

JOHANN WILHELM FRIEDRICH HOEFLING: THE MAN AND HIS ECCLESIOLOGY

Part 4—What Connection Exists Between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?

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The early Latin father Tertullian has been famously and frequently quoted for asking the searching question: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem or the Academy with the Church?” With these words Tertullian was raising a most legitimate concern as he witnessed the growing influence of Greek philosophy in the Christianity of his day. Despite his theological drift into Montanism, Tertullian today is perhaps singularly remembered as a pioneer in Latin theological nomenclature. In similar fashion, Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling seems to be singularly remembered for his congregational understanding of the doctrines of church and ministry. When Hoefling’s ecclesiastical views are presented in North America, the Wisconsin Synod’s understanding of church and ministry at times is mentioned in the same sentence with Hoefling’s understanding. Some churchmen—particularly those with what has been called “the Missouri view” of church and ministry—have concluded in the past and in the present that there is a connection between Erlangen, Germany, where Hoefling worked, and Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, the former site of the Wisconsin Synod’s theological seminary, where Professors John Philipp Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller worked to articulate what they believed the Holy Scriptures taught on the questions of church and ministry. Some Lutheran churchmen—critical of Wisconsin’s view of church and ministry—have definitely concluded that there is a connection between Erlangen and Wauwatosa.

The fourth and final installment of this series of articles on Hoefling and his ecclesiology will examine the available empirical evidence which could shed some light on conclusively answering the question: “What connection exists between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?” This article will first present a sampling of how theologians outside the WELS have described what they perceive to be the relationship between Hoefling and Wisconsin Synod. It will then present the available empirical evidence which connects Hoefling with the Wisconsin Synod’s understanding of church and ministry and finally it will seek to draw some conclusions about whether there really is a connection

between the Erlangen Theology of Hoefling and the Wauwatosa Theology of Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller.

Is a study of the purported connection between Hoefling and the Wisconsin Synod really necessary? The personal experience of this writer and many other brothers in the WELS ministerium answers in the affirmative. Take for example an incident that took place in Wyneken Hall at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, back in June 1995. The venerable Dr. Robert Preus—before a packed class, with a WELS pastor sitting in the front row—blithely stated that the Wisconsin Synod got its doctrine of the ministry from Hoefling. When challenged after class about why he made such an assertion, Dr. Preus replied that while he had not studied the issue in-depth, he had learned about the Hoefling/Wisconsin connection from others.

Coincidentally or not-so-coincidentally, five months later, Robert Preus had a conversation with Fort Wayne seminary colleague David Scaer over ministry issues, only a few days before Preus' death. As related by Scaer in a 1999 *Logia* article, in this same conversation, "Dr. Preus suggested I present a paper on the nineteenth-century German-Lutheran theologian Hoefling's doctrine of the ministry."¹ Scaer then preceded to summarize Hoefling's theology by listing eight key teachings which he gleaned from Walther W. F. Albrecht's index of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*. After discussing Hoefling's ecclesiology, Scaer makes this assertion about a Hoefling/Wisconsin connection: "Recently two scholars noted that Hoefling's position was strikingly similar to that of August Pieper (which is also the current WELS view) and of Schleiermacher."²

In the late Kurt Marquart's dogmatical work, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry and Governance*, published nine years before Scaer published his *Logia* article, the Hoefling/Wisconsin Synod connection is also asserted. At the end of the book, in an excursus entitled: "'Missouri' and 'Wisconsin' on Church and Ministry," Marquart references a statement written by John Philipp Koehler in his church history text, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*—a statement which will be studied later—and concludes that despite official doctrinal statements to the contrary, Hoefling's influence is seen in Wisconsin's position:

¹David P. Scaer, "The Lutheran Confessions on the Holy Ministry With a Few Thoughts on Hoefling," *Logia* 8 (Reformation 1999): 37–38.

²*Ibid.*, 39. The two scholars which Scaer references are John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Ministry in Missouri until 1962*, [Privately published, 1992] and Erling T. Teigen's, "The Universal Priesthood in the Lutheran Confessions," *Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter* Letter No. 25 (Advent 1991): 1–7. In Wohlrabe's monograph, Hoefling's name is not specifically mentioned, but Wohlrabe numerous times attributes a functionalist understanding of the ministry to August Pieper and his Wauwatosa co-workers.

“Old Missouri” (Walther and Pieper) and “Old Wisconsin” (Hoe-neck) did not differ over church and ministry. Both synods shared the standard Lutheran dogmatic tradition, which they re-appropriated respectfully but not slavishly. The chief impetus towards “New Wisconsin” came, it seems, from the historian J. P. Koehler who held that in the 19th century German disputes about church and ministry, only Höfling’s position was “completely free and correct according to Scripture.” Modern Wisconsin’s Statements on Church and Ministry formally reject Höfling’s stand: “It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency (Höfling).” Materially, however, the Wisconsin Statements suggest Höfling’s influence, for instance in the virtual identification of priesthood and ministry, and the apparent failure to distinguish the one Gospel ministry from auxiliary offices. Höfling, too, admitted the “divine institution” of an abstract “public ministry” [*Predigtamt*] held in common by all.³

The previous citation references in its footnotes Wisconsin’s 1967 *Proceedings*, which contained “Theses on Church and Ministry,” which were formally adopted by the WELS in convention in 1969.

Another source for the “Hoefling/Wisconsin connection” and perhaps one of its chief originators is the late Dr. Wilhelm M. Oesch. Oesch was an American-born and Missouri-Synod-educated pastor who spent the majority of his ministry serving in Europe. He served from 1947–1968 as a professor of systematic theology at the Lutherische Hochschule in Oberusel, Germany.⁴ He was also the long-time editor of the theological journal *Theologische Rundblick*. Dr. Oesch is quoted twice in Dr. Eugene Klug’s *Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther* as pairing some aspects of Hoefling’s ecclesiology with Wisconsin’s understanding of the ministry. These assertions come in the final portion of Klug’s monograph, when he summarizes the “dialogues” he has had with European theologians and Luther scholars on church and ministry issues. As related by Klug in his *Church and Ministry*, while reacting to a set of theses on church and ministry issues which Klug himself authored, Dr. Oesch stated back in 1978:

Hoefling, and so also the Wisconsin Synod, held that the pastor’s office evolved out of the general priesthood, according to Matthew 28. In a certain way, of course, this is true, since a pastor’s call originates from the congregation; but it is true in a restricted way and

³Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry and Governance*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, Vol. 9, ed. Robert D. Preus and John R. Stephenson, (Fort Wayne: The International Lutheran for Confessional Lutheran Research, 1990), 220.

⁴Heinrich J. Vogel, “Dr. Wilhelm Oesch,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 79 (Summer 1982): 150–151; David P. Scaer, “In Memoriam: Wilhelm Martin Oesch, 1896–1982,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (April–July 1982): 241–242.

with a great difference; for those who succeed to the office of the ministry after the apostles enter their office by God's express will and ordaining through the instrumentality of the congregation.⁵

In his book's conclusion, Klug summarized Oesch's understanding of the Hoefling/Wisconsin connection: "Hoefling and the Wisconsin Synod converged on the same track in holding that the pastoral office evolves out of the general priesthood (Oesch). In a way this is true, of course, but in a definitely restricted way, as stated above (Oesch)."⁶ Since Dr. Oesch grew up in the Missouri Synod and remained in fellowship with the LCMS throughout his life, his assertion that there is a Hoefling/Wisconsin connection likely influenced Missouri men to espouse similar views.

Is there empirical evidence demonstrating any kind of a Hoefling/Wisconsin connection? The surviving evidence—slim and subjective—indicates that at least the Wauwatosa triumvirate of Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller were familiar with Hoefling's most famous writing on ecclesiology, *Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung* (*Principles of Evangelical Lutheran Church Polity*). The first available piece of evidence comes from a bound copy of what appears to be an early and yet unpublished edition of Koehler's *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*. The printed notes are clearly the work of Koehler—his church history chronological divisions are easily recognized—but there is no author, date, or publisher described in the pages themselves. This set of notes is bound with alternating blank sheets of paper and appears to have been intended as a combination text and notebook for church history. On page 100, there is this cryptic line, in which Koehler pairs Walther and Hoefling together concerning their understanding of ecclesiology: "Theological controversies: Kliefoth, Vilmar, Petri, Loehe against Hoefling, Walther concerning catholicized doctrine of church and ministry."⁷ This statement, written somewhere between the years 1900–1917, indicates that Koehler regarded both Walther and Hoefling as standing opposed to a Romanist view of

⁵Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry: The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 329.

⁶Ibid, 366–367.

⁷John Philipp Koehler, *Geschichte der Kirche* [no publisher or date], 100: "Theolog. Streitigkeiten: Kliefoth, Vilmar, Petri, Löhe gegen Höfling, Walther über katholischer Lehre v. Kirche und Amt." Theodor Kliefoth (1810–1895) was a Lutheran theologian who advocated separating the Lutheran church from the state and placing it under the sovereign of the region. August Vilmar (1800–1868) was a Lutheran professor at Marburg who held a Romanizing view of the church. Ludwig Petri (1803–1873) was a Lutheran pastor in Hanover who was a staunch opponent of rationalism and the Prussian Union. J. K. Wilhelm Loehe (1808–1872), a Lutheran pastor and mission planter, who helped establish both the Missouri and Iowa Synods while serving as pastor at Neundettelsau, also held a Romanizing view of the church and its ministry.

church and ministry, both favoring an ecclesiology that was distinctly congregational. In making this connection Koehler may have recalled that Walther had been associated with Hoefling by contemporary critics, a connection that Walther denied.⁸

Koehler's statement in his 1917 church history text is the primary source quoted the most to establish a Hoefling/Wisconsin connection. As indicated earlier, Marquart cites this Koehler reference in his 1990 dogmatics text. In the section under German Protestantism, after discussing how unionism went hand-in-hand with theological liberalism, Koehler writes:

Actual doctrinal controversies could only take place among the Lutherans. In the first years after 1848, a controversy persisted concerning the doctrine of church and ministry. Kliefoth, Vilmar, Muenchmeyer and Loehe had high-church perceptions of the office of the pastor and the church similar to Grabau in America. Against them probably stood most of the Lutherans of other circles, especially the Erlangen School. All alone and correctly following Scripture stood only Hoefling with a few other colleagues.⁹

"All alone and correctly following Scripture stood only Hoefling with a few other colleagues." In the more than ninety years since that rather *carte blanche* endorsement has entered the public realm via Koehler, the WELS has sought to distance itself from Hoefling's ecclesiology. The culmination of this effort was the adoption of "Theses on the Church and Ministry" at the 1969 synod convention, which

⁸Walther had been accused of being a Hoeflingite by the Romanizing Lutherans. In a footnote to an article on "Kraussold and the Doctrine of the Ministry," Walther wrote: "Regrettably it has come to this, that now everyone who rejects the Romanizing doctrine of the ministry is reckoned to be a Hoeflingianer in this doctrine and is held under suspicion as being such, but Hoefling's doctrine of the ministry and that of the Romanizing Lutherans are the opposite extremes, between which in the middle lies the pure Lutheran doctrine, to which alone our Synod has confessed itself and still confesses itself." There is a certain irony involved in the fact that when WELS theologians are accused of being Hoeflingites by Romanizing Lutherans, they find themselves in the same spot that Walther found himself in during the first phase of the "ministry wars" in American Lutheranism.

⁹John Philipp Koehler, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1917), 659: "Eigentliche Lehrstreitigkeiten konnten nur unter den Lutheranern vorkommen. In den ersten Jahren nach 1848 bestand ein Streit über die Lehre von Kirche und Amt. Kliefoth, Vilmar, Münchmeyer und Löhe hatten hochkirchliche Auffassungen vom Amte des Pastors und der Kirche ähnlich wie Grabau in Amerika. Gegen sie standen wohl die meisten Lutheraner anderer Kreise, besonders auch die Erlanger. Ganz frei und korrekt nach der Schrift stand nur Höfling mit einigen wenigen Genossen." August Münchmeyer (1807–1882) was a Lutheran pastor in Hanover who advocated the complete separation of church and state and who wrote a refutation of Hoefling's *Principles of Evangelical-Lutheran Church Polity*.

contained this statement: "Thus these public ministers are appointed by God. Ac 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Co 12:28. It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency (Hoeffling)."¹⁰ Furthermore, various interpretations of Koehler's conclusion have been offered over the years. Most seek to explain that while Koehler rightly found many things to praise about Hoeffling's ecclesiology, Koehler was not completely well-read in all of Hoeffling's positions and may not have known or fully realized that Hoeffling denied a specific divine institution of the public ministry. Consider the conclusion Prof. Edward C. Fredrich reached in his paper "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry" which was presented at the 1992 WELS Ministry Symposium:

An even sharper critic of Loehe was another Erlangener, Johann Hoeffling, the extremist on the 'low church' side. From that vantage point he comes out correctly in giving lay people a share in the church's regimen and in assigning ordination its proper place. Positions like these influenced J. P. Koehler to speak of Hoeffling as being 'entirely free and correct according to Scripture.' It is a different matter when Hoeffling treats the origin of the ministry. There he denies a special, God-ordained ministry.¹¹

Those that have concluded that somehow Hoeffling's ecclesiology was a significant contributing factor in the development of the WELS doctrine of church and ministry have used the Koehler's 1917 quote as an important part of their argument. Why Koehler put into print the statement that Hoeffling stood alone with his position and was completely correct according to Scripture is difficult to fully explain. Some of the conclusions that Koehler took on the ministry—and later the WELS in general—obviously contradicted Hoeffling's position. If Koehler had further criticisms of Hoeffling's position, they have not come to light. What Koehler did record in his synodical history, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, was that when his 1917 general church history text was being compiled, this was a time when August Pieper, John Schaller, and himself were intensively studying church and ministry issues. Koehler records this revealing comment in his synod history:

During Schaller's time at the Seminary, 1909–1918 [sic], the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry was threshed out by the faculty over against the muddled or erroneous ideas that had been

¹⁰"Theses on the Church and Ministry," *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS*, Prepared by the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 50.

¹¹Edward C. Fredrich, "The Scriptural Basis and Historical Development of WELS Doctrine of Ministry," in *WELS Ministry Compendium: Study Papers on the Doctrine of Church and Ministry*, Vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 771.

current for thirty years or more, even though at different times and different places various points had been clarified.¹²

At any rate Koehler reports that he played virtually no role in formulating the Wauwatosa position on ministry beyond raising the initial exegetical questions. He had not even read his colleagues' writings on the subject, so any alleged Hoefling connection of Koehler would have had little influence on the formulation of the Wauwatosa position.¹³

Koehler's quotation regarding the work of the Wauwatosa faculty in articulating where the Wisconsin Synod stood on church and ministry serves as a fitting introduction to the most extensive evidence available that at least one of the Wauwatosa men appears to have read—and read well—Hoefling's *Principles of Evangelical Lutheran Church Polity*. These are the underlining and marginal notes found in the 1850 edition, the first and original edition, of Hoefling's *Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung*. There is circumstantial evidence that this underlining and margin notes were made by seminary president John Schaller himself.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's library has a non-annotated copy of Hoefling's 1853 edition of *Principles* in its circulation stacks. Apparently the existence of the 1850 edition—with significant underlining and margin notes—was not known in recent generations in the WELS until this researcher secured a copy of Manfred Kiessig's work, *Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Höfling: Leben und Werk*, from Germany in summer 2002. Kiessig's dissertation contained a complete bibliography of Hoefling's published works and revealed that there were three editions of Hoefling's *Principles* published over a short period of time. The third and final edition—significantly enlarged and emended compared to the first two editions—was published in 1853, the year of Hoefling's death. This is the edition that is most often used in studying his ecclesiology. Kiessig's bibliography reveals that the first edition (1850) was initially published in the theological journal of the University of Erlangen, *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche (Journal for Protestantism and Church)*. Hoefling served as one of the editors of this periodical. After locating the volumes of *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche* in the WLS library's periodical section, Hoefling's *Principles* was found in volume 19, no. 9 (1850). Two other

¹²John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, edited and with an introduction by Leigh D. Jordahl, 2nd ed, Faith-Life, The Protestant Conference (Sauk Rapids: Minnesota: Sentinel Printing, 1981), 230. Why Koehler in his history cited John Schaller's tenure as seminary president from 1909–1918 is also unknown, since Schaller served as the president of the Wauwatosa seminary from 1908–1920 and died in office on February 7, 1920.

¹³Koehler, *History*, 238.

interesting discoveries were made at the same time. While volume 19 has no particular stamp of ownership, the ink hand stamp on the front title page of volume 21 reads: "Rev. Prof. J. Schaller, Luth. Theol. Seminary, Wauwatosa, Wis." This stamp is identical to the stamp that appears in Schaller's copy of his 1913 *Pastorale Praxis in der ev.-luth. Freikirche Amerikas (Pastoral Praxis in the Ev. Lutheran Free Church of America)*. The other discovery made was numerous handwritten annotations in Hoefling's *Principles*, which Schaller purportedly made as he read and evaluated Hoefling's ecclesiology.¹⁴

The majority of these annotations are underlines of various sentences or parts of sentences which occur on numerous pages of the 103-page document. In the margins occasionally there are single words, ranging from the Latin *ubi* (where) and *quid* (why) in some places, to twice the German *gut* (good). Frequent question marks and exclamation points are also found next to sentences and paragraphs. Occasionally there are longer annotations written in the margins—written in pencil and in German—that after a century are all but illegible. To at least an amateur's eye, the handwriting seems to match the known handwriting of John Schaller, which occurs frequently in the margins of his original copy of *Pastorale Praxis*.

It has been said that the two most Lutheran questions in the world are: "What does this mean?" and "Why do you ask?" What do the Schaller annotations—and the two Koehler references—all mean in addressing the original question of this article: "What Connection Exists between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?" The reason why this question must be asked has already been addressed. Several critics of the WELS understanding of church and ministry assert that the venerable Wauwatosa triumvirate—Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller—did not thresh out the doctrines of church and ministry from the Scriptures themselves, but lifted many of their original ideas from Hoefling's writings.

This purported physical evidence from the writings of Koehler and Schaller has been discussed before in WELS circles. It was the subject of an hour-long presentation by the researcher at the second Lutheran College Conference (a biennial summer conference between the faculties of Bethany Lutheran College, Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran College) which took place on WLC's campus in August 2003. Considerable discussion followed the presentation of the evidence, especially the Schaller annotations, which no one but the researcher had previously seen or known about. The general reaction of those in attendance was that it is more than a bit reckless to draw any concrete conclusions from the marginal notes of a man who has

¹⁴Johann W. F. Höfling, "Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung," *Zeitschrift für Protestantismus und Kirche*, 19, no. 9 (1850): 317–420.

long since been deceased, with one member of the audience in particular exclaiming: "I would hate for someone to go through the books in my library, read some of the margin notes I have made, and then draw any conclusions about my beliefs from them."

A point well taken. Many of Schaller's annotations are illegible to begin with and exactly what the venerable professor was thinking about and concluding about Hoeffling's ecclesiology as he was reading Hoeffling and making numerous underlines and notes will have to remain a mystery. Schaller's tragic death by the virulent post-World War I flu epidemic prevented any researcher in that generation or since to really find solid answers to questions like these "What do all these annotations mean?" and "Why did Schaller make them in certain sections of Hoeffling's work and not in others?"

So what should WELS called workers and laity make of these accusations that the WELS has a spurious doctrine of church and ministry partially because three of its most influential seminary professors lifted unscriptural ideas about church and ministry from an obscure German theologian, known for his doctrinal aberrations? Is there really a connection between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?

Based upon a careful study of the main points of Hoeffling's ecclesiology, it is simply not accurate to assert that the WELS doctrine of church and ministry is really an American version of the ecclesiology of Johann W. F. Hoeffling. A study of Hoeffling's *Principles*—his seminal work on ecclesiology—and Kiessig's lengthy monograph reveal that Hoeffling wrote a great deal about church and ministry. Some of what he wrote is accepted Christian truth. Hoeffling also made distinctions in areas that are seldom discussed or addressed today in American Lutheran ecclesiology—such as his distinction between sacrificial and sacramental office (*Amt*). The first edition of Hoeffling's *Principles*—published in journal form—was 103 pages, while his third and final edition (1853) runs 194 pages, with an additional 129 pages of annotations (*Anmerkungen*). Compare this amount of ink on church and ministry from Hoeffling's pen to the slightly more than twelve pages which make up the historical introduction and theses statements of the WELS "Theses on the Church and Ministry." Clearly Hoeffling had much more to say on church and ministry issues than where the WELS has officially stood on the subject.

Are there any other published writings of Koehler, Pieper and Schaller which demonstrate evidence of dependence on Hoeffling's writings? Has a genuine connection between Erlangen and Wauwatosa definitively been established? What can be safely said is that Hoeffling and the Wauwatosa men had similar concerns in some key areas of church and ministry. The two most prominent are:

(1) Who instituted the public ministry and when was it instituted? and (2) Did Christ give any legal regulations to his New Testament church? These two issues were specifically addressed in various essays and articles in the early twentieth century, two in particular: John Schaller's essay "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," first published in the 1911–1912 seminary catalog, and August Pieper's 1916 *Quartalschrift* article "Are There Legal Regulations in the New Testament?" A critique of these articles is addressed in Erling T. Teigen's 1991 essay, "The Universal Priesthood in the Lutheran Confessions," in which he observes: "Both in Schaller and in August Pieper, as we shall see later, there is an indiscriminate movement back and forth between a definite *Amt* and an abstracted activity common to all."¹⁵

"What connection exists between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?" This researcher has concluded that there is empirical evidence to conclude that at least two of the three Wauwatosa men seem to have read and studied Hoefling. This took place in the early days of the twentieth century as they sought to articulate the revelation of Scripture on the doctrines of church and ministry. The only point this actually proves is that the Wauwatosa Triumvirate of Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller found it important to be well-read about the theologians and controversies of their day—an eloquent demonstration that they belonged in a seminary classroom. What cannot be analytically measured is Hoefling's possible influence on any of the Wauwatosa men. Minds that may operate with preconceived notions could examine the writings of Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller in search of evidence and draw opposite conclusions.

"What connection exists between Erlangen and Wauwatosa?" If Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller conducted their studies in church and ministry the way they confessed doing it and the way history has recorded them doing it, the answer to that question is that Erlangen had a negligible effect. The Wauwatosa Theology was distinctly an exegetical movement—a return to performing the theological task by momentarily laying aside systematic theology and going back to the source of Christian theology—the Scriptures themselves. If the Wauwatosa seminary faculty derived even some of their ideas about ecclesiology from Hoefling's largely systematic work, they would indeed be something less than the men they claimed to be.

Perhaps another worthy point to be made, especially with extended conversations with Missouri men, is that accepting, confessing and defending with conviction the WELS position on church and

¹⁵Teigen, 3.

ministry—as described in “Theses on the Church and Ministry”—does not *necessarily* mean defending every word that John Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller ever wrote on the subject of church and ministry. There is a refreshing honesty in admitting that the theological forefathers of the Wisconsin Synod—gifted as they were—were not infallible in always making definitions and distinctions in the theological task. Their writings had strengths and weaknesses as well, just like all other human writings. A fair observation made about Missouri men is that they often have the impression that everything written by Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller necessarily has become part of the public doctrine of the Wisconsin Synod itself—which is certainly not always the case. Let this article serve as an impassioned plea—to both those inside and outside the WELS—to begin one’s study and evaluation of the WELS understanding of church and ministry with the published doctrinal statement on the subject, which the synod adopted in convention in 1969.

Perhaps it is also good to remember the advice the Wauwatosa men gave to their brother pastors as the controversy over church and ministry began. They directed attention not to Hoefling but to Luther and Walther as the most important secondary sources to study. Early in the controversy August Pieper had reviewed Walther’s *Church and Ministry* and offered this assessment:

Walther’s chief work was that he purely “repristinated,” or better “reproduced” both of these doctrines [justification and church and ministry] from Luther and the confessions and brought the majority of the Lutheran church in America to recognize them. That assures him of a place among the greatest theologians of the church and gives him a claim to the thanks of all who love Zion. . . . The on-going discussion among us concerning church, synod, and discipline calls each one of us urgently to study the doctrine of church and ministry anew. For this study Walther’s classic book is the most convenient and best pre-school.¹⁶

In magnitude and importance Walther’s work is less than Luther’s only to the extent that Luther’s was less than Paul’s.¹⁷

Perhaps an interesting topic for another article would be “What Connection Exists Between St. Louis and Wauwatosa?”

As this year-long series on the ecclesiology of Johann W. F. Hoefling comes to an end, a few areas of further research must be mentioned. A significant contribution to the field of Lutheran ecclesiology would be an accurate and readable translation of Hoefling’s *Principles*

¹⁶Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1912, 36, 40.

¹⁷Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” in *Wauwatosa Theology III*, p 233-234. Also in *WLQ*, 1923 (German) and 1987 (English).

of *Evangelical Lutheran Church Polity* and its supporting annotations. With the exception of excerpts, no complete translation of *Principles* has ever been published. Another worthy project would be the translation of Holsten Fagerberg's monograph, *Bekennntnis, Kirche und Amt in der Deutschen Konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (*Confession, Church and Office in German Confessional Theology of the Nineteenth Century*). This is a systematic and historical treatment of various church and ministry issues and controversies in nineteenth-century Germany, including an extended treatment of some of Hoefling's positions. In general, it is this researcher's hope that these articles about Hoefling and his ecclesiology have shed some much needed light on a man who for too long has been relegated to obscurity.

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