel, but the professional teachers of the Gospel should make it their business to proceed with teaching the Bible truth on the basis of exegetical examination of Scripture’s statements, lest they get into wrong mental processes and into conflict with the Bible. And that applies not only to the original languages of the Bible but to the translations as well and all teaching of the Scriptures.¹¹⁵

Along with proficiency in the original languages, the Wauwatosa theologians emphasized the necessity of understanding the history and context of the author and his words. “If we do not know the author’s point of view and manner of expression, we shall again make our own manner determinative to the detriment of correct understanding.”¹¹⁶ In summary, “a correct biblical hermeneutics is simply the application of the generally accepted rules of exposition to the Holy Scriptures.”¹¹⁷

Clearly John Ph. Koehler played a critical role in forging a fresh theological approach at Wauwatosa that was rooted in Lutheran Reformation principles and inextricably linked to a

¹¹² John Ph. Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 207.

¹¹³ Koehler, “The Connected Study of Holy Scripture,” 107.

¹¹⁴ Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 203.

¹¹⁵ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 242.

¹¹⁶ Koehler, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 196.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

proper emphasis upon the historical disciplines. Humanly speaking, however, August Pieper's energetic espousal of Koehler's original spadework was essential in turning over the theological field within the Wisconsin Synod. Like the work of the ancient apostles, one planted the seed, the other did the watering, but God made it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Supplying the Seed: The *Theologische Quartalschrift*

It is not difficult to demonstrate that other Lutherans in America recognized the Wauwatosa theological approach as being novel in the early twentieth century. In the 1916 edition of his *Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, J.L. Neve comments that within the Wisconsin Synod an "'exegetical tendency' asserted itself, which, while revering the fathers of the Church, goes back directly to the Scriptures. And this immediate investigation of the Scriptures creates another, a milder, more charitable, more tolerant spirit."¹¹⁸ The fact that other American Lutherans were beginning to note this "exegetical tendency" was due in no small part to the faculty's realization of a long-held dream, the publication of a quarterly theological journal. Through this journal, the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, the principles espoused by the Wauwatosa faculty soon became common knowledge, especially within Midwestern Lutheran theological circles, and they were also thankfully preserved for the generations to follow.

Launching the periodical, however, was no easy task. Koehler reports that the *Quartalschrift* "was not a sudden inspiration, for the idea of a theological periodical was as old in Synod as the Seminary," which had been founded in 1863. "When the new seminary at Milwaukee was opened in 1878, the idea was revived," but nothing came of it. "At the founding of the general synod of Wisconsin [in 1892], the plan for a theological journal was laid down in the constitution and discussed from time to time. But always the crowded time of the Seminary teachers proved the obstacle."¹¹⁹

What finally got the *Quartalschrift* off the ground, according to Koehler, was the free conference movement within Midwestern Lutheranism beginning in 1903, though in his editorial foreword to the first volume Hoenecke expressly stated, "Some might think that current events in the Lutheran church have dictated the founding of this journal. But that is not the case." Instead, Hoenecke insisted that the journal's appearance was "simply due to favorable circumstances that make the publication possible."¹²⁰

That being said, it was indeed true that Lutherans had been divided especially over the doctrine of election for more than twenty years, and now pastors and theologians from the various synods were making an effort to overcome those differences through a series of free conferences. It was certainly to be hoped that the publication of essays and articles in a theological journal could also serve the purpose of bridging these differences, prompting the Wauwatosa faculty to pick up their collective pen in 1904.

Seminary Director Adolf Hoenecke "promised that [the journal] would offer articles on points of doctrine in general, but that naturally, special attention would be given to articles of

¹¹⁸ J.L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, 288.

¹¹⁹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 211.

¹²⁰ Adolf Hoenecke, "Foreword to Volume 1, Number 1, January 1904" (John Hartwig, Trans.) *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 3.

special interest for the Lutheran Church of our land or specifically for our synodical circles."¹²¹ Homiletics and pastoral practice would also receive special consideration.

Hoenecke outlined two important goals for the *Quartalschrift*. The journal was to benefit those within the Wisconsin Synod and her broader church fellowship, but it was also to be hoped that its essays and articles might have an impact on the larger Lutheran scene in America. Hoenecke noted:

God is now, through our synods, allowing a strong movement toward unity in doctrine to take place. Our goal must be to serve this movement in all sincerity, honesty, and Christian love. And that means not yielding in those areas where we, bound by conscience that has been convinced by the clear testimony of God's word, should not yield. Nothing is accomplished by bargaining, as it occurs today now and again in matters of doctrine. Compromise doesn't accomplish the sort of unity in which Lutherans can truly be of one heart and one soul. We can only be truly united when there are no points that painfully wound some party or another each time they are raised.¹²²

Needless to say, the publication of the *Quartalschrift* would also provide the newest Wauwatosa faculty members with a forum to explain and promote their emphasis on the historical disciplines. J.L. Neve would later observe that Wauwatosa's "exegetical tendency" was "found in the Wisconsin 'Quartalschrift,' in a series of articles signed by Professors Koehler, Augustus Pieper and Director [John] Schaller."¹²³ Through the *Quartalschrift* these men would supply the necessary seed for a planting of the historical disciplines throughout the Wisconsin Synod and beyond.

The inaugural issue of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* appeared in January 1904 and included the first installment of J.P. Koehler's epic essay "The Analogy of Faith." Professor John Brenner explains the debate over this term and Koehler's reason for addressing it.

This expression had come to the fore at the Free Conference in Watertown in 1903. Ohio and Iowa theologians used the expression "the analogy of faith" to indicate that there was a harmony of biblical truth in which all doctrine fit logically and neatly. In the light of passages like John 3:16 they claimed that election had to be in view of faith. Koehler insisted that the analogy of faith meant only the totality of the passages in the Bible that spoke about election. Doctrine is to be derived from those passages that specifically treat that doctrine. If teachings based on clear passages of Scripture seem to our human reason to be in conflict with each other, that conflict or tension must stand. It is not to be resolved by the use of human logic or reason. For instance, Scripture teaches that if a person is saved it is completely to God's credit, and if a person is lost it is

¹²¹ Martin Westerhaus, "Adolf Hoenecke and the *Quartalschrift*," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2.

¹²² Hoenecke, "Foreword," 4.

¹²³ J.L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, 288, 219fn.

completely that person's fault. These two teachings appear to be contradictory to human reason and yet both must stand because they are clearly taught by Scripture.¹²⁴

Koehler's essay is particularly notable because he asserts that the debate over the term "analogy of faith" – indeed, even the manner in which the debate was carried out – served as a microcosm of what was wrong within Lutheran theological circles. He asserted that many theologians had simply lifted the phrase "analogy of faith" from Romans 12:6 and used it dogmatically as a hard-and-fast hermeneutic principle without first doing the necessary exegetical and historical work to determine what Paul actually meant by the phrase. After doing that necessary legwork, Koehler concluded that Romans 12:6 "furnishes no rule of interpretation,"¹²⁵ as so many insisted. Instead Paul's point is that all Christians should use their God-given gifts as members of the Body of Christ for the building up of their fellow members. Christians "should confine themselves in their prophesying, its content, scope, and exercise, to the measure or degree of faith with which they were endowed, by virtue of which they could exercise such gift through the Spirit; they should not try to go into higher flights of their own (Ro 12:3)."¹²⁶

Koehler would later lament that "the traditional interpretation of Romans 12 is for me a characteristic example of the style of mechanical exegesis that has come down to us from most ancient times, which does not correspond to the linguistic resources and consequently not to the claims that one today must place on the hermeneutical art." Even so, he expressed the hope that his essay would "have a general influence on us, not so much in the interest of our position in this controversy about the analogy as in the interest of stimulating us to an impartial style of exegesis."¹²⁷ Indeed, the volumes of the *Quartalschrift* that were published between 1904-1920 would strive to attain that most worthy goal. Through its pages much valuable seed has been supplied, even down to our day.

Watering the Seed: Professor John Schaller

Even with the advent of the gifted Professors Koehler and Pieper at the Wauwatosa Seminary, Adolf Hoenecke remained the rudder of the ship. In 1903 the elder statesman was honored with a Doctor of Theology degree bestowed by Northwestern College and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to commemorate his twenty-five years of faithful service to the Wisconsin Synod's seminary.

¹²⁴ John M. Brenner, "Continuing in His Word – A History of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 19.

¹²⁵ Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 237.

¹²⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 212. Koehler would no doubt look with favor on the New International Version's translation of this phrase: "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it *in proportion to his faith*."

¹²⁷ Joh. Ph. Koehler, "Addendum to 'The Analogy of Faith,'" *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. I* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 272.

Both Koehler and Pieper describe their working relationship with Hoenecke as being very cordial, almost fatherly. Koehler suggests that Hoenecke did not always agree with his younger colleague's theological conclusions but neither did he "make an issue of it" as long as a serious and faithful study of the Holy Scriptures was taking place. With obvious appreciation, Koehler adds, "Hoenecke was not inclined to go heresy-hunting."¹²⁸ Pieper would later recall how Hoenecke "strengthened and guided his coworkers in the synod and gave his students a firm grounding in sound Lutheranism, and with great patience he eagerly pursued peace with all who loved divine Truth."¹²⁹

Hoenecke's quiet theological leadership grew silent on January 3, 1908, when he died of pneumonia, leaving the seminary without a director for the first time since Edward Moldehnke's resignation in 1866. Hoenecke had quietly dominated the theological scene within the Wisconsin Synod for forty years, so his passing was viewed as an ending of an era. Koehler remarks: "Hoenecke's passing may be said to mark a new phase in the conduct of Synod's affairs. Until then men with European training had been at the helm."¹³⁰ Now the Synod and Seminary would be led by its second generation of pastors, home-grown theologians.

Four men were initially nominated to replace Hoenecke as seminary director – Koehler, Pieper, August Ernst, the longtime Northwestern College Director, and his faculty colleague, Dr. Henry Wente¹³¹ – but the Seminary Board resolved to call Professor Friedrich Bente from Concordia Seminary. When Bente declined, the board turned their attention toward Koehler and Pieper, though not without controversy. In both his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*¹³² and "Retrospective,"¹³³ Koehler offers a rather detailed account of charges soon levied against both him and Pieper. Pieper was accused by some Milwaukee area pastors with "Rottiererei" (plotting) in a local discipline case. These pastors apparently felt that Pieper had involved himself unnecessarily in the case, but the Wauwatosa professor was cleared of the charges. Koehler came under fire for a 1908 *Quartalschrift* article entitled, "The Baptism and Temptation of Christ,"¹³⁴ that, some claimed, contained false doctrine about the person of Christ. Some members of the Seminary Board shared these concerns and questioned Koehler at length. When the professor took umbrage at what he perceived to be a high-handed approach, the matter was dropped, though probably not forgotten. Koehler was informally asked to withdraw his name from consideration in favor of Pieper, "since some of the Board members insisted that Koehler

¹²⁸ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 215.

¹²⁹ August Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism" *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 351.

¹³⁰ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 252.

¹³¹ In his *Centennial Story* (Watertown: Northwestern College Press, 1965), President E.E. Kowalke reports on Wente's rather tempestuous personality and the ill will he managed to generate among his fellow faculty members and student body during his five years at Northwestern, 150-151. One wonders what the motivation could have been to nominate him as the new seminary director. Koehler reports that a "host of protests from Synod" were raised at the nomination of both Wente and Ernst (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 218).

¹³² Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 218-219.

¹³³ Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 13-14.

¹³⁴ *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 371-386.

was entitled to the directorship by virtue of seniority," while others wondered whether Koehler was "competent to teach dogmatics." The professor probably scoffed at the "underlying thought ... that the director ought to have the chair of dogmatics" and refused to stand down, adding that he "did not claim any rights and that he was opposed to all personal calculations and interference in such matters, where every responsible party should form and voice his independent honest opinion, uninfluenced by improper manipulations."¹³⁵

Ultimately the board was led to the very providential selection of Professor John Schaller, Director of Dr. Martin Luther College, as the next director of the Wauwatosa Seminary. Schaller took up his new duties on September 9, 1908, with the assignment to teach dogmatics, homiletics and pastoral theology. Koehler would later comment that the "three teachers each had the subjects which agreed with their talents and inclinations, and that in itself made for successful work. That it so happened was no man's doing."¹³⁶

Some students initially wondered whether Schaller would be competent to fill Hoenecke's shoes,¹³⁷ but everyone soon discovered that the new professor was well-suited for the post. August Pieper commented on how snugly Schaller fit into the new Wauwatosa mold.

Thanks to his eminent intellectual gifts and exceptional diligence he succeeded to such an extent that he (soon) was fully at home in his assigned field, and could draw from the fullness of his learning and became an interesting and fruitful teacher for his students. And not only did he have a mastery of dogmatics, he acquired a significant knowledge of the Scriptures and a great mastery in exegesis. Especially his choice of proof texts in dogmatics is eloquent testimony of this. ... He stood with us from the beginning for the one great thing: above all else the study of the gospel directly from the source, independent Scripture study, not passage by passage, but book by book, ultimately from the original text. This he helped to further at our seminary with all his strength. And while we were of one heart and one soul with him in agreeing that the dogmatic training of our future pastors dare not be neglected in this unionistic and syncretistic age, so he also was completely of one mind with his colleagues in agreeing that the historical-exegetical studies must claim first place as laying the foundation.¹³⁸

Koehler adds that, while Schaller was not an "original mind or theological pioneer," he followed in the footsteps of his father, Concordia Seminary Professor Gottlieb Schaller (1819-1887), who "had the ability to adopt the right idea of another, use it, and give the other credit for it."¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 219.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹³⁷ Frey, 213.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Westerhaus, "The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message," 68-69.

¹³⁹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 235.

Besides inheriting some of his father's intellectual gifts, "Schaller also had the endearing native Frankish make-up of his father,"¹⁴⁰ according to Koehler, who knew both men. From all accounts Schaller had a decidedly different personality from his new seminary colleagues. While Koehler could seem aloof and was sometimes painfully pointed with his words, and Pieper was prone to dramatics and hyperbole, Schaller comported himself in a friendly, gentle manner. Koehler writes that "Schaller was of a reserved nature, in an unstudied way. But though there was nothing effusive about him, he met everyone in an amiable way."¹⁴¹ Pieper adds, "Schaller was more than a sound theologian; he was a friend, a personality, a colleague and Christian gentleman, a joy to those who knew him well. ... Schaller formed the heart and soul of our Seminary; for the students, a fatherly friend who had a warm understanding of their problems; for his fellow-workers, a warm and encouraging spirit in the labors at hand."¹⁴² Many have suggested that Schaller soon became the steady fulcrum upon which the divergent personalities of Koehler and Pieper now balanced. Immanuel Frey commented, "It would almost seem impossible to have found a man who fitted better into this particular picture than the genial Schaller with his great tactfulness."¹⁴³ Paul Hensel added:

It is probably not generally known that Director J. Schaller repeatedly played the difficult and delicate role of the good shepherd pacifying his two stalwart colleagues (Koehler and August Pieper) when they locked horns with one another. In this capacity Schaller was a soothingly gentle Gospel man, at the same time firm and uncompromising, so that the two irate combatants bowed to the sway of his compassionate rebuke and felt forever indebted to him.¹⁴⁴

Now these three men took up together the mantle of theological leadership in the Wisconsin Synod, and their students and church body were the richer for it. It is interesting to note that at least one young man, who was torn between attending the Wauwatosa Seminary or Concordia, St. Louis, finally settled on the Wauwatosa Seminary in 1914 because it had, in his estimation, "better faculty."¹⁴⁵ Elmer Kiessling maintained that beginning already with the re-establishment of the Wisconsin seminary in 1878, the synod "had our own cradle of theological culture, and it has always played a highly important role in developing unity of feeling. The work of four outstanding personalities, beginning with Hoenecke and continuing with John P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, was especially notable up to about the year 1920. The teaching was so distinctive that it was called by a special name – the Wauwatosa theology."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 235.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 235.

¹⁴² Quoted in John Schaller, *Biblical Christology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981), 13-14.

¹⁴³ Frey, 210.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Hensel, "Note" *Faith-Life* 38, no. 1 (January 1965): 16.

¹⁴⁵ Sitz journal, August 26, 1914.

¹⁴⁶ Elmer Kiessling, "The Tie That Binds" *Faith-Life* 37, no. 4 (April 1959): 16.

Cultivating the Soil: The Church and Ministry Debate

In his introductory essay to John Ph. Koehler's *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Leigh Jordahl writes:

Koehler's consistent application of his hermeneutical method [as outlined especially in his "Analogy of Faith"] is apparent in all his exegetical work. Coupled with this is his insistence upon historical consciousness. ... Only with difficulty can one separate the essence of a thing from the historical form in which it finds its expression. Form and content tend to become one. Because this is true there is always the tendency to absolutize and read back into Scripture what were only historical developments. All this is illustrated in the doctrine of Church and Ministry where what had in fact developed historically was treated as though the forms themselves were absolute and valid for all times and in all situations. The Church and Ministry issue becomes an excellent example of the Wauwatosa's historical-exegetical methodology in practice. It is worth noting that on this specific issue Koehler's position was eventually adopted by the Wisconsin Synod. Nevertheless, it might also be suggested that even here what was important – the historical consciousness and the emphasis upon evangelical freedom – was not so well absorbed.¹⁴⁷

Koehler himself recounts the history of the church and ministry debate within the Synodical Conference on the pages of both his *History of the Wisconsin* and 1930 "Retrospective." By any account, the debate had and continues to have a long and storied history. For the purpose of this study we will begin our account with the infant years of the Synodical Conference in the late-1870s.

Church and ministry questions were not new to American Lutheranism in the 1870s. Thirty years earlier the Missouri Synod's C.F.W. Walther and the Buffalo Synod's Pastor J.A.A. Grabau had gone toe-to-toe on this troubling issue. Grabau and his adherents held a strongly Romanizing position, maintaining that "the office of the public ministry is not conferred by the call of congregation as the original possessor of all spiritual power, but is a divine institution in the sense that it was transmitted immediately from the Apostles to their pupils, considered as a separate 'ministerial order' or caste, and that this order perpetuates itself by means of the ordination."¹⁴⁸ Grabau also believed that the congregation owed obedience to the pastor in all things – both earthly and spiritual matters – so long as his regulations were not clearly unscriptural.

The Missourians strongly disagreed. In response to Grabau, Walther composed his now-famous "Theses on the Church and Ministry" in which he clearly states in accordance with Scripture that "the holy ministry of the Word is the authority conferred (*übertragen*) by God

¹⁴⁷ Leigh Jordahl, "John Philipp Koehler, the Wauwatosa Theology and the Wisconsin Synod," Introduction to *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Co. for the Prot stant Conference, 1981), xxiii.

¹⁴⁸ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 447.

through the congregation, as the possessor of the priesthood and all church authority, to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood in public office on behalf of the congregation” (Thesis VII). The pastor was the servant to the congregation in the same way that Jesus had come to be a servant (Matthew 20:25-28). Walther made it clear that the Scriptural idea behind ministry has nothing to do with *power*. It has to do with *service*.

Walther’s theses won the day, and the matter was settled for the Missouri Synod and the yet-to-be-established Synodical Conference: the pastor has no spiritual power or authority by virtue of his ordination; instead all the spiritual authority he exercises within a congregation is conferred on him by God through the congregation. He receives this authority solely through the call of the congregation, nothing else. End of discussion; the doctrine of the church and ministry had finally been threshed out in its entirety. Or so it was thought.

The Doctrine of the Ministry: Is a teacher’s call divine?

By the 1870s additional questions began to arise due to the rapid establishment and expansion of Lutheran elementary schools within the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. The questions were innocent and obvious ones to raise: What about elementary school teachers? Where do they stand in relation to the public ministry of the gospel? Is *their* call divine like the pastor’s? Does the congregation confer the public ministry of the Word on *them* as well? Or are they simply doing a job that has been established by human beings, without divine institution? Koehler recalls the historical background to these questions being asked. His Wauwatosa perspective is unmistakable.

At the end of the 70s there was a discussion in Wisconsin among the teachers of the Synodical Conference as to the divineness of the teacher’s call. The conferences centering around Watertown, Oshkosh, Manitowoc and Sheboygan were mainly engaged in the discussion. The opinions voiced indicated that there was difference as to whether the Christian school derives directly from divine ordinance or from the course of development in human education. The argument proceeded along the current “dogmatic” lines, i.e. the reasons and counter-reasons advanced were not deduced by careful exegetical examination of the Scriptures and determination of doctrine and history, but from the theories that the current doctrine of the ministry or the ideas concerning the duties and privileges of parents suggested.¹⁴⁹

There were two basic answers given to these questions at the time. Some held that the teacher’s office received its “divine nature” only through being associated with a pastor. In other words, if a pastor needed assistance in teaching the children, he would simply delegate some of his divinely instituted office to a teacher. Without a pastor, however, the Christian teacher’s call would be a purely human arrangement and thoroughly secular.

¹⁴⁹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 230.

Others chose to address the question in a different, more roundabout way. They suggested that it was the parents' job – not the church's – to secure Christian education for their children, using Ephesians 6:4 as their proof passage. Therefore, since the establishment of Christian schools is nowhere enjoined upon congregations in Scripture, whenever a congregation chooses to establish a school and secures a teacher, this is simply a free human arrangement left to Christian discretion and the teacher's calling is no different than any secular calling.

In Koehler's estimation, both these answers

betrayed the want of understanding for historical development. And the exegetical and historical operations were not calculated to discover the development of the teacher's calling so much as [it was] to formulate a thesis that was in line with the current system of doctrine. That even for the latter purpose something in the nature of historical-exegetical research was prerequisite, entered no one's mind in the dispute. If someone ventured out on that path he was given scant attention, and he himself was handicapped by the sense of being off the beaten track.¹⁵⁰

Koehler, though, was willing to step off the "beaten track" of these dogmatic formulations to review these questions in the light of an historical-exegetical approach to Scripture. Although still a young pastor several years removed from his Wauwatosa professorship, Koehler began to question the old formulas of answering these inquiries in the mid-1880s.

Koehler recounts the history of his entering the debate:

In the middle 80s a mixed conference of the Synodical Conference pastors and teachers in the Manitowoc-Sheboygan area witnessed a discussion of the subject that at least broke away from the usual line of dogmatizing. ... At this particular conference Pastor Reinhold Pieper [brother of August and Concordia Seminary Professor Franz] read a paper on the question of the teacher's call and espoused the "secular" interpretation ... [The essayist suggested that it was] a commendable conception of their office when the teachers look upon it as divine, and that view of it no doubt will make for faithfulness on their part, but their calling belongs to the same category as that of the Christian cobbler or tailor.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 231. Koehler's last comment would seem to suggest that he wrestled with himself, wondering if he was simply misreading what Scripture actually teaches in this matter. Luther spoke of the same battles, especially concerning the doctrine of justification (*AE* 14:37-38).

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 231. Koehler goes on to comment: "The last three sentences are quoted practically verbatim, in translation, excepting that the German '*Schuster und Schneider*' conveys something of a slight (which the English doesn't)." One wonders if Pieper may have been quoting the Lutheran theologian Martin Chemnitz, who wrote disapprovingly about the Anabaptists when they claimed that "if anyone understands the doctrine of the Gospel, whether he be a cobbler or a tailor or a blacksmith, he should teach and preach" (*Loci Theologici*, Vol. II, J.A.O. Preus, ed. [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989], 698).

Koehler, who happened to be in attendance at this conference as pastor at St. John, Two Rivers, was not going to let what he thought was such a disparaging remark toward the teaching ministry pass without comment. Instead he contended that “the ministry belongs to the teacher and to every Christian as well as to the pastor. ... Because the Christian teacher’s whole work of teaching is governed by the Word of God, his work in the school merits the same appreciation of being ‘divine’ as that of the pastor of the congregation.”¹⁵² Koehler was saying nothing more than his beloved Seminary professor, C.F.W. Walther, had said to the 1866 Missouri Synod convention two decades earlier.

The Apology does not have Grabau’s understanding according to which “the office of the ministry” (*Predigtamt*) is always equivalent to “the office of a pastor” (*Pfarramt*), so that therefore the words of the 28th article of the Augsburg Confession: “These gifts cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching,” are equivalent to saying that without the office of the pastor a person cannot obtain either faith or forgiveness of sins or salvation! No, when our old teachers ascribe such great things to the office of the ministry, they thereby mean nothing else than the service of the Word, in whatever way (*Weise*) it may come to us.¹⁵³

We are told that there was “general agreement” at Manitowoc on the young pastor’s statement, but Koehler himself characterized it as “half-hearted progress, ... [although] it may be said that the Manitowoc discussion signaled the beginning of a real exegetical and historical analysis of such questions in Wisconsin, and beyond, that was destined to have its repercussions.”¹⁵⁴ The Wauwatosa ideal was ever in sight, even in the face of reprisal.

The public debate would continue within Wisconsin at Koehler’s prompting in 1892. Of particular import was the exchange between Koehler and his future colleague Adolf Hoenecke during a general pastoral conference held at St. Matthew, Milwaukee. There Hoenecke presented a paper on “The Divinity of the Teacher’s Call,” at the behest of August Ernst, the recently-elected and first president of the newly federated Synod. Dr. Ernst was a strong proponent of the idea that the teacher’s call had its origin in parental establishment. Hoenecke, on the other hand, stressed that its origin was to be found in the pastoral office because, to his traditional way of thinking, the *Pfarramt* was the one and only public office in the church. He argued that “the office of the parochial school teachers must be integrated into the pastoral office, because according to the *Augustana* no one is supposed to teach publicly without a regular call,”¹⁵⁵ though Hoenecke also conceded that “the call of the teacher is to be considered divine, like that of the pastor.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Ibid., 231.

¹⁵³ C.F.W. Walther, “The True Visible Church,” *Essays for the Church*, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 102.

¹⁵⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 231.

¹⁵⁵ Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 18.

¹⁵⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 232.

One man in attendance was not content with Hoenecke's concession, and that, again, was J.P. Koehler. He recounts the ensuing discussion.

This was questioned, even as at Manitowoc: Why detour through the office of the pastor in order to establish the divine character of the teacher's call? That which distinguishes the pastor's call and exalts it above others is the fact that he "labors in the word and doctrine." ... It is likewise true of the parochial school teacher; and he is called thereto by the congregation. Why then should not Acts 20:28: "The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers over the flock" apply to teachers as well as to pastors[?] ... Hoenecke acknowledged the comment as novel and worthy of careful study.¹⁵⁷

One disagreement that became especially apparent at this conference was the intended meaning of the word "public" when referring to the *public* ministry. Hoenecke seemed to suggest that "public" (*öffentlich*) had to do with the number of people served by the person called. He "ventured to suggest that when a family, or even two, thus provided for the training of their children [by 'calling' a teacher], such a teacher's call was not a public call. The situation might be different when three or more families acted together." Koehler quickly spotted the arbitrariness of Hoenecke's theological mathematics and went on to explain:

Prof. Hoenecke's statement did not clarify the meaning of the word 'public' in the Augsburg Confession; so the writer now enlarged on the Latin term *publice* in the original version of the Confession ... [because] in the present case the Latin terminology [*publice*] is more significant than the German translation [*öffentlich*] ... (*Publice*) hasn't anything to do with numbers, but was aimed at the enthusiasts and radicals who set themselves up as teachers in opposition to the church and state authorities, claiming that the Spirit spoke through them, without the written Word, by direct revelation ... So it was a matter of order, which on earth is governed by changes of time and circumstances, just so it is sensible and serves the Gospel. It is not a matter of Scriptural ordinance, and a congregation may very well, for a common-sense reason, make different arrangements than we have at present, regarding the relationship between pastor and teacher and other offices. The Bible itself, indeed, reports on changes, not only between Old and New Testament institutions, but in the organization of the Apostolic church during the short space of fifty years.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 232. In his "Retrospective," Koehler recalls: "Hoenecke responded to Koehler by saying that his ideas sounded all right, but they would have to be discussed in greater depth sometime. Ernst told Koehler in a private conversation that he thought that Koehler had led the discussion out of its mechanical, external train of logic into a deeper, evangelical perception of all of the ideas concerned." (*Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 [March/April 2003]: 18).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 232.

Even with Hoenecke's concession that the issue warranted further study, after 1892 public dialogue seemed to die down, although the dispute no doubt continued to simmer behind closed doors.

In 1908 the new Seminary Director John Schaller presented a paper at a mixed conference in Milwaukee on "The One Office of the Pastor." As can be deduced from the title, he too concluded that there is one divinely ordained office in the church, the pastor's office. "All other offices that have been created in the course of church history are deaconate offices, that is, auxiliary offices not ordained by God but branched off from the pastoral office by the church in the exercise of its Christian liberty. Such offices are those of the parochial school teacher, the church council, the high school, college and seminary professors, the synod presidents, visitors, missionaries, etc."¹⁵⁹

Again Koehler publicly objected, though recognizing that Schaller had not been party to previous discussions. He argued that a dogmatic statement – namely, "the pastorate is the only divinely ordained office in the church" – was being presumed at the outset and Scripture passages were being taken out of context and made to support this presumed truth. "Koehler showed that this procedure was a falsely so-called dogmatical method of determining doctrine by citing doctrinal statements of the Scriptures without paying attention to the historical context and its way of presenting things."¹⁶⁰

Among the disputed passages, 1 Corinthians 12:28 was perhaps the most significant. Here Koehler argued that the extensive list of spiritual gifts mentioned in this passage are all "of divine origin, so the 'God hath set some in the church ...' is not simply identical with the institution of the ministry of 'the Word and Sacraments.'"¹⁶¹ God institutes – he sets in place (τίθημι) – every spiritual gift among the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit by means of the gospel. In this way, many forms of ministry are "divinely instituted," but not in a legalistic way by means of a legal precept. Instead they are naturally and evangelically brought into being by the Spirit through the gospel as historical circumstances dictate.

Koehler mentions that his "views did not meet with vigorous denial; they were tolerantly received, but not followed up. Alongside, there were other discussions that eventually had their bearing on the question of the Church and Office and its practical application and finally led to drastic opposition."¹⁶²

The Doctrine of the Church: Who's got the power?

Sadly, the discussion of church and ministry issues quickly degenerated in the early twentieth century, due mainly to practical concerns arising out of a long and hotly-debated case involving a Missouri Synod congregation, Trinity, Cincinnati. Ultimately this case was nothing more than a power struggle.

In 1899 a Mr. Schlueter decided that he was going to remove his eleven year old son from Trinity's school so that the boy could get caught up on his English instruction. The man thought

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 232.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 232.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 232.

¹⁶² Ibid., 233.

that the Cincinnati public schools would be better suited for the task. Within a week he was called on the carpet by the congregation for his allegedly scandalous conduct. The church demanded that, in addition to an apology, he return his boy to the parochial school at once. When Schlueter refused, he was classed among those who had excommunicated themselves.

The synod and district officers of the Missouri Synod, most notably Professors Franz Pieper and William Dau, then became involved in the case. They did not approve of the congregation's action, and the final upshot was that Pastors A. and E. von Schlichten and their Trinity Congregation were suspended by the Central District officials of the Missouri Synod.

The whole fiasco touched upon a fundamental issue, namely, whether or not a synod or district had any say in the disciplinary actions taken by a member congregation. Many within both the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods had long held that the local congregation had an absolute and unquestionable autonomy in every matter of doctrine and practice and that the synod had no right to tell a member congregation how to conduct its business. They argued that this was Walther's doctrine of the church (congregational autonomy), as opposed to Grabau's false Romanist view. In order to buttress their point of view, the argument was advanced that the local congregation is the *only* divinely-instituted form of the church. All other forms, including synods, are simply human arrangements.¹⁶³ Therefore, the Missouri Synod officials had no right to "stick its nose" in the Cincinnati congregation's business.

This particular case was eventually brought to a conclusion in 1911, almost by default. One of the Cincinnati pastors had died in 1909; the other was deposed, along with the church council, by the congregation in 1911. A new council and pastor were quickly elected, with one of their first orders of business being the lifting of Schlueter's excommunication.

Even though the Cincinnati case was now resolved, the fundamental questions still loomed large in the minds of many: What authority does a synod have in matters of a member congregation's doctrine and practice? Is synod "church"? Are synods divinely-instituted or simply man-made arrangements? Sadly, for many the ultimate question was this: Who's got the power? That such a question would even be raised betrayed a very basic misunderstanding concerning the nature of the church and its ministry. Jesus had to explain to his disciples more than once that the church and its ministry is very different from the way the world thinks (Matthew 20:25-28); it's not a question of power but of service. Now that lesson needed to be taught once again. Koehler recalled: "It remained for the three Wauwatosa Seminary men ... by their joint work to clarify the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, as a direct outgrowth of that case."¹⁶⁴

Shoulder to Shoulder: The Wauwatosa Gospel comes of age

By 1912 it was no longer possible to ignore the reformation that had taken place in the theological perspective and approach at the Wauwatosa Seminary. John Ph. Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller had all been convinced how important it was to do solid, confessional,

¹⁶³ This whole argument is directly analogous to the discussion of the church's ministry, concerning which many stated that the only divinely-instituted form of the ministry was the pastorate. All other forms of ministry are simply human arrangements.

¹⁶⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 234.

theological work without the burden of preconceived, dogmatic notions. By 1912 all three men had begun that work in earnest so that Koehler could report that “the three Seminary men stood shoulder to shoulder.”¹⁶⁵ Nowhere did that become more evident than on the pages of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* between 1912 and 1918. It was in these extraordinary issues that the Wauwatosa men would publicly hash out the comprehensive and Scriptural doctrine of church and ministry.

But before that work could be accomplished with the *Quartalschrift* articles, it had to first be completed in the Wauwatosa faculty room. In Koehler’s view, both Pieper and Schaller – while acknowledging that there was a problem with the doctrine of church and ministry as it had been traditionally handled in the Synodical Conference – were still approaching the question in the traditional, dogmatic fashion by first formulating dogmatic statements and then going back to Scripture in attempt to prove their assertions with proof passages that were very often torn out of context. In this way, Koehler recalls that “the Wisconsin position was developed dogmatically (with detailed explanations) by Pieper and Schaller from the premise that the office of the keys was given to the church, not to the local congregation.” Koehler, on the other hand, “emphasized on the basis of exegesis that in the Scriptures there is no mention of an institution (*Einsetzung*), which could serve as the basis for [Missouri’s] external legalistic claims. ... There is not enough in Scripture on which to formulate Missouri’s teaching of the local congregation and the local ministry [as being the only divinely-instituted forms].”¹⁶⁶

Pieper’s first public attempt in taking up the question came in the form of a 1911 *Quartalschrift* article entitled “*Menschenherrschaft in der Kirche*” (“Lording It Over Others in the Church”). Koehler recalled that it met with immediate objection.

What chiefly aroused opposition was the statement that suspension is “*der Idee nach Bann*” which the objector understood to imply that suspension and excommunication are identical, while it does say that suspension to all intents and purposes means excommunication. Another statement that was objected to was ... that a whole congregation might become subject to the action. The background of Pieper’s discussion was an obvious case of impenitence regarding false doctrine or public offense in conduct, of which the body, whether a local congregation or a synod, had to clear its skirts. A suspension ordered in accordance with the synodical constitution should be respected by withdrawing from the accused.¹⁶⁷

In Koehler’s opinion, Pieper’s presentation still betrayed a dogmatic approach, especially in his distinguishing between synodical suspension and congregational excommunication, as if synodical suspension was based upon man-made constitutions and excommunication upon Scripture. Koehler concluded that “Prof. Pieper still had the idea that a synod is not of divine ordinance like a local congregation.”¹⁶⁸ Koehler also questioned what he perceived to be

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶⁶ Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 19.

¹⁶⁷ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 236.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 236.

Pieper's emphasis on the idea that suspension and excommunication were practiced for the purpose of "cleaning house." Rather, Koehler later wrote, "excommunication, finally, rightly understood is not an enforcement of damnation, but should serve the sinner's ultimate salvation, by bringing him around, and, failing that, serve the sanctification of the church."¹⁶⁹

Synodical dissension finally led to the calling of a Synod-wide pastoral conference, which met at Manitowoc, Wisconsin, on September 27-28, 1911. Pieper was asked to present a paper on "The Doctrine of the Church, of Synodical Discipline, and especially Doctrinal Discipline." In this paper he made it clear that he believed synodical suspension and congregation excommunication were essentially the same thing. When some protested that a synod couldn't exercise the Keys, Pieper reportedly retorted: "If you stick to that, then we have come to the parting of the ways," to which someone responded: "We are ready for that right now."¹⁷⁰

It was at this point that Koehler once again intervened with his fresh, exegetical approach. In particular he conveyed his misgivings about the traditional, legal understanding of the word "institution" as it related to the New Testament institutions of our Savior. He now addressed and answered two fundamental questions at the Manitowoc conference: 1) *What* has the Lord instituted for his New Testament church and; 2) what is the *nature* of our Savior's institutions in the New Testament?

First, concerning *what* our Lord Jesus instituted, Koehler advanced these points:

This "institution" means that the Lord has commissioned his disciples with the ministry of the Word and Sacraments to the whole world, with the promise that he would endue their work with his Spirit, to the end that all believers will be saved. The latter are "his church" (Mt 16:18), which he has built on a rock, the communion of those who eventually will enter into life eternal with him. ... The use of the Keys here depends on the specific circumstances of time and place, here of course the congregation or body of those that are immediately concerned.

To elucidate: Christ has only one concept of the church, but at Matthew 18 he, of course, speaks of the (in time and space) localized church as a part of the whole, the congregation of those Christians directly concerned in the matter of the brother's sinning. That may mean a synod as well as a so-called *Ortsgemeinde* (local congregation). ... As a matter of course, the larger body will consider the smaller group that is involved by further ties with the erring brother. But that cannot mean that a righteous judgment pronounced by the larger body, say a synod, is not honored in heaven until the smaller has had its say. And it is the effectiveness in heaven around which Matthew 18 revolves, not outward organization membership here on earth.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 236.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 236.

Based upon his exegetical examination of Matthew chapters 16 and 18, Koehler finally concluded that a synod of Christians established for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel was as much a church or congregation as was a localized congregation of Christians established to do that same work. In addition, every grouping of Christians had the right and responsibility to use the Keys.

The present-day distinction between the local congregation and the synod has no place in the Lord's discourse at Matthew 18. ... Moreover, the contention regarding the present distinction between local congregation and synod, to wit: that the former has the purpose of spiritual edification, the latter that of outward business, is a fallacy, notwithstanding what synodical constitutions and quotations from the fathers, early and later, may say. As far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, a local congregation and a synod as well are called into being by the same promptings of fellowship and of the purpose to promote the Kingdom. ... There is no objection to the use of the term "*Ortsgemeinde*" (local congregation) if it is rightly understood as meaning the congregation of believers at a given time and place concerned with a given matter, and that applies to a synod as well as to the smaller group.¹⁷²

And what is the *nature* of our Savior's New Testament institutions? Are they legal or evangelical institutions? Koehler answered:

... the Lord's parting statements instituting the ministry of the Word and Sacraments ... [are] not the creation of a certain office, attached to certain ordained persons, or a distinct clerical order, or of any specified forms of carrying out that ministry to the entire world. ... [Instead] this ministry, in its human forms, is no longer, as a matter of New Testament liberty, tied to the Old Testament ceremonial law, though that doesn't spell freedom to do things contrary to the will of God or without the prompting of the Holy Ghost; it means that Christians are free to organize and carry on their ministry according to the moral values that are inherent in the concept of the fellowship that is sanctified by communion with our Lord and Savior.¹⁷³

Koehler later recalled the reaction to his presentation, particularly of his two Wauwatosa colleagues. "Pieper and Schaller remained silent." Koehler now aspired to cultivate in his colleagues a deeper appreciation for the theological approach he was espousing.

When we returned home from Manitowoc, Franz Pieper came to visit his brother and their discussion of the matter together raised doubts in A. Pieper's mind, whereupon Koehler said to him: "As long as Schaller and you do not

¹⁷² Ibid., 236.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 237.

acknowledge clearly the validity of my exegesis, your dogmatical position cannot be tenable." Schaller and Pieper then followed up on this advice with a series of articles.¹⁷⁴

Most Wisconsin men were not ready to accept the fresh ideas coming out of the Wauwatosa faculty room, which would now be splashed across the pages of the *Quartalschrift*. Chief among the naysayers was Prof. August Ernst, who prepared sixteen theses for his pastoral conference taking issue with the Wauwatosa position. Of special note was Ernst's contention in theses ten and eleven that "Synodical discipline is not church discipline, but is derived from human regulations, even when administered by Christians according to the Word of God" and "Suspension from synodical fellowship is not excommunication but for the time being discontinuance of synodical fellowship and in itself not discontinuance of church fellowship." Thesis sixteen summed up Ernst's ultimate bone of contention with the Wauwatosa men: "Only the local congregation with its pastor can excommunicate, but only its own members."¹⁷⁵

Koehler was once more critical of Ernst's traditional, dogmatic procedure which put a serious, exegetical study of Scripture in the backseat. "Each of these sixteen theses was implemented with more or less proof-texts from the Scriptures, the Confessions, Luther's, Hoenecke's and Walther's writings. The objections to the Wauwatosa faculty's teachings were refuted in the *Quartalschrift* and at conferences and some of the misunderstood proof-matter, adduced in support of the theses, placed in the right light."¹⁷⁶

Among the most important *Quartalschrift* articles written at this time to advance the Wauwatosa approach was August Pieper's January 1912 critique of Walther's book *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry). While granting the strengths of Walther's presentation, Pieper also pointed out that there was "room for misunderstanding the fathers or Walther himself, and that even Walther himself misunderstands at times."¹⁷⁷ Pieper concluded in typical Wauwatosa fashion: "The third generation of pastors since Walther are now in the ministry. To us applies the proverb, 'What you have inherited from your fathers, acquire anew in order to possess it.' ... We need to appropriate the doctrines of church and ministry once again with a fresh start through personal and thorough study."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 19.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 237.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 238. In a later article entitled "Luther's Doctrine of Church and Ministry" (*The Wauwatosa Theology*, III), A. Pieper would write that the Wauwatosa men "do not consider Walther's identification of the public preaching office with the pastoral office as a happy one. From this some people who have not thought or studied independently have drawn the conclusion that the public office, that is the office of the Word which is transmitted from the church to an individual person, and the pastoral office are equal and exchangeable concepts and that therefore only that form of the public preaching office which we call the pastoral office is of divine origin" (193).

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Edward Fredrich, "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry," (WELS Ministry Compendium, 1992), 778.

In the April 1912 *Quartalschrift* article, "The Doctrine of the Church and Its Marks Applied to the Synod," Pieper continued his study, writing that "wherever on earth, be it in Wauwatosa or Asia Minor, there are two or more believers, there is a congregation; a people of God is present whether or not they have united in an outward church organization, whether they have formed one outward church organization or 73. ... Not the external association makes the true congregation, but the faith of a number of people combined in the same way."¹⁷⁹ He finally concluded, "In short, the synodical assembly has the infallible marks of the church in the proper sense; therefore it is church in the strict sense of the Word. ... And the synod itself is church just as certainly. ... The Wisconsin Synod is church in the strict sense of the word."¹⁸⁰

John Schaller also entered the fray, particularly with his signal treatise on the ministry entitled "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," first published in the 1911-12 Seminary catalog. Here Schaller concluded, as Koehler had previously, that the pastoral office is not the only divinely-instituted office in the Church. Instead Schaller, writing for his Wauwatosa associates, maintained:

If ... we want to gain a correct understanding of the forms of the ministry as we find them in the church of all times, we have to free ourselves from the thought that only official public proclaiming is gospel preaching. This false view betrays itself immediately when one simply identifies the ministry [*Predigtamt*] with the pastoral ministry [*Pfarramt*], even when the clear presentation of thoughts demands something else, as for example, if one takes the sentence, "The ministry [*Predigtamt*] is the only office [*Amt*] that Christ ordained in his church," and construes it without further thought as if it were speaking exclusively about the pastoral office. Our studies, which have adhered strictly to what is set forth in the Holy Scriptures, incontrovertibly show that the ministry, that is, the commission to preach the gospel, is given to every Christian; that at conversion not only the ability but also the impetus for this preaching is implanted in him; and that the gospel by its very nature as a *message* presupposes this preaching activity and at the same time by the effect it has guarantees it will occur.¹⁸¹

Schaller correctly emphasized the service aspect of ministry, whether public or private, when he suggests that the word *Predigtdienst* (the service of preaching), better than *Predigtamt* (the office of preaching), describes the servant attitude that Christians will have as they fulfill the Great Commission.¹⁸² Finally, he also asserted that any and all New Testament forms were of a different sort than those of the Old Testament. In other words, all New Testament forms were not of a legal but of an evangelical kind, set in place (instituted) entirely by the Holy Spirit through the working of the gospel in the hearts, minds and lives of Christians. As a result, the

¹⁷⁹ August Pieper, "The Doctrine of the Church and Its Marks Applied to the Synod," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 64.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁸¹ John Schaller, "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 81.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 89.

Wauwatosa men declared that all New Testament forms of ministry are divinely-instituted but not legally-mandated or coerced, as such.

As soon as a group of Christians gather together as such in any manner and at any place ... it must make provisions to let the Word of Christ ring out in its gathering. That this takes place is essential; *how* it takes place is incidental and depends on the circumstances of the congregation and on the opportunity. Among us it usually delegates to a single individual the responsibility to do the formal, solemn preaching on a regular basis, to conduct the public worship services, and in addition to serve the individual members of the congregation with the Word according to their needs. These things could also be arranged in an entirely different way since the pastorate in the form that is customary among us was very likely totally unknown in apostolic times.

... As soon then as the congregation has established any such ministry and has called men for it, God gives it his approval and calls the men whom he bestows on this church "gifts" and assures them that they have been appointed by the Holy Spirit. For whatever the Christian congregation decides upon to further the preaching of the gospel it does at the instigation and under the guidance of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.¹⁸³

E.C. Fredrich wrote that the "three Wauwatosa teachers had not set themselves an easy task in this effort to change traditional thinking. It took many one-on-one discussions, many conference papers and debates, and many articles in the *Quartalschrift* before their position became a generally held position. Some never agreed. ... The strongest and longest opposition came from the Synodical Conference brethren in the Missouri Synod."¹⁸⁴

The Beginning of the End: The Wauwatosa-St. Louis debates

The Wisconsin and Missouri Synods always had an interesting relationship during their years together in the Synodical Conference. Even previous to their 1868 declaration of fellowship and the 1872 formation of the Synodical Conference, the two Synods had been rivals, with Missouri serving in the role of the domineering big brother and Wisconsin the pesky little one. There is no question that Missouri had had an overwhelming influence upon Wisconsin, both doctrinally and practically. Humanly speaking, the men of the Wisconsin Synod owed many thanks to their brethren in Missouri, yet Missouri seemed always to sense an air of ingratitude – perhaps rightly so – on the part of Wisconsin, especially when their friends to the north would throw doctrinal flies in the ointment, as if almost to question Missouri's Lutheran orthodoxy. For this very reason alone there can be little doubt that the Wauwatosa theologians

¹⁸³ Ibid., 93-94.

¹⁸⁴ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 110.

were a source of great irritation in the St. Louis faculty room, leading to a deep-seated suspicion of the Wauwatosa Gospel and its principles.

Nowhere did this rivalry and suspicion become more apparent and intense than in the hotly-contested Wauwatosa-St. Louis debates of the 1910s and 1920s concerning the issues of church and ministry. Fredrich quips that “attacks from Missouri leaders were launched almost before the ink had dried on the *Quartalschrift* pages.”¹⁸⁵ The first formal protest took place at the 1914 Synodical Conference gathering in Milwaukee, when the St. Louis faculty sought an interview with their Wauwatosa counterparts. One session took place during the morning of August 11 in the Missouri Synod’s Trinity parish hall; the other in a Wauwatosa classroom on the evening of August 12. Representing the Missouri Synod were Professors Franz Pieper, George Metzger, Ludwig Feuerbringer, Friedrich Bente and William Dau, along with Pastor William Dallmann. The Wisconsin contingent included Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller, and Pastor Gustav Bergemann.

Koehler briefly summarized the days’ events in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*.

Since there was no definite program, and the Wauwatosa men mostly replied to objections to their personal statements, it is hard to recall just what was said. The upshot, however, was that there was no agreement, both in regard to the formulation of the doctrine and the method, as well, by which it is to be derived from the Scriptures.¹⁸⁶

The extant minutes of the August 11 meeting report that August Pieper presented six theses representing the Wauwatosa position, concluding that “proof for the special divine institution and moralistic obligation of the Apostolic episcopacy ... is impossible and vain. Whoever maintains this must be able to point out a clear and specific word for it or prove that it is contained in either the Law or the Gospel.”¹⁸⁷ When Koehler and Schaller assented to their colleague’s presentation, the St. Louis men charged that “the Wauwatosa men denied the divine institution of the pastorate.”¹⁸⁸

Finally, a written protest was formulated and sent by the St. Louis faculty on August 3, 1916, “against various statements of the three elder Wauwatosa professors.”¹⁸⁹ The Missourians were confused, stating “we do not really know what is public doctrine [concerning church and ministry] in the honorable Wisconsin Synod at this time.” They observed a difference in recent *Quartalschrift* articles when compared to Adolf Hoenecke’s earlier *Dogmatik*, “in which,” they stated, “as far as we see, the doctrine of the church and the ministry which has been common

¹⁸⁵ Fredrich, “WELS Doctrine of Ministry,” 781.

¹⁸⁶ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 238.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Jon Ladner, “The Church and Ministry Debate Between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods” (Essay delivered to the St. Croix Conference of the Minnesota District of the WELS, June 12, 2001), 12.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁸⁹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 238.

among us is propounded." Now the Wauwatosa faculty was publicly claiming to have "an 'understanding of Scripture' in these matters which did not prevail among us before."¹⁹⁰

Three issues in particular troubled the St. Louis men about the Wauwatosa approach. First, they believed that in Wauwatosa's presentation of this doctrine "the divine arrangement of the public pastoral office is pushed too much into the background, even openly denied," although admitting that the Wauwatosa men did "indeed also speak of a divine origin of the office, and indeed in a preeminent sense over against all other callings, but this only after all manner of detours."¹⁹¹ The St. Louis faculty strongly asserted that the office of the pastoral ministry (*Pfarramt*) was a legal command and regulation of God to be enforced within the Church, adding that "one must not be frightened or permit himself to be terrified by 'legalistic' or 'ceremonial laws,' etc. One could with as much right charge that concerning both Sacraments."¹⁹² Still, the Missouriians had to admit that they were "indeed able to offer no word of specific institution"¹⁹³ which set apart the ministry of the congregational pastor (*Pfarramt*) as a specially and legally-binding form of gospel ministry within the Church.

The second area of concern dealt with the meaning of the term "local congregation" (*Ortsgemeinde*). The Missouriians asserted that "the local congregation [within a fixed geographical area] is the divinely-willed outward form of the Church, while you assert many outward forms on the Church: synods, conferences, yes, two or three Christians on trips, etc."¹⁹⁴ They went on to suggest that by taking such an approach "the concept of the local congregation is destroyed" by the Wauwatosa faculty, adding, "we believe that here lies the real basis of the difference, as indeed the treatment of the whole matter in the *Quartalschrift* has been developed from this original point [namely, the Cincinnati case]."¹⁹⁵

The third objection was that the Wauwatosa men placed "various synodical offices, etc., on the same plane with the pastoral office"¹⁹⁶ in terms of their divine institution. The St. Louis men stated that "with the exception of the ministry of the Word to 'those without,' that is, the ministry of evangelization, we find the office and the work of the ministry spoken of only in connection with the local congregation."¹⁹⁷ Only the congregational pastorate is divinely mandated; all other offices in the Church are simply human arrangements and are to be considered auxiliary.

The two faculties met again on December 20-21, 1916, in Chicago over the Christmas break. Koehler would later reminisce at length about the happenings of those acrimonious days.¹⁹⁸ Eventually, the two faculties formulated what became known as the Wauwatosa Theses.

¹⁹⁰ "Basic Documents in the Church and Ministry Discussions," *The Faithful Word* 7, no. 1 (February 1970): 23.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁹⁸ Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 20.

1. The Church in the intrinsic sense of the term is the sum total of all those who have come to faith in Christ through the Gospel.
2. Local congregations are organizations of Christians who, conforming to the will of God, according to locality and circumstances, have associated themselves for the public administration of the Means of Grace and for joint work in the Kingdom of God. They are associations formed according to the will of God. An occasional and casual meeting of Christians, also in the name of Jesus, is no local congregation in this sense.
3. The parish pastorate (*Pfarramt*) is the ministry delegated (*übertragen*) by the congregation to persons with the required aptitudes in order to exercise the rights of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians on behalf of the congregation.
4. The office is of divine institution, and its functions are exactly appointed in the Word of God. Hence the establishment of this office is not a matter of the Christians' option. The external form and arrangement of this office God has left to the wisdom and the liberty of the Christians under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

August Pieper would later comment in 1929: "With the common adoption of certain theses in 1916 the discussions were essentially concluded, even though unanimity was not attained in all points."¹⁹⁹ However, in a 1970 essay published in *The Faithful Word* outlining the Wauwatosa-St. Louis discussions, Harold Romoser challenged Pieper's contention. Romoser claimed that "the issues were met and settled" but that the Wauwatosa faculty quickly reneged on the agreement. He points an accusing finger especially at the 1917 publication of Koehler's *Kirchengeschichte* as the "deal breaker" since, in his opinion, it included an "endorsement of [Johann] Hoefling's position (p. 659)²⁰⁰ and [a] repudiation (p. 712) of the plain statements of the

¹⁹⁹ August Pieper, "Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and of Its Ministry, with Special Reference to the Synod and Its Discipline," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 98.

²⁰⁰ Erlangen professor Johann Hoefling (1802-1853) opined that, while the ministry of the gospel carried out by the priesthood of all believers is divinely-instituted, the public ministry as established by the congregation is of human origin "developed from inner necessity." Most of all, Hoefling was concerned not to make rules, where God made no rules. In his Church History text Koehler commented: "In the first years after 1848, a controversy existed over the teaching of Church and Ministry. Kliefoth, Vilmar, Muenchmeyer and Loehe had a High-Church view of the pastor's office and the church, similar to that of Grabau in America. Most Lutherans of other circles stood against it, especially the Erlangen faculty. Very freely and correctly – according to Scripture – stood only Hoefling with some of his colleagues. This controversy also took place in the Free Church. Huschke held the position that the office was a *juris divini* [divine decision], while the outward form was a *juris humani* [human decision]. Its head opponent was Pastor Dietrich, who in 1861 emerged and established the Immanuel Synod" (659). In his critique of Hoefling, Franz Pieper wrote: "He holds that if one assumes a divine command for the administration of the means of grace by public servants, one carries over into the New Testament Church an Old Testament feature, a legalistic element, a trace of the Old Testament bondage" (*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, 445). It is true that Koehler and the other Wauwatosa theologians were also were wary of introducing divine

1916 Theses.”²⁰¹ Romoser, though, offers no evidence that the fundamental issues had truly been resolved with the drafting of the Wauwatosa Theses since their wording tended to be just as ambiguous as that contained in the later Thiensville Theses, drawn up in 1932.²⁰²

Franz Pieper seemed to blame Koehler for this latest impasse as well. When the two met at the 1917 Missouri Synod convention that next summer in Milwaukee, Pieper stopped Koehler in the corridor and said: “In your *Church History* you touched upon the dispute between our faculties. By that, you made it impossible for us to recommend your History. We shall point out that the local pastor’s office (*Pfarramt*) has existed since the time of the Fathers, and before.” Koehler calmly retorted: “A correct historical perception, of course, is not determined by the sale of the book, but is guided by the truth. The dispute between us is commonly known among Lutherans. That is why I had to touch upon it. The manner of presentation, I’m sure you will not dispute.” J.P. Koehler never saw Franz Pieper again.

commands where no divine commands existed, but they also stressed that the public ministry and its different forms were all divinely-instituted by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Finally, the definition of the word “institution” became the real sticking point between the St. Louis and Wauwatosa faculties. ²⁰¹ Harold Romoser, “The Church and Ministry,” *The Faithful Word* 7, nos. 3 & 4 (August-November, 1970), 45. Concerning the Synodical Conference debate, Koehler states: “In the last few years the faculty of the Wauwatosa Seminary has come out in favor of a presentation of the doctrine of church and office which appears opposed to that held by Walther. Walther identified the pastorate and the preaching ministry and gave greater prominence to the local congregation than to other church bodies in that he claimed a separate special divine institution for both. The Wauwatosa faculty maintains that the pastorate is a species of the preaching ministry that originated first in Germany in the Middle Ages, and likewise that the local congregation is a species of the concept Church; and it maintains in both cases that the term ‘institution’ is not to be understood [as if] God has distinguished these two species by a special ordination compared to other similar forms of Christian and church life which have also been created by the Gospel. On the contrary, by the term ‘institution’ is meant a divine creation of forms (pastorate, local congregation, synod, office of school teacher, office of professor, et al) through the work of the Holy Ghost in Christendom, in which with Christian freedom Christians organize these things as suited to the external existing conditions. The discussions concerning these questions have not yet come to an end, but because both parties at heart take the same evangelical stand toward the concrete things that are concerned, it is to be expected that in the intellectual conception and presentation of the matter there will also come an agreement based on the Word of God” (715).

²⁰² Koehler viewed the 1932 Thiensville Theses as a compromise that accomplished nothing because they use the “weasel” words, “It is God’s will and order.” In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod* Koehler posed the question: What is meant by “will” and “order”? Does that mean legal “command” or evangelical “pleasure”? Does that mean legal “ordinance” or evangelical “arrangement”? (239) Koehler commented that these theses “are externalistic, couched in the terms of law, in that they are concerned about jurisdictions, when, of all things, the doctrines of the Church, the Ministry and the Office of the Keys cry for a presentation from the Gospel point of view.” The *real* issue separating these two faculties was this: Are New Testament divine institutions law or gospel? St. Louis said law; Wauwatosa said gospel. Both the Wauwatosa and Thiensville Theses are simply ambiguous on this question.

Rooting Out the Weeds: The Battle Against Legalism

As far as the Wauwatosa faculty was concerned, there was one fundamental issue in the church and ministry debate that needed addressing, namely: what is meant by the term “divinely-instituted”? In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler states it quite plainly: “The real issue was the definition of the term ‘institution’ as applied to the church and the office of the ministry in their concrete form.”²⁰³

The St. Louis faculty held a legalistically-inclined position. They argued that Christians are conscience-bound to form and join local congregations because they are the strict, legal command of God, the only divinely-mandated form of the church. Synod membership, on the other hand, is not commanded; they are man-made and therefore not divinely-instituted. In the same way, the office of pastor is the one divinely-mandated form of the public ministry, an imperative to be obeyed. All other forms of the ministry are simply human inventions. In his *Christian Dogmatics* Franz Pieper asserted that “the formation of Christian congregations, and membership in them, is not a human, but a divine mandate [*mandata Dei*].”²⁰⁴ The same held true for the office of local pastor. “Here, too,” Pieper argues, “we are dealing with imperatives, therefore with a divine arrangement in the sense of a divine command.”²⁰⁵ The St. Louis faculty was adamant that the local congregation and the local pastorate are both legally-binding, divine institutions of the New Testament. All other forms in the church are human inventions, brought about apart from divine institution. Many within Wisconsin concurred without objection.

Ironically, and contrary to popular opinion, the Wauwatosa faculty *agreed* that the local congregation and local pastorate are divine institutions. However, it was their understanding of the word “institution” that was far different and decidedly more evangelical than the one commonly held by their Missouri counterparts. So different, in fact, was their outlook that it ultimately led to an impasse. More important, the faculties’ disagreement on the meaning of the word “institution” for New Testament Christians uncovered an even more fundamental difference of opinion on and approach to Article VI of the Formula of Concord, which deals with the so-called “third use of the law” and its application to the Christian life. The St. Louis faculty held a traditional, dogmatic opinion, while the Wauwatosa men would in time be charged with antinomianism²⁰⁶ because they did not approach the law’s third use in the traditional, Melanchthonian way that was typical within Lutheran Orthodoxy after the time of Luther. This would quickly become *the* principal topic of discussion.

Between 1914 and 1916, the Wauwatosa trio set out to enlarge upon their evangelical perspective in a series of *Quartalschrift* articles. In particular, they now dealt extensively with that most beloved of Lutheran subjects, namely, the proper distinction between law and gospel with special attention being given to the third use of the law. These *Quartalschrift* articles,

²⁰³ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 238.

²⁰⁴ F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 421.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 446.

²⁰⁶ The charge of antinomianism is still made today. For examples, see Erling Teigen, “The Universal Priesthood in the Lutheran Confessions,” *LOGIA* 1, no. 1 (Reformation 1992):12; Harold Romoser, “Church and Ministry,” *The Faithful Word* 7, nos. 3 & 4 (August-November 1970):43-44; and Neil Hilton, “Church and Ministry,” *The Faithful Word* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1969):28-29.

containing vintage Wauwatosa Gospel, had their genesis in the church and ministry debates and would ultimately become the catalyst for the deepest rift yet between St. Louis and Wauwatosa.

The first article in this law-gospel series is perhaps the crown jewel of John Ph. Koehler's *Quartalschrift* contributions, "*Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns*" ("Legalism Among Us"), published in the last number of 1914 and the first two numbers of 1915. As Koehler informs us in his introduction, this article was written as a direct result of "a remark made at a larger mixed [Synodical Conference] conference" which led him and others to believe that the "term *legalism* was not generally understood."²⁰⁷ Koehler now addressed this important issue on the basis of four theses:

1. Legalism among Christians consists in that they take the motives and forms of their actions from the law instead of letting them flow from the gospel. This comes from the flesh, which blends this inclination into every expression of the Christian's life and thereby makes it superficial.
2. This behavior manifests itself in the Lutheran church chiefly and principally in bravado of orthodoxy. Connected to it is a bravado of *sanctification*, which asserts itself particularly by measures of church government. ...
3. Where these factors gain the upper hand in every phase of ongoing church life and become a condition to the point of style, the decline sets in, evident externally when we adopt all kinds of unhealthy traits copied from the sectarian churches.
4. Only the repentant recognition throughout the church of these conditions can offer the prospect of halting the outright opposition to the working of the gospel. But this working is brought about when again we search more deeply into the gospel and cling to it all the more incessantly.²⁰⁸

One prominent example of legalism in the Lutheran church that Koehler instantly spotted involved the doctrine of church and ministry, particularly Missouri's insistence that the local congregation and the office of the parish pastor are instituted by means of divine law. Koehler wrote: "At issue here are the association of Christians in congregations and synods, the conduct of officials and congregation members, of congregations and synods toward one another ... We need hardly pause to prove that it is the old Adam that also in this area engenders legalism."²⁰⁹ Koehler had in mind the insistence on certain outward ecclesiastical forms where God makes no laws. He conceded that "when Christians assemble to do what flows spontaneously from the gospel, namely, to speak about the great acts of God, then the human circumstances at once produce certain limitations with regard to persons, time, place and actions. ... The requirement for external regulations is inherent in the organic character of human fellowship, and the

²⁰⁷ John Ph. Koehler, "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 229.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 229-230.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 264.

regulations take form through human intercourse."²¹⁰ But he also added in opposition to Missouri's legalistic approach:

So far as the gospel is concerned, we would need no modes and regulations at all beyond Word and sacrament. ... For any other kind of modes and regulations [such as the local congregation and parish pastor] no such [legal] institutions appear [in Scripture]; to try to derive divine ordinances from historical events and examples in the life of the apostolic church is inadvisable; and for all such cases the apostle's word is sufficient, namely that one should not allow external things to be made matters of conscience. ...

But the flesh intermingles in these matters *that* character and *that* conception which accompanies these matters in all sinful human existence, that is, selfishness. Because it has something to do with *regulations*, the legal character is at once present for the flesh, which emphasizes the mode, the *external* mode, the fact *that* it is regulation. Thereby, the content, the gospel, the primary object in the individual case, recedes.²¹¹

Professor Joel Fredrich explains Koehler's perspective and the cause for his unease in his 1994 essay, "The Divine Institution of Gospel Ministry."

A large part of Koehler's concern is that when a thing such as the preaching of the gospel has its impetus and authority in the life-creating gospel itself, we should not adopt modes of speech and thought which imply that the gospel is a poor, dead thing. We should not imagine that the ministry of the gospel would somehow lack legitimacy or authority without a separate [legal] institution or command [*mandata Dei*]. We should not suppose that gospel ministry must perish unless we can maintain it by basing it on a divine law.

A similar concern for the supremacy of the gospel led Koehler to emphasize the principle that the gospel creates its own forms as the church pursues its mission in changing circumstances. That is part of our New Testament freedom in Christ. ... Hence we should not expect God to prescribe arbitrary, external forms for ministry in the New Testament, or expect to find such forms instituted as necessary for the life of the New Testament church. The forms will take care of themselves since the gospel will move God's people to find appropriate ways of letting the good news be heard.²¹²

²¹⁰ Ibid., 265.

²¹¹ Ibid., 265, 267. Emphases in this and all future quotations are original.

²¹² Joel Fredrich, "The Divine Institution of Gospel Ministry," Unpublished essay, 14.

John Schaller further elucidated the Wauwatosa concerns and approach with his 1915 article entitled "God's Will and Command." Schaller began by posing this question: "How does the Christian as a child of God stand in relation to the so-called legal will of God?"²¹³ He made the following, typically-Wauwatosan observation about the Synodical Conference:

In spite of all the correct phraseology in use among us, we are still far away from the point where the correct point of view on this matter actually rules in public preaching. ... It is obviously Jesus' will and command that we celebrate the Lord's Supper, that we baptize, and that we carry on mission work, in which we publicly and specially proclaim his Word or have it proclaimed. ... [However,] do divine commands of this kind belong in the same category with the commands that, e.g., God has expressed in the Ten Commandments? If not, then where does the difference lie? In the course of this discussion it will confront us ever more clearly how very much the correct answer to these questions depends upon the correct understanding of the gospel, so that our conclusions will in fact be a contribution to the proper distinction of law and gospel – if these conclusions are scriptural.²¹⁴

Schaller then pointed out a basic distinction we need to make and a basic difficulty we need to confront in discussing this issue.

He who *accurately* examines the commands of God in Scripture, that is, in the light of the knowledge of God which the gospel bestows, will soon notice that human language lacks the capability of distinguishing in the external form of presentation between a command of God *which we are to carry out* and one of his commands *which requires nothing of us, but which as an effectual power produces in and on us what God wills*. In human language we have only one form of expression for both types of God's will, the imperative. ... Both kinds of imperatives appear linguistically to be completely alike, and yet, as expressions of will, they are of a completely different nature. ... The one kind simply expresses what ought to happen according to God's will, without guaranteeing that it will happen. The other kind expresses a *creative will* of God and is the effective Word of God itself, which has the inherent power to establish, make, and create what the imperative designates as the will of God.²¹⁵

As an example of God's creative will, Schaller used Jesus' Great Commission to preach the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

²¹³ John Schaller, "God's Will and Command," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 150.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

That is also a categorical imperative, in its outward form no different from the command to love enemies. But here from the very outset it is not the intent of God that this command should work death, the very opposite of the expressed purpose, but through this very Word God wants to create and produce precisely what the Word itself says. When he says, Preach the gospel, God by this command sets in motion [i.e., institutes] the activity of preaching the gospel.

The same holds true in the same way for the commands of God which we designate as the institution of the Sacraments: Baptize – This do! From our youth on it is an established fact that the sacraments are nothing else than a special clothing of the gospel. ... The added imperative points out the will of God, that these actions are to serve as means of grace for all time, and authorizes the continuing use of both sacraments. But the imperative is not that of the moral law, but here also we have a creative Word of God, through which he wants to effect what he wills.²¹⁶

Based on this understanding, Schaller took umbrage at the suggestion that God has legalistically commanded certain outward forms of gospel ministry, particularly the local congregation and the office of the parish pastor, binding his Church to these forms in all places for all time. He finally pointed out that any attempt to foist such commands upon the Church, passing them off as divine law, is pure legalism. In truth, the Holy Spirit works among Christians through the gospel in a very different manner. Yes, God has instituted the local congregation and the local pastorate, but not by means of the law. They have been instituted (i.e., set in place and set in motion) – along with all other forms in the Christian church – by the Holy Spirit through means of the gospel.

[The church] knows of no determined form, no limiting precept. Her one concern, like that of her Lord, is that the Word of grace may sound forth richly; therefore she sets her standards according to the circumstances in complete freedom, influenced only by the will of her Lord. She grants no man, no group of men, no creature whatsoever ... the right to saddle her with an outward form of gospel-preaching as divinely ordained, because in this matter her Lord has not expressed any particular will. ...²¹⁷

In other words, the *verba institutionis* are lacking even for the office of bishop and presbyter in apostolic times, and certainly also for any additional special forms of congregational ministry. Through the gospel God creates [i.e., institutes] this ministry always and everywhere on earth where he gathers his congregation, and he always leads his church in such a way that it makes use of the persons he gives it, suitable to circumstances at the moment. Here again

²¹⁶ Ibid., 153-154.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 154.

God's creative will is quite clear, but he has not expressed it in the form of a command.²¹⁸

And then, in what is perhaps a direct allusion to the legalistic perspective of the St. Louis faculty, Schaller brings his article to the following pointed conclusion.

God's evangelical will and command has nothing legalistic in it, either according to its nature or according to God's intention. ... But how far removed from the understanding of the gospel must one be who would conclude this from these things: Because those evangelical commands produce what the law demands, therefore they themselves are legalistic commands! That is the logic of the natural man, who only knows the law. ... The true logic of the Holy Spirit teaches us, rather, to conclude: If someone has true confidence in God and freely confesses his name, loves the preaching of the gospel, cannot get along without it, and willingly helps to bring its saving use to others; therefore, if someone does these greatest and most excellent works a man can possibly do, he is no longer under the law, has not come to those works through the law, but he is under the life-giving gospel, which alone makes a man capable for such works and produces them in him.²¹⁹

August Pieper followed up his colleagues' masterful articles with three masterpieces of his own: "The Law Is Not Made for a Righteous Man," "The Difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran Interpretation of the So-Called Third Use of the Law," and "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" all published in consecutive issues in 1916.

In the first-mentioned article, Pieper stated that he would "treat a question often aired, but never, at any time, treated exhaustively among us. This question concerns the meaning of the law for the Christian."²²⁰ After an extensive exegetical study, particularly of 1 Timothy 1:9, Pieper offered his conclusion.

Absolutely: *There is no such thing as law for the just.* Only he, who knows this and holds fast to it, can use the law, good as it is in itself, rightly and usefully, whether he be teacher or hearer. The Christian teacher, who does not cling to this knowledge, will always corrupt the gospel and confuse and despoil his hearers. ... We are free and released from the law *as a doctrine and rule of conduct, because we have all been taught by God through faith.*²²¹

Here Pieper wrote the "magic words" that were bound to stir up controversy in the Synodical Conference, arguing that the Christian was free from the law in all respects, even as a

²¹⁸ Ibid., 166.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 167-168.

²²⁰ August Pieper, "The Law Is Not Made for a Righteous Man," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 73.

²²¹ Ibid., 87-89.

rule or guide, the so-called “third use of the law.” Pieper’s words would seem to be a direct attack upon Article VI of the Formula of Concord, which concerned the third use of the law and was written to oppose the antinomians. But Pieper addressed the question he knew would be forthcoming from his critics. His answer is both interesting and important to note.

Is our church then wrong when she teaches in great detail the third use of the law for Christians, as in the Formula of Concord, Article 6? No, the church is right. The Confession teaches that not only the “third,” but all “uses” of the law are still needed by the Christian: the law as mirror, rule, coercion, and punishment. And that also is right. The church teaches the use of the law by the Christian *because of the flesh which still adheres to him* and as applicable to it.²²²

That being said, Pieper also suggested some lack of clarity and preciseness on the part of the Article VI formulators when defining the law, especially as St. Paul presents it, stating that their “definitions ignore the *characteristics* which the law without exception possesses over against the *sinner* in all his activities and accomplishments. For it confronts him as an alien will, coming from without.”²²³ Pieper suggested that “it will contribute more to clearness and a more precise understanding of the difference between law and gospel, if one takes the term ‘law’ in the sense we outlined above, according to which the ‘Thou shalt’ belongs to the essence of the law.”²²⁴ In other words, Pieper argued, the law by its very nature pushes, prods, coerces and punishes sinners; it does not and cannot guide the Old Adam (Romans 8:7). On the other hand, the law has nothing to say to the Christian as New Man at all, even as a guide.

It should be noted at this juncture that the Wauwatosa faculty was of the distinct opinion that the command given to Adam in the Garden was not “law,” as that term is normally used and understood in Scripture. August Pieper wrote, “The concept ‘law’ does not exist *prior to sin*, because that thing did not exist which confronted man with demands *from without*, with threats, and with destruction by God’s moral will. Men blithely inject the commandment, not to eat of the tree of knowledge, at this point. ... But it was no demand, made on unwilling persons, as the law is since sin entered the world. It was a special commandment, given to willing observers.”²²⁵ Koehler asserted earlier that “the words about the tree of knowledge in Paradise are also not to be construed as if God wanted to *destinate (bestimmen)* the first man by demanding, threatening, and condemning. Rather, the intention there is to warn against harm. Also for the Christian as such, for him as *πνεῦμα*, the holy will of God persists; but not in the form of demanding, threatening, condemning.”²²⁶ Schaller declared, “In his state of innocence Adam needed no directions how to serve God and his neighbor properly, and it was not even

²²² Ibid., 92-93.

²²³ Ibid., 90. Koehler, too, suggested that it was more precise to reserve the term *law* “for the legalistic conception, for the sake of *distinction*, exactly following Paul’s example” (“Legalism,” 233; emphasis in original). He also intimated that the formulators had not been careful enough in their definition of the so-called *third use of the law* in FC VI (see “Legalism,” 256-258).

²²⁴ Ibid., 91.

²²⁵ Ibid., 80-81

²²⁶ Koehler, “Legalism Among Us,” 231.

necessary to remind him of this. His concreated perfection guaranteed that he by nature knew and did everything God wanted."²²⁷ In other words, the law is not intended or necessary for the New Man in any way. The New Man is instead guided by the Spirit, not the law (Galatian 5:18; Romans 6:14; 1 Timothy 1:9). Pieper boldly stated:

Therefore it is false in every way and contrary to the clear word of Scripture and also of our Confession, to say: The Christian *as Christian*, as a believer, is still under the law, at least in its use as a rule of conduct. We must not form the habit of using this manner of speech, not even if it were found in some explanation of the catechism, in a schoolbook, a synodical report, a volume of dogmatics, or elsewhere. Such talk not only diametrically opposes our chapter but the entire Scripture, creating confusion and wavering in regard to the whole doctrine of grace, the "glorious gospel of the grace of the blessed God." It mixes law and gospel, falsifies the gospel, and again makes it to be law.²²⁸

In his next article, "The Difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran Interpretation of the So-Called Third Use of the Law," Pieper would need to address his critics when his previous article elicited one letter "that did not agree and one that expressed hesitation regarding the main point."²²⁹ Here he warned anyone who would listen about the dangerous temptation of taking a Reformed view of the law. He summarized the important distinction.

It could not be expressed more definitely than this, namely, that [in Reformed theology] the law applies *to the believer as such*, while Lutherans declare that the believer is free from the coercion (*coactio*) and threat (*comminatio*) of the law in that he as a believer voluntarily (*sua sponte*) does what is God-pleasing [guided by the Spirit, not by the law]. Consequently, he does not need the external prod of a demanding law standing over him. ... The Reformed, on the other hand, let law apply to the believer *because and in so far as* he is a believer. ... This insistence that the law applies to the Christian has often given the application of Scripture to morals and life in the Reformed Church a distressing and rigoristic quality. ... So, just *because* faith has been kindled, *for that reason* the law is necessary, which urges one on to action. It is precisely the regenerate person who needs the law for his development, his perfection, his positive progress, his manifestations of obedience, and his good works, which should glorify God. ... This, then, is the basis for the Lutheran charge that *Reformed piety is servile, legalistic and not evangelically free*.²³⁰

²²⁷ Schaller, "Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," 77.

²²⁸ A. Pieper, "The Law Is Not Made for a Righteous Man," 93-94.

²²⁹ August Pieper, "The Difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran Interpretation of the So-Called Third Use of the Law," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 101.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 106, 109.

Scripture approaches our Christian lives of sanctification in a much different manner, pointing to and relying on the power of justifying faith in the gospel, worked by the Holy Spirit. Pieper asserted:

... in the justified person faith ... is such a unity of the human substance with the divine that he finds in himself the norm and stimulus for his actions. He no longer needs to receive this from the outside. Because he has been given the Holy Spirit, he is an independent source of a divine manifestation in his life and his activity. The law, therefore, does not stand *over* him anymore as something *foreign* to his will, but it *has passed over into his will* as the impulse of love, inflamed by the Holy Spirit. ... *Only because of the old man* does the believer also need the law as a taskmaster of the flesh in the interest of the spirit. Thus the law has for him a negative function. All truly Christian, positive action, however, proceeds *from faith itself*, which receives from itself guidance and impulse. ... the law always serves him only to convict him of sin. That which is positively good is only a work of the freedom of faith in the Spirit.²³¹

In the last of the three articles in this series, "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" Pieper finally applied these abstract ideas to concrete examples of legalism he perceived in the visible church. In particular he now targeted the Missouri opinion that certain forms of church and ministry have been strictly commanded by divine law. Such a view was incongruent with Christian liberty, Pieper argued. "If no law is meant for a righteous person, then no legal regulations are given to him either. For a legal regulation or arrangement is nothing but a species of the genus law."²³²

In the end, Pieper returned to the fundamental question that separated the Wauwatosa and St. Louis faculties on the matter of church and ministry, namely, what is meant by the term "divinely-instituted"? Is it a legal concept? As Koehler and Schaller had previously, Pieper now warned against a misunderstanding of "divine imperatives" found in the New Testament, particularly as they relate to the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

One cannot dispute the fact that the preaching of the gospel is in the fullest and most intensive sense an ordinance, arrangement, institution, and establishment; indeed, it is the one great general and permanent commission of the Lord in the New Testament. No command of the Lord addressed to his disciples is as great, as comprehensive, as intensive, as general, as permanent as this one. It is the great kingdom commission of the Lord addressed to every believer, to the entire church, and in effect until his return. This is to such a degree the one great arrangement of the New Testament that the preaching of the gospel has rightly

²³¹ Ibid., 108-110.

²³² August Pieper, "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 115.

been called the one task of the church. ... If we have carried out only this command with everything that we think, imagine, speak, and do, we have fulfilled every will of God. ...

The preaching of the gospel is the one great outward ordinance of the New Testament. Added to it are the sacraments. ... Thus the gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are indeed outward ordinances in the New Testament. But the question is not whether they are outward but whether they are legal regulations, ordinances of legal character, having the same nature, the same effect, and the same purpose as the outward regulations of the old covenant. All this is plainly and categorically to be denied.

When the Lord says preach, baptize, do this, then these are in themselves neither moral nor ceremonial, symbolic demands through which obedience toward God is meant to be exercised and faithfulness toward him is to be manifested. ... [Instead] the New Testament deals with the regenerate and mature (Ga 4:1ff.). If the preaching of the gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper were legal ordinances, they would have to lock up and preserve until Christ would appear, and be a custodian until his coming. But the New Testament is the fullness of time, is itself Christ's appearance. It is just through these ordinances that Christ imparts himself to the world. As legal arrangements, the preaching of the gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper would be powerless, impotent ordinances not imparting salvation but killing and damning us; under them we would be frightened and yearn for other, new ordinances which would give us salvation.

The proclamation of the gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are not legal but *evangelical* arrangements. ... after we have come to know the gospel in faith, preaching, Baptism, and celebrating the Lord's Supper become for us Christians not a duty – for duty is a legal concept – but an inner compulsion. “I believe, therefore I speak,” says David. “We cannot help speaking,” says Peter. “You will be my witnesses,” says the Lord. Yet this is not a legal compulsion, but a compelling force inherent in the Christian's new spiritual nature. ... Also without the express command of Christ, the church, the assembly of believers, would have preached, baptized, and administered the Sacrament after the Lord had ordained them as means of grace. The preaching of the gospel, like prayer, is, because of the Christian's very nature, the immediate, the most immediate and necessary outpouring of faith. It is so inevitable that the stones would cry out should we keep the gospel hidden. As Christians our hearts would burst if we would not confess our own and the world's Savior and praise his soul-saving grace. That is why we would not need the command to do so if we were wholly spiritual. Only because we are not that as yet, but still have the shy, worldly-

minded, lazy flesh clinging to us, has the Lord expressly given us the command.²³³

However, as the Wauwatosa theologians had repeatedly asserted, unlike the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacrament, there are no “words of institution” for specific ministerial forms such as the local congregation and the local pastorate, to which the church was bound by divine law.

The concept *the ministry of the church* embraces absolutely all forms of the administration of Word and sacrament, while the *congregational pastorate* designates only a specific form of the public administration of the means of grace. Not to distinguish these two concepts ... and imply to identify them with one another means confusing everything and arriving at the ill-boding error that actually only the one form, the congregational pastorate, has been instituted by God, whereas every other form is of human origin. As soon as the two concepts are clearly distinguished as genus and species, and what Scripture says is carefully noted, everything becomes clear and plain. ... nowhere is it stated as a permanent regulation of the Lord, valid for all times and circumstances: Every local congregation is to have pastor!²³⁴

On the basis of passages like Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, Pieper and his Wauwatosa colleagues emphasized that ministers of the gospel are gifts of Christ to his Church, given not by legal mandate but graciously bestowed upon his people through his ongoing, creative work.²³⁵ These gifts of ministry are divinely-appointed in much the same way that our Lord appoints the different parts of the human body with a variety of gifts and abilities for the benefit of the whole body.

God has not appointed the members of the natural [human] body through precept or command or regulation, but “appointed,” created them through his counsel and almighty creative act. In just the same way he has also “appointed” the various *charismata* in the spiritual body of Christ. Here we have creation through the Holy Spirit, not external prescription and regulation for the church. The church merely carries out what the Holy Spirit gives and creates. ... Today

²³³ Ibid., 121-123, 125-126

²³⁴ Ibid., 126-127.

²³⁵ One of J.P. Koehler’s most extensive treatments of this entire subject can be found in his commentary on Ephesians 4:11-16 (*Paul’s Rhapsody in Christ*, 391-415). Here Koehler emphasizes that teaching gifts are created, appointed and given. They are not instituted (i.e. mandated) in any kind of legalistic way. Consider also Koehler’s 1913 *Quartalschrift* review of John Schaller’s *Pastorale Praxis* where he qualifies Schaller’s use of the word “institute” when describing the God-given work of gospel ministry. “With the word ‘institute’ (*stiften*) we want to indicate that God has *set in motion* the preaching of the gospel on earth through the gift of the gospel, nothing more, nothing less” (“Review of Schaller’s *Pastorale Praxis*,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 10, no. 4 [October 1913], 300-301).

the Lord gives similar or other gifts, in lesser or greater variety. But we can be certain that today and at all times he gives the church those gifts, offices, and forms of office which it in every age and every place needs. ... As gifts of Christ, appointed by the Holy Spirit, they all carry out the one great ministry of the church, earned by Christ's blood, revealed by the Holy Spirit, and expressly commanded by Christ, the office of the Word and the sacraments.²³⁶

And so it is with various assemblies of God's people, gathered around Word and Sacrament.

There are various forms of the church: the house congregation, the local congregation, the institutional congregation (instructors and students), the council or the synod ... Wherever, therefore, two or three are gathered in Christ's name, there is the visible church; there Christ is in their midst; there is absolutely all power of the church, including also all power to exercise it, whether this church is called local congregation or house congregation, council or synod, conference or institution, whether it is mobile or stationary. The power of the church does not depend on its outward form, nor does the right to exercise it; this lies in the essence of the church. The only concern is that everything be done decently and in order (1 Co 14:40) ... Moral matters, love, and order (1 Co 16:14) regulate this exercise, as they do among the gifts given to the church and in the filling of the office of the congregation likewise. Also here there is no legal or evangelical regulation. ... After the Lord gave the church the gospel and the sacraments and his Holy Spirit, he left all outward forms and arrangements, everything of a ceremonial nature, to the free determination of the church governed by the Spirit.²³⁷

So then, if there is no divine command for the specific forms of congregational pastorate and local congregation, are all forms of the public ministry simply human arrangements, instituted by men for mere expediency? "Then" as Pieper himself queried, "the church or a congregation could perhaps do away with the present congregational pastorate and introduce a Quaker type of proclaiming the Word?"²³⁸ To both these questions Pieper and his colleagues answered unequivocally: Absolutely not! The Wauwatosia men stressed again and again, as Paul had nineteen centuries earlier: Just because Christians are free from the law, it doesn't mean that they will use their freedom for licentiousness, to do as they please (Galatians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 10:23,24). Instead, through the gospel the Holy Spirit leads Christians to make use of the best and most beneficial forms.

²³⁶ Pieper, "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" 130-132.

²³⁷ Ibid., 139-141.

²³⁸ Ibid., 132.

... while we have no explicit, simple, legal, or evangelical regulation for any one of them, all possible forms of the office [of the ministry of the gospel] are not purely of human but of divine origin. We human beings do not govern the church; when we do govern it, it regularly becomes ill-governed; but the Lord, the Holy Spirit governs it, and he governs it in a proper and wholesome manner. He wants his church to be edified by Word and sacrament to attain a perfect manly age in Christ. That this may come about, he at all times gives his church just those gifts, types of offices and men to fill them, which it needs at every place and under every course of events and will best serve its edification.²³⁹

In other words, all forms of the gospel ministry *are* divinely-instituted, that is, set in place and set in motion by the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of believers through faith in the gospel. The Spirit leads and guides the Church to make use of the best forms not by means of divine law but by means of the gospel of grace. All forms in the Church – indeed, all fruits of faith produced by Christians – are divinely-instituted, brought about by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. They are not our legal duty *per se* but an evangelical compulsion.

Such evangelical pronouncements, however, made others nervous within the Synodical Conference. They thought, perhaps unconsciously, that proclaiming such absolute freedom in the gospel – as the Wauwatosa men were doing – would surely bring about a disorderly mess. Much better to make rules and laws to keep people in line and to keep the church's business running smoothly. Yes, use the law for the maintenance of outward peace and tranquility! Such was the thinking of legalists then, and such is the thinking of legalists today. Such is the thinking of us all by nature, since sinners are by nature legalistic; they respond to the law. Simply put, trusting the gospel to produce proper and God-pleasing fruits of faith in the fullness of time is risky business in this world, especially when dealing with sinful people. It will not always work in just the way or as quickly as we may want or expect. In most cases, the law will certainly get more immediate and more quantifiable results.

But the Wauwatosa men would have us ask ourselves: Is *that* the goal? Immediate, quantifiable, outward, and earthly results? Pieper granted that if we use the law to motivate our lives of "good works"

our zeal ... would perhaps be greater. But that we would thereby be richer in real good works cannot be proved, for all good works are good only insofar as they proceed from faith itself *freely* and not forced by the law. Accordingly, the cure for our lack of works does not consist in this, that we become more legalistic in our Christianity and adopt something of the Reformed spirit, but in this, that we, in a genuinely Lutheran spirit, apply the law in its sharpness as a mirror to our lazy flesh, that we allow ourselves to be judged and condemned by it, that we become alarmed at our lack of energy because of which we neglect God's kingdom and poor souls, and that we flee again to grace and from its fullness

²³⁹ Ibid., 130.

and fervor, which surpasses all human thought, acquire for ourselves new, *free*, spiritual willpower.²⁴⁰

The Lovely Flower: The Christian *Weltanschauung* and the Art of Being a Child of God

Since the days of the apostles, few men have been granted the God-given gifts necessary to capture and communicate “the deep truths of the faith” (1 Timothy 3:9) in a natural and unstudied way. Martin Luther serves as one historical exception to that reality.

By virtue of his own faith Luther was enabled to apply a deep insight to all the affairs of life in his age, in the masterful way we note in his works. ... Hence, for the true understanding of life and of history, he marshaled the Scriptures that have not laid down a set of theses for the mind to appropriate but have set down facts that concern the heart. And in such use of Scripture he opposed all rationalistic deduction, demanding faith in the forgiveness of sins as the source and means of opening our understanding.²⁴¹

Professors John Ph. Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller struggled to ascend this mountain of deep, spiritual truths themselves, and they saw a glimpse, perhaps, of what men like Abraham, Jacob, David, Simeon, and the Apostles had seen before them. To put those divine truths into human poetry, prose, music and art is the challenge that mortal men wrestle to overcome, as Paul humbly admits: “Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!” (Romans 11:33)

In many ways, this was the ultimate goal of the efforts that the three Wauwatosa professors undertook in the training of future pastors from 1900-1920: to communicate in their own small way just how small we and our efforts are in the kingdom of God and just how much we rely on him “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). They preached and taught what they did, not in an effort to win the theological argument or to establish some kind of earthly Zion for the Wisconsin Synod or the Lutheran Church, but to instill with the Spirit’s help a Christian *Weltanschauung* (worldview) in the hearts and minds of their disciples, the future pastors of the Wisconsin Synod whom the Lord Jesus would call to be his witnesses to all the world in his overarching purpose to gather the elect.

How necessary it was and is for fishers of men to undertake their divine calling with their hearts and minds set “on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossian 3:1,2)! Yes, they are to be about their earthly calling to gospel ministry with earnestness and faithfulness, all the while keeping in mind that “this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31). The Christian’s *Weltanschauung* matches that of our faithful father Abraham who “made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents,” all the while “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:9,10).

²⁴⁰ August Pieper, “Difference between the Reformed and the Lutheran Interpretation,” 110fn.

²⁴¹ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 6.

This was the ultimate intent of the Wauwatosa Spring and its emphasis upon the historical disciplines, that the flower of a Christian *Weltanschauung* might blossom and flourish.

So it is not outward visible attainments that the Christian's hope is engaged with, but the inward life kindled by the Gospel; it is not temporal blessings that we look forward to but the eternal rest of the saints with and in God, after all earthly and temporal things have been finally consumed in the Judgment and we in our glorified bodies have been received into the heavenly mansions. And furthermore, these ideas are not a logical system that appeals to our reason and challenges us to become busybodies in this world and promote great undertakings for its betterment, but they are the sum and substance of God's revelation by which historical facts have been communicated to us. These facts of history we receive by faith, and again, they fill us with faith that we are saved and may look forward to our final redemption and can render no greater service than to spread this message, in order that the children of the Kingdom may be gathered. For winning men for Christ, we are sure, is the one and only means to accomplish betterment in earthly and temporal matters too. That is the Christian *weltanschauung*.²⁴²

And how is this Christian worldview gained? Not by our great learning, ingenious thought and hard labor. No, we can only gain a proper, Christian worldview through godly repentance, by heeding Jesus' call to "change and become like little children" (Matthew 18:3). To revel in a truth that only an inspired Apostle could first utter: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). To understand that we are God's children, not by virtue of who we are or what we do, but by virtue of who He is and what he has done from all eternity. To trust and treasure these truths in the artful and unscientific way that only a child can.

Children are true artists ..., and all great artists have kept the childlike mind. The young student who has a smattering of diversified knowledge but is still green in the experience of life is a dogmatist. Most men do not get beyond that stage because they are busy with the small things of life. Real men, also from a Christian point of view, are those who become as little children. 'Whosoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein' (Luke 18:17). That was Christ's idea. Paul's is in keeping with it when he says that the teachers are given by God unto us '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 fullness of Christ' that we get the free command of our individual gifts, which is in love (Eph. 4:11-16). ...

²⁴² Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 2-3.

Whatever does not thus spring into life, even tho its form be captivating, its means sumptuous and splendid, and its success rich in financial reward and in the clamorous applause of the many – and whether you find it with those that walk in high places or those that grovel – it is not art but artificiality and has no business to claim the attention of people.²⁴³

Simply put, the art of being a child of God is a gift from above, undeserved, unforced and unsought. And so it is that the children of God are born in a miraculous, Spirit-wrought way, “not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:13). Through this new birth they enter upon an eternal relationship with a heavenly Father that yields the lovely flower of faith and graciously prompts a Christian to have “the unsophisticated nature of a child.”²⁴⁴

“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

-- Matthew 11:25,26

²⁴³ Koehler, “The Art of Making Books,” 15.

²⁴⁴ John Ph. Koehler, “Sanctification Is Not Hurrah” *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. II* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 402.