

**THE WAUWATOSA SPRING:
The Flowering of the Historical Disciplines
at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
(1900–1920)
Part II**

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Turning Over the Earth: Professor August Pieper

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

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

From every indication Pieper took up his new assignment with enthusiasm and vigor, and he soon became a student body favorite. "Pieper no doubt had a way with words. Whether expressing himself orally in a classroom or pulpit . . . or in writing . . . he was highly articulate, often eloquent. . . . It is not surprising to hear that he easily established a good rapport with students in the classroom."¹ One former student recalled that Pieper "was a thorough extrovert. His was a dramatic personality, and he had a dramatic way of speaking and lecturing. The students often sat spellbound before him. One of his out-

¹Westerhaus, 50.

standing gifts was to inspire enthusiasm for the ministry."² Compared to the reserved and even distant Koehler, Pieper must have seemed like a breath of fresh air to many seminarians, in many respects the polar opposite of his seminary colleague. That being said, in their early years together at Wauwatosa, Koehler and Pieper worked side-by-side in a concerted effort to prepare the future pastors of the Wisconsin Synod with a seminary education that was second-to-none in its day.³ The ground that Koehler had staidly broken at Wauwatosa, Pieper now helped to overturn with zeal.

If there is one academic undertaking for which Pieper is best known during his years at Wauwatosa, it is his exegetical lectures and eventual commentary on Isaiah 40-66. "Mention of exegesis in connection with the name August Pieper must at once bring to mind for every Wisconsin Synod pastor his masterly commentary" on those chapters.⁴ As one who sat in his classroom, Pastor Immanuel Frey simply described Pieper's lectures as "unforgettable."⁵ Martin Westerhaus asserts, "Alongside a thorough mastery of the lexicology and grammar of the biblical language, there is a strong emphasis on the context, both immediate and broader. This, of course, is the historical-grammatical method put to use by a master."⁶ It was this shared emphasis upon biblical exegesis that now made Koehler and Pieper a powerful and unique twin force at the Wauwatosa Seminary.

It would be inaccurate, however, to imagine or suggest that biblical exegesis was non-existent in other American Lutheran seminaries when the Wauwatosa theologians were in their heyday. Most every other seminary included courses in biblical exegesis for its students and required them to do work in the original Hebrew and Greek testaments.⁷ In fact, the Lutheran historian J. L. Neve points out that, in contrast to the Missouri Synod, the Iowa Synod "declared that it represented 'the exegetical tendency' held by [Wilhelm] Loehe and other

²Frey, 212-213.

³In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler also reports that he and Pieper "stood shoulder to shoulder . . . in the cause of sound pastoral and intersynodical practice" (211). They seemed to have expressed their criticism of pastoral decisions made by Wisconsin Synod men when it came to inter-congregational matters (accepting members who had been excommunicated by Missouri congregations for what the Wisconsin men deemed unscriptural reasons?). As a result, Koehler reports that they became open to the charge of "pro-Missourianism."

⁴Westerhaus, 50-51.

⁵Frey, 213.

⁶Westerhaus, 52.

⁷For a summary of the theological courses offered at American Lutheran seminaries around 1910, see Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co, 1911), 357-365.

European scholars of the confessional side,⁸ especially the important Erlangen exegete J. C. K. von Hofmann.

Both Koehler and Pieper conceded that the men of the Iowa Synod, particularly the brother-theologians Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel, had been early pioneers of an exegetical emphasis in American Lutheranism.⁹ The problem, they insisted, was that the Iowans employed Hofmann's "so-called positive modern theology,"¹⁰ which was "rigorously scientific,"¹¹ exhibited "the weakness which comes from a lack of doctrinal firmness,"¹² and finally allowed the interpreter to become "the judge as to whether something in Scripture is God's Word or not."¹³ Simply stated, their exegetical methods "were employed in the service of a false doctrinal position,"¹⁴ because, Koehler argued, they were not well enough grounded in dogmatics.

That conclusion will not come as any surprise to those who have spent time delving into the writings of the Wauwatosa men. They are often wrongly accused of denigrating the importance of dogmatics, but the charge is simply unfounded. J. P. Koehler wrote in no uncertain terms how "it is self-evident that dogmatics and pastoral theology must keep their old place of importance in the curriculum of our theological studies and that the preparatory work at our colleges which is done especially in the religion courses must be of such a nature that nothing is changed in it."¹⁵ Later he would assert: "In the study of theology, dogmatics and history occupy parallel positions; the former presenting the inner connection of the divine purpose of salvation and its revelation in the Word of God, the latter telling the story of the working out of the divine plan on earth through the ages. The center of study is the exegesis of the Scriptures, which forms the basis both for doctrinal theology and the teaching of history and itself deals with both."¹⁶ Pieper would agree: "Dogmatics is altogether indispensable.

⁸J. L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Second Revised and Enlarged Edition, Burlington, IA: The German Literary Board, 1916), 286.

⁹Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 432, and August Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," 403.

¹⁰A. Pieper, "The Significance of Adolf Hoenecke," 403. See Koehler's critique of Hofmann's approach in "The Analogy of Faith," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 258-259.

¹¹Koehler, "Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music," *Faith-Life* 40, no. 3 (May/June 1967), 10.

¹²Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 432.

¹³Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 259.

¹⁴Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 433, and A. Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke," 403-407.

¹⁵Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 439.

¹⁶Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 214.

Without it we cannot keep the gospel pure."¹⁷ These men could see in the Iowa Synod example what an overemphasis on the historical disciplines produced: "a skeptical uncertainty which cannot quickly come to firm opinions."¹⁸ Koehler wanted to make the Wauwatosa position abundantly clear.

Certainly no one will misunderstand me so completely as to think that I am suggesting that the historical studies are a panacea for every possible evil, both theoretical and practical, in the theological world. . . . Therefore it also became necessary to call attention to the dangers inherent in an overemphasis on [the historical disciplines].¹⁹

It should also be noted how wrong it is to suggest that the Wauwatosa theologians somehow asserted that we are to come to our study of the Holy Scriptures with no preconceived notions, as some kind of blank slate (*tabula rasa*).²⁰ Instead, Koehler believed that when St. Paul writes, "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith" (Romans 12:6), the apostle means to remind us that when we are reading and interpreting the Holy Scriptures, we will always do so mindful of the fact that we are approaching the very Word of God, stepping into his throne-room. In this task, we will not think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but rather think of ourselves with sober judgment (Romans 12:3). We will pray with Samuel, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9). In other words, we will seek to take a ministerial approach to the Scriptures, rather than a magisterial one; we will come to this study with all kinds of assumptions about ourselves who listen and him who speaks.

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

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

¹⁷A. Pieper, "Anniversary Reflections," 283.

¹⁸Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 429.

¹⁹Ibid., 438-439.

²⁰See John Ph. Koehler, "Holy Scripture as the Basis of All Theology," *Faith-Life* 42, no. 3 (May/June 1969), 15-16.

The fact that God speaks in Scripture so that his truth attests itself to the heart ought to fill us with great seriousness, lest we use his Word wantonly, and again it ought to fill us with comfort and confidence when we recognize his grace. Thus the man of God is trained . . . always immediately from the life of the Holy Spirit, who is working in him.²¹

So what made the approach of the Wauwatosa theologians unique? It was not the fact that they employed biblical exegesis and promoted the historical disciplines. What made their approach unique was the *place* they attempted to give the historical disciplines, especially exegesis, in the seminary curriculum. Whereas Lutheran dogmatics and pastoral theology ruled supreme at almost every other American seminary because these studies were thought to be eminently practical, Koehler and Pieper sought to bring about a profound change of perspective at Wauwatosa with the Lord's guidance and blessing. They did not seek to jettison dogmatics and replace it with exegesis. No, they were determined to entrust to their students a "balanced combination of the two."²² Koehler plainly stated: "They belong together. The exegete cannot get along without the dogmatical distinctions, nor the dogmatician without the exegetical proof."²³

Our theological students dare not be satisfied with acquiring a knowledge of dogmatics together with the practical skills in homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral theology. Exegesis and history have their proper place in the course of study and deserve to be pursued in a deeply imaginative and earnest manner. . . . Exegetical work . . . leads the preacher deeper into Scripture and an understanding of God's thoughts and their influence upon the heart of man . . . History not only gives all kinds of valuable information concerning practical questions but also trains to observe how minds work and to trace historical connections. By this, but even more by the method which is peculiar to history and exegesis, it develops a mental attitude which is of importance for effective practical life. While dogmatics promotes sharp thinking and by directing attention to the precise definition of theological concepts leads to a clear, unambiguous presentation, both historical branches train the mind to probe, to criticize, to be cautious in judgment. They promote modesty, gentleness, and patience in judgment and thus in the mental attitude supplement what dogmatical study has produced.²⁴

²¹Koehler, "The Connected Study of Holy Scripture, the Heart of Theological Study (2 Timothy 3:15-17)," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 105-107.

²²Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 429.

²³Ibid., 442.

²⁴Ibid., 437-438.

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

I am under the impression that very rarely can one find the same person gifted with both aptitudes in an outstanding manner. I find them both in Luther and would like to consider him both the greatest exegete and the greatest dogmatian. Otherwise, however, it seems to me that either one or the other activity is always predominant, and in my opinion in the great period of our American Lutheran church it was dogmatics.²⁵

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

Walther was the faculty. . . . The special emphasis put on pure doctrine, which had now become a synodical emphasis, and the towering personality of Walther together with the impractical arrangement of the other subjects inevitably led to the result that only dogmatics and pastoral theology were actually studied and little or nothing was learned in the other subjects. . . . New Testament exegesis consisted mainly of dictated quotations from the Lutheran exegetes of the 16th and 17th centuries. Old Testament exegesis involved translation and quotations. When the writer of this article was in the seminary from 1876 to 1879, hermeneutics was taught by Walther himself in the first (!) year according to the Latin textbook of 1754 by the old Dr. C. G. Hofmann! . . . In isagogics the Bible itself was seldom used in class. Actually, then, the students came out of the seminary without having the slightest ability in exegesis. In fact, they had not even studied a single book of Holy Scripture somewhat thoroughly.²⁶

That being stated, both Wauwatosa men made clear that Walther himself was generally able to avoid the pitfalls of employing a theological method that leaned too heavily on dogmatics.²⁷ Koehler asserted that his old teacher “opposed the presentation of many of the great teachers of the past and in our time independently championed the correct doctrine and proved it from Scripture.”²⁸

²⁵Ibid., 442.

²⁶A. Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 264-265.

²⁷One exception was the *Gnadenwahlstreit*, the Election Controversy that erupted in 1877. August Pieper recalled Adolf Hoenecke’s critique: “Walther, in his zeal, let slip several sentences that said too much, and they will have to be set straight” (“The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke,” 417).

²⁸Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines,” 443.

Walther could share with his students a directly scriptural theology that still presupposed a knowledge of the original languages, probably seldom realized. . . . However, this training in the long run also has its dangers. Dogma is the word crystallized into an inflexible human form. It says so much and no more; it does not express the full content of Scripture. That is its essence. Scriptural truth is so living and refracting, so fresh and fluent, that one can turn it a thousand times, inspect it from a thousand situations, without its losing any content or power. It is like a nimble giant, growing to every new situation, need, and danger. It is spirit and it is life, God's life. God's mind and life's blood for the saving of lost sinners. It remains eternally young and eternally new and makes everything new and anew.²⁹

This unbalanced approach to theological training persisted at St. Louis “until [Georg] Stoeckhardt, the exegete who had come from Germany, and other younger theologians who were thoroughly trained in the language of the New Testament—some of whom also came from abroad—broke through Walther's ‘father theology’ in principle and practice and by means of Scripture won the victory for what was right.”³⁰ In Germany, Stoeckhardt had come under the influence of Erlangen's Hofmann, even tutoring students under him in Old and New Testament exegesis before coming to America.³¹ August Pieper, Stoeckhardt's brother-in-law, reports that the Concordia professor eventually “found the correct position among all the un-Lutheran circumstances that surrounded him . . . [and] emancipated himself theologically from von Hofmann, his chief teacher at Erlangen, who had such a great influence on his exegetical methods.”³² Now he shared his exegetical insights with the Concordia student body, including Koehler and Pieper.

It should be noted at this point, however, that especially Koehler's approach to exegesis and biblical hermeneutics seems to have differed slightly from Stoeckhardt's. The elder exegete tended to take a more scientific approach than his student did. An interesting comparison between the two can be made by thumbing through their respective commentaries on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.³³ The reader will instantly notice a marked difference. Stoeckhardt has copious quota-

²⁹August Pieper, “Stoeckhardt's Significance in the Lutheran Church of America,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 423.

³⁰A. Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 263.

³¹Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 161.

³²A. Pieper, “Stoeckhardt's Significance,” 420.

³³John Ph. Koehler, *Paul's Rhapsody in Christ: A Commentary on Ephesians* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000); George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987).

tions from other exegetes; Koehler has practically none. Stoeckhardt spends much more time on the fine points of grammar and syntax; Koehler deals much more with the interrelatedness of Paul's thought and the application of its saving truths to our lives as Christians. Stoeckhardt reads as if he is delivering a lecture aimed principally at the mind; Koehler sounds like he is delivering a sermon aimed principally at the heart.³⁴

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

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

We must understand that in the interpretation of Scripture no other principles prevail than those which every intelligent person uses when hearing or reading any word of man. There is only one special consideration; namely, that Scripture is God's infallible Word.³⁵

Koehler insisted that it was "a matter of prime importance to bring the hermeneutical method back to its natural simplicity,"³⁶ commenting that a child uses the exact same method "even before he can speak."³⁷ In his 1925 opening address to the seminary student body, Koehler explained himself further on the subject of biblical hermeneutics.

[He assumed that his audience would] very likely expect a hermeneutical discussion in the usual fashion, in which one speaks of language and objects, or of biblical philology and biblical history writing and their mutual influence upon the understanding of Scripture. We omit that here, because there is, after all, only *one* hermeneutics, only *one* art of interpretation in the world. As far as these things are concerned, biblical exegesis is no different from the exegesis of any other writing.³⁸

³⁴Martin Westerhaus has also observed that in Koehler's own work as a "professional" exegete he strove for simplicity. See "The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message," 36-38.

³⁵Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 259-260.

³⁶Ibid., 260.

³⁷John Ph. Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 207.

³⁸Koehler, "The Connected Study of Holy Scripture," 107.

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

That said, there was no dispute that the "professional" exegete "must be well versed in the languages of the original text," though Koehler especially warned "against a specialization which easily strays from intensive knowledge of Scripture."³⁹

It would be awful, of course, if those who did not know Greek and Hebrew would not be able to grasp the message of the Gospel, but the professional teachers of the Gospel should make it their business to proceed with teaching the Bible truth on the basis of exegetical examination of Scripture's statements, lest they get into wrong mental processes and into conflict with the Bible. And that applies not only to the original languages of the Bible but to the translations as well and all teaching of the Scriptures.⁴⁰

Along with proficiency in the original languages, the Wauwatosa theologians emphasized the necessity of understanding the history and context of the author and his words. "If we do not know the author's point of view and manner of expression, we shall again make our own manner determinative to the detriment of correct understanding."⁴¹ In summary, "a correct biblical hermeneutics is simply the application of the generally accepted rules of exposition to the Holy Scriptures."⁴²

Clearly John Ph. Koehler played a critical role in forging a fresh theological approach at Wauwatosa that was rooted in Lutheran Reformation principles and inextricably linked to a proper emphasis upon the historical disciplines. Humanly speaking, however, August Pieper's energetic espousal of Koehler's original spadework was essential in turning over the theological field within the Wisconsin Synod. Like the work of the ancient apostles, one planted the seed, the other did the watering, but God made it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Supplying the Seed: The *Theologische Quartalschrift*

It is not difficult to demonstrate that other Lutherans in America recognized the Wauwatosa theological approach as being novel in the

³⁹Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 203.

⁴⁰Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 242.

⁴¹Koehler, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 196.

⁴²Ibid., 208.

early twentieth century. In the 1916 edition of his *Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, J. L. Neve comments that within the Wisconsin Synod an “exegetical tendency” asserted itself, which, while revering the fathers of the Church, goes back directly to the Scriptures. And this immediate investigation of the Scriptures creates another, a milder, more charitable, more tolerant spirit.”⁴³ The fact that other American Lutherans were beginning to note this “exegetical tendency” was due in no small part to the faculty’s realization of a long-held dream, the publication of a quarterly theological journal. Through this journal, the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, the principles espoused by the Wauwatosa faculty soon became common knowledge, especially within Midwestern Lutheran theological circles, and they were also thankfully preserved for the generations to follow.

Launching the periodical, however, was no easy task. Koehler reports that the *Quartalschrift* “was not a sudden inspiration, for the idea of a theological periodical was as old in Synod as the Seminary,” which had been founded in 1863. “When the new seminary at Milwaukee was opened in 1878, the idea was revived,” but nothing came of it. “At the founding of the general synod of Wisconsin [in 1892], the plan for a theological journal was laid down in the constitution and discussed from time to time. But always the crowded time of the Seminary teachers proved the obstacle.”⁴⁴

What finally got the *Quartalschrift* off the ground, according to Koehler, was the free conference movement within Midwestern Lutheranism beginning in 1903, though in his editorial foreword to the first volume Hoenecke expressly stated, “Some might think that current events in the Lutheran church have dictated the founding of this journal. But that is not the case.” Instead, Hoenecke insisted that the journal’s appearance was “simply due to favorable circumstances that make the publication possible.”⁴⁵

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

⁴³J. L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, 288.

⁴⁴Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 211.

⁴⁵Adolf Hoenecke, “Foreword to Volume 1, Number 1, January 1904” (John Hartwig, Trans.) *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 100, no. 1 (Winter 2003), 3.

Seminary Director Adolf Hoenecke “promised that [the journal] would offer articles on points of doctrine in general, but that naturally, special attention would be given to articles of special interest for the Lutheran Church of our land or specifically for our synodical circles.”⁴⁶ Homiletics and pastoral practice would also receive special consideration.

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

God is now, through our synods, allowing a strong movement toward unity in doctrine to take place. Our goal must be to serve this movement in all sincerity, honesty, and Christian love. And that means not yielding in those areas where we, bound by conscience that has been convinced by the clear testimony of God’s word, should not yield. Nothing is accomplished by bargaining, as it occurs today now and again in matters of doctrine. Compromise doesn’t accomplish the sort of unity in which Lutherans can truly be of one heart and one soul. We can only be truly united when there are no points that painfully wound some party or another each time they are raised.⁴⁷

Needless to say, the publication of the *Quartalschrift* would also provide the newest Wauwatosa faculty members with a forum to explain and promote their emphasis on the historical disciplines. J. L. Neve would later observe that Wauwatosa’s “exegetical tendency” was “found in the Wisconsin ‘Quartalschrift,’ in a series of articles signed by Professors Koehler, Augustus Pieper and Director [John] Schaller.”⁴⁸ Through the *Quartalschrift* these men would supply the necessary seed for a planting of the historical disciplines throughout the Wisconsin Synod and beyond.

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

This expression had come to the fore at the Free Conference in Watertown in 1903. Ohio and Iowa theologians used the expression “the analogy of faith” to indicate that there was a harmony of biblical truth in which all doctrine fit logically and neatly. In the light of passages like John 3:16 they claimed that election had to be in view

⁴⁶Martin Westerhaus, “Adolf Hoenecke and the *Quartalschrift*,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, 2.

⁴⁷Hoenecke, “Foreword,” 4.

⁴⁸J. L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, 288, 219fn.

of faith. Koehler insisted that the analogy of faith meant only the totality of the passages in the Bible that spoke about election. Doctrine is to be derived from those passages that specifically treat that doctrine. If teachings based on clear passages of Scripture seem to our human reason to be in conflict with each other, that conflict or tension must stand. It is not to be resolved by the use of human logic or reason. For instance, Scripture teaches that if a person is saved it is completely to God's credit, and if a person is lost it is completely that person's fault. These two teachings appear to be contradictory to human reason and yet both must stand because they are clearly taught by Scripture.⁴⁹

Koehler's essay is particularly notable because he asserts that the debate over the term "analogy of faith"—indeed, even the manner in which the debate was carried out—served as a microcosm of what was wrong within Lutheran theological circles. He asserted that many theologians had simply lifted the phrase "analogy of faith" from Romans 12:6 and used it dogmatically as a hard-and-fast hermeneutic principle without first doing the necessary exegetical and historical work to determine what Paul actually meant by the phrase. After doing that necessary legwork, Koehler concluded that Romans 12:6 "furnishes no rule of interpretation,"⁵⁰ as so many insisted. Instead Paul's point is that all Christians should use their God-given gifts as members of the Body of Christ for the building up of their fellow members. Christians "should confine themselves in their prophesying, its content, scope, and exercise, to the measure or degree of faith with which they were endowed, by virtue of which they could exercise such gift through the Spirit; they should not try to go into higher flights of their own (Ro 12:3)."⁵¹

Koehler would later lament that "the traditional interpretation of Romans 12 is for me a characteristic example of the style of mechanical exegesis that has come down to us from most ancient times, which does not correspond to the linguistic resources and consequently not to the claims that one today must place on the hermeneutical art." Even so, he expressed the hope that his essay would "have a general influence on us, not so much in the interest of our position in this controversy about the analogy as in the interest of stimulating us to an impartial style of exegesis."⁵² Indeed, the volumes of the *Quartalschrift* that were

⁴⁹John M. Brenner, "Continuing in His Word—A History of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 100, no. 1 (Winter 2003), 19.

⁵⁰Koehler, "The Analogy of Faith," 237.

⁵¹Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 212. Koehler would no doubt look with favor on the New International Version's translation of this phrase: "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith."

⁵²Joh. Ph. Koehler, "Addendum to 'The Analogy of Faith,'" *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 272.

published between 1904-1920 would strive to attain that most worthy goal. Through its pages much valuable seed has been supplied, even down to our day.

Watering the Seed: Professor John Schaller

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

Both Koehler and Pieper describe their working relationship with Hoenecke as being very cordial, almost fatherly. Koehler suggests that Hoenecke did not always agree with his younger colleague's theological conclusions but neither did he "make an issue of it" as long as a serious and faithful study of the Holy Scriptures was taking place. With obvious appreciation, Koehler adds, "Hoenecke was not inclined to go heresy-hunting."⁵³ Pieper would later recall how Hoenecke "strengthened and guided his coworkers in the synod and gave his students a firm grounding in sound Lutheranism, and with great patience he eagerly pursued peace with all who loved divine Truth."⁵⁴

Hoenecke's quiet theological leadership grew silent on January 3, 1908, when he died of pneumonia, leaving the seminary without a director for the first time since Edward Moldehnke's resignation in 1866. Hoenecke had quietly dominated the theological scene within the Wisconsin Synod for forty years, so his passing was viewed as an ending of an era. Koehler remarks: "Hoenecke's passing may be said to mark a new phase in the conduct of Synod's affairs. Until then men with European training had been at the helm."⁵⁵ Now the Synod and Seminary would be led by its second generation of pastors, home-grown theologians.

Four men were initially nominated to replace Hoenecke as seminary director—Koehler, Pieper, August Ernst, the longtime Northwestern College Director, and his faculty colleague, Dr. Henry Wente⁵⁶—

⁵³Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 215.

⁵⁴August Pieper, "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 351.

⁵⁵Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 252.

⁵⁶In his *Centennial Story* (Watertown: Northwestern College Press, 1965), President E. E. Kowalke reports on Wente's rather tempestuous personality and the ill will he managed to generate among his fellow faculty members and student body during his five years at Northwestern, 150-151. One wonders what the motivation could have been

but the Seminary Board resolved to call Professor Friedrich Bente from Concordia Seminary. When Bente declined, the board turned their attention toward Koehler and Pieper, though not without controversy. In both his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*⁵⁷ and “Retrospective,”⁵⁸ Koehler offers a rather detailed account of charges soon levied against both him and Pieper. Pieper was accused by some Milwaukee area pastors with “Rottierererei” (plotting) in a local discipline case. These pastors apparently felt that Pieper had involved himself unnecessarily in the case, but the Wauwatosa professor was cleared of the charges. Koehler came under fire for a 1908 *Quartalschrift* article entitled, “The Baptism and Temptation of Christ,”⁵⁹ that, some claimed, contained false doctrine about the person of Christ. Some members of the Seminary Board shared these concerns and questioned Koehler at length. When the professor took umbrage at what he perceived to be a high-handed approach, the matter was dropped, though probably not forgotten. Koehler was informally asked to withdraw his name from consideration in favor of Pieper, “since some of the Board members insisted that Koehler was entitled to the directorship by virtue of seniority,” while others wondered whether Koehler was “competent to teach dogmatics.” The professor probably scoffed at the “underlying thought . . . that the director ought to have the chair of dogmatics” and refused to stand down, adding that he “did not claim any rights and that he was opposed to all personal calculations and interference in such matters, where every responsible party should form and voice his independent honest opinion, uninfluenced by improper manipulations.”⁶⁰

Ultimately the board was led to the very providential selection of Professor John Schaller, Director of Dr. Martin Luther College, as the next director of the Wauwatosa Seminary. Schaller took up his new duties on September 9, 1908, with the assignment to teach dogmatics, homiletics, and pastoral theology. Koehler would later comment that the “three teachers each had the subjects which agreed with their talents and inclinations, and that in itself made for successful work. That it so happened was no man’s doing.”⁶¹

to nominate him as the new seminary director. Koehler reports that a “host of protests from Synod” were raised at the nomination of both Wente and Ernst (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*), 218.

⁵⁷Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 218-219.

⁵⁸Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003), 13-14.

⁵⁹*The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 371-386.

⁶⁰Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 219.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 235.

Some students initially wondered whether Schaller would be competent to fill Hoenecke's shoes,⁶² but everyone soon discovered that the new professor was well-suited for the post. August Pieper commented on how snugly Schaller fit into the new Wauwatosa mold.

Thanks to his eminent intellectual gifts and exceptional diligence he succeeded to such an extent that he (soon) was fully at home in his assigned field, and could draw from the fullness of his learning and became an interesting and fruitful teacher for his students. And not only did he have a mastery of dogmatics, he acquired a significant knowledge of the Scriptures and a great mastery in exegesis. Especially his choice of proof texts in dogmatics is eloquent testimony of this. . . . He stood with us from the beginning for the one great thing: above all else the study of the gospel directly from the source, independent Scripture study, not passage by passage, but book by book, ultimately from the original text. This he helped to further at our seminary with all his strength. And while we were of one heart and one soul with him in agreeing that the dogmatic training of our future pastors dare not be neglected in this unionistic and syncretistic age, so he also was completely of one mind with his colleagues in agreeing that the historical-exegetical studies must claim first place as laying the foundation.⁶³

Koehler adds that, while Schaller was not an "original mind or theological pioneer," he followed in the footsteps of his father, Concordia Seminary Professor Gottlieb Schaller (1819–1887), who "had the ability to adopt the right idea of another, use it, and give the other credit for it."⁶⁴

Besides inheriting some of his father's intellectual gifts, "Schaller also had the endearing native Frankish make-up of his father,"⁶⁵ according to Koehler, who knew both men. From all accounts Schaller had a decidedly different personality from his new seminary colleagues. While Koehler could seem aloof and was sometimes painfully pointed with his words, and Pieper was prone to dramatics and hyperbole, Schaller comported himself in a friendly, gentle manner. Koehler writes that "Schaller was of a reserved nature, in an unstudied way. But though there was nothing effusive about him, he met everyone in an amiable way."⁶⁶ Pieper adds, "Schaller was more than a sound theologian; he was a friend, a personality, a colleague and Christian gentleman, a joy to those who knew him well. . . . Schaller formed the heart and soul of our Seminary; for the students, a fatherly friend who had a

⁶²Frey, 213.

⁶³Quoted in Westerhaus, "The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message," 68-69.

⁶⁴Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 235.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

warm understanding of their problems; for his fellow-workers, a warm and encouraging spirit in the labors at hand."⁶⁷ Many have suggested that Schaller soon became the steady fulcrum upon which the divergent personalities of Koehler and Pieper now balanced. Immanuel Frey commented, "It would almost seem impossible to have found a man who fitted better into this particular picture than the genial Schaller with his great tactfulness."⁶⁸ Paul Hensel added:

It is probably not generally known that Director J. Schaller repeatedly played the difficult and delicate role of the good shepherd pacifying his two stalwart colleagues (Koehler and August Pieper) when they locked horns with one another. In this capacity Schaller was a soothingly gentle Gospel man, at the same time firm and uncompromising, so that the two irate combatants bowed to the sway of his compassionate rebuke and felt forever indebted to him.⁶⁹

Now these three men took up together the mantle of theological leadership in the Wisconsin Synod, and their students and church body were the richer for it. It is interesting to note that at least one young man, who was torn between attending the Wauwatosa Seminary or Concordia, St. Louis, finally settled on the Wauwatosa Seminary in 1914 because it had, in his estimation, "better faculty."⁷⁰ Elmer Kiessling maintained that beginning already with the re-establishment of the Wisconsin seminary in 1878, the synod "had our own cradle of theological culture, and it has always played a highly important role in developing unity of feeling. The work of four outstanding personalities, beginning with Hoenecke and continuing with John P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, was especially notable up to about the year 1920. The teaching was so distinctive that it was called by a special name—the Wauwatosa theology."⁷¹

To be continued

⁶⁷Quoted in John Schaller, *Biblical Christology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981), 13-14.

⁶⁸Frey, 210.

⁶⁹Paul Hensel, "Note," *Faith-Life* 38, no. 1 (January 1965), 16.

⁷⁰Sitz journal, August 26, 1914.

⁷¹Elmer Kiessling, "The Tie That Binds," *Faith-Life* 37, no. 4 (April 1959), 16.