

# The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference

and an

## Appendix of Translated Articles

In the Election Controversy that rocked the fledgling Synodical Conference, history consistently points to the leadership of Dr. C.F.W. Walther and the Missouri Synod. However, the Wisconsin Synod's preeminent theologian, Dr. Adolf Hoenecke also made substantial contributions to fight for truth in this controversy. The Wisconsin Synod's early doctrinal vacillation seems to cloud history's recollection of Wisconsin's later efforts under the guidance of Hoenecke. Rather than indecision, vacillation, or blind capitulation, the historical record shows that as theological leader of the Wisconsin Synod Hoenecke provided Walther with quiet support from the beginning, with encouragement and counsel when needed, and finally with public confession for synodical unity.

Although its coals had been smoldering for several years, the genesis of the Election Controversy came at the 1877 meeting of the Western District of the Missouri Synod when Walther presented an essay on election. Several men took issue with some of Walther's statements in his essay and in subsequent publications; they perceived them as Calvinistic teachings of absolute predestination and irresistible grace. Preeminent among Walther's opponents were Friedrich Schmidt, Henry Allwart, and Frederick Stellhorn. They, in turn, faced accusations of synergism for their election in view of faith. Walther succinctly defined the controversy in 1881:

It consists simply in the following twofold question: first, whether God from eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, out of pure mercy and only for the sake of the most holy merit of Christ, elected and ordained the chosen children of God to salvation and whatever pertains to it...or second, whether in his election God took

into consideration anything good in man, namely the foreseen conduct of man, the foreseen non-resistance, and the foreseen persevering faith, and thus elected certain persons to salvation...The first of these questions we affirm, while our opponents deny it, but the second question we deny, while our opponents affirm it.<sup>1</sup>

This controversy and its related doctrine are often spoken of as *Walther'sche* and Missouriian. But from the beginning, far from indecisive or non-committal, the Wisconsin Synod under the leadership of Adolf Hoenecke gave quiet, consistent support to our older sister.

Hoenecke's support of Walther and Missouri actually predates the beginning of the wider controversy in 1877. In the early 1870s, Professor Stellhorn, the Missouriian teaching at Watertown, already rejected the exclusion of man's role in election and saw a measure of self-determination in conversion.<sup>2</sup> During a pastoral conference of the Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod, Stellhorn presented his self-deterministic views to the assembly of pastors. Koehler provides the following account:

Hoenecke asked for the floor and in his trenchant way showed in short order that the approach was all wrong. The Missouri conference at once decided to make Hoenecke its spokesman and in the ensuing debate between him and Stellhorn, the latter, by Hoenecke's animated gestures, was literally backed up against the wall of the church, where he sat down and admitted his defeat.<sup>3</sup>

Hoenecke's support of Walther and Missouri continued after the controversy re-ignited in 1877. However, it was a quiet support, for Hoenecke differed greatly from Walther in personality: "Hoenecke was no fire-breathing warrior who pressed recklessly forward and broke through enemy lines so that others might follow."<sup>4</sup> Synodical reports contain next to nothing regarding the controversy for the first few years. But "in this case, too, Hoenecke had not plunged forward like a man breaking new ground. Rather, with great care he had worked his way through this article of

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<sup>1</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination*, trans. A. Crull (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Edward C. Frederick, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 59.

<sup>3</sup> J.P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), 158.

Christian doctrine, thoroughly and over a long period.”<sup>5</sup> Quietly, the doctrines were studied through, and the Wisconsin Synod followed the leadership of Hoenecke who had quickly come to Walther’s defense in the instructive articles of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*.<sup>6</sup> From his position as editor, he used the pages of the *Gemeinde-Blatt* to explain his support of Walther’s position.

In November of 1877 he authored the article “Was kann ich zu meiner Bekehrung bei tragen oder wie werde ich bekehrt?” In this early article, Hoenecke’s stance against the self-determinism of Schmidt-Stellhorn-Allbeck is blatantly clear. He said, “The word of God clearly and plainly teaches that God alone is the one who begins and completes the work of conversion in the heart of man.”<sup>7</sup>

In January of 1878 he authored the lead editorial entitled “Wenn Gott allein die Menschen bekehren kann und muß und solches thut ohne des Menschen Zuthun, woher kommt es denn, daß so viele Menschen unbekehrt bleiben?” Though the controversy was yet in its infancy, Hoenecke displays a complete grasp of the doctrine causing such conflict. In this article he answers, *cur alii prae aliis*. “The short answer to the question is this: the fact that so many men are not converted is not God’s fault, but rather solely and only the guilt of the men who remain unconverted.”<sup>8</sup> He emphasizes both the universal call to grace and the efficacy of the means of grace:

He also gave his church the command to go into all the world and to preach the gospel. This command doesn’t exclude anyone; each one who believes shall be saved. That is his expressed, clear will: he does not want the death of the sinner, but rather he wants the sinner to turn and live... The word spoken by him is able to win the hearts of all... The word of the gospel is also an all-powerful word; whoever hears it feels something of its power. The gospel is the power of God to save all who believe it. Just as God placed power in kernels

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<sup>4</sup> August Pieper, “The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism,” trans. W. Franzmann, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 88, Number 2, (Spring 1991), 144.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>6</sup> Koehler, 158.

<sup>7</sup> Adolf Hoenecke, “Was kann ich zu meiner Bekehrung bei tragen oder wie werde ich bekehrt?” *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 13, Number 5 (1 Nov 1877), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Hoenecke, “Wenn Gott allein die Menschen bekehren kann und muß und solches thut ohne des Menschen Zuthun, woher kommt es denn, daß so viele Menschen unbekehrt bleiben?” *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 13, Number 9 (1 Jan 1878), 1.

of wheat to nourish and strengthen man's body, in the same way he placed his divine power in the word of the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2.

Finally, he concludes by saying that although many different causes may impel a man to reject the grace offered in the gospel, “all the other causes are encompassed within the chief cause which is the inborn unbelief of all men...And so, few are converted because the majority repeatedly struggles against the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, and despises the means of grace while lusting after the world instead.”<sup>10</sup>

Even in the articles that he didn't author, Hoenecke used his position as editor to shape the character of his publication. In February and March of 1880, *Gemeinde-Blatt's* leading editorial had the heading: “Though a Man Can Do Nothing to Obtain his Salvation, He Can Through his Own Fault Lose it.” – In August; “The Lord Knoweth Them That are His.” – March, 1881: “God Saves a Sinner by Grace.”

Finally, in April 1880, as the controversy began to rise to a feverish pitch, Hoenecke published a beautifully simple, clear, and sound article entitled “Zur Lehre von der Gnadenwahl.” With characteristic clarity he begins the article with a simple summary:

It is certain, that the grace of God is a universal grace. It is further certain that the merit of Christ is sufficient for the whole sinful world. Finally, it is certain that God wants repentance and faith preached to all peoples. Even so, it is also certain that God has not predestined all.

He continues by pointing out the reason why the error had reared its head within the church:

In predestination as the Scriptures teach it, our corrupted reason sees God as unjust. Because of this, many have been persuaded to either completely deny the doctrine of predestination, or to at least justify the actions of God to reason...They feel they must justify the holy and righteous God in his unknowable counsel and actions. However, God needs no such justification. He is always just, even when he appears to us to be unjust.

His solution to the doctrinal conflict calls for subservience of reason to Scripture:

In view of this, if we want consider the doctrine of predestination in a fruitful way, then we must beat down all our thoughts and all the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 2.

conclusions of our reason which contend against the Word of God.  
We must cling only to the revealed Word of God.

The body of the article is comprised of four points of doctrine which culminate in a quotation from the Formula of Concord. His main points are:

- A. The Scriptures not only teach that the number of the elect is small, but also that the elect are individual, completely definite persons.
- B. It is to be observed further that it wasn't first in time that God made this decree to choose some out of the fallen human race. Rather, his election is an eternal election.
- C. This eternal election of God stands unshakably firm. Those whom God has chosen are inevitably saved; in contrast, no one is saved who does not belong to the number of the elect.
- D. Finally, God's Word also teaches us that God has elected his own not only to salvation, but in general he has elected them to be his temple, so that they should belong to him and be his possession already in this life. We see therefore: God has not chosen his elect immediately from hell into heaven, from damnation to salvation, but he has chosen them in Christ and through Christ. He has chosen them and thus wants them in time to travel on the path ordained by him, in Christ, to salvation.<sup>11</sup>

While diligently pursuing his duties at the Milwaukee Seminary, Hoenecke greatly contributed to the efforts of the Synodical Conference in the Election Controversy by quickly defending Walther's position, by gently leading the Wisconsin Synod through careful instruction, and by publicly formulating clear, sound testimonies to the doctrines expressed in Scripture. Although Hoenecke began by offering quiet support for Missouri, his role quickly expanded.

What began as a disagreement over a conference essay had quickly deteriorated into an inter-synodical controversy inextricably bound to numerous strong personalities. In 1879 Hoenecke began to contribute to the controversy with more than quiet support: under his theological leadership the Wisconsin Synod offered Walther both encouragement and counsel.

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<sup>11</sup> Hoenecke, "Zur Lehre von der Gnadelwahl," *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 15, Number 16 (15 Apr 1880), 1-3.

Hoenecke understood both the positive and negative aspects of Walther's expositions of Missouri's stance on election; he saw what areas needed to be emphasized and what areas needed to be moderated. August Pieper records this remark Hoenecke made privately:

Walther's teaching is not Walther's, but the teaching of the Scriptures, of Paul, of Luther and of the Formula of Concord. The second way of presenting this doctrine, however, is dogmatic derailment. Walther, in his zeal, let slip several sentences that said too much, and they will have to be set straight. But Walther stands directly on Scripture, and his opponents are mired in reason. With him we stand on Scripture. Several Missouians are hard to bear, but on the score of theology we are of one flesh and blood with Walther. Therefore there can be no talk made of seperating from Missouri.<sup>12</sup>

Hoenecke began his campaign to correct those "several sentences" at the 1879 pastoral conference. At that meeting, Missouri was asked to provide emendations to several questionable phrases. Wisconsin's concerns were sent in the following letter:

The undersigned committee for the examination of the report of the Western District of the Honorable Missouri Synod from the year 1879 takes leave to report to the Synodical Conference that discussions on the doctrine of predestination are contained in the stated synodical report and regrets that the expressions therein are not always precise and careful enough according to the pattern of the divine Word. Nonetheless, we must explicitly declare that we find no error in it...<sup>13</sup>

Walther accepted the counsel and offered a correction on the language at a Chicago caucus in 1880. It is a testament both to the counsel offered and to the man who received it, that in front of colleagues and opponents he made the emendations. "After the meeting, according to Ernst's and Bading's story, he remarked half-humerously to the latter: 'You put me on the spot right in front of my own cohorts.'"<sup>14</sup>

Though, under Hoenecke, the Wisconsin Synod insisted on changes in phraseology, its support of Walther was never in question. Rather, Hoenecke and the synod served as a great

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<sup>12</sup> Pieper, 145.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 273.

encouragement to Walther in troubling times. At the 1881 Colloquy in Milwaukee, war was declared within the Conference (Wohlan, wollet ihr Krieg, ihr sollt Krieg haben!) and the theologians couldn't even adjourn with joint prayer because of their differences. But the stance of Hoenecke and Wisconsin evoked from Walther this joyful sentence in the midst of his solemn description of the events: "Praise God! We Missouriians do not stand in this fight alone! The Wisconsin Synod, in the theologians of its faculty and in its many able members, stands at our side."<sup>15</sup>

With the encouragement, however, came more insistence by Hoenecke that Walther retract the language of some of his statements. August Pieper relates that it was Hoenecke's persuasion that led Walther to publish his article "*Sententiam teneat, linguam corrigat*" in the month following the colloquy.<sup>16</sup> Walther conceded that in their explanation of the doctrine of election the Missouriians hadn't always written and spoken in such a way that they couldn't have been misunderstood. Then, speaking of Hoenecke, he wrote: "Our friends have called to us, '*Sententiam teneatis, linguam corrigatis*.'"<sup>17</sup> So, by the counsel of Hoenecke, he corrected his language in three areas: that there are no conditions in God; that those who are lost perish because their perdition is foreseen by God; that the elect receive a richer grace.<sup>18</sup>

In October of 1881, the Wisconsin Synod began to deal corporately and publicly with the doctrine of election. As before, this public confession for synodical unity was under the guidance and tutelage of Hoenecke. The following announcement appeared in the October 15 issue of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*:

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<sup>14</sup> Koehler, 158.

<sup>15</sup> Walther, "Das Colloquium," *Der Lutheraner*, Volume 37, Number 2 (15 Jan 1881), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Pieper, 145.

<sup>17</sup> Walther, "Sententiam teneat, linguam corrigat," *Lehre und Wehre*, Volume 37, Number 3 (15 Feb 1881).

<sup>18</sup> Roy Arthur Suelflow, "The History of the Missouri Synod during the Second Twenty-Five Years of its Existence," (Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 1946), 162.

## Pastoral Conference

According to the resolution of last year's pastoral conference, this year's conference will convene on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, at 9:00 AM in the church of Grace Congregation in Milwaukee. The subject for discussion will be theses on the doctrine of Election by Professor Hoenecke...<sup>19</sup>

Hoenecke presented two theses at the pastoral conference. Unfortunately, the minutes of the conference proceedings have not been preserved. Although there is no record of the explanation and discussion of the theses, the theses themselves have been preserved in the *Lutheran Standard* and *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*. Hoenecke said:

1. Just as Scripture teaches a general gracious will of God for the salvation of all men, so also it certainly teaches God's special election of individuals to salvation.
2. The eternal election of God is the cause of faith in the elect. However, election did not happen in view of the faith of the elect.<sup>20</sup>

From the descriptions of Graebner, Loy, and Fritschel, the theses generated a great deal of discussion. At least to some, it appeared that there was neither closure nor consensus on the doctrine of election at the pastoral conference. However, Graebner's account of the conference shows that Hoenecke's theses were received with joy:

The subject of the essay was the doctrine of election. This is an article of Christian doctrine which clearly shows that mortal reason is totally blind when dealing with things pertaining to man's salvation...It was indeed worth the time and effort for the pastors to assemble to consider this thoroughly comforting doctrine and to study, to hear, and to learn what the gracious God has revealed about his eternal election to comfort us poor sinners...Indeed, dear reader, the discussion of our pastoral conference was richly blessed.<sup>21</sup>

Hoenecke's public confession of the scriptural doctrine received quick attention. Though his teaching had not changed in the past ten years, its reception throughout Midwestern Lutheranism certainly did. Within two weeks of the conference's adjournment, Loy in the *Lutheran*

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<sup>19</sup> *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 17, Number 4 (15 Oct 1881), 32.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Gottfried Fritschel, "Zur Chronik des Prädestinationstreites," *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1881, 183.

*Standard* quoted Hoenecke's theses and called the second thesis "an open denial of Lutheran doctrine."<sup>22</sup> Ohio's German publication, the *Kirchenzeitung* also attacked the theses and included the response of a Reformed publication which saw Hoenecke's doctrine as being in accord with their own.

The Wisconsin Synod's response came in the December 15 issue of *Gemeinde-Blatt*. In it Graebner answers the attacks of Ohio's publications:

Let's take a look at the *Standard* first. This publication accuses Prof. Hoenecke's second thesis of "an open denial of Lutheran doctrine." That such an accusation is merely its own addition, is unfortunately no longer surprising in the columns of the *Standard*. If others had not already clearly shown the writers of that publication that what they maintain is untrue, we would consider it our duty to furnish them proof in any way we were able. However, we leave it up to them to come to terms with the Second Commandment and only advise them to do it yet at the proper time.<sup>23</sup>

Although there was discussion after the presentation of the theses, Graebner clearly states that the *Standard* had received faulty information. Graebner clearly explains that Wisconsin didn't "agree to disagree":

Now let's look at the other claim which the writer of the *Standard* transcribed in a somewhat corrupted form from his source. He maintained that our synod now has the policy of agreeing to disagree in order to avoid division. So we now want to make the following publicly known to the *Standard* and its source: In a convention that represents its majority according to the truth, if, after long and pointed discussion, the one opposed is clearly told to cease the unpleasant misleading he had done till now, and until the resumption of the discussion, to study the doctrine under conflict in the light of God's Word, and if it is earnestly and resolutely explained to him, yet he seeks to spread the error further, then nothing remains except to separate oneself. If then one comes out and repeats such union as the *Standard* and its source ascribe to us, then we call this calumny

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<sup>21</sup> Graebner, "Unsere Pastoralconferenz," *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 17, Number 5 (1 Nov 1881), 32.

<sup>22</sup> M. Loy, *Lutheran Standard*, Volume XXXIX, Number 45 (12 Nov 1881), 356.

<sup>23</sup> Graebner, "Kirchliche Nachrichten," *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 17, Number 8 (15 Dec 1881), 62.

and advise both to make sure that they come to terms with the Eighth Commandment, and do it likewise yet at a proper time.<sup>24</sup>

The *Kirchenzeitung* attacked Wisconsin from a different angle. They maintained that Hoenecke's doctrine merely aped the Missouri Synod. However, Graebner quite correctly points out that Wisconsin had shown enough independence to thwart her larger sisters' State-Synod plans:

He indicated at the same time that many people are inclined to let themselves surmise that the Wisconsinites adopted their present position on the doctrine of election at least in part because "they like to be guided by the Missourians." In reference to this last insinuation we may note that whoever is conversant in the newer and most recent church history will hardly suspect us Wisconsinites of adopting any position because "Missouri" or "Ohio" or any other synod adopted it.<sup>25</sup>

In response to the *Kirchenzeitung* report that the Reformed agreed with Hoenecke's doctrine on election, Graebner offered this retort:

Indeed we know well enough what this agreement means—namely, it's the first praise of the Formula of Concord on the part of the Reformed in three hundred years.<sup>26</sup>

Fritschel immediately replied in the pages of *Kirchliche Zeitschrift* with his "Zur Chronik des Prädestinationstreites." He understands the point of Hoenecke's theses, but opposes them along party lines:

One sees (here most decidedly Missouri's doctrine is pronounced) that not the general gracious will of God concerning all men, but the special grace of election of only a certain few is designated as the source from which faith flows forth. The result is that those who are not predestined cannot even come to faith; and one sees therefore that it was completely true, when Prof. Loy explained in *The Lutheran Standard* that the second thesis contained "an open denial of Lutheran doctrine."<sup>27</sup>

After quoting Graebner's explanation of the convention's procedure when there is doctrinal disagreement, Fritschel responds by saying, "So that means they didn't agree to disagree. Certainly

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 62.

that is an explanation unable to be misunderstood—a clear explanation that in the Wisconsin Synod the pure Lutheran doctrine shall be condemned and excluded from now on.”<sup>28</sup>

Hoenecke had led Wisconsin into the fray, and his 1881 theses served as the basis for his next work which would bind Wisconsin and Minnesota with Missouri in a united front. But although Hoenecke’s theological leadership on the doctrine of election had been consistently sound and public for over a decade, there were still quite a number of the most respected pastors who were on the verge of jumping to the Ohio Synod.<sup>29</sup> The deciding battle would come at the synod’s convention in June.

In order to provide an opportunity to study the issues, Prof. Graebner had been asked to draw up theses on conversion for the 1882 Wisconsin Synod convention. The rationale was simple:

Theses on conversion formed the subject of the doctrinal essay. The treatment of this doctrine was extremely important and timely, especially because there are many today who maintain that they are the defenders of Lutheran doctrine, and that we synods of the Synodical Conference have fallen away from the doctrine of our Church and have endeavored to bring false and dangerous things into acceptance in reference to this doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

But when the synod convened on June 8, 1882, in La Cross, Wisconsin, not quiet study but loud dissension characterized the early days. Pastor Klindword of Galena, Illinois, who recently had come from the Iowa Synod, wrote several pamphlets attacking the doctrine of election and canvassed his views even outside of the sessions of the convention.<sup>31</sup> The next morning’s presentation of Graebner’s second thesis dealt with the cause of faith and the inability of man to contribute to his conversion. Klindworth’s actions led to a discussion on election during

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<sup>27</sup> Fritschel, 183.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>29</sup> Pieper, 144.

<sup>30</sup> Graebner, “Unsere Synodalversammlung,” *Evangelisch Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, Vol. 17, Number 21 (1 Jul 1882), 162.

<sup>31</sup> Koehler, 159.

presentation of the essay. By mutual consent, Hoenecke rose and gave the following presentation on the doctrine of election:

“Regarding Eternal Election Holy Scripture Teaches the Following”

Out of his unending mercy for lost mankind, God from eternity resolved to redeem all the world through Christ. We thus reject as a damnable doctrine the teaching of the Calvinists: 1. that God sent his dear Son only for the elect. 2. that God decreed this election without any regard for Christ and his merit. Only the pleasure of his and Christ’s will, and Christ’s sacrifice, which was offered for all, have determined God with the special decree of election.

The Bible teaches further, that God has mercy on all, that Christ has come for all, and that he wants all men to be saved. We designate as a damnable doctrine that teaching which says that Christ only shed his blood for the elect.

In the same way Scripture teaches that for Christ’s sake and according to the pleasure of his will, God from eternity has elected certain men to salvation. In these men their election serves as the cause from which God works their calling, conversion, and everything else that is necessary for their salvation—so then they certainly are saved; and because Scripture says it, therefore we believe it.

One may ask: Can you make sense of that for yourself? — What then? — God wants to save all, but again: Has he elected only a few who alone are saved? — No, I can’t make sense of that for myself. However, has God revealed his truth to us that we should make sense of it for ourselves? No, exactly the opposite, we believe it as he has revealed it to us.

Further, Scripture teaches: 1. that God has the steadfast will to call all men to salvation in Christ; 2. that this call is meant earnestly and sincerely; 3. that the means through which this call happens are always powerful and efficacious. Therefore, the doctrine of the Calvinists is a damnable one that teaches a two-fold call of God, an earnest one for the elect and one that is only a mere pretense for those who are not chosen. We know only one call that God truly intends for all. With it, he calls innumerable men who are not saved on account of the hardness of their hearts. Through the same call he also calls his elect and does nothing in addition; his call is the same for all.

That is Scripture’s teaching regarding election.

However, someone could say about this doctrine of election, “Isn’t it basically a terrifying thing?” No, we answer, if we simply

remain with what Scripture says about it, and do not forget that election happens in Christ. For as with all of the Gospel, this part too is only comforting. Look at Jesus Christ; then you see your election. Don't speculate about the secret counsel, rather cling to Christ and to the Gospel which speaks so comfortingly about the universal gracious will and mercy of God in Christ. Let us suppose that you have been a terrible sinner, a drunk, a fornicator. Does it now in some way say, "Stay away from Christ; you have no part in him; election in no way applies to you?" No, rather much more: Christ has died for all; his blood purifies all; fornicators and tax collectors still enter the kingdom of heaven sooner than Pharisees. In Christ, "whose blood perpetually cries: Mercy, mercy!" there is a wide gate open for all sinners. When it says: "Many are called, but few are chosen," the election of God agrees with his mercy which applies to all. Just believe that you also are chosen. — In this way one should speak regarding election, and in this way also, one should take the word of Scripture as it reads.<sup>32</sup>

Hoenecke's clear and simple words expressed the unfathomable mystery as Scripture reveals it. He placed the contradiction of *cur alii prae aliis* back onto God, while affirming both the universal grace of God and particular election. He didn't fall into Walther's error of "richer grace," but affirmed one call from God; he rejected irresistible grace, but insisted on the efficacy of its means; he admitted inability to harmonize the doctrine with human reason, but affirmed that it provides great comfort; he ascribed election to God's mercy and Christ's merits, and denied that man added anything at all—election is the cause of faith in the elect.

The moment of decision came in the afternoon session. After years of quiet leadership and instruction, Hoenecke through this doctrinal explanation had led his synod to the fork that divided the roads of Ohio and Missouri. Before the question was put to vote, "it was explicitly explained that the presentation rejected an election in view of faith."<sup>33</sup> Then the convention displayed sound fellowship principles and brotherly love when it was emphatically stressed:

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<sup>32</sup> Hoenecke, "Verhandlungen der Zweiunddreißigsten Versammlung der Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und anderen Staaten, gehalten in Gemeinschaft mit der Synode von Minnesota zu La Crosse, Wisconsin, vom 8. bis 15. Juni 1882," 33-34.

<sup>33</sup> Graebner, "Unsere Synodalversammlung," 162.

We are certainly ready to be patient with brothers who are not yet clear on this doctrine—insofar as they do not work against and combat the truth recognized by us. However, though ready to be patient, we still cannot refrain from giving testimony to the truth, nor can we in unionistic fashion—either actual or apparent—keep our attitude secret.<sup>34</sup>

In the afternoon session, the two synods followed where Hoenecke had led them.

Graebner relays the eyewitness account:

The two synods in turn confessed to this presentation of the doctrine of eternal election by a standing vote. The first question raised was whether the Wisconsin Synod would accept this presentation of the doctrine as its own. A powerful impression was left when the large convention rose silently and full of holy earnestness. Then when those who did not agree with the presented doctrine were requested to stand up, two pastors [Klindword, Althof] and a teacher [Gruber] rose. In addition, the delegate from the congregation of one of the two pastors rose. A third pastor [Kleinlein] had previously explained that he wasn't yet fully clear on the doctrine and therefore he abstained from the voting.

The moving event was repeated when the acting president of the Minnesota Synod placed the questions before his synod. Here as well two pastors [Vollman, Siegrist] stood up as those who did not agree with the presented doctrine.<sup>35</sup>

Loy's reaction to Hoenecke's presentation on election and the synodical response bemoaned the loss of a sister synod into Missouri's fold. He seems to ignore the study and leadership of Hoenecke, but rather sees the synod's actions merely as capitulation to Walther:

Missouri has gained a triumph in the West. The synods of Wisconsin and Minnesota, both in the Synodical Conference, have met in joint convention and adopted the Missourian platform...How do the men of Wisconsin manage to render it plausible that there is comfort in their theory? "God's election," they say, "is in harmony with his mercy, which extends over all men: only believe that you are elected!" It is sad that a large body of men who were once earnest in their opposition to Reformed error should so speedily be led to the adoption of a Reformed principle.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "Verhandlungen," 34.

<sup>35</sup> Graebner, "Unsere Synodalversammlung," 162.

<sup>36</sup> Loy, "Wisconsin's Ways," *Lutheran Standard*, July 15, 1882, 2.

Missouri's reaction to Hoenecke's presentation was, of course, much more favorable. In the Synodical Conference convention of 1882, Hoenecke's presentation was read along with Missouri's Thirteen Theses. With only Pastor Muus voting against the recognition, each synod accepted the other's confession as their own.<sup>37</sup> Due to Hoenecke's thorough study, careful instruction, and consistent leadership, Minnesota and Wisconsin stood side by side with Missouri for the rest of the controversy.

Without doubt, Dr. Walther and the Missouri Synod led orthodox Lutheranism in its fight against false doctrine in the Election Controversy. However, the contributions of Adolf Hoenecke cannot be overlooked. He provided the Missouri Synod and Dr. Walther with quiet support from the beginning, with encouragement and counsel when needed, and with public confession for synodical unity. Hoenecke's stability amid the tumult of the controversy was noted even by his opponents. Fritschel spoke of Prof. Hoenecke as one "of whom it is said that in the doctrine of predestination he has proceeded much more logically and exactly than Professor Walther." His calm, instructive words served to balance Walther's often invective speech. "During the controversy, Dr. Hoenecke by gentle and conciliatory speech took the sting out of Missouri's offensive phraseology, and accomplished much in the interest of peace in the church."<sup>38</sup>

But his contributions were greatest within the Wisconsin Synod. "He kept our synod on the right track, although a small number of men—they never were really one with us—deserted us. Humanly speaking, our synod might well have been torn apart if Hoenecke's theology—not outwardly dazzling, but strong because it was Lutheran to the core—had not held us together."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "Verhandlungen der neunten Versammlung der evangelisch lutherischen Synodal-Konferenz zu Chicago, Illinois, vom 4. Bis 10. Oktober 1882," 64.

<sup>38</sup> J.L. Neve, *The History of the Lutheran Church in America*, ed. Willard Allbeck, (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), 231.

<sup>39</sup> Pieper, 145.

## **An Appendix of Translated Articles**

The following article appears in the January 1 edition of the *Gemeinde-Blatt* in 1878, Volume 13, Number 9. What follows is this writer's translation of Hoenecke's article entitled "Wenn Gott allein die Menschen bekehren kann und muß und solches thut ohne des Menschen Zuthun, woher kommt es denn, daß so viele Menschen unbekehrt bleiben?"

### **If only God can and must convert men, and does so without man's cooperation, then why do so many men remain unconverted?**

By A. Hoenecke

That is an important question and everyone who wants to be saved should seek its answer. The short answer to the question is: the fact that so many men are not converted is not God's fault, but rather solely and only the guilt of the men who remain unconverted. To prove this assertion, we utilize the story told us in Luke 4:14-30. For in this story we see the sinner-seeking Savior and the heart of man which rejects that loving Savior. From both of these we see that the fault belongs not to God, but only to man, when a man is not converted. Even though a man possesses within himself absolutely no will or power to convert himself, yet he does possess the frightful power to oppose the working of God in his heart and to reject God.

In the cited story we are told that after he had spend forty days and forty nights in the wilderness and had been tempted by the devil, the Lord Jesus went forth to begin his teaching ministry among the people of Israel. He came to Nazareth, the town in which he had spent his youth, and he entered the synagogue and preached the Gospel – for he came to seek and to save the lost. Soon he gathered a band of disciples around himself and sent them out with the commission to preach the gospel to all creatures. Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved. This preaching of grace since then has gone to the ends of the earth. To lead them, he established the preaching ministry in the church and will preserve it until the last day. In addition to that ministry he also gave his church the command to go into all the world and to preach the gospel. This command doesn't exclude anyone; each one who believes shall be saved. That is his expressed, clear will: he does not want the death of the sinner, but rather he wants the sinner to turn and live. He wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. On the other hand, he does not want a man to be lost. God even had the gospel preached to the Gentiles who accepted it. Many do not get to hear it, because God in his omniscience knows that they wouldn't accept it even if they did hear it.

The word spoken by him is able to win the hearts of all. We see that in the beautiful, remarkable sermon which he preached to his countrymen there. According to his custom he entered the synagogue and stood up to read. The book of the prophet Isaiah was passed to him. He then opened the book and found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is with me; he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to preach freedom to the captives, sight to the blind, and release to the oppressed, to preach the year of the Lord's favor." After he had set aside the book, he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Oh, how near salvation was brought to those people! The one of whom Moses and all the prophets had prophesied, the one who is the point of all of scripture, Jesus, true God and true man, stood before them and testified to them that he was the one for whom their fathers had waited. With the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is with me; he has anointed me," the prophet points to the

person of the Lord—for the Lord Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure. He is received by the Holy Spirit. The eternal Godhead has bound itself with humanity in the most personal and indivisible way in Jesus. The result is that in Christ, God and man are only one person. God even testified to that fact at the baptism of his son. What great grace was shown to those people of Nazareth! They were given the honor of actually seeing the true God-man Jesus with their bodily eyes and of hearing the gospel of free grace in Christ from his blessed, divine mouth!

These remarkable passages contain the sweetest gospel. He was sent to proclaim the gospel to the poor: those who knew that they were poor and miserable in their souls; those who knew that they lacked the righteousness which has value before God; those who knew that the devil had robbed them of all their jewels and riches which God had created in them so that now they could be justified and saved only through a foreign righteousness. To those people, the joyful message should be proclaimed, that now has appeared the one who will return to them all their lost goods and treasures. These poor people are also called the broken-hearted. They said with David, “I cry out from the unrest of my heart.” They are called captives because the devil holds them captive in the bonds of sin and death. They are called blind because they could not recognize God and therefore they could not come to him. They are called oppressed because they are under God’s wrath. Since all men find themselves in this miserable condition by nature, the Savior appeared to all so that all may be helped. The year of the Lord’s favor is the time of the New Testament in which grace is announced to all in place of the well-deserved punishment. The joyful year of jubilee has begun which all the slaves are given freedom and in which all pawned possessions must be given back to their original owners. This joyful, blessed time began for them at that time and for all men today. Oh, how everyone should rejoice and grasp this proclaimed grace with both hands to be a participant of it!

However, the word of the gospel is also an all-powerful word; whoever hears it feels something of its power. The gospel is the power of God to save all who believe it. Just as God placed power in kernels of wheat to nourish and strengthen man’s body, in the same way he placed his divine power in the word of the gospel. Through it all who receive this word are strengthened in their soul and are saved. We see in this story how he had proven his power to all the people there in Nazareth. In verse 22 we read: “They all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words which came out of his mouth.” We read further in verses 14 and 15: “Jesus came to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and the news about him spread through the whole countryside. And he taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.” We see from these words what a powerful impression the word of the gospel made and still makes on all men. The most wicked enemies of Christ have to sense that no other word on earth is like the word of the gospel. Therefore, it’s certainly true when one says, “It takes more effort for a man to enter hell than it would for him to be saved.” Therefore, on the last day there will be horrible contrition over disdaining the gospel.

We see now that, despite the wonderful grace shown to them, those people of Nazareth had pushed salvation away. The first thing we are told about them is that they took offense at the humble person of our Lord. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they called out. “Does this one want to teach us who are older, wiser, and more intelligent than he?” What can we learn from this? Is it any different today? The majority (especially the wise and intelligent people of the world) takes offense at the humble person of the Lord Jesus. Should such learned people first learn true wisdom from the poor carpenter from Nazareth? The true Church of God on earth is very similar in its outward appearance to the Lord its Savior. Like him, the church has no form or beauty that is pleasing to the world. Therefore, it is most deeply despised for its servants and its means of grace. Men are ashamed to belong to it. The false church of the papists has much more respect in the world. There, even sooner, natural man finds something suitable to his intellect. The Lord Christ is proclaimed, offered, and imparted to us in the word of God and in the holy sacraments, but oh, how

these means are despised! Who today wants to bow before God's Word? Who today esteems the sacraments? The unenlightened human reason takes offense at these means and considers them worthless in spite of the fact no one can deny their power. So the world shoves away the offered grace and rejects its Savior who came to seek and to save.

The people of Nazareth took further offense because he had not performed great signs and wonders among them as he had in Capernaum. Through such signs and wonders, they wanted to make a name for themselves, to become a famous city, and to derive all kinds of profit. Had the Lord performed such signs and wonders, things would have gone well for him among his native people. Isn't this still so? If one would derive all kinds of profit from following after Jesus, then the whole world would cling to him. But because we are only dealing with spiritual possessions, one may not trouble himself. Of what use is it to be a Christian and to follow the Lord Christ? Aren't many who don't believe much richer and more honored than those who do believe? Thus we see that the world's intelligence and greed is the reason why many reject the offered gospel and to cling to the world and its treasures.

However, the chief cause that encompasses all the other causes is the inborn unbelief of all men. The Lord Christ illustrates that in two examples—namely, in the example of the widow of Zaraphath and in the example of Naaman the Syrian. Why wasn't Elijah sent to a widow in Israel? Because there was none at hand who would have received him in faith and have provided for him. Why was no leper from Israel made clean through Elijah? Again, no leper was cleansed because no one had used the means in faith which the prophet had recommended. Thus they hindered their true conversion because they took offense at the person of Christ and pushed grace away. They further hindered their conversion, through the intelligence of the world and the love of the world which they could not overcome, and finally, the third hindrance was their great unbelief in which they were firmly set.

If someone is so disposed and throws salvation further and further away from himself, then he doesn't remain as he was, but rather he becomes an open enemy of Christ. This is what happened to the people of Capernaum who went so far as wanting to kill the Lord. And so, few are converted because the majority repeatedly struggles against the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, and despises the means of grace while instead lusting after the world.

The following article comes from the April 15, 1880, issue of *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde Blatt*, Volume 15, Number 16. What follows is this writer's translation of Hoenecke's article entitled "Zur Lehre von der Gnadenwahl."

## **Regarding the Doctrine of Predestination**

By A. Hoenecke

It is certain, that the grace of God is a universal grace. It is further certain that the merit of Christ is sufficient for the whole sinful world. Finally, it is certain that God wants repentance and faith preached to all peoples. Even so, it is also certain that God has not predestined all. "Many are called," spoke our Lord Jesus Christ, "but few are chosen." We stand here before a bottomless mystery for our reason. Is it possible, we ask, that God earnestly wants the salvation of all? Is it possible that he actually is reconciled with the whole sinful world through Christ? Is it possible that he wants the Gospel to be preached to all men so that they believe and are saved? Is it possible for all these things to be true, and yet nevertheless this same God from eternity predestined to this salvation only a small number from this sinful world? However, in this we make our reason captive to the Word of God. It stands in the Bible, and it's not for us to ask, "What sense does this make?" Rather, we are obliged to believe the Word of God. If it is necessary to make our reason captive to obedience of the Word of God for a right understanding of all divine doctrines in general, then it is all the more necessary, for a right understanding of the doctrine of predestination. In the consideration of this doctrine, anyone who wants to be led by his reason, his wisdom and his own thoughts, must err, for we are dealing here not with human thoughts, but with God's thoughts. This necessity of error must also stand fast for all those who do not unconditionally subject themselves to God's Word, but subject themselves to a logical explanation. Writing which is led by the conclusions of reason must go dangerously astray in the doctrine of predestination, as we will see in the course of this essay.

How difficult it is for us men to subject ourselves unconditionally to the Word of God! When he speaks in his Word, how difficult it is for us to honor God by saying, "Your thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways are not your ways. Rather, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are your ways higher than our ways, and your thoughts higher than our thoughts." How difficult it is to do that so that we can rightly understand the doctrine of predestination. In predestination as the Scriptures teach it, our corrupted reason sees God as unjust. Because of this, many have been persuaded to either completely deny the doctrine of predestination, or to at least justify the actions of God to reason. However, they either don't see, or don't want to see that this always happens at the cost of the revealed Word. Even in the Lutheran church, which has always held to the principle: "Scripture is to be explained with Scripture," men who are unfaithful to this principle in the doctrine of predestination have quickly erred. This is because they feel they must justify the holy and righteous God in his unknowable counsel and actions. However, God needs no such justification. He is always just, even when he appears to us to be unjust. He overcomes when he is judged. [Rm 3:4].

In view of this, if we want to consider the doctrine of predestination in a fruitful way, than we must beat down all our thoughts and all the conclusions of our reason which contend against the Word of God. We must cling only to the revealed Word of God. The only one who will derive true blessing and comfort from this doctrine, is the one who falls with a believing heart in true reverence before God and his Word in the Scriptures—the one who, full of confidence through faith in the Word of God, can lift up his heart to God and can say: "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening."

For anyone who knows Scripture, there is no doubt that Scripture contains the doctrine that God predestined only a few out of the whole sinful world. Our Lord Christ himself said, "Many are called, but few are chosen." Yet the Scriptures not only teach that the number of the elect is small, but also that the elect are individual, completely definite persons. This is proven not only from the word "chosen" which shows that they were taken out of the others, namely, those who were called, but also it becomes evident from many clear testimonies of Scripture. In Mark 13:20 Christ says, "And if the Lord had not cut short these days, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them." Christ isn't speaking here about the elect in general, but about completely definite persons whom his heavenly Father had chosen. "I know," Christ says in another place, "whom I have chosen." Paul also teaches the same thing in 2 Timothy 2:19, "The Lord knows his own," namely, his elect. If he knows them, then they must be definite persons who are known to him.

It is to be observed further that it wasn't first in time that God made this decree to choose some out of the fallen human race. Rather, his election is an eternal election. Scripture also teaches this. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God chose us through Christ "before the foundation of the world was laid," and 2 Timothy 1:9 says, "before the beginning of time." Paul writes in Thessalonians that God had chosen them "from the beginning" for salvation. Before humans were created, even before the world was created, thus from eternity God chose out of the sinful world all those who would become his possession.

The Word of God also tells us that this eternal election of God stands unshakably firm. Those whom God has chosen are inevitably saved; in contrast, no one is saved who does not belong to the number of the elect. In Matthew 24:23 Christ says, "False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders that will deceive even the elect—if that were possible." "If that were possible," Christ said. With that he wants to say, "It is not possible to deceive them. Even if such a thing were to actually happen at some point, they will yet finally come back to the right path, because God has chosen them and his election is unchangeable. In John 10 Christ says that no one can snatch from his hand the sheep which his heaven Father had given to him. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:19, "The solid foundation of God stands firm and has this seal: the Lord knows his own." This means that not only does God know those who are his own, but he has surrounded them with eternal love so that they also must remain his own for all eternity. If we compare this with what Christ held against the condemned in Matthew 7:23, "I have never known you (as my own); Away from me, you evildoers!" then from that it irrefutably proceeds that all those who are not included in this eternal election of God are lost.

Finally, God's Word also teaches us that God has elected his own not only to salvation, but in general he has elected them to be his temple, so that they should belong to him and be his possession already in this life. However, we are his possession only in Christ and through faith in him. Therefore the Scriptures also say, "God has chosen us in Christ," Ephesians 1. Paul says, in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "But we should always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, that God chose you from the beginning for salvation in the sanctifying work of the Spirit and in the faith of the truth to which he has called you through our Gospel to the glorious possession of our Lord Jesus Christ." Those God has chosen from eternity, he also calls through the Gospel, works faith in them, and gives them to Christ to be his glorious possession. Christ is looking at this eternal election of God in John 6:37 when he says, "Everything which my Father gives me comes to me, and whoever comes to me, I will not drive away." That God the Lord conveyed his election to Christ already in this life, can be clearly derived from the High Priestly Prayer of our Savior (John 17), in which Christ repeatedly pronounces that those elected to salvation are given to him already in time. We see therefore: God has not chosen his elect immediately from hell into heaven, from damnation to salvation, but he has chosen them in Christ and through Christ. He has chosen them

and wants them then in time to travel on the path ordained by him, in Christ, to salvation. In Romans 8:29-30, Paul gives us the order in which God wants the decree he made in eternity regarding the elect to be followed in time, “For those God foreknew he also foreordained that they should be conformed to the likeness of his son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. But those God foreordained, he also called; but those he called, he also justified; but those he justified, he also glorified.” With that the Apostle wants to say: Those God through his son Christ foresaw and foreordained to salvation, he also called through his Word, gives them his Holy Spirit who justifies them (i.e., makes them believers), and then glory also follows this Word and faith, so that those justified through faith in Christ are certain of the adoption of God and eternal life; they praise God for his good deeds; they extol him in their lives as his children; and ultimately, they are saved.

Our Formula of Concord teaches the following regarding predestination: “If we wish to think or speak correctly and profitably concerning eternal election, or the predestination and ordination of the children of God to eternal life, we should accustom ourselves not to speculate concerning the bare, secret, concealed, inscrutable foreknowledge of God, but how the counsel, purpose, and ordination of God in Christ Jesus, who is the true Book of Life, is revealed to us through the Word, namely, that the entire doctrine concerning the purpose, counsel, will, and ordination of God pertaining to our redemption, call, justification, and salvation should be taken together; as Paul treats and has explained this article Rm 8:29ff.; Eph 1:4ff., as also Christ in the parable, Mt 22:1ff., namely, that God in His purpose and counsel ordained:

1. That the human race is truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who, by His faultless obedience, suffering, and death, has merited for us the righteousness which avails before God, and eternal life.
2. That such merit and benefits of Christ shall be presented, offered, and distributed to us through His Word and Sacraments.
3. That by His Holy Ghost, through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and pondered, he will be efficacious and active in us, convert hearts to true repentance, and preserve them in the true faith.
4. That He will justify all those who in true repentance receive Christ by a true faith, and will receive them into grace, the adoption of sons, and the inheritance of eternal life.
5. That He will also sanctify in love those who are thus justified, as St. Paul says. Eph. 1:4.
6. That He also will protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and rule and lead them in His ways, raise them again when they stumble, comfort them under the cross and in temptation, and preserve them.
7. That He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work which He has begun in them, if they adhere to God’s Word, pray diligently, abide in God’s goodness, and faithfully use the gifts received.
8. That finally He will eternally save and glorify in life eternal those whom He has elected, called, and justified.

And in this His counsel, purpose, and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned He will, by His grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto, aid, promote, strengthen, and preserve them” (FOC, *Triglot*, 1068-1069).

This article is found in the December 15, 1881, edition of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, Volume 17, Number 8. What follows is this writer's translation of Graebner's "Kirchliche Nachrichten."

## **Ecclesiastical News**

By A. Gräbner

Two publications of the Ohio Synod, the *Standard* and *Kirchenzeitung* have occupied themselves with the proceedings of our last pastoral conference. Each of the two publications has harnessed a stranger's colt and has plowed freely with it under the whip-cracks of its own additions.

Let's take a look at the *Standard* first. This publication accuses Prof. Hoenecke's second thesis of "an open denial of Lutheran doctrine." That such an accusation is merely its own addition, is unfortunately no longer surprising in the columns of the *Standard*. If others had not already clearly shown the writers of that publication that what they maintain is untrue, we would consider it our duty to furnish them proof in any way we were able. However, we leave up to them to come to terms with the Second Commandment and only advise them to do it yet at the proper time.

Now let's look at the other claim which the writer of the *Standard* transcribed in a somewhat corrupted form from his source. He maintained that our synod now had the policy of agreeing to disagree in order to avoid division. So we now want to make the following publicly known to the *Standard* and its source: In a convention that represents its majority according to the truth, if after long and pointed discussion, the one opposed is clearly told to cease the unpleasant misleading he had done till now, and until the resumption of the discussion, to study the doctrine under conflict in the light of God's Word, and if it is earnestly and resolutely explained to him, yet he seeks to spread the error further, then nothing remains except to separate oneself. If then one comes out and repeats such union as the *Standard* and its source ascribe to us, then we call this calumny and advise both to make sure that they come to terms with the Eighth Commandment, and likewise, do it yet at a proper time.

Now we come to the *Kirchenzeitung*. This publication reprinted an article from the *Reformirten Kirchenzeitung* in which the Milwaukee Theses on the one hand are described as scriptural, but on the other hand it is said that the Lutherans of the Wisconsin Synod earlier were opposed to such a meaning. The Reformed writer of the reprinted article appealed to observations made on a past visit by a previous president and by other prominent pastors of the synod. He indicated at the same time that many people are inclined to let themselves surmise that the Wisconsinites adopted their present position on the doctrine of election at least in part because "they like to be guided by the Missouriians." In reference to this last insinuation we may note that whoever is conversant in the newer and most recent church history will hardly suspect us Wisconsinites of adopting any position because "Missouri" or "Ohio" or any other synod adopted it.

Moreover, we consider it shameful that our synod is under suspicion because of the words of the *Reformirte Kirchenzeitung* and because of the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* which reprinted the article without reservation, especially in this case, where it is a question of the status of teachers; and as far as "the past president and those other prominent pastors" are concerned, we say what St. Paul first wrote: "As for those who seemed important—whatever they were makes no difference to me." That passage reminds one that church history tells of a certain Doctor Luther, who according to his own confession didn't become a master overnight. The earlier Luther was corrected by the later. But the first point which the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* makes (and doing so seems to give it special

satisfaction), namely, that according to the *Reformirten Kirchenseitung* our doctrine of election concurs with the teaching of the Reformed, we find to be but a vain attempt. For apart from the consideration that in reference to the doctrine of election one shouldn't speak all at once of the "doctrine of the Reformed Church," we indeed know well enough what this agreement means—namely, it's the first praise of the Formula of Concord on the part of the Reformed in three hundred years; and that can make us neither rejoice nor go astray.

The following article appeared in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, volume 1881, page 183. What follows is this writer's translation of "Zur Chronik des Prädestinationsstreites."

## **On the Chronicle of the Predestinarian Conflict**

By G.Fritschel

In its pastoral conference held in the late fall, the Wisconsin Synod had discussed the following theses regarding predestination which were composed by Professor Hoenecke, of whom it is said that in the doctrine of predestination he has proceeded much more logically and exactly than Professor Walther.

1. Just as Scripture teaches a general gracious will of God for salvation of all men, so also it certainly teaches a special election of God of individuals to salvation.
2. The eternal election of God is the cause of the faith of the elect. However, the election did not happen in view of the faith of the elect.

One sees (here most decidedly Missouri's doctrine is pronounced) that not the general gracious will of God concerning all men, but the special grace of election of only a certain few is designated as the source from which faith flows forth. The result is that those who are not predestined cannot even come to faith; and one sees therefore that it was completely true, when Prof. Loy explained in *The Lutheran Standard* that the second thesis contained "an open denial of Lutheran doctrine."

The two parties on hand came to no agreement in the pastoral conference. The news trickled down through letters; the outcome of the conference was this: that despite the present differences in doctrine they wanted to remain together in peace, so they agreed to disagree. Thereupon, an explanation was given in the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, in which it was openly pronounced that this was an untruth, and that even those who held fast to the doctrines of all the old Lutheran dogmaticians would be excluded from the synod if they did not submit to Walther's doctrine. It said, "In a convention that represents its majority according to the truth (by "truth" is meant the Calvinist error), if after long and pointed discussion, the one opposed is clearly told to cease the unpleasant misleading he had done till now, and until the resumption of the discussion, to study the doctrine under conflict in the light of God's Word, and if it is earnestly and resolutely explained to him, yet he seeks to spread the error further, then nothing remains except to separate oneself." So that means they didn't agree to disagree. Certainly, that is an explanation unable to be misunderstood—a clear explanation that in the Wisconsin Synod the pure Lutheran doctrine shall be condemned and excluded from now on.

The *Reformirte Kirchenzeitung* praises the theses treated in Milwaukee as being in accord with Scripture, but said at the same time that the Lutherans of the Wisconsin Synod earlier held to a contrary meaning. The reformed author of this article thereby appealed to observations made on a past visit by a previous president and by other prominent pastors of the synod. He indicated at the same time that many people are inclined to let themselves surmise that the Wisconsinites adopted their present position on the doctrine of election at least in part because "they like to be guided by the Missourians." The *Gemeinde-Blatt* angrily denies that: "Whoever is conversant in the newer and most recent church history will hardly suspect us Wisconsinites of adopting any position because "Missouri" or "Ohio" or any other synod adopted it." The *Columbus Kirchenzeitung* did a shameful deed, that it reprinted that article from the *Reformirte Kirchenzeitung*, and as far as the past president and those other prominent pastors are concerned, even Luther didn't become a master overnight, but the early Luther was corrected by the later Luther" (*Gemeinde-Blatt* 15 Dec 1881). *The Lutheran Standard* made an observation on this point which is certainly true: Men may change in the course of time.

This excerpt is from the Verhandlungen der Zweiunddreißigsten Versammlung der Deutschen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und anderen Staaten, gehalten in Gemeinschaft mit der Synode von Minnesota zu La Crosse, Wisconsin, vom 8. Bis 15. Juni 1882.

The essayist for the convention was Prof. A. Graebner who presented the essay: “Thesen über die Bekehrung.” The presentation of the second thesis led to brief explanation of election by Prof. Hoenecke, found on pages 33-34 of the *Proceedings*. What follows is this writer’s translation of the minutes which contain Prof. Hoenecke’s words, and the synodical reaction.

## **Proceedings**

After this [presentation of Graebner’s second thesis] followed the related explanation of the doctrine of Election by Professor Hoenecke which is reproduced below:

### **“Regarding Eternal Election Holy Scripture Teaches the Following”**

Out of his unending mercy for lost mankind, God from eternity resolved to redeem all the world through Christ. We thus reject as a damnable doctrine the teaching of the Calvinists: 1. that God sent his dear Son only for the elect. 2. that God decreed this election without any regard for Christ and his merit. Only the pleasure of his and Christ’s will, and Christ’s sacrifice, which was offered for all, have determined God with the special decree of Election.

The Bible teaches further, that God has mercy on all, that Christ has come for all, and that he wants all men to be saved. We designate as a damnable doctrine that teaching which says that Christ only shed his blood for the elect.

In the same way Scripture teaches that for Christ’s sake and according to the pleasure of his will, God from eternity has elected certain men to salvation. In these men their election serves as the cause from which God works their calling, conversion, and everything else that is necessary for their salvation—so then they certainly are saved; and because Scripture says it, therefore we believe it.

One may ask: Can you make sense of that for yourself? — What then? — God wants to save all, but again: Has he elected only a few who alone are saved? — No, I can’t make sense of that for myself. However, has God revealed his truth to us that we should make sense of it for ourselves? No, exactly the opposite, we believe it as he has revealed it to us.

Further, Scripture teaches: 1. that God has the steadfast will to call all men to salvation in Christ; 2. that this call is meant earnestly and sincerely; 3. that the means through which this call happens are always powerful and efficacious. Therefore, the doctrine of the Calvinists is a damnable one that teaches a two-fold call of God, an earnest one for the elect and one that is only a mere pretense for those who are not chosen. We know only one call that God truly intends for all. With it, he calls innumerable men who are not saved on account of the hardness of their hearts. Through the same call he also calls his elect and does nothing in addition; his call is the same for all.

That is Scripture’s teaching regarding election.

However, someone could say about this doctrine of election, “Isn’t it basically a terrifying thing?” No, we answer, if we simply remain with what Scripture says about it, and do not forget that election happens in Christ. For as with all of the Gospel, this part too is

only comforting. Look at Jesus Christ; then you see your election. Don't speculate about the secret counsel, rather cling to Christ and to the Gospel which speaks so comfortingly about the universal gracious will and mercy of God in Christ. Let us suppose that you have been a terrible sinner, a drunk, a fornicator. Does it now in some way say, "Stay away from Christ; you have no part in him; election in no way applies to you?" No, rather much more: Christ has died for all; his blood purifies all; fornicators and tax collectors still enter the kingdom of heaven sooner than Pharisees. In Christ, "whose blood perpetually cries: Mercy, mercy!" there is a wide gate open for all sinners. When it says: "Many are called, but few are chosen," the election of God agrees with his mercy which applies to all. Just believe that you also are chosen. — In this way one should speak regarding election, and in this way also, one should take the word of Scripture as it reads.

A member of the Minnesota Synod also repeated this presentation of the doctrine of predestination in its essential parts.

Now after the aforementioned explanation of the doctrine of predestination was given, a member of the Wisconsin Synod stated that he could not confess the doctrine as explained. In response, it was emphatically stressed, that we are certainly ready to be patient with brothers who are not yet clear on this doctrine—insofar as they do not work against and combat the truth recognized by us. However, though ready to be patient, we still cannot refrain from giving testimony to the truth, nor can we in unionistic fashion—either actual or apparent—keep our attitude secret. It was therefore resolved, to meet in joint session again in the afternoon, and to have each member of both synods be ready to explain his agreement with the reported doctrine, or if he couldn't confess it, to likewise make this publicly known.

In the afternoon session once more it was brought up, that although the given explanation certainly did not in detail enlarge upon each individual point connected to the doctrine of predestination, yet in it one had an explanation of the points especially significant at the present time regarding this doctrine. In view of this, each of those present could take a position on this explanation. After it was stressed yet again, that through this vote the synod did not intend to force out those who were not yet clear enough on this doctrine, as long as they did not combat the correct teaching. Finally, on the question of whether a confession to the above explanation should also count as a confession to all that the honorable Missouri Synod had written about this subject, it was explained, that we represent nothing other than what we ourselves have confessed here. On the inquiry which was about to happen the explanation was given that the reported explanation of the doctrine of predestination indeed rejected the teaching that God elected in view of faith. In accordance with the prepared resolution the Wisconsin Synod first took a standing vote on the question of whether the explanation of the doctrine which had been given should be considered as the position of the Synod of Wisconsin on the doctrine of predestination. The outcome was that only two pastors, namely Pastor Klindworth and Pastor Althoff, Teacher Gruber and the delegate of Pastor Klindworth's congregation, could not join in this explanation. Pastor Kleinlein had stated before the vote that he was not yet ready to take a position and so abstained.

After the Wisconsin Synod vote, the members of the Minnesota Synod voted on whether their synod should also state its position on the doctrine of predestination. With twenty-four in favor and twelve against, the chief question was brought to a vote. Thirty-three Synod members rose in favor of the aforementioned explanation of doctrine and two, Pastors Siegrist and Vollman, voted against it.

The following report on the Synod convention of 1882 was printed in the July 1, 1882, edition of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, Volume 17, Number 21. What follows is this writer's translation of the article entitled "Unsere Synodalversammlung."

## **Our Synodical Convention**

By A. Gräbner

"Can two walk together if they are not one with one another?" These words of the prophet Amos were the text which served as the basis for the honorable Vice President Adelberg's opening sermon. He delivered it on the eighth of June in the church at La Cross before the first joint convention of the Wisconsin and Minnesota synods. Seven days later, when the last joint session of this year's convention was closed with prayer and its members left, they could take home in thankful hearts the knowledge that through the wonderful grace of God the two synods walk hand in hand with one another, as is pleasing to God—for they are one with one another.

Immediately after the opening service the two synods had an organizational meeting. It was resolved to jointly convene for the morning session and to hear the doctrinal essay at that time. For these common sessions the following were elected to their offices: Rev. Bading, President; Rev. Tirmenstein, Vice President; Rev. Jaekel, Secretary; Rev. Hoyer, Assistant Secretary. Theses on conversion formed the subject of the doctrinal essay. The treatment of this doctrine was extremely important and timely, especially because there are many today who maintain that they are the defenders of Lutheran doctrine, and that we synods of the Synodical Conference have fallen away from the doctrine of our Church and have endeavored to bring false and dangerous things into acceptance in reference to this doctrine. These are the same people who in the doctrine of eternal election of the children of God wander down the wrong path, walking by the false light of human reason. As for the true Lutherans who bow in the obedience of simple faith before the Word of God—these they accuse of secession to Calvinist false doctrine.

By looking at the following excerpt from the minutes of the doctrinal essay, one can see that our synods didn't want to fall into either the Calvinistic false doctrine on the one hand, or into reason's discovery of an election in view of faith in the other. The excerpt comes from the minutes of the discussion of the second thesis:

Out of his unending mercy for lost mankind, God from eternity resolved to redeem all the world through Christ. We thus reject as a damnable doctrine the teaching of the Calvinists: 1. that God sent his dear Son only for the elect. 2. that God decreed this election without any regard for Christ and his merit. Only the pleasure of his and Christ's will, and Christ's sacrifice, which was offered for all, have determined God with the special decree of election.

The Bible teaches further, that God has mercy on all, that Christ has come for all, and that he wants all men to be helped. We designate as a damnable doctrine that teaching which says that Christ only shed his blood for the elect.

In the same way Scripture teaches that for Christ's sake and according to the pleasure of his will, God from eternity has elected certain men to salvation. In these men their election serves as the cause from which God works their calling, conversion, and everything else that is necessary for their salvation—so then they certainly are saved; and because Scripture says it, therefore we believe it.

One may ask: Can you make sense of that for yourself? — What then? — God wants to save all, but again: Has he elected only a few who alone are saved? — No, I can't make sense of that for myself. However, has God revealed his truth to us that we should

make sense of it for ourselves? No, exactly the opposite, we believe it as he has revealed it to us.

Further, Scripture teaches: 1. that God has the steadfast will to call all men to salvation in Christ; 2. that this call is meant earnestly and sincerely; 3. that the means through which this call happens are always powerful and efficacious. Therefore, the doctrine of the Calvinists is a damnable one that teaches a two-fold call of God, an earnest one for the elect and one that is only a mere pretense for those who are not chosen. We know only one call that God truly intends for all. With it, he calls innumerable men who are not saved on account of the hardness of their hearts. Through the same call he also calls his elect and does nothing in addition; his call is the same for all.

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However, someone could say about this doctrine of election, "Isn't it basically a terrifying thing?" No, we answer, if we simply remain with what Scripture says about it, and do not forget that election happens in Christ. For as with all of the Gospel, this part too is only comforting. Look at Jesus Christ; then you see your election. Don't speculate about the secret counsel, rather cling to Christ and to the Gospel which speaks so comfortingly about the universal gracious will and mercy of God in Christ. Let us suppose that you have been a terrible sinner, a drunk, a fornicator. Does it now in some way say, "Stay away from Christ; you have no part in him; election in no way applies to you?" No, rather much more: Christ has died for all; his blood purifies all; fornicators and tax collectors still enter the kingdom of heaven sooner than Pharisees. In Christ, "whose blood perpetually cries: Mercy, mercy!" there is a wide gate open for all sinners. When it says: "Many are called, but few are chosen," the election of God agrees with his mercy which applies to all. Just believe that you also are chosen. — In this way one should speak regarding election, and in this way also, one should take the word of Scripture as it reads.

After it was explicitly explained that the presentation rejected an election in view of faith, the two synods in turn confessed to this presentation of the doctrine of eternal election by a standing vote. The first question raised was whether the Wisconsin Synod would accept this presentation of the doctrine as its own. A powerful impression was left when the large convention rose silently and full of holy earnestness. Then when those who did not agree with the presented doctrine were requested to stand up, two pastors and a teacher rose. In addition, the delegate from the congregation of one of the two pastors rose. A third pastor had previously explained that he wasn't yet fully clear on the doctrine and therefore he abstained from the voting.

The moving event was repeated when the acting president of the Minnesota Synod placed the questions before his synod. Here as well two pastors stood up as those who did not agree with the presented doctrine. Already during the synodical convention, all four pastors (Klindworth, Althof, Vollmar and Siegrist) explained their separation from the union of their synods.

We do not need to prove that such an open and candid stance for the truth was imperative on the part of our synod in view of current circumstances. If we should and would walk further with one another as brothers, then we must clarify for ourselves the following questions: Are we actually still one with one another in faith and in doctrine? Are we all actually firmly grounded on the old teachings of the Word of God and are we remaining true to the old good confession of our fathers? We have asked those questions, and we rejoice that it has happened...

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