
Lutheran Synod Quarterly



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Foreword

In this issue of the *Quarterly* we are pleased to share with our readers the 2003 annual Reformation Lectures, delivered on October 30-31, 2002, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures were sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the thirty-sixth in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967. The format of the Reformation Lectures has always been that of a free conference and thus participation in these lectures is outside the framework of fellowship.

This year there were three presenters. The first lecture was given by the Rev. Rolf Preus of East Grand Forks, Minnesota. The Rev. Rolf David Preus attended the University of Missouri in Columbia, Concordia Lutheran Junior College in Ann Arbor, MI, and graduated from Concordia College in St. Paul, MN, in 1975. He attended Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, IL, and Ft. Wayne, IN, (M. Div. in 1979 and STM in 1987). His STM thesis was entitled, "An Evaluation of Lutheran/Roman Catholic Conversations on Justification."

Pastor Preus was ordained and installed at Clear Lake, MN, on July 1, 1979. He has also served in East Grand Forks, MN, and Racine, WI. He presently serves as pastor of River Heights Lutheran Church in East Grand Forks, MN.

Pastor Preus has taught courses in theology for Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Concordia University–Wisconsin, and St. Sophia Lutheran Theological Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine. He has also been a frequent speaker at free conferences on a variety of theological topics. His booklet, "Justification: Am I Good Enough for God?" is available from Northwestern Publishing House. Pastor Rolf Preus is married to Dorothy Jean nee Felts. They have 12 children.

The second presenter was President Emeritus Rev. George M. Orvick, who was born at Hanlontown, IA. He graduated from Bethany Lutheran College (1948), Northwestern College, Watertown, WI (1950), and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (1953). He did post graduate work at the University of Wisconsin 1956-59. He was ordained in June 1953 and served as pastor in New Hope, WI; Manitowoc, WI; and Madison, WI, where he served from 1954 to

1986. He was a member of the Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary 1957-1969.

He served as President of the ELS 1970-1976 and 1980-2002. The office became full time in 1986, at which time he moved to Mankato, MN. He retired from the presidency on August 1, 2002, and was then appointed director of the Department of Archives and History. President Orvick and his wife, Ruth, live in Mankato, MN.

The third presenter was the Rev. Prof. Erling T. Teigen who is a graduate of Bethany Lutheran College 1960 (AA), the University of Minnesota 1962 (BA – English), Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1966, and the University of Minnesota, 1978 (MA – Philosophy). He has served parishes in East Grand Forks, MN; Mayville, ND; Crookston, MN; and Apple Valley, MN. He has taught at Bethany since 1977 in the areas of Religious Studies, Philosophy, Ethics, and Composition at the college, and Modern Theology and American Church History at the seminary. He served as college chaplain from 1977 to 1989 and has served on various committees, chairing the Religious Studies division for many years, as well as the Curriculum Committee and the Reformation Lectures Committee (since 1978). He has also served on the Doctrine Committee of the ELS.

He has been guest lecturer at the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN; the Pieper Lectures at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis; as well as numerous free conferences. He has also lectured at the University of Latvia; the Augsburg Institute, Riga, Latvia; in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. He has served as editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel*, the *Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter*, and of *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology*. In addition to numerous quarterly and journal articles, he has contributed to several fest-schriften, including *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker 1884–1959*, and translated Sigurd Ylvisaker's *Letters from Leipzig*, published in 2000. At present he is preparing a history of Bethany Lutheran College, 1911 to the present. He is married to Linda nee Sheriff.

The topic of the lectures was “The Legacy of the Norwegian Synod.” The first lecture presented by Rev. Rolf Preus was entitled “The Legacy of the Rev. H.A. Preus.” In this presentation the essayist

summarized the life and work of Herman Amberg Preus. The second lecture, "The Legacy of U.V. Koren," was given by Rev. George Orvick. In this lecture the essayist presented the life and work of Rev. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren in connection with the history of the Norwegian Synod. The third lecturer, Prof. Erling Teigen, presented "The Legacy of the Rev. J.A. Ottesen." In this lecture the essayist presented a summary of the life and theology of Jakob Aall Ottesen.

This year we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Norwegian Synod. Our Reformation Lectures were centered on the lives of these three important leaders of the "old" Synod: Rev. H.A. Preus, Rev. J.A. Ottesen, and Rev. U.V. Koren. They upheld the central doctrine of the Reformation, justification by faith alone, and they emphasized the importance of the inerrant Scriptures and the life-giving Sacraments. They continued to maintain the Reformation heritage in their new homeland and have passed it on to our generation.

This Quarterly contains an exegetical study of 1 Peter 2:1-10 by Prof. Michael K. Smith presented at the 2002 ELS General Pastoral Conference. This portion of Scripture speaks of the universal priesthood of all believers. All Christians are spiritual priests who offer themselves as a living sacrifice, a high doxology unto the blessed Trinity.

A new translation of the Book of Concord has been produced. The editors of this translation are Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert. This translation is reviewed by Prof. Erling Teigen.

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Lecture One:

The Legacy of Herman Amberg Preus

by Rev. Rolf David Preus

Herman Amberg Preus was my great-great-grandfather. His great-great-grandfather was from Eisfeldt, on the Werra River in Sachsen-Meiningen, Germany. Hans Preus had three sons, all of whom moved to Norway. His first son was named Abraham. Abraham begat Jacob. Jacob begat Paul. Paul begat Herman. Herman moved to America and begat Christian. Christian begat Jacob. Jacob begat Robert. Robert begat me, and, by God's fatherly providence the begetting of Preuses has continued. But I am not sure that this is the legacy envisioned by those who asked me to speak to you today on the topic: "The Legacy of Herman Amberg Preus." The true legacy of Herman Amberg Preus is that of a faithful Lutheran pastor.

Part One: The Preuses in Norway

Still, a bit of family history is in order.¹ Herman's great-grandfather Abraham (1691-1765) was born in Germany and settled in Kristiania (today called Oslo) where he served as Royal Commissioner of Weights and Measures. Abraham married Mette Christine Louise Liwyn. Their second son was named Jacob (1733-1805). Jacob, Herman's grandfather, served as a pastor in Haabel, east of the Oslo Fjord, not far from Denmark. When Jacob was 43 years old, he met a seventeen-year-old girl by the name of Anne Elizabeth Arctander. She was quite a young lady. Three days after Jacob met her, he proposed and three weeks later they were married. Anne wrote poetry and hymns, established a weaving industry in the parish, had ten children, and on one occasion saved her pastor husband from being dismissed from his office. Her husband Jacob had married a couple whose papers appeared to indicate that they had parental approval for the wedding. But they did not. They were eloping without their parents' permission. The bride's father was furious and he was an influential man. He went to the authorities in Kristiania and had Pastor Preus suspended from office. Anne Elizabeth was not going to

take this lying down. She hired two men to row her across the Kattegat Straits to Denmark. This was before Norway had its own king. She went to Copenhagen where she secured the efforts of the Prime Minister to persuade the King to have her husband reinstated. What a wife!

Jacob Preus and his wife Anne became the parents of Paul Arctander Preus on July 27, 1779. Paul attended the Cathedral School in Kristiania. After graduating from the University of Copenhagen, he accepted the position of headmaster at the Cathedral School in Kristiansand, in the southernmost part of Norway. Paul, like his father before him, married well. His wife was also named Anne – Anne Keyser – whose father was Johan Keyser, the Bishop of Kristiansand. Anne was the only child of Johan's first wife, who died at the age of twenty-nine. It was to Paul and Anne Preus that Herman Amberg Preus was born on June 16, 1825 in Kristiansand. He was their fourth son and their sixth child.

Herman attended the Cathedral School in Kristiansand. He was firmly indoctrinated in the historic Lutheran teaching. From his earliest years he learned theology from men strongly opposed to the prevailing rationalism of the day. While one might argue that in the Norway of the nineteenth century even strong confessionalists were not entirely free from the influence of pietism,² Herman gave evidence throughout his life of a clearly confessional Lutheran approach to theology. After coming to America, Herman would become a great admirer of C. F. W. Walther as an outstanding Lutheran theologian. Herman, however, was spared much of the youthful turmoil that marked Walther's theological development. Walther alternately gave his devotion first to pietism and then to a radically anti-establishment confessional movement known as Stephanism. We see in Walther's early years a tumultuous struggle in the soul from which the great confessional Lutheran theologian would be born after coming to America. There is no such struggle evident in Herman Amberg Preus. From his early theological training as a boy in Kristiansand to his education at Royal Frederik's University in Kristiania, Herman was indoctrinated in the classical Lutheran orthodoxy to which he would be committed his entire life. At the University he became acquainted with the Jewish convert and great German confessional

theologian, Carl Paul Caspari, and took classes as well from Gisle Johnson. Herman graduated from the University in 1848 and became a schoolteacher as he waited for the opportunity to serve as a pastor in America.

As I mentioned earlier, Herman's mother, Anne, lost her mother at an early age. Her father remarried and had seven children. One of these children was Christian Keyser, who became one of Herman's teachers at the University. Christian was thus a half-brother to Herman's mother, making Christian's children half-cousins to Herman Amberg Preus. There were seven of these half-cousins, one boy followed by six girls. The oldest girl was Caroline, but everyone called her Linka. Linka was born in Kristiansand on July 2, 1829. She lost her mother when she was ten years old. Her father died when she was seventeen. She was very close to her extended family of aunts and uncles as evidenced by her many references to them in her diary.³ Linka had known her half-cousin Herman since she was a child. On February 26, 1849, when she was nineteen and Herman was twenty-three, they became engaged to be married. They were married on May 5, 1851. Pastor Magnus Landstad, a family friend, officiated. Landstad authored several hymns, including: "When Sinners See Their Lost Condition" and "There Many Shall Come From the East and the West." In describing her wedding, Linka said, "Pastor Landstad spoke briefly and appropriately."⁴

During their two-year engagement Herman and Linka were preoccupied with one particular topic: America. The question was both whether and when they would go there. Herman wanted to serve as a pastor in America. He had heard of the settlements of Norwegians on the American frontier of Wisconsin. His countryman, the Rev. J. W. C. Dietrichson, had been ordained in the Church of Norway in 1844 after which he went to America to serve the Norwegian immigrants in southern Wisconsin. Herman corresponded with Pastor Dietrichson about serving as a pastor in Wisconsin. Dietrichson had assured him that congregations were in need of pastors and that Herman would be receiving a call. But matters were not quite so simple.

Dietrichson was a disciple of the maverick Danish theologian and hymnist, Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig. In addition to authoring such powerful hymns as "Built on the Rock the Church

Doth Stand” and “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage,” Grundtvig also came up with an interesting doctrine that became known in the old Norwegian Synod simply as the “Grundtvigian error.” He taught that the Apostles’ Creed, which is the baptismal creed, was the living word of Jesus in contrast to the Holy Scriptures that were a dead word. Grundtvig was a strong opponent of rationalism as well as a proponent of congregational autonomy over against the authority of the state church. He was in many respects a confessional Lutheran and he gained a following from among confessional Lutheran pastors in Norway, Dietrichson being one of them. Dietrichson had brought the Grundtvigian error with him to America and had established it there. When visiting with Herman Amberg Preus in Norway during September of 1850, this particular theological topic took center stage in their discussions. Herman asked Dietrichson about a call to America. Apparently, Dietrichson wanted Herman to endorse the Grundtvigian opinion about the “living word” as a condition to receiving a call to America. When Herman objected and argued against this error, Dietrichson became furious with him and informed him that he could not give him a definite answer about a call to America until November of that year.⁵ So Herman was left hanging, uncertain of where he stood. He describes the turmoil he was experiencing in these words:

The dream of my youth was: By the side of a beloved wife, to pass the “Green Years” in the midst of a faithful congregation, proclaiming to them the Good Tidings of the Lord. That thought had become so much a part of me that there seems to arise a void in my soul at the idea of giving it up. And now, perchance, my hope is to wither and be moved out into the dark future. For I am still terribly uncertain that I can defend before God and my conscience the acceptance of the call to America on the condition laid down, a condition to which I have not up to this time felt able to assent. Nevertheless, it seems strange to me, indeed incredible, that men who are enlightened and whose entire activity bears witness that they are saturated with the spirit of truth – men with whom I am in church fellowship, in fact in the same Department – could lay down such a condition with reference to the administration of the Ministerial Office, that I, on account of it, cannot accept the call, since I believe I am thereby acting contrary to my Christian faith. – God enlighten me and cause me to know His will!⁶

At the age of twenty-five, Herman saw himself throwing away the future that had occupied his thoughts and affections for years. But he could not help himself. His problem was his doctrinal inflexibility. Nothing marks his life more than his refusal to compromise on doctrine. The reason he could not tolerate the Grundtvigian opinion was that it contradicted the principle of Scripture alone. The fact that this error was held by men whom Herman admired could not alter what was for him a matter of principle. A Lutheran pastor could not compromise on doctrine, regardless of what the consequences might be.

As it turned out, the consequences for Herman were not so dire, after all. Just a few months later, on January 1, 1851, he received the call to be the pastor of the congregation in Spring Prairie, Wisconsin, a congregation that he served until his death some forty-four years later. This is what Herman wrote the day after receiving the call:

On New Year's Day, I received a letter – my heart beat fast. It was a letter of call to me to become pastor at Spring Prairie, Wisconsin. While reading the letter, my arm was about her whose love would ease life's sorrow and sweeten its joys and who did not shrink from sharing all with me. In that hour our hearts beat strongly, and our eyes expressed what the lips could not utter.

This was indeed the most serious and solemn hour in all my experience. I had become a minister; I had a congregation! What significance, what responsibility, in those words! A congregation of souls was turning to me in matters pertaining to their salvation; their spiritual welfare rested on my heart. The Lord shall require their souls at my hand. I shall address them in God's own Word of reproof and of blessing. The Lord says, "lovest thou Me? Then feed My sheep."

O Father in heaven, give me strength and Thy blessing that I may truthfully say, "yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee"; that in due time, in the midst of right many of my flock, we may gather with the great flock of the supreme Shepherd, saying, "Here, Lord, are those whom Thou gavest me!"

These words may sound to our ears just a bit flowery and the piety a bit more explicitly expressed than we are used to hearing. I

suggest to you that these heart-felt sentiments of that young man were much more than a passing emotional reaction to receiving the call that he had so eagerly desired. These sentiments define the legacy of Herman Amberg Preus. If we are to understand H. A. Preus' legacy, we can do no better than to begin right here. He wanted to be a pastor. This lifelong desire permeates his approach to theology. The theological task and the pastoral task were for him one and the same thing. He received an excellent theological education. He was immersed in the Lutheran Confessions and the writings of the Lutheran fathers. He admired and relied on the efforts of confessional Lutherans of great scholarly achievement. But Herman Amberg Preus did not conceive of theology primarily as an academic discipline. He was a down to earth theologian who had no time or patience for the kinds of theological abstractions and nuances that so frequently occupy the minds of men who are not actually engaged in the feeding of the flock. Every theological issue was for him an issue of pastoral care. Herman wanted to be a faithful pastor. And he was quite intolerant of those who would stand in his way.

As we can see from the words he recorded on the day after receiving his call, Herman believed that the call from the congregation was the essential element in the placing of a man into the pastoral office. He writes, "I had become a minister; I had a congregation!" As a matter of fact, he would not actually become their pastor for another seven months. He was not even ordained yet and he talked as if he was their pastor. This should not be construed to suggest that Herman did not believe he had to be ordained. While he believed that the office belonged to the church and not to a clerical hierarchy, he could not have imagined going to America to serve as a pastor without first being ordained. In fact, after arriving in America, one of the first issues young Herman would have to face was that of laymen who were not called and ordained preaching publicly in the church.⁸

Not everyone shared Herman's eagerness to serve, however. In February of 1851 he asked Bishop Arup of Kristiania if he would ordain him. The bishop refused. Listen to Herman describe why:

Today I was out to see Bishop Arup, to request ordination to the Holy Ministry. I have always regarded him as a serious, zealous Christian, burning for God's cause, but it is difficult for me to be of that opinion any longer. For he told me that he neither

could nor would grant my petition. And what were his reasons? He said he would not ordain me unless there were ordained simultaneously another minister who should be engaged here at home, since he, as Bishop of Christiania Diocese, might be called on to officiate at too many ordinations, if he should permit himself to ordain me, who, he said, was none of his concern. As though he were completely indifferent to one who wishes to dedicate his life to the service of the same God whose servant he himself must admit that he is. I am almost led to believe that it is because he does not want to give a dinner – or else he does not wish to be put to the inconvenience connected with such an occasion. Whether it is one of these reasons, or that he has not grasped the significance of the justifiability of missions in the Church – he has at least compromised himself in my eyes and discredited not only himself but also the clergy, whose head he is, if indeed we can suppose there is anybody who approves his conduct... However, I am sure the Lord will give me His blessing even if Arup will not.⁹

He discussed with Linka the possibility of going to Kristiansand to be ordained by Bishop Jacob von der Lippe. Apparently, Bishop Arup had a change of mind and Herman modified his severe judgment of him a couple of months later when Arup finally ordained him. Herman wrote that Bishop Arup was a man who would surely want to do what is right if only he could see it clearly. Still, Herman added, “But he has a not too clear theological insight and probably suffers from a little indolence where something beyond his duty is required.”¹⁰

Indolence is one vice of which nobody ever accused Herman Amberg Preus. He was an indefatigable workhorse. He despised laziness, apathy, and disinterest in connection with the preaching of the gospel and the caring for souls. If he was intolerant of others in this respect, he drove himself even harder. While not always receiving praise for such things as diplomacy, eloquence, or delicacy of expression, Herman Amberg Preus was admired by friend and foe alike for his constancy in the face of duty.

Part Two: The Theology of Pastor Herman Amberg Preus

Herman and Linka crossed the Atlantic together just three weeks after they were married in May of 1851. Herman was installed as the pastor of Spring Prairie Lutheran Church in August of that year. He preached his first sermon on August 10. It was the Eighth Sunday after Trinity. The Gospel Lesson for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity is Matthew 7:15-23. Herman preached on verse 15, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” Listen to the opening words of this sermon. While Herman preached this sermon at the age of twenty-six, it typifies the theology and pastoral approach of his entire life.

Christian friends!

Two thousand years have soon passed since a Man whose name was Wonderful and the Prince of Peace, from whose lips flowed words like milk and honey and who spoke the words we have heard read, stepped forward at the River Jordan. What was it really which drew people to him every time he came into their region? What was it which made crowds flock around him from far and near and in silent anticipation listen to the blessed words which came from his mouth, to the kind voice which spoke to them? What was it which made many of them who had come to him never want to leave him but rather to forsake everything they had and to follow him and to cling to him with all their soul throughout their lives?

We know what, friends! It was a constant, deep, earnest need, a strong and inner yearning which did not allow them any peace but which urged them on. It was because they believed they would find in him, and many times they did find it, what their hearts had desired in hours of pain, that which they knew made up for all their shortcomings and which had healing in itself for the sicknesses, the evil which gnawed at their innermost heart. It was because they had to acknowledge that he did not speak as the scribes but as one who had authority and because the words which he spoke were like heavenly manna for their hungry souls, and poured soothing balm into their wounds and brought a peace hitherto unknown to them, and salvation to their troubled, fearful hearts. Yes, my friends, because they felt that the serpent of sin was devouring life at its root and that the angel of

death had laid his hand upon them, that's why they fled to him in the pain of despair as the Rock of their salvation and their source of blessedness! That's why they listened to those words of life which wonderfully refreshed them and which, when they accepted them in faith, let them feel the powers of life surge through them, chase the angel of death away and bring life into everything which before was dead. Then they recognized that the Lord was a gracious God who does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they should live, and that for their sakes he revealed himself as a man, since he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to the world.¹¹

Insofar as it is a feature of pietism to focus in on the personal spiritual needs of the individual Christian, we can see such an influence on Herman Amberg Preus. But his theology is not centered in feelings, even if he makes liberal reference to the feelings of his hearers. It is centered in Christ. The overarching pastoral concern to which Preus gave evidence throughout his life was that his hearers should know Christ, trust in His righteousness, be set free from Satan's bondage, and be saved eternally. Herman Amberg Preus was first and last a pastor. For this reason we must understand his theology within the context of the pastoral task because that is how Preus viewed theology. This did not make him an adherent of what passes today as pastoral theology with its fixation on successful methods for doing this, that, and the other thing. Rather, the theologian who subsumes all theology under the single objective of caring for souls is a man who understands the radical nature of confessional Lutheran theology. If Herman Amberg Preus is the epitome of a confessional Lutheran pastor, this is what we can say a confessional Lutheran pastor is. He is dogmatically inflexible. He submits to the clear word of God and urges others to do so. He believes in the supremacy of doctrine over life because he knows that the righteousness of Christ, in which the pure doctrine is centered, is reckoned by God to sinners who have no righteousness of their own and by this gracious reckoning, which faith receives, sinners are justified and saved. This is why the confessional Lutheran pastor preaches the gospel without attaching any conditions to it and insists that his brother pastors do so as well. The confessional Lutheran pastor believes in the inherent efficacy of the means of grace. He defends the freedom of the Christian and the Christian congregation. He is conservative, giving more credence to

the fathers than to the theological fads of his own day. He is stubborn. He will neither yield nor be silent on any article of Christian doctrine regardless of the price he will be required to pay for his stubbornness. All of these features of the confessional Lutheran pastor are seen in the life and preaching of Herman Amberg Preus and are all interwoven in the same fabric of the pastoral care for souls that marked Herman's entire adult life.

To attempt a chronological recounting of Herman's life in America would entail telling the history of the Norwegian Synod inasmuch as he served as president of the Norwegian Synod for over thirty of the first forty years of its existence. I would not presume to make such an attempt especially in the presence of our other speakers, President Orvick and Professor Teigen, both of whom have probably forgotten more about the Norwegian Synod than I will ever know. Instead, I would like to set before you the teaching of H. A. Preus in the following interrelated areas: the importance of the pure doctrine; the authority of the Scriptures and confessional subscription; the meaning of the gospel; church and ministry; unionism and syncretism; and slavery.

The Importance of the Pure Doctrine

The French have a saying, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." The more things change, the more they stay the same. In his presidential address to the Norwegian Synod in 1884, President Herman Amberg Preus speaks directly to our generation:

Many people are confused in their simple Christian faith and ask in doubt: "Yes, what is the truth?" Base elements, which must be found in congregations, step forward who quickly gain support and attempt to make themselves influential. Respect for the ordinances of the church and for Christian morality is dulled. Doctrinal discipline and the little church discipline which is to be found, are relaxed. Agitation and church politics are promoted. Majorities decide matters instead of the Word of God. Thus we stand in danger of a general demoralization. Suspicion, disunity and conflict arise between members of the same congregation, yes, of the same family. Factions are formed which lie in wait for each other and try to get the best of everyone. Splits in congregations and deposing of pastors have even occurred because of the controversy.¹²

Sound familiar? Pastor Preus spoke from personal experience. He and his son Christian served as pastors of Norway Grove Lutheran Church in Dane County, Wisconsin. Herman had served the congregation for thirty years. Agitators from the so-called Anti-Missourian Brotherhood stirred up certain members of the congregation to demand that their pastors repudiate the confessional Lutheran doctrine on election. They refused. On Good Friday 1883, Pastors Herman and Christian Preus were not only deposed by a majority of the congregation, they were also bodily removed. The congregation later repented of their sin.

One does not fight for doctrine for the sake of fighting. For H. A. Preus, defending the pure doctrine was a matter of defending life itself. Pure doctrine could not be understood apart from Christ the Savior. It was always for the sake of faith in Christ and the eternal life that this faith receives that Preus argued so vigorously for defending the pure doctrine. As Preus put it in an address to the Synod in 1864:

But friends! How should we better be able to render each other such help than to build up each other in the doctrine of the one saving faith through mutual consultation and mutual instruction from the Word of God? For where is the Lord, so that we can turn our eyes to him? The apostle John says: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." (Jo. 1:18.) But it is in the Word in which he has wrapped himself. The Gospel is his clothing in which he who is the express image of the Father reveals himself to us full of grace and truth, one God, for the salvation of many. Yes, the more we gaze at him there and learn to know his essence, attributes and works, yes, the more we thereby are strengthened in the true faith and pure doctrine, the more should we also learn to turn our eyes to him and look to his hand alone.¹³

The pure doctrine of the gospel was the clothing in which Christ was dressed. Only in knowing Christ in this clothing could a sinner find his Savior. There could not possibly be any true Christian living apart from faith in the Christ revealed in this pure gospel. Responding to the false antithesis so often advanced between concern for pure doctrine and pure living, Preus went on to say:

The Lord himself says also, "My words are spirit and life" (Jo.

6:63) and again, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,” (Ja. 1:18) and John says, “This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (17:3). In these passages the Lord teaches us to get the relationship between his Word and life clear, namely that his Word is life and gives life and that the proper acknowledgement of the Lord and God revealed in the Word, exactly that, is true life.

Or, where really does life with all that is good, holy feelings and emotions, with its self-denial and sacrifice, its humility and patience, its love to God and men, where does it really come from except from the faith which appropriates to oneself the love of God to us and believes that God is both so incomprehensibly great that he has in Christ offered himself for us, and for the sake of Christ forgives us all our sins? Thus the apostle says also, “We love him, because he first loved us.” (1 Jo. 4:19.) But this faith which is the fountain of life in us from which streams of living water spring, is, of course, worked by the Spirit of God just through the Word as Paul teaches in Romans 10, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Verse 17.) How earnestly do not also the Lord and the apostles admonish us to take heed to the Word and to continue in the pure doctrine. Yes, in John’s Gospel the Lord sets this as a mark of those who are his true disciples! And Paul says in Galatians 1:8: “Cursed is he who preaches another gospel than that which we have preached to you.” How do the Lord and the apostles not warn throughout the entire Scriptures against false prophets and the leaven of false doctrine?¹⁴

Preus saw clearly that the holy living advanced by the denigration of the pure doctrine was a sham. He had a profoundly Lutheran understanding of sin and its effects. He despised all forms of moralism. The very idea that there lay anything within man from which he could contribute anything at all to his conversion, preservation in the faith, or final salvation was abhorrent to Herman. His piety grew out of a deeply ingrained consciousness of his own personal sin and unworthiness. In a sermon he delivered at the ordination of two men in July of 1865, Herman said:

... we must take heed to ourselves so that we do not look the other way and excuse our own errors and sins, but that we denounce them sharply and condemn them in ourselves so that we

should not be condemned with the world. Surely the more we acknowledge our own sins and our own soul's need the more we shall be able to understand the imperfections and hurt of others and have compassion upon everyone. And the more sharply we judge ourselves, shall we not be able to chastise others with greater candor, but at the same time shall we not be able to show greater gentleness and patience toward the weak?¹⁵

Contending for the pure doctrine was not therefore an intellectual battle in which one theologian sets out to score points against another. Nor was it a church-political debate for sectarian purposes. It was literally a battle against the lies of Satan who designs the destruction of every Christian by tearing him away from Christ. It was not a battle of the flesh for fleshly goals. It was rather from within the context of the Christian's personal struggle against his own sin and doubts that this battle found its shape. Far from evidencing pride and a cock-sure know-it-all attitude of smug self-righteousness, Herman's doctrinal inflexibility was inseparable from his own personal faith, a faith born in contrition.

Linka gave expression to the deeply penitential nature of this faith in an entry in her diary on October 5, 1852. She had had a bad day. She wasn't happy in America. She was eight months pregnant with her first child, she was homesick, tired, and generally feeling sorry for herself. She was afraid of dying and she was afraid of the Judgment. Her words open for us a little window into the heart of this pious Christian lady whose faith would be fed by the word of God her husband would preach to her for the rest of her life. Listen to how Linka describes her spiritual struggles:

Again, Selfishness and Pride direct my step; and can these do that which is well pleasing to God? No; and again no! What then remains for me? Nothing, except the knowledge that I am a sinful creature who constantly deserves to be punished by God, instead of being an object of His love. Would that in a truly contrite heart I might feel this! I do say: "Thou are truly a miserable, perverse creature, Linka!" But do I sincerely feel the abomination of being as I am? I am afraid I do not; if I did, it would seem that humility would have taken root within me; bitter tears of repentance would then freely flow down my cheeks; and within me would be the same spirit that dwelt in the publican, who, when he recognized his unworthiness, did not dare lift his

eyes toward heaven, but with eyes cast down cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” – God be merciful to me a sinner! This is my cry to Thee, my God, now and ever, but it does not seem to come from that contrite and broken heart which alone is well pleasing to Thee, O God my Father!

Thus it appears that I do nothing, nothing, which is good in Thy sight; which I ought to do, if I loved Thee; and still I say that I love Thee! Alas, there is no truth in me! Help me, Lord Jesus Christ, lest I be cast into the fiery pit! My hope and my comfort is that Thou who didst die upon the Cross, even for me, Thou wilt not forsake me, but be at my side when I shall stand before the throne of the Judge. For Thy sake shall my utterly countless sins be forgiven; in Thee, and in Thee alone, shall I be able to stand in the hour of reckoning. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Because of this I can without fear look death in the face.¹⁶

Linka’s piety shows some of the influences of pietism’s preoccupation with a pure penitential spirit. It also shows the simplicity of her faith in the truth of the gospel. Herman knew his wife and he understood her spiritual needs. They were not that she should spend her time attempting to prove to herself the sincerity of her contrition. That road could lead only to despair, and Herman knew it. What animated his forceful defense of the pure doctrine was his desire that those Christians under his pastoral care, such as his dear Linka, should have the assurance of salvation. That the gospel is true means that it can be relied upon in the face of death. It means that faith can appeal to God’s doctrine whenever doubts arise. Doctrinal uncertainty was incompatible with faith. Therefore, doctrinal inflexibility was required for the faithful pastor.

Why not compromise on doctrine? Souls are at stake. To acquiesce to the compromise of God’s doctrine at any point would be to set aside the proper care for souls. Even while pastors and congregations were defecting from the Norwegian Synod because of her doctrinal inflexibility, Preus argued against any compromise. In his presidential address to the 1869 convention of the Norwegian Synod he explained why the Synod could not yield in the slightest in the clear confession of the pure doctrine of God’s word. He said:

The Word is not ours which we can do with as might please us. It is the Word of the holy, righteous God which He has in grace and indescribable love committed to us pure and unadulterated which we therefore are also to proclaim *pure and unadulterated* without addition, without suppression, without obscuring, without distortion, and which we are to preserve unfalsified and unabridged as our most precious heritage to our descendants. Surely there is no communion between Christ and Belial, light and darkness, truth and lies. In order to show honor to the Lord and his Word and love to the brethren as well as the opponents, it behooves us, much rather, it is our Synod's unalterable duty to confess the truth of the Word of God with all the certainty, clarity and precision we have at our disposal, and above all, the truth that the Word of God is not an uncertain word of men which requires the explanation and interpretation of men, but the Word of the God of Truth, the truth unto salvation, clear, simple and intelligible to everyone who uses it correctly, be he lay or learned.¹⁷

Preus and the Norwegian Synod suffered from a great deal of vicious calumny on account of their doctrinal integrity. Professors August Weenaas and Sven Oftedal from Augsburg Seminary of the Norwegian-Danish Conference wrote scathing attacks on the Norwegian Synod for various alleged ecclesiastical sins. The Norwegian Synod was accused of an "anti-Christian tendency" called Wisconsinism, named after the State where the Norwegian Synod was centered. Wisconsinism was supposedly a blend of Grundtvigianism and Missouriianism. While Preus willingly embraced the Missouriianism of C. F. W. Walther – and paid dearly for so doing – he was instrumental in removing the Grundtvigian error from the constitution of the Norwegian Synod. What was really under attack was the Norwegian Synod's uncompromising confessionalism. The charge of Wisconsinism included the allegation that the Norwegian Synod was guilty of a papistic principle, theoretical and practical Catholicism, religious indifference, hierarchy, pastoral despotism, and a contempt for spiritual life in the congregation. For defending the inherent efficacy of the absolution, the Norwegian Synod was accused of seeking to establish "the papacy's chief cornerstone: the sacrament of the Ministry."¹⁸ For teaching objective justification, the Norwegian Synod was accused of teaching universal salvation for everyone, whether he believes or not. The Norwegian Synod was called "an organization which is a blotch on Christianity and a disgrace for

the Norwegian people.”¹⁹

Herman saw the violent attacks against the Norwegian Synod as God’s means of humbling them. He acknowledged that contending for God’s truth brings unpleasant consequences from which we naturally turn away. The desire to shrink from theological battle was based on an ignorance of God’s word. This ignorance was due to a lack of a love for God’s truth. So when the Norwegian Synod suffered persecution, Herman saw this as a discipline from God designed to purify His church. The correct response to persecution in the face of contending for God’s truth was a rededication to catechizing the laity in the pure word of God.²⁰

The Authority of the Scriptures and Confessional Subscription

Herman Amberg Preus was a traditionalist. He was a “fathers theologian.” His severe judgment against rationalism was directed not only against their denial of the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, but also against what he called their “haughty” and “flippant” attitude toward the Lutheran Confessions.²¹ He did not view the Bible in isolation from the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers. In a scathing attack on the spirit of religious unionism, Preus describes the “enlightened” person of his day who does not want to be a heathen (but doesn’t really want to be a Christian either) as opining:

No, one must hold fast to Christianity, but not the kind of Christianity which was set forth by the apostles in the barbaric ancient times and interpreted literally according to the dogmatic restrictions and prejudices of the 16th century. But the kind which the new Bible Criticism has created.²²

For Preus there was no dichotomy between the apostolic teaching and the Lutheran dogmatic tradition. The notion that the pastor should attempt to approach the Holy Scriptures with perfect exegetical neutrality, ignoring the guidance of the Lutheran Confessions in the theological task, could not have occurred to him. On the contrary, Preus joined together into one activity the reading of the Holy Scriptures and the study of the Lutheran Confessions. He said:

Therefore the apostle also says, "Give attendance to reading." (1 Ti. 4:13.) And he must do that above all through the reading of the Holy Scriptures, the Book of books, the fountain of revelation, and next, from the Confessions of the church, from the good writings of the fathers and others through which he can be led into the treasure chambers of the Holy Scriptures, become familiar with its precious treasures and learn to draw from them old things and new for every situation which he faces.²³

Preus was a conservative. He followed the same approach to making a theological defense of his teaching as that followed by C. F. W. Walther. First, he would set forth the clear Scriptures. Then he would appeal to the Lutheran Confessions. Then he would appeal to the Lutheran fathers.²⁴ The Scriptures were authoritative because they were the word of God. The Confessions were authoritative because they agreed with the Holy Scriptures. The fathers were authoritative as they correctly set forth the biblical teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. While he served as the president of the Norwegian Synod for over thirty years and wholeheartedly endorsed her doctrine at every point, he did not appeal to synodical authority in defending his doctrine.

Preus did appeal to the writings of C. F. W. Walther. He regarded Walther and the Missourians as being singularly faithful to the Scriptures and the Confessions in the American sea of heterodoxy. Already in 1864, as the War Between the States was raging, Preus publicly praised the faithfulness of the Missouri Synod. He said:

However, we must surely acknowledge with praise to God that there is, though, a German Lutheran synod, the Missouri Synod, which has not let itself be content with merely the Lutheran name but tirelessly has brought to life the testimony of the Lutheran fathers, undaunted, shown off the prayers of the Lutheran Church, the pure doctrine, zealously watched over its preservation within the synod's own bounds and fearlessly and openly as well as with scholarship defended it against opponents outside it.²⁵

Preus did not back away from his support of Missouri, but rather reiterated it throughout the rest of his life. In 1881, Preus summarized the contributions of Missouri under Walther's leadership by saying,

I especially want to call attention to some basic truths for whose preservation and carrying out, both in theory and in practice, Dr. Walther, together with the whole Missouri Synod, has lifted the banner and fought with unshaken faithfulness, namely, the freedom of a Christian man and a Christian congregation, the universality of divine grace and the total depravity of the natural man and his inability to cooperate in any way whatsoever in his conversion.²⁶

While Preus' early and persistent support of Missouri may have been the right thing to do theologically and confessionally, from a church-political point of view it was a colossal mistake on his part. He and the Norwegian Synod were hounded by charges of being lackeys of the man widely viewed among Norwegian Lutherans in America as the American Lutheran pope. The enmity against Walther on the part of many Norwegian-American Lutherans was quite intense. Walther personified the Missouri Synod, a synod headquartered in a slave state and that defended slavery. The Missouri Synod, under Walther's theological leadership, took a strong stand against all forms of synergism and in support of the confessional Lutheran doctrine of election. That particular controversy, as it erupted in the Norwegian Synod in the 1880s, could never be viewed apart from the Norwegian Synod's close ties to Missouri and C. F. W. Walther.

Weenaas and other critics of the Norwegian Synod saw the Synod's support of Walther as a vulnerability to be exploited, and they did so with relish. It looms as a subtext of every criticism leveled against the Norwegian Synod, as if to say that they could not think for themselves. In response to the charge from Weenaas that the Norwegian Synod's support of Walther's theology made them guilty of "clinging to personalities," Preus wrote:

When we acknowledge and accept with thanks to God the gifts God has given his church in such a man as Professor Walther, then we do not rob but only give God the glory he has coming and in no way does this entitle Professor Weenaas to accuse us of "clinging to personalities" which is said to be characteristic of the mind and spirit he ascribes to us and the Missouri Synod. I dare say that a church body is not to be found in our days which carries on such a life and death struggle against all faith in and idolizing of authority as the Missouri Synod with Professor Walther in the lead.²⁷

Preus' support of the Missouri Synod and Walther should not be mistaken for a loyalty to a particular Lutheran tradition. It was precisely Walther's confessionalism that Preus admired. He found in Walther a confessional Lutheran brother and in the Missouri Synod the same confessional Lutheran spirit that had been inculcated in him as a boy growing up in Kristiansand. When Preus and the Norwegian Synod defended the called and ordained ministry of the word in opposition to lay preachers who presumed to preach without need and without a churchly call, they did not do so in service to what Weenaas called a "rational orthodoxy" or "the system of the scholastics."²⁸ They were confessional Lutherans. Confessional Lutherans accept the clear teaching of Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession.²⁹

That the Lutheran Confessions should serve a real normative purpose for the Lutheran pastor was for Herman Preus a pastoral necessity. He criticized the rationalists who "laid the Confessions on the shelf as an ancient curiosity [and] mastered the Word of God according to the will-of-the-wisp of their reason."³⁰ These men could not care for the souls of people who were "given to a sickly enthusiasm and emotion, or a subtle works-righteousness" because the pastors were ignorant. "The Confessions of the Lutheran Church were an unknown book to them as were all the writings of the fathers."³¹ For Preus, the Book of Concord was a textbook in pastoral care. He read it faithfully.³²

The Meaning of the Gospel

What is the gospel? Is it information about what God has done for us in Christ to which must be added the correct response of faith? Is the gospel a promise of what God will do if we believe in Christ? Or is the gospel the actual imparting of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus has won for us all? For Preus, the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ was meaningless unless God has, for Christ's sake, forgiven the entire world of sinners. This is objective or universal justification. Preus defined the doctrine of objective or universal justification in these words:

By this we understand that by raising Christ from the dead God declares him righteous and at the same time acknowledges and declares all people, the whole world, whose Representative and

Substitute Jesus Christ was in his resurrection and victory as well as in his suffering and tribulation (“He was delivered for our offenses and raised for our justification”), as free from guilt and punishment, and righteous in Christ Jesus.³³

This doctrine was and is an offense to many. Those who promote it have been falsely accused of denying the necessity of faith. Preus, along with the rest of the Norwegian Synod, always taught the necessity of faith to receive and be comforted by the forgiveness of sins. He taught justification by faith alone. This did not prevent critics from claiming that the doctrine of objective justification “separates justification in Christ from faith.”³⁴ Preus argued that if objective justification is not true, faith cannot be the means by which the sinner merely receives God’s forgiveness, but it must become meritorious. The denial of objective justification turns faith into a work. God will not justify the sinner solely on the basis of Christ’s redemption, but will justify the sinner only when the sinner meets the condition of having faith. Thus, the redemption of Christ does not actually cause God to forgive anyone, but merely makes God willing to forgive if sinners perform the necessary work of believing. Faith becomes a work.³⁵ The merit of Christ is denigrated. His satisfaction is insufficient.

Preus points out the irony of insisting that God does not forgive anyone prior to faith. He writes:

Since faith is worked only by God through his proclaiming to people that he forgives them and is no longer angry, then according to Professor Weenaas’ claim, this message must not be spoken to people before they have come to faith, then a person can never come to faith through Professor Weenaas’ gospel. Because then there is no Gospel of God through which it can be worked.³⁶

In other words, if God has not forgiven all sins of all sinners for Christ’s sake, it is not possible to preach the gospel.

What is especially noteworthy here is that for Herman Amberg Preus the debate about objective justification could not be disjoined from the pastoral care for souls burdened by sins and in need of a pure gospel. It is as the physician of souls that Herman’s mind conceived of the issue and its implications. Any gospel that is dependent for its

truth or validity upon the correct human response is no gospel at all. The gospel must have the power to confront and overcome the abiding and unfathomable unbelief that clings so stubbornly to the flesh. Preus advocated private confession and absolution³⁷ and regularly confessed his own sins to a “father confessor” (young enough to be his son!)³⁸ because he knew his own carnal weakness and he wanted his faith to rely solely on the word of God. At no other point in Herman’s controversy-ridden ministry was the essence of the Christian doctrine more clearly revealed than in the absolution controversy with pastors of the Augustana Synod.³⁹

The absolution controversy encompassed several topics at the same time. It was a debate about the nature of the pastoral office as well as the meaning of the rite of absolution. The fundamental issue, however, was the content and the essence of the gospel itself.⁴⁰ The debate about objective justification was a debate about what the gospel was. The debate about absolution was a debate about how the gospel is given. Is the gospel a real and unchanging declaration from God? Is it true and inherently efficacious on account of what it is? Is the absolution of the pastor the very absolution of sins from God Himself? Or are the truthfulness and efficacy of the gospel contingent upon something in the sinner to whom the gospel is addressed? In defense of the Norwegian Synod’s objective gospel, which was true whether anyone believed it or not, Preus appealed to the words of Jesus about casting pearls before swine. He wrote:

But at the same time we hold firmly to it as the teaching of the Word of God, that God’s forgiveness also occurs without faith being present, in other words, that the absolution spoken in the name of God to a hypocrite (who surely does not have faith), is however God’s absolution. When the Savior warningly says: “Do not give that which is holy to dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, so that they should not trample them with their feet,” then he presupposes as a given, that it can happen that the pearls and sacred things can be cast before swine and dogs. If that could not possibly happen, as Professor Weenaas thinks, then the Lord would not have given such a warning. For what else are the pearls and the holy things than the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins, and who else are swine and dogs than the unbelieving and the ungodly? But now if the pearls, i.e. God’s act of forgiving sin were thus bound to faith, as Professor Weenaas claims, then surely the pearls cannot be cast before swine and then neither

is any such warning needed, because even if the forgiveness were then promised to an unbeliever, therefore it surely was not God's act of forgiving sin, thus there surely were no pearls; not pearls, but only a husk were then cast before swine. The apostle Paul teaches otherwise when he says in Romans 3:3 that man's unbelief cannot make God's trustworthiness of no effect.⁴¹

The denial of objective justification makes it impossible to preach the gospel. The preacher may not tell anyone that his sins are forgiven. No pearls can be given to anyone at all. How can the pastor ask the penitent, "Do you believe my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?" if the pastor cannot give forgiveness except to the believer? The pastor cannot see faith. A pastor who does not know he has forgiveness to give, regardless of the spiritual condition of the one to whom he is speaking, can give only stones, not bread. Pastor Preus asks:

How shall the troubled person, who surely is hovering in doubt precisely about his faith and his sincerity, find comfort in the absolution and strength in his misery through such teaching? He must surely despair completely.⁴²

The gospel must be preached. And when it is preached, it cannot be conditioned by any legal restrictions or it is no gospel at all. Salvation is at stake. God saves sinners by means of the gospel that is preached to them. This is how Preus told preachers they should preach:

But you are also to proclaim the Gospel in its truth and purity, free and unconditioned, sweet and pleasant as God has given it to us. Woe to the blind guides who out of ignorance or from pride, since they rely upon their own works, set up all kinds of conditions and restrictions around the Gospel of God and build a fence around Golgotha just as there was around Sinai. They forbid other people access to the kingdom of heaven and do not want to enter it themselves. They make the Gospel into a Law and instead of luring the anxious and frightened sinner to faith, to the freedom and salvation of children of God in Christ Jesus by holding before him the undeserved and unending love of God in Christ Jesus which he has earned for everyone and which he wants to give everyone so that everyone can be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, they place a new burden upon him

which he can as little bear as the former. Therefore, let us above all apply ourselves so that we proclaim the pure and unabridged Gospel of Christ. It justifies. It gives life. It saves. It also makes holy and pious people, and nothing but the Gospel of Christ does such a thing.⁴³

Church and Ministry

Preus was a practical theologian. That is to say, theology was practice and practice was theology. The “chicken or egg” debates that erupted a generation or so after his death concerning the means of grace and the church would have held no interest for him. Does the Christian congregation have the means of grace because she is a Christian congregation or is she a Christian congregation because she has the means of grace? I suspect Herman Preus would have given a stern “yes!” for an answer that might just have silenced the questioner and prevented any more abstract theologizing.

Preus believed in the divine institution of the local congregation. In his presidential address to the Norwegian Synod in 1865 he listed seven reasons why Christian congregations should join together to form synods. But he made it clear what was by divine command and what was not. He said:

... the forming of congregations is ordered and commanded by God himself in his Word, and therefore in the proper understanding of the word [congregations] are an institution of the Lord, a work of the Lord, while the coming together of individual congregations into a larger church body, be it a state church or synods, is not commanded by God.⁴⁴

Preus taught that the Christian church, which is essentially invisible because it is made up only of the faithful, is recognizable by the means of grace, the gospel and sacraments. From this foundation he concluded that it was necessary for Christians to belong to orthodox congregations with orthodox pastors. Herman Amberg Preus regarded theology as too serious a business to let it become captive to academicians preoccupied with refined distinctions. He made no distinction between the preaching office and the pastoral office. For Preus, the preaching office was the pastoral office. In an ordination sermon preached in 1868, Preus used the terms shepherds, teachers,

overseers, and ambassadors to refer to parish pastors, that is, to incumbents of the ministry of the Word. The pastors were God's gifts to and servants of the church. He rejected all forms of clericalism that would take away from the laity of the local congregation the right to judge doctrine.⁴⁵ Speaking on what a "true Lutheran" knows about the church, Herman said:

With the fathers in the Augsburg Confession, [the true Lutheran] says that the church is a "communion of saints," whether or not they hold the office of pastor. He says that the ministry of "preaching the word and administering the sacrament" is entrusted to all the church and that the administrators of the ministry, the pastors, are gifts granted to the congregation by its Lord, Christ.⁴⁶

God instituted the pastoral office and the local congregation. God gathers Christians together in congregations. Synods are, by definition, adiaphorous organizations instituted by men.⁴⁷ The keys are given to Christian congregations which may delegate their use to princes, bishops, state churches, synods, and the like, but the keys do not belong to such entities except by delegation from the congregations which always retain the right to take back the authority they have delegated.

Preus believed that God had provided the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America a unique opportunity to develop the spiritual priesthood of the laity. While one searches in vain in his writings to find anything like the concept of "Voters' Supremacy," he most certainly did teach that the laity had the right to judge the doctrine of their pastors and that it was their sacred obligation to do so.⁴⁸ Unfaithful pastors must be removed from office. While, as noted, Preus himself was fired as a pastor precisely because of his faithfulness to God's word, he was far more concerned about pastors abusing congregations than congregations abusing pastors.⁴⁹

One of the most undeserved of all the calumnies directed against the Norwegian Synod was the charge that they were papistic, hierarchical, setting up pastors as tyrants over the people. The controversy over lay preaching in the Norwegian Synod was not a debate about whether or not the preaching office belonged to the whole church and to every local congregation. It did. Preus and the Norwegian Synod were crystal clear on that point. The issue was

rather that souls must be fed with the wholesome and life-giving words of God and that therefore the divine institution of the pastoral office (AC XIV) must be honored.⁵⁰ Preus and the Norwegian Synod defended the right of laymen publicly to assume the pastoral office without a call from the church when the needs of faith required it. In emergency situations laymen became pastors to meet the need.⁵¹

To understand H. A. Preus' doctrine of church and ministry, one needs to understand his primary concern for the need of the Christian to have the assurance of salvation. This requires pastors who are devoted to the pure doctrine. This requires congregations to hold their pastors accountable to teach only the pure doctrine. The faith of God's children in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins is the underlying concern of Preus' doctrine of church and ministry.

Unionism and Syncretism

The issue of religious unionism looms large in the demise of the Norwegian Synod after Preus' death. For Preus, the unionistic spirit, the spirit of doctrinal compromise for the sake of the appearance of unity, was of the devil. In a powerful address to the 1870 convention of the Norwegian Synod, Preus says that divisions in the church are caused by disloyalty to the truth. This is the devil's work. He insists on granting lies equal rights with the truth. This is the essence of unionism.⁵² The devil attacks any kind of Christian conviction, turning men in on themselves and away from God's word. Preus anticipates the "self-esteem" gospel of our day as he gives voice to the devil's argument.

"There is no God. Love for self is the basis of all human relationships. It brings everyone together." Voltaire especially advocated this principle in the previous century. It has now become obvious, it must be admitted, that self-love brings no union but brings rebellion, war and bloodshed.⁵³

What would Pastor Herman Amberg Preus have thought of the Prayer Service at Yankee Stadium that precipitated so much controversy in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod? Let him speak for himself:

On the other hand, if [the devil] is working with ungodly people of the more refined type, of which Christianity is full in our days, then this is written on the banner: "We all believe in a higher being, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and heathen. We are surely all children of the same Father. We are all brothers. The Christian Church is terribly intolerant. It considers only its own people as brothers. Our brotherhood extends over the whole world and we all worship the same god whether we say that he is three persons or only one, whether we call him the Lord Jesus, or Jehovah, Allah, or Brahma."⁵⁴

Slavery

On no issue did the Norwegian Synod receive more vehement criticism than on the position she took on slavery. It was called the "rotten fruit"⁵⁵ of Wisconsinism, epitomizing everything that was wrong about the Synod. The fact that many Norwegian Lutheran immigrants lost men fighting for the Union during the War made the Norwegian Synod's refusal to condemn the South's "Peculiar Institution" an apparent repudiation of the freedom for which so many men had given their lives. While the Norwegian Synod had nothing good to say about the enslavement of Africans in the American South and did not defend the South, neither could the Synod agree in principle with the arguments against slavery that were being advanced. Here is how President Preus presented the issue to the synodical convention of 1869:

This matter first became important for us when we realized that those who were opposing us were proceeding from principles that were directly opposed to evangelical doctrine, namely, from the standpoint of absolute innate human rights, the necessity of outward freedom, and similar propositions of the spirit of the times which have their basis precisely in this, that the complete culpability of sinful man, and loss of *all* right to *all* good, is not acknowledged, so that of necessity neither the doctrine of God's grace nor of Christ who is the sinful man's One and All, could be given its due. Our duty not to yield in this controversy became even clearer to us when the spokesmen for our opponents showed very plainly that in order to defend their position they did not hesitate to assail this basic principle about the Word of God as the only infallible and clear source for all faith and doctrine.⁵⁶

Even in the face of serious attacks for supporting an immensely unpopular position, Preus and the Norwegian Synod could not compromise the *sola Scriptura* principle, the teaching of man's total depravity, and the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Similarly, Herman preached against socialism because it was based on the egalitarian lie that all men can become equal in this world.⁵⁷ The theological task of the church could not be confused with or distracted by any political creed or ideology.

Part Three: The Legacy of Herman Amberg Preus

Christian Keyser Preus was Herman's first-born son and my great-grandfather. He has not fared as well as Herman Amberg within the various oral histories of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in large part because, despite his impeccable orthodoxy and devotion to the same doctrine as his father, he chose not to join the little Norwegian Synod. I am not going to defend his decision. Rather, I would like to share with you just a bit of family history that might put into perspective the implications of that decision.

Christian Keyser Preus died three years after the "Little Norwegian Synod" (the ELS) was born and three years before my father was born. He died broke and in debt. He had indebted himself by publishing, at his own expense, theological arguments in defense of the confessional Lutheran doctrine of grace alone. He fought against the merger of the Norwegian American synods that formed the old ELCA (ELC) in 1917. After he was persuaded that he could continue to contend for the pure doctrine within the newly formed church body, he decided to join. His son, my father's Uncle Herman, lived to be over a hundred years old and continued in the confessional Lutheran theology of his father and grandfather. He wrote an excellent volume on Luther's theology entitled, *A Theology to Live By*, sadly out of print.⁵⁸ All of Christian's sons save one spent their entire lives within the ELC, later to become the ALC, and finally, the new ELCA. While much has been said about Uncle Herman's theology and salutary influence – he spoke at these Reformation Lectures on more than one occasion – little is known or said about the theology of his older brother Jacob, my grandfather, though it is quite significant in the legacy of Herman Amberg Preus.

Jacob Aall Ottesen Preus was thirteen years old when his grandfather, Herman Amberg Preus, died. He was forty-nine years old when his father Christian Keyser Preus, died. He was serving his first of two terms as Governor of Minnesota. When his father died, he paid off his debts. He was a bit soured by the church-political machinations of those days and developed a rather interesting doctrine of his own. "I believe in the invisible church," he would say. He refused to join any synod or any congregation. But he never missed church and he attended only orthodox Lutheran congregations.

After leaving government service, my grandfather moved to Highland Park, Illinois where my father and uncle were raised. He was the only son of Christian Keyser Preus to leave the ELC and join the Missouri Synod, but then he would have argued that he never did that. J. A. O. Preus didn't believe in synods. He was pontificating on the subject one day with the pastor of the Missouri Synod congregation that he attended every Sunday with his family. When the pastor pointed out to Grandpa that he was a member of a Missouri Synod congregation, Grandpa denied that he was. He didn't belong to any particular church – only to the invisible church. "But am I your pastor?" the pastor asked. Grandpa was stunned by the question. "Of course, you're my pastor!" Well, that settled that! Grandpa Preus went to where the pure marks were to be found, and it just so happened to be in a congregation belonging to the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

So it came to pass that my father grew up being catechized in the same theology of C. F. W. Walther that his great-grandfather Herman and his grandfather Christian held dear. Robert Preus grew up with the same convictions concerning the pure doctrine and the Holy Scriptures held by the patriarch of the Preus family in America. When Robert Preus attended Luther Seminary, he confronted the same synergism that Herman Amberg Preus had confronted two generations earlier⁵⁹ and it led him out of the ELC into the ELS and the Missouri Synod.

Before Robert Preus died, he had written several books, numerous scholarly and popular articles, and hundreds of sermons that reflected the theology of Herman Amberg Preus. While it is fashionable to praise the scholarly achievements of Robert while minimizing the theological capabilities of his great-grandfather, these two men were

very much alike. Call it an attitude. It is a resolve, usually calm and determined, but occasionally erupting into a zealous eloquence. It is intimidating to some but deeply comforting for others. It is a conviction. It is a confidence not only in the truthfulness of the word being proclaimed but also in the need to proclaim it. God's doctrine is not so high above us that we cannot know it. It is right here. It is stated plainly in the Holy Scriptures, the inerrant word of God. It is confessed faithfully in the Lutheran Confessions, which agree in their every doctrinal assertion with God's word. It is to be preached to wholly unworthy and undeserving sinners. It is the gospel of God's justification of the ungodly by reckoning to him the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is the ground of faith and the assurance of eternal life. To teach it, preach it, defend it, and die confessing it is what brings the greatest joy in life and the greatest comfort in death. That is the legacy of Herman Amberg Preus.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Herman Amberg Preus: A Family History*, by Johan Carl Keyser Preus, 1966. Privately printed and distributed by the Preus Family Book Club. Pages 2-6.
- ² *Vivacious Daughter: Seven Lectures on the Religious Situation Among Norwegians in America*, by Herman Amberg Preus, Edited and translated by Todd Nichol, 1990, The Norwegian-American Historical Association, page 4.
- ³ *Linka's Diary: On Land and Sea (1845-1864)*, translated by Johan Carl Keyser Preus and Diderikke Margrethe Preus, 1952, Augsburg Publishing House.
- ⁴ *Linka's Diary*, page 131.
- ⁵ *Linka's Diary*, page 106
- ⁶ *Linka's Diary*, pages 108-109
- ⁷ *Linka's Diary*, pages 116-117
- ⁸ *Vivacious Daughter*, pages 119 to 131
- ⁹ *Linka's Diary*, pages 119-120
- ¹⁰ *Linka's Diary*, page 124
- ¹¹ H. A. Preus Sermons, Larson, pages 5-6. While I was preparing this paper, the Rev. Herbert Larson, retired pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, emailed to me his translations of much material written by Herman Amberg Preus and originally appearing in issues of the Norwegian Synod's *Maanedstidende* and *Kirketidende*. Pastor Larson's translations include addresses that President H. A. Preus gave at Norwegian Synod conventions from 1863 to 1893 and sermons that Pastor Preus preached in the years 1851 to 1876. Pastor Larson also translated Preus' lengthy response to the "Open Declaration" of Professor Oftedal and a book by Professor Weenaas, both of Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis, who charged the Norwegian Synod with what they called "Wisconsinism." Preus' response was entitled, "The 'Wisconsinism' of Professors Oftedal and Weenaas: Considered in the Light of Truth." This wealth of material is as yet unpublished. I wish to express to Pastor Larson my deep appreciation for his labors in providing the church with these writings in English along with my hope that they will soon be published, widely distributed, and read by a new generation of confessional Lutherans. I have received these materials in three documents: H. A. Preus Sermons, H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, and a document entitled, "Wisconsinism" (H. A. Preus' response to Prof. Weenaas). Due to the vagaries of electronic transmission of documents, the pagination in this essay may not correspond to the pagination of these documents in Pastor Larson's files or in any future publication of this material.
- ¹² H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 65.
- ¹³ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 9.

- ¹⁴ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 10.
- ¹⁵ H. A. Preus Sermons, Larson, page 15.
- ¹⁶ *Linka's Diary*, pages 225-226.
- ¹⁷ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, pages 37-38.
- ¹⁸ Wisconsinism, page 1.
- ¹⁹ Wisconsinism, page 2.
- ²⁰ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 39.
- ²¹ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 27.
- ²² H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 42.
- ²³ H. A. Preus Sermons, Larson, page 16.
- ²⁴ See, for example, Wisconsinism, pages 35-43 where Preus argues for the doctrine of objective justification from Scriptures, the Confessions, and the Lutheran fathers – in that order. He also appeals (page 41) to *The Norwegian Church Ritual* of 1685.
- ²⁵ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, pages 14-15.
- ²⁶ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, pages 58-59.
- ²⁷ Wisconsinism, page 13.
- ²⁸ Wisconsinism, page 17.
- ²⁹ *Vivacious Daughter*, pages 124-125.
- ³⁰ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 27.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² See, for example, the personal recollections of Pastor Adolph Bredesen in *Herman Amberg Preus: A Family History*, page 106.
- ³³ Wisconsinism, page 31.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ Preus argues at length on this topic (Wisconsinism, pages 31-51) which leads him into a defense of the Norwegian Synod's teaching on the unconditional absolution. The argument for objective justification presented here is one of the most compelling arguments I have read on the subject.
- ³⁶ Wisconsinism, page 38.
- ³⁷ *Herman Amberg Preus: A Family History*, page 104.
- ³⁸ *Herman Amberg Preus: A Family History*, page 105.
- ³⁹ See *Vivacious Daughter*, pages 157-160.
- ⁴⁰ *Vivacious Daughter*, page 158.
- ⁴¹ Wisconsinism, page 39.
- ⁴² Wisconsinism, page 40.
- ⁴³ H. A. Preus Sermons, Larson, page 17.
- ⁴⁴ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, page 17. *Vivacious Daughter*, page 47.
- ⁴⁵ *Vivacious Daughter*, page 148.
- ⁴⁶ *Vivacious Daughter*, page 146.

⁴⁷ H. A. Preus Presidential Addresses, Larson, pages 17-19.

⁴⁸ He predicted that the Synod's schools of higher learning would fall into error if and when the congregations of the Synod lost their zeal for the pure doctrine. He said in his presidential address to the 1864 Synod convention: "But it is, however, really the prevailing spirit in the congregations which always will not merely exert powerful influence, but also be the determinative influence. If this is of the truth then it will well watch over that the truth is also prevailing at the school and knows how to sweep out the errors and false tendencies which might creep in there. But if the congregations founder off into religious indifference and carelessness for pure doctrine and tolerate all kinds of errors and false tendencies in its bosom, then the synod's school cannot possibly remain untouched by it in the course of time and preserve

Lecture Two: The Life and Legacy of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren

by Rev. George M. Orvick

Background Information Norwegian Emigration To America

On the 4th of July in the year 1825 a small boat sailed out of the harbor of Stavanger, Norway, on its way to America. It carried 53 passengers and their supplies. Most of these passengers came from the District of Rogaland, with an especially large contingent from Tysvær, many of whom were related. Some of the people on board were probably Quakers. There was a small colony of Quakers which had become established in the Stavanger area. Undoubtedly some people on board were “Haugeans” who were followers of the great lay leader Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824). The man who provided the strong impetus for the immigration was Cleng Peerson, who had been in America and came back to encourage others to emigrate also. The *Restoration* landed in New York on October 12, 1825. Those who arrived on the *Restoration* played virtually no role in establishing a Norwegian Lutheran Church here in America, but their coming does mark the beginning of the emigration to America.

From 1801 to 1865, the country of Norway’s population increased from 882 thousand to 1.7 million. It was not possible for the industries of farming, fishing and forestry as well as shipping to provide a living for everyone, so many decided to emigrate. Therefore, from 1825 to 1865, 78,000 Norwegians left to search for a means of livelihood in America. The year 1865 marked the beginning of large-scale emigration. It lasted until World War I. Between 1865 and 1914, 665,000 people left for America. In America there was greater opportunity for advancement. Here the “Homestead Act” of 1862 gave every man or woman over age 21 one hundred sixty acres of free land which was an encouragement for people to emigrate to America. The story of how the new emigrants fared as they labored

to establish their new homes in the wilderness is a fascinating account. When we read about the sacrifices and hardships which they endured we become more aware of the debt of gratitude which we owe to these hardy souls.

Another serious factor faced by the early settlers was the lack of any kind of spiritual care for the welfare of their souls. The Rev. Adolph Bredesen spoke of this in an address in 1894 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Koshkonong Churches:

In the summer of 1844, there was not, among our people in America, a single trained minister of the Gospel nor a fully organized church, nor a church edifice, a periodical, or a school of any kind, bearing the Lutheran name. Lutheranism among our people was not "void," but it was "without form," and darkness brooded over its chaotic state. This darkness was made a shade deeper by the circumstances that emissaries of nearly every sect known to the country were hard at work among our people, trying, by fair means and foul, to draw them from their old church moorings.¹

Help, however, was on the way. A few pastors soon came from the mother church in Norway to help the immigrants establish congregations here in the United States. Claus Lauritz Clausen, who had been a lay preacher both in Norway and Denmark, was called on September 13, 1843, to serve a group at Muskego, Wisconsin. Clausen accepted the call and was ordained by the Rev. L. F. E. Krause, a German Lutheran pastor. The Muskego Congregation thus began to function although it had not adopted a constitution. Shortly after the ordination of Clausen, the first regularly trained pastor from Norway came to work among the immigrants. He was the Rev. J. W. C. Dietrichson, a graduate of the University of Christiania in 1837. He landed in New York on July 8, 1844, and made his way to Koshkonong Prairie, near Stoughton, Wisconsin, where there were five separate settlements. On Sunday, September 1st, he preached before a large gathering of settlers in Amund Anderson's (Hornefjeld) barn and celebrated Holy Communion. The following day, September 2nd, he preached under two oak trees farther west in the settlement and also gave communion to about 60 persons. These activities soon resulted in the establishment of the East and West Koshkonong Lutheran

Churches. Soon other pastors began to arrive. Rev. H. A. Stub came in 1848, followed by A. C. Preus in 1850. Before the end of the year 1851 three additional pastors had arrived from Norway. H. A. Preus accepted a call from Spring Prairie, Wisconsin; G. F. Dietrichson succeeded C. L. Clausen as pastor of Luther Valley; and N. Brandt was called to Rock River and Pine Lake in southeastern Wisconsin. By the spring of 1860, 17 pastors had come from Norway.

After a preliminary attempt at organizing in 1851, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (commonly known as the Norwegian Synod) was organized at Luther Valley Church (near Janesville, Wisconsin). The constitution had been adopted at a meeting at East Koshkonong on February 5, 1853, but final approval took place at the convention held at Luther Valley on October 3-7, 1853. The synod consisted of 17 congregations with 6 pastors. The 6 pastors were H. A. Preus, G. F. Dietrichson, N. O. Brandt, H. A. Stub, A. C. Preus, and J. A. Ottesen. The first president of the synod was the Rev. A. C. Preus. He was succeeded by the Rev. H. A. Preus.

Koren's Early Life

Ulrik Vilhelm Koren was descended from a line of merchants' and pastors' families which had come to Bergen at the time of the Hanseatic League. He was born the 22nd of December, 1826. His parents were Paul Schonevig Stub Koren and Henrietta Christiane Wolffs. He entered the city's Latin School and graduated from there. When he was only 16 his father was killed in an earthquake on the island of San Domingo in 1842. The widow and her five children were left almost destitute. As a young boy he was confirmed. He writes, "At my confirmation I was instructed by an otherwise well-meaning rationalist pastor. I was asked what kind of blood was to be found in a fish. That it was 'red and cold' was to be considered testimony to the wisdom of God. And then the next boy was called."² In 1844 he was enrolled as a student at the University in Oslo. Since he had a remarkable singing voice he became a member of Behrens' Quartet and thus gained entrance to the capital city's leading families. It was his intention to become a pastor and so he began to study theology. He was very independent in his studies and thought for himself. After graduating from the university, Koren was engaged as teacher at the Nissen Latin School in Christiania; but this was not the kind of

work which could satisfy his fervent longing to enter upon “real and important work and engage in the spiritual conflicts connected with it.”³ He had, indeed, heard about the urgent need for pastors to serve the countrymen who had immigrated to America, but at first he paid little attention to it. One evening he learned that a new congregation had been established in Iowa and that they desired to obtain a pastor from Norway, and in the quiet of his mind he thought about going to America but he said nothing to anyone. When in his circle of friends it became known that he desired to go to America, many sought to hold him back.

He was too good to cast himself away in that manner,” they said. “His talents undoubtedly would open doors for him to follow a glittering official’s career in Norway and finally elevate him to a bishop’s chair or a position in the state government. ‘Iowa?’ Where was that? It lies west of the Mississippi, a great river. It borders upon the great American wilderness, the Western Sahara. No, he must not go there but remain at home. But the young man was determined.⁴

At this time Koren was engaged to Else Elisabeth Hyssing, whose father was a pastor in Larvik. He had studied theology and became a teacher in Bergen’s Cathedral School and later served in the parliament. She was of the same mind as her beloved and was willing to follow him wherever the Lord called him.

On the 18th of August 1853 a letter of call was sent to Koren from a settlement in northeastern Iowa composed of the congregations at Paint Creek, Norway Settlement, Clermont, and Little Iowa. He writes about his graduation sermon which he was now to preach.

It was my first time that I was in the pulpit and I was very nervous. There was a large gathering of officials before me but there was no expression on their faces. After lunch it was better. My old friend comforted me and said that I had a “sympathetic voice.” He didn’t say anything about the sermon. I then delivered my ordination sermon and spoke with another person as to how my sermon was received and he comforted me in that he said I should not be worried because Bishop Arup had heard many poor sermons.⁵

Koren Arrives In Iowa

After their marriage in Larvik the Korens left Norway September 5th, landed at Kiel and went by train to Hamburg, from whence they were to sail for America. They sailed September 15th on the "*Rhein*" and arrived in New York on November 20th, after a voyage of nine and one half weeks. They spent a few days in New York City, visited some sites and even attended the play "Uncle Tom's Cabin." They traveled from there by train and by steamer until they finally arrived in Milwaukee. They left Milwaukee by means of a lumber wagon with which they traveled to Koshkonong.

After visiting at the home of Herman Preus and family at Spring Prairie, Wisconsin, they began their journey to Iowa. When they came near Madison, Wisconsin, Elisabeth reports, "We met two wagons with Indians; farthest back in the wagon sat the chiefs, their faces painted red, their heads uncovered and adorned with feathers. They made a brave show as they sat there wrapped up in their white and colored blankets."⁶ On their journey westward they found shelter in taverns along the way. They left New York December 1st and arrived at the Washington Prairie Settlement southeast of Decorah on December 22nd. Their journey from Larvik had taken 15 weeks and two days.

The taverns in which they had found shelter were often very crowded and filled with travelers. At some of them, Elisabeth reports, she was "quite aghast at how filthy and horrid they were." The next challenge was to get across the Mississippi River. The account of their crossing is a story in itself. Mrs. Koren writes:

After we reached the river, the horses were unhitched. A so-called 'doctor' went ahead, trying the ice with a long stake and helped Vilhelm draw the buggy, in which I sat; a Norwegian boy pushed from behind; and so we proceeded—as much as possible across islets, then alternately over ice and trees, a mile or so across in all. When we reached the other shore the boy stayed with the equipment and we followed the 'doctor' down a remarkable road through the sloughs along the river.⁷

After spending the night in McGregor, Iowa, they continued their journey to Washington Prairie. Here it was decided that they should live with Mr. and Mrs. Erik Egge. Their small log cabin was

divided into a sleeping area and a living area. On one wall were two beds separated by calico curtains. The other side was for the stove, table and chairs and for the two children. They lived there from December 24, 1853, until March 10, 1854. The original cabin has been preserved and is a part of the Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa.

On Christmas Day in the year 1853 Koren preached his first sermon. The service was held at the home of Thorgrim Business. Elisabeth writes:

When the service was over I talked with several people—as many as I could, for it was so crowded that no one could move. It pleases and interests me to see and talk to all these different people, our Norwegian farm folk, with whom I have had so little acquaintance up to this time. I find many of them attractive; I like those best who have no city flourish about them, but come up, take me by the hand, and say, well, “we wish you welcome to America!”⁸

Pastor Koren immediately began ministering to the settlers in far-flung communities throughout northeastern Iowa and south-eastern Minnesota. Koren describes his vehicle by which he traveled as follows:

You would have been amused to see my primitive means of travel: My first sleigh consisting of runners and thills constructed from two long hickory limbs, on top of which there was a little box with a board over it to be used as a seat, all put together with wooden pins without the help of a single nail. My first carriage was a single wagon with wooden axles and lynch pins, and no springs under the seat, or my first harness, in which all the running parts, including the reins, were made of clothes line.⁹

After their stay with the Egges the Korens moved to the Sørlands' home and finally on May 2nd moved to the home of the Skaarlias. While living at the Sørlands' home Elisabeth describes the conditions as follows: “The rain is forcing its way through the walls here and there all over the room. I do hope we get a tight house so that I will not have to go about with a rag in my hand and mop up every time it rains.”¹⁰

It is truly amazing how this woman who together with her

husband had moved in the most cultured circles in Norway yet found no great difficulty in facing the hardships and sacrifices of pioneer life and adjusting to conditions among the pioneer settlers, who were mostly plain folk brought up in humble circumstances in the homeland. Yes, Elisabeth's sensibilities were at times disturbed by their living conditions. She writes that one evening Erik, while they were eating,

drew off his shoes and socks, put both his feet on a stool, and began quite unabashed to rub them with turpentine; my appetite was not particularly sharpened by either his manners or the awful smell. On the whole we have to shut our eyes and ears as much as possible to preserve our appetite and good humor when our finer sensibilities are offended by these rustic manners; fortunately, they usually have the opposite effect, however; one glance at each other, and we have a hard time to keep from bursting into laughter.¹¹

In spite of the harsh conditions which they faced, it was their faith that sustained them in the midst of these circumstances. When told after months of waiting that the parsonage was not yet ready, Koren said that for the first time he saw a tear in Elisabeth's eye.

Today it is difficult to imagine the magnitude of the immigration and the westward flow of settlers. Elisabeth writes:

I think the whole population of Wisconsin must be moving west. A young man who came here yesterday with greetings from Pastor Preus had passed more than 300 wagonloads of Norwegians, the greater part bound for Minnesota.... In Minnesota people are so eager to get a minister that it can hardly be long before they arrange to send a call to Norway.¹²

Koren was quite impressed by the solid character of the people to whom he was to minister. He writes that he found in them "more genuineness, more earnestness, more fear of God, more industriousness, more willingness to make personal sacrifices, more honesty, less demands than I had, as a rule, previously been acquainted with. True, there were differences here and there."¹³

Koren was alone in serving a huge field, visiting congre-

gations and preaching places in the settlements that soon included eight counties. In 1863 in his six congregations in Iowa, he baptized 170 persons, confirmed 69 and lost 69 to death. He was alone in the field which soon came to number 10,000 Norwegian Lutherans. At least 20 congregations were later formed from that field. The Rev. F. C. Clausen, the Rev. N. E. S. Jensen, the Rev. O. J. Hjort and the Rev. O. Waldland came in the next few years to provide much needed help to Pastor Koren. In the period 1862–65, Prof. Laur. Larsen and Prof. F. A. Schmidt of Luther College aided Koren by preaching to the small congregation in Decorah and assisting in several other congregations. About ten other pastors came to help so that after 1883 Rev. Koren served only the Washington Prairie, Calmar, and Stavanger congregations until the latter received a resident pastor in the Rev. H. J. G. Krogh in 1896.

A synod meeting was held in Washington Prairie, October 9–13, 1857, the first such meeting to be held west of the Mississippi. This meeting is very historic because here it was formally decided that an institution of higher learning should be established and that funds should be collected for this purpose. Thus began the movement which culminated in the building of Luther College on a beautiful site selected by Rev. Koren.

Koren's leadership qualities were early recognized. He served as a member of the church council 1861–1910; vice-president of the synod 1871–1894; president of the Iowa District of the synod 1876–1894; president of the Norwegian Synod 1894–1910. In 1903 the degree of doctor of divinity was conferred upon the Rev. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren by Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. As a theologian he is generally recognized as being, perhaps, the most outstanding that our Norwegian Lutheran Church in America has produced.

His loving wife, *Fru* Koren, was at all times his trusted right hand. Koren gives her much credit for his work in the ministry. He said that it was from her that he learned to preach in a manner which people could understand. He said that when he first came to America he used a high-toned city form of speech, but his wife got him to step down from such learned heights. "Do you think that the farmers understood what you said today?" she asked him when he had preached after a Christiania preacher's manner. Thereafter when someone, after

he had preached in the church at Washington Prairie, commented that he appreciated and understood his sermons, Koren answered, "It came about because of what my wife said." Rev. Koren himself frequently alludes to her fine understanding and judgment in the most practical and subjective matters.¹⁴ Mrs. Koren provided able assistance to her husband and willingly endured the material discomforts that were to be found in the frontier settlements. Her fine influence and gentility made itself felt in wide circles. The happy union that was to last for 57 years was broken on December 19, 1910, when Pastor Koren died. On December 23rd this talented and faithful servant of the Master was laid to rest in the cemetery adjacent to the house of worship where he had those many years proclaimed the message of the one thing needful. His faithful helpmate, Else Elisabeth Hyssing Koren, was laid to rest by his side in 1918.

Religious Currents In Norway

Rationalism had been a growing force in the religious life of Norway for many years. By 1780 the spirit of Rationalism was dominant in the theological faculty at the University of Copenhagen, where theological candidates were trained for service in Norway's parishes. Thus, after 1780 and into the next century many younger rationalistic pastors took office in Norway. The Rationalism found amongst the clergy in the church of Norway was relatively mild in comparison with that found in other countries. By the year 1800 its influence had spread over most of the clergymen in Norway. There were a number of pastors, however, who remained loyal to the old Lutheran faith. Bishop Johann Nordahl Brun of Bergen fought against Rationalism and by 1814 he was the only one of Norway's bishops who was not rationalistically inclined. The common people, however, were not greatly influenced by the movement. The pastors used traditional terminology and assumed that the common people would not understand what they were saying.

The Haugean Revival

There were two factors which finally arose to restrain Rationalism. The first was the Haugean Revival and the second was the resurgence of evangelical Christianity within the Oslo theological

faculty, by which a new generation of pastors had been trained at the Oslo school.

Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) was a lay evangelist. He had undergone a religious experience on April 5, 1796, while he was at work in the fields of his father's farm. On account of his preaching a "religious awakening" took place in Norway between 1796 and 1804. His message of repentance and conversion had a powerful effect upon the people, especially those of the farming class. His preaching, however, emphasized so strongly the law and repentance that the message of salvation by grace alone was often obscured by his legalism. He was also an author who published many books which also had their influence upon their readers. While he remained a member of the church of Norway, he was particularly critical of the clergy. He accused the pastors of being proud, avaricious, worldly, and negligent of spiritual responsibilities. He did, however, urge his followers to be faithful to their congregations and to attend church regularly. This gave rise to the advent of the lay preaching movement. He was also engaged in various business enterprises in an effort to assist the farmers. He was in prison from 1804 until 1811 after being accused of violating the conventicle act of 1741 which forbade itinerant lay preaching and required that public religious gatherings be held under the supervision of the pastor.

The Haugean Revival Movement had a powerful influence upon the entire country. It became a leaven which reshaped the life and character of the church in Norway. Hauge's preaching and activity had the effect of activating the laypeople which was to have a significant impact upon the future and had much to do with the internal strife that plagued the church of Norway for decades. Also, American Lutheranism was to feel the effects of the Haugean Revival. Haugeanism was a people's movement which led the farmers to be bold and not be afraid to stand up to authority. By 1833 the "*storting*" (parliament) was dominated by the farmers, several of whom were Haugeans. The vast majority of the Norwegians who emigrated to America in the 19th century were farmers. Of these only a small minority were Haugeans by personal conviction. But practically all of them had imbibed something of the spirit of the democratic awakening of the mother country and to that awakening Haugeanism had made significant contributions.

Grundtvigianism

Another movement which had some influence amongst the early pastors who came to America in the emigration was that of Grundtvigianism. This was begun by the famous N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872). He forcefully condemned Rationalism and attacked religious indifferentism, and thus became a controversial figure in Denmark. At first Grundtvig was recognized as the outstanding champion of Biblical Christianity in his homeland. This, however, was called into question when he made what he called “his matchless discovery” on account of which he drastically changed his theology. In his view, the Apostles’ Creed was to be more highly regarded than the Scriptures. To him the Apostles’ Creed was the voice of the church that had been unchanged through the centuries. It was the key to the understanding of the Bible because it was confessed by the church before Scripture existed. The Words of Institution of the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Prayer together with the Apostles’ Creed became the testimony of the church. Scripture was considered an invaluable source of information but not a life-giving Word. This view of Grundtvig with its exaltation of the church and the sacraments came to be known as the “churchly view.” He also held to the view that there would be a second chance for the people who were in hell to be saved. Such views of Grundtvig were thoroughly discredited by the rise of Lutheran Confessionalism as represented by Prof. Gisle Johnson and Carl P. Caspari.

A few of the pastors, such as Dietrichson and Clausen, who organized the Norwegian Synod in 1851, were influenced by Grundtvigianism. When more orthodox and confessional pastors came, the constitution adopted at the first convention in Muskego was rejected. The new constitution which was finally adopted in 1853 had no reference to Grundtvigian theology.

Johnsonian Era

After the era of Rationalism, Haugeanism, and Grundtvigianism, which all had a powerful influence upon the church of Norway, there arose “the Johnsonian Era.” The leader of this return to Confessionalism was a professor by the name of Gisle Johnson

(1822–94). The Johnsonian Awakening began in the 1850s and for about two decades set the religious tone in Norway. Johnson was appointed to the theological faculty of the university in Oslo at the age of 27 years. He was a very gifted teacher who made a deep and lasting impression upon his students. He was later joined by a renowned scholar by the name of C. P. Caspari. Johnson and Caspari contributed to the demise of Grundtvigianism and were instrumental in establishing certain church reforms which returned more authority to the people and the congregations and removed some of the power of the government in church affairs. The young church in America, however, inherited all of the tendencies, false teachings, and problems of the mother church in Norway.

Koren's Ministry

It is against this background that we now examine the role of Ulrik Vilhelm Koren, the young pastor who had come to Iowa in 1853. Pastor Koren was called to be the pastor of the congregation at Washington Prairie in addition to several others. He, however, realized the great need of the immigrants that had settled in northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota. They were sheep without a shepherd and so he spent most of his early years as a traveling missionary. He was gone from home for weeks at a time, preaching, instructing children, ministering to the sick, and burying the dead. It is said that some 20 congregations were formed from what was his parish. Koren had a keen understanding of the spiritual feelings and fluctuations that existed in the hearts of his hearers. He knew how lonely they were for their families and their homeland. He understood their weaknesses, their sorrows and their temptations. In his sermons he applied the law and the gospel in a way that really touched the hearts of his hearers. Koren himself writes that he had been influenced by the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was one who could see through all sham and pretense. Koren likewise would cut through all hypocrisy and outward show and get right down to what was going on in a person's heart. In his preaching he was able to discern and describe what these new settlers in the forests and fields were really thinking.

One of Koren's Sermons

Let us take a look at just one of his sermons. This was the Ascension Day sermon, based on Acts 1, 1-11, preached at the synod meeting in Spring Grove, Minnesota, in 1881. His theme was "The Comfort which Christ's ascension into Heaven and His sitting at the right hand of the Father brings us." Hear him as he proclaims the Law:

He (the Saviour) knew also that it was not enough that we learn the lesson that the entire human race is fallen and all are sinners; therefore, He took us into a one-room school and held up a mirror for us, namely, the law, so that we could see ourselves Thus He prepared us until we were forced to break out with sorrow of heart, and a shame of deepest distress: Oh, yes, I am the man, I am the sick, the leper, the helpless, the condemned; there is nothing good in me! Where is there medicine for this sickness?

Hear Koren now as he proclaims the gospel.

If you have learned this, then surely the Holy Spirit has also opened your heart so that you have heard Jesus' answer to your cry: Behold, I am your Savior, He says, come to Me with your sorrow—I will give you rest—I take away your sins, just leave them on Me! Fear not, I will be with you.... Behold, He who will be your power sits at the Father's right hand. From thence comes help: if you are foolish, He is your wisdom; if you are a sinner, He is your righteousness; if you are smitten, if you are condemned, He is your sanctification and deliverance.

Going on in the same sermon Koren speaks in a most comforting manner to these immigrant souls who are no doubt fearful in this new land.

Do you think that you are forgotten? Do you think that he, therefore, suffered so much evil for your sake, later to let go of you and let you go astray? Has He not said that He will be with you always? Has He not kept that promise? Yes, certainly, thou fearful soul, He has never left you because of sin, not for a day, not for an hour. He has guided you and led you; if you forsook Him, then He went after you and called to you; otherwise you would not have been really anxious and troubled; ... Are you small and insignificant? You were, however, big enough and

precious enough so that He bore your guilt and punishment, ... See, then, how precious you are in His sight and learn to trust in Him.... Or perhaps there are other needs which burden you? Is it one or another of your dear ones who has gone astray and over whom you sorrow? Oh, they can be heavy, those sorrows, but do you think it lies heavier on your heart than on His, the Good Shepherd's? So confide your sorrow to Him, talk to Him, pray to Him, and honor Him then also by believing Him when He promises to hear your prayers.... Or is it God's congregation which concerns you? ...Oh you fool! Do you not think He can steer His church? Do you think that He forsakes His flock and does not care for His own body? Or do you think that He does not know the way and the means, the right time and the right means? ... Ah, no, His purpose is certain, gracious and good, and He knows how it can be carried out. Nothing can hinder Him. Just see to it that you cling to Him yourself, that you grasp His hand tightly and let Him hold you firmly, and do not let yourself be confused!¹⁵

Koren makes use of a great number of hymn verses for the comfort and edification of his hearers. He was the author of a number of wonderful hymns, for example "*Ye Lands to The Lord*," one of the favorites. He wrote numerous poems. Of special note is "*Det Gamle Hus*," a lengthy, beautiful discourse on the Church of God. .

This is just a sample of Koren's preaching by which he comforts not only the laypeople but also his fellow servants in the ministry. A number of these sermons have been translated into English and are found in the book *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, published by the ELS in 1978. Also contained in this volume besides the sermons are a number of addresses and doctrinal articles in which Koren deals with the real issues that face the church and which trouble precious Christian souls.

Opposition From The Conference

In order to understand more fully the role Dr. Koren played in the struggles that took place in the years following the organization of the synod, let us take a look at the strong opposition which was leveled against the synod especially by the Conference for the Norwegian Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. From the year 1870 this group made its headquarters in Minneapolis and car-

ried on missionary activity in the rapidly growing settlements of the Northwest. The leaders of the Conference became bitter enemies of the Norwegian Synod. We now see this from Koren's address entitled, "Why Is There Is No Church Unity Among Norwegian Lutherans in America?" The opposition's leader was Prof. A. Weenaas who had come over from Norway. About half of the congregations, which before 1870 had united themselves with the Augustana Synod, followed their pastors into the Conference. The Conference had acquired a building—Augsburg Seminary—already erected in 1872, but had only Prof. A. Weenaas as teacher. In 1873 they secured another teacher in the person of Candidate of Theology Sven Oftedal who accepted the call and stepped into his new office the same year. The Professors Oftedal and Weenaas now attempted with a violent blow, to crush the Norwegian Synod; however, they did not succeed in their attempt. What they did was to issue the well-known and infamous "Open Declaration." [See *Kirketidende* for 1874, p. 102f] In this we read, among other things:

By the Norwegian Synod or Wisconsinism (it was called Wisconsinism because the leading theologians were from Wisconsin. It is not to be confused with the Wisconsin Synod) we understand an anti-Christian school of thought and a dangerous organization, which, carried by a papistical principle, works toward dissolving Christianity into universalism and hierarchy, sprung from the catholicizing school of Grundtvigianism.¹⁶

This Open Declaration brought much criticism upon the Conference 'here in America' and in the mother church in Norway.

The Conference was sharply criticized by Prof. Johnson in Norway and sympathy was expressed for the synod. The "Open Declaration" has said quite bluntly that "the Conference can no more be reconciled with 'Wisconsinism' than Christ and Belial, than fire and water."¹⁷ At the annual meeting of the Conference in 1874 it was announced that the theological candidates George Sverdrup and S. A. Gunnerson had also declared themselves willing to become professors at Augsburg Seminary.

Koren comments on these controversies as follows:

In these controversies the Synod was always the attacked party. The attempts that were made, by means of negotiations in free

conferences, were not successful. It is my conviction that the Synod in these controversies has strictly held itself to what the Lutheran Church has taught in its confessions.¹⁸

There was always a bitter hatred against the Synod because it represented the State Church of Norway and Orthodoxy. We quote Prof. S. Oftedahl:

I know that the Norwegian pastors in America, worm eaten by Latinism, washed out by monarchism, and frozen stiff by orthodoxy, impelled by hunger for an official position and morbidly thinking of home, had been swallowed by Missouri and were in the act of imposing the bonds of slavery and papistical darkness upon a people, whom the Lord had chosen to be the champions of Christianity and freedom.¹⁹

Koren's Theology As Set Forth In His Writings

Dr. Koren's son, the Rev. Paul Koren, who was his father's assistant at Washington Prairie for a number of years, published a four-volume set of his father's *Collected Writings (Samlede Skrifter)*. He also wrote other sermons, addresses and doctrinal articles which were published in the monthly organ of the Synod in years past. Unfortunately, most of his writings have not been translated from the Norwegian into English. Also, his writings have not been very popular since the Norwegian Merger of 1917. Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker points out in *Faith of our Fathers* that Dr. Koren always pointed to the two mighty pillars by which the church of God is fitly joined together, namely these: "The Word of God as the only norm of faith and life, and the Doctrine of Justification by faith alone without the works of the law as the central and saving truth of that Word."²⁰

Since it is impossible to deal with all of Koren's writings we list them here for those who wish to do further research:

1. What the Norwegian Synod has Wanted and Still Wants
2. The Right Principles of Church Government
3. On the Use of the Word of God
4. Introductory Remarks to a Discussion Regarding Justification by Faith
5. The Inspiration of Holy Scripture

6. The Book of Concord
7. Can and Ought a Christian be Certain of His Salvation?
8. What Hinders the Merger of the Various Norwegian Lutheran Synods?
9. The Requirements Which the Present Condition of our Church Body Demands of Our Clergy
10. Address to the Students of a Theological Seminary
11. Address to the Convention of the Norwegian Synod, 1903

The above-mentioned articles are available in English in *Faith of Our Fathers* and in *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*.

Excerpts From Koren's Writings

Let us now take a look at some of these writings:

“Introductory Remarks to a Discussion Regarding Justification by Faith”

In all of his writings we find Koren quoting extensively from the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and Luther's Works. In writing about the Doctrine of Justification by Faith he calls attention to the church's zeal for this doctrine, whose purpose is, namely, “To comfort and raise up those anxious and fearful consciences.... and to answer a question of vital importance, ‘What shall we do to be saved?’ ‘How shall I become righteous before God?’” He goes on to say that this doctrine “was the watchword of the Church of the Reformation, and to this very day the first and mightiest demand upon all Lutherans is that they must honestly hold fast to this deepest and highest and most glorious central truth in God's revealed Word.” He quotes Martin Chemnitz, who wrote, “The norm and rule for speaking in the church ought to be that the true and necessary things are set forth directly and clearly, without ambiguity and in such a manner that they can be rightly understood without interpretation, also by the unlearned.” This was one of Koren's strong points, namely, that he was able to set forth things in such a clear manner that they could not be misunderstood. Koren goes on to say:

It will be beneficial for us that we here also learn from the past. Just as there was a time in the Lutheran church when they were so indulgent and so afraid of bringing forward the motto '*sola fide*,' that is, by faith alone, that very seldom and scarcely even as a weak whisper was it heard here and there, so there was also a time when it seemed as if many teachers would not hear anything from God's Word except this, '*sola fide*,'—by faith alone—and as if they scarcely tolerated hearing the phrase 'of good works' mentioned. Just as the former were afraid of being accused of despising good works, so the latter were afraid of considering faith too little. . . . In the presentation of truth, however, everything has its proper place. If it is taught correctly, then there will be room both for the doctrine whose marks are the words '*sola fide*,' and for the doctrine which has the goal of inculcating good works as God's will for us."

Koren then continues by pointing out how especially difficult it is to divide rightly between the law and the gospel, while at the same time nothing is more important for us than to do just that. He asks:

What truly evangelical pastor is there really who has not been in great distress on exactly this point both about preaching the gospel fully and unabridged, so that anxious souls can be comforted and edified, and then about chastising secure and self-righteous sinners, so that they do not harm themselves with a false comfort?

With this article about justification by faith Koren penetrated to the heart of the controversies by calling for a thorough understanding of this chief article. He offers these words of encouragement, "If we Norwegian Lutherans by basic and earnest discussions can be united in the right understanding of this chief doctrine, justification by faith, then we dare to have more hope of future unity than the present external situation among us seems to promise. . . ."²¹

Another outstanding article by Koren is the one entitled: "Can and Ought A Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?"

In the introduction Koren explains why he is writing this article:

I have several reasons for it, both general and more specific. Partly, there are many who think they are certain of their salvation, but who deceive themselves, and therefore need to be admonished; partly, there are many who would very much like to be certain of their salvation, but dare not be, and therefore need to be encouraged; finally, the question has recently become the object of controversy among us—a controversy very closely allied to, or rather a part of, the controversy concerning the doctrine of election.

Koren then writes that there are certain truths which must be noted in advance, be strictly adhered to, and never lost sight of. (The excerpts quoted below are only a summary. It is necessary to read the complete article to get the full meaning.) They are:

1. First of all, we must maintain that when this question of our final salvation is being considered, there can be no talk of any so-called absolute certainty, provided the word “absolute” is used in its proper sense.... The certainty of which we speak is, first of all, a certainty of faith, which can be only where faith is ... it does not follow from all this that the certainty of faith is weaker than absolute certainty.... Faith is certainty, and the Holy Scriptures often use the expression.

2. Furthermore, we must maintain that a certainty of salvation is a certainty of faith; only he who is truly a believer can have it.... Many imagine that they are certain of salvation (Matthew 7,21-22); it often seems as though they believe that to be saved nothing else is needed than to belong to a congregation, live somewhat decently, and then die. But like their faith, their certainty is only imagination, for their faith does not have the marks which the New Testament places upon faith.

3. Thirdly, we must maintain that a certainty is not here spoken of which all believers must have in the same degree, or which all believers necessarily must feel within themselves, with the result that if they do not do so, they must conclude that they do not have the right faith.... The strength of faith, we know, can be different, without the essence of faith being changed thereby.

4. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that faith and hope, in the Biblical meaning, are not different in such a way that faith is stronger and hope weaker.... There is also this difference that, while faith is the assent of the heart to the Word, and appropriation

of the promise it contains, hope is the firm expectation of the blessings which are promised in the Word. Faith and hope are therefore inseparable.

5. Further, we must maintain that there is no difference between being certain of one's salvation and being certain of one's election.... for these two concepts, to be saved and to have been elected, nevertheless amount to the same thing in effect. Every single soul of the elect will be saved, and none except the souls of the elect.

6. Finally, we must be convinced that certainty of salvation cannot be attained by brooding over or wanting to "investigate the secret, concealed abyss of divine predestination." Whoever makes this his beginning will fall into either arrogance or despair and will not attain to any certainty of salvation.... For we must carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in His Word and what He has not revealed.²²

God has in Christ revealed to us all that we need in order to be certain of our salvation, but much of His secret counsel He has kept hidden. We are not to brood over this—and this admonition is needful in the highest degree. "In our presumption we take much greater delight in concerning ourselves with matters which we cannot harmonize—in fact, we have no command to do so—than with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in His Word."²³

We wish to quote one more excerpt, this one from Koren's essay on:

The Right Principles of Church Government

In this article Dr. Koren sets forth in a very scriptural and logical manner what the Church is, how it is established, and how it is to be governed. He deals with the purpose of synods and what their work is to be. He shows how

the Church is established by the Word of God in accordance with the command of Christ: "Go and make disciples of all nations," etc., for that which makes us Christians is faith, and faith comes by the Word of God. Therefore the Lutheran Church confesses in the Augsburg Confession, Article 5, as follows: "That we may

obtain this faith, the office of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For, through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the gospel.” There is no reference in this article to the work of the public ministry, by which the office of the word is to be performed in the congregation by certain persons who have been called to it. That is discussed later in the 14th Article. Here the reference is to the essence, power, and effectual working of the means of grace.²⁴

Concerning the matter of calling pastors and teachers, we read as follows:

So the office (of pastor and teacher) also belongs to the congregation. But Christ has given the congregation the command and the explanation concerning the public execution of the office, which has just been mentioned and which our church confesses in the 14th Article of the Augsburg Confession. There it is also the congregation which calls its preachers and teachers and which has to see to it that these do the work they are called to do. The pastors are not, according to God’s Word, to be lords over the congregation. They are to be the servants of the congregation, and at the same time they are to be servants of God.²⁵

Koren writes that there are no special instructions for how the church should be organized to carry out its work, but that all things should be done decently and in order.

The Missouri Connection

Koren now goes on to discuss the relationship of the Norwegian Synod to the Missouri Synod.

The Synod had established, already in 1857, after careful investigations, a connection with the Missouri Synod, which was founded ten years earlier, and which had schools for training pastors in St. Louis and Fort Wayne. The conditions were that our synod, in return for appointing and supporting a professor at the Missouri Synod school in St. Louis, was to have the opportunity of having its students admitted there. Much has been said about the effect which our connection with the Missourians has had upon the Norwegian Synod. . . . We have not learned anything new

from them, i.e. any new doctrine or any doctrine other than that which we had with us from the University in Christiania.

The synod has been reproached that from the Missourians it has learned to put all stress upon doctrine and to neglect Christian life. In other words: The Missourians and the Norwegian Synod have been accused of orthodoxism. They, themselves, have rejected this accusation. That the danger lies near, both these church bodies have themselves always acknowledged and confessed. Orthodoxy signifies 'pure doctrine.' Orthodoxism may be translated 'pure doctrinarism.' This last consists of making pure doctrine the end, although it is only the means to the proper end. The end is to be the true, real, living faith. For that is the life in God. As one believes, so he lives.... They (the pastors of the synod) have constantly, again and again reminded their hearers that he who lives an ungodly life, and who lives for this world alone, has no true faith, even if he considers himself ever so orthodox.²⁶

The Norwegian Synod benefited greatly from its association with the Missouri Synod. From its emphasis on pure doctrine, from its brotherly fellowship and missionary zeal the Norwegian Synod was strengthened and encouraged as they began the tremendous undertaking of founding a church body in a new and unfamiliar land. Koren writes:

I have said above that the Norwegian Synod has much for which to thank the Missourians. In the front rank of these things I will place the earnest, basically Christian and Lutheran character, which, during the studying in St. Louis, was instilled in the Synod's future pastors.... This influence has been continued with loyalty and ability by the present theological professors of the Synod, who have studied in St. Louis, and who, praise be to God, harmoniously work together in the same spirit.²⁷

The Doctrinal Controversies Of The Norwegian Synod

The founders of the Norwegian Synod were determined to hold fast to the pure teaching of God's Word. They were not about to allow the enemies of the gospel to introduce false teachings nor to allow human reason to enter into the teaching of God's Word. This strong stand led to a number of controversies among the Norwegian

Lutherans. Most of those controversies were brought with them because they had inherited them from the church in Norway. The effects of Haugeanism and Pietism were felt in most places. Dr. Koren wrote in 1877 in an article entitled, *The Church Parties among our People in America*:

Since the church factions among our people synchronized with the emigration, their roots must be sought in the church conditions in Norway, of which ours are but a continuation under other external circumstances.²⁸

In Norway there were three factions resulting from Rationalism and the Haugean Revival which divided the church people even though they all remained within the ranks of the State Church. There were, first, the rationalistic state church pastors and their more or less worldly and indifferent church members; secondly, the followers of Hans Nielsen Hauge who were serious students of the Word but too often opposed in an unreasoning manner everyone and everything connected with the state church; and thirdly, the Orthodox State Church pastors and their loyal Christian church members.²⁹

These controversies arose in the young church in America and had to be addressed. We read in *Grace for Grace* that "It may seem, indeed, that there was more of such controversy among Norwegian Lutherans than among other groups. But, if so, the reason is to be sought mainly in the peculiar conditions which they inherited from the church in Norway."³⁰

We shall briefly summarize these controversies to show what the fathers had to face:

Lay Preaching

Due to the influence of the lay preacher, Hans Nielsen Hauge, it was quite common to have laymen serve as preachers in Norway. Hauge had attacked the State Church clergy in their "black robes" and encouraged lay preaching. Thus the first preaching amongst the settlers was carried out by men who were not ordained, notably Elling Eielsen. Eielsen was a bitter enemy of the ordained clergy. His anger flared when Dietrichson asked him not to continue in any more religious activity. He grabbed Dietrichson by the beard and

exclaimed, "Hear me, you pope, I wish to be your pestilence while yet I may."³¹

There were therefore those who thought it in order to permit lay-preaching by such as were "moved by the Holy Ghost," even though they had not received a regular call. When other ordained clergy came they soon pointed out that the Augsburg Confession states in Article 14: "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."

With the help of Dr. C. F. W. Walther a series of seven articles was drawn up which settled the matter. The theses, adopted in 1862, allowed for a lay man to preach only in case of actual need, such as when a pastor is not at hand and cannot be secured, or in the case of a pastor preaching false doctrine. This marked the end of the controversy in the Norwegian Synod, although others continued to disagree on the matter.³²

The Third Commandment And Sunday

It was the Seventh Day Adventists who stirred up this controversy in the congregations. They attempted to entangle the settlers in the Law of Moses which required that the seventh day be observed. The settlers had not been sufficiently instructed from the Large Catechism or the Lutheran Confessions to understand that they had been freed from the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. Not only the Adventists but also the followers of Elling Eielsen attacked the Lutheran Doctrine. It was held by some that Sunday only takes the place of the Jewish Sabbath. It was Rev. J. A. Ottesen who wrote a series of five theses which set forth the Biblical doctrine that the observance of Sunday was by free choice, following the example of the early Christians. We truly keep the Third Commandment when we "fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." The theses written by Ottesen were adopted by the Synod in 1863.

The Slavery Issue

The controversy over the slavery question broke out in 1861 within the Norwegian Synod which caused the Synod to adopt the

following resolution: "Although according to the Word of God it is not in itself sin to have slaves, yet slavery is an evil and a punishment from God, and we condemn all the abuses and sins which are connected with it, just as we, when our call requires it and Christian charity and wisdom demand it, will work for its abolition."³³ The Scripture which was cited was the occasion where the Apostle Paul sent the slave, Onesimus, back to his Christian master, Philemon, asking both of them to observe the law of love in their relations with each other, since both now were Christian, though he did not question Philemon's right to own Onesimus as a slave. Koren writes about the matter as follows:

The pastors, who all were anti-slavery, as the declaration shows, could not retreat from what it was easy to see was the teaching of the Word of God, and they did not yield either, however heartily they deplored this controversy. . . . a similar controversy had been carried on, for a long time, among just about all the Protestant church bodies here in the Northern States . . . and all of these had declared themselves in the same manner as the pastors of the Norwegian Synod.³⁴

Koren points out that it was unknown to the participants at that time that the "Norwegian Mission Society has had slave owners among the members of its congregations among Christians in Madagascar without demanding that they be excommunicated."³⁵ Koren continues, "The controversy ended with this that the Rev. C. L. Clausen and his congregations left the Synod, and that some few other congregations were split."³⁶ Rev. Clausen moved to St. Ansgar, and began work there. It was Pastor Claus Friman Magelssen who served Luther Valley from 1859 to 1869. When two-thirds of the Luther Valley congregation voted to leave the Synod because they thought the Synod favored slavery, Magelssen and the minority founded a church in Orfordville. For more than 44 years Luther Valley remained outside any synodical organization until 1913 when it joined the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. Thus the church in which the Norwegian Synod was founded in 1853 was lost to the Synod over the slavery question.³⁷ Koren sums it all up when he writes in "*What the Norwegian Synod has Wanted and Still Wants*" as follows: "We thank God because our country is freed from the curse of slavery and from the sins crying to heaven which resulted from it,

and we regard it as a worthy object of Christians to strive with all their might to exterminate it wherever it is still found in the world.”³⁸

Regarding Absolution

The controversy on absolution was a serious matter which had to do with the Doctrine of Justification. Koren writes:

We taught that the forgiveness of sin in absolution did not come into existence first when a person believed, but that absolution is always forgiveness of sin by God even though the one who does not believe refuses God’s gift and thus does not become partaker of it... They (The Conference) continued to insist that “when absolution is pronounced upon an unbeliever, then there is no act of forgiveness of sin connected with it. The minister absolves but not God,” consequently that absolution is one thing when it comes to the believer, and another, when it comes to the unbeliever.”³⁹

Both the Synod men and the Conference agreed as to the effects of Absolution, that only believers received forgiveness of sins by it; but they disagreed as to the essence or nature of Absolution, what it was in itself.⁴⁰ The Synod held to an “unconditional absolution,” namely this, that God has forgiven the sins of the whole world because Christ died and rose again. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” II Cor. 5, 19. Believe this and you will be saved. The Conference held to a “conditional absolution,” namely this, that first a man must believe and then his sins will be forgiven. This makes faith a cause of man’s forgiveness rather than the empty hand which receives and lays hold of it.

The Gospel And Justification

What part does faith play in the matter of the justification of the sinner before God? This was the question which was at the root of the controversy over the Doctrine of Justification. Does the Gospel offer the forgiveness of sins only to believers or is forgiveness offered to all regardless of whether they have faith or not? Among the opponents it was taught that without faith there was no forgiveness of sins. To them it was as if the justification wrought by the merits

and sacrifice of Christ existed only for those who accepted it by faith. This makes faith a meritorious cause of our justification. On the other hand the Synod taught that Christ “gave himself a ransom for all” (I Tim. 2,6) and that therefore the Gospel which tells of the redemptive work of Christ is also the same for all. What is faith then? Faith is the empty hand which merely receives the gift which God offers to all men, and that even the ability to receive it is a gift of God. This is in accordance with the Formula of Concord (III, 3) which says: “Faith justifies, not because it is so good a work and so fair a virtue, but because, in the promise of the Gospel, it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ.” Luther writes as follows: “A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king’s fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.”⁴¹

This “objective justification” is the blessed teaching that God has declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ, to be justified and forgiven on account of what Christ accomplished with His perfect life and His innocent suffering, death and resurrection. We make this precious gift our own when we believe it, when we accept it by faith. Our ELS Explanation of the Catechism contains this beautiful definition:

How can God declare the sinner righteous? God can declare sinners righteous because, on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ, He has acquitted all people of the guilt and punishment of their sins, and has imputed to them the righteousness of Christ; He therefore regards them in Christ as though they had never sinned (general or objective justification).⁴²

This controversy naturally led into the controversy over the Doctrines of Conversion and Election. “It is not strange that those who emphasize man’s faith at the expense of the objective validity of Christ’s Gospel and His work of justification should go astray in the Doctrines of Conversion and Election, so as to give man’s faith there also an entirely unscriptural importance.”⁴³ This was the most serious controversy which the Synod had to face and which has not been settled to this day.

The Doctrines Of Conversion And Election

In the 1880s the Norwegian Synod again found itself immersed in controversy. The Doctrines of Election and Conversion were the subject of the disagreement this time and the outcome was a devastating split in the Synod. It raged from 1880 to 1887 and when it subsided, about fifty thousand souls, 200 congregations and 55 pastors, or about one third of its membership, had left the Synod. How did such a tragedy happen? The Synod had been united all along also in this teaching. But then, mostly through one man, false doctrine reared its ugly head and the conflict began.

The Doctrine of Election is a beautiful teaching which the Lord revealed to us in His Word for our comfort. We find it in passages such as Eph. 1,3-7. Here we learn that God

has chosen certain individuals to salvation; that this choosing took place in eternity on the basis of God's grace in Christ; and that through the Word and Sacraments these individuals shall be brought to faith in Christ, justified, sanctified, and glorified. In this doctrine God lays a solid foundation for the Christian's hope in Christ.⁴⁴

The Doctrine of Conversion likewise teaches that our turning from unbelief to faith in Christ is due entirely to the Holy Ghost who works through the Word and Sacrament of Baptism. This is taught in these words of Scripture: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Ezek. 36,26. In many other passages also it is clearly taught that our conversion is due entirely to the work of the Holy Spirit, as we confess in the Explanation of the Third Article, "I believe that I cannot of my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel ..."

These teachings are comforting because the Christian can rely on God and God alone for his election, conversion and preservation in the faith. "To God alone be glory" is the theme song of the believer. We say with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake." Psalm 115,1.

It is right here, however, that a question arises. If God wants all men to be saved (universal grace), if He calls all men with equal earnestness through His Holy Spirit through the Word, and if all men are equally and totally dead in trespasses and sins, then why do some respond to the call, become believers and thus partake of eternal life, while others reject the Holy Spirit and remain lost in their sins? Why some and not others? (*Cur alii prae aliis*). This is an age-old question which has troubled theologians for centuries. The facts are simply this: God does not answer the question. It remains a mystery. As soon as one tries to answer the question he immediately falls into the error of Calvinism, on the one hand, or synergism on the other. John Calvin (at Luther's time) taught absolute predestination, namely that God elected not only some to salvation but also others to damnation. This solved the problem for human reason but it violated God's Word because it denied universal grace. Philip Melanchthon, one of Luther's co-workers, also tried to answer the question. He found the answer in man. He said that some resisted the Word of God while others did not. This answer also violates Scripture because it denies the total depravity of man. It is called synergism because man, by ceasing to resist the Holy Spirit, is given credit for working together with God for his conversion and election, thus denying the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Natural man is dead in trespasses and sins and is unable to cooperate at all in his conversion.

A disagreement now arose between C. F. W. Walther of the Missouri Synod and F. A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod. At the 1877 convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod Walther had delivered a paper with six theses on the Doctrine of Election. There was general agreement with the presentation except for a few. Pastor H. A. Allwardt of Lebanon, Wisconsin, expressed opposing views in 1879. Previous to this time Prof. Schmidt and Prof. Walther had been in agreement. Schmidt did good work in helping to organize the Synodical Conference of 1872. He was serving as the Norwegian Synod's professor in the new seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. But now Prof. Schmidt, together with Allwardt, rose up against Walther and accused him and the Missouri Synod of teaching Calvinism. He even began a new publication, *Altes und Neues* (Old and New), for the specific purpose of attacking Walther. He later turned his attack against the Norwegian Synod officials and pastors, accusing them of

advocating a new and false doctrine which he must oppose. Schmidt had fallen into the trap of using human reason in order to answer the question of why some are saved and not others.

As is often the case, there were private reasons for Schmidt's attitude. A disagreement arose between two professors at the Seminary in Madison. They were Prof. Schmidt and Prof. O. Asperheim. Asperheim soon resigned. Schmidt, on the other hand, began his attack on the Missouri Synod and then brought the controversy into the Norwegian Synod. Schmidt was bitterly disappointed because he did not receive the call to become professor of theology at the Seminary in St. Louis.⁴⁵ This could well have been a cause for his hatred of Walther and the Missouri Synod. Prof. Armin Schuetze writes: "It does not appear to have been mere coincidence that not long after Schmidt failed to receive the desired call, early in 1879, he informed Walther of his objections to the report in the 1877 proceedings, stating, 'I can no longer go with you.... I dare no longer keep silence.'"⁴⁶

The Missouri Synod took its stand on the matter in May 1881, when it adopted thirteen theses prepared by Dr. Walther. The Theses clearly affirmed God's universal grace, God's earnest call to all men to faith through the Gospel, and man's sole responsibility for his rejection of God's grace in Christ. The controversy in the Missouri Synod was virtually over at that time. In the Norwegian Synod, however, the battle had just begun. The controversy was carried on from 1880 to 1887.

Koren's Leadership Role

Let us now ask, "What role did Dr. Koren play in the controversy?" It was in October of 1884 at the General Pastoral Conference in Decorah, Iowa, that it was felt necessary to explain to the congregations what was the truth in light of all the charges that had been raised.

Dr. Koren, therefore, prepared a document called "*En Redegjørelse*," (An Accounting), consisting of 63 theses, complete with references to the Scriptures and the Confessions. It was not only a defense against all the accusations which had been raised, but a presentation of all the points in controversy. Concerning this document Pastor T. A. Aaberg asserts: "The document no doubt is the finest

piece of theological work to come out of the election controversy, surpassing the Missouri Synod's Thirteen Theses."⁴⁷ Koren set forth the doctrine in four parts, universal grace, conversion, election, and the certainty of salvation. We here summarize them as follows: Under **Universal Grace** the clear teachings of Scripture are set forth, namely, that God will have all men to be saved, that Christ has redeemed all men, that God calls all men to repentance, that the means of grace always possess their innate power, and that the power of the means of grace can be resisted. In each of these truths the corresponding Calvinistic error is rejected. Under the heading of **Conversion** the truths of Scripture are clearly delineated, namely, that natural man himself cannot change the condition of his heart, nor can he cooperate with the Holy Spirit in ceasing to resist the power of the Word. It belongs to the gracious work of the Holy Ghost to "remove the resistance of the will." Therefore there can be no synergism or cooperation in conversion, but if a man is brought to faith it is solely due to the work of the Holy Ghost. Ascribing any power or ability to man in bringing about a change of heart is clearly rejected. Under the heading of **Election** the great principle of the Lutheran Church, namely, Grace Alone, is clearly set forth. In one brief paragraph from the "Accounting" the entire controversy is summed up. Dr. Koren writes:

According to Scripture it belongs to the essence of grace to be free; for if grace is not free, i.e., undeserved by any kind of merit whatsoever in the one who is favored with it, then "grace is no more grace" (Rom.11.6) and a man cannot then trust in the grace of God alone. Rom. 3, 23-24, 27-28; Eph. 2,8-10. We reject the synergistic doctrine that the election in Christ has not taken place in accordance with a free purpose of grace by God, and that "salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone." Eph. 1,11.... Prof. Schmidt refused to subscribe to the "Accounting" and regarding the above mentioned point he said: "I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God's Word and our Lutheran Confession, that 'salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.'"⁴⁸

Another form of false teaching which was accepted by many who insisted that man had something to do with his election was that called "*intuitu fidei*," (in view of faith). It was basically this that when God looked into the future he saw that some would come to

faith, and that it was “in view of this faith” that they were elected to salvation. Faith was, therefore, looked upon as a meritorious cause of a man’s election rather than the result of his election. Salvation is then no longer purely by grace alone. This concept of “*intuitu fidei*” is thoroughly rejected in the “*Redegjørelse*.” We read in Part III, 19, “Since everything is eternally present for God, the faith of the elect is also foreseen, and the elect themselves are foreseen by God as believing, without its being the case, however, that this foreseen faith in any way dare be counted among the efficient causes of election.”⁴⁹

Under the fourth part entitled “**Concerning the Certainty, by faith, of Preservation (in the faith) and of Salvation**” the following truths are set forth and are here summarized: When a man has been converted he receives a new spiritual life with the desire and power to do that which is good. The preservation of this new life is to be ascribed solely and alone to the power of God. Since faith is a new life, the believer is also willing to do, and be active in, the good by the powers given him by God, works out his own salvation with fear and trembling through daily renewal and strives thus to keep the faith.... Since God has promised His children that He will keep them in the faith unto the end, the believer trusts in this promise of God, which is unbreakable and sufficient; therefore, he has the certainty by faith that he will be kept in the faith until the end, that God then “will grant him and all believers in Christ eternal life” and that he thus actually will attain and share the (life of) glory with God.⁵⁰

Over 100 of the synod’s pastors subscribed to the “Accounting.” The truths of the controversy were made clear to many of the lay people. When Schmidt said that our salvation does not depend upon God’s grace alone, that was enough to cause many to remain with the synod. Those who followed Schmidt and embraced his position were called “Anti-Missourians.” The Anti-Missourians met on Oct. 14, 1885, at Red Wing, Minnesota, and resolved that the pastors who had signed “An Accounting” should be deposed from office. This meant that Pres. B. Harstad of the Minnesota District, and Pres. U. V. Koren of the Iowa District, should be removed from office. As a result Pres. H. A. Preus and his assistant, C. K. Preus, were deposed at Norway Grove, Wisconsin, and Rev. J. A. Ottesen was deposed at the Koshkonong and Liberty Prairie parishes, near Stoughton, Wisconsin. No doubt the seminary students in nearby

Madison who were avid followers of Schmidt were also instrumental in bringing about the tragic actions in those congregations. The Anti-Missourians established their own seminary at St. Olaf's School in Northfield, Minnesota. At the convention in 1887 at Stoughton, Wisconsin, this group resolved to withdraw from the Synod. The Synod had a membership of 143,885 before the split. It now dwindled down in 1890 to 93,891, but by the year 1902 the number had grown to about 140,000.⁵¹

Koren reports the following:

The anti-Missourian pastors, who had withdrawn from the Synod, got into touch with other Norwegian parties, and, after various preparatory meetings, the United Church was founded in 1890. It consisted of The Conference, the anti-Missourian Brotherhood, and the Norwegian Augustana Synod.⁵²

A joint meeting between the Norwegian Synod and the United Church was held at Willmar, Minnesota, January 6-12, 1892. At this meeting it was revealed that at least two other differences existed. The first pertained to the question of prayer fellowship and the second involved the inspiration of the Scriptures.

The Norwegian Synod, like the Missouri Synod, held to the position that participation in common prayer was to be denied unless there was complete doctrinal agreement. A Synod delegate, T. A. Torgerson, contended therefore that the sessions must not begin with prayer. The United Church representatives reluctantly allowed this, recognizing that the meeting would founder unless they made this concession.... It was not long before the representatives of the Synod suggested an alteration in the wording of the paragraph defining the authority and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.... The response of the United Church men was that ...they did not want to make the Doctrine of Inspiration a condition of union.

A vigorous debate followed between President G. Hoyme of the United Church and "the keenest of the Synod dialecticians, U. V. Koren."⁵³

Koren also reports that later

several efforts have been made toward the goal of attaining a better understanding among the church bodies and a reconciliation among them, but these efforts have not brought happy results. A “colloquium” between the theological faculties of the United Church and the Synod was arranged. But this was foiled by Dr. Schmidt publishing a distorted account of the negotiations in which he declared that the theses drawn up by the colloquium contained a compromise “for concealing a great cleavage between truth and error” and that they were inclined towards the so called “Missourian doctrine.” The Church Council of the Synod declared on that occasion, that since there had, during the 8-year controversy, been so many proofs of Dr. Schmidt’s dishonesty, and that, since he through his own report of the colloquium shows himself to be unchanged, “we consider him to be an essential hindrance not only for unity, but also for understanding between the church bodies.”⁵⁴

This, of course, brought a response from the United Church that the Church Council of the Synod should prove what they had said, which the Council proceeded to do. This was met with a response which was entitled, “The Church Council has spoken evil.” And thus further negotiations were put off for some time.

Dr. Koren Becomes President

Upon the death of Rev. H. A. Preus the synod elected Rev. U. V. Koren as the next president in the year 1894, a position he held until his death in 1910. At its convention in 1903 President Koren, in his presidential report, spoke of the importance of Christian Day Schools. We quote him as follows:

If there is any matter of importance for us, a matter into which the Synod now at the beginning of a new era should betake itself with power and eagerness it is our Christian Day Schools.... the *Festskrift* that has just come out has pointed out that the Synod’s greatest lack is the neglect of the thorough and constant instruction of the children in Christianity.⁵⁵

He also reported the following to the Convention:

With regard to the dealings with other Norwegian Lutheran bodies in this country I can inform the Synod that I received information from the secretary of the United Church in July 1902, that the United Church holds fast to its resolution of last year (1901, p. 206), and therefore does not find itself inclined to take into consideration the memorial which was drawn up at the last Synod Convention in the interest of this cause. As far as I can see, the door to further dealings in official colloquies is thereby closed...⁵⁶

However, during the Convention, the Synod received a telegram from the secretary of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in which it asked whether or not the Synod recognized the pamphlet recently published against Dr. F. A. Schmidt as its own. The following answer was wired back to the United Church Convention:

“Dr. F. A. Schmidt has demanded that the Church Council prove its accusations against him. The Church Council has complied with the demand. If the Church Council has spoken evil, bear witness of the evil.” A rising vote was called for and the resolution was passed unanimously.⁵⁷

The 1903 Convention was very festive with greetings from various church bodies. The King of Norway, His Majesty Oscar II of Christiania, also sent his greetings. Dr. Fr. Pieper, then president of the Missouri Synod, brought greetings in the German language with these closing words:

“Your Synod has also from its beginning unto this day endured affliction. You have been afflicted both from within and without. They have derided you on account of the truth of God’s Word that you confessed.... But by God’s grace you confess unto this day the ‘*sola scriptura*’ and the ‘*sola gratia*’ in opposition to the many kinds of seductive error. For this unspeakable grace of God you thank God today, and we, your brethren in the faith, thank God along with you.”

Pres. Pieper then switched to the Latin language and informed the assembly that the Faculty of the Theological Seminary of the Missouri Synod had decreed to create the President of the Norwegian Synod, Pastor V. Koren, and also Prof. Laur. Larsen, Doctors

of Theology. This was formally done, and thereafter the entire assembly arose to congratulate Pres. Koren and Prof. Larsen on the occasion of the great honor bestowed upon them.⁵⁸

Pastor Fr. Sievers of the Synodical Conference also sent a congratulatory letter.

As the convention drew to a close, two of the Synod's pastors were asked to address the Synod. They were Pastor Bjug Harstad and Pastor George A. Gullixson. Pastor Harstad was 54 years of age and Pastor Gullixson 36. Dr. Koren then offered a prayer and pronounced the blessing upon the assembly and all joined in singing "On my heart imprint Thine image." Pastor T. A. Torgerson then spoke up and reported that it was now 50 years since Pastor and Mrs. Koren were married and fifty years since he was ordained. The entire assembly arose in congratulation.⁵⁹

The 1908 Convention Of The Norwegian Synod

The 29th convention of the Norwegian Synod met at Our Saviour's Church, Chicago, IL, in June of 1908. Dr. Koren's presidential address was in the form of a treatise on "The Inspiration Of Holy Scripture." He wanted this address to be considered as his testament to the Synod. The entire address is translated and may be found in *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, pages 145 to 166. Here he takes on the spokesmen for "higher criticism" and shows in great detail how those modern theories do not measure up when they are examined in the light of God's Word. Koren, after dealing with the learned critics of God's Word, says the following:

We must—each one of us—become as children, and learn not to consider ourselves wise, least of all to want to be wise above that which is written. According to the Word of God we have reason to be certain that many an unlearned, and by the world despised, man or woman has come farther in the knowledge of God and His will than the most learned pastors and professors. Jesus has said to us all, "Except ye become as children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 18,3.⁶⁰

The District Conventions Of 1910

The districts of the Synod had their conventions in 1910. In the Report of 1910 President Koren made the following announcement: "It is well known to most of the members of the Synod that I have been ill during this synodical year. My sickness is 'angina pectoris.' It has hindered me from taking part in meetings, and at these the vice-president, Dr. Stub, has functioned for me."⁶¹

An unfortunate occurrence took place at these conventions. Dr. Koren was not able to attend and so Dr. Stub took his place and delivered his message for him. In his message Dr. Koren had called attention to the fact that there was still no real agreement on the Doctrines of Election and Conversion. He called for antitheses in order to be certain there was no misunderstanding. He wrote in his message to the Districts, "The doctrinal discussions which have been carried on with the other Norwegian Lutheran church bodies have not, it is my conviction, led to any reliable results.... If only insignificant things were at stake, then it would not be right to separate; but when the question is raised whether God alone is our Saviour, then we cannot be too careful."⁶² But what was the unfortunate occurrence? Dr. Stub, who favored the union of the church bodies, omitted this portion of Koren's address when he presented it. The testimony of Dr. Koren, calling for caution in dealing with such an important matter, did not come to the attention of the convention.

The Synod Convention In 1911

The 30th Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod was held in Central Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, MN, beginning on Friday, June 23, 1911. President Koren had died on Dec. 19, 1910, lacking only three days of being 84 years of age. He had been president of the Iowa District from 1876 to 1894, and president of the Synod from 1894 until his death. Dr. H. G. Stub, as vice president, now took over as president of the Synod. In his report Dr. Stub gave a brief account of Dr. Koren's life and work, and also reported concerning his last illness, death and burial. Dr. Koren's mortal remains were laid to rest in the churchyard of Washington Prairie Lutheran Church, near Decorah, Iowa. Of him Dr. Stub said: "May our Synod not forget

what a gift God gave us in him who after 57 years of tireless work as one of our pioneer pastors and as a champion in doctrine and in the care for the congregation and the Synod was granted to enter into the eternal rest.”⁶³

Dr. Koren’s Legacy

His legacy is so broad that it is difficult to summarize it briefly. That could possibly best be done by pointing out his steadfast adherence to the two principles of the Lutheran faith: The Word of God as our only rule of faith and conduct, and the Doctrine of Justification by faith alone without the works of the Law. In all of his writing, debating, and preaching he continually upheld and defended these two principles. D. J. Magnus Rohne in his book, *Norwegian American Lutheranism*, writes as follows: “For years he was the chief champion of the Synod’s position and has been called the ablest statesman of the church up until the time of his death in 1910. In the course of the many battles he clearly, and in a very far-sighted manner, enunciated principles that should outlive his time and day.”⁶⁴ But there is more to be said. At the Koren Eighty-Fifth Anniversary Festival held at Luther College on September 4, 1938, a booklet was published which gave details about Koren’s life, written by Sigurd S. Reque, on behalf of the Anniversary Committee. We quote from the conclusion as follows:

As a theologian he is generally recognized as being, perhaps, the most outstanding our Norwegian Lutheran Church in America has produced.

As a pastor and preacher, the volumes of sermons from his hand to be found in the many homes bear eloquent testimony, as does the fact that his home congregation tenaciously retained his service for fifty-seven years.

His executive talents may be inferred from the positions he was elected to fill.

In speaking of him as an educator, reference need only be made to the impression he has left on our institutions of higher learning, seminary, college and academy, and not to forget the parochial school.

The inner mission found in him a foremost champion. The founding of Luther College, in which he took a leading part, resulted during its first twenty years, in the preparation of 225 pastors to be sent out into the field, in most instances the inner mission field.

His general cultural interests are well known. In music, in his writings and discourses, in his poetry—*Det Gamle Hus*.

His discernment, his clear thinking, his honest reasoning and eloquent presentation, his energy and industry, talent for organization, his high principles and ideals, his highly developed scholarship, and even his erect carriage, in a measure sum up the impression he has left of himself as a man.

To describe fully the part of his loving wife, Fru Koren, in the great work he was given to do would be impossible. She was at all times his trusted right hand. Rev. Koren himself frequently alludes to her fine understanding and judgment in the most difficult practical and subjective matters.⁶⁵

Others outside the Norwegian Synod paid tribute to Dr. Koren as well. Professor Wm. Moenkemueller of the Missouri Synod's Concordia College, St. Paul, MN, had this to say, "Dr. Koren occupied a high position as a teacher of the Lutheran church at large; we, too, of the German Synod of Missouri, owe him a debt of gratitude."⁶⁶

Conclusion

As we observe the 150 Anniversary of the founding of the Norwegian Synod we, the spiritual and theological successors of the founders, can do no better than to continue in the doctrine and follow in the footsteps of Dr. U.V. Koren. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Jer. 6,16.

Ye lands, to the Lord make a jubilant noise:

Glory be to God

O serve Him with joy, in His presence now rejoice:

Sing praise unto God out of Zion!

ELH 56

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Endnotes

- ¹ *Grace for Grace*, p. 18.
- ² *Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. 4, p. 8.
- ³ *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 33.
- ⁴ *Kort Udsigt Over Det Lutherske Kirkearbeide*, p. 256.
- ⁵ *Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. 4. p. 16.
- ⁶ *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren*, p. 79.
- ⁷ *Ibid*, p. 92.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, p. 103.
- ⁹ *Symra*, Vol. 23, 1905.
- ¹⁰ *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren*, p. 198.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 122.
- ¹² *Ibid*, p. 252.
- ¹³ *Built On The Rock*, p. 42.
- ¹⁴ *Kort Udsigt Over Det Lutherske Kirkearbeide*, p. 860.
- ¹⁵ *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, pp. 38f.
- ¹⁶ "Why Is There No Church Unity Among Lutherans?" p. 23.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 22.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 22.
- ²⁰ *Faith of Our Fathers*, pp. 39-41.
- ²¹ *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, p. 137f.
- ²² *The Book of Concord*, Tappert edition, p. 625, 52.
- ²³ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, pp. 149-153.
- ²⁴ *Faith of Our Fathers*, pp. 117-118.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 125-126.
- ²⁶ "Why Is There No Church Unity Among Lutherans?" pp. 39-40.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 38.
- ²⁸ *Grace for Grace*. p. 136.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 136.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 136.
- ³¹ *The History of Luther Valley: A Pioneer Lutheran Church*, p. 27.
- ³² *Grace for Grace*, pp. 138-139.
- ³³ *Ibid*, p. 149.
- ³⁴ "Why Is There No Church Unity," pp. 16-17.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 18.

- ³⁷ *The History of Luther Valley*, p. 150.
- ³⁸ *Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 105.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 101-102.
- ⁴⁰ *Grace for Grace*, p. 159.
- ⁴¹ *Luther's Works* 40, p. 367.
- ⁴² *ELS Catechism & Explanation*, p. 143.
- ⁴³ *Grace for Grace*, p. 165.
- ⁴⁴ *A City Set on a Hill*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁵ *The Synodical Conference*, p. 93.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 93
- ⁴⁷ *A City Set on a Hill*, pp. 32,33.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 36.
- ⁴⁹ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, p. 142.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Vol. 43, p. 143-145.
- ⁵¹ *Grace for Grace*, p. 92.
- ⁵² "Why Is There No Church Unity?" p. 50.
- ⁵³ *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*, Vol. 2, pp. 133-134.
- ⁵⁴ "Why Is There No Church Unity?" p. 52.
- ⁵⁵ *Synodal Beretning*, A. Harstad translation, 1903, p. 5.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.
- ⁵⁷ *Grace for Grace*, p. 94.
- ⁵⁸ *Synodal Beretning*, Harstad translation, 1903, p. 11.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12.
- ⁶¹ *Synodal Beretning* 1910, Harstad translation, "Report to the Districts", p. 10.
- ⁶² *Grace for Grace*, pp. 98-99.
- ⁶³ *Synodal Beretning* 1911, Harstad translation, p. 13.
- ⁶⁴ *Norwegian American Lutheranism*, p. 128.
- ⁶⁵ "The Koren Eighty-Fifth Anniversary," p. 25.
- ⁶⁶ *Built On The Rock*, p. 52.

Lecture Three

Part One: The Legacy of Jakob Aall Ottesen

Part Two: The Enduring Legacy of Preus, Koren, and Ottesen

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The Legacy of Jakob Aall Ottesen

Of the three fathers who have been shaped into a sort of holy trinity for the Norwegian Synod, the “forgotten” or less visible person of that trinity might be Jakob Aall Ottesen. Perhaps the metaphor is objectionable, and we might want rather to use the image of that Russian drawn carriage/sleigh, the *troika*. At least in the parochial boundaries of the Norwegian Synod, Preus and Koren both served as Synod president (the two holding forth from 1862 until 1910), while Ottesen was once elected a district president and declined to serve, and a year later was called to teach theology at Luther College, but declined that as well. Preus was front and center, along with Koren, in the election controversy which rocked Midwestern Lutheranism in the 1880s, while Ottesen primarily wrote articles and letters. In an even earlier time of controversy with other Norwegian Lutherans, Ottesen was co-editor with Preus of *Kirkelig Maanedstidende for den norsk-evangelisk-lutherske Kirke i Amerika*, the church paper for the Synod, and he wielded a great influence there.

J. A. Bergh¹ described some of the Norwegian church leaders in the course of a discussion of H. A. Preus: “Rev. H. A. Preus possibly does not possess the dialectic ability of his great co-laborer, Jacob Aall Ottesen, is not a diplomat like Rev. V. Koren, or an eloquent preacher like P. A. Rasmussen, or a persistent worker like Prof. Laur. Larsen, or a quick thinker like B. J. Muus, or as learned as Prof. F. A. Schmidt.” So Bergh pegs Ottesen as the pre-eminent dialectician – the logician and debater – of the crowd. Dialecticians, those who get their arguments straight and present them forcefully, however, are also generally labeled as troublemakers or contentious, especially by those who cannot rise to their level. And so it was in Ottesen’s case.

Ottesen is only briefly memorialized in a biography, an article in *Kirketidende* by Laur Larsen, a close friend, which was later included in a little volume² *Life Sketches from the Lutheran Church in America*. We are going to try to get some insight into Ottesen and his contribution not through what others say about him, but through some specific literary contributions of the man himself:

1. As one of two assigned by the synod to visit some Lutheran Seminaries in the U.S. in order to find a place to train pastors, and author of the trip report.
2. As co-editor of *Kirkelig Maanedstidende for den norsk-evangelisk-lutheriske Kirke i Amerika*, and author of documents regarding lay ministry, slavery, church discipline, and the election controversy.

Biography

Jacob Aall Ottesen, like Preus and Koren, came from an aristocratic family in Norway. His father and grandfather had been pastors in Norway, though the family was originally Danish. Early 19th century Norway was in a time of turmoil and class struggle. The clergy belonged to the educated class, and were therefore considered aristocracy. Norway had been without its own university until 1811. Norway was under the Danish crown until 1814 when Denmark found itself on the wrong side in the Napoleonic wars; it lost Norway, which was then given to Sweden. The aristocracy was educated largely in Denmark, and consequently spoke and wrote in Danish, regarded as a more refined language than the often-uncharted dialects of the valleys and fjords. The two could understand each other, but their different languages marked them as being worlds apart. Like Preus, who had a German ancestor, thanks to the Hanseatic League, Ottesen as well had imported, Hanseatic, Danish blood.

The division was not only social and political, but extended to the church, where many of the laymen followed the spiritually egalitarian movement of Hans Nielsen Hauge, the famous lay preacher; in its more radical form the movement centralized the Universal priesthood, but had little time for the trained, called ministry – often with good reason.

The immigrant church inherited that divide: the clergy were

highly educated, and in some places the laypeople easily gravitated toward the lay preachers. Yet at the same time, the immigrant clergy, such as Preus, Koren, and Ottesen, were very easily and quickly adapted to the democratic ways of their adopted land. Ottesen, like his confreres, was born into that world. His father and grandfather were both pastors, both trained at the University of Copenhagen. Otto Ottesen, grandfather of Jacob Aall Ottesen, graduated from the theological faculty at København (Copenhagen) and then was sent to Norway where he served as pastor in several places and married the daughter of a Norwegian merchant. The larger part of his ministry was as *sogneprest* (parish pastor) in Fet. His assistant, and then his successor there, was Otto Christian Ottesen, J. A. Ottesen's father. Otto Christian, also trained at the university at Copenhagen, served in several places and was married to Diderikke Aall, the daughter of a businessman Jacob Aall.

Jacob Aall Ottesen was born at the *prestegaard* (parsonage) at Fet, Norway, June 1, 1825, and christened with the name of his maternal grandfather. In that christening was put together a string of names later to be joined to the Preus name, which has not been without reputation in the United States, being borne by a governor of Minnesota and founder of Lutheran Brotherhood Insurance; his son, of some fame in American Lutheran church politics; and, as I understand it, now borne by a IVth.

Ottesen attended Latin School at Drammen, Norway, and from 1844 was a student at the young University of Christiania, where he first had the philosophy exam and then the theological exam. Among his classmates at the University were Ulrik Koren, O. J. Duus, and Nils Brandt, all important figures later in the Norwegian Synod. After being a candidate of theology, he taught for three years at Nissen's Latin School in Christiania, more on which later.

In April 1852, after he had been teaching at Nissen's for three years, Ottesen received the call to Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and was ordained on June 2 in Oslo by Bishop Arup; this event was quickly followed by his marriage on June 11 to his cousin Catrine (Cathinka) Tank Døderlein, daughter of Tank Døderlein, a grammar school principal. Then came a ten-week trip to New York on a ship with the foreboding name "*Incognito*," arriving in New York in September and in Manitowoc in October. Here he served from 1852 to 1860. The

majority of his pastoral service was from 1860 to 91 at Koshkonong, just east of Madison, Wisconsin, a far-flung parish, which was mother to many other congregations in the area, especially to the west. The twilight years of his service to the church were spent in Decorah, Iowa.

As a student, Ottesen seems already to have had a reputation as a keen mind. His graduation exams were all *laudabilis*, and Larsen records the comment of a younger contemporary who “looked up with awe to the tall blond candidate, about whom they already were saying that he was a sharp dogmatician.”³

Ottesen was one of the seven pastors who organized the Norwegian Synod in 1853 (C. L. Clausen, H. A. Stub, A. C. Preus, G. F. Dietrichsen, H. A. Preus, Nils O. Brandt, and Ottesen), having just arrived in 1852. Aside from his long service as a parish pastor, Ottesen’s contributions are in the form of theological writing, particularly polemical articles in the church paper, first called *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, but *Luthersk Kirketidende* after it became necessary to publish semi-monthly and weekly. He served several times in the early years as secretary of the synod, but a most momentous and far reaching assignment for this young pastor came in 1857 when he was sent by the Synod (the resolution was passed at the 1855 convention) with Pastor Nils Brandt to visit some Lutheran seminaries in the U. S. The mission was to find a place to train pastors for the Norwegian immigrant church. From 1859-1868, he was co-editor with H. A. Preus of the church paper, *Maanedstidende*, which was the platform for a large part of his writing, much of it doctrinal and polemical. He wrote a brief history of the Norwegian Synod (to be distributed at the Chicago Exposition in 1893), as well as a series of articles entitled “A Look at the Missouri Synod.”⁴ He translated Guenther’s *Symbolik* from German to Norwegian, as well as Walther’s *The Evangelical Lutheran Church: God’s True Visible Church on Earth*.⁵

Ottesen had one son who entered the ministry, Otto Christian Ottesen, but did not outlive his father by many years, dying in 1917. Two grandsons, Hans Andreas Stub and Jacob Aall Ottesen Stub also became pastors, and had notable service in the merged Norwegian Lutheran Church in America after 1917. Their mother, Diderikke Aall Ottesen, was married to H. G. Stub, who led the Norwegian Synod into the 1917 merger. The young mother died in 1879, soon after the

birth of her second son. The first daughter born to the Ottesens was named Hannah, but she died soon after birth, as did another girl. Including Diderikke, the young mother, the Ottesens left three children buried at Koshkonong. (Nils Brandt was married to a Diderikke Ottesen, who apparently was a cousin of J. A. Ottesen.) One daughter lived to adulthood, also named Hannah, who lived with the Ottesens until the death of Cathinka in 1899, and Pastor Ottesen in 1904. Ottesen also had a foster son, Olaf Mandt, who lived with the family in Koshkonong for confirmation instruction, and then was sent by Ottesen to Luther College in Decorah and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. After his ordination, he served in Baltimore, where he died after two years in the ministry.⁶ So there was plenty of sorrow in the Koshkonong parsonage.

But that was not all the sorrow Ottesen left at Koshkonong. On August 10, 1891, the Ottesens were taken to the depot in Stoughton and took the train to Decorah, Iowa, where they would spend the rest of their lives. Ottesen's friend Laur Larsen notes that in the ensuing 13 years, Ottesen traveled some, coming as close to Koshkonong as Spring Prairie, (where he performed the wedding of his niece Cathinka Hjort to pastor J. Strand), but never visiting there. He was invited by the congregations often, and always sent a greeting for festival occasions, but never visited. It does not seem that this reluctance to return to the place where he had served as pastor for 31 years was rooted in a circumspect pastoral ethic to stay away from places one has previously served.⁷ What kept him away?

While serving the three-point parish, West and East Koshkonong and Liberty (near Deerfield), Ottesen confirmed about 3,000 young people. From that number, one can project an even larger number of baptisms, as well as a great number of marriages, and funerals. And there is a great deal of evidence that Ottesen was a dearly loved pastor among his people. In the late '70s he was permitted to leave for several months to visit Norway, which included the final visit with his father.

But Ottesen had health problems. Early on there is mention of his being sickly and not always able to carry the full load of his ministerial duties. Certainly the East and West congregations on Koshkonong Prairie, as well as Liberty congregation to the north, grew rapidly, and one wonders how one man could keep up with that work.

George Orvick reports the recollection of a Koshkonong parishioner:

Ottesen traveled a distance of 30-50 miles a day on horseback, in summer heat and winter storm. As a result of these strenuous journeys, Ottesen contracted chronic rheumatism which worked havoc with the nerves of his legs, so that it was difficult for him to talk or stand long. Because of this Ottesen was often forced to sit in the pulpit when delivering his sermons.”⁸

This condition may have exacerbated another condition – there is some evidence that Ottesen suffered some depression; which might today be called depression and anxiety. In any case, even before the outbreak of full-scale doctrinal warfare, because of Ottesen’s illnesses the congregations hired a “*kapellan*,” a curate or assistant pastor, which would have serious repercussions in the controversial years to follow.

In 1885 Ottesen gives a glimpse of his condition when he writes about the election controversy at Koshkonong:

But I will add that in the last four to five years I have been under a great deal of pressure from sorrow and distress, both because of physical illness, namely, an often painful nervousness [*nervøsitet*], and also because of the emergency I saw in the congregation during the bitter controversy which has gone on here in these years. No one will be surprised that during all this I have often been more despondent (*modløs*) and indecisive (*rådløs*), than I would have been otherwise.⁹

What he describes, mentioned also by others, appears to be an already existing condition exacerbated by unusually stressful circumstances. Karen Larsen also refers to his “unfailing sense of humor even in the midst of periods of depression that often overwhelmed him.”¹⁰

The situation Ottesen describes is rooted in the election controversy, which has already been detailed in these lectures. The synod’s seminary had just been opened at Madison, Wisconsin. The first two professors were F. A. Schmidt and Ole Asperheim, who had been the synod representatives at St. Louis and Springfield. Asperheim soon left and was replaced by Johannes Ylvisaker. Very shortly, Schmidt, in a paper delivered in 1878 to the Western District of the Missouri

Synod, accused C. F. W. Walther of holding a Calvinistic teaching on election or predestination.

During the ensuing controversy, many congregations in the synod were split, but, it turns out, the closer one was to the hotbed and center point of the controversy, Madison, the more likely it was that a congregation would be split. Schmidt was a charismatic individual, and Ottesen and others describe a steady stream of seminary students visiting the congregations bringing Schmidt's "anti-Walther," and "anti-Missourian" (anti-Preus, Koren, Ottesen, Larsen, etc.) message.¹¹

At congregation meetings in 1884, a resolution was introduced in which Ottesen was asked if he agreed with the position the majority in the congregations had taken supporting the teaching of Prof. Schmidt. If he did not, his services were to be terminated. The Curate, Pastor Ola M. Saevig, had taken a position opposite Ottesen, supporting Schmidt. The resolution said that "no other teaching about the doctrine of election shall be presented either from the pulpit or in confirmation instruction than what the congregation itself has taken and confessed as doctrine, which in our Lutheran Church is customarily called: election in view faith."¹² The resolution demanded that no one could serve as pastor of the congregation unless he accepted this. Ottesen, of course, explained that this was not Lutheran teaching and he could not teach it. When the vote was taken on the proposed resolution, it was a tie vote 66 to 66, and the motion was declared rejected. At a meeting in Liberty congregation, when another deadlock was apparent, two laymen produced a compromise resolution. Pastor Saevig had received a call to Wiota, and the compromise resolution urged him to take it. Then, since Pastor Ottesen was in ill health, he would in the next year retire and the congregations would agree on calling a new pastor. Ottesen spelled out that he was prepared to resign when the congregations were able to agree on calling another pastor. The resolution was then accepted. However, in the ensuing year, the congregations tried to agree on a call, and were unable to – everything hinged on the position one took on the doctrine of election. When at the next annual meeting Ottesen had not resigned, those who opposed him took him to task, and he pointed out that the condition had not been fulfilled – the congregations had not agreed on a replacement. As a result, each of the three congregations split, with a close major-

ity in each case rejecting the pastor who had served them for over 25 years. The groups that stayed with Ottesen then built anew: Liberty congregation built in nearby Deerfield while Ottesen was still there. West and East congregations' buildings were dedicated after Ottesen left; he was succeeded by M. F. Wiese, who served Western Koshkonong until 1917. At that time the East Church and Deerfield entered the Merger, and the Western congregation stayed out and became a founding congregation of the "Reorganized Norwegian Synod," as it was called, which later took the name The Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

That was the consequence of Ottesen's refusal to go along with the majority. One of the distinguishing features of those who opposed the position taken by F. A. Schmidt, was that, although Schmidt and his compatriots were able to find expressions in the 17th century dogmaticians of Lutheran orthodoxy, and the various catechisms of the church, the "Missourians," with Walther, went directly back to the Book of Concord and espoused the clear position set forth there, which they found to be in agreement with Scripture. The words Ottesen wrote years earlier were prescient: "May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions."¹³ The doctrine of election was one of those matters settled by the Lutheran Confessions; and in Ottesen's mind, there was no reason why there should have been continued wrangling over it.

So, at age 66, Ottesen left the parish where he had devoted 31 years of service. He retained an affectionate relationship to those congregations – but he could not bring himself to go back even for an anniversary. He spent his waning days at Decorah, which by then was the new "nerve-center" of the synod. He wrote a few articles in *Kirketidende*, served on some boards, participated in the 1903 50th Anniversary Jubilee, spent considerable time "up on the hill" at Luther College, and served as vacancy pastor of the Decorah congregation. In 1899 he buried his wife, and in 1904 he himself was taken to his heavenly rest. He was not a broken man, but his 52 years of service to the Norwegian Lutherans in America had been filled with hard work, which contributed to ill health, turmoil and personal sadness. "There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall

be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21: 4). The funeral was conducted by I. B. Torrison whom Ottesen had baptized in his first parish at Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

J. A. Ottesen’s Legacy to the Norwegian Synod

What is of chief interest to us in this essay is the theological legacy, especially the Reformation, confessional Lutheran legacy Ottesen left on the immigrant church he helped organize. One part of that legacy is fellowship with the Missouri Synod, which led to the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872. We will see this in “*Indberetning*” or “Trip Report.” The other part consists of doctrinal and polemical writings in *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*.

Fellowship with Missouri

Ottesen participated in the founding convention in 1853. At the time he was a young, 28-year-old pastor, who spoke not only Norwegian, but German, and possibly some English. Of the pastors who had begun the organization of the Synod, C. L. Clausen and J. W. C. Dietrichsen were more or less Grundtvigian in their theological outlook. Grundtvigianism was the school following the Danish pastor, poet, theologian N. F. S. Grundtvig. In reaction to Enlightenment Rationalism Grundtvig called for a return not only to true Lutheranism, but to an earlier, better tradition in the church. A part of his theology elevated the Apostles’ Creed to the status of being the Living Word of God, following the discredited tradition that Jesus and the disciples formulated the creed at the Ascension. Grundtvig’s theology at its best could produce wonderful, orthodox hymn texts like “God’s Word is our Great Heritage,” “Built on a Rock,” “The Happy Christmas Comes Once More,” and others. But at its weakest it admitted theological ideas which could not stand the biblical test. Nevertheless, as a reaction against rationalism, ideas of tradition and Romantic nationalism were widely accepted not only in Denmark, but also in Norway. Norwegian pastors carried the idea home with them, so that Grundtvigian Romanticism became widely popular in Norway, championed especially by W. A. Wexels, a highly respected pastor in Christiania, in numerous writings. The Grundtvigian move-

ment was widely accepted as the salvation from Rationalism, until the anti-Grundtvigian party found champions in Gisle Johnson and Carl Paul Caspari of the University faculty. Dietrichsen, Clausen, and H. A. Stub were both under the influence of the Grundtvigian party, and H. A. Stub was partial to Wexels' "neo-Grundtvigian" ideas. A. C. Preus, older cousin of H. A. Preus, was probably not so influenced by the Grundtvigian ideas, but may have been on the naïve side, and when the constitution – prepared by J. W. C. Dietrichsen, who before the 1851 meeting returned to Norway – was presented by Clausen in 1851, Preus didn't seem to have been troubled by it.

Others, perhaps some of the laymen were troubled; in any case, word quickly got back to Norway, so that H. A. Preus and G. F. Dietrichsen who came late in 1851 and 1852, were ready for battle when they arrived. In 1852 they succeeded in turning back that constitution. A. C. Preus, having been persuaded by his young relative, got the assembly to agree that the actions of the preceding year were merely preliminary, which in effect nullified that constitution and dissolved the organization in process. Ottesen was not on hand for that, though he had equally strong feelings about the matter. At a meeting at East Koshkonong February 5, 1853, Ottesen was present; this meeting revised the proposed constitution by removing the offending Grundtvigian clause, and establishing a procedure for adopting the constitution and holding a constituting convention. That happened October 3-7, 1853 at Luther Valley, Wisconsin. Hence, the Synod has always celebrated its founding as having taken place in 1853, not 1851.

At the second regular (biennial) convention in 1855, a chief concern was how to provide pastors to serve the flood of Norwegian immigrants pouring into the upper Midwest. The pressure was on because of the decade-long-loss of Norwegian Lutherans to the Mormons, Methodists, Baptists, and others, as well as the continued work of the lay preachers coming out of the Fox River, Illinois Norwegian immigrant settlement. By this time it was clear that there was not going to be a great deal of interest on the part of the Norwegian State Church; though the confessional revival was making itself felt there, the religious establishment was generally opposed to the migration to America, and frequently counseled people against emigrating.

In 1855, the Synod pastors, now numbering eight, proposed

that they begin an institution of higher learning to train pastors. G. F. Dietrichson could even report that his parish had already collected \$1,600 dollars for the purpose. But the laymen were not quite so ready, and it was clear that they were not behind the proposal. Instead, the synod resolved to send two pastors, the two young newcomers Ottesen and Nils Brandt, to visit some German Lutheran Seminaries. They knew enough about American Lutheranism to determine that Gettysburg Seminary of the General Synod was not a candidate. But they specifically designated Columbus University of the Ohio Synod and Martin Luther College of the Buffalo Synod in New York as candidates. The trip report, published in *Maanedstidende*, is signed by J. A. Ottesen and Nils Brandt, but it appears that the chief penman was Ottesen.¹⁴

In 1851 there had been an overture from the Ohio Synod's school at Columbus offering use of their school for the training of Norwegian pastors. Partly because they were in the midst of organizing the Norwegian Synod, and partly because of things they heard about Capital University and the Ohio Synod (there were non-Lutherans on the Board of the school, and Ohio had at one point proposed union with the German-Reformed Church). The invitation was declined. Later, the Norwegians were in fellowship with the Ohio Synod when with Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Ohio, they joined in forming the Synodical Conference – though Ohio's membership ended in another decade because of the election controversy.

In spite of the controversy over the Grundtvigian clause in the first Norwegian Synod constitution of 1851, the Synod already knew that it was staunchly Lutheran, which it expressed in article II of the constitution (both 1851 & 1853): "The doctrine of the church is that which is revealed through God's holy Word in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, interpreted in agreement with the Symbolical Books or Confessional Writings. ..." ¹⁵

Several historical treatments¹⁶ have asserted that the Norwegian Synod first came under the spell of Walther and the Missourians, and then became hyper-confessionalists. The lie is quickly put to that by the statement found in the 1851 and 1853 constitutions. In 1858, C. F. W. Walther read his paper on Confessional Subscription where he outlined the strict, unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions in similar words, four years after the Norwegians

and Missourians had officially discovered each other. It turns out, of course, that the Missourians and the Norwegians had some common influences in Europe – much of which is traced back to Ernst Hengstenberg and Franz Delitzsch. The Norwegian professor Gisle Johnson met Hengstenberg in Berlin, who recommended Carl Paul Caspari, a brilliant Old Testament graduate from Leipzig, as a teacher at Christiania. Caspari was a very close friend of Franz Delitzsch at Leipzig, who had also been a close friend of Walther. Hengstenberg edited *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung* as a vehicle for confessional theology; it was quoted frequently in Walther's *Lehre und Wehre*, and, it seems, was read by the Norwegians. It is certainly clear that Caspari and Gisle Johnson, who together translated the *Book of Concord* into Norwegian for the first time, would have known already in the late 1840s about the Missouri Synod in America and would have shared that information with their students, Herman Preus, Jacob Ottesen, Wilhelm Koren, Nils Brandt, Gustav Dietrichsen, all of whom became pastors of the Norwegian Synod.¹⁷

Thus, when, Ottesen and Brandt presented their trip report, they had much to say about the theology they met in Walther and the pastors at St. Louis, as well as those met at Ft. Wayne.

It is a real joy to be able to say, in gratitude to God, that we have invariably got the impression that they are all possessed of the same spirit that prevails in the university [Concordia College and Seminary]: a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols [the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions] and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in them His holy Word is rightly explained and interpreted, and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions. May they rather show their true Lutheranism by truly believing that God's Word is taught rightly and without error in the Lutheran Confessions. Otherwise, the Lutheran name is but duplicity and hypocrisy. The genuine, old-Lutheran spirit is upheld and disseminated with equal fidelity at the other institution of this church, the Fort Wayne Seminary....¹⁸

The report goes on to describe the worship life in the congregations, which was much like their own and not imitative of the

Pietists, Moravians, Methodists, or Baptists:

The complete old-Lutheran ritual and altar books from the days of the Reformation are very faithfully followed. The lovely old Lutheran hymns, chanting from the altar, lighted candles at Holy Communion, intercessions for the sick, publishing of the bans, vestments, in short, their whole worship life is marked by a deep love for the fidelity to the traditions of the fathers. In this regard their worship life has much in common with our own.¹⁹

There was no freewheeling worship at the idolatrous altar of “free to do your own thing” for them.

In further paragraphs, Ottesen details the church discipline practiced in Missouri, and also notes that to that end: “The practice of private confession is closely related. This has not yet been introduced everywhere, although it is becoming more and more widespread,” even though in the Norwegian Synod not everyone has quite become clear on these matters. But he points out that “we too are trying to make our congregations aware of these things, how several of our own congregations have introduced private confession, and how we too were attempting to revive genuine church discipline.”²⁰

As the trip report concludes its section on the Missouri Synod, it emphasizes that it has not learned anything new at St. Louis. “We can truly say that we found the same faith in which we were raised, as well as the same idea of how a Lutheran free church ought to be ordered.” And there is a reiteration of that: “[W]ith regard to baptism, regeneration, the church, and the ministry, the Missouri Synod teaches exactly the same as Pontoppidan and our old dogmaticians and profoundly and strenuously opposes the new teachings on these subjects.” The theme of the report is that what they have found in Missouri “is the genuine old-Lutheran spirit,” which again is defined by the Lutheran Confessional writings, and the church fathers – “they have the symbols and the writings of the oldest and most famous Lutheran dogmaticians on their side.”²¹

That this expectation stuck with Ottesen is made clear by Larsen: “But there was one thing which especially made a powerful impression on Ottesen, and that was that he found in their theology again his father’s theology, which was impressed on him at home from childhood.”²² To what extent Ottesen’s father was actually “old Lutheran” is not clear, given the influences current at Copenhagen

at the time. But there was certainly something in it that Ottesen recognized in Missouri Synod Lutheranism.

Those who organized the Norwegian Synod came to this country already espousing a view of the Lutheran Confessions that was at odds with many in Norway, as well as with the more biblicistic and egalitarian form of Lutheranism advanced by the Haugeans. It was also decidedly at odds with the longer-standing Lutheranism in the Eastern United States being expressed by S. S. Schmucker in the General Synod. The only exception in the established Eastern Lutheranism (which dated back to 1747 and the Pennsylvania Ministerium) was in the circle growing up around Charles Porterfield Krauth in the General Synod, in a few years to be in the General Council. But there was one place where these Norwegians felt at home—“high church” they have often been inaccurately called because of their view of the ministry, the liturgy, and the confessional writings—and that was with the Missourians. They were simply Lutheran in their outlook, with a high regard for the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church and faithfulness to their tradition. It was not that the Norwegian Synod fathers learned their confessionalism from Walther *et al.* Rather they had common theological roots, and the Norwegians immediately recognized the faith of their teachers and the faith of their fathers in the theology they read in Missouri’s *Lehre und Wehre* and in their meetings with the St. Louis and Fort Wayne theologians.

Ottesen, Preus, and Koren carried on extensive, intimate correspondence with Walther, as did others, such as Laur. Larsen, first Norwegian Synod teacher at St. Louis, and founding president of Luther College. Yet, Ottesen seems to have been particularly influential in locating and cultivating the warm connection the Norwegian Synod had in St. Louis, especially in the heat of conflict with others in controversies over the ministry and election.

Doctrinal conflicts

A survey of the history of our Norwegian troika, Preus, Ottesen, and Koren, suggests to some that they were excessively contentious. And certainly their lives seem to have gone from one conflict to the next. From 1851 until 1891, there hardly was an issue of the church paper that did not chronicle one dispute or another about Lutheran

theology or church political issues. There is something in the modern mind that holds theological disagreement, separation when necessary, and bold, unequivocal, uncompromising witness to be something that holds the church back from the more important work of evangelism and church extension, and therefore to be avoided. Doctrinal conflicts, especially of the sort seen in the election controversy, are lamented as the worst things that happen to the church. That spirit proceeds to wonder how much more good would have been accomplished had these people been not so endlessly engaged in controversy. Of course, one might be prepared to counter: "Well, a lot of good would have been accomplished had Adam and Eve not sinned, as well." A more sober response would point to Jesus' commands and observations, including his condemnation of the lukewarm ones who could not stand up for their faith, and his blessing on those persecuted for his sake, etc. Ottesen *et al.*, though they suffered mightily in the election controversy, might wonder if the church would have been much worse off if there had *not* been an Arian controversy – for then there would be no Nicene Creed; Indulgence controversy – for then there would have been no Augsburg Confession, etc.; or election controversy – for then there would have been no ... – well, ELS. (Perhaps we might have stopped a clause earlier.) In any case, our subjects would surely have observed Satan's hand in the false teachings that provoked the conflict; but they would also have observed how having to deal with various aspects of the heresies surely drove them to sharpen up their focus on or deepen their understanding of the gospel itself. As tragic as the election controversy was, it did greatly illuminate the pure gospel and the divine monergism by which God brings salvation to sinners. Who knows? Had it not been for that controversy, there is no telling what kind of murkiness of teaching would have been our heritage.

Our Norwegian fathers certainly did not go looking for fights; yet, when they were confronted with the need to confess, to denounce teachings not in accord with the Holy Scriptures and the confessions of the Lutheran Church, they did not turn tail and run, or compromise, or cover them over. Undoubtedly Ottesen, Preus, Larsen, and even Koren on occasion were considered contentious. In fact, a cursory reading of Ottesen's *Maanedstidende* writings moves one to cry out for that epithet. In his biography of Ottesen, Larsen writes: "In spir-

itual matters, he was a fighter, who was not afraid to use the sword of faith. He cut both sharply and keenly, and many times the cutting would have been sharper and deeper had it not been for his gentle and wise wife who laid her mild and calming influence over his zeal.”²³ If “contentious” means that one picks a fight for the sake of the fight, then contentious they were not. But if “contentious” means that one will struggle or fight for truth, rather than evade it, or even duck the issue to maintain peace, then contentious they were.

The controversies in which the Norwegian Synod found itself have already been detailed. To Ottesen, as secretary of the synod during some of the earliest years, and as co-editor of *Maanedstidende* with H. A. Preus—to Ottesen naturally fell the task of articulating the position of the synod to its membership, friends, and opponents. His natural abilities and the propensities of the educational system that formed his intellect and skills made him a particularly effective “swordsmen” in wielding the “sword of faith.”²⁴ According to Larsen, he was well above average in mathematics, which contributed to his shrewd dialectic abilities.

The Slavery Controversy

Most of the controversies in which Preus, Ottesen, Koren, and their spiritual brothers found themselves orbled around the heart of the gospel. One, however, did not – the slavery controversy, though it did have important ramifications beyond the surface level.

Ottesen does not have any signed articles on the issue of slavery. The primary articles in which the issues are detailed are signed “Red.” for *Redaktøre*, the *Maanedstidende* editors. The writing bears strong marks of Ottesen’s style of writing and argument, though undoubtedly the two editors, Preus and Ottesen, worked on the articles together. It also seems that some of the documents in the synodical proceedings may have come from Ottesen’s hand. For the Norwegian Synod pastors, the issue had to do with the principles of biblical interpretation. Some of the argumentation they shared with, or even derived from, the Missourians: Can one condemn something as inherently sinful if the Bible itself speaks approvingly of someone who is performing that action?

The controversy seems to have been seriously misunderstood,

both then and now. It is difficult to evaluate it strictly in the framework of the 1860s, as opposed to the 20th/21st century. It never was the case that the Synod “approved of slavery,” as uninformed opinion usually has it. The “Pastors’ Declaration” said that they would fight for abolition of slavery in America wherever the opportunity presented itself. Furthermore, with one exception, the ministerium of the synod was united on the matter; and the laity stood, at least at the beginning, on the other side; however, in the course of the controversy most discussion arose over the position expressed by the pastors. The charge that that Synod approved of slavery came largely from the Norwegians in other synods and outside of the church. It may have been a festering sore that was fanned back to life again in the election controversy of the 1880s, leading many to rebel against the “Missourianism” or the “Wisconsinism” of Preus, Ottesen, Koren, Larsen *et al.*

One reason for the difficulty is that the pastors were intent on presenting the issues on the basis of Scripture, and arguing in systematic form. The laity took that as temporizing and theorizing, and insisted on knowing, “But what about THIS issue” – the slavery which seemed to be at the heart of the civil conflict destroying their new land. After all, Norwegian immigrant blood was being shed in the war against the South as well.

To this day, the issue is commonly construed as a matter of the Missouri Synod and their Norwegian friends approving, or refusing to condemn slavery, or even favoring the secessionists. But the clergy had been schooled in a theological system which practiced the art of making distinctions, and they inherited a philosophical outlook that was perfectly capable of distinguishing between absolute principles and periodic mores, or between things wrong in themselves and things wrong because of accompanying circumstances.

Since the Synod’s ministerial students were studying at St. Louis, when they came home during the Civil War, questions were naturally put to them, the chief of which was, “What does Dr. Walther say about slavery?” The students probably were not the most precise in their depiction, but the indications that Walther might be somewhat less than absolute in his condemnation of slavery provoked considerable offense among the laity of the newcomers in Wisconsin.

Emigranten, a Norwegian language newspaper, heard the reports and asked Laur. Larsen for his views. On the advice of Preus,

Ottesen, and Koren, he declined, because it was not a doctrinal matter but political. An editorial then appeared in *Emigranten* which forced Larsen to answer. But in his answer, he said too much. Pastor Clausen then expressed disagreement, which also appeared in *Emigranten*. Thus the matter became an issue not only inside the Synod, but in the general Norwegian-American community as well. A series of meetings and discussions among the ministerium ensued, with the matter ultimately being taken up at the 1861 synod meeting. A resolution by the pastors used strong language in asserting that slavery was not *per se* sinful, but nonetheless evil, including this thesis:

Although, according to God's Word, it is not in and by itself sin to own slaves, yet slavery in itself is an evil and a punishment from God, and we condemn all the abuses and the sins which are connected with it, just as we, when our official duties demand it, and when Christian love and wisdom require it, will work for its abolition.²⁵

Pastor Clausen had originally signed the "Pastors' Resolution," but when he returned home, he retracted his signature and published his disagreement. In their response on the issue, the *Maanedstidende* editors, which I take here primarily to be Ottesen, launched into a defense of the declaration that slavery is not in and of itself contrary to God's Word, but is still an evil, and all ought to work for its abolition. The editorial argues with an analogy to war – God certainly has permitted war and even commanded war, especially in the Old Testament. Yet, war is an evil, because it is always a consequence of man's sin.

The distinction caused considerable difficulty for the laymen, and for Clausen. President A. C. Preus, in a meeting, explained the distinction in this way: "Sin in itself is such an act as is absolutely sinful whenever, wherever, and however it is performed."²⁶ The debate continued for some time, but according to Rohne, "through it all, the other Synod pastors not only held their ground, but little by little the distinction between slavery as a sin and slavery as an evil gained ground among the people."²⁷

The editors argued that "we have God's word with us," and, with a few examples from St. Paul, would show how clear the matter was.

Our opponents argue that slavery is sin in itself in the same way as are adultery, murder, and theft, because the slaveholder steals a man, or in any case, steals from him his freedom, which is a far greater value than goods. So claim those who contend against us. But if this were true, then would the apostle Paul be agreed herein? He must have known that a slaveholder lay in an even more shameful, open sin than a general thief. And since he said that a thief could not inherit God's kingdom and never could be called a faithful Christian so long as he continued in such sin, he certainly would have thought that a slaveholder, who lay in an even greater sin, could not possibly be a believer so long as he did not stand in humble repentance. And likewise, it would be a shameful mockery against the truth if a Christian teacher called an open thief "beloved brother." "faithful and beloved"; then it would have been a shameful hypocrisy of Paul to call a slaveholder like Philemon a friend and co-laborer and praise his love and faithfulness, and say that "the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother." (Philemon 1:7).²⁸

The editorial then goes on to refer to other passages in Paul's writings.

On the basis of the fact that St. Paul is able to speak to slaveholders like Philemon, it is impossible to say that slavery is a categorically forbidden action. And so, the distinction then is between *sin per se* and evil. He argues that "where slavery is practiced in a sinful way, then it is sin not because the matter is in itself sin, but only because the abuse of it makes it sinful in this particular case."²⁹ Modern ethical theory has argued that certain actions are *prima facie* (on the face of it) wrong, but in certain cases may be permitted. And in the same line of thinking, Immanuel Kant argues that only those things are categorical imperatives, or absolute moral rules, which will admit of no exceptions, or in which it is impossible that the action could under any circumstance be permitted.

Ottesen's arguments, while they would not necessarily be accepted by modern ethicists, employ distinctions that are still being made in ethical debate. In dealing with the so-called "problem of evil," the tradition in Christian theology as well has been to distinguish between moral evil (*sin per se*) and "natural evil," or the evil of the consequences of natural conditions. But the main issue in the argument, as it is enunciated by the editors, is that since the Apostle does not condemn the slavery in the case of Philemon, it

is impossible to say that it is categorically wrong. They viewed it not as a socio-political issue, and did not examine the case so much anthropocentrically – as an ethical issue– but as an issue involving biblical hermeneutics. They could permit themselves to approach the matter only with the presupposition that Scripture is the divinely given, authoritative, and infallible Word of God, and that they could not stand in judgment over the Apostle, who addressed at least one slave-owner in a way that held the man to be a faithful Christian. So, even if they were very quick to judge slavery in general as evil, just as sickness and war are evil, they were not prepared to call it in and of itself sin, anymore than one who contracts cancer is guilty of sin for having cancer, or to say that the cancer is a result of a particular sin (Lk 13:1-5). And yet, they did not denounce the war against the South as evil or as sin, because the institution of slavery that was at issue was certainly carried on in such a way that it was sinful. But it did not follow that one who owned slaves could not in fact be a Christian.

If there was a failure on the part of Ottesen and the others, it may have been that they simply did not articulate the latter points as clearly as they needed to, or as a more popular perception would have demanded. The distinction might be difficult for the modern mind to grasp; their argumentation was sound when it is understood that their concern was not anthropocentric but theocentric, i. e. they were operating first and foremost in the realm of biblical theology, and not concrete, social or civil application. They never successfully separated in the minds of many the differences between the moral and biblical issue per se, and the issues of secessionism and American chattel slavery.

The Lay-ministry Controversy

Ottesen wrote extensively on the issue of lay-ministry. The immigrant church inherited this problem from Norway in the Haugean lay-preaching movement. Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) had come onto the scene in Norway when the clergy had been thoroughly riddled with Rationalism. There was little sin-and-grace preaching; the clergy, not totally of course, but to a great extent, were regarded as lazy, as aristocratic men of leisure, interested in just about everything except

serving the people as ministers of comfort, and preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. At the age of 13, Hauge had a personal awakening during an illness, and was disappointed by the clergy who had no comfort to give him. In 1796, he began walking the country, preaching sin and grace and denouncing the rationalistic clergy. In 1804, he was convicted of violating the Anti-conventicle Act of 1741, enacted in response to the earlier pietism of Phillip Jakob Spener. The anti-conventicle law forbade religious gatherings apart from the official church.

Hauge's Pietism was not really in the mold of either the more extreme forms of German pietism or the radical Moravian/Herrnhut movement of Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Hauge regarded himself as being in an emergency situation in which there were no, or almost no, orthodox pastors and bishops. He was not completely correct in this, but in certain parts of Norway, not far from it. By 1820 there was only one orthodox bishop in Norway. Hauge was opposed mostly by the rationalistic bishops, but even the orthodox bishop J. N. Brun was critical of Hauge for preaching without a call according to the rubric of Augsburg Confession article XIV.³⁰ While the Haugean confrontation could have led to a much-needed reform in the church – to throw off the rationalism which had so deeply penetrated the clergy, it actually became a part of a class struggle. Norway had become deeply divided between the *Bønder* (farmer class) and the aristocracy, consisting of government officials (which included clergy and educators) and merchants. The clergy had become as much civil as ecclesiastical officials. Since the primary source of clergy was the University of Denmark, and because of Norway's position as a part of the Kingdom of Denmark (until 1814 when control passed to Sweden) the aristocratic and official government language was Danish. The *bønder* and other less privileged classes spoke regional dialects of the Norwegian language. That led to a deep divide; the conflict between the classes found the government persecution of H. N. Hauge to be a convenient issue to take up.

The followers of Hauge established *Bedehuse*, prayer houses which were not, at first, substitutes for the church, but were places where the Christians gathered to receive the instruction that they were not getting from the state church, and in almost no cases were the instruction and prayers led by ordained clergymen. When Ottesen

attacks “lay people’s praying and speaking” it is this practice that he is after, but in the form in which it was transported to the immigrant communities.

The immigrants of the 1840s brought this conflict to the U.S. One of the first to serve the Norwegian immigrants was Elling Eielsen, a layman. Eielsen attracted a considerable following among many of the immigrants, especially in the Fox River Settlement in Illinois, and to a lesser degree at Muskego, near Milwaukee. It was the presence of this lay preacher and likeminded Norwegians in the Muskego settlement that prompted C. L. Clausen, the theologically trained Danish schoolteacher, to take ordination and begin serving those people on the basis of an explicitly Lutheran confession. When the other theologically trained Norwegian pastors arrived, conflict inevitably arose with the anti-church and often anti-sacrament lay-preachers. Many of the Norwegians who had remained a part of the State Church and been influenced by the more confessional outlook that was growing in Norway, and which was reflected in the young pastors arriving – Preus, Koren, Ottesen, Brandt, G. F. Dietrichsen. As soon as orthodox pastors were available, as in the work of Pastors J. W. C. Dietrichsen, C. L. Clausen, H. A. Stub, and A. C. Preus, they turned away from their Prayer houses back to orthodox worship. However, there were still a few hangers on, and so the synod pastors had to deal with it, both from a few within the synod, and some from outside of it.

Eielsen began as a lay preacher, but, after the more churchly pastors like Clausen and Dietrichson began to work, felt the need to be ordained in order to “compete” on more equal footing. In 1846, Eielsen organized the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Yes, that’s right, ELCA, which still exists) and was ordained. That led to a real spat with the early Norwegian Synod men, who accused him of not even being legitimately ordained. But that was not a main thrust of the controversy.

Through a series of meetings, some including C. F. W. Walther and other Missouri pastors, the issue was discussed: What is the relationship between the universal priesthood and the ecclesiastical ministry? Under what circumstances is it improper for laymen to lead in worship and to preach? In 1859 both Preus and Ottesen wrote several articles in *Maanedstidende*, some of which were responses

to articles from the other side.

In one article appearing in May and June 1859,³¹ Ottesen first presented a series of theses on the ministry. In the first, he asserts the universal priesthood, which “is to proclaim the Lord in word and deed” and which has “the power and authority to teach and exhort, and comfort, and bind each other with God’s Word and sacrament.” But thesis 2 points out that if everyone exercised this power publicly, there would be confusion, and therefore God has established a ministry to do all of this on the public behalf. In thesis 3, this ministry is charged by God with preaching the word and administering the sacraments in the public gathering. In theses 5 & 6 “it is the Lord who calls and places the individual in this service,” and it is “ordinarily by this ministry that the Lord works faith and distributes spiritual gifts.” Thus, whoever despises this ministry despises the Lord. The people’s part in this ministry is that they are the means that the Lord uses in order to call. The last thesis, 9, then discusses the inner call, as being insufficient, and the emergency circumstances that might lead a congregation to call one of their number to serve as the public minister.

The theses are followed by a detailed discussion of each one, offering support from Scripture and the Confessional writings, as well as Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, Walther, and others. At this point, it starts to become clear what sort of books Ottesen and Preus had in their libraries, and the kind of instruction they had gotten at Christiania. They were very familiar with Luther and the orthodox dogmaticians.

A continuation in the following month is entitled: “Laypeople’s praying and speaking in the public service of edification is contrary to God’s Word.”³² A large part of this section is a debate with the writers in Hatlestad’s *Norsk Luthersk Kirketidende*. Ottesen notes that some have found Luther in 1523 (“On the Ministry”) interpreting 1 Corinthians 14:30 as referring to “those sitting” as lay-people, and used this to prove one of their points. However Ottesen points out that Luther later re-examined this and demonstrates that the text is referring to called preachers. Ottesen comments also that of these two documents, Luther was battling in the earlier work (“The ministry”) against the papists and was concerned to show the power of the universal priesthood, while in the later work of 1530 (“The Keys”) as well

as the 1532 “Against Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers”: “When he saw the false advantage the Enthusiasts made of this passage, he soon saw that this passage was not so much a testimony against the papistic perception, as much more against the separatistic perception.” And he then summarizes Luther’s view:

Luther teaches: the entire church, all believers, have originally and immediately the keys and ministry, but God has within the church made this order, that this public ministry only is to be administered by those specially called to it who are able to teach others and who in a distinctive understanding of the power of his ministry can act in Christ’s name, according to his command, and in his place.”³³

But this does not mean that the individual Christians give up what they possess: “because the church possesses this ministry originally, each Christian can and shall exercise his right, where God’s order is not annulled thereby – e. g. among the heathen, or where emergency abolishes the order...”³⁴ Ottesen is convinced that this principle is operative all the way through Luther’s writings, and he finds it to be the only way that one can understand Augsburg Confession Article XIV.

Ottesen then goes on to apply this against the arguments which have appeared in *Norsk Luthersk Kirketidende*. Among other things, they appeal to “Hans Hauge, and all our friends in Norway”; “Why not in America also,” he snidely asks. And he then demolishes the arguments by showing how completely different the situation was in Hauge’s Norway (where the church was riddled with rationalism, and one could hardly find an orthodox pastor or bishop). He points out also that

[When *Kirketidende*] says that from our understanding laypeople do not have the right to hold “free prayers” publicly, it follows that we hold that all laypeople who pray with their own words are heterodox Enthusiasts, the opponents have put forth such a desperate conclusion that I think any sound-minded person can see what a great untruth it is.”³⁵

Though the article was finished at that point, in October Ottesen published “A little more about laymen’s prayer and speaking etc.” First he had a correction to make of a statement in thesis six

which was not well stated and caused some confusion and misunderstanding. The sixth thesis had read: “Ordinarily the Lord will work faith and bestow spiritual gifts through this ministry, and we should not expect to get them in any other way.” In the new article, he wants to add the following “for clarity’s sake”: “and we should not expect to get them (spiritual gifts) in any other way when this ministry is neglected or despised where it can be had.”³⁶ He simply wants to say what Luther has said: “It is God’s will that we should seek to hear the gospel from those who preach it, where they shall be found, or else nowhere.”³⁷

However, Ottesen’s treatment of the laypeople was not all negative. He concludes this added portion with a discussion of the responsibilities of the laity. 1) The father or mother of the house should hold family devotions, where they freely, with their own or others’ words in a book, teach and pray – and not only teach, but urge them to live according to the word. “There,” he says, “you are truly called a house-pastor.”³⁸ 2) As a private Christian in a congregation, one is to watch over and help to see to it that those who are called to the public ministry in the congregation rightly fulfill this ministry. 3) When your brother sins, you are to rebuke him – by the word – and otherwise carry out the spiritual priesthood. 4) In congregation meetings where doctrinal questions are often discussed, there you can in conversation, in mutual exchange confirm or correct what others say. And, finally, Ottesen urges an evangelical spirit: “When you are either out and about or at home you shall testify about him, who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, which is in truth nothing other than to preach God’s word.”

So, even in the midst of controversy, Ottesen brought a pastoral heart to the matter and had in mind as much the laymen who simply want to be good servants; so he goes far beyond scoring debating points against his adversaries.

At the end of this final installment of Ottesen’s article on the problem of the layman’s public praying and teaching, we get a little glimpse of the small ministerium at work with each other. Added to the end of the article, in smaller type is a half-page note by H. A. Preus, co-editor, which is worth quoting in its entirety:

I am convinced that this addition and explanation to his earlier treatment of “Laypeople’s Praying and Speaking in Public

Gatherings” by our dear coworker removes all hesitation and objection (grounded and ungrounded) against his earlier theses by those who are only concerned about the truth, and will gladly be convinced by it.

There is, however, a point which I should have wished Pastor Ottesen, for the sake of completeness, to have developed a little more, but which he only touched upon. I fear that Pastor Ottesen’s theses have been misunderstood on just this point; I will therefore make the reader aware of the little parenthesis, which stands where it talks about the different form for a layman’s and a pastor’s teaching activity. The parenthesis reads thus: “Only among the heathen, or in case of emergency, or if the Lord is blasphemed, only then should you not be silent, even if others are silent.” There is the situation in which the layman has the right, indeed is obligated, to teach publicly and also in the form and in the way which otherwise is unique to the rightly-called teacher himself; it is namely the situation where there is a need, where a regularly examined and called teacher is not available nor can be obtained; or where the rightly-called pastor is himself a false teacher, or where false prophets want to intrude themselves into the congregation, and there is no teacher who would or can defend the flock. For in both of these cases, God’s name would be blasphemed if no one would testify against the liars and the false prophets.

In this connection, here will I also make note of the error in viewing a schoolteacher’s public prayer and speech in his school as contrary to what is taught in the foregoing. When a school teacher in the circle of his children begins or ends instruction with a free prayer, gives an exhortation or explains a passage of Scripture for the children, he is by no means sinning against God’s command, even if some others are present and are edified by it, because he is called precisely to do that, and he honors and obeys God when he carries out and testifies to his call, but also that he is preserved in humility and remains in his call, and in view of that, he ought always remember that it is really for the children, not for the congregation, that he is appointed as teacher.

H. A. Preus.³⁹

These colleagues, in a fledgling church body, with mutual respect and give-and-take, sought together to proclaim the Lutheran teaching, and to provide safety for their flocks by repudiating the false teachings that burned around them.

The Enduring Legacy of Preus, Koren, and Ottesen

Why Preus, Koren, and Ottesen? (If we arrange them according to their ages, it would be Ottesen, Preus, Koren, respectively June 1, 1825, June 16, 1825, and December 22, 1826.) Two were presidents of the synod, but not the third. There are some other candidates, if one were to select three who contributed most to the confessional stature of the Norwegian Synod. Consider, Laur. Larsen; Peter Laurentius Larsen was his full name, but Laurentius seemed to him too extravagant, so he always signed and went by Laur. There was A. C. Preus, the first president, who didn't see the weakness of the first constitution, but when it was pointed out by his younger cousin, he was most instrumental in having it changed. However, he returned to Norway, and was not present for the greatest struggles. There was G. F. Dietrichsen, who was a stalwart confessor, but he returned to Norway to stay in 1860. There was Nils Brandt, one of the founders, first full-time pastor in Decorah, who also taught for many years at the college, and had a wide influence on many young men. He was on the visitation to the German Lutherans with Ottesen, but remained a quiet force in the background. And he outlived all the rest. There would be also Johannes Ylvisaker, perhaps the greatest exegetical scholar among the early Norwegian Synod men – but he came later, and did not have the far-reaching influence of the early founders. In fact, he was a graduate of Concordia Seminary–St. Louis, and did receive an effective influence there.

So why these three? Limiting this little troika of fathers to them certainly slights some others. And yet, there is something about the three that stands strong and steady like the oak trees that have memorialized the Norwegian Synod. Preus and Ottesen were founders in the sense that they voted at the 1853 constituting convention. Koren was a little late for that, and even though his call was across the dividing Mississippi River, in northeast Iowa, he stood with the other two, sometimes as a moderating influence, and as the diplomat able to bring along others who moved a little slower than the quick and incisive Preus and Ottesen.

To many outsiders, Preus and Ottesen typified the objectionable dogmatic certainty of the fledgling synod, and so the theology of the synod was referred to as “Wisconsinism.” But that included Koren and Larsen, and later on Ylvisaker as well. From both within

and without the synod there was some objection to the strength of their leadership, and they were labeled “That Decorah Ring,” but that included also the Wisconsinites.

There are a few superficial similarities among these three – they all graduated from the University of Christiania, and thus were deeply influenced by two of the architects of confessional orthodoxy in Norway, Gisle Johnson and Carl Paul Caspari. All three were ordained in Oslo by Bishop Arup. Those two presented a thoroughgoing confessional theology and together published the first Norwegian translation of the entire Book of Concord in 1868.

Another tantalizing similarity is that all three, after passing their theological exams (thus becoming candidates of theology) and before emigrating, spent their time teaching at Nissen’s Latin School in Christiania (*Nissens Latin- og realskole*, roughly equivalent to our high school and junior college). I have tried to discover any specific significance in this, but without complete success. There were “Latin Schools” in the larger cities in Norway, sometimes connected to the cathedral. They were essentially University prep schools. Prior to the mid 19th century there was a wave of educational reform in Norway, with some struggle (mostly of the peaceful Norwegian kind, without any dead bodies) in the department of education. Hartwig Nissen had founded the school in 1843 as a sort of a compromise between classical education and the newer educational philosophy that emphasized practical, life-based education. Nissen was a pupil of Frederick Bugge, president of the Trondhjem Cathedral school where some other theological graduates taught before coming to America.⁴⁰ The one hint I have gotten regarding the significance of Nissen’s is from an educator friend in Norway who believes that at that time, “some of the women in his [Nissen’s] nearest family were close friends of Gisle Johnson, or at least devout followers of him.”⁴¹ Since the first pastors who received calls were teaching at Nissen’s, and they went into a situation in which the first decisive task was to repudiate the Grundtvigian idea which was already known to be in the constitution authored by J. W. C. Dietrichsen, it is not difficult to imagine that it was more than coincidence.

I would like to aim at just two of the characteristics that stood out in these three fathers – and they are characteristics not possessed by them alone among the Norwegian Synod pastors, but certainly epitomized by them.

1) Preus, Ottesen, and Koren were three immensely busy parish pastors, successful by any standard, who had long tenures in their calls, especially in terms of today's "mobile ministerium." There certainly was less administrative, CEO pressure on them than on the pastor today. But they served many congregations, and their congregations bore daughter congregations. They rode their horses and drove their buggies across roadless prairies, seeking out the newcomers, pulling the sheep back into the flock before the heterodox wolves devoured them. And yet, we never hear any complaint from them that they are too busy with their parish work to edit the synodical paper, to keep up on their theology, or to carry on the polemical struggles demanded by their situation. The time of their busiest theological and polemical activity was also the time of the greatest congregational work, gathering together the Norwegian new-comers flooding into the Midwest. Pastor Preus commented about Herman Amberg Preus: "The theological task and the pastoral task were for him one and the same thing" (p. 10). That was true for Ottesen and Koren, as well. In fact, that principle permeated the ministerium of this fledgling, immigrant synod, and one of the reasons they fastened on the Missourians was that they recognized the same spirit there. The Lutheran Confessional writings and systematic theology, biblical theology, and pastoral ministry were a whole cloth, and the idea that one could be a pastor without the other two was unthinkable for them. When they did battle with the pietistic Lutherans regarding lay-ministry, gospel and absolution, when they took up the conflict over slavery, and especially, when in spite of having to suffer great indignity they took on F. A. Schmidt in the struggle over conversion and election, they were doing nothing other than "guarding the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers" (Acts 20:28). That was their call. It is not Lutheran to say that their call was only to be a pastor, not to study, not to engage false teachers, not to plumb the depths of the Holy Scripture in systematic study of its teaching, its doctrine. If this legacy has been lost, it needs to be regained.

As pastors, they were tireless. They served far-flung congregations, gathered groups of settlers together for Word and Sacrament. They did not shrug off the challenges of their fellow Norwegians who had a different theological orientation so they could go about their business of being pastors. They met those challenges head on for what

they were, views which obscured the gospel or created uncertainty for the faith of the flock. Maintaining the integrity of their church's confession of faith was an integral part of their pastoral ministry. Each one of them in their writings always exhibits a clear view of the faith of their people, and their doctrinal struggles always have that in mind.

2) They shared a deep commitment to the Lutheran Confessional writings and they did not tire in their defense of that commitment. As we have noted, the founding constitution of the Norwegian Synod, both in its 1851 and 1853 manifestations committed the preaching and teaching of its pastors to the understanding of God's Word found in the Lutheran Confessional writings. And that was the measure, the standard, in all of their struggle. In the election controversy, that commitment was put to its most fiery test. As Ottesen had commented early on in the Trip Report: "[W]ith regard to baptism, regeneration, the church, and the ministry, the Missouri Synod teaches exactly the same as Pontoppidan and our old dogmaticians."⁴² But then came F. A. Schmidt's accusations of Calvinism in Walther's 1877 paper on Election. It may be that Walther had had to go through a similar process, not, early on, recognizing the problems with the expressions used by the orthodox Lutheran theologians like John Gerhard. But a deeper study of the biblical texts and Article XI of the Formula of Concord on election led to a sharper, more precise expression. For the Norwegians, that re-study led them to the point where they had to reject at least that page in Pontoppidan's Catechism⁴³ on which they had relied for their orthodoxy. In that sense, they did not have "Father theology." They were committed to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures as understood by the confessions of their church – the ecumenical creeds and the Book of Concord. And of course, Ottesen's remark, commenting on the Old Lutheranism of the Confessions was probably a shot across the bows of some other ships sailing on those waters: "so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions."⁴⁴ By that time the Norwegians were entirely aware of the brouhaha in the General Synod over "Augustana Revisited" – "The American Recension of the Augsburg Confession," in which the most distinctive Lutheran doctrines were sacrificed for a general protestant view. The Confes-

sional writings stood for the Norwegians as enough, until the tragic compromise of the Madison agreement, *Opgjør*, in 1912, a mere two years after the death of the last of our troika.

We could certainly say more in praise of these three men. After all, the fact that their pictures grace the walls in a most prominent position in our school of the prophets and synodical headquarters indicates that they are models to be emulated. But even from some of their most devoted children come some criticisms. Fifty years ago, in 1953, as our Synod celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Old Norwegian Synod, Pastor Christian Anderson of the ELS wrote “Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown of the Old Norwegian Synod.”⁴⁵

In his paper, Anderson, who had been one of the first to leave the Old Norwegian Synod because of the doctrinal compromise of the Madison Agreement, outlined four basic causes for that compromise and the merger of 1917:

- 1) In the first place there was from the very beginning a constantly expressed desire for uniting all Norwegian immigrants into one church body. In itself there surely was nothing wrong in the desire for such outward fellowship, provided that there was an inner spiritual unity. But here I think the mistake was made from the start, that too much stress was laid on the desirability of outward union without considering sufficiently what obstacles there might be to a true union....
- 2) I said that the opponents were generally the aggressive accusers while our synod patiently defended itself against false accusations without pointing out sufficiently the false doctrine of the opposition. This so easily led many to believe that there was no real difference between us, so that if the opponents would stop accusing us, all would be well. It is true that in the controversy of the eighties Dr. Koren exposed clearly the errors of the Anti-Missourians, and at that time the differences were taken seriously by most of the people on our side. But after the complete break in 1887 the majority of our people had tired of the controversy, so that they let it suffice to blame the opposition for the controversy, which they regarded as unnecessary, and neglected to continue to study the issues involved. Thus they became more and more ignorant of those issues, while the opposition by continuing their propaganda against our Synod kept the issues for which they had

contended fresh in mind. When the opposition began to appear more friendly, many of our pastors who had stood firm seemed to feel that the matter was now just about solved.

I feel that there was something lacking in the instruction on the issues of the controversies at our seminary. This was the case at least while I was a student there. Too much was taken for granted as to our knowledge of these things when they occasionally were mentioned....

- 3) In the period following the withdrawal of the Anti-Missourians there arose a number of very able leaders within our Synod. For a long time they were thoroughly sound doctrinally, and they worked diligently for the true welfare of the church. While this no doubt was a blessing, it however tended to encourage a greater part, at least of the clergy, to be satisfied to follow the leaders without seeking diligently to inform themselves on the issues, so that they would be prepared to hold back in case those leaders should go wrong....
- 4) The custom of continuing the same men in office for a long time helped to centralize power and influence in a few. It is no doubt an advantage to let those who have proven their ability continue at the head of the organization, rather than have frequent changes. Experience surely counts for much in carrying out the duties of the office. But on the other hand there is the grave danger that the prestige connected with holding office a long time may be abused when a crisis arises....

Anderson certainly does not mean to lay the blame for the break-up of the old Norwegian Synod on our troika of three fathers. And yet, there were circumstances which developed which he thinks need to be spoken to the successive generations, and what makes more sense than to hear them fifty years after they were first presented?

A. C. Preus served as president of the synod until 1862, when he returned to Norway, and was succeeded by Herman Amberg Preus. He served for 32 years until his death in 1894, and was succeeded by the 68-year-old Koren, who served until his death in 1910, at the age of 84. Through the first three decades of the synod's existence, a certain amount of resentment built up against what appeared to some to be a "ruling elite," so that the label "Wisconsinism," hurled against Preus and Ottesen by outsiders, resonated among some within the Synod as

well. The departure of C. L. Clausen, one of the founders, was over more than the slavery controversy – also rooted in resentment going back to the 1853 rejection of Grundtvigianism by the vocal newcomers, G. F. Dietrichsen, Preus, and Ottesen.

When the followers of F. A. Schmidt adopted the name “Anti-Missourians,” the primary frame of reference was not over against Walther’s Missouri Synod, but against the “Missourianism” of Preus, Ottesen, Koren, Larsen, Ylvisaker (trained at St. Louis) and others of that “Inner Ring.”⁴⁶ Other times, the group perceived as the “ruling elite” was labeled “The Decorah Gang,” but the focus was still on the same men, this time with Koren and Larsen at the center, including Preus and Ottesen, as well. One can also suppose that after a long series of theological battles they had developed something of a siege mentality, which tended to make them close their ranks rather than take younger men in to gradually assume leadership positions.

The controversies which the Norwegian Synod faced in those years were doctrinal (from both sides), and the Norwegian Synod men were serious and focused in their defense of the Lutheran Confessional doctrine. And we don’t want to suggest that the disputes were less than substantive. Nevertheless, it is tempting to wonder if the outcomes might not have been different if the inner ring had not been so pronounced, and leadership had not been so sharply concentrated as it was. (It should be noted, by the way, that F. A. Schmidt, a German, borrowed from the Missouri Synod, was, until 1878, of the “inner circle” of the Norwegian Synod. However, there may have been an Inner Ring in the Missouri Synod that he was eager to rejoin; it has long been thought that he was miffed against Walther because he did not receive a Missouri Synod call to St. Louis. His short time there was only as a representative of the Norwegians.)

The Norwegian Synod was blessed with pious, faithful, God-fearing leaders in these three, as well as the many names that could be added to them. These three were thoroughly aware of their own limitations, their own sinfulness and weakness; they could not have been such champions of the gospel of God’s unconditional love in Christ without that awareness; nor would they have sacrificed so much in the struggle – not just for the doctrine of election, but for the truth expressed in the catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to

him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the one true faith.”

We on this panel certainly want to believe that the Norwegian Synod, from 1853 to 1917, and in its reincarnation in the Reorganized Norwegian Synod of 1918 (ELS), has been a blessing in its proclamation of the gospel and defense of the confessional Lutheran faith. We know our brothers and sisters in our church believe that, too.

But we cannot and must not become so full of ourselves that we forget that human frailties always take over, that human organizations always fail, and that the rain of God’s grace always moves on to water other ground.

So what do we do with our fathers, especially these three? We thank God for what they taught us; rededicate ourselves to the commitment that they showed in their service as pastor/theologians; pray God that he will help us see their weaknesses and mistakes and not repeat them; and know that in spite of ourselves, and our weak human nature, God’s will is nevertheless done, as it surely was in them.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Den Norsk lutherske Kirkes historie i Amerika*, Augsburg, 1914, p. 80, translation from Magnus Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism, Up To 1871*, New York: Macmillan Co., 1926, 117. Bergh was a pastor of the Norwegian-Danish Conference which did theological battle with the Norwegian Synod.
- ² *Livsbilleder fra den Lutherske Kirke i Amerika*, Decorah: Den norske Synodes forlag, n.d., 259 ff. According to Rohne, Halvor Halvorson was the editor, but that is not noted in the edition; originally published in *Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidende*, 1905, p. 1295, and running into 1906 in several installments.
- ³ *Livsbilleder*, 264.
- ⁴ "Blik i Missouri Synoden," [A Look at the Missouri Synod] *Maanedstidende 1858* (1900 reprint), III, No. 5 & 11 (May & October, 1858) and IV, No. 1 & 2 (January/February 1859), written after attending the 1858 Free Conference in Pittsburgh. Sometime later, another "Blik" appeared, "Blik i General Synod," ("A look at the General synod") which was highly critical and noticed the total lack of confessional commitment found there.
- ⁵ *Den evangelisk-lutherske kirke, Guds sande synlige kirke paa jorden; et referat for Missourisyndens møde i St. Louis den 31te okt. 1860 og følgende dage. Overs. af J. A. Ottesen.*
- ⁶ *Livsbilleder*, 268 f.
- ⁷ *Livsbilleder*, 311 f.
- ⁸ George M. Orvick, *Our Great Heritage: A Popular History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (no date given, ca. 1968), 17.
- ⁹ *Kirketidende* 1885, (Vol. XII), 274, "Fra Koshkonong og Liberty," Ottesen's account of what led to a split in the three congregations.
- ¹⁰ Karen Larsen, *Laur. Larsen, Pioneer College President, Northfield; Norwegian American Historical Association, 1936*, p. 10.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, "Kirkechrønike," 187.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, "Fra Koshkonong..." 273.
- ¹³ "Indberetning fra Pastorerne Ottesen og Brandt om deres Reise til St. Louis, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; og Buffalo, New York," *Kirketidende*, 1857, 476. For a translation, see *Pioneers Find Friends*, Carl S. Meyer, Decorah: Luther College Press, 1963, Appendix A, 63.
- ¹⁴ Meyer, 63
- ¹⁵ The constitution and by-laws can be found in translation in various places, including Rohne, 129 ff., and E. Clifford Nelson, Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans; a History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960, I, 344.
- ¹⁶ Nelson-Fevold: Typical are statements like this: "The general position it [the Norwegian Synod] assumed and defended was supported and significantly colored by the Synod's fateful alliance with the Missouri Synod" (I, 161).
- ¹⁷ Gisle Johnson: 1822-1894. Johnson was a student of Christian Thistedahl in Kristiansand, Norway, from whom he got his confessional orientation. He visited Germany in 1846,⁴⁷ and spent time at Berlin, Leipzig, Erlangen, Tübingen, and Heidelberg. As a Candidate of Theology, he accepted an appointment to the University of Christiania in 1849, where he taught until his death. Johnson met Carl Paul Caspari at Leipzig in 1846. Caspari, born in 1814, was a German Jew, and had accepted Christianity at Leipzig at the age of 24. He already had a reputation

as an orientalist when Johnson met him. Just previous to that meeting, Caspari had declined a call to Königsberg since the Prussian Church was a union church, and he accepted Johnson's suggestion to apply for a position at Christiania. He began teaching at Christiania in 1847 and remained there until his death in 1892. Though Caspari and Walther probably never met (Caspari enrolled at Leipzig in 1834, and Walther graduated in 1833), they had many friends in common, especially Franz Delitzsch. See Meyer, 48 ff.

¹⁸ Meyer 69, emphasis added.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74f.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Livsbilleder*, 273.

²³ *Livsbilleder*, 272.

²⁴ A long list of writings which exhibited these skills could be compiled; such a list would have to include *Det egentlige Stridspunkt (The Real Point of Controversy, Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidende*, IX, 47, Nov. 1882); *Svar fra Amerika til "Norsk Kirketidende" i Christiania (Answer from America to the Norwegian Church Times in Christiania, Maanedstidende III, No. 1, January, 1863)*.

²⁵ *Maanedstidende*, 1861, 261, tr., Rohne, 206. *Grace for Grace*, ed. S. C. Ylvisaker, Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943, 149.

²⁶ Rohne, 209.

²⁷ Rohne, 210.

²⁸ *Maanedstidende*, 1862, (Jan, VII ,2), 23, 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Augsburg Confession XIV: "Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called."

³¹ *Maanedstidende*, 1859 (May, June, October, IV, No.s 5, 6, 10), 67, 83, & 145.

³² *Ibid.*, 82.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁰ Rune Slagstad, "Kunnskapens Hus I Det Norske System," a paper posted on the internet at www.itk.ntnu.no/ansatte/Andresen_Trond/dwnld/slagstad-mjoes.

⁴¹ Personal e-mail from Phillip Kaspersen, October 7, 2003. He informed me that reading of the Rune Slagstad article was required in his teacher's college education.

⁴² Meyer, 74. (See above, f.n. 19).

⁴³ "What is election? God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ, and remain constant in this faith unto the end" (Cited in Nelson-Fevold I, 257).

⁴⁴ See above, f.n.12.

⁴⁵ *Clergy Bulletin*, September 1953, Vol. 13, a paper *Delivered at the General Pastoral Conference of the Norwegian Synod held July 27th to July 31st [1953] at Bethany College, Mankato, Minnesota*.

⁴⁶ The term is borrowed from C. S. Lewis' commencement address in which Lewis warns his hearers not so much never to be in the Inner Ring, but rather suggests that the

cause of much evil is the great desire to be IN the Inner Ring – often at any cost: C. S. Lewis, “The Inner Ring,” The Memorial Oration at King’s College, the University of London, 1944 printed in *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses*, York: Macmillan, 1980.

The Universal Priesthood

An Exegesis of 1 Peter 2:1-10

by Professor Michael K. Smith

Introduction

“Tell me a little about yourself.” When we hear that line from someone with whom we’re not well-acquainted we usually launch into something like this: “Well, I’m forty years old (or was that forty-one?), married to a beautiful woman, have two children; we live in North Mankato, which is right next to Mankato, MN, where I teach at Bethany Lutheran College....” Many factors come to mind when we think of who we are—our identity.

In his first letter Peter continually reminds his readers of their identity. Rather than focus on inane worldly details, he zeroes in on what’s most important: our standing in the eyes of God, or our place in His kingdom.

The section under scrutiny bears this identification out especially through the use of contrast. Peter reminds his readers of who they were prior to being made part of God’s family, contrasting that non-status with the present reality of what God had made them. This was especially important for Peter’s readers as they compared themselves to the unbelievers around them, and as they fought to retain hope in what may have seemed like hopeless times.

Isagogical Comments

Authorship: The apostle Peter is clearly identified as the author of this letter (1:1¹). Additional internal and the external evidence point to his authorship, and there have not been serious challenges to it historically.

The date and place of writing: No date of writing is given by Peter, nor is there a link to any one specific historic event. It is clear that the recipients of the letter were undergoing some sort of persecution (1:6; 3:14; 4:12-16; 5:8-9²). Most likely this letter was composed during the early 60s AD. Emperor Nero reigned from AD 54-68 and instituted his persecution of the Christians in AD 64. However, the persecution to which Peter alludes in this letter was

more likely verbal than physical (e.g., 4:14 – “If you are insulted now for the name of Christ, you are fortunate....”). Peter’s death in AD 67-8 precludes this letter being dated later than that time.

The identification of the place of writing is slightly more enigmatic. In 5:13 Peter states, “Your sister [church] in Babylon, chosen together [with you], greets you....” Many have taken “Babylon” to refer to Rome, using as additional evidence references in Revelation (e.g., 14:8; 16:19; 18:2³). Could Peter instead be referring to a region of Mesopotamia? Paul states in Galatians 2:9 that it was decided he and Barnabas were to work among the Gentiles, while James, Peter, and John were to work among the Jews. There were many Jews scattered in Mesopotamia, and some early Church writings make reference to Peter carrying out much work in the area. It may very well be that Peter wrote this letter from the vicinity of the geographical Babylon and not Rome.

The recipients: “[T]he elect sojourners scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1) are the Christians to whom Peter wrote. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians constituted these churches, but the Gentiles may have been more predominant (cf. 1:14; 2:9-10). However, it also appears that Peter expected his readers to have at least some knowledge of the Old Testament (which would suggest more of a Jewish audience). Pilgrims from these areas are also mentioned in Acts 2:9-11 (Pentecost). The churches addressed in Revelation 2-3 might also be included among the recipients.

The purpose: Peter states in 5:12, “Through Silas the faithful brother (as I consider [him]) I am writing to you briefly, encouraging and assuring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!” He also states in 2 Peter 3:1-2, “Dear friends, this is now the second letter I am writing to you. In both of them I stir up your pure minds by reminding you to think of the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and of what the Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles” (NET). Therefore his purpose is twofold: (1) to give hope and strength to the Christians in the outer reaches of the empire; and (2) to add his own testimony to the truth of God’s grace.

Context

This passage resides in the third major section of Peter’s epistle. In 1:3-12 Peter had stressed to his readers that they were

possessors of a sure hope, because their inheritance was in heaven. The second section, 1:13-25, addresses how to live with one another as co-heirs of this hope. In this third section, 2:1-10, Peter maintains that his readers are God's priests, and as such are boldly to proclaim their hope before the world in what they say and do.

Verses 1-3

(1) Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόνους καὶ πάσας καταλαλιὰς, (2) ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ ἀύξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν, (3) εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος.

Variants:

(2) The Textus Receptus omits εἰς σωτηρίαν at the end of the verse. Attestation for its inclusion is overwhelming. (3) εἰ, supported by earlier witnesses, is replaced by the stronger form εἴπερ (if indeed, if after all, since) in later witnesses.

(1) Therefore, after you get rid of every evil and every guile and hypocrisy and jealousy and every slander, (2) as newborn babies long for the pure spiritual milk, in order that in it you may be caused to grow toward salvation, (3) if you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Vocables

Verse 1

Ἀποθέμενοι – aor. ptc. (circumstantial preliminary) fr. ἀποτίθημι; get rid of, lay aside, cease from

οὖν – inferential conjunction (what follows is based on 1:13-25); therefore

δόλον – m. acc.; bait for fish (lit.), guile, deceit by entrapment

ὑποκρίσεις – f. acc.; delivery of a speech along with interpretive gestures and imitation (lit.), hypocrisy, pretense, giving impression of having certain motivations but not having them, deceit by false representation

Verse 2

ἀρτιγέννητα – nom. neut. pl. adj. (attributive ptc. form); just born, newborn

ἐπιποθήσατε – aor. impv. 2 pl. fr. ἐπιποθέω; long for, yearn for (after recognizing a lack)

αὐξηθήτε – aor. subj. pass. 2 pl. fr. αὐξάνω; you may be caused to grow, increase

Verse 3

ἐγεύσασθε – aor. mid. (dep.) 2 pl. fr. γεύομαι; you have tasted, partaken of, enjoyed

χρηστὸς – adj. nom. (pred.); good, gracious

With the inferential conjunction οὖν, Peter ties what he had just written in the previous section (1:13-25, especially 1:22-25⁴) to what he now states. His readers were to share their eternal hope with each other, primarily by loving one another. Their new status as ones who have been “born again” (1:23) does not make them able to do this on their own. They need a source of strength for this noble work. Peter now tells them what that source is.

Prior to receiving that source of strength, Peter tells his readers what they must do first. Ἀποθέμενοι carries the connotation of “taking clothes off” and laying them aside (cf. Acts 7:58b⁵). What a striking visual picture of Peter’s instructions! Considering the evil attitudes Peter is about to mention, it is an appropriate term to use. The Christian is to have nothing at all to do with the forthcoming evil attitudes; he must separate himself from them completely.

Peter’s list of the attitudes that are to be laid aside includes sins which stand in stark contrast to the Second Table of the Law; thus, they all mitigate against the Christian’s love for his brother. The use of *πάσαν*, etc., emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of what is to be removed; *Make sure you get rid of all this stuff!* Peter exclaims. *Κακίαν* is the most general term of the list, focusing on moral depravity. *Δόλον* and *ὑποκρίσεις* both feature deceit, the former by entrapment and the latter by false representation. *Φθόνους* simply points out the jealousy one brother may have concerning another. Perhaps one brother is jealous of another and therefore acts deceitfully! Finally, such a brother might

also speak disparagingly (καταλαλιᾶς) about the brother of whom he is jealous. All of these awful sins are to be gone!

Peter characterizes his readers with an interesting simile in v.2: ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη. Note the forward placement of this term for emphasis. Peter states his readers are like those who are “just born.” In 1:3 he had said they were given a “new birth” by God. In 1:23 Peter stated they were “born again” by God’s Word. Along those same lines Peter now says his readers are like newborn infants, helpless (note the lack of the article with βρέφη) and in need of nourishment.

The type of nourishment needed comes first. There is only one specific nourishment (the article τό) Peter has in mind: τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα. The adjective λογικόν stands in the emphatic position, and helps identify the “milk” as God’s Word. After all, what other “milk” could be spiritual? This is the same means by which the readers were born again (1:23) and which they had heard preached to them (1:25). The adjective ἄδολον further bolsters this identification since God’s Word definitely contains no guile.

What is to be the readers’ attitude toward this marvelous milk? Mincing no words, Peter commands: ἐπιποθήσατε! *Do not just have a mild hunger for it*, Peter says. *Crave it!* The readers are to show that they cannot get enough of this spiritual milk, especially after they realize their lack of spiritual strength to unclot themselves from all the evil attitudes listed in v.1.

The purpose clause closing this verse states why the readers are to crave the pure spiritual milk. The agent behind the passive αὐξηθήτε is, of course, God, since it is His Word which is being ingested. Through that milk God causes His infants to “grow toward salvation.” That is, this is the final goal of the Christian’s life. Thus Peter is restating the confident hope he so eloquently described in 1:3-7.⁶

A simple conditional phrase ends the sentence in v.3. The εἰν could almost be translated as “since,” because the readers, if they examine their lives carefully, know that what follows is true. Peter quotes Ps. 34:8 to emphasize how gracious God is in what He has done for His children. Note the predicate nominative use of χρηστός to emphasize God’s goodness.

Commentary on verses 1-3

Do we, as Christians, love God? Certainly! Do we want to follow God joyfully? Certainly! But first we must get rid of what's in the way: sin. No simple task, to be sure, and one that will not be completed in this mortal life. But since "every evil and every guile and hypocrisy and jealousy and every slander" (v.1) are not acceptable to God, we will strive to put them aside through the constant and voracious use of the Means of Grace. Our craving for God's Word and Sacraments is like an infant's craving for milk. We will not adulterate God's Word with our infantile opinions, because that would serve only to water down and perhaps stifle altogether the blessings God grants. We have seen and felt what God has done in our lives, that He has given us a "living hope" (1:3), and we want to continue to grow in that hope which the one and only true God gives.

Verses 4-7a

(4) πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι λίθον ζῶντα ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον (5) καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνεύγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. (6) διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ, Ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον ἀκρογωνιαῖον ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ καταισχυθῆ. (7a) ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν...

Variants:

(5) The Textus Receptus, later uncials, and most minuscules omit εἰς. However, its inclusion is strongly attested.

(4) By coming to the One who is the living Stone, (who was) rejected by men but (considered) by God chosen (and) precious, (5) you yourselves are being built as living stones (into) a spiritual temple, in order that as holy priests you offer up spiritual sacrifices very acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (6) Because it says in Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a Cornerstone, chosen (and) precious, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame." (7a) Therefore the honor is to you who believe...

Vocables

Verse 4

προσερχόμενοι – pres. ptc. (circumstantial manner) nom. m. 2 pl. fr. προσέρχομαι; by coming to

ἀποδοκιμασμένον – pf. pass. ptc. acc. m. sg. fr. ἀποδοκιμάζω; rejected, thought of as unworthy, thrown out as a result of a serious test (lit.)

ἐκλεκτὸν – adj. acc. m. sg.; chosen, selected, excellent [cf. v.9 also!]

ἐντιμον – adj. acc. m. sg.; honored, esteemed, respected, precious

Verse 5

οἰκοδομεῖσθε – pres. pass. 2 pl. fr. οἰκοδομέω; are being built, established

ἱεράτευμα – acc. neut. sg.; priests, priesthood

ἀνενέγκαι – aor. inf. fr. ἀναφέρω; bring up, offer up

θυσίας – acc. f. pl.; sacrifices

εὐπροσδέκτους – adj. acc. f. pl.; very acceptable, welcome, pleasing

Verse 6

περιέχει – pres. 3 sg. fr. περιέχω; contains

ἀκρογωνιαῖον – acc. m. sg.; lying at the extreme angle (lit.); w/ λίθον, cornerstone, capstone

καταισχυνθῆ – aor. subj. pass. fr. καταισχύνω; will (never) be put to shame, be disappointed, be made a fool of

Excursus on the Structure of vss. 4-10

The structure of verses 4-10 can be seen as a chiasm, which combines the inner elements for a climax:

- A. Living Stone – rejected by men (4a)
- B. Living Stone – considered chosen and precious by God (4b)
- C. living stones – spiritual house (5a)
- C'. holy priests – spiritual sacrifices (5c)
- B'. Cornerstone – chosen and precious (6)
- A'. Stone rejected by men – stumble and fall (7-8)
- C. + C'. spiritual house – sacrifice of praise = people of God (9-10)

Thus the key point of this section is the center of the chiasm, verse 5. This element is also emphasized by the return to the point at the end of the section. This is not to detract from Peter's emphasis on Christ Jesus as the Living Stone, the Cornerstone. Rather, Peter continues to bolster his readers by reminding them of their identity as God's special people. Such an emphasis fits well with the overall theme of the letter.

With the circumstantial participle (of manner) προσερχόμενοι Peter ties the upcoming thoughts to what was expressed in verse 3. That is, he continues to describe the actions of his readers. The participle is in the present tense, indicating that this is an ongoing action – the readers continue to do this. Peter's use of πρὸς reiterates the preposition of the participle and thus emphasizes the notion of directionality as well as its object.

The object of πρὸς is worth noting. The relative pronoun οἷον is a tie-on; that is, an important point is about to be added to its antecedent. In this instance the antecedent is in verse 3: "the Lord." The continued description of the Lord becomes the focal point in verse 4.

Peter's description of the Lord begins by calling Him a λίθον ζῶντα. "Stone" stands in apposition to the relative pronoun. The lack of the article emphasizes the quality of this stone, that it is intended for building; it stands dressed and ready for construction. The attributive participle ζῶντα emphasizes a particular characteristic of the stone. On the surface it appears as though Peter creates a paradox – how can one have a stone that is alive? Obviously Peter personifies the stone to indicate he speaks of the Messiah, the One whom God raised from the dead (1:21). This stone is living because it wields the power of life (cf. below concerning the rescue out of darkness). Jesus made references to Himself as inanimate objects which were alive: e.g., "living water" (Jn 4:10) and "living bread" (Jn 6:51).

The description of the Living Stone continues with a μὲν ... δὲ correlative phrase. On the one hand, the Stone was rejected by ἀνθρώπων. The lack of the article indicates the generic nature of the term; thus *all* mankind is implicated. The perfect tense of ἀποδοκιμασμένον emphasizes that this action has been occurring throughout every period of history. This participle is attributive, placing special emphasis on the rejection. On the other hand, the

Stone is judged by God as ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον. Peter also used “chosen” to describe his readers (1:1). Here the emphasis is on the fact that the Stone is of the highest quality. The lack of the conjunction between the two adjectives emphasizes not only their presence, but also their sense. Thus ἔντιμον is not simply “honored,” but “precious.”

Verse 5 begins with an intensive use of αὐτοί (bolstered by the ascensive use of καί.) – “Yes, even you!” Here Peter shifts more to a communal perspective than was present in verse 4. That is, it is clear that even as individuals the readers come to the Living Stone. In verse 5, the initial emphasis is on what is happening to all the individual stones as a group.

The main verb of verses 4-5 is οἰκοδομείσθε. The present tense indicates the ongoing nature of the building process which Jesus related to Peter in Matthew 16:18. Until the end of time, more and more living stones will be added to the building, the *Una Sancta*. God is obviously the agent behind the passive, since only He can add stones to His temple.

Peter then refers to his readers as λίθοι ζῶντες. By doing so he does not equate them with *the* Living Stone (v.4), but looks ahead to verse 6 where he specifies Jesus as the Cornerstone. Thus, the living stones are built into the spiritual temple on *the* Living Stone. The attributive participle ζῶντες recalls the “living hope” the readers have through God (1:3).

Peter uses another predicate nominative to describe the structure into which the living stones are placed. Οἶκος lacks the article, stressing the quality of incorporation or unity which is seen in this house. It could be translated either as “temple” or even “sanctuary.” Πνευματικός does not stand in contradistinction to “physical,” but relates the divine nature of the temple. This temple is supernatural, not just special!

Why be built into such a sanctuary? The purpose clause beginning with εἰν explains. First, though, Peter ascribes a new identity to his readers: ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον. God’s people are priests, all members of the same priesthood. The lack of the article emphasizes the function of this priesthood as opposed to its form. That is, what these priests do as priests is the focus. The adjective ἅγιον stresses that the members of this priesthood have been set apart, or consecrated, for their service to God.

The purpose of being built into a spiritual temple is so that the holy priests do what priests do: offer up sacrifices. The aorist tense of ἀνεύγκαι indicates that there is no question that this is their work. The content of their sacrifices is also logical: those being built into a spiritual temple should offer up spiritual sacrifices. Here πνευματικῶς might also emphasize the non-material nature of the sacrifices in addition to their divine nature. Because of the work of Christ, their praises and thanksgivings are acceptable to God (Heb 13:15⁷). The lack of the article with θυσίας stresses that they are willingly given to God, as is true of any sacrifice.

God definitely appreciates the sacrifices of His priests. Peter says they are εὐπροσδέκτους to God. Note the compound nature of this word: εὖ (good) + προσ (to) + δέχομαι (receive). The sacrifices are particularly acceptable to God, and thus pleasing to Him. Peter also emphasizes why the sacrifices of the holy priests are so pleasing to God: διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ/. That is, God finds what His holy priests offer acceptable because of the work of the Great High Priest. Apart from His redemptive work, the sacrifices of the priests would be worthless to God the holy Judge.

At the beginning of verse 6 the conjunction διότι is used in a causal sense, indicating that what follows is the proof that what was just stated in verses 4 and 5 is true. Naturally Peter's proof comes from Scripture. The present tense of περιέχει indicates that what is about to be stated remains true for all times. Literally the word means "contains;" thus, "it is contained (in Scripture)." Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16. The first half of the quote follows neither the Hebrew nor the LXX exactly; he retains "stone" (both Heb. and LXX), "elect" (LXX), and "precious" (both). The emphasis in the first part of this quote is that this is not a chance event, since God Himself is the one laying or placing (τίθημι) the Stone. This Stone is further described by the appositive ἀκρογωνιαίου. While this word can be taken to mean "cornerstone" or "capstone," it is best to understand it as the cornerstone. The Cornerstone's location, ἐν Σιών, is among His people. Finally, Peter reiterates the description of the Stone from verse 4 as ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον.

The second half of the quote from Isaiah 28:16 follows the LXX rendering of the Hebrew: "the one who believes in Him will

never be put to shame” versus “the one believing *in it* will not hurry [or flee].” The substantival participle πιστεύων demonstrates that the key characteristic of this person is his absolute trust. His trust is entirely (ἐπ’) on the Cornerstone and nowhere else. Note also the use of litotes here, wherein the negative is stated in order to stress the positive to a high degree. Thus, God (the agent behind the passive καταισχυθῆ) will in no way make a fool of such a person. (God will not pull the rug out from under him after telling him to put his trust in the Stone and say, “Ha ha! I changed the rules! You lose!”)

Peter places the readers in the emphatic position in verse 7. He follows with the inferential conjunction οὖν, since what follows is true because of the preceding. In verse 5 Peter described the status of his readers as “holy priests.” He now refers to this status as ἡ τιμή. This “honor” is best thought of as a state of great value. Of course, this value is not intrinsic but that which God has granted. The believers share in the honor granted Christ because of their relationship to Him – they are living stones being built on Him as the Cornerstone. Peter finally states that this honor is τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, reminding his readers of their deep trust in the Stone which God had placed among them.

Commentary on verses 4-7a

To his previous focus on how his readers are to be built up in God’s Word, Peter now adds the result of such growth: they will be built as “living stones” on *the* “living Stone,” the one whom they have already tasted and experienced as “good” (v.3). Not everyone, however, experiences Jesus as good, since many make a conscious choice to reject Him. But the Judge who matters makes the declaration that Jesus is the best! Furthermore, this Judge builds up His children into a marvelous structure, the Holy Christian Church. Peter’s primary message (the center of the chiasm) is clear and compelling: (1) our present and future *status* before God is sure, because we are select stones of God’s holy house; and (2) our *mission* is equally sure, because we are priests of the great High Priest. To what do we dedicate our lives as members of the priesthood of all believers? To the sacrificial service of the Lord! Luther comments that our spiritual service also includes preaching the Gospel:

Briefly stated, all this means [offering spiritual sacrifices] that the Gospel is preached. He who preaches the Gospel does all this.

He slaughters the calf, namely, the carnal mind; he strangles the old Adam. For one must slay with the Gospel what is irrational in the flesh and blood. Then we let ourselves be sacrificed and put to death on the cross.⁸

Such spiritual offerings will always be acceptable to God because of Christ Jesus. God's construction of us as His priests is, indeed, an incredible honor. What higher honor than to have direct access to Him through Jesus?

Verses 7b-8

(7b) ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ λίθος ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας (8) καὶ λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου· οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν.

(7b) ...but to those who do not believe, the Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone (8) (and) a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that is a death trap; who dash against the Word by being disobedient, for which they were destined.

Vocables

Verse 7b

ἀπεδοκίμασαν – aor. 3 pl. fr. ἀποδοκιμάζω; (cf. v. 4 for meaning)
εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας – prep. + fem. acc. sg. + fem. gen. sg. adj.; the head of the corner (lit.), Cornerstone; this construction (εἰς + acc.) is the LXX equivalent to a predicate nominative

Verse 8

προσκόμματος – gen. neut. sg.; stumbling, to cut against, something you bump into by accident (lit.)

σκανδάλου – gen. neut. sg.; trap stick, what causes people to fall, stumbling block, that which causes offense, death trap

προσκόπτουσιν – pres. act. 3 pl. fr. προσκόπτω; dash against, beat on, dash against, stumble

ἀπειθοῦντες – pres. ptc. nom. m. pl. fr. ἀπειθέω; disobey, are disobedient, reject

ἐτέθησαν – aor. pass. 3 pl. fr. τίθημι; they were placed, put, appointed, destined

Peter's inference from the truth of v. 6 continues with a negative description in v. 7b. The attributive participle ἀπιστοῦσιν stands in direct contrast to the believers of v. 7a. The unbeliever's disbelief in the face of God's amazing love is the particular characteristic Peter wishes to stress.

In keeping with the chiasmic structure present in vss. 4-10, Peter returns to a further description of the Cornerstone in vss. 7-8. An important added point about the Stone is noted by the relative tie-on οἴη. This added information will center on the role of the Stone for the unbelievers. The information Peter adds about the Stone comes from Ps. 118:22.⁹

The first part of Peter's description of the Stone is that He is completely rejected (note the aorist tense of ἀπεδοκίμασαν). The rejecters literally threw Him out because He did not pass their test. Who are οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες? When Jesus quoted Ps. 118:22 (as recorded in Mt. 21:42¹⁰), He did so in the context of telling the ruling priests and elders that their rejection of Him would cause God to take His Kingdom from them and give it to others. Peter's "builders," however, would probably be better seen as unbelievers in general. One can look to the Jewish religious leaders as the ultimate unbelievers, since they possessed all the prophecies about the Messiah, saw them fulfilled in Jesus, and still rejected Him outright.

Peter's further describes the Stone as κεφαλὴν γωνίας. Literally this term means "head of the corner" (γωνίας is a descriptive genitive, indicating the kind of "head"). This is the same term used in the LXX in Ps. 118:22. The two ideas brought out by this term is that the Cornerstone is the one that controls and guides (head), and the one that determines the lines of the building (corner). This, in spite of the rejection of the unbelievers!

The next part of the Stone's description (v. 8) Peter takes from Is. 8:14.¹¹ This particular Stone is the kind which is προσκόμματος. "Stumbling" is seen here as the result of the action (the -ma ending of the root word) and not the action itself. But "stumbling" does not quite bring out the destruction of the unbeliever who runs into this Stone. Rather, the rejecting unbeliever runs full force into the Stone and is destroyed. Thus also the intent of πέτρα σκανδάλου. Note the shift from speaking of a Stone involved in building to one of sheer magnitude. In context, it is best to take σκανδάλου in its strongest

sense, that of a trap that lures its victim to its death.

Peter closes v. 8 with a final description of the actions of the unbelievers which he began in v. 7. The present tense of προσκόπτουσιν indicates that they continually carry out this futile action. Notice that Peter describes them as dashing themselves against the Word. This is not to be taken as the equivalent of λίθος, but as the means by which the unbeliever comes into contact with Jesus. The manner of their dashing against the Word is indicated by ἀπειθοῦντες. Their continual disobedience is how they dash against the Word.

The final clause of this description of the unbelievers has caused some consternation. Part of the difficulty lies in determining the antecedent of the relative pronoun ὃ. No suitable neuter antecedent is located in the immediate context. Thus it is best to consider the antecedent a verbal idea in the clause; namely, that the unbelievers “dash against” the Word. Peter does not state here that the unbelievers are destined for unbelief (which is what gave Calvin ammunition for his false teaching), but rather that they are destined for carrying on the result of their unbelief.

Commentary on verses 7b-8

In spite of unbelief and rejection, the Stone still becomes the Cornerstone! Regardless of who throws Jesus out as a result of some subjective test, even if it be religious “leaders” or “scholars,” Jesus remains the same (Heb. 13:7). He is shown to be even more than a mere foundation on which to build, because He also guides and determines the direction of His Church. What a blessing to us who are living stones in the Church! Conversely, what a curse to those who thoroughly reject Jesus. Instead of life He brings unbelievers death. More than one who simply beats his head against the wall, the picture Peter paints of the unbeliever is of someone who gets a long, running start, accelerates to a sprint, and runs full force into the immovable Cornerstone...time and again. What futility! What a demonstration that there is no salvation apart from Jesus.

Verses 9-10

(9) Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκοτοῦς ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς·

(10) οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.

(9) But YOU are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for (His) own possession, so that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (10) Once (you were) the ones (who were) not a people, but now (you are) the ones (who are) people of God, the ones who had not been shown mercy, but now the ones who have been shown mercy.

Vocables

Verse 9

γένος – pred. nom. neut. sg.; people, nation (descendancy involved)

ἔθνος – pred. nom. neut. sg.; nation, people (Louw-Nida: largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community [same for λαὸς])

λαὸς – pred. nom. m. sg.; people

περιποίησιν – acc. f. sg.; possession, possessing for oneself (L-N: that which is acquired, presumably with considerable effort) [note on progression]

ἀρετὰς – acc. f. pl.; wonderful deeds; praise, honor, valor (lit.) (L-N: manifestation of power characterized by excellence)

ἐξαγγείλητε – aor. subj. 2 pl. fr. ἐξαγγέλλω; that you may proclaim throughout, report widely, tell everywhere

καλέσαντος – aor. ptc. gen. m. sg. fr. καλέω; who called

θαυμαστὸν – adj. acc. neut. sg.; wonderful, marvelous, remarkable, worthy of amazement

Verse 10

ἠλεημένοι – perf. pass. ptc. nom. m. 2 pl. fr. ἐλεέω; had (not) been shown mercy

ἐλεηθέντες – aor. pass. ptc. nom. m. 2 pl. fr. ἐλεέω; have been shown mercy

Peter constructs a contrast with the preceding thought about the unbelievers in two ways: with the use of δέ, indicating that he is changing subjects; and with the use of the intensive personal

pronoun *υμεῖς*. Especially in light of the unbelievers' rejection of the Cornerstone, the believers, Peter's readers, stand apart. Recall that these two verses are the return to the key point of the chiasm of vs. 4-10. This is another reason Peter establishes such a strong line of demarcation between the unbelievers and the believers.

In v. 9 Peter recalls various phrases and ideas from the Old Testament which describe God's people. (Note the lack of articles with the nouns, stressing the quality of each.) The first phrase, *γένος ἐκλεκτόν*, brings to mind Dt. 7:6, Is. 43:10, 20, and 44:1-2.¹² *Γένος* carries with it the idea of people who are somehow related, not just a generic group. The special nature of this group of related people is indicated by *ἐκλεκτόν*, the same word Peter used to describe his readers in the opening verse of the letter, and the same word used to describe the Cornerstone in v. 6.

Peter also calls the members of this select group a *βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα*. This term comes directly from the LXX's rendering of Ex. 19:6.¹³ With it Peter also re-emphasizes the point made in v. 5, that the believers are holy priests. The addition of "royal" to the description of the priesthood of the believers is significant. With it Peter places believers on a plane that is not superseded by any other priesthood. In the Old Testament, the Levitical priesthood was not royal. The only mention of a royal priest is seen in the person of Melchizedek, since he was both a king and a priest (Gen. 14:18ff.). The priesthood of believers is highly unique. Operating under the Levitical priesthood, God's people were below the priests concerning their access to God. In the royal priesthood, believers have direct access to God through the great High Priest.

The description of the believers continues with *ἔθνος ἅγιον*. Again Peter draws this term from Ex. 19:6. *Ἔθνος* is the more general term for "nation," and simply conveys the fact that the believers constitute one unit which is distinct from all other groups of people. This distinction is even more sharply drawn with the adjective *ἅγιον*, which Peter had used in v. 5 to describe the priests. Again the idea of being set apart is stressed; believers are a special group of people because they have been consecrated by God. They stand out among all other peoples of the world (cf. 1:1).

Peter adds that believers are *λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν*. This term has its roots in passages such as Ex. 19:5 ("My own special treasure

[LXX - περιούσιος; Heb. - פְּרָזֶזֶת] among all the peoples”) and Dt. 7:6. Most often in the LXX λαός is used to designate God’s chosen people, an appropriate connotation for this context also. The picture drawn by περιποίησιν is vivid also: believers are the prized possession of someone who has worked hard to obtain them.

To what end this special status? Peter’s purpose clause mirrors the thoughts expressed in Is. 42:12 and 43:21.¹⁴ *You prized people just described*, Peter states, *have been so blessed* “...so that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds....” He places τὰς ἀρετάς forward for emphasis. Louw-Nida’s definition of a “manifestation of power characterized by excellence” fits well for this term since God definitely displayed His power in making His believers what they are, and since the result certainly is excellent for the recipients. The report of these wonderful deeds is to be told everywhere. Luther comments about this aspect of the priesthood:

The first office, that of the ministry of the Word, therefore, is common to all Christians. This is clear...from 1 Peter 2:9.... I ask, who are these who are called out of darkness into marvelous light? Is it only the shorn and anointed masks [ordained priests]? Is it not all Christians? And Peter not only gives them the right, but the command, to declare the wonderful deeds of God, which certainly is nothing else than to preach the Word of God. ... So as there is no other proclamation in the ministry of the word than that which is common to all, that of the wonderful deeds of God, so there is no other priesthood than that which is spiritual and universal, as Peter here defines it.¹⁵

Peter then describes τὰς ἀρετάς in more detail with a substantive participial phrase: τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς. God’s calling of His people is the particular characteristic Peter stresses here. Here is also seen the root meaning of the term ἐκκλησία. Anyone who has been called out of darkness by God is a member of the holy Christian Church. The “calling” is God’s effective call to faith (note the aorist tense). The genitive of τοῦ...καλέσαντος is possessive: the wonderful deeds belong to God.

God’s special people have been called ἐκ σκότους. Note the lack of the article with σκότους, indicating the severity and totality of this darkness. Isaiah referred to this darkness in Is. 9:2 (9:1 in the LXX - ὁ λαὸς ὁ πορευόμενος ἐν σκότει), which is the same darkness out

of which God called His people: the darkness of unbelief, exclusion from the Kingdom of God. In this darkness languishes anyone not believing in God's mercy.

How else might this transition of the people from darkness to light be described? With two relative tie-ons Peter adds additional descriptions of this rescue in v. 10. To do so he employs the language used in Hosea 1:6, 8-10 and 2:1, 23.¹⁶ The ποτε ... νυν contrast mirrors the contrast between sin's darkness and God's light. In the darkness, God's people were simply οὐ λαός! Note the lack of the article, stressing the complete lack of any special quality to be recognized by God. While in the darkness, they were "nobodies." However, now that they have been brought from the darkness to the light they have become not just "somebodies," but God's very own! They now belong to God (genitive of possession), since He is the one who caused them to be born again (1:3).

The second relative tie-on Peter uses to describe this transition is that prior to being rescued from the darkness the people had received no meaningful help from God in their time of need. Note the periphrastic stress on the participles in this clause. Prior to their rescue the people *continually* received no mercy (the perfect tense of ἠλεημένοι); now it was a definite *fact* that they had been brought into the light (the aorist tense of ἐλεηθέντες) through God's mercy. God is indeed the agent behind both passives.

Commentary on verses 9-10

Peter began this section of his epistle (1:3-2:10) stressing God's mercy. What a fitting way to close! In God's mercy He has made us who were hopelessly lost in the darkness, who were pitiable but not pitied, into His prized possession: we are God's priests. In this royal position we do not show conceit as we revel in our regality. Rather, the entire purpose for God's merciful rescue is that we will continue joyfully and thankfully to carry out the primary work of priests as we spread the incredible news of not just our rescue, but of the rescue of all mankind.

Application to the Present-day Discussion of the Public Ministry

None of us denies the existence of the universal priesthood.

What may be an issue, however, is the *function* of this priesthood. That is, how broad is the scope of this priesthood's work? Is the priesthood limited only to proclaiming "the wonderful deeds of the One who called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (v.9)? Where is such proclamation to take place? How broadly defined is such proclamation regarding content?

Keep in mind that Peter's purpose is not limited to detailing the functions of the universal priesthood. His primary goal is to encourage and give hope to his readers. Thus he emphasizes their status with God in contradistinction to their status with mankind. Peter simply states in vss. 5 & 9 that his readers *are* priests. Did his initial audience automatically recall Exodus 19:6 and all the implications therewith?

God's Old Testament priests (those in the Levitical office) were the mediators between Him and His people. Their duties and functions were numerous. Their primary function was to serve God and His people. God's New Testament priests retain the same primary function. They serve God directly and through their service to others. This service is inextricable with the Word. Luther lists the rights and privileges of the priesthood.

There is no other Word of God than that which is given to all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted. There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose. There is no other sacrifice than of the body of every Christian. No one but a Christian can pray. No one but a Christian may judge doctrine. These make the priestly and royal office.¹⁷

The distinction between the universal priesthood and the office of the public ministry is encapsulated in the word *public*. All Christians are priests; not all Christians carry out this work on behalf of the church. We dare not over- or under-emphasize either of these roles in our day.

Endnotes

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia....

²1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

3:14 - But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

4:12-16 - (12) Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

(13) But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

(14) If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

(15) If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

(16) However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

5:8-9 - (8) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

(9) Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

³14:8 - A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." 16:19 - The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.

18:2 - With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.

⁴ (22) Since you have consecrated yourselves in the sphere of the obedience of the truth resulting in genuine love for the brothers, love one another with a pure heart (23) since you have been born again, not by seed which perishes but which does not perish, through the living and abiding Word of God, (24) because all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flowers fall off, (25) but the Word of the Lord remains forever. This is the word that was preached to you.

⁵ καὶ οἱ μάρτυρες ἀπέθεντο τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας νεανίου καλουμένου Σαύλου.

— The witnesses had laid their outer clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁶ (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in line with His great mercy caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) resulting in an inheritance which is incorruptible and

undefiled and unfading, guarded in heaven for you, (5) the ones being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time, (6) in which you continue to be overjoyed, although now for a little while, if it is necessary, you be put to grief with various trials, (7) in order that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold which perishes though proved by testing by means of fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ....

⁷ Through Jesus, then, let us always *bring to God a sacrifice of praise*, that is, *the fruit of our lips praising His name* (NET).

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: The Catholic Epistles*, vol. 30 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 54.

⁹ The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.

¹⁰ λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς, Λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας....

¹¹ ...ὡς λίθου προσκόμματι συναντήσεσθε αὐτῷ οὐδὲ ὡς πέτρας πτώματι....

¹² Dt. 7:6 – For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Is. 43:10, 20 – (10) “You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.” (20) “The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen....” Is. 44:1-2 – (1) “But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. (2) This is what the LORD says — he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.”

¹³ ...ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον... (“and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”).

¹⁴ Is. 42:12 – Let them give glory to the LORD And declare His praise in the coastlands. Is. 43:21 – “The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise.”

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry II*, vol. 40 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), pp. 21-22.

¹⁶ 1:6 – Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, “Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them.” 1:8-10 – (8) When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. (9) And the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God.” (10) Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place Where it is said to them, “You are not My people,” It will be said to them, “*You are* the sons of the living God.” 2:1 - Say to your brothers, “Ammi,” and to your sisters, “Ruhamah.” 2:23 - “I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had

not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, '*You are my God!*'"

¹⁷ *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, pp. 34-35.

Book Review:

The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

by Erling T. Teigen

Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, ed.; Charles Arrand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, Timothy J. Wenger tr.; Mineapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

Order from Bethany Lutheran College Bookstore at 1-800-944-1722.
Price: \$45.00

Appearance of the newest translation of the Book of Concord into English was a welcome event. This translation joins a long line of translations of the Confessional Writings into English: the Henkel, Jacobs, Triglotta, and Tappert editions. The first two are little used; the third remains the chief source for many; the last was widely used, but found some dissatisfaction among those who cared about the correctness of the text. Now those who value the confessional writings have a new text to examine.

Kolb-Wengert is a welcome addition to scholarship. So far, the translation seems to stand the test of accuracy; a readable translation in language that avoids the folksiness of many modern retranslations. For some, the use of gender-neutral language, even when the text does not, will be too much of a concession. But by and large, it appears that the translation will win wide approval for its readability and accuracy.

The new translation incorporates a critical apparatus much better than Tappert. Kolb-Wengert avoids misleading, interpretive notes like Tappert's note 4, p. 31 on AC V, which makes an assertion not demanded by the text, or footnote 4 on page 591, which fails to note that the document which provides a list of presumptuous questions was in fact a Phillipistic document. One complaint this reviewer has always had about the Triglotta text is the lack of textual

notes accompanying the text, with all pertinent information restricted to Bente's introduction. Improving the tradition of Tappert, Kolb-Wengert translates the Latin and German texts of the Augustana side by side in an easy to follow layout. A critical apparatus accompanies all of the confessional writings, but with an added help in the Formula of Concord where parts of the text are keyed as to their origin in the precursor documents –Andreae's Swabian Concord, Chytraeus' and Chemnitz contributions to the Concord, the Maulbron Formula, the Torgau and Bergen books. The introductions to each of the writings are sparing, but adequate for the general reader of the Confessional writings.

This reviewer has used the Kolb/Wengert text in a course offered to third and fourth year BA students, where the reading met a good reception even from the easily discouraged, which would seem to commend the translation as one readily accessible to laypeople.

A major criticism of the basic editorial principle employed has already been leveled against the new translation in a review appearing in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, April 2002 (Vol. 66, No. 2). "The New Translation of the Book of Concord: Closing the barn door after...." Roland F. Ziegler. Ziegler points out that the principle for the text on which the new translation is based is enunciated by the editors in the Foreword: "This translation employs as its basis the earliest complete edition of every document (with one exception)" (ix) – that being the Apology, more on which later.

That creates a problem. The various confessional writings were not, in any systematic, regular manner adopted as official confessions of the Lutheran Church at the time that they were written. The Augustana was. It was read in German, and both German and Latin copies were from the beginning regarded as equally official and representative of the Reformation doctrine. No general gathering, however, adopted the Apology and the Catechisms. Luther's Smalcald Articles was signed by those who agreed with it at Smalcald; it was presented to some, but not the south Germans, who would not have been able to agree with it; Melancthon's Tractate was officially adopted at Smalcald, but over the next decades it came to be regarded as an appendix to the Smalcald Articles, sometimes supposed to have been written by Luther, and other times by "the scholars." Nicolas Selnecker's 1580, unofficial, Latin translation of the Book of Concord

even contained a Latin translation of the German translation of the Tractate – so long forgotten as it was that it was written originally in Latin.

The only officially adopted confessional writings before 1577 were the Augustana and the Smalcald Articles/Tractate, when the Formula of Concord was published. The Formula enumerated the accepted confessional writings in “The Comprehensive Summary” and the Formula was then adopted, and signed by 8,000 theologians. The “Summary” specified the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Apology published in 1531. All of the subsequent writings were taken to be defenses and explanations of the faith expressed in the Augustana, so that nothing new was said in the later writings than had already been said in the foundational confession presented at Augsburg. That included Melancthon’s Tractate, which was requested by the Elector precisely because nothing critical had been said about the papacy in the Augustana.

Three years later, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, and in commemoration, all of the confessions were assembled together in German text and translation.

The text of the confessions is not as the text of the Bible. (Dr. Sigurd Ylvisaker reported that when he was in Leipzig from 1907-1910, a Lutheran student from the Eastern U. S. asked one day about the unique belief of the Midwestern Lutherans that the Book of Concord was verbally inspired.) So the standard acknowledged among students of the biblical text, namely, that the closer to the autograph the more authentic the text, is hardly applicable in the question about the text of the Bekenntnisschriften. Certainly, more than a few monstrosities are created in that case – shall the Small Catechism be printed on placards that might be hung by the dinner table? Is the entire Lutheran Church obligated to follow the Marriage Booklet and Luther’s Baptismal Booklet – with its double exorcism, etc.? Certainly, there was good reason for the 1584 *Liber Concordiae* to drop those very theological and beautiful services – especially in light of AC VII’s insistence that we do NOT demand uniformity of liturgical forms.

Nevertheless, the text does matter, and Melancthon himself may be the one responsible for making the text matter so much. A great deal of the furor from 1546 to 1577 had to do with Phillip’s

tinkering with the text of the Augustana (and Apology). And in spite of the resurgence of a Melanchthonian spirit in modern Lutheranism, the fact remains that the Formula of Concord was the result of a long polemic over who was the true interpreter of the Augustana – Luther or Phillip. Consequently, when a decision had to be made, it was not merely a flip of the coin, but a confessional issue that texts with which Phillip had tinkered had to be restored to their original form. No Lutheran who takes the confessions seriously can be oblivious to the fact that in the Formula of Concord Luther is repeatedly upheld as the true teacher and interpreter of the Augustana, and that the Book of Concord effectively sets aside Melanchthon's *Corpus Doctrinae*.

The text of the Augustana seems at first to be a simple matter – but on further reflection emerges as more complex. It was the Augustana that Melanchthon had tampered with the most extensively, and the Formula specified that the text should be the original text of 1530—“the First, Unaltered Augsburg Confession, delivered to the Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the great Diet” (FC Summary Content, § 3, Triglotta, 777). Unfortunately, the editors of the Book of Concord didn't quite get what they were shooting at: the *editio princeps* has come to be Melanchthon's 1531 Quarto edition of both the Augustana and Apology. But later scholars recognized that more authentic was the Mainz manuscript. However, J. T. Müller in his 1847 edition noted that in spite of the fact that the latter text was more authentic, all textual errors were easily corrected “so that we have no reason to surrender the text received by the Church and to accept another in place thereof” (tr. Bente, 21). The bottom line is that the 1580 and 1584 editions of the Book of Concord had an inferior text of the Augustana, but a scholar such as Müller was restrained enough not to depart from what had come to be regarded as the authoritative texts of the Confessional writings, the 1580 German and the 1584 Latin texts.

The Apology is a more significant issue. The Apology was written during the summer of 1530, but was not published until 1531. Then, three different forms of it appeared. One, from its size, is called the Quarto edition, published in May, 1531. A revision of the Quarto was published in September, 1531, and is referred to as the Octavo edition. A third is a German translation by Justus Jonas. The history of the former texts especially is confusing. It does not seem that any

doctrinal issues hang on differences between these texts. The 1580 German edition of the Book of Concord used the Jonas text, which is distinguished by being something of a paraphrase of the Latin text. Selnecker's 1580 unofficial Latin text used the Octavo edition, from September, 1531. This was a text which Melancthon had "tweaked," though no deviations were introduced. By the time of the Book of Concord the lessons of Philippism had made a deeper impression on of the Concordia theologians, and when Chemnitz and Chytraeus prepared the 1584 edition, they returned to the May, 1531 Quarto edition.

As it turns out, the Octavo edition is not a vehicle for Melancthon's perfidy. As the editors claim, rightly I think, Luther himself had a hand in improving the later text (K-W, 108,109). Nevertheless, by 1584, the editors were concerned enough about the continuing effects of Phillips influence, that, fearing his hand in the Octavo edition, they reverted to the earlier, inferior, it turns out, edition, which they presumed was free of Melancthon's hand.

Some textual questions can be raised about the Small Catechism, but apart from the question of the Marriage and Baptism booklets, no significant variations are found.

Some questions, of course, can be raised about Melancthon's Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. It was written at Smalcald in Latin at the behest of the Elector. The Augustana, for some clear and valid reasons, had reined in any rhetoric regarding the Pope. At Smalcald, Melancthon had dissented from Luther's strong language concerning the papacy in his articles; then, for inexplicable reasons, Phillip was asked to write an addendum to the Augustana on the papacy, and, as is known, he came on like gangbusters, radically altering his previous position. Unlike Luther's articles, Melancthon's treatise was signed by all of those present. Bente suggested that Veit Dietrich's German translation was the version signed, but it appears rather that it was a *copy* of the Latin original. However, the Dietrich German translation was what got currency in the intervening years, and by the time of the Formula the Tractate was regarded as an appendix, not to the Augustana, but to the Smalcald Articles, was attributed to "the Scholars," not Melancthon, and was known only in a German translation.

Thus, in the 1580 Book of Concord, the Treatise on the Power

and Primacy of the Pope was printed in German, as though that were the original, and was attributed to “the scholars,” and not to Phillip. To make matters worse, when Selnecker published his 1580 Latin edition (later noted by himself as “privately published,” he included a *Latin translation* of the German translation, apparently unaware of a Latin original text. Only in the 1584 text of the Book of Concord, did the original Latin text appear; but not even then was Melanchthon credited as author.

As is the case with the Apology, this issue does not affect any dogmatical issues. However, we can cite one case where there is a significant textual variation. In Tr 10, the German text has: “das predigtamt vom gemeinen Beruf der Apostel herkommet und ist nicht not, daß alle dieser einigen Person Petri Beruf oder Bestätigung haben.” That expression is absent from the Latin, and one might argue that since it was not Melanchthon’s intention to say that, it is not legitimately a part of the Confessions. However, it is the German text that was published in 1580 as an authoritative confession of what was taught by the Lutherans.

So, the question remains, what is the authorized text of the Lutheran Confessional Writings? If such a question depends on the mood of the scholars who examine every newest shred of evidence to determine what was the intention of the writers of those documents, the quest will be endless and doomed to a relativism and trendiness. The fact is that the Book of Concord was published as a German text in 1580, with names affixed, and as a Latin text, worked out by the chief writers of the Formula in 1584, and those texts are quite certain. We can regard them as the authoritative texts.

When the Triglotta translation was produced, it handled cases where there was a difference in the authoritative texts by translating the secondary material in brackets. Ziegler points out that in the Kolb-Wengert translation, the principle of the oldest, most original text leads the translator to insert the “filioque” in brackets. The Triglot translation indeed inserts material found in the German Apology but not the Latin in brackets, and the Tractate example given above is accorded the same note: “[that the office of the ministry proceeds from the general call of the apostles and that it is not necessary for all to have the call or confirmation of this one person, Peter, alone.]” (Triglotta 507). The first example, putting “filioque” in brackets is

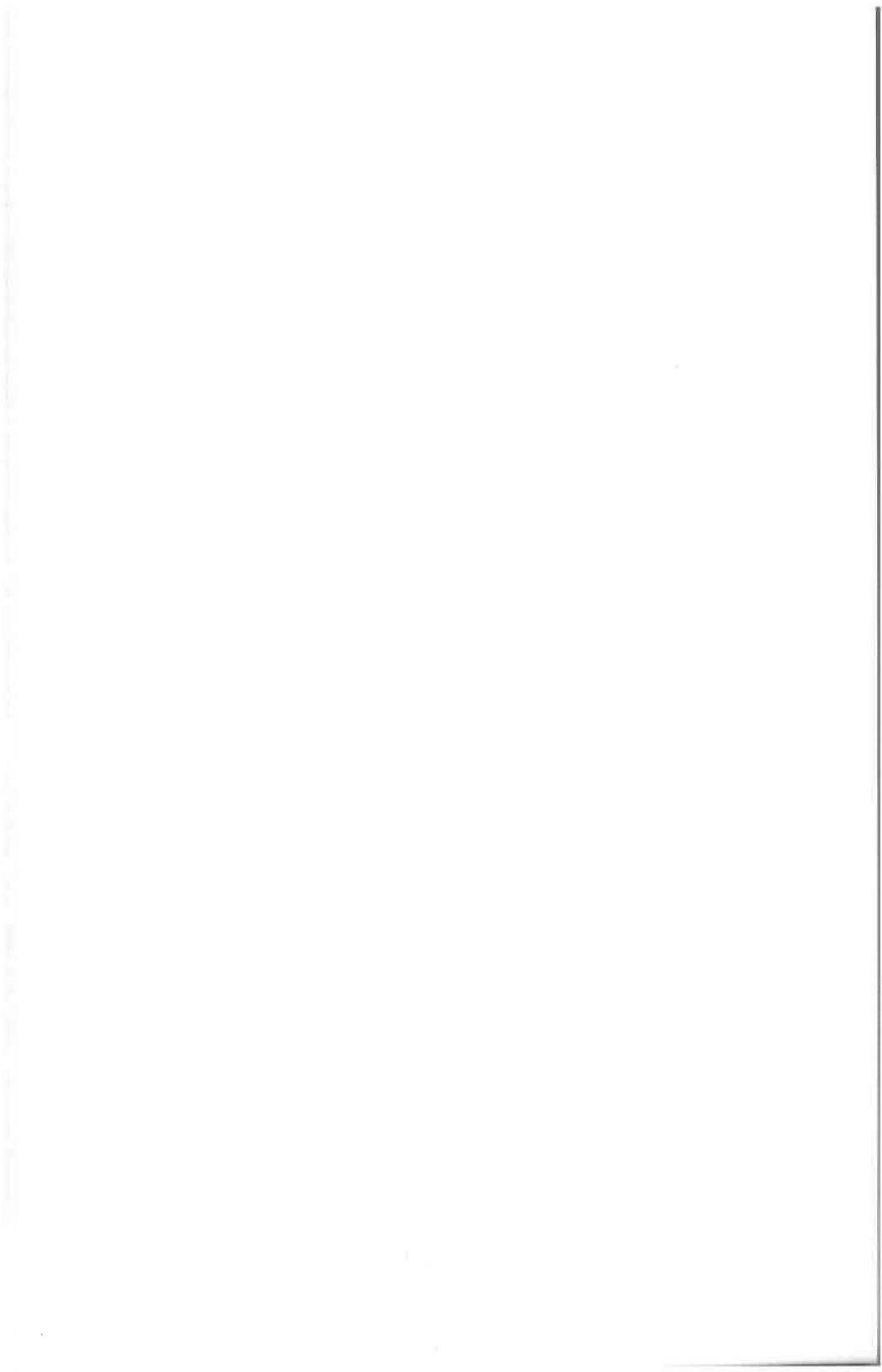
absurd; the latter is certainly sensible. And the statement belongs to our confession no less than the text without it.

So, what of highly respected, and greatly admired scholars like Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, along with their associated translators? Does that mean that their work counts for nothing? I used their text a year ago in a Confessions course, and will use it again next term. It is eminently readable. I suspect that I will carry it with me for the rest of my professional life. But the *Göttingen Bekentnisschriften* and the Triglotta will remain my most used texts (who can not like all that white space in the Triglotta?).

If there were no other virtue in Kolb-Wengert than highlighting the textual issues, it would be a worthwhile study text indeed. And it will be so used. In the meantime, one can fuss a little and suspect how much more useful it would be if, e.g., it printed the Apology in parallel columns with the Quarto and Octavo texts both readily available, or if it followed the Triglotta tradition of using brackets to translate the controverted texts (not including the filioque text in that category).

All in all, we commend Kolb-Wengert. Time will tell how well the translation itself wears. One must suspend judgment on that for a while; only after considerable use can it be deemed successful or not. The text, however, and the principles behind the text can be judged at this point, and they are found a little wanting.

On balance, however, we commend Kolb-Wenger (KW) as a useful text of our confessional writings. We can only wish that this text would be subordinate to reading the confessions in the Latin and German, where textual issues, but not translation issues, remain.



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