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**Charles Porterfield Krauth:  
The American Chemnitz**

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*C. P. Krauth*

## Introduction

C. F. W. Walther, the great nineteenth-century German-American churchman, has sometimes been dubbed by his admirers “the American Luther.”<sup>1</sup> While all comparisons of this nature have their limitations, there is a lot of truth in this appellation. Walther’s temperament, his leadership qualities, and especially his theological convictions would lend legitimacy to such a description.

Similarly, we would like to suggest that Charles Porterfield Krauth, in light of the unique gifts and abilities with which he was endowed, and in light of the thoroughness and balance of his mature theological work, can fittingly be styled “the American Chemnitz.” Krauth was in fact an avid student of the writings of the Second Martin, and he absorbed much from him in both form and substance. It is also quite apparent that the mature Krauth always attempted to follow a noticeably Chemnitzian, “Concordistic” approach in the fulfillment of his calling as a teacher of the church in nineteenth-century America. We will return to these thoughts in a little while. Before that, though, we should spend some time in examining Krauth’s familial and ecclesiastical origins, and the historical context of his development as a confessor of God’s timeless truth.

## Krauth’s Origins

In the words of Walther, Krauth was, without a doubt,

the most eminent man in the English Lutheran Church of this country, a man of rare learning, at home no less in the old than in modern theology, and, what is of greatest import, whole-heartedly devoted to the pure doctrine of our Church, as he had learned to understand it, a noble man and without guile.<sup>2</sup>

But Krauth’s pathway to this kind of informed Confessionalism was not an easy one. He passed through many trials of conscience as he grew, throughout his life, into an ever deeper appreciation of the pure doctrine of the Gospel as confessed in the orthodox Lutheran Church, and into an ever fuller understanding of how this doctrine works itself out in the life and practice of the church.

Charles Porterfield Krauth was born in a Lutheran parsonage in Martinsburg, Virginia (now West Virginia), on March 17, 1823. Because of the largely Puritanical mindset of “General Synod” Lutheranism at that period in history, we doubt that anyone noticed at the time that this was St. Patrick’s Day. In any case, he was not named after the “Apostle to Ireland,” but after his two grandfathers, Charles James Krauth and (Robert) Porterfield Augustus Heiskell. His father, Charles Philip Krauth, who later served as the president of Pennsylvania College in Gettysburg, and as a professor in the General Synod’s theological seminary in the same town, was a Lutheran pastor. Krauth’s more remote ancestors, however, were a mixed bag of Lutherans, Reformed, and Anglicans. His was a very “American” family. His forebears had emigrated from Germany to Pennsylvania and Virginia in the eighteenth century, and from England to Virginia in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> Note especially the title of the book *C.F.W. Walther: The American Luther*, a collection of essays published in Mankato, Minnesota, by Walther Press in 1987.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *Lehre und Wehre* XXIX:1 (January 1883), p. 32; quoted in F. Bente, *American Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), Vol. II, p. 182.

The “East Coast” tradition of American Lutheranism into which Krauth was born left much to be desired in the early nineteenth century. The Lutheran pastors who had served in the eastern seaboard colonies during the time when Lutheranism was first being planted in the New World, such as Wilhelm Christoph Berkenmeyer and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, did embrace and promote a distinctively Lutheran theological identity. They unreservedly pledged themselves to the Lutheran Confessions, and for the most part they conducted their ministries accordingly. But the situation among the Lutherans in America began to change not long after the American Revolution. Krauth himself summarizes this sad history, down to the time of the organization of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (as an association or federation of state and regional synods) in 1820:

After our fathers fell asleep our Church in America began to exhibit evidences of decline in faith and life. The struggle for our independence left the land under that demoralization which follows war, however just it may be. Deism had run riot in England, and Atheism in France, and from those powerful nationalities had spread their influence through Europe and America. Rationalism in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Romish Churches, had been growing stronger in times so well fitted for its growth. Socinianism, which had triumphed in the Calvinistic Churches of the Continent, and of England, ...appeared in New England, the American Geneva, and from it went forth with a might which seemed to threaten the very existence of the Gospel faith in all the churches. Universalism arose and spread. The doctrines of the French revolution were widely diffused. The religious life characteristic of the period, in some sense, aided the evil. Unionism, Pietism, Moravianism, and Methodism were alike in the indeterminate character of their doctrinal basis. The defenders of revelation showed a difference of opinion, rather than of spirit, from its assailants; the maintainers, in some degree, of the old faith, often made good their cause by abandoning a large part, and half betraying what they pretended to advocate. It was the saddest era in the history of the Church since the Reformation – the era of spurious “illumination.” The light itself had become darkness, and the darkness was great indeed. Our Church in America shared in this terrible defection. Socinianism worked furtively, and at length openly, in parts of it. Precious doctrines were diluted, ignored, or abandoned. The Confessions were set aside virtually, even where the antecedents of the past made it impossible to abandon them openly. The history of our Church, the tradition of her faith and life, was still strong enough to make caution necessary; and the evil worked rather by the withholding of the truth, than by the formal annunciation of error. The Church was drugged with narcotics, not with irritants, or, indeed, was starved to death, rather than poisoned. We had a weak, indecisive pulpit, feeble catechisms, vague hymns, [and] constitutions which reduced the minister to the position of a hireling talker, and made Synods disorganizations for the purpose of preventing anything from being done. Our sun had gone down, and the only relief from absolute night was the diffused light which still lingered from a happier time. The General Synod was organized in the period when the fearful thrall of rationalism was most complete over portions of our Church, and was felt in some degree in almost every part of it, and by no means least in parts of our own land. ... In the United States there were nominally Lutheran Synods which were largely Unitarian... In the deadness of our whole land, in the rationalism of Europe which was imported, and in the Socinianism of New England, which was of native growth, had originated the fearful change which came over our Church, and to these influences we owe nearly every trouble under which our Church afterward labored. The General Synod then embraced elements which were relatively, at least, distinctively Lutheran, and others distinctively Latitudinarian, and a third class distinctively nothing...<sup>3</sup>

Krauth also minces no words in criticizing what he considers to have been the worse element in the General Synod, which contributed significantly to its failure actually to become the Lutheran body that it claimed to be. This element was comprised of the “moral weaklings, who deem

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<sup>3</sup> C. P. Krauth, “The General Council Before Its First Anniversary,” *The Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (October 1907), pp. 660-62. Here and elsewhere in this paper we have included some relatively lengthy quotations from the writings of Krauth that preserve the context of his more memorable remarks. The essayist is of the opinion that his hearers and readers are (or should be) more interested in what Krauth had to say for himself, than in any summaries of Krauth’s ideas that we might formulate.

themselves miracles of gentleness, prudence, and moderation, snaky doves, or dove-like serpents, refusing to be reduced to a class.” They are “amiable inanities,” who “play at neutrality and conservatism.”<sup>4</sup> Krauth continues:

They think that there are no real differences in the world, and that...there is nothing which could not have been healed by a cataplasm of soft words and soft soap, or an ointment of love and lard. ... They now go with the one side, now with the other, and now with neither, but take a path exactly midway between them... The indistinct classes are alike in this, that as their position is ambiguous, they become make-weights on this or that side, as circumstances may determine. Their general affinities and mysterious fate ordinarily, however, bring them out in the end with the wrong. Finding that instead of winning the confidence of extremes, they lose the little of it they may have had, they grow weary of being wandering stars, and tumble at last into the bosom of the largest orb that attracts them.<sup>5</sup>

This was the ecclesiastical mess in which Krauth was raised. This was the conviction-starved religious environment, bearing the appellation “American Lutheranism” or the “American Lutheran Church,”<sup>6</sup> in which he received his formal theological education at the Gettysburg seminary, and in which he began his ministry in 1841. In many ways, ironically, it is not dissimilar to the circumstances that obtain in many parts of the church of our day.<sup>7</sup>

### **Krauth’s Development and Maturation**

But something stirred within this man – something that would not allow him to be at peace with this situation. Krauth’s own father had never completely forgotten the theology of the Lutheran Reformation, and he encouraged his son at the very least to become familiar with the dogmatic history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lutheranism. More than the elder Krauth could have ever imagined, however, when Krauth the younger began to study this theology, it completely captivated and permeated him. Krauth’s long-time friend J. B. Bittinger observed in later years that as a result of this study

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<sup>4</sup> Krauth, “The General Council Before Its First Anniversary,” p. 662.

<sup>5</sup> Krauth, “The General Council Before Its First Anniversary,” pp. 662-63.

<sup>6</sup> In a key example of his life-long intolerance for inane sloganeering, Krauth writes that “The ‘American Lutheran Church’ lacks three elements to justify its name. 1. It is not *American* – this is its first lack. Its fundamental principles were asserted by ancient errorists, renewed in part by Zwingle, in other parts by the Anabaptist fanatics, and carried out by the Socinians and Rationalists. These principles are simply an adoption and adaptation of European error, and are not American. 2. This so-called Church is *not Lutheran* – this is its second lack. Its whole distinctive life turns upon the denial of the Lutheran faith. 3. It is not a *Church* – this is its third lack. It has no separate organization, no creed, and no history. Not American, not Lutheran, and not a Church, where and what is the ‘American Lutheran Church?’” Quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> In an incisive ecclesio-historical analysis, equally applicable to the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, Krauth explains that “When error is admitted into the Church, it will be found that the stages of its progress are always three. It begins by asking *toleration*. Its friends say to the majority: You need not be afraid of us; we are few, and weak; only let us alone; we shall not disturb the faith of the others. The Church has her standards of doctrine; of course we shall never interfere with them; we only ask for ourselves to be spared interference with our private opinions. Indulged in this for a time, error goes on to assert *equal rights*. Truth and error are two balancing forces. The Church shall do nothing which looks like deciding between them; that would be partiality. It is bigotry to assert any superior right for the truth. We are to agree to differ, and any favoring of the truth, because it is truth, is partisanship. What the friends of truth and error hold in common is fundamental. Anything on which they differ is *ipso facto* non-essential. Anybody who makes account of such a thing is a disturber of the peace of the church. Truth and error are two co-ordinate powers, and the great secret of church-statesmanship is to preserve the balance between them. From this point error soon goes on to its natural end, which is to assert *supremacy*. Truth started with *tolerating*; it comes to be merely tolerated, and then only for a time. Error claims a preference for its judgments on all disputed points. It puts men into positions, not as at first in spite of their departure from the Church’s faith, but in consequence of it. Their recommendation is that they repudiate the faith, and position is given them to teach others to repudiate it, and to make them skilful in combatting it.” *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871), pp. 195-196. Emphases in original.

Dr. Krauth underwent a complete transformation. The poet and preacher turned into the theologian and controversial writer. I once questioned his venerable father about the great change. His reply was that, so far as he knew, the turning point was his presentation to “Charles” – as he always affectionately called him – of a copy of Chemnitz. Of so great significance is a book which has in it the soul and seeds of things.<sup>8</sup>

In the mid to late 1840s Krauth prepared a catalogue of the books that he had already amassed in his personal library. It listed the following works by Martin Chemnitz: *Loci Theologici*, *Examen Concilii Tridenti* (regarding which he had noted, “from father”), *Oratio de lectura Patrum*, *Fundamenta Doctrinae de Coena Sacra*, and *De Duabus Naturis*.<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Fritschel also contributes this reminiscence regarding Krauth and his theological development:

We once asked him in what manner God had led him to that knowledge and appreciation of the truth, as confessed in the Lutheran Church, which he possessed in such admirable thoroughness, clearness, and firmness. We thought that the Lord perhaps used as an instrument one of the few remaining witnesses of a former better time, or one of the confessors of His truth that were raised in recent times; and we would have liked to know the Ananias through whom this chosen vessel had been rescued from American Lutheranism, and restored to the pure and simple faith of the Church. But to our great astonishment we were informed that he had reached his decided Lutheran views without such personal acquaintance and direct influence of earlier or modern Lutheran theologians, simply through the study of the Lutheran Confessions themselves. When he turned away from the illusions of American Lutheranism in total disappointment and dissatisfaction, he found in the Confession the very thing that he had longed for, as an old treasure, shining in ever clearer and more perfect luster.<sup>10</sup>

According to William Alfred Passavant, Krauth’s long-time friend and colleague, Krauth

was truly a prince in Israel. The son of a noble sire, he grew up in the sanctity of a Christian home and in the atmosphere and surroundings of Christian nurture and sanctified learning. His personal experience, history and studies led him through the various schisms, sects, tendencies and systems of religion and philosophy in vogue for the last half century; and, in the wonderful providence of God, ...he came to the conviction that the true solution of the troubles of Protestantism was in the loving reception of the Divine Word as confessed by the Lutheran Church. What this position cost, to a nature, generous, sensitive and catholic, it is not possible to express. It caused him nights of waking and days of suffering. In the midst of all the goings forth of life and love, it for a time left him well-nigh alone. His name was cast out as evil. He lost the regard of former associates and brethren. He was looked upon as one who dreamed. Men counted his life a failure and his learning foolishness. But none of these things moved him. He took no steps backward. He went to the Holy Scriptures with new love for the divine communications. How he grew strong and great, thus alone with God, and powerful before men in the defence of the divine Word, the whole Church knows; for the influence of his studies and his writings has infused into it a new and diviner life.<sup>11</sup>

Krauth was the leader of an ever-growing and ever-maturing Confessional movement in the General Synod during the 1850s and early 1860s. Contacts were established with pastors in Confessional Lutheran synods that had never been a part of the General Synod, such as the Tennessee and Missouri Synods, especially through the Free Conferences that were held at the instigation of C. F. W. Walther between 1856 and 1859. In 1861 Krauth became the editor of the *Lutheran and Missionary*, a periodical that advocated a return to sound doctrine and practice in the

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<sup>8</sup> J. B. Bittinger, quoted in C. A. Frank, “Dr. Charles P. Krauth” (Editorial), *The Lutheran Witness*, Vol. 1, No. 17 (January 21, 1883), p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. I (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Fritschel, “In Memorium,” *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1883, p. 30; quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. I, pp. 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> William Alfred Passavant, *Workman*, 1883; quoted in G. H. Gerberding, *The Life and Letters of W. A. Passavant* (sixth edition) (Greenville, Pa.: The Young Lutheran Co., 1906), p. 524.

General Synod. The Pennsylvania Ministerium, which belonged to the General Synod but which was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the weak theological position of that body and of its seminary, established its own seminary in Philadelphia in 1864. We are not surprised that Krauth was elected to be one of its first professors.

This was also the period of time when Krauth once and for all shook the remaining dust of “American Lutheranism” from his feet, in his definitive retraction of any and all former ambiguities regarding the Confessional principle of the Lutheran Church. Samuel Simon Schmucker was Krauth Sr.’s more liberal colleague on the faculty of the Gettysburg seminary, and Krauth Jr.’s former professor there. He and the other theological leaders of the General Synod had always asserted that the outward unity of the church required agreement only in the so-called “fundamental” articles of the Christian faith, by which they meant those beliefs on which all Protestants supposedly agree. They were willing to admit that they did not, “after the additional experience and light of more than three centuries, feel any reluctance in departing from some of the minor doctrines of the Augsburg Confession.”<sup>12</sup> These “minor” doctrines, of course, included some that the sixteenth-century Reformers would certainly not have considered minor, such as baptismal regeneration and the Real Presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. With this as the backdrop, on July 13, 1865 (three months after Lee’s surrender to Grant), Krauth published the following declaration:

As for ourselves, we wish no one who feels any interest in our opinions, to doubt where we stand. ... We do not feel ashamed to confess that time and experience have modified our earlier views, or led us to abandon them, if we have so modified or so forsaken them. ... In Church and State the last years have wrought changes, deep and thorough, in every thinking man, and on no point more than this, that compromise of principle, however specious, is immoral, and that however guarded it may be, it is perilous; and that there is no guarantee of peace in words where men do not agree in things. So far, then, as under influences, for which we were not responsible, we once believed that there can be true unity in the Church, which does not rest on the acceptance of the doctrines of the Gospel, in one and the same sense, so far we acknowledge that time and the movement of God’s providence have led us to truer and juster views. *To true unity of the Church is necessary an agreement in fundamentals, and a vital part of the necessity is an agreement as to what are fundamentals. The doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession are all articles of faith, and all articles of faith are fundamental. Our Church can never have genuine internal harmony, except in the confession, without reservation or ambiguity of these articles, one and all.* This is our deep conviction, and we herewith retract, before God and His Church, formally, as we have already earnestly and repeatedly done indirectly, everything we have written or said in conflict with this our present conviction. This we are not ashamed to do. We thank God, who has led us to see the truth, and we thank Him for freeing us from the temptation of embarrassing ourselves with the pretense of a present absolute consistency with our earlier, very sincere, yet relatively very immature views.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in 1866, a separation occurred in the General Synod, and the synods that had come to embrace a more Confessional doctrinal position – led by the Pennsylvania Ministerium – withdrew from that body. In 1867 Herman Amberg Preus of the Norwegian Synod noted these developments with sympathetic interest:

The oldest Lutheran synod in America, over 120 years old, is the Pennsylvania Synod. Its congregations are partly German and partly English. Until last autumn it belonged to the large so-called “Lutheran General

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<sup>12</sup> S. S. Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church* (Springfield, Ohio: D. Harbaugh, 1851), p. 203. For a general introduction to the phenomenon of “American Lutheranism,” and to the nineteenth-century Confessional reaction to it, see David Jay Webber, “Confessing the Faith in the Language of America,” *Logia*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (Holy Trinity/July 1995), pp. 39-48.

<sup>13</sup> Krauth, quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, pp. 114-15. Emphasis in original.

Synod in America.” This General Synod is comprised of more than half a score of synods, among which there are still to be found some who have never explicitly acknowledged the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church. The General Synod itself only acknowledges the Lutheran confessions with reservations. In recent years, however, a more decidedly Lutheran tendency has begun to make itself felt. This tendency finds its best champions in the bosom of the old Pennsylvania Synod and for the last four or five years has had its own organ, *Lutheran & Missionary*, edited by the gifted Professor Krauth in Philadelphia, as well as its own seminary in the same place.<sup>14</sup>

When the Pennsylvania Ministerium called for a meeting of representatives of all genuinely Confessional Lutheran synods in America, to discuss the possibility of organizing a new general body, representatives of the Norwegian and Missouri Synods were among those who attended. At this meeting, which was held in Reading, Pennsylvania, in December of 1866, a statement on “The Principles of Faith and Church Polity of the General Council of the Lutheran Church in North America,” authored by Krauth, was adopted. This statement unambiguously endorsed the principle of a *quia* subscription to the Confessions, and the principle that the true unity of the church is to be found in a Biblically-based unity in doctrine.<sup>15</sup> It was also resolved by a majority of those present that a new general organization should be established on the basis of these Principles in the nearest future. Preus recounts that

Representatives from the Missouri Synod and our synod, however, declared themselves against these resolutions. While they also desired such a bond of unity among the orthodox Lutherans in America, it was their opinion that it could only be established among those who actually stood on the ground of one faith and who were from the heart united in the doctrine of the Lutheran church. They were convinced that this was not the case with several of the synods represented in the convention in spite of their assent to the Fundamental Principles of Faith.<sup>16</sup>

The Missourians and the Norwegians suggested that some more free conferences be held before the organization of a new body, to discuss the outstanding doctrinal issues and to work toward the establishment of complete doctrinal agreement within and among the various synods.<sup>17</sup> But the majority was not persuaded, and the General Council was organized in the following year, without the Norwegian or Missouri Synods as members. The membership of the new body did, however, include the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods – the predecessor bodies of the modern-day Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Krauth certainly would have agreed that there were still some issues that needed to be sorted out within and among the synods that he wanted to see become a part of the new body. But instead of delaying the formation of the Council, as the Norwegians and Missourians had recommended, he thought that a more patient and “educational” approach within the parameters of a recognized ecclesial communion would be more appropriate, given the circumstances that

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<sup>14</sup> Herman Amberg Preus, *Vivacious Daughter* (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990), pp. 113-14.

<sup>15</sup> The text of this statement can be found in the companion volume (Vol. II) of *The Book of Concord*, edited by Henry Eyster Jacobs (reprint: Decatur, Illinois: The Johann Gerhard Institute, 1996), pp. 338-42.

<sup>16</sup> Preus, p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> The Missourians especially had reason to believe that such meetings could indeed bear the desired fruit, if they were entered into with the proper seriousness. Just days before, representatives of the Missouri Synod had held a successful fourteen-day colloquy with representatives of the Buffalo Synod, which resulted in the establishment of fellowship between Missouri and a majority of Buffalo’s pastors on the basis of full doctrinal unity, even though there had previously been very significant differences between the two synods in their teaching on church and ministry. See Preus, pp. 188-91.

existed among Lutherans in nineteenth-century America. Just before the Reading meeting, on December 6, 1866, Krauth wrote:

The Lutheran Communion on this Western Continent has one of the grandest problems which have ever been given to the Church to solve. She is numerically one of the largest of the churches; she has varied nationalities to combine into one well disciplined host of her Lord. Her sons hold the Word of God, and teach its precious truths in more tongues than any of the other churches in the land, perhaps in more than all the others together. Her people have been trained under different governments and diverse forms of church polity, and thousands of them have endured wrongs of State usurpation and the mischief of rationalistic or pseudo-unionistic teachings. To bring this mighty mass into a harmonious whole will not be the work of a day; but it is a work so glorious, so happy, so divine, that it may fill the measure of the fullest ambition which a holy heart can cherish, to do something, even a very little something, toward its consummation.<sup>18</sup>

The “fullest ambition which a holy heart can cherish,” which Krauth describes here, was indeed his personal and vocational ambition, and the defining mission of his life, for as long as he lived. Krauth was certainly aware of the kind of problems that the stricter Lutherans were noticing, but he considered these problems to be evidences of weakness among sincere brethren who were on the right pathway and who were simply in need of more instruction, and not evidences of persistence in error. We must remember, too, that Krauth was already in fellowship with these men and with the synods to which they belonged. They had all come out of the General Synod together for sound Confessional reasons. So, his perspective was different from that of theologians and church leaders whose synods had always remained aloof from the General Synod, and who were now considering the prospect of recognizing, for the first time, a new fellowship relationship with these bodies.

### **Krauth the Churchman and Teacher**

A significant milestone in the fulfillment of the churchly “ambition” to which Krauth had referred was the publication, in 1871, of his *magnum opus*, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*.<sup>19</sup> Several of its chapters were comprised of material that had been previously published in various periodicals, and that had been revised and reworked for inclusion in the book. *The Conservative Reformation* is basically an *Apologia* for Lutheran Confessionalism, especially as this Confessionalism was at that time re-emerging in the nineteenth-century context and was asserting itself ecclesiastically in the principles of the General Council. Theodore Emmanuel Schmauk, who had been one of Krauth’s first students at Philadelphia, describes this great literary monument of his former professor as a “mighty protagonist of confessional English Lutheranism, lifting up its stature and spear, head and shoulders above all the host of Israel, establishing the Church in her old faith, and defending her against all assault.”<sup>20</sup> In the book’s Preface Krauth very frankly admits that

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<sup>18</sup> Krauth, quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1909), pp. 173-74.

<sup>19</sup> This book is now out of print, but it is available in its entirety on the Internet:

<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=AJK2557>

The present essayist also maintains a web site on which quite a bit of material from Krauth’s writings can be found:

<http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/lutherantheology.html>

<sup>20</sup> Theodore E. Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. xviii.



The positions taken in this book are largely counter, in some respects, to the prevailing theology of our time and our land. No man can be more fixed in his prejudice against the views here defended than the author himself once was; no man can be more decided in his opinion that those views are false than the author is now decided in his faith that they are the truth. They have been formed in the face of all the influences of education and of bitter hatred or of contemptuous disregard on the part of nearly all who were most intimately associated with him in the period of struggle. Formed under such circumstances, under what he believes to have been the influence of the Divine Word, the author is persuaded that they rest upon grounds which cannot easily be moved.<sup>21</sup>

Also in the Preface, Krauth lays out the full implications of what he is prepared to say about the catholicity and apostolicity of the Confession of his church, with assertions that were no doubt just as shocking in 1871 as they are today, in our age of pseudo-ecumenical post-modern skepticism:

No particular Church has, on its own showing, a right to existence, except as it believes itself to be the most perfect form of Christianity, the form which of right should and will be universal. No Church has a right to a part which does not claim that to it should belong the whole. That communion confesses itself a sect which aims at no more than abiding as one of a number of equally legitimated bodies. That communion which does not believe in the certainty of the ultimate acceptance of its principles in the whole world has not the heart of a true Church.<sup>22</sup>

In the meantime, Krauth's friend C. F. W. Walther, whom he held in high esteem, was following a different pathway in contending for the faith.<sup>23</sup> He and his synod (Missouri) had not been able to see their way clear to affiliate with the General Council, and in 1872 they participated in the organization of an alternative general body, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference. But Krauth never considered Walther and the Missourians to be his enemies. As Carl Adolf Frank notes,

He was a great friend of the work which Missouri and its allies were doing and, though he sometimes thought the strictures which Missouri and its Friends were applying to General Council ways to be too severe, he would not write a word against them lest he might disturb or retard the good things they were ac-

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<sup>21</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, p. xiii. As an example of the kind of changes that occurred in Krauth, we will first note this statement from an 1845 letter to his father: "I shall never be able to believe in the *substantial* presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the elements." Quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. I, p. 135. Emphasis in original. Compare this to the following statement from *The Conservative Reformation* regarding the Confessional Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper: "Men have talked and written as if the doctrine of our Church, on this point, were a stupid blunder, forced upon it by the self-will and obstinacy of one man. The truth is, that this doctrine, clearly revealed in the New Testament, clearly confessed by the early Church, lies at the very heart of the Evangelical system – Christ is the centre of the system, and in the Supper is the centre of Christ's revelation of Himself. The glory and mystery of the incarnation combine there as they combine nowhere else. Communion with Christ is that by which we live, and the Supper is "the Communion." Had Luther abandoned this vital doctrine, the Evangelical Protestant Church would have abandoned him. He did not make this doctrine – next in its immeasurable importance to that of justification by faith, with which it indissolubly coheres – the doctrine made him. The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is the most vital and practical in the whole range of the profoundest Christian life – the doctrine which, beyond all others, conditions and vitalizes that life, for in it the character of faith is determined, invigorated, and purified as it is nowhere else. It is not only a fundamental doctrine, but is among the most fundamental of fundamentals." p. 655. Emphasis in original.

<sup>22</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, pp. xiv-vi.

<sup>23</sup> Adolph Hoenecke writes that, in the nineteenth century, "Like unto Walther Charles P. Krauth also entered the lists for a theology solely based on the Scriptures and in accord with the Confessions of the Lutheran Church." *Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 189; quoted in Paul Peters' review of a reprint edition of *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Oct 1963), p. 316. Kurt E. Marquart laments: "With the benefit of a century's worth of hindsight, it seems indeed a great pity that those two Lutheran stalwarts, C. F. W. Walther and Charles Porterfield Krauth, the great theological leader of the General Council, were unable to join forces." *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 39.

completing in the Church. Owing to the origin and former connections of the churches of the Council, and the poor means which especially the American ministers had to acquaint themselves with the treasures of Lutheran theology in former days, he thought it would take a long time and a great deal of instruction before the Council-churches and pastors would be able to reach that point of thoroughness and confessionality which our German churches had attained to.<sup>24</sup>

Sometimes, however, Krauth did vent his frustrations regarding the criticisms of certain Missourians over against the General Council. In a letter to (Hans Heinrich Philipp) Justus Ruperti in 1876, in which he was responding to Ruperti's own observations of the laxity of some General Council men in their fellowship practices, Krauth expressed the thought that

One of the most serious obstacles in the way of the advance of the truth, is the harshness of the men of the Synodical Conference, towards those who have not been able to see entirely with them. If we don't speak in their way, they abuse us without stint: if we do speak in their way, they say, we are dissemblers, and don't mean what we say. While you are doing good by standing up in the General Council for the truth, do good for the General Council by helping the Missouri Synod to look with justice and kindness upon it, for they cruelly misunderstand its real spirit.<sup>25</sup>

And yet, later in the same year, Krauth wrote a letter to Christian Spielmann of the Ohio Synod (a Synodical Conference member-church), concerning the General Council's ongoing discussions on altar and pulpit fellowship, in which he said the following:

I have been saddened beyond expression by the bitterness displayed towards the Missourians. So far as they have helped us to see the great principles involved in this discussion, they have been our benefactors, and although I know they have misunderstood some of us, that was perhaps inevitable. They are men of God, and their work has been of inestimable value.<sup>26</sup>

Almost immediately after the founding of the General Council, the differences that the Norwegians and Missourians had perceived within and between the various constituent synods did in fact flare up into intense discussions. The focus of these debates was distilled down to "Four Points": millennialism or chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and secret societies or lodgery. Despite its strictly Lutheran Confessional basis, as articulated in its "Principles of Faith and Church Polity," the General Council "never issued a declaration satisfactory to strict Lutherans regarding the Four Points."<sup>27</sup> For this reason the Wisconsin Synod withdrew in 1869, and the Minnesota and Illinois Synods in 1871. All three bodies then participated in the organization of the new Synodical Conference in 1872.<sup>28</sup>

Among the synods that stayed, however, the debate on the Four Points continued. Just as Krauth had led the way in the Confessional movement in the old General Synod, resulting ultimately in the organization of the General Council, so too he now led the way in attempting to guide the General Council toward a truer and more consistent Lutheran viewpoint and practice in regard to these matters. And all the while his own understanding of the proper Lutheran approach

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<sup>24</sup> Frank, "Dr. Charles P. Krauth" (Editorial), p. 132.

<sup>25</sup> Krauth's letter continues: "If the General Council be broken down, it would be an immeasurable calamity to our Church. The Synodical Conference might pick up some of the fragments, but the larger part of it would be too disheartened to attempt a new organization, and would certainly not unite with any of the existing ones." Quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, pp. 218-19.

<sup>26</sup> Krauth, quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 236.

<sup>27</sup> "General Council," *Lutheran Cyclopaedia* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), p. 325.

<sup>28</sup> The Illinois Synod merged into the Missouri Synod in 1880.

was becoming ever clearer, and his own commitment to it was becoming ever stronger. In particular, the subject of altar and pulpit fellowship was continually brought up and discussed at successive General Council meetings. A crucial apex, of sorts, was reached at the 1875 convention in Galesburg, Illinois, with the adoption of the final form of the “Galesburg Rule”:

The rule, which accords with the Word of God and with the confessions of our Church, is: “Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers only – Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only.”<sup>29</sup>

At the direction of the Council Krauth then prepared his comprehensive “Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship,” 105 in number, which were presented to the 1877 convention and discussed there and in successive meetings.<sup>30</sup> Those members of the General Council who were more lax in their practice did not like them, but they made a very positive impression on those who, like Krauth, wanted to be consistently Lutheran. Stephan Klingmann, the president of the Michigan Synod (a member-church of the General Council), offered this glowing report on the Theses soon after they were presented: “They are so lucid and so persuasive; they are gleaned from the Word of God and the Confessional Writings of our Church, so that everyone who will not willfully close his mind against their biblical basis must be convinced by them.”<sup>31</sup>

Adolph Spaeth, Krauth’s son-in-law, opines that Krauth eventually became

the most powerful and consistent champion of “Close Communion” the Lutheran Church has ever had in this country or in Europe. It brought down upon him the censure, condemnation and estrangement of brethren whom he loved and esteemed, and who considered his attitude as uncharitable, intolerant and quite inconsistent with positions he had formerly held and defended. But he held that there is no peril greater to a man’s love of truth than a false pride of mechanical consistency. His seeming inconsistencies were the long growth of ripening consistency.<sup>32</sup>

As his own study and reflection in the area of pulpit and altar fellowship continued, Krauth remarked, a year after the adoption of the Galesburg Rule, that

Our aim is to see whether, in the light which we now have, we can come to the full comprehension of our own language: for often nothing is harder than to comprehend the full force of our own words. We have often found a principle to the acceptance of which we had been brought in the providence of God, unfold and

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<sup>29</sup> “Galesburg Rule,” *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, p. 321.

<sup>30</sup> Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 222. The text of the Theses can be found in *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (July 1907), pp. 515-27; No. 4 (October 1907), pp. 740-48; Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (January 1907), pp. 129-37; No. 2 (April 1908), pp. 321-30.

<sup>31</sup> Stephan Klingmann, quoted in “A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Michigan and Other States” (1910); in *Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us* (Michigan District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1985), p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 197. In 1877 Krauth summarized his position on “Close Communion” as follows: “It is a principle of the New Testament universally recognized in the Church, that the reception of the Lord’s Supper in a particular congregation or particular communion, has, as one of its objects, the confession of the pure faith as against the false or mingled, the complete as against the imperfect, the sound doctrine as against the corrupt or dubious, the true Church as against the spurious or doubtful. It is the most solemn mode of marking church conjunction, and of witnessing for a particular communion as over against all communions in any way arrayed against it, or officially separate from its fellowship.” Charles P. Krauth, “Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship,” Part II, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4 (October 1907), p. 745.

again unfold itself, until we have been astonished at the result. We have admitted the acorn and it has become an oak.<sup>33</sup>

These discussions were still going on in the General Council at the time of Krauth's death, in the prime of his professional life at the age of 59, on January 2, 1883. His pen had given so much to the church, and the church had expected so much more from him, but alas, in the infinite wisdom of the Almighty it was not to be. Still, the writings that he has left for us, on the important subjects of Lutheran Confessionalism and church fellowship, and on many other themes, are still recognized to be of enduring worth by those who have breathed in the same Confessional spirit that animated him, and who have embraced – or rather been embraced by – the same unchanging Gospel that saved and comforted him. Considering the totality of his work, we can venture to say that it might have been better if some of his propositions had been formulated differently, and if some of his judgments had been made differently. But even with the hindsight of one and a quarter centuries, there is relatively little that a Confessional Lutheran of today would want to criticize in Krauth, and there is very much that a Confessional Lutheran of today would want to learn from him. As Spaeth observed in 1909,

Not what we, who knew him face to face, may say of him, will be of permanent value to the Church, but what Dr. Krauth himself thought and spoke on the great questions that agitated the Church in his days, and will continue to agitate her for some time to come. ... Dr. Krauth, in many respects, was ahead of his time. With all the admiration and affection he gained among his contemporaries, there were comparatively few English Lutherans ready to follow him consistently to the end, through all his arguments and conclusions. His day is yet to come, if we are to have a harmonious Lutheranism that truly represents, in doctrine and life, the Mother-Church of the Reformation in the English world-language. ...we are fully convinced that the truly Catholic Protestantism of the Conservative Reformation, that is Lutheranism, has its greatest mission yet to fulfill in this Western world, and if it is to abide and to do the work assigned to it in the providence of God, it must be on the lines and principles mapped out and maintained by its greatest English-speaking teacher and representative, Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth.<sup>34</sup>

The General Council as a whole never reached the level of consistency in Lutheran practice toward which Krauth was trying to lead it, and it did not take very long, after Krauth's death, for the trend to start going in the opposite direction. The Michigan Synod (to which we have previously referred) withdrew from the General Council in 1887, as the Council was already beginning the sad and gradual regression in doctrine and practice that resulted finally in its 1918 reunion with the General Synod in the United Lutheran Church in America – a forerunner of today's Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Michigan's withdrawal from the General Council was not, however, a repudiation of the Krauth legacy, but it was precisely an act of solidarity with it, at a time when the rest of the Council was even then beginning to turn away noticeably from Krauth's principles.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Krauth, quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 220. In an 1876 letter to Henry Eyster Jacobs, Krauth wrote: "My own convictions have become so clear, I have found so completely the ground toward which I have been struggling, that I am full of hope for all earnest minds, however miseducated they may have been. Nothing fills a man with such faith in the truth as the possession of it does." Quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, pp. 227-28.

<sup>34</sup> Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. vi.

<sup>35</sup> Specifically, at first, this was in the area of pulpit fellowship, but a pervading spirit of laxity soon spread also to other areas. If we may be permitted to add a somewhat personal note, we believe that it is correct to say that Krauth is, in every sense, a true Father of the ecclesial fellowship to which the present writer's church body (the Evangelical Lutheran Synod) belongs. This is so not only according to the sense in which any sound and orthodox teacher of the past can be honored as a Father, but also according to the particularly "provincial" or "synodical" sense in which people like Walther and Preus are Fathers for Lutherans in the Synodical Conference tradition. The modern-day Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the largest member-church of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, came into existence through the 1892 federation of its three nineteenth-

## **Krauth the Theologian: The Confessional Principle**

We can benefit from a review of some of the writings of Krauth particularly on the two main subjects that occupied most of his attention as a Lutheran churchman: the Confessional Principle and Church Fellowship. This is not, of course, a mere academic exercise, since these issues are pressing ones in our day as well. Within the purview of this paper we can touch on only a few of his statements. We would hope that this brief exposure to Krauth would, however, whet the appetites of our listeners and readers for more of the same. In the examples that we will share here, we also hope that our listeners and readers will be able to see some of the evidence of the Chemnitzian character of Krauth's work that we have noticed and admired throughout the corpus of his writings.

In his mature theologizing, Krauth is unswerving in his commitment to those principles that form the bedrock of a Lutheran Confessional consciousness, without a hint of compromise or equivocation. At the same time, his generous and peace-loving mind does everything it can to avoid battles over words, and the unnecessary divisiveness that such battles often foment among committed Lutherans. In his calm and thorough discussions of the various articles of faith, Krauth tries always to acknowledge the legitimacy of, and to find the proper place for, each genuinely Lutheran accent and nuance that would contribute in some measure toward a complete and balanced exposition of the doctrine under examination. In some cases Krauth did almost exactly what Chemnitz did, so that in his writings we can see the same sort of terms and arguments that appear in the writings of the great sixteenth-century Concordist. In other cases Krauth did what Chemnitz no doubt would have done, employing Chemnitz's judicious methods and imitating his even-handed approach in answering new questions, in clarifying new misunderstandings, and in settling (or trying to settle) new disputes.

In discussing the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures by means of the human writers through whom they were brought forth, Krauth observes that there is a highly illustrative comparison to be made between the divine-human character of the Bible and the divine-human character of Jesus Christ:

The word of God is perfectly divine in its contents; but except where the divine form is as necessary as the divine fact, no book is more perfectly human in its form. It is inspired, for it comes from God; it is human, for it comes through man. But remember, we do not say that the human is without the divine. The Spirit is incarnate in the Word, as the Son was incarnate in Christ. There is deep significance in the fact, that the title of "the Word" is given both to Christ, the Revealer, and to the Bible, the revelation of God, so that in some passages great critics differ as to which is meant. As Christ without confusion of natures is truly human as well as divine, so is this Word. As the human in Christ, though distinct from the divine, was never separate from it, and his human acts were never those of a merely human being – his toils, his merits and his blood were those of God – so is the written word, though most human of books – as Christ, "the Son of Man," was most human of men – truly divine. Its humanities are no accidents; they are divinely planned. It is essential to God's conception of his Book, that it shall be written by these men and in this way. He cre-

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century predecessor bodies: the (old) Wisconsin Synod, the Minnesota Synod, and the Michigan Synod. (The federation became a formal amalgamation in 1917.) Of these three, the Michigan Synod had remained a member of the General Council, and in fellowship with Charles Porterfield Krauth, throughout his lifetime. The Michigan Synod heritage that resides institutionally within the WELS – and especially in its Michigan District – has therefore brought the Krauth legacy directly into the fellowship of churches of which the WELS (and ELS) is now a part. May this noble legacy, which is ours by birthright and not only by adoption, be continually rekindled and burn brightly in our midst!

ated, reared, made and chose these men, and inspired them to do this thing in their way, because their way was his way.<sup>36</sup>

On behalf of himself and his colleagues at the Philadelphia seminary, Krauth was also unequivocal in his confession of the unique and unquestionable authority of Holy Scripture in all matters of doctrine and practice:

We stand upon the everlasting foundation – the Word of God: believing that the Canonical Books of the Old and New testaments are in their original tongues, and in a pure text, the perfect and only rule of faith. All these books are in harmony, each with itself, and all with each other, and yield to the honest searcher, under the ordinary guidance of the Holy Spirit, a clear statement of doctrine, and produce a firm assurance of faith. Not any word of man, no creed, commentary, theological system, nor decision of councils, no doctrine of churches, or of the whole Church, no results or judgments of reason, however strong, matured and well informed, no one of these, and not all of these together, but God’s Word alone is the Rule of Faith. No apocryphal books, but the canonical books alone, are the Rule of Faith. No translations, as such, but the original Hebrew and Chaldee of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New, are the letter of the Rule of faith. No vitiation of the designing, nor error of the careless, but the incorrupt text as it came from the hands of the men of God, who wrote under motions of the Holy Spirit, is the rule of faith. To this rule of faith we bring our minds; by this rule we have humbly tried to form our faith, and in accordance with it, God helping us, we will teach others – teaching them the evidences of its inspiration, the true mode of its interpretation, the ground of its authority, and the mode of settling its text. We desire to teach the student of theology the Biblical languages, to make him an independent investigator of the word of the Holy Spirit, as the organ through which that Spirit reveals His mind. We consecrate ourselves, therefore, first of all, as the greatest of all, as the groundwork of all, as the end of all else, to teaching and preparing others to teach God’s pure Word, its faith for faith, its life for life; in its integrity, in its marvelous adaptation, in its divine, its justifying, its sanctifying, and glorifying power. We lay, therefore, as that without which all else would be laid in vain, the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets – Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.<sup>37</sup>

Krauth’s conviction that Holy Scripture is the only Rule of Faith does not mean, however, that he fails to see the important role that the Lutheran Confessions play in the life of the Church. He writes:

The basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the Word of God, as the perfect and absolute Rule of Faith, and because this is her basis, she rests of necessity on the faith of which that Word is the Rule, and therefore on the Confessions which purely set forth that faith. She has the right rule, she reaches the right results by that rule, and rightly confesses them. This Confession then is her immediate basis, her essential

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<sup>36</sup> C. P. Krauth, *The Bible a Perfect Book* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Henry C. Neinstedt, 1857; reprint: Decatur, Illinois: The Johann Gerhard Institute, 1996), p. 10. On at least one occasion Luther had used the same Christological analogy in describing the character of Holy Scripture, but because it was in a somewhat obscure inscription it is unlikely that Krauth was aware of it. Luther had written: “The Holy Scripture is God’s Word, written and, so to speak, lettered and put into the form of letters, just as Christ, the eternal Word of God, is clothed in humanity.” WA 48, 31; quoted in *What Luther Says* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 71. This analogy has been used many times since Krauth put it into print in 1857. For example, Siegbert W. Becker wrote in a 1965 essay on “The Inspiration of Scripture” that “it is not surprising that men who 10 years ago were saying that the Bible cannot be perfect because it is a human book, today are ready to assert that the Lord Jesus too, since He was a true human being, was mistaken in many things. It is only another demonstration of the truth that, when men lose the Scriptures, they must eventually also lose Christ. For just as Christ is human and divine, so the Scriptures, too, are both human and divine. The words are human words spoken and written by men, but they are also divine words spoken and written by God through human agency. The holy writers were His scribes, His penmen, whom He used to produce the sacred Scriptures, just as the king of Assyria was the rod of His anger which He used to punish recalcitrant Israel. There is no warrant, therefore, for any attempt to separate the divine words from the human words, or to distinguish the divine message from the human assertions in this book.” *This Steadfast Word* (Lutheran Free Conference Publications, 1965), p. 40.

<sup>37</sup> A statement of the faculty, drafted and delivered by Krauth, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Philadelphia Seminary in 1864; quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 143-44.

characteristic, with which she stands or falls. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Catechisms and Schmalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, have been formally declared by an immense majority of the Lutheran Church as their Confession of Faith. The portion of the Church, with few and inconsiderable exceptions, which has not received them formally, has received them virtually. They are closely cohering and internally consistent statements and developments of one and the same system, so that a man who heartily and intelligently receives any one of the distinctively Lutheran Symbols, has no difficulty in accepting the doctrine of the whole. They fairly represent the faith of the Church, and simply and solely as so representing it are they named in the statement of the basis of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. ... The propositions we have just advanced, no Lutheran, in the historical sense of the word, can deny; for the man who would deny it, would, in virtue of that denial, prove that he is not in the historical sense Lutheran; for he, and he only, is such who believes that the doctrine of the gospel is rightly taught in the Augsburg Confession.<sup>38</sup>

When we study God's Word we do not do so from the starting point of some kind of feigned religious neutrality, but from the starting point of consciously knowing ourselves to be members of the believing *and confessing* Church of Jesus Christ. As Krauth said in another context, "We belong to the Church, it does not belong to us."<sup>39</sup> And the "Lutheran Church" to which we belong is bigger than any particular synod at any particular time in its history. It is this greater and transcendent "Lutheran Church" that teaches us, through the Confessions, about the Biblical faith that the Lord of the Church has entrusted to her, and that she in turn has entrusted to us, her grateful sons and daughters. In this way, then, the Confession of our Church becomes also our own individual Confession:

We do not interpret God's word by the Creed, neither do we interpret the Creed by God's word, but interpreting both independently, by the laws of language, and finding that they teach one and the same truth, we heartily acknowledge the Confession as a true exhibition of the faith of the Rule – a true witness to the one, pure, and unchanging faith of the Christian Church, and freely make it our own Confession, as truly as if it had been now first uttered by our lips, or had now first gone forth from our hands.<sup>40</sup>

It is true, of course, that our doctrine is to be taken only from Scripture. But it is also true that we are not the only people in the history of the Christian Church who have known this. The doctrine that is in the Lutheran Confessions is doctrine that has been taken by their authors from Scripture. Again, as Krauth explains, the historic Confession of the Lutheran Church, enshrined chiefly in the Book of Concord, "is her immediate basis, her essential characteristic, with which she stands or falls."

A sermon on "the right of private judgment" in the Lutheran Church that Schmucker preached at the 1866 convention of the General Synod<sup>41</sup> – just before the more Confessional synods separated from that body – was "an extraordinary mingling of the most dangerous as-

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<sup>38</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, pp. 179-80. Most of this excerpt is also quoted approvingly by Peters in his *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* review of Krauth's book, p. 318.

<sup>39</sup> Charles P. Krauth, *Christian Liberty in its Relation to the Usages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (reprint: Decatur, Illinois: The Johann Gerhard Institute, 1996), p. 65. This pamphlet was originally published in 1860.

<sup>40</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, p. 169. We see here Krauth's way of trying to overcome the seeming impasse between those who maintain that the Scriptures should be interpreted in light of the Confessions, and those who maintain that the Confessions should be interpreted in light of the Scriptures.

<sup>41</sup> This convention was held in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Krauth attended it as one of the delegates from the Pennsylvania Ministerium. "On the Sunday between the sessions the Ministerium delegation worshiped and received Holy Communion at the Missouri Synod's St. Paul's Lutheran Church where Wilhelm Sihler was pastor. The fervent hope was expressed that the day would soon come when America's Lutherans would be one." August R. Suelflow and E. Clifford Nelson, "Following the Frontier," *The Lutherans in North America*, edited by Nelson, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980 revised edition), p. 234.

sumptions of Romanism in the one direction, and of the dreariest rationalism in the other, ...a plea for hopeless schism, sectarianism and heresy.”<sup>42</sup> Krauth offered a stinging critique of this manifesto of nineteenth-century “American Lutheranism” which also finds a target in some of the attitudes that can be found in the limping Lutheranism of our day:

One great fallacy which underlies the whole argument and comes to the surface in a great variety of phases is, that Lutheranism is not a system of doctrine, but merely one of the rules of Hermeneutics; not a *result*, but a *process*, – or, rather, a theory of process. This process, according to Dr. S[chmucker], goes on indefinitely; and the results may vary according to the time, place, person or church which uses the process. Lutheranism may successively mean everything and anything which the craziness of an abuse of the right of private judgment may cover with the pretenses of Protestant investigation. Lutheranism may be Unitarian, Pelagian, Calvinistic, Baptist, Arminian, as the current shifts. Provided only that nothing in the way of “writings or creeds of men come between them and the examination of the Bible,” twenty men may reach twenty different results, and all be equally good Lutherans. A man may have twenty different phases of credence, and be equally Lutheran through the whole. The Lutheran Church may have a new set of doctrines in every generation, and teach the children to deride the faith, and trample on the teachings, of their fathers and mothers. ... It has hitherto been supposed that the Lutheran Church owed her being to her having “proved all things,” and having by this process found that which is good, holding fast to it, and to this very end embodying it in her Confessions. But it seems this was a mistake. It is not what she finds, but the way she hunts for it, that gives her [her] character. She is to assume that the proving is never done, but always to be done, and three centuries after her credulous profession that she has the truth, is to go to work seriously to find it... Poor, fond, old mother! She thought her merchantman had found the great pearl at the old Wittenberg long ago, but it seems that it was but paste. ... The fact is that these principles root up the faith utterly. They ignore the divine origin, perpetuity, and heavenly guidance of the Church, they put the teaching power of the Bible and of the Holy Ghost, below that of an ordinary arithmetic and of a country schoolmaster. It is too mild to call such views Latitudinarianism; they are logically Nihilism. They do their work so effectually that they would not only leave no Lutheran Church, but they would leave no Church at all, – they leave no solid ground of the “one faith” which has always been held, and must ever be held, somewhere in the world, and whose perishing would be the perishing of the Church itself. We have left us but a mere mirage of whimseys and notions. They give us a rule of faith which never generates faith, a Creed by which no man can know what we believe; they give us a state of mind in which we do not know what we believe, or whether we are to believe at all.<sup>43</sup>

In response to the “American Lutheran” supposition that the Confessions are not really that important, since they are “human explanations” of the Word of God and not the Word of God itself, Krauth points out that the Confessions are *correct* explanations of what Scripture teaches, and

that *correct human explanations* of Scripture doctrine are Scripture doctrine, for they are simply the statement of the same truth in different words. ... There is no personal Christianity in the world which is not the result of a human explanation of the Bible as really as the Confession of our Church is. It is human because it is in human minds, and human hearts, – it is not a source to which we can finally and absolutely appeal as we can to God’s word. But in exact proportion as the word of God opened to the soul by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, is truly and correctly apprehended, just in that proportion is the “human explanation” coincident with the divine truth. I explain God’s truth, and if I explain it correctly, my explanation is God’s truth, and to reject the one in unbelief, is to reject the other. ... Our English translation of the Bible is a human explanation of a certain humanly transcribed, humanly printed text, the *original*; which original alone, just as the sacred penmen left it, is absolutely in every jot and tittle God’s Word; but just in proportion as our translation is based upon a pure text of the Hebrew and Greek, and correctly explains the meaning of such an original, it too, is God’s Word. Our sermons are human explanations of God’s Word, but so far as

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 157.

<sup>43</sup> Krauth, in the *Lutheran*, August 23, 1866; quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, pp. 157-58. Emphases in original.



they explain it correctly, they do set forth God's Word, and he who hears us, hears our Lord. Our Confession is a human explanation of God's Word, but so far as it correctly explains it, it sets forth God's Word.<sup>44</sup>

Because the Scriptures are the *norma normans*, we do not go to the Symbolical Books instead of going to the Bible. But because the Symbolical Books are the *norma normata*, we also do not go to the Bible with the pretense that we are unaware of the Symbolical Books, or with a feeling of shame or embarrassment that our faith has been shaped by the instruction we have received through them. The Confessions were written by Fathers and Reformers who were providentially raised up by God, as divinely-called pastors and teachers, at pivotal times in the Church's history. Krauth's acknowledgment of the faithful ministry of these extraordinary men for the timeless benefit of the Church, under Scripture and in the service thereof, is expressed pithily in this way:

We do not claim that our Confessors were infallible. We do not say they could not fail. We only claim that they did not fail.<sup>45</sup>

The Lutheran Confessions do not, of course, directly address every question with which the contemporary Church is struggling. One will not, for example, find detailed treatments in the Book of Concord of historical criticism, evolutionism, or feminism, or of how the Church should guard itself against these errors. But those who are unfamiliar with the Confessions may be very surprised, if they begin to examine them, to see how applicable they actually are to contemporary times. The sixteenth century was a virtual cauldron of ideas, which were swirling around every corner of the western church. Among the many erroneous teachings that have become popular in various segments of Christendom in the past 400 years, there are very few that had not already been proposed in the sixteenth century, in at least a germinal form, and that had not already elicited a Biblical response from the Lutheran Confessors. Those who doubt this should simply read the Book of Concord, and find out for themselves.

### **Krauth the Theologian: Church Fellowship**

We have already noted that Krauth dedicated an increasing amount of time to a consideration of the doctrine and practice of pulpit and altar fellowship once the General Council had taken shape. Those who are familiar with Krauth's theology chiefly through his book on *The Conservative Reformation* may be unaware of the equally important writings that he produced soon after that on church fellowship. These were a direct working-out of the principles of Lutheran Confessionalism that he had so ably articulated in that more widely-known volume. In these writings Krauth also demonstrates his grasp of the intimate connection between sound Lutheran principles of church fellowship and the more fundamental Lutheran conviction that it really is possible to know objectively, and to confess clearly, the saving truth that God has revealed in Scripture. Krauth laments that

It is one of the greatest sins and calamities of the Church of our day that there is widespread and utter carelessness in regard to doctrine, or a fixed aversion to it; in some a contempt for it, in many ignorance or an ignoring of it. Men sometimes array the Gospel against itself by urging that they "want the Gospel," they "don't want doctrine"; as if there could be any real Gospel which is not doctrine, or any Gospel in its total-

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<sup>44</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, pp. 184-86. Emphases in original.

<sup>45</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, p. 186.

ity, which does not embrace all the doctrine of the Gospel. It is as if they said: “We want nourishment; we don’t want food”; “We want warmth; but none of your fuel and clothes for us.” Whether the laxity of the time helps men toward the extreme [of] pseudo-ecclesiasticism or the extreme of unionistic sectarianism, the beginning of the healing must be a Bible estimate of the indispensable nature of Bible doctrine. Our Church, once chosen of God to lead His people back to the pure faith, must realize that none can take her vocation from her. The front of the host is still her place, if she is faithful to the Captain of her salvation, and she can do now no work more characteristic of her, and more worthy of her great name and responsibility, than to help in awakening the mind of Christendom to a consciousness of the disastrous tendency of the time.<sup>46</sup>

As we examine the theological and ecclesiastical landscape of the early twenty-first century, we cannot but share in Krauth’s lament, and for the same reasons. In Krauth’s day and in ours, the spirit of “unionism” was and is all-pervasive. Krauth generally uses the phrase “pulpit and altar fellowship” when he is talking about those arenas of church life that must especially be preserved from this destructive spirit. But he also makes it clear that the sacred transaction of preaching and learning from a sermon, or the sacred transaction of administering and receiving the Lord’s Supper, cannot somehow be isolated from other aspects of the overall life of the church and of its members, which naturally flow from the administration of the means of grace and point back again to them. There are many ways by which Christians confess themselves to the pure marks of the church, or, in contrast, by which they confess themselves to something other than the pure marks. The spirit of unionism seeks to permeate and corrupt the spiritual life of the body as a whole, and the spiritual life of each of its members. Therefore both the body as a whole and each of its members need to be protected against this spirit. Krauth, in the midst of his own confessional struggles, observes:

From the first quarter of the nineteenth century there has been a general breaking down of the old landmarks in this country. Popular and influential forms of embodying union sentiment have become more and more common. We have Sunday School and Tract Unions, union revivals, union prayer meetings, the Evangelical Alliance, Young Men’s Christian Associations, all involving compromise on the [basis of the] principles of individualism and all tending to laxity and indifferentism. The world has been coming into the church with its easygoing policy. There has been a large influx of unworthy professors [of the faith], a relaxation of discipline, a spirit of social complaisance taking the place of principle. ... Denominationalism with spread sails filling in the gale of unionism, and without pilot or helmsman, is bearing full upon the rock of absolute individualism. When the rock is fairly struck, the vessel will go to the bottom.<sup>47</sup>

Krauth is remarkably prescient also in his discernment of the trends that would lead to modern phenomena like “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” and that would lead to the kind of compromises with Rome that have been made of late by many nominal Lutheran bodies, especially through the notorious *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. He writes:

There is no sufficient bulwark against Rome but the doctrine of *justification by faith*, with all it involves. The struggle for the possession of the future is between Romanism, Protestantism, and Atheism; and Protestantism, robbed of its great material principle, will be absorbed into Romanism or Atheism. A Bible unbelieved will not save us. A Rule of Faith which we will not allow to make our faith, will not help us. The decline of the power of the great doctrine of justification by faith is the result of the decline of faith itself. Men have less and less confidence and interest in justification by faith, because they have less and less of the faith which justifies. As faith is regarded after the Romish fashion as an intellectual assent, and intellectual assent to divine truth dwindles more and more in the sectarian construction into individual notions and

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<sup>46</sup> Krauth, “Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship,” Part II, pp. 747-48.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Porterfield Krauth, “The Right Relation to Denominations in America,” *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America, 1840-1880*, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 112-13.

opinions, all of equal validity, the great New Testament doctrine of faith and of justification by faith, is fading more and more out of sight.<sup>48</sup>

Krauth also deals with the phenomenon of the general disintegration of those church traditions that have their roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation, and that historically identified themselves with the dual principles of the clarity and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. The times in which we live, wherein we have seen countless examples of Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Lutherans of all shades crossing either the Tiber or the Bosphorus, are anticipated in the nineteenth-century Protestant attitudes that Krauth here addresses:

Our church does indeed rest its relations to the denominations around us on its conviction that its system is in all its parts divine, derived from the Word of God and in accordance with it. And there are those who object to this position, not that they charge any specific error on our church – they waive even the consideration of that question – but that in general they assume that we are not prepared to treat any system as throughout divine. A system, they say, may be divine, but we cannot know that it is. We see in part, we know in part. It is not probable that any one denomination has all the truth on the mooted questions. We think we are right. Others think they are right, and they are as much entitled to assert the possession of truth for themselves as we are for ourselves. The church is still seeking: the church of the unknown future may perhaps see things in their true light. ... It is true that the church on earth is imperfect and that in its best life, and because of it, it ever grows. But it must have a complete life to have a constant growth. An acorn is not an oak, but the vital force in the acorn is that which makes the oak and abides in it. The question here is, Has the church reached such a clear, binding faith on the great vital questions, not only of individual salvation but of her own highest efficiency and well-being, as justifies it in making them a term of communion and of public teaching? The question is not whether it can reach more truth, or apply more widely the truth it has, but whether what it now holds is truth and whether by seeking more truth by the same methods it can be assured of finding it. The Old Testament has been teaching for thousands of years, the New Testament has taught for two thousand years, and yet it is pretended by those who profess to hold [to] the clearness and sufficiency of Holy Scripture that no part of the church of Christ, not even that part which they declare they hold in highest esteem, has reached a witness which can commend itself to human trust or can tell whether it has failed or not.<sup>49</sup>

Krauth then asks,

If the divine truth has no self-asserting power, sufficient to dispel doubt, how shall we reach any sure ground? Shall we say that all nominally Christian systems are alike in value, or that if they differ in this no one can find it out? This on its face seems self-confuting, but if we had to confute it, we could only do so by showing that God's Word is clear on the points on which churches differ. If we do not believe that we are scriptural over against Rome, we have no right to be separate from Rome. If the churches divided from us do not believe that they are scriptural, they have no right to be divided from us, and if we have no assured conviction that we have the truth, we have no right to exist. This agnosticism is at heart unbelief, or despair, or indolence, or evasion of cogent argument. Of all Romanizing tendencies the most absolute is that which puts the dishonor on God's Word and on the fundamental principles of the Reformation implied in this view. It may be safely asserted that ecclesiastical bodies will not claim less for themselves than they are entitled to, and when it shall be said that no part of the churches of which the Reformation was the cause or occasion even pretends to have an assurance of the whole faith it confesses, then will men regard Protestantism as self-convicted and, if they do not swing off to infidelity, will say: Rome at least claims to have the truth, and if truth is to be found on earth it is more likely to be found with those who claim to have it than with those who admit they have it not. To sum up, we say Rome is fallible, the denominations are

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<sup>48</sup> Charles P. Krauth, "Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship," Part III, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (January 1908), p. 128.

<sup>49</sup> Krauth, "The Right Relation to Denominations in America," pp. 129-30.

fallible, and the Lutheran Church is fallible: but the Romish Church has failed in articles of faith, so have the denominations; the Lutheran Church has not.<sup>50</sup>

In the matter of the admission of preachers to the pulpits of the Church, and of the admission of communicants to its altars, Krauth tries to get Lutherans to think these things through in a consistent and objective way. Specifically on the subject of making “exceptions” to the rule, Krauth warns:

We must either demand Lutheran authentication from every man who enters a Lutheran pulpit, or demand it of none. However the matter may be covered over with a plausible pretext, it is simply moral suicide for a church to discriminate against her own children, and to exact from her own preachers pledges and guarantees which she does not exact of others. It is either right to give others constant admission, that is, to throw away our confessional and distinctive life altogether, and abandon to sect the whole idea of a church, or it is wrong to give them occasional admission. If it be right in principle to admit them at one time, it is right to admit them at another time, and at all times. It is no longer exceptional, it is normal. It is not a privilege, it is a right. The principle on which rests constant admission to Lutheran altars, demands that those who are there received shall have been taught and examined as to their knowledge of the fundamental truths of the Gospel system, which is the confessed system of our Church; shall have solemnly bound themselves, by God’s help, to persevere in the Lutheran faith, and in fidelity to the Lutheran Church, to conform and be subject, as communicant members, to its divine government and discipline. There can be no principle of occasional admission to the altar distinct from and in conflict with this. In a word, the principle of a constant admission precludes the existence of any separate principle of occasional admission.<sup>51</sup>

The unwillingness of the orthodox Lutheran Church to open its pulpits and altars to the heterodox, or to send its pastors and people to heterodox pulpits and altars, will always bring upon it, in a society that is dominated by religious latitudinarianism, a multitude of reproaches. And these reproaches, or the fear of them, can be felt to be too much of a burden – so much so that a “negotiated surrender” to the sects can become, after a while, an increasingly appealing option to some or many who bear the Lutheran name. In our day we certainly know this to be so. But Krauth also knew this to be so. Speaking from both conviction and experience, he writes:

When the Lutheran Church acts in the spirit of the current denominationalism it abandons its own spirit. It is a house divided against itself. Some even then will stand firm, and with the choosing of new gods on the part of others there will be war in the gates. No seeming success could compensate our church for the forsaking of principles which gave her her being, for the loss of internal peace, for the destruction of her proper dignity, for the lack of self-respect which would follow it. The Lutheran Church can never have real moral dignity, real self-respect, a real claim on the reverence and loyalty of its children while it allows the fear of the denominations around it, or the desire of their approval, in any respect to shape its principles or control its actions. It is a fatal thing to ask not, What is right? What is consistent? but, What will be thought of us? How will the sectarian and secular papers talk about us? How will our neighbors of the different communions regard this or that course? Better to die than to prolong a miserable life by such compromise of all that gives life its value.<sup>52</sup>

In commenting on the main issue that came to the fore at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, and that has been the focus of Lutheranism’s debates with the Reformed ever since, Krauth points out that

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<sup>50</sup> Krauth, “The Right Relation to Denominations in America,” pp. 130-31.

<sup>51</sup> Charles P. Krauth, “Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship,” Part IV, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (April 1908), pp. 325-26.

<sup>52</sup> Krauth, “The Right Relation to Denominations in America,” p. 135.

A Zwinglian may admit that a Lutheran is not in fundamental error; a Lutheran cannot admit it in regard to a Zwinglian. To claim that what is really but bread and wine is Christ's body and blood may be a great absurdity – but it is the result of too absolute a trust in his word – it is the superstition of faith. But to say that what he really tells us is his body and blood is but bread and wine implies lack of trust in his word – it is the superstition of unbelief. ... They have a metaphor to literalize; we accept a verity deep as the incarnation itself, a verity involving the incarnation and involved in it.<sup>53</sup>

And from the perspective of the Lutheran Church, unionistic fellowship arrangements with the Reformed, or with outright apostates, definitely are surrenders, and not merely compromises (as distasteful as even a compromise would be). Krauth observes that

When there is official fellowship between those who hold the higher and positive position and those who hold a lower and negative one, the communion is always to the benefit of the lower at the expense of the higher. For however the holders of the higher view may protest as to their personal convictions, the act of communion is regarded as a concession that the convictions, if held at all, are not held as articles of faith but only as opinions. If a Socinian and a Trinitarian commune, each avowing his own opinion as neither changed nor involved, which cause is hurt and which benefited? It looks equal, but Socinianism, whose interest is laxity, is advantaged; Trinitarianism is wounded. It gives fresh life to error; it stabs truth to the heart. Contact imparts disease but does not impart health. We catch smallpox by contact with one who has it, but we do not catch recovery from one who is free from it. The process which tends to the pollution of the unpolluted will not tend to the purification of the evil.<sup>54</sup>

Krauth also sees no enduring place for the kind of “moderate” or “centrist” position in matters of doctrine and practice that would be defined or understood by its advocates in relativistic or ecclesio-political terms, and not on the basis of theological principle. He says, quite simply, that

There is no firm ground between strict confessionalism and no confessionalism. All between is hopeless inconsistency.<sup>55</sup>

Krauth's Lutheran ecclesiological vision is best summarized in these words:

When we speak of *genuine* Lutheranism, we do *not* mean that the thing itself can be other than genuine – that there can be of right two kinds, that anything but the real thing is entitled to the name – *but*, that in common with all names the name Lutheran may be, and is, misapplied. That may be called Lutheranism which is not Lutheranism. Gold must be gold, yet we can distinguish for convenience sake between genuine gold and spurious gold; gold pure and gold alloyed. We can speak of genuine, true, pure Christianity, and of spurious, false, corrupted Christianity. ... Genuine Lutheranism we contrast as a thing of intelligence, over against ignorance. It is the Lutheranism of those who know why they are what they are – who know the hope that is in them and have a reason for it. They know what the Confessions teach, and what is in the Word on which the Confession rests. They know the genius of their Church, its history, its wants, its glories, its defects, the prospects which animate it, the discouragements it has to overcome. A genuine Lutheranism is a *living*, devoted, earnest Lutheranism, over against aversion, frigidness, and indifference. ... It is a Lutheranism which is *consistent*, as over against one which is continually denying the just inferences of its own profession. ... Genuine Lutheranism is *firm*, over against all vacillation, all temporizing, lowering of principle, and abasement before the idols of the hour. It lifts itself above the blandishments of the time and the dread of its odium and persecution. It does not fear being left a little flock if the evidence remains of the Father's good pleasure to give it the kingdom. It sings “Ein feste Burg” with heart as well as voice, confessing that nothing on earth or in hell can move it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Krauth, “The Right Relation to Denominations in America,” p. 124.

<sup>54</sup> Krauth, “The Right Relation to Denominations in America,” pp. 135-36.

<sup>55</sup> Krauth, “The Right Relation to Denominations in America,” p. 128.

<sup>56</sup> Charles P. Krauth, “Religion and Religionisms,” *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (April 1907), p. 231.

Emphases in original.

## Conclusion

Numerically and institutionally, at least in the western world, the kind of “genuine Lutheranism” for which Krauth yearned is in decline. The inner life of the massive structures of the European state churches collapsed long ago, and only the outer shells remain, surrounding the ecclesio-cultural rubble within. For the past several decades, free churches and synods with long and respectable Lutheran pedigrees have also been tottering, and toppling, one by one. This process continues with a vengeance. Are these sad occurrences frightening empirical evidence that Confessional Lutheranism has really been, after all, a well-intentioned but misguided dream, and that it will not – indeed cannot – survive? Should we look instead to something more outwardly stable, like Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, which in their institutional strength seem more plausibly to be pointing toward an ultimate ecclesiastical success? Should we look instead to something more overtly powerful, like Evangelicalism or Pentecostalism, which in their zeal and energy seem more able to draw to themselves the masses of humanity? Krauth would not think so in either case. In view of Lutheranism’s ecclesiology of the cross, he says:

The obligation to stand by truth is not conditioned by the human probabilities of its triumph. While there may be again, as there has been in the past, a relative advance of truth, error will abide upon the earth, and we know not in what proportions, while the earth stands. The harvest will open on tares and wheat together. The Church may have relative rest, but she will have no absolute rest; but will bear the cross till she is lifted to her crown in heaven. We do not stake the great principle, nor the right of our Church to abide by it, on any prophetic pretense of its earthly triumph or of hers.<sup>57</sup>

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states:

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings... (Heb. 13:7-9, NASB)

With the qualification that Scripture itself gives us, regarding their speaking of the Word of God and not of unprofitable opinions, the noble company of those whom Confessional Lutherans “remember” and “imitate” includes Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Chrysostom; Hilary, Ambrose and Augustine; Luther, Melancthon, and the Concordists; and, especially in certain American circles, Walther, Hoenecke, and the Pieper brothers. But let us not neglect to include also in this worthy band of brothers and fathers the man whom Walther described as “the most eminent man in the English Lutheran Church of this country,” Charles Porterfield Krauth.

We conclude with this message of hope and encouragement that Krauth addressed to Matthias Loy in 1876, but which could just as well have been addressed to us at the beginning of the twenty-first century:

Our Church has a terrible battle before her, but with her great divine principles and God blessing her, she need not fear the issue. The true Church will always be relatively a little flock, but it will be none the less the hope of the world.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Krauth, “Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship,” Part III, p. 135.

<sup>58</sup> Krauth, quoted in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. II, p. 235.

*Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven,  
and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*  
(Daniel 12:3, NASB)

David Jay Webber  
Ternopil', Ukraine  
October 1, 2004

## **Addendum: Krauth on the Ministry**

During his very fruitful ministry Krauth produced much useful material on many specific articles of faith that we have had neither time nor space to explore here. This we regret. There is one subject, however, which is currently the focus of intense discussion in the Lutheran Church, about which we would like to share at least a few brief thoughts from Krauth's writings: the doctrine of the Public Ministry. We are persuaded that Krauth's insights on this topic can go a long way in helping the orthodox Lutheran Church of our day to arrive at a God-pleasing resolution of a multi-faceted debate that has been going on for quite some time.

In the context of studies pertaining to the preparation of a model constitution for General Council congregations, Krauth prepared eighteen very extensive Theses on the Doctrine of the Ministry that deserve to be much better known than they are.<sup>59</sup> In these Theses he begins with an acknowledgment of the divine institution and perpetual necessity of the Public Ministry:

To the end that God may be glorified in the *salvation* of men, our Lord Jesus Christ, in his Divine Unity with the Father and the Holy Ghost, has instituted the ministry; to *teach* the pure Gospel, and to *administer* the Sacraments rightly in the Church. ... This divinely instituted ministry is a sacred public office, conferred by legitimate vocation, on suitable men. ... The ministry is necessary as the ordinary instrumental medium ordained of God, whereby the Word and Sacraments which are the only means of grace in the strict and proper sense, are to be brought to men. ... Though God is the perpetuator of the ministry, as he is its author, He continues it on Earth, *by means of his Church*; through which He exercises his power of appointing teachers of the word. ... A minister, New Testament Bishop, Presbyter, Elder, or Evangelical Pastor, is a man legitimately called by God, through the Church, to teach the word publicly in the Church; to administer the sacraments, and to maintain sound discipline and good government.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> These Theses can be found sequentially in the following articles: "Thetical Statement of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Gospel" [First Article], *Lutheran and Missionary*, Vol. XIV, No. 12 (December 31, 1874), p. 1; "Thetical Statement of the Doctrine of the Ministry" (Second Article), *Lutheran and Missionary*, Vol. XIV, No. 13 (January 7, 1875), p. 1; "The Doctrine of the Ministry Thetically Stated" (Third Article), *Lutheran and Missionary*, Vol. XIV, No. 15 (January 21, 1875), p. 1; and "The Doctrine of the Ministry Thetically Stated" (Fourth Article), *Lutheran and Missionary*, Vol. XIV, No. 19 (February 18, 1875), p. 1. Also helpful are Krauth's lectures on "Church Polity," published posthumously as follows: Part I, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. II, Whole No. 8 (October 1883), pp. 307-23; Part II, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. III, Whole No. 10 (April 1884), pp. 139-51; and Part III, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. III, Whole No. 12 (October 1884), pp. 320-34.

<sup>60</sup> C. P. Krauth, "Thetical Statement of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Gospel" [First Article], *Lutheran and Missionary*, Vol. XIV, No. 12 (December 31, 1874), p. 1. Emphases in original.

Later, in his discussion of the origin and character of the office of deacon, Krauth introduces a very helpful distinction between the Public Ministry in the “stricter sense” and the Public Ministry in a “broader sense”<sup>61</sup>:

The deacons received power and entered on duties originally held and exercised by the Apostles as pastors of the Church at Jerusalem. The office was created by a separation of certain powers and duties of the ministry, and devolving them on a new class of officials. The deacons are not a part of the people to do the work pertaining to the people in common, but are a part of the officials of the Church, taking a share in the ministry and being in that broader sense ministers; aiding the pastoral ministry in its work by taking upon them, in conformity with the instructions of the Church, such collateral portions of the work as do not require the most important and special powers of the pastor and teacher. ... The true original conception of the deacon is that of the pastor’s executive aid. The particular work assigned to the seven deacons, first chosen, was simply a determination of this general conception, produced by the specific nature of the case. The distribution of a common fund in alms, or the service of poor widows is not the whole generic idea of the diaconate, though it was its whole actual function at first. ... Deacons were not originally appointed to preach the Gospel, or to administer the Sacraments, or to bear official part in the government of the Church. They are in their proper intent executive aids of the ministry, in its collateral labors, or in the incidental, not essential, parts of its proper work. ... Deacons are not ministers in the specific or stricter sense, nor are they essential to the organization of every congregation. A congregation, now, like the congregation at Jerusalem in its first stage, can exist as an organization without deacons... So far as is not inconsistent in any manner or degree with the sole direct Divine authority of the ministry of the Word to teach publicly in the Church and to administer the Sacraments, nor with the rights and duties inseparably connected therewith, the Church has liberty to enlarge the functions of the diaconate in keeping with its original generic idea, so as to make it, in accordance with her increasing needs, a more efficient executive aid to her ministers. In the Ancient Church, enlarging in her liberty the functions of the deacons, as executive aids to the ministry of the Word in the service of the Church, the deacons took care of the sacred utensils employed in the sacraments; they received the contributions of the people, and conveyed them to the pastor; they took part in reading the Scriptures in public worship; at the request of the pastor they might take part in the *distribution* (not in the consecration) of the elements; they helped to preserve order and decorum in the service of the sanctuary; they furnished to the pastor information that would be useful to him in his labors – they were his almoners – in short, they were the executive aids of the minister of the Word, in the closest relations of official reverence, and of faithful service to him...<sup>62</sup>

As Krauth continues his discussion of the diaconate, he goes on to a consideration of the ancient church’s office of deaconess, which in the nineteenth century was in the process of being revived within Lutheranism:

In some Churches, especially among the Gentile converts, there were Deaconesses, Christian women, largely selected from the widows known as faithful and holy. They were occupied with the care of the sick and of the poor, and with the externals of the Church’s work. They were in the one diaconate with its official character, as an executive aid of the ministry unchanged, and with its specific characteristics determined by the special gifts and facilities pertaining to Christian women. In the Ancient Church they gave instruction to the female catechumens, rendered the necessary aid at their Baptism, were guardians of the pri-

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<sup>61</sup> A distinction between the Public Ministry in the “narrow sense” and the Public Ministry in a “wider sense” is also used by E. W. Kaehler in an essay that was originally published in *Lehre und Wehre* (in three parts) in 1874: “Does a Congregation Ordinarily Have the Right Temporarily to Commit an Essential Part of the Holy Preaching Office to a Layman?,” *Logia*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (Holy Trinity 1997), pp. 37-43. This exact terminology does not appear in the writings of people like Luther, Chemnitz, or David Chytraeus, but the idea that this terminology is intended to clarify and expresses can definitely be found in their writings. See, for example, Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 219-31; Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), pp. 682-88; and David Chytraeus, *On Sacrifice* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), pp. 97-102.

<sup>62</sup> Krauth, “Thetical Statement of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Gospel” [First Article], p. 1. Emphasis in original.



vate life of Christian women, gave useful information to the pastors and such assistance as the pastors desired. They tenderly cared for the martyrs, confessors, travelers, sick and needy persons, especially though not exclusively of their own sex, and preserved order among the women in public worship.<sup>63</sup>

Obviously, Krauth sees no female equivalent to deaconesses within the category of the Public Ministry in the stricter sense. The ordinary offices of spiritual oversight in the church that involve the carrying out of the distinctive duties of the pastoral ministry (“Bishop, Presbyter, Elder, or Evangelical Pastor”) are not open to women. Again, to quote Krauth, such offices are to be “conferred by legitimate vocation, on suitable men.”

According to Krauth, neither deacons nor deaconesses were serving in the “ministry of the Word” in the stricter or narrower sense. They were, however, carrying out certain limited spiritual duties that were, in their origin, constituent components of the “ministry of the Word,” and that would otherwise be carried out by the church’s pastors as a natural and necessary part of their own ministry. Deacons, for example, were authorized to read publicly from the Scriptures and to assist in the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, while deaconesses were authorized to give instruction to female catechumens and to assist at their baptisms. Those who serve in diaconal offices like this, also in our day, would therefore properly be understood to be ministers of the Church in a “broader sense.”<sup>64</sup> Krauth elsewhere approaches this from a slightly different angle:

The Apostles were missionaries, not merely under the necessity of the case, but, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit gave security to the work and wrought and made a basis for its extension by organizing congregations in which the life of the disciple found its home and sphere of labor. With the establishment of these congregations, and as an essential part of their organization was connected the institution of the congregational pastorate, the vocation which was to superintend and spiritually rule the congregations, to conduct the public services, to administer the sacraments, to labor in the word and in doctrine and to watch for souls to the conversion of sinners and the building up of saints. The pastorate was the determination to a distinct office of so much of the Apostolate as pertained to the single congregation. The institution of the Apostolate was the general institution of the entire ministry, whose specific forms, especially the Presbyterate-episcopate, and the diaconate, were but concrete classifications of particular functions involved in the total idea of the ministry. The specific ministries are but distributions of the Apostolate in its ordinary and permanent functions.<sup>65</sup>

The debate over the necessity, or at least over the ecumenical desirability, of embracing the so-called “historic episcopate” has been agitating certain segments of world Lutheranism in recent years. On this subject in general, Krauth writes, with his typical wit, that

In their extraordinary powers and functions the Apostles had no *successors*. In their ordinary ones all true ministers of Christ are their successors. There is a ministerial succession unbroken in the Church; but, there is no personal succession in a particular line of transmission. The ministry that is, ordains the ministry that comes. The ministry of successive generations has always been inducted into the office by the ministry pre-

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<sup>63</sup> Krauth, “Thetical Statement of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Gospel” [First Article], p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Krauth had not learned this approach in seminary. His own Dogmatics professor taught categorically and without qualification: “As to the deacons, for whose election Paul gives directions, they were not ministers, but, as we are expressly told, laymen elected by the members of the church ‘to serve at tables,’ in order that the apostles might be released from that duty, and be able to give themselves ‘continually to prayer and the ministry of the word.’” S. S. Schmucker, *Elements of Popular Theology*, 5th edition (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1845), pp. 221-22.

<sup>65</sup> C. P. Krauth, “Church Polity,” Part I, *Lutheran Church Review*, Vol. II, Whole No. 8 (October 1883), p. 317.

ceding; but, the so-called Apostolical succession or canonical succession does not exist, would be incapable of demonstration if it did exist, and would be of no essential value even if it could be demonstrated.<sup>66</sup>

Historically, Krauth observes that, in the Lutheran Church,

The idea of the universal priesthood of all believers at once overthrew the doctrine of a distinction of essence between clergy and laity. The ministry is not an order, but it is a divinely appointed office, to which men must be rightly called. No imparity exists by divine right; an hierarchical organization is unchristian, but a gradation (bishops, superintendents, provosts) may be observed, as a thing of human right only. The government by consistories has been very general. In Denmark, Evangelical bishops took the place of the Roman Catholic prelates who were deposed. In Sweden the bishops embraced the Reformation, and thus secured in that country an “apostolic succession” in the high-church sense; though, on the principles of the Lutheran Church, alike where she has as where she has not such a succession, it is not regarded as essential even to the order of the Church. The ultimate source of power is in the congregations, that is, in the pastor and other officers and the people of the single communions. The right to choose a pastor belongs to the people, who may exercise it by direct vote, or delegate it to their representatives.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Krauth, “Thetical Statement of the Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Gospel” [First Article], p. 1. Emphasis in original.

<sup>67</sup> Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, pp. 152-53.