
Loeche about Himself: What Were Loeche's Key Theological Themes?

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Even some of his contemporaries did not really understand Loeche and were therefore unable to seriously engage with his thoughts. He himself presented his view of things in clear words. This cannot be denied. Nevertheless, Loeche has often been misunderstood and therefore inaccurately interpreted, even criticized. In his introduction to the edition of Loeche's letters, Klaus Ganzert said that he "wanted to draw particular attention to those characteristics of Loeche that seemed to him to have remained too much in the background and in the dark in previous portrayals."¹ The attempt to portray Loeche as he saw himself has guided many who have turned to his path and thinking. Even so, it is noticeable that the result is often an image that a later author had of him. How did he express himself about himself and his central concerns? I set out once again to find out what he communicated about himself. To do that, you have to go with him a bit on his path and into his texts.

Loeche hardly speaks about himself in a way that one could learn how he is feeling. Of course, there are the significant wounds in his personal life, such as the deaths in his family: his beloved wife, his little son Philipp, and his mother. There one sees the man, strong with trust in God, suffering from these losses. But this does not really say anything about him because he was not inclined to give information about his condition.

His "self", his own "I," always stood before God, to whom he owed himself and his whole life, and to whom he wanted to give an account of his will and actions. Of his diaries, we now have in print the diary from his time as a student in Berlin in 1828.² Another diary from the time of his vicariate in Kirchenlamitz is being edited by Gerhard Philipp Wolf.³ Loeche notes the events

1. Klaus Ganzert, "Einleitung," in Wilhelm Loeche, *Gesammelte Werke* (hereafter GW), ed. Klaus Ganzert, 7 vols., (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1951-1986), 1:17.

2. Wilhelm Löhe, *Tagebuch 1828, Berlin*, eds. Dietrich Blaufuß and Gerhard Philipp Wolf. GW, *Ergänzungsreihe 6* (Nürnberg: Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte; Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2020).

3. I would like to thank Dr. Wolf for letting me look at his

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of each day very briefly. His remarks about the Berlin lectures are very restrained, ultimately providing little to observe his position on what he heard. He pays little tribute to the famous names among the professors at the University of Berlin at that time. Here, too, it is evident that Loeche strongly pursued his personal theological inclinations in his studies. He studied devotional literature (*Erbauungsschriften*) in order to form and nourish his theology. He wrote down elaborate, free-form prayer texts in his diary. There we see him before us in conversation with his God. Again and again, he reflects on his sinfulness, gives thanks to God for salvation, and asks for further guidance and deliverance from sin. His language—even in these free prayers!—is influenced by thoughts from the devotional literature he studied and, of course, by the Luther Bible, in which he was at home. To appreciate these entries would require a keen sense of pastoral psychology and related knowledge.

I was reminded of Luther's remarks in the Preface to the Psalter. Luther formulated the following about the Psalter:

In summary, if you would see the holy Christian church painted with living color and shape and put into one little picture, then take up the Psalter. There you have

manuscript.

a fine, bright, pure mirror that will show you what Christendom is. Indeed you also will find yourself in it and the true *gnothiseauton*, as well as find God in God's self and all creatures.⁴

Luther had found in the Psalms an answer to the old request of the oracle of Delphi: "*Gnothiseauton*." ("Know yourself?"). This could also be applied to Loehe, even if the Neuendettelsau village pastor and son of a burgher from Fürth did not bring Luther's monastic experience with the Psalms with him and only in the course of time found his way deeper into the prayer of the Psalms. Loehe recognizes himself by praying before God, confessing his sin, and allowing himself to be given strength and forgiveness, perceiving and discovering it for himself. Loehe's self-knowledge, however, does not first revolve around his own ego, but is always connected with the basic questions of determining where he stands in the respective tasks in his position and calling as student, as vicar, as pastor, as teacher of the "pupils for America" and as rector of the deaconesses. All this was, after all, his exercise of the office of ministry to which he was called. I approach Loehe and his self-understanding by asking where his heart beat theologically and where he expressed himself about it. This means I am convinced that we understand Loehe best about himself when we look at the themes that were important to him and note what he wrote about them. He lived so completely for his calling and found fulfillment in it that he hardly noticed how he let himself be taken up by his calling beyond his own powers. So then, what are the key themes for Pastor Loehe?

What did Loehe want?

In the 150th year after Loehe began training deaconesses, the church historian Peter Maser, who is well known for his knowledge of the Awakening Movement (*Erweckungsbewegung*), gave a lecture titled "Was wir im letzten Grunde wollten" ("What we ultimately wanted").⁵ In his paper, Maser wanted to look at Loehe from the outside and to focus on Loehe's concerns without feeling obligated to further developments up to the present. Although the confessional resolve of the Lutheran Loehe was foreign to him, Maser clearly showed its contours and did not blur them. In particular, he emphasizes that Loehe, who was not given a position in the Bavarian *Landeskirche* appropriate to his talents, "created his own world in Neuendettelsau, which in the end was to radiate beyond the narrow village boundaries and his own *Landeskirche*."⁶ However, Maser continues with Loehe's well-known oral statement,

handed down by his biographer Johannes Deinzer:

If one wants to know what we actually wanted (i.e., with our ecclesiastical endeavors), then one must look at the deaconess institution, except that one would not have to think only of sisters. We wanted an apostolic-episcopal Brethren Church (*Brüderkirche*). Lutheranism is not a party matter for us. What we are Lutheran about with all our soul is the sacrament and the doctrine of justification. We are not Lutherans in the sense of the Missourians,⁷ nor in the sense of the Old Lutherans.⁸ We are quite ancient and quite modern. A further development of Lutheranism into an apostolic-episcopal Brethren Church is what we ultimately wanted.⁹

Now, it should be noted that this is an oral statement made by Loehe but communicated twenty years after his death. Loehe, who wrote so much, did not himself put these words on paper for a work intended for print. There may be quite different reasons for this. It is possible that Loehe came up with these formulations only in his last years, and Deinzer remembers them in retrospect. This statement was apparently of such great importance to the biographer that he memorized it and therefore wanted to pass it on to posterity in a significant place. The distancing from the Missourians and the Old Lutherans was of particular interest to Deinzer because as a biographer he strove to remove Loehe from the exposure caused by his association with the "special churches." Regarding circumstances in America and free-church Lutheranism in Germany, Loehe liked to speak of special churches (*Sonderkirchen*), which were churches in the sense of the Lutheran confession without the status of a state church.

The Brethren Church

Let's clarify what Loehe had in mind with the concept of the *Brüderkirche* (Brethren Church). In the summer of 1851, he wrote to his friend Pastor Carl Eichhorn¹⁰ in Baden:

7. "Missourians" refers to representatives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Loehe was very important in the founding phase of the synod through the disciples he sent and his contacts.

8. "Old Lutherans" was the term originally used by outsiders to refer to the representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia, which had arisen as a separate church in protest against the Prussian Union. It had important centers in Silesia and especially in Wroclaw. Later this designation was adopted internally and used positively. Loehe occasionally called them just "Silesians," which then was not simply meant geographically.

9. Johannes Deinzer, *Wilhelm Löhe's Leben: Aus seinem schriftlichen Nachlaß zusammengestellt*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Nürnberg: Gottfr. Löhe, 1874), vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1880), vol. 3 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1892), 3:327-28.; unless noted otherwise, all quotations from the German are translated by Allison Werner Hoenen and Thomas H. Schattauer.

10. Carl (Karl) Eichhorn, 1810-1890, was the most important figure of the Lutheran movement in Baden aligned with the Old Lutherans; see Zscharnack, in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (hereafter RGG²), 2: cols. 47-48.

4. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Psalter, 1528 (1545)," in *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 6: *The Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Euan K. Cameron, trans. Kristen E. Kvam (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 211; Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906-1960), 10.1:105.5-9.

5. Peter Maser, "'Was wir im letzten Grunde wollten': Ein Blick von außen auf Wilhelm Löhe, seine diakonischen Strategien und ihr kirchlich-theologisches Umfeld," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 74 (2005): 14-22.

6. Maser, 16.

It seems to me that a lukewarm air of Union is blowing through all of Germany, that great external victories of the aforementioned direction could be imminent, but that the Lutheran Church will become what it was before Luther, a unity of brothers scattered throughout the world. Next to the powerfully creative Roman Church, a universal church, in which the cruel enemy of all spiritual life would be hidden until the flags of the Lord waved for the last battle. May God grant us great joy when we are worthy to wield his sword, alone victorious.¹¹

It is striking that Loehe combines realistic observations about the ecclesiastical situation of his present with a vision for the special mission of wielding God's "sword, alone victorious sword." Loehe took an intensive interest in Eichhorn's resignation from the Church of the Baden Union and his move switch to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia. He had even congratulated him on this step. This wording is not included in the edition of the letters, but it is of great weight. Loehe wrote to his friend in Baden:

Although more plodding, I am walking with you through the country, with you to prison, into the place of joys known to the world; I feel the melancholy which is attached to such suffering, but also the powerful satisfaction that greets you in the soul, despite all weakness, recognized and unrecognized. I congratulate you on the honor of the disgrace and on the bitterest drop of it, that you, the most loyal subject of your sovereign, had to let yourself be treated as if you were a child of 1848 and 49.¹²

He makes a similar statement on the subject of the Brethren Church to Friedrich Theodor Horning, who was active in Strasbourg.¹³ He asks, "whether there will not one day be a Lutheran brotherhood of all countries as opposed to a Protestant universal church."¹⁴ Also in a letter to Karl von Maltzan in Mecklenburg he remarks:

Throughout the whole of church history from Luther to the apostles, the Brethren Church under various names stands at the center of Christian inclinations. It culminated in the Reformation and was lost in it like a stream in a river. If now on the one hand there is Rome, on the other hand a universal Union church, and in the middle there grows up a thorn-crowned bride of Christ, so be praised the most holy name.¹⁵

Loehe clearly shapes these thoughts in these letters from 1851. He

longed for "true churchly and Christian congregations," whether you call them Brethren congregations (*Brüdergemeinden*) or whatever you like; thus, he wrote in May 1852.¹⁶

To his friends in America, Loehe also describes what he understands by Brethren congregations. Thus, in 1853 he writes to Grossmann and Deindorfer how he envisions missionary work:

We would prefer to try it in the following way: two disciples (*Zöglinge*) [as he calls the young men educated in Neuendettelsau] sharing in ministry and school together with two or three Christian brothers would go to a richly settled area and buy cheap land at our expense, on which they would build a church, parsonage, and farmhouse and live together. One of the disciples would be ordained pastor of the others. They would be a house community, praying, living, studying together and farm the land together (ah, without becoming countryfied!). On Sunday they preach; those from the neighborhood who wanted to come could come. They would hold school and instruction for all who wanted. They would baptize children, bless marriages, give addresses at funerals. But if someone wanted confirmation, absolution, and the Lord's Supper, one would indeed take attested faithful people to the Lord's Supper, but into the closer community of the congregation only people of complete agreement. One would aim at the formation of Lutheran Brethren congregations (*lutherische Brüdergemeinden*), which would not be Herrnhuter, but would live together according to the sense of the Association of Apostolic Life.¹⁷ In this way, one would maintain pure communion fellowship (*Abendmahlsgemeinschaft*) and congregational relationships, and yet could be as beneficial as possible.¹⁸

This is his vision of missionary work. In this vision, the Brethren congregations play an important role. Of course, it must be kept in mind that this model of Brethren congregations and their impact on the population would not be easy to handle in pastoral practice. People insist on equal treatment and look very critically at any perceived preferential treatment of others. The pastor wielding the shepherd's crook would have to approach his task with a great deal of wisdom and love if he wanted to be understood by people. Who could carry out this differentiation of a core congregation—a Lord's Supper congregation—and the whole congregation in terms of spiritual care? Nevertheless, it is significant that he thinks through the model of the Brethren church also for America and the missionary work and attaches great importance to it.

Of course, these questions are also connected to how Loehe

11. Rudolf Keller, "Wilhelm Löhe und Carl Eichhorn: Ein unbekannter Brief aus dem Jahr 1851," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 58 (1989): 202-203.

12. Keller, 202n24.

13. Friedrich Theodor Horning, 1809-1882, Alsatian Lutheran theologian; see Anrich, *RGG*², 2:2017-2018.

14. Keller, Löhe und Eichhorn, 203n29.

15. Keller, 203n29.

16. Keller, 203n29.

17. See Wilhelm Löhe, *Apostolisches Leben: Vorschlag und Katechismus 1848*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß, Studienausgabe 2 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2011).

18. Wilhelm Löhe, Brief an G. M. Großmann, J. Deindorfer, ?8.53, in *Gesammelte Werke* (hereafter *GW*), ed. Klaus Ganzert, 7 vols., (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1951-1986), 2:208.

thinks about the free-church Lutheran congregations that emerged in the struggle against the Union. His fraternal ties with the “separated” Lutherans in other German territorial states are well known.¹⁹ He was helpful in obtaining suitable pastors for the congregations and personally assisted in an ordination in Nassau. Loehe even declared himself willing to visit the vacant Baden congregations of Pastor Carl Eichhorn once every quarter and to hold services there.²⁰ Yet he did not go this way into separation himself and did not become pastor of such a congregation.²¹ Loehe saw the changed attitude of his *Landeskirche* since the appointment of Adolf von Harleß as president of the Oberkonsistorium. So, he remained village pastor in Neuendettelsau, where he could then develop his great effectiveness as founder of the deaconess work and the motherhouse. Loehe wanted, however, that the free churches or “special churches”—as he called them collectively—and the *Landeskirchen* to be unified and bound together in the Lutheran confession.²² He regarded the Society for Inner Mission as birthing assistant and midwife in the formation of free churches.²³ Visitors from the ranks of free-church Lutheran ministers naturally participated in church services in Neuendettelsau as preachers and liturgists.²⁴ Loehe practiced pulpit and altar fellowship with them.

One concern he shared with the separated Lutherans was the practice of communion fellowship. Only together with members of a Lutheran church did Loehe want to celebrate the Lord's Supper because only there is the comforting meal of communion with Christ through his body and blood celebrated according to its institution. For this reason, he opposed the practice of “*Abendmahlsmengerei*” (“shared communion”) in the Union churches (i.e., participation of both Lutheran and Reformed Christians in the Lord's Supper), and he repeatedly reminded his own *Landeskirche* of this pastoral duty. Loehe was convinced that the unified practice would eventually lead to the loss of the full and rich content of the Lutheran celebration of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, he wanted to consider the designated practice of admission to the Lord's Supper as a “shibboleth.”²⁵

19. Rudolf Keller, “Kirche im Sinne des lutherischen Bekenntnisses: Löhes Vorstellung von freier Kirche,” in *Wilhelm Löhe: Erbe und Vision*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 186.

20. Keller, 190-192.

21. See Dietrich Blaufuß, “Löhe auf dem Weg in die Separation? Die Korrespondenz Wilhelm Löhe—

Alexander von Wartensleben-Schwirsen Dezember 1848 / Januar 1849,” *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 75 (2006) 87-95.

22. See Keller, “Kirche im Sinne,” 189-90n42.

23. Wilhelm Löhe, “Über die Geschichte der Gesellschaft für innere Mission” (1856), GW 4:220.

24. See the statements of Wilhelm Eichhorn (Carl Eichhorn's son), later rector of the Deaconess Institute in Neuendettelsau in Keller, “Löhe und Eichhorn,” 207n56.

25. “One point from the memory of former times that hurts me most, I must here . . . not conceal; it is the communion fellowship (*Abendmahlsgemeinschaft*) with those who hold other beliefs ‘The church-dividing disagreement over the Lord's Supper (*Abendmahls-differenz*)’ is a truth we cannot drop without falling away from the

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The Sacrament of the Altar

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper was one of the important reasons Loehe wanted to be and to remain a Lutheran. Already as a student in Erlangen in the summer of 1827, Loehe had written to his friend Gustav Ritter²⁶ in Ansbach in response to a question of Ritter:

Yes, dear Gustav! I have often thought about it, even seriously. But thinking about such high things does not get much done. The Holy Communion is not merely a commemoration of Jesus Christ, but a mystery, namely, that the true body and blood of the Lord are given to the communicants in bread and wine. – Therefore, your question—“Are you completely clear? Is everything clear to you?”—you can only take back again. It's not a question of knowledge and clarity, but that I have the faith that Jesus Christ unites with me, even if incomprehensibly, yet most intimately. If I am a true Christian, I must feel this through and through. – You do not have to go around the Lord's Supper with your mind like a microscope! It is no better than the naked eye to see what is there. To ask the question how is useless. It cannot be grasped how we receive with the bread the body that really died on the cross and with the cup the blood that flowed from his holy wounds. Here we must believe. For Jesus, who is the Word, who was and is God, who is truth himself,

Lutheran Reformation itself, and, like every truth, we must confess most loudly when it is disputed. Something can become a shibboleth through opposition, even if by its nature, it is a hundred times less suitable to be a shibboleth than the call raised above.” Wilhelm Löhe, “Das Verhältnis der Gesellschaft für innere Mission im Sinne der lutherischen Kirche zum Zentralmissionsverein in Bayern” (1856), GW 5.2:701.

26. Gustav Ritter (1809-1887) from Heldenfingen/Württemberg, attended the Gymnasium in Ansbach, then was a pastor in various places in Bavaria; from information kindly shared by Pastor Wolfgang Huber, who is preparing the Bavarian pastors register.

says: "This is my body, this is my blood."²⁷

I find it striking that in *Drei Bücher von der Kirche* from 1845, Loehe does not explicitly deal with the Lord's Supper,²⁸ but only with the liturgy in general: "The true faith is expressed not only in the sermon but is also prayed in the prayers and sung in the hymns."²⁹ We can assume that with such words he is also thinking of the liturgy of Holy Communion. To be sure, the Lord's Supper is mentioned repeatedly in *Drei Bücher* as well as in regard to the doctrinal differences between the confessions, but it does not have its own section.

The question of church fellowship was also something Loehe only highlighted very clearly in the second edition of *Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch* from 1851. This topic became of such importance to him only in the course of time. He held the view that one could not be in communion with a church "from which we have separated, or which has separated from us for the sake of truth."³⁰ Loehe was very clear on this issue and remained so to the end of his life. In the 1870 preface to his *Beicht- und Kommunionbuchlein für evangelische Christen*, Loehe stated the following about his principles on the Lord's Supper: "Despite the fact that he [i.e., the author] must face the future in silence, he does not deviate in the least from the principles he has always held."³¹

Provoked by Ludwig Feldner,³² the editor of the *Rheinisches lutherisches Wochenblatt* and superintendent of the Rhenish diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Prussia ("Old Lutheran"), Loehe published a statement in 1868 in the *Korrespondenzblatt der Diakonissen* under the title "Brüderliche Klage über Gewissensver-

27. This letter is printed only in abbreviated form in Löhe, Brief an Gustav Ritter, 26.6-2.7.27, GW 1:255-256. The portion quoted here can be found in full in Ganzert, "Einleitung," GW 1:166, although without a complete reference.

28. See Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, "Wilhelm Löhe als Zeuge des Altarsakraments," *Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes* (1947): 69-78; unfortunately published without annotations, but found in an earlier, hectographed version of the 1941 lecture. Wolfhart Schlichting, "Hinführung zum Abendmahl als Einweisung in gelebte Rechtfertigung: Löhes 'Fortschritt' in 'sakramentlichem Leben,'" in *Wilhelm Löhe und Bildung/Wilhelm Loehe and Christian Formation*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß and Jacob Corzine (Nürnberg: Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, and Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2016), 1-22.

29. Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 179; Wilhelm Löhe, *Drei Bücher von der Kirche 1845*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß, Studienausgabe 1 (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2006), 203.

30. Wilhelm Löhe, "Fragen und Antworten zu den sechs Hauptstücken des Kleinen Katechismus Dr. M. Luthers," in *Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch für Christen des lutherischen Bekenntnisses*, GW 3.2:456. See Rudolf Keller, "Löhes 'Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch,'" in *Löhe und Bildung*, 35.

31. Wilhelm Löhe, "Beicht- und Kommunionbuchlein für evangelische Christen," 7th ed., (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1894), vii. The preface to the 1870 edition cited here is not included in GW!

32. For Ludwig Feldner (1805-1890), see *Kirchliches Handlexikon: In Verbindung mit einer Anzahl ev.-lutherischer Theologen*, ed. Carl Meusel, 2:523. In 1858, Feldner resigned from his influential position as a Lutheran pastor in Elberfeld and from the *Landeskirche* and then was pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia in Elberfeld. Soon he became superintendent of the Rhenish diocese of that church. As such, he was editor of the *Rheinisches lutherisches Wochenblatt*.

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wirrung" ("Fraternal Complaint about Confusion of Conscience"). There Loehe gave an answer to the question of communion fellowship among the deaconess houses in Germany.³³ The Lutheran deaconess houses in Dresden and Neuendettelsau had co-signed an appeal by all Protestant deaconess houses, including Reformed and Union ones, for young women to join them. Feldner viewed this as a transgression of the limits of church fellowship. Therefore, he asked whether he could continue to send young women members of the Lutheran Church of Prussia to these houses. He had found this to be an offence.³⁴ Loehe felt compelled to respond to this "fraternal complaint." He recalls that a number of pastors in Bavaria had advocated the "unmixed and unblended administration of the holy sacrament."³⁵ With this he recalls what had been formulated in the Schwabach petition of October 9, 1851.³⁶ The congregation of Neuendettelsau had declared it wanted to practice an unmixed communion at the Lord's Supper. The village pastor now professed this anew. With the founding of the deaconess house, he had wanted to stem the tide of the Union movement in matters of inner mission and diaconal ministry. Loehe had no intention of outdoing Wichern or Fliedner. He even admired these men.

What I wanted and still want, however, is nothing more than to provide proof that the Lord does not exclude my homeland—which is, so to speak, ancestral home of the Augsburg Confession—and us poor Lutherans from the inner mission or from the holy diakonia of the nineteenth century because we upheld the little flag of unmixed communion fellowship; but that the Lord can and will further us in spite of all resistance from near and far. All our actions, however little or much they may be, have had and still have no other purpose than to honor the creative words of our most holy Consecrator in the Sacrament of the Altar. Among all those who serve the Lord and his people anywhere, we poor people of Dettelsau would like to consecrate all our work to his altar as a small, but ever-blooming wreath of thanksgiving and praise.³⁷

33. Klaus Kanzert, "Erläuterungen," GW 5.2:1067.

34. Wilhelm Löhe, "Brüderliche Klage über Gewissensverwirrung" (1868), GW 5.2:909-10.

35. GW 5.2:910.

36. Wilhelm Löhe et al., "Schwabacher Eingabe" (1851), GW 5.1:604-605.

37. Löhe, "Brüderliche Klage," GW 5.2: 911-912.

He asks for understanding that he might send representatives of his house to the deaconess day at Kaiserswerth, so that one could learn from them "and appropriate every good experience for ourselves."³⁸

These much-quoted sentences must be seen in their own context. Loehle made this statement in 1868, three years before his death. This is the context in which he formulates that diakonia should go forth from the altar and finds its center there in honoring the words of consecration as they are used and understood in the Lutheran Church. He does not hide his disappointment over the weakness and timidity of the Lutherans within the Union churches.³⁹ On the other hand, he also remains willing to learn something from Kaiserswerth. In the challenge by Feldner, his friend in the Old Lutheran Church, he took such a clear position on the central importance of a clearly defined Lutheran practice of the Lord's Supper.⁴⁰ So what significance did the confession have for Loehle?

The Lutheran Confession

On June 25, 1830, the day of the tercentenary of the *Confessio Augustana* (CA), Loehle wrote to his friend Wißmüller⁴¹ that he was preparing to receive Holy Communion:

This week I had read the Bible passages on this point, in addition the dogmatic history, especially Löscher's *Historia Mutuum*.⁴² I had come to the conviction—if that is not to claim too much—that Luther's teaching on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper was truth. Now my mind believes article 10 of our confession [CA 10], and I rejoiced to confess this faith of mine before God and the world while holding my Lord's Supper today.⁴³

A good year later, Loehle was ordained in Ansbach. There he entered his curriculum vitae in the ordination register: "The Augsburg Confession—if I, in all humility, may be permitted these words—is also my confession; the other symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in agreement with the *Augustana* are also *norma normata* for me."⁴⁴

38. GW 5.2: 912.

39. GW 5.2: 913.

40. See also the letter from 1867 in GW 5.2:1331-1332n706.

41. Johann Christian Adam Wißmüller (1804-1875) from Großhabersdorf was a pastor in various places in Bavaria; information from Pastor Wolfgang Huber (see n. 26 above).

42. Valentin Ernst Löscher had published his three-volume *Ausführliche Historia Mutuum zwischen den Evangelisch-Lutherischen und Reformierten* starting in 1707; see Horst Weigelt, "Löscher," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (hereafter TRE), 21:416.

43. Löhe, Brief an J. Ch. A. Wißmüller, 25.6.30, GW 1:302; see also Ganzert, "Einleitung," GW 1:177.

44. See Ganzert, GW 1:178. Loehle reflects further in the same context: "I do not hate the people who are against this faith of ours, but I have sincere love for them. Nonetheless, with St. Augustine I implore 'you to kill them with the two-edged sword, Hebr[ews] 4:12, that they may no longer be your enemies. I desire they should die to themselves, that they may live to you.' Certainly, I do not hate anyone, but from the depth of my soul, I hate all harmful and corrupt doctrine. With God's help I will preach the true doctrine and not fall silent until

His statements about the confession of the Lutheran church in *Drei Bücher* date from the year 1845. There Loehle had emphasized its confessions as the mark of a denomination (*Partikularkirche*). The mark of the church is the confession "because a denomination's understanding of the Word and use of the sacraments must be described in its confession."⁴⁵ He goes on to say that the confession must be scriptural and states that "the Lutheran Church has the distinctive mark of a confession which is faithful to the scriptures."⁴⁶

On the other hand, around 1850 Loehle was nevertheless also able to look at the confessional writings in a differentiating way and to distinguish "what is and what is not said confessionally... It does not occur to me to cling to the letter and to be guilty of worshipping the confessions (*Symbololatrie*)."⁴⁷ In light of this, Loehle is critical of Luther's *Schmalkald Articles*, claiming that Luther's style lacked objectivity because he wrote in his characteristic originality. Loehle did not want to endorse papal anti-Christianity in his own time. With Loehle, one must always pay attention to the historical context of what he has said.

I consider it necessary to determine Loehle's understanding of the confession not simply from the statements in *Drei Bücher*⁴⁸ but to understand these statements in the wider context of his practical decisions.

The Office of Ministry

Loehle considered the understanding of the office of ministry (*Amt*) to be an important topic. It is not necessary at this point to revisit this topic in all its breadth.⁴⁹ His understanding of the office of ministry according to its institution was of particular significance to him. Different views clashed with one another in the disputes among Loehle's North American friends, including his Neuendertelsau disciples. In fact, the Missouri Synod, which Loehle initially supported, did not break with him and vice versa on the question

the Lord himself takes me, his peace-loving soldier, from the church at battle into the holy silence of the church triumphant! Likewise, let it be my earnest endeavor that my life be like my faith, lest, while I preach to others, I myself become reprobate, 1 Cor. 9:17. Lord, I wait for your salvation Genesis 49[:18]."

45. Loehle, *Three Books*, 106; Löhe, *Drei Bücher*, 98.

46. Loehle, 111; Löhe, 105.

47. Wilhelm Löhe, *Unsere kirchliche Lage im protestantischen Bayern und die Bestrebungen einiger bayerisch-lutherischen Pfarrer in den Jahren 1848 und 1849* (1849/50), GW 5.1:429. This passage is discussed by Gottfried Hornig, "Lehre und Bekenntnis im Protestantismus," in *Die Lebrentwicklung im Rahmen der Ökumenizität*, Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte, ed. by Carl Andresen, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 180. Hornig, however, assigns Loehle to the side of a legalistic symbololatrie—mistakenly, as it turns out.

48. In this, I am addressing a critical question to Werner Klän, "Bekenntnisrenaissance im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Bekennen und Bekenntnis im Kontext der Wittenberger Reformation*, ed. Daniel Gehrt, Johannes Hund, and Stefan Michel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 241-244.

49. See Rudolf Keller, "August Vilmar and Wilhelm Löhe: Historische Distanz und Nähe der Zeitgenossen im Blick auf ihr Amtsverständnis," *Kerygma und Dogma* 39 (1993): 202-223.

of ministry. Loehe and his friends in the Missouri Synod opposed Grabau,⁵⁰ who strongly emphasized the divine institution of the office of ministry and did not accentuate the interrelatedness of office and congregation as Loehe did. Regarding the relationship between office and congregation, Loehe spoke of the “dualism of the congregation.”⁵¹ He knew that he had already “fallen into the hands” of the Missouri Synod on the doctrine of ministry,⁵² but he wanted to continue in fellowship with his Missouri friends. “The anathema by the Missouri Synod’ was probably the most painful of the many disappointments in Loehe’s life.”⁵³ Nevertheless, in a letter to friends—his “last true ones”⁵⁴—who sought his counsel and in 1854 founded the Iowa Synod, Loehe writes: “In the end, going [i.e., leaving Saginaw County, Michigan] is more beneficial to our missionary calling than staying. If we go, we can with effectiveness use the experiences we have had and at the same time work in accordance with our doctrine of ministry.”⁵⁵ Here in conversation with his friends, we can see how much importance Loehe attached to the right understanding of the doctrine of the ministry.⁵⁶ Keep in mind that Loehe made his argument for the right understanding of the office of ministry in view of the reordered conditions in North America and at the same time in view of the conditions and doctrinal opinions in Germany.

What can we learn from Loehe?

First, it must be clear that Loehe lived and thought in his own time. He of all people, so keen to embrace new developments, would have rejected the idea that you simply transfer quotations from his writings to the present day. That is why it is important we try to determine exactly what he formulated for his time. In doing so, it should not matter whether it is pleasing and relevant, “usable” for us today.

We need to listen to his arguments from back then and thoroughly examine what can be thought-provoking or helpful for us in our contexts and challenges today. This may be different in Germany in the context of the Evangelical Church in Germany and in America in the context of the various synods. In America, Loehe is discussed across the boundaries between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church—Missouri

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Synod. This also leads to different emphases. The consequences of what Loehe means for today can only be drawn within these frameworks, but these frameworks must not norm historical research on Loehe, his texts and his decisions at that time.

In the era after the adoption of the Leuenberg Agreement, it seems to me that the emphasis on the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper according to the Augsburg Confession, article 10, is an important impulse. Unfortunately, in the teaching of the Lord’s Supper today, theories being advocated in the practical conduct of congregations have left CA 10 far behind. Those who preside at celebrations of the Lord’s Supper should make new efforts to understand the real presence of Christ in the holy meal and to act accordingly in the liturgy.

How, under today’s conditions, considerations about admission to Holy Communion can be implemented and how, from a pastoral perspective, participation in Holy Communion can even be refused, requires very thorough consideration. The arguments may be more theologically rigorous among those who preside over the celebration than among those without theological education but who desire Holy Communion as baptized Christians. How can one invitingly proclaim the blessing of the meal, yet also demonstrate the duty of responsible administration of the sacraments, while at the same time preventing the existence of different “classes” in the community of Jesus Christ? In the current times of mobility and migration, these questions are posed differently than in the village of Neuendettelsau from 1850 to 1872.

What from Loehe’s accent on the *Brüderkirche* might be important for the formation of spiritual cells and circles in modern Protestantism?

Loehe fought for his ideals in the Bavarian *Landeskirche*. Is that just something particular to back then, or does his voice have an enduring right to be heard in his own church?

By reflecting on key statements from Loehe, I wanted to encourage us to listen and reconsider his statements even when they are not so easy to fit into today’s systems of thought. This is how he speaks to us about himself.

We cannot simply imitate Loehe today, but nevertheless we can fruitfully take from him food for thought. Of course, we may also distance ourselves from him, but this should also be carefully considered and not simply done with a wave of the hand. Even today, it is worthwhile to stay on the trail of his thinking.

50. Johann Andreas August Grabau (1804-1879), pastor in Erfurt from 1834, gathered a separated Lutheran congregation around him from 1836, with whom he emigrated to America in 1839. There he founded the Buffalo Synod; see *Kirchliches Handlexikon*, 3:48.

51. Wilhelm Löhe, *Aphorisms on Church and Office, Old and New*, trans. John R. Stephenson (St. Catharines: Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2016), 148; Wilhelm Löhe, *Kirche und Amt. Neue Aphorismen* (1851), GW 5.1:562. Loehe comes to the conclusion: “But if the congregation is with the office the dual factor of a single sacred whole, then there is a balance that benefits both parts.” Löhe, *Aphorisms*, 154; GW 5.1:567.

52. Deinzer, *Löhe’s Leben*, 3:120.

53. Wolfhart Schlichting, “Löhe,” in TRE 21:414. Schlichting here refers to Deinzer, *Löhe’s Leben*, 3:120.

54. Schlichting, 414.

55. Löhe, Brief an Großmann, Deindörfer, ?8.53, GW 2:208.

56. On this topic, see also Keller, “Kirche im Sinne,” 182.