

## The Lutheranism of C. P. Krauth

C. P. Krauth is one of the most famous men in the history of American Lutheranism. His pen was always busy. Yet, there is really very little material available to the cursory student of Church history. Rather he is mentioned again and again as the famous C. P. Krauth. This paper looks into his Lutheranism. Since it is based on only two books it should be considered more in the line of an hypothesis than a final result. The two books are: CHARLES PORTERFIELD KRAUTH by Spaeth as it has been reprinted by Religion in America, Arno Press (hence known as bio.)<sup>0</sup> and THE CONSERVATIVE REFORMATION AND ITS THEOLOGY by Krauth himself (Hence known as Reformation).

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## He Wanted To Be A Lutheran

Charles Porterfield Krauth spent much of his life in an intellectual battle. He sought to understand, master, and promulgate the theology of the Augustana. Yet, "he cherished a catholic spirit and took a cordial interest in the prosperity of all evangelical Churches" (bio. Vol. II, 332). He wanted to purify the English speaking Lutheran church in America but he did not want to offend anyone. He sought to build a homogeneous synod out of heterogeneous synods. He wanted to be a Lutheran but he could not escape the Calvinistic and Arminian influences of his surroundings nor the tolerance of his learned nature.

Krauth was born March 17, 1823 in Martinsburg Virginia, where his father was pastor of a Lutheran congregation. Less than a year after Krauth's birth his mother died. For the next several years Charles was separated from his father, in the care of various relatives. In 1834 the elder Krauth remarried and became the President of Pennsylvania College. So it happened, that Charles, at the age of eleven, got a new mother and entered college. By 1839 he was ready for the Theological Seminary of Gettysburg, where his father was also a professor. In 1841 he was finished with school and ready for his first church.

Now, this is not a biography of Krauth. There are two points this brief look at Krauth's early years can serve to illustrate, however. First, it should be noted how young

he was when he entered the ministry. Secondly, note that Charles was not under the direct influence and instruction of his father until his eleventh year. Even then, Krauth's relationship with his father was more student - teacher than father - son. He even lived in a dorm at times. These points are important as we try to discover the roots of Krauth's confessional posture. Surely it did not come through indoctrination at his father's knee. In fact, Krauth says of a Sunday School which he attended in Philadelphia; "here in St. Matthew's he (speaking in the third person) had first become acquainted with Lutheranism" (bio. Vol. I, 28). "In the winter of 1836-37, under deep religious impressions, he joined the catechetical class conducted by the pastor of the college church - and being confirmed he decided to devote himself to the work of the holy ministry" (bio. Vol. I, 34). Although Krauth's father was one of the leading church men among Lutherans of his time it seems as if he had paid little or no special attention to the instruction of his son in these important matters. The answer to this problem seems to lie in his father's philosophical and extremely tolerant attitude toward religion. This attitude Krauth did learn from his father. This was the atmosphere he breathed in his youth.

Krauth's seminary training did little to shape him into the mold of Lutheran theology. He did not like German in college and could not handle it well in his seminary days. This cut him off from the vast wealth of Lutheran literature. Later in his life, Krauth commented on this problem:

The ministry is withheld, not by positive but by negative Lutheranism, from entering other denominations. They do not refuse to become Presbyterians, Episcopalians, or Methodists because they are Lutherans, but because they are not satisfied with some fundamental principle of one or the other of these sects -- we are in this anomalous position for want of a Lutheran literature and theology, accessible alike to our ministers and people, in the English language. (bio. Vol. I, 182).

Cut off from much of value in Lutheran literature the English speaking Seminary at Gettysburg was more like a Bible school than what we think of today as a seminary. Writing in '49, eight years after his son had graduated from the seminary at Gettysburg, the elder Krauth calls for the publication of a thorough Lutheran dogmatics book in English and a reform in the curriculum of the theological schools:

We would have all our ministers acquainted with the Symbolical Books; we would have them all versed in the distinctive theology of the theological schools the study of the Symbols, and didactic polemic theology so administered as to bring before the view pure, unadulterated Lutheranism. (bio. Vol. I, 22)

Up until that time there was little if any formal study of the Symbolical Books in the English speaking Churches of the General Synod. What study there was mostly private -- out of personal interest. Didactic polemic theology served to foster the kind of negative Lutheranism Krauth wrote about. As a result of this lack of positive Lutheranism there was a lack of real agreement in the church. As the elder Krauth continued:

As things are, we have no standard, no guide. Everyone is left to fix his own views; and while we presume there is general agreement in our Church on the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, our ministers display, in the opinions they

entertain, sometimes a decided Calvinistic influence, sometimes an extreme Arminian, sometimes a Pelagian. (bio. Vol. I, 22)

Even though the elder Krauth saw these problems he could take no firmer action than Eli of old. He looked to improve but did not take positive action. This same attitude permeated the seminary at which he taught. The only forces which took strong action were the "new measure" men. These too were represented on the faculty. In fact, Dr. S. S. Schmucker, the author and chief apostle of the Definite Platform, was a member of that same faculty.

As Krauth matured he found himself to be a natural scholar. He loved to read and study. He was becoming his father's son. The elder Krauth was very pleased at his son's bent and helped him as much as he could. He advised his son on how and what to study. He supplied books and offered encouragement. Much of this advice was good. Again and again the elder Krauth advised his son to master the Bible in its original languages before anything else. He also convinced his son to learn and master German. On the other hand, he passed on to his son the spirit of Eli. They both felt that the Lutheran family should be kept together - polemics were in but proscriptions were out. As late as 1865 Krauth wrote: "When we speak, however, of pushing back (toward confessional Lutheranism), we mean not by proscription, but by the avoidance of entangling alliances - and by the assertion and maintenance of sound principles, until the Church is ripe for such action as shall put her right" (bio. Vol. II, 90).

In spite of his poor start in life and the spirit of Eli

which he inherited from his father, Krauth, by 1867, was recognized as the shining star of conservative Lutheranism in America. To be sure, his polemics sounded clear. He stood ready to point out error where ever it sprang up. Yet, we must ask: "Did his actions conform with his polemics"? Further we must ask: "Just how Lutheran was this shining star of Lutheranism"?

As has been suggested above, I have formed my own answers to these questions. My research, however, has been largely limited to the two books mentioned in the introduction. Neither one of these books are really clear enough to answer the questions definitively. The biography was written by Krauth's son-in-law and seeks to set Krauth forward as a hero of Lutheranism. The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology would seem to be confessional polemics. However, it is really a book of apologetics - a flag around which Lutherans should be able to gather. For this reason it is not always very clear. Though it may seem to set forth the position of the confessions clearly and condemn others, it can be understood in more than one way. It almost seems that the many words add to rather than prevent confusion.

Though it is impossible for me, at this time, to state definitively that Krauth does not deserve the place which he holds in the history of Lutheran Confessionalism, I will suggest certain areas which do merit further investigation.

In Article II of the Formula of Concord we read:

the pure teachers of the Augsburg Confession have taught and contended that by the fall of our first parents man was so corrupted that in divine things pertaining to our conversion and the salvation of

our souls he is by nature blind, that, when the Word of God is preached, he neither does nor can understand it, but regards it as foolishness; also, that he does not of himself draw nigh to God, but is and remains an enemy of God, until he is converted, (Trig. p.881, Sol. Dec. II, 5) in spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of the unregenerate man are utterly unable, by their own natural powers to understand, believe, accept, think, will begin, effect, do work, or concur in working anything, but they are entirely dead to what is good, and corrupt, so that in man's nature ~~is~~ there is not the least spark of spiritual power remaining - - by which, of himself, he he can prepare himself for God's grace, - - or by his own powers be able of himself, as of himself, to aid, do, work, or concur in working anything towards his conversion, either wholly, or half, or in any, even the least or most inconsiderable part; but that he is the servant [and slave] of sin, John 8,34, and a captive of the devil, by whom he is moved, Eph. 2,2; 2 Tim. 2,26. (Trig. p.883, Sol. Dec.II,7)

Krauth writes:

The only previous condition in the human soul positively necessary when the Holy Spirit approaches it, is that it shall not resist His work. (Reformation p. 423)

The Holy Spirit breathes forever on and in the word, and is, with it, received by all who hear the word, quickening the yielding heart, and hardening the heart which resists Him. (Reformation p. 644)

Now since Scriptures teach, even as the fathers confessed, that man's conversion is entirely the work of God's grace, it is just as wrong to speak of non-resistance as it is to speak of acceptance as part of conversion. The Scriptural Lutheran view has always been that natural man is an enemy of God and thus always resists God's grace until conversion takes place (Rom. 8:7). Thus while Krauth speaks of original sin and the natural depravity of man it would seem to be more in the spirit of the synergistic Iowa and Ohio groups than in the spirit of the Lutheran Confessions.

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper, on which Krauth spends 245 pages, is not treated as clearly in The Conservative

Reformation And Its Theology as it is in the 1943 Missouri Catechism. There may be good reason for this. Twenty-six years earlier Krauth had prepared a statement on the Lutheran view of Christ's presence in the sacrament. The excerpts from this document which are quoted in his biography sound very echt. However, in a letter to his father, in which Krauth refers to this document, he says:

Dr. Kurtz was evidently by no means desirous to have it produced - - [from] a lurking suspicion that I was too sound on the subject - - . He might have dismissed the latter apprehension. I shall never be able to believe in the substantial presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the elements. But my conviction became very clear, in the process of investigation, that our views of Christ's presence are tending to the other and far more dangerous extreme and that for His personal and distinct official character, the desposition is to infuse a vague and Unitarian idea of divine ubiquity. - -

There is a presence peculiar to His people when assembled, a presence peculiar to His ministers, a presence peculiar to His supper. Whether the peculiarity in each case is simply a moral one, arising from the condition into which each properly puts the believer, is a difficult question; but my impression is that in this peculiarity in each case the Son of God implicated as well as His people. (bio. Vol. I, 135-136)

In 1856, Krauth drafted another document which reads in part:

This Synod, resting on the Word of God as the sole authority in matters of faith, on its infallible warrant rejects the Romish doctrine of the real presence or Transubstantiation - - . (bio. Vol. I. 379)

To be sure, neither of these quotes mean anything in themselves; the first because it came so early and is so unclear; the second because it could be correctly understood. Yet, these statements might stand out like a warning flag to one who receives the Lutheran Confessions. Even in the Conservative Reformation, Krauth avoids the use of the term real presence in favor of sacramental of spiritual presence.



He does however claim:

"Our Church never has denied that the ascension of Christ was real, literal, and local; never has denied that His body has a determinate presence in heaven - - - That body in its determinate limitations is in heaven, and in and of itself would be there alone, but through the divine, in consequence of the personal conjunction, and in virtue of that conjunction, using in the whole person the attributes of the whole person in both its parts, it is rendered present" (Reformation p. 650-51).

This does not quite square with the Formula of Concord where Luther is quoted:

Also: The one body of Christ [says Luther] has a threefold mode or all three modes of being anywhere. First, the comprehensible, bodily mode, as He went about bodily upon earth, when, according to His size, He vacated and occupied space [was circumscribed by a fixed place]. This mode He can still use whenever He will, as He did after the resurrection, and will use at the last day, as Paul says, 1 Tim. 6,15: "Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed God (and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords)". And to the Colossians, 3,4: "When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear". In this manner He is not in God or with the Father, neither in heaven, as the mad spirits dream; for God is not a bodily space or place. And this is what the passages how Christ leaves the world and goes to the Father refer to which the false spirits cite. (Trig. p. 1005, Sol. Decl. VII, 99)

In another place Krauth explains the sacramental union as voluntary operativeness. In this case he seems to be falling into the trap of learning. Would it not be better to simply say that Christ's body is present in a different way in the Lord's Supper than it is present with us at all times because of His promise than to go on as Krauth does below?

The divine nature of the Son of God is personall present with every human creature, nay, is in every believer, yet no man thereby becomes incarnate God. All substantial presence, in the divine economy, becomes operative through means. The Lord's Supper is no exception to this rule. The relation of the supernatural reality conveyed, to the natural element conveying, is not that of mechanical union, or of passive copresence, but is that of sacramental union,

of voluntary operativeness, in virtue of which the consecrated elements are the media of a communication which would not take place without them. Hence, while the generic, substantial presence of the whole Christ perpetually characterizes His state of plenary exercise of the prerogatives of His undivided divine - human person, the specific operativeness of that presence which renders it sacramental is dependent upon Christ's will, and is confined to the Supper. (Reformation p. 821)

Finally there is Krauth's insistence on calling the bread and wine the communicating medium. "Paul says, the bread we break, the cup we bless, is the communicating medium" (Reformation p. 631). This observation is founded on I Cor. 10:16. The word *κοινωνία*, however, means association, fellowship, close relationship. The idea is that the divine elements are in close association with the earthly elements not so much that the earthly elements communicate the divine. Could it be that Krauth does not believe that the true body and blood are really present in the way in which Luther, the fathers, and Paul believed? Is it possible that Krauth's view of the Sacrament of the altar made it possible <sup>for him</sup> to believe and defend so positively his proposition that Calvin signed the unaltered Augsburg Confession without reservation? (compare Reformation p. 180 with Historical Introduction Trig. 174)

Even if you can not go along with my suspicions on Krauth's concept of the Lord's Supper, I think you will be able to agree with me that Krauth was not sound on his position with regard to election. He wrote:

Is the election of God in any sense the cause of the difference? The answer of the Calvinist is: Yes. The answer of the Lutheran is No. The election of God is indeed the cause of the faith of the one, but it is neither positively nor negatively, neither by act nor by failure to act, the cause of the unbelief of the other. Hence it is not the cause of the difference. I choose (or elect) to offer bread to the

beggars. The election of bread for his food and the election to offer it to him are the proper cause of the reception of the bread on the part of the one, but they are not the cause of the rejection on the part of the other. The first concurs in my election, but his concurrence is the effect, not the cause, of my election. The second refuses, but his refusal is not the effect of my election, but an effect in spite of it. As between me and the men the decision must be, that the acceptance of one is no more than the refusal of the other, the cause of my election. But between the one and the other the difference is made by the willingness to receive - wrought by me through the offer - and the unwillingness to receive, wrought by the man himself in spite of the offer. (bio. Vol. II, p. 329-30)

Then he concludes: "Faith is the actual condition of the application of election or its determination at this point" (bio. Vol. II, p. 331). Holding this view it would have been impossible to be reconciled to Walther - Walther was<sup>a</sup> a confessional Lutheran.

There are also some other points at which Krauth might find himself at odds with the confessions. In 1860 at a special meeting of the church council of St. Mark's Church in Philadelphia, Krauth received permission to wear a preaching gown. This had not been the custom of that congregation. The congregation objected. There was a congregational meeting but Krauth and the council refused to let the congregation vote on the matter. Krauth later defended his actions as follows.

This was a Church question and not a congregational one, and therefore, to be settled by the church and not by the congregation. If the Church had not settled it, it would be a question for the minister, and not for the congregation. (bio. Vol. II, p. 4)

This argument is in conflict with both the Biblical and Lutheran doctrine of the Church as well as article X point 9 of the Formula of Concord, thor. Decl.

Krauth also held that one day in seven must be set apart as the Lord's day. Even his hero worshipping biographer wrote:

Having thus recorded the position of Dr. Krauth on "the Divine Obligation of the Lord's Day", we feel bound to add a few words of explanation to our narrative. The views set forth in the above quoted summary were undoubtedly held by him even in later years, possibly to the end of his life. But - - - (bio. Vol. II, P.119)

The final point which I shall raise in this connection deals with the antichrist. This point like the one on the Lord's Supper and others which I have not mentioned is based to a large degree on feeling. In those cases where I have found mention of the Pope it has not been as the antichrist. This may be do to the construction of the sentence or a like consideration. In fact, in the Conservative Reformation page 241 Krauth does say: "Luther wished that among the Articles of Abuses there should have been a declaration that the Pope is antichrist". Then he goes on to show that <sup>was</sup> this was not possible because the confession was to be a joint one. In all other references to the antichrist which I came upon the preceding word was an. To my mind this does not conform to the Confessions.

Even if Krauth was innocent of all the doctrinal charges which I have brought against him, he must be found guilty of not living up to his own polemic standard. He set the standard on very Biblical and confessional grounds.

In maintaining, therefore, as Protestants, the right and duty of men, in the exercise of private judgment, to form their own convictions, unfettered by civil penalties in the State, or by inquisitorial powers in the Church, we maintain, also the right and duty of the Church to shield herself from corruption in

doctrine by setting forth the truth in her Confession, by faithfully controverting heresy, by personal warning to those that err, and finally, with the contumacious, by rejecting them from her communion, till, through grace, they are led to see and renounce the falsehood, for which they claimed the name of truth. (Reformation 175)

Then added this brave statement: "Every Christian is bound either to find a Church on Earth, Pure in its whole faith, or to make one" (Reformation 195)

In spite of this brave stand, Krauth fought at Fort Wayne to retain the Pennsylvania Synod's membership in the General Synod though he and the Pennsylvania Synod were at serious odds with the General Synod on doctrinal matters. (bio. Vol. II, p. 157 ff.) In spite of his brave stand, Krauth was the moving Spirit in founding the General Council, which was based on a platform too narrow to expect be really Lutheran. Compare the following with Dr. Walther's article "the False Arguments For the Modern Theory of Open Questions".

What the Evangelical Lutheran Church regards as fundamental to Gospel doctrine, that is, what ~~he~~ her existence, her history, her Confessions (for Krauth this meant the first twentyone articles of the Augsburg Confession) declare or justly imply to be her articles of faith, these ought to be accepted as such by all honorable men, who bear her name. (Reformation p. 183)

In spite of his brave statements, Krauth retained his membership in the General Council eventhough it showed itself to be in opposition to the Lutheran Confessions by its reaction to "the Galesburg Rule". How was Krauth able to do these things? He did them in the spirit of Eli, the spirit of his father.

If Krauth is important in the History of the confessional

Lutheran Church, he is important as a warning. He wanted to be a Lutheran but he couldn't bring his reason into subjection. He wanted to be a conservative but he didn't have the courage. Finally, he found his true vocation as a liberal teacher of philosophy.