

Heinrich von Rohr:

Strong Believer,

Capable Leader,

Practical Theologian

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## I

The three aspects of Heinrich von Rohr's character mentioned in the title colored his activities throughout his life. By his strong faith he was able to endure numerous trials. By his capable leadership other believers were led out of persecution and strife to a better day. But by his theology rooted in the practical he also failed to correct the teaching of others and to steer a straight course himself.

## II

Heinrich Karl Georg von Rohr was born on March 28, 1797 in Bielerbeck, Pomerania. His father, Philip von Rohr, was a privy councillor at the court in Berlin and also a revenue assessor. This second position meant some travel to different parts of the realm. It was on one of these trips that Heinrich was born. The von Rohr family was a noble family whose line went back as far as 1191.

In keeping with family tradition, Heinrich received a military training. In 1805 at age eight he was sent to the Prussian military academy at Stolp. He became a page at the court of Frederick Wilhelm and Louise three years later. There he was a "familiar figure in the family."<sup>1</sup> He continued his military education and was commissioned in 1815 as a second lieutenant in the 27th grenadier regiment, the "Kaiser Alexander." While serving in this outfit, von Rohr went to Paris in connection with the settlement of the war with Napoleon. Nine years later he was promoted to first lieutenant and on March 30, 1834, he was commissioned as a Hauptmann,

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<sup>1</sup>Philip von Rohr-Sauer, "The Prussian Immigration," Walther League Messenger, May, 1939, p 598

<sup>2</sup>Philip von Rohr-Sauer, "Heinrich von Rohr and the Prussian Immigration to New York and Wisconsin," paper written in 1933, p 3

an artillery captain in the 27th regiment.<sup>2</sup> He moved to Magdeburg two years later.

After living the celibate life for 32 years, von Rohr married three times in eleven years. His first wife was Emilie Willman. They were married in 1829 and the sermon preached at their wedding had a remarkable effect on von Rohr. Emilie did not live long however, She died when their only child, Max was born.

The second Mrs. Heinrich von Rohr was Julia Mangold, the daughter of a Berlin physician. They were married in 1834, shortly after von Rohr received his captain's commission. The Lord blessed this pair with two children, a daughter, Julchen, and a son. The son was born October 10, 1836 and died in March of the following year. von Rohr also lost his wife and his son Max to cholera that year. He was left with his little daughter.

The religious activities of von Rohr in Germany can be divided into two definite periods, before and after he met J. A. A. Grabau. He no doubt was baptized when he was born, but the rough military life probably dulled or killed his faith. One would think a close association with the pious Queen Louise would have influenced him. But instead it seems that he "was a carefree young officer who enjoyed the pleasures of the world and had little time or interest in religion."<sup>3</sup>

His firm religious conviction had its beginning in the sermon preached at his first wedding. Perhaps he experienced a true conversion. Perhaps he was already a believer, though weak, and experienced a great strengthening of that faith. According to Philip von Rohr-Sauer, "During the marriage service came his conversion to Christianity and the unquenchable thirst for religious truth that was to alter not only his own life but also the

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<sup>3</sup>Leroy Boehlke, et al., By the Grace of God, 1964, p 13

destiny of many fellow-Lutherans."<sup>4</sup>

This new-found religious conviction began to work in von Rohr's life. He attended services conducted by Hengstenberg and Schleiermacher and was strengthened by their sermons. He no longer allowed swearing or obscene language in his regiment. He associated with theological students. He helped found the Berlin Sick-Benefit Society. He took private instructions from a Berlin pastor. As the Agend Controversy grew, he began to hold services in his home. The years 1829-36 meant the crystalization in von Rohr's mind of the difference between Lutherans and Reformed.

von Rohr first was persecuted for his beliefs when his son was born in 1836. He refused to have him baptized by a Union pastor but chose Pastor Kaul from Berlin instead. Bishop Dräseke insisted that a Union pastor perform the baptism. von Rohr had had a previous confrontation with Bishop Dräseke and had told him that the sacrament of the altar was not valid in the Union Church. So now Bishop Dräseke gave him an ultimatum. von Rohr adamantly refused to go along with him but appealed to Friedrich Wilhelm III instead. His commanding officer even interceded on his behalf. But the king would not listen. Finally, on February 10, 1837 the order came from the king, "I hereby release Captain von Rohr from further service because he refused to carry out the order of his superiors."<sup>5</sup>

von Rohr was in rough shape at this point. He lost his first wife a few years before. His second wife and two sons died also. He lost his source of livelihood, his army commission. He was fined \$30 for having Kaul baptize his son. Added to that was a \$5 fine for every unauthorized meeting conducted in his home. He had his little daughter to take care

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<sup>4</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "Heinrich von Rohr and the Prussian Immigration to New York and Wisconsin" p 3

<sup>5</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "The Prussian Immigration," p 598

of. To make ends meet he became a book dealer, especially old Lutheran books.

von Rohr then was invited by a Mr. von Beelow of Seehof near Stolp, Pomerania to stay with him. So he sold all his furniture and bought a wagon. He enlisted a former oboist in his regiment, Friedrich Mueller, as his companion. It was at this point that his relationship with Grabau began to take shape.

Grabau and von Rohr had met previous to von Rohr's unfortunate state of affairs. Grabau had attended a meeting of Old Lutherans in von Rohr's home in Magdeburg. Probably then ~~that~~ they recognized their kindred spirit. Later, in March, 1837, Grabau was arrested for illegally performing ministerial acts.

von Rohr and Mueller took it upon themselves to help Grabau escape. Grabau had been declared innocent in court but the authorities in Erfurt wanted to keep him in prison to prevent his religious activism. "Unfortunately for Grabau, neither the right of habeas corpus nor the Bill of Rights existed in the land."<sup>6</sup> But his prison conditions were anything but severe. He received and sent uncensored mail. He took nightly walks with a guard.

It was on just one such walk that von Rohr and Mueller engineered Grabau's "daring" escape. Mueller visited Grabau and told him von Rohr was waiting with a wagon.

"Pastor Grabau recognized in this the direction of God and went as usual for a walk with the police officer. Outside the gate he took leave of the officer by saying: 'Today I am going where God directs me as you have often advised.' The officer bid him farewell, and Pastor Grabau ran to the wagon.

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<sup>6</sup>Ralph Dornfeld Owen, "The Old Lutherans Come," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol. XX, No. 1 (April, 1947), p 14

As they rode away the police officer cried after him, 'Pastor Grabau, do come back.'<sup>7</sup>

This unlikely trio headed in the direction of von Beelow. During their ten-day journey they had many narrow escapes. But they also preached and baptized along the way. To keep the authorities from discovering them, they used the password, "Unkown and yet known."<sup>8</sup> Grabau had to hide in the homes of faithful Lutherans, as he did in Stettin at the home of the Barthels. von Rohr and Mueller could stay at an inn.

When they arrived at Kammin they encountered some pietists. They voiced their opposition to them because of their lay preaching.

They finally made it to Seehof, but they found von Beelow to be pietistic also. Again they spoke out against lay preaching. They left and wintered at Versin, on the border of Posen. They continued to carry out the work of the church.

At the end of the winter of 1837-38 they went their separate ways. Grabau operated out of Brüssow for a time. While he was there he baptized the son of Martin Lindecke. This sparked a confessional movement in Wallnow and Bergholz in the Ueckermärk. The result was the immigration of these two villages to New York.

von Rohr journeyed to Lübjest where his brother lived. He stayed for a while but could not remain inactive. He decided to go to Berlin where he was arrested. The time of his arrest and imprisonment is hard to determine from available sources. Most have von Rohr spending about a year in prison ending in early 1839. In By the Grace of God, his arrest and imprisonment began on November 1, 1838 and lasted until about

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<sup>7</sup>Johann Grabau, "Johann Andreas August Grabau," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol. XXIV, No. 1(April, 1951), p 36.

<sup>8</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "Heinrich von Rohr and the Prussian Immigration to New York and Wisconsin," p 8

December 15, 1839.<sup>9</sup> This same source also speaks of a subsequent imprisonment in April and May, 1839.<sup>10</sup> This appears to be the most acceptable.

Whenever his term began, it is certain what the charges were: a refusal to testify about his and Grabau's religious activities. "When he refused to air any evidence against Grabau, he was promptly imprisoned. His prison sentence was to be completed in Magdeburg where threats and even the third degree were to force from him a confession."<sup>11</sup> It was ironic that he should be imprisoned in magdeburg, "where only two years before he had been a distinguished member of society."<sup>12</sup>

von Rohr's stay in prison was not completely unpleasant. The warden was friendly and allowed him a great deal of freedom. He was even granted leaves to Berlin and Nurnberg to study his hobby, antiquarian lore.<sup>13</sup>

While he was behind bars Stephan began his emigration. On October 25, 1838 contact was established between the two groups at Magdeburg. But Grabau was in prison at Heiligenstadt following his arrest in Weimar in September, 1838. Some sources seem to indicate that von Rohr met with O. H. Walther in late October, 1838 and traveled with him to Hamburg. This would be unlikely if he was indeed in prison then. But it would have been possible considering the freedom he was granted. If the meeting did take place, then the November 1, 1838 date is probably the correct one for von Rohr's imprisonment.

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<sup>9</sup>Boehlke, p 15

<sup>10</sup>Boehlke, p 20

<sup>11</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "Heinrich von Rohr and the Prussian Immigration to New York and Wisconsin," p 8

<sup>12</sup>Owen, p 15

<sup>13</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "Heinrich von Rohr and the Prussian Immigration to New York and Wisconsin," p 8



The time he spent in prison gave von Rohr the opportunity to do some deep thinking. He had arrived at firm religious convictions. Yet he could not freely exercise them. He had given up great material blessings for the sake of those convictions, position, money, honor, freedom. Why should he remain in a land that did not want him? If Stephan and Kavel could emigrate for religious convictions, why not von Rohr also? "During this imprisonment . . . Heinrich von Rohr no doubt reached his decision to go to America."<sup>14</sup>

The end of this stay in prison also was the end of the first part of Heinrich von Rohr's story. The most important events were his religious awakening, his association with Grabau, his imprisonment and his decision to emigrate. Several significant characteristics of von Rohr are also evident. He showed his strong religious beliefs, his leadership ability and the influence of Grabau.

### III

Emigration had been in the wind in Germany for a few years already. A small contingent of Pomerians left in 1837. Stephan left for America in 1838. In that same year Kavel headed for Australia.

von Rohr started making plans for emigration already in 1838. On February 15, 1839 he and three other men met in Berlin. von Rohr represented Saxony and Berlin, Martin Krueger and David Helm represented Pomerania and Wilhelm Bortfeld, Thuringia. They formed a committee which drew up a program for emigration.

This program included some very basic principles. Those involved were not to have common ownership of property but were to set up a common pool

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<sup>14</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "The Prussian Immigration," p 598

of freely lent money. The erection of churches and schools would be the first order of business upon arrival. And only true Lutherans could participate.

This committee decided on New York, specifically Buffalo, as their destination. A group of Pomeranians had settled there, as had Krause. They were willing to go without passports if necessary. And it was their responsibility to take care of the outfitting of ships and the cost of the journey.

Whatever the actual dates are for von Rohr's imprisonment, there can be no doubt that he was the guiding light in this emigrant organization. Grabau was in prison until March 12, 1839 and was very sickly even after his release. But von Rohr, only three days after his release on May 10, met with the other members of the committee in Kammin. They proceeded to draw up a highly organized and detailed emigration agreement.

When this group sought the governments permission to leave, the crown prince, later Friedrich Wilhelm IV, tried to dissuade von Rohr.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps they were acquainted with one another from von Rohr's tenure as a page. But the decision had been made to emigrate because of religious convictions and von Rohr was loyal to those convictions.

von Rohr at first tried to make Hamburg the place where they would board ships for America. But he found out that they did not have enough money for all the ships they wanted. A couple merchants told him if they wanted to Liverpool first and then to America, they would save money.<sup>16</sup> So in late May or early June, accompanied by Dr. Gustiani, a former Catholic

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<sup>15</sup>Roy Suelflow, "The First Years of Trinity Congregation, Freistadt, Wisconsin," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (April, 1945), p 8

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p 8

priest who could speak English, von Rohr went to England. He worked out the necessary details at Hull and Liverpool.

He did not return to Germany but ~~se~~ sail for America on June 16, 1839. He and Gustiani arrive at Baltimore on August 29. Then von Rohr went to New York to wait for the others. The rest of the group left Germany between late June and late July. After transferring in England they all arrived in September.

von Rohr not only demonstrated his leadership in Germany but also took charge of the immigrants in America. Grabau came on the last of the four ships and did not arrive until late September. When he got to Buffalo on October 4, he found most of the immigrants. But von Rohr, without consulting him, had already left for Wisconsin with about 40 families, those who could afford it.

The group that came to Wisconsin was not the gullible type. They knew they wanted a separate community. Under von Rohr's guidance, they studied the survey maps and selected Freistadt.<sup>17</sup> They bought about 1200 acres of land at \$1.25 per acre. von Rohr used his second wife's inheritance to purchase his 40 acre plot. The land set aside for the church was put in his name.

After they cast lots for their 40 acre sections they began to build their cabins. von Rohr, ever full of energy, built his first by November 14. All the rest had theirs up by the end of that month. Church and school were held in von Rohr's cabin.

This community had many factors which recommended it but they were a church without a pastor. They asked Grabau to come and serve them but

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<sup>17</sup>Boehlke, p 27

he had his congregation in Buffalo. The congregation then chose Joachim Luck, a teacher, to conduct services and to administer the sacraments. They asked von Rohr if he had any objections but he agreed that this was proper.<sup>18</sup> Then they asked von Rohr, as the recognized leader, to write to Grabau and to ask him if it was proper for a layman to conduct services. The result of this request was forthcoming on December 1, 1840. It was the infamous "Hirtenbrief," the letter which really touched off the Missouri-Buffalo controversy.

von Rohr's personal life was taking a turn at this point also. He had a five year-old daughter who had no mother. But was corresponding with a certain Margarethe Lutz<sup>"</sup>el in Buffalo. In the summer of 1840 wrote him and asked him to return to Buffalo to prepare himself for the ministry. So Heinrich von Rohr took a bold new step. He sold his farm and left Wisconsin on September 18, 1840.

During this time of emigration and settlement Heinrich von Rohr was at his best. Strong, imaginative leadership was needed and he delivered it. He did not draw back when faced with major decisions. He moved forward with conviction to England, New York, Wisconsin. He rallied the troops. He led them to victory. He was the general who arranged for transportation and secured a foothold.

Had von Rohr stayed in Freistadt, the history of the Lutheran church in America would certainly be different. What would Krause have tried to get away with while von Rohr was around? Would von Rohr have challenged the "Hirtenbrief" if he had been outside of Grabau's influence? Would his views on church and ministry have developed differently? von Rohr

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<sup>18</sup>P. H. Buehring, The Spirit of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1940) p 24

cannot be faulted for studying to be a minister. But it is interesting to speculate on his potential role as an influential layman.

#### IV

Heinrich von Rohr prepared himself for the ministry by being the first student at Martin Luther College in Buffalo. The only teacher at first was Grabau. The course of study included church history, dogmatics, exegesis and homiletics. The relative value of the education he received there is questionable. His son took a fuller course under more teachers and he said this about his education: "When I compare this instruction with the training that our sons are getting at college and the seminary today, I recall painfully an almost wasted youth. The instruction was very deficient and what is more, very mechanical."<sup>19</sup> Whether Heinrich von Rohr had an advantage or a disadvantage because of his age (43) and the size of his class (one) is questionable. But he was an educated man. He had carefully examined his own religious convictions. He had studied Lutheran literature and even possessed a large and valuable library. And most of all, he was willing to learn.

But he was also somewhat handicapped in his seminary training. While he went to school he also worked part-time as a teacher, earning about \$3.00 per month. He married for the third time, to his pen pal, Margarethe Lutzel. The Lord blessed them with a son, Philip, in 1843. Despite all these hardships, he made it through.

These four years of seminary training were crucial to von Rohr. He became Grabau's pupil. Grabau must have been an influential man since even a charismatic personality such as von Rohr could fall under his spell.

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<sup>19</sup>Philip von Rohr-Sauer, "Philip von Rohr--Devoted Pioneer Pastor," paper written in 1975, p 4

Philip von Rohr says of him, "Pastor Grabau we all honored. His example influenced me and others favorably and taught us never to complain of overwork in our parishes. Complete devotion to our calling--that was the attitude, God be thanked, that we were imbued with."<sup>20</sup> Heinrich von Rohr never really broke from Grabau's influence and Hochstetter was not too far off when he wrote, "Pastor von Rohr is and remains Grabau's pupil."<sup>21</sup>

von Rohr completed his training and passed the necessary examination in 1844. Grabau arranged for him to receive his first call to Humberstone, Ontario. He preached his first sermon there on June 6, 1844. His pastorate there seems to have been a bad experience for him. Perhaps this was a trouble-spot. It was not a large congregation and von Rohr was not paid with any degree of regularity. It must have been quite a change for him also. He was no longer the influential lay leader of a large group. He was the parish pastor of a small flock. The only notable incident during his two-year stay occurred in 1845. von Rohr became a charter member of the Buffalo Synod.

In 1846 he was called to a triple parish in Niagar County, New York. He served congregations in Walmore (New Wallmow), Bergholz (New Bergholz) and St. Johnsburg (St. Johannisburg).

The members of these congregations were immigrants from villages of the same name in the Ueckermark near Prenzlau. They were part of the 1843 immigration. Pastor Kindermann, who began David's Star, Kirchain, Wisconsin, had served these people in Germany. They were also served by Pastor Ehrenstrom.<sup>"</sup> When they came to New York, Grabau served them until

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p 4

<sup>21</sup>Chr. Hochstetter, "Eine unadelige Weise," Kirchliches Informatorium, Volum 15, No. 7 (July 1, 1867), p 54

Ehrenström<sup>"</sup> arrived.

Ehrenström<sup>"</sup> was a strange egg. At times he appeared very orthodox. He stood with Kindermann in opposition to the Breslau Synod in the matter of state schools. He had a magnetic personality. A moving and dynamic preacher, he was imprisoned for a fiery sermon just as he was about to board the boat for emigration.

He arrived in America in 1844. Almost immediately he began to tear these congregations apart. He condemned all translations of the Bible and demanded that the lay people read the Greek aloud--with the proper accents. And we think we have problems with opposition to new translations! He also taught that the ultimate proof of one's Christianity was the ability to perform miracles. He was soon deposed and died as a pauper in California.

Such was the situation when von Rohr arrived. It was a situation which demanded evangelical leadership. The people there wanted the pure Word of God and a pastor they could trust. There could have been no better Buffalo Synod man to choose than von Rohr.

He lived in Bergholz as he served this parish. Philip von Rohr gives some insights into life in this community.

"Of my youth in New Bergholz there is little to record. The school there offered only the most meagre necessities; the teachers were hard and administered vigorous punishment even for minor offenses. The village in general was ruled by a very pietistic atmosphere; skating and snowballing were considered evil excesses by the people there. . . The situation in the parishes was a unique one. Only people who belonged to the congregation lived in these cities. New settlers had to take instruction before they were full-fledged members. Church discipline was strictly enforced. All so-called worldly activity such as dancing was strictly forbidden. Members who had fallen into sinful ways had to do penance publicly. All Church holidays were meticulously observed. In short a strong church spirit regulated everyone. Thus outwardly a model congregational life was to be observed there."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> von Rohr-Sauer, "Philip von Rohr--Devoted Pioneer Pastor," p 4

von Rohr served Walmore until 1854. They then called their own pastor, H. Lange. Von Rohr installed him on March 1, 1854. When von Rohr began to serve only Bergholz is unclear, but by this time that was his only parish.

He seems to have been as evangelical, if not more so, as any other Buffalo Synod pastor. Nothing is available to indicate any trouble at Bergholz during these years. He did help found a church in Wolcottsville which later (1857) was divided over the Cent-Kasse. A Missouri Synod church sprang up there. But not until the Buffalo Colloquy was there a hint of unrest at Bergholz.

The Lord richly blessed the von Rohr family in these years. Besides Philip in 1843, twin girls, Marie and Elise were born in 1847 and John arrived in 1850. von Rohr's daughter Julchen by his second wife married his old companion, the oboist Friedrich Mueller. He also prepared himself for the ministry at Martin Luther College. He was later a pastor of the Buffalo congregation that split from the Missouri Synod Freistadt congregation.

von Rohr was faithful giver to the Lord. The "Receipts" column of the Kirchliches Informatorium often lists him as one who paid his subscription. He was a regular supporter of Martin Luther College and the Synod. Even Mrs. von Rohr helped out. She somehow raised \$4.00 to help pay for a washing machine at MLC on September 29, 1864. All this was done on a salary that began at \$20.00/month and was raised to \$100.00/three months in 1858.<sup>23</sup>

Heinrich von Rohr's pastorate must have been a time of joy for him. He finally was able to settle down. He had a wife who lived more than

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<sup>23</sup>Dedication of Holy Ghost Lutheran Church, booklet published in 1970



three years. He saw his children grow up in a Christian environment. He sent his son Philip to MLC in 1853. The congregations he served were growing also. On the surface it seems an idyllic situation. But von Rohr was embroiled in the Missouri-Buffalo controversy. His station in life had also changed. He had to give up his leadership role. The most he could hope for was second-in-command. He had committed himself to playing in Grabau's ballpark and now had to play according to Grabau's rules.

#### IV

The controversy that erupted between the Missouri and Buffalo Synods finds its source in Freistadt, Wisconsin. In 1840 Grabau issued his "Hirtenbrief" in answer to a question by the Freistadt congregation. In it he maintained that only an ordained pastor could administer the sacraments and preach, except in emergencies. He included some false doctrine of the church in it also. When he sent a copy to the Saxons in Missouri, they did not approve. So a doctrinal battle ensued.

At this time in Freistadt Pastor Krause was serving the congregation. He, like a number of other Buffalo pastors, was very unevangelical. He attempted to exercise the authority spelled out in the "Hirtenbrief" at almost every opportunity. This resulted in a number of excommunications in that congregation. The people who were thus unfairly excommunicated sought a pastor from the Missouri Synod. When one was sent the pattern of Missouri opposition churches to Buffalo churches was set. A jurisdictional and actually, fellowship, battle ensued.

The battle was carried out in the press. The organ of the Missouri Synod was the Lutheraner, edited by Walther. The Buffalo Synod countered with the Kirchliches Informatorium, edited by Grabau.

von Rohr was a regular contributor to the Kirchliches Informatorium,

especially in the early years. He was not just a hatchet man for Grabau. Although von Rohr was polemical in his articles, Grabau was just as polemical, if not more so. But most of von Rohr's writings were directed against the Missouri Synod in general and Walther specifically. He did write a few reports on Bergholz and her neighbors. But the controversy with Missouri must have influenced him greatly or else Grabau assigned his topics to him.

The Kirchliches Informatorium began in 1851. von Rohr wrote his first article for the eighteenth issue, July 11, 1852. But after that, except for a brief period during lent, 1853, he had an article against the Missouri Synod in nearly every issue until the trip to Germany in the summer of 1853.

von Rohr wrote several important and revealing articles in the first years of publication. One of the first articles he wrote was "Judgment of a Reader of the Lutheraner and the Kirchliches Informatorium Following a Request of Prof. Walther."<sup>24</sup>

Walther had called upon the readers of the Lutheraner to judge the Cramer-Winkler case in Michigan. Cramer had accepted members excommunicated by Winkler. The Missouri held the excommunications to be invalid because the people had no chance to appeal. von Rohr maintained in his article that they did appeal to Grabau. But they wanted Cramer to defend them. He said that was not allowable since Missouri and Buffalo had differing view on excommunication.

In criticizing the Missouri Synod practice in this case, von Rohr also

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<sup>24</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Urtheil eines Lesers des Lutheraners und des Kirchlichen Informatoriums, in Folge der Aufforderung des Herrn Professors Walther," Kirchliches Informatoriums, Vol. 1, No. 18 (July 1, 1852), p 140

accused the Missouri Synod of excommunicating the Buffalo Synod. His rationale was: The Missouri Synod accepts people excommunicated by the Buffalo Synod, therefore the Buffalo Synod has the wrong doctrine on excommunication. If the Missouri Synod feels that way, then it had labeled the Buffalo Synod as a false church and has thereby excommunicated it. But von Rohr failed to differentiate between lack of fellowship and excommunication.

He also accused the Missouri Synod of being too rigid. He appealed to Löhe's advice, that each side give in a little. He asked a wearching question: What is worse, to err in an excommunication or to decide too soon that an excommunication was invalid?

Following the Buffalo line, he maintained that the obstacle to peace between the two synods was the mob-preachers and the opposition altars. Since Missouri had sent them and built them, they should also remove them. Then peace talks could begin.

von Rohr laid all the blame on Missouri. In an effective use of sarcasm he wrote, "Now the wolf(Mo.) complains that the bloodied lamb (Buff.) has harmed him and treated him improperly with his cry and makes him hated by people through slander??!"<sup>25</sup> His main point was that Missouri was treating Buffalo not as fellow Lutherans but as Catholics.

von Rohr's goal was peace. He viewed the controversy as a sign of Satan's work in the last days. He was hoping for a reconciliation, but it had to be a reconciliation based on mutual respect.

"Is it possible to have a Christian over doctrinal difference (as Lutheran pastors struggle with Lutheran pastors, or wish to struggle) with those who have condemned others to death, who for eight years through deeds have anathematized and excommunicated another as false, unlutheran pastors and have

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p 142

fixed their own position so firmly that only it is possible?  
Is that a Christian struggle and doctrinal dispute? . . . No,  
that is pure hypocrisy."<sup>26</sup>

Two months after he wrote that article, von Rohr came out with a more personal attack on the leader of the Missouri Synod. He wrote, "How Professor Walther Fights with us and Threatens to Fight with us."<sup>27</sup> This was written shortly after Walther's book, Kirche und Amt, came out.

von Rohr lists three ways Walther was fighting with the Buffalo Synod. He fought first of all with the Lutheraner. von Rohr called it the weapon of lies and slander from Krause and other mob-preachers. Secondly, he accused Walther of crafty and deceitful polemics. Of all things, he condemned Walther for donatism. He claimed Walther taught that an improper handling of a situation by a pastor makes a church false. He said Walther was wrong for advising invalidly excommunicated people to join another church because Luther taught they should just endure their invalid excommunication.

The third point really fit under the second. von Rohr maintained Walther was wrong in his claim that the Buffalo Synod had excommunicated him when it said, "The Lord reproach you, you Satan." According to von Rohr this reproach only applied to Walther's supposedly false doctrine, not to him personally. After all, Jesus had reproached Peter in the same way. "Whoever slanders the church of God deserves to be called 'Satan' in order that he might come to repentance for his satanic sins."<sup>28</sup>

The new threat to fight with Buffalo came in the form of Walther's

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p 142

<sup>27</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Wie Herr Prof. Walther mit uns kämpft, und wie er mit uns zu kämpfen droht," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 2, No. 4 (September 1, 1852), p 27

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p 28

"Beiwagen"--Kirche und Amt. von Rohr said Walther did not want to use the Lutheraner for this fight any longer (and he was right about that). But But how von Rohr could claim that Walther used only Kirche Und Amt and not the Bible is hard to imagine. That book is replete with Bible passages and references.

At the close of the article von Rohr proved himself to be both a poor prophet and an accurate prophet. He guessed wrong when he wrote:

"Professor Walther will reap only contempt with his 'Beiwagen,' and his donatistic and pietistic false doctrine will be brought even more into the light that the shame and aggravation which he served up in the congregations of our synod, and inside and outside of the Lutheran church, with the service of calumniators, liars and slanderers, will come down on his head."<sup>29</sup>

But he was an accurate prophet when he said, "The Argernisz will not come down on the head of the slandered, but the slanderer."<sup>30</sup>

von Rohr was not finished with Walther's book though. In a series of articles published between November, 1852 and February, 1853, he attacked it. This was the most major work by von Rohr and was entitled, "Concerning the Doctrine of the Church as Professor Walther Formulated It in Nine Theses as the Doctrine of the Missouri Synod."<sup>31</sup> Since it was longer and its teaching occurs in other places, it will not be dealt with in this paper.

A few months later, in May, 1853, he published an article he had written in January, "Why We Can Hold No Colloquy with the Pastors of the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p 29

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p 29

<sup>31</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Über die Lehre von der Kirche, wie sie Herr Prof. Walther in 9 Thesen als die Lehre der Synode von Missouri aufstellt," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 2, No. 8 (November, 1852), p 57

Synod from Missouri."<sup>32</sup> He wrote it in response to L<sup>o</sup>he's question, why should Missouri not receive people excommunicated from the Buffalo Synod.

He listed several reasons why they should not. First, both the Missouri Synod and the Buffalo Synod were Lutheran church bodies and should respect each other's excommunications. Secondly, all the excommunications were valid and even the people who were excommunicated would say they had a dispute with the pastor, not about doctrine. And finally, the Missouri Synod had sent mob-preachers into Buffalo territory.

From those points von Rohr drew the conclusion that no colloquy was possible. He maintained that the Buffalo Synod had already held colloquies with all the excommunicated people. To hold a colloquy with Missouri would effectively nullify the effect of those excommunications. It would also violate fellowship principles, Rm 16:17.

Instead of calling for a colloquy, von Rohr issued the plea: just treat the Buffalo Synod like a Lutheran church. He did not demand that the Missouri Synod change its doctrine, just that they recall the mob-preachers. They did not even have to admit to false doctrine, only that the question was still open.

During the summer of 1853, von Rohr took a sabbatical from writing for the Kirchliches Informatorium. He and Grabau were elected delegates by the synod convention to go to Germany to raise money for Martin Luther College. That the synod's major building project at the time. But another important purpose in their trip was to do public relations for the Buffalo

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<sup>32</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Warum wir kein Colloquium mit den Pastoren der Synode von Missouri halten können," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 2, No. 14(May 1, 1853), p 105.

Synod against the Missouri Synod.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with this goal, a pamphlet was printed which related the intersynodical strife which had taken place--from Buffalo's point of view. This Grabau and von Rohr distributed in Germany.

The first person they wanted to see was Löhe. He was the man who had made the Missouri Synod successful. His support was crucial for Buffalo's future development. He was surprised to see Grabau and von Rohr. He welcomed them, but not too warmly. He declined to give them his support because of his close Missouri connection and because of Grabau's severe personality.<sup>34</sup>

Grabau and von Rohr then went to the Leipzig Conference. This was held from August 30 to September 1. The conference did not want to pass judgment on the Missouri Synod with hearing their version. Grabau then requested that they answer three general questions on inter-church relations. The conference answered them in abstracto.<sup>35</sup> But their answers gave the clear implication that Missouri had wronged Buffalo. Both Grabau and von Rohr subscribed to their decision.

They next presented their case to the Fürth Conference, held on November 26, 1853. This conference was not a clear-cut victory for them. Buffalo was condemned for its excommunication practice and Missouri for its acceptance of those excommunicated. The Buffalo Synod was also advised to forget the past. The doctrine of church and ministry was viewed

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<sup>33</sup>Roy Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (October, 1954), p 114

<sup>34</sup>Roy Suelflow, A Plan for Survival (New York; Greenwich Books, 1965) p 104

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p 106

as an open question.<sup>36</sup> Grabau and von Rohr also subscribed to this.

This presentation of the Buffalo Synod's views to the German theologians seems kind of phony. Grabau and von Rohr played one tune in America and another in Germany. They conceded on points which they otherwise held to firmly. This was not von Rohr's fault. He was still dominated by Grabau. And Grabau probably made these concessions because he was his synod slipping in comparison to Missouri and was desperate for survival.

von Rohr did not stop writing articles upon his return. He continued his battle with the Missouri Synod but more of his works began to deal with other subjects. Typical of the short pieces he wrote is "A Report:"

"Where to find the only orthodox Lutheran synod in North America:

Pastor Brohm in New York submitted to one of the papers circulated in Germany:

'We would recommend Lutheran immigrants only to such congregations in their settlements which belong to the Missouri Synod, not only because we ourselves are members, but also because we hold this to be the only orthodox Lutheran synod in this land.'

The Lutheraner, the organ of the Missouri Synod, gives this declaration its full approval when it relates with satisfaction that this pamphlet has already been received in a German newspaper.

Pride goes before ~~the~~ fall."<sup>37</sup>

One can also notice a marked change in some of von Rohr's writings. In "The Visible Church Defended," he took a strictly doctrinal approach.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod," pp 114-118, for an excellent summary of these conferences.

<sup>37</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Eine Nachricht," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 3, No. 14(February 15, 1854) p 111

<sup>38</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Die sichtbare Kirche vertheidigt," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 6, No. 24(August 15, 1857) p 185



The polemics of previous articles were toned down. He tried to develop a logical argument.

His main argument rested in the words of the Augsburg Confession. He said that according to the AC, the church is a group of believers, mixed with unbelievers. Therefore it is proprie visible, it can never be invisible. Its visibility is recognized by its signs, pure Word and sacrament. That definition left only Lutherans in the church.

He took Walther to task for using the word wahr to describe the invisible church. To von Rohr wahr meant "orthodox." But Walther actually used it in terms of "real."<sup>39</sup>

von Rohr opposed Walther's view of the church on three grounds. First, he called it a perversion of the Augsburg Confession, fighting words at this time of the "Definite Platform." Secondly, it was a degradation of the holy, catholic church to mix in erring bodies. And finally, he labelled Walther's doctrine of the invisible church a platonic ideal, "the proper, invisible, hidden church which exists only in a picture, which never assembles itself in truth, but only in the thought of a common faith, having a super-sensory and abstract communion."<sup>40</sup>

He was willing to agree that the church was invisible in some respects but not properly and always. Therefore he rejected the supposed Missouri doctrine of three separate churches:

1. The proper, true(wahr), invisible church outside of which there is no salvation.
2. The improper, outwardly true(wahr), catholic Lutheran church.
3. The improper, visible church, consisting of all particular churches.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Das Buffaloer Colloquium<sup>u</sup>(St. Louis: Aug. Wiesbuch, 1866) p 2

<sup>40</sup>von Rohr, "Die sichtbare Kirche vertheidigt," p 187

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p 188

Besides the battle in the press, there were several other developments after the trip to Germany. In the 1850's Grabau instituted his Cent-Kasse. This was an involuntary proto-type of the Church Extension Fund. von Rohr went along with this plan. There is a vague reference to troubles he had with in a later issue of the Kirchliches Informatorium. But this writer found no specific information on it. Also, the issues of the Kirchliches Informatorium from 1857 to 1863 were not available.

The relations with the Missouri Synod took another turn. von Rohr corresponded with Wyneken in the middle 1850's. The upshot of this exchange was the relaxation of the prior stipulation for a colloquy. The Buffalo Synod in 1857 no longer demanded the removal of the mob-preachers, only an admission of guilt by the Missouri Synod for sending them.<sup>42</sup> Such an admission was not forthcoming.

Then the Buffalo Synod came up with a different proposal. Both sides should submit their cases to an impartial jury who would render a verdict. The Missouri Synod would not agree to that because they did no wrong. The result was that the 1859 convention of the Buffalo Synod broke off all relations with Missouri.<sup>43</sup>

In all this pre-colloquy activity, von Rohr spoke the party line-- Grabau's. His articles against the Missouri Synod could easily have been written by his mentor. He was the obedient pupil on the trip to Germany.

But still, von Rohr must have done some independent thinking. His articles were not altogether unconvincing drivel. He made some points which were difficult to answer, especially in his references to the

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<sup>42</sup>Suelflow, "The Relations of the Missouri Synod with the Buffalo Synod up to 1866," Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (October, 1954) p 124

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p 124

Augsburg Confession.

His major deficiencies included his use of Scripture. In his articles it is virtually lacking. There was a good reason for that, at least in hindsight. His doctrine of the church was not based on Scripture.

von Rohr also stumbled in the matter of excommunication. He was not concerned enough about the souls of those who were the objects of improper excommunications. He was not objective enough to see their invalidity. And he was not sufficiently convinced and confident to stand up to Grabau in this matter.

But von Rohr must be commended for the irenic side of his character. What he did, wrote and said, he did for peace. He did not want to fight with Missouri but was convinced he had to. His polemics were mild compared to Grabau's. He also progressed from demanding the removal of the mob-preachers to the demand of an apology for them.

If there was one event that led to the Buffalo Colloquy, it was the falling out Grabau had with von Rohr and the majority of the Buffalo pastors. Disatisfaction with Grabau had been on the rise for a few years. During the Civil War he showed his anti-democratic tendencies. He thought the North would lose. This naturally did not sit well with people in western New York.<sup>44</sup> Another consideration that came into play was the number of pastors from other synods who joined Buffalo.<sup>45</sup> Habel, a former Missouri Synod secretary, joined and worked for peace with Walther. Hochstetter, from the Ohio Synod, became Grabau's assistant in Buffalo. He too was on friendly terms with Missouri.

The point on which von Rohr and Hochstetter broke with Grabau seems

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p 125

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p 125

to have been the dispute over conversion and the power of the Word. This is dealt with to some extent in Grabau's biography.<sup>46</sup> In September, 1865, in a sermon Grabau said, "The chief power of a sermon is to prove doctrine," and cited Ac 9:22. von Rohr and Hochstetter took issue with him. They maintained that the Word of God, as preached in a sermon, is already pure doctrine and has inherent power. In other words, according to Grabau, a sermon is only effective if it proves doctrine. von Rohr and Hochstetter, on the other hand, held that a sermon, as the Word of God, is intrinsically powerful because it is pure doctrine.

All the ramifications of these views<sup>5</sup> are not immediately clear, but it does not seem all that great a difference. It may just have been the opportunity some Buffalo pastors were looking for to throw off the shackles of Grabau. When the ministerium met in March, 1866, Grabau resigned as senior pastor and was replaced by Wolläger. With only two exceptions, the von Rohr-Hochstetter position was upheld.

So, after years of dictatorial rule, even his old companion Heinrich von Rohr was ready to depose Grabau. von Rohr took the offensive and labelled Grabau a false teacher. He warned the people in Bergholz and Martinville about him. When the ministerium met in April, Grabau was suspended from the ministry.

Grabau was officially removed from the Buffalo Synod at its June, 1866 convention. This was carried out partly because of false doctrine and partly because he had put the deed to Martin Luther College in his own name. Burk and Hahn left the synod at the same time.<sup>47</sup> According to Grabau's son, this was done in an unloving spirit.<sup>47</sup> von Rohr thanked

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<sup>46</sup>Grabau, pp. 52-53

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p 60

God that "the godless were separated from the pious." After Grabau was removed, the convention sang, "Now Let All Praise God's Mercy."

The removal of Grabau set the stage for the next major event, the Buffalo Colloquy. The Buffalo Synod had been urged by the German theologians, especially Munkel, to engage in a colloquy with Missouri.<sup>48</sup> The first move came from von Rohr in an article published in the September 1, 1866 issue of Kirchliches Informatorium. He got in a few digs at Walther and the Missouri Synod. Then he broke the ice and wrote:

"So we therefore wish, in order to do everything that is before us, in order that under the help of God's grace we come to unity in doctrine and to peace and Christian reconciliation, to receive the . . . repeated, unchanged offer of the Missouri Synod for a colloquy."<sup>49</sup>

von Rohr and Hochstetter were the advance men for the colloquy. They met with Walther and Sihler in Ft. Wayne on October 10 and 11. This was the first face-to-face meeting between two men who had struggled with each other for over 20 years. At the end of the meeting, "the firm hope was expressed that the open colloquy would lead to a complete understanding and agreement."<sup>50</sup>

The Buffalo Colloquy was held in Buffalo from November 20 to December 5, 1866. The colloquists of the Missouri Synod were Pastors Walther, Sihler and Schwann and laymen Roemer, Keil and Theisz. The colloquists of the Buffalo Synod were Pastors von Rohr, Hochstetter and Brand and laymen Krull, Schorr and Christiansen. The Missouri side had agreed

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<sup>48</sup>Chr. Hochstetter, Die Geschichte der Evangelisch-lutherischer Missouri-Synode (Dresden: Heinrich Naumann, 1885), p 252

<sup>49</sup>Heinrich von Rohr, "Antwort auf den hier folgenden Aufsatz im Lutheraner," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 11, No. 9 (September 1, 1866) p 69

<sup>50</sup>Chr. Hochstetter, "Das Buffaloer Colloquium," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 1, 1867) p 4

before the colloquy that their laymen should not speak in deference to the Buffalo Synod. The Buffalo laymen did speak up, however.

The colloquy covered five disputed doctrines, the church, ministry, excommunication, adiaphora and ordination. The official copy of the colloquy contains the items submitted to protocol and some of the discussion.<sup>51</sup> In the early issues of Volume 15 of Kirchliches Informatorium and in his history of the Missouri Synod, Hochstetter supplied more of the discussion.

In most places he identifies the debaters with an "M" for Missouri and a "B" for Buffalo. That makes it very difficult to tell who on which side said what. Any of the three Missouri pastors was capable of handling the important issues discussed here. But one can probably assume that Walther took the lead. von Rohr appears to have been the main speaker designated by "B." The questions, phrases and arguments used by the "B" speaker closely reflect his views and also are similar to his old Kirchliches Informatorium articles.

von Rohr began the discussion section of the colloquy by submitting a proposition against the doctrine of the invisible church. The Missouri representative began the debate with definitions of the visible and invisible church. von Rohr countered with his old argument that that meant two churches. When the Missouri man denied it, von Rohr maintained that according to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed and the seventh article of the Augsburg Confession, the church is the assemble of those who have the pure Word and sacraments and such an assembly is visible. This was agreed with by Missouri to the extent that this was the visible church,

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<sup>51</sup>Das Buffaloer Colloquium,

not the church outside of which there is no salvation. Otherwise no one could be saved outside of the Lutheran church. The discussion continued, being led by the Missouri men with von Rohr offering no real objection they could not answer.

The result of this first discussion was encouraging. Agreement was actually reached, even with von Rohr. Under point one of the doctrine of the church all agreed that only true believers are in the church. In this life the church is mixed with hypocrites. But the church is not two, visible and invisible.<sup>52</sup> It is unfortunate that such agreement did not result from the rest of the colloquy.

The discussion continued and points 2, 3 and 4 were arrived at. These amounted to weak and spurious attacks by von Rohr and a strong defence by Missouri.<sup>53</sup> von Rohr opposed the Missouri doctrine of the church because it could be misused by the sects. He was then reminded that any doctrine, even salvation by faith could be misused. von Rohr thought people would neglect the visible association and claim salvation by membership in the invisible church. But the Missouri men told him that every believer is a member of the visible church also, even if he is not a member of a particular church.

von Rohr wanted to make pure Word and sacraments part of the essence of the church. He was corrected and it was pointed out to him that they were the marks of the church, not the essence. von Rohr thought he had the Missouri men and said that heterodox bodies cannot be part of the church because they do not have the pure Word and sacraments.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p 1

<sup>53</sup>Chr. Hochstetter, "Beleuchtung der schließlichen Erklärung des Buffaloer Colloquiums aus den dabei geführten mündlichen Verhandlungen," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 15, No. 2 (February 1, 1867) p 12. See following issues for additional references to this article.

But the Missouri representative showed that they have at least part of the pure Word.

von Rohr then appealed to the German theologians who defined the church as the Lutheran church. The Missouri men explained that these theologians looked at the Lutheran church in two ways, as a particular church and as the catholic church. Then von Rohr brought in his strange doctrine. He said that believers in other churches really belong to the orthodox, Lutheran church. That argument cut down by the statement that believers in other church bodies are saved because they are Christians, not because they are Lutherans.

At that point, von Rohr marshalled his essential argument for his doctrine.

"Therewith each hypocrite can justify himself and say, even if I outwardly belong to a heterodox church, yet I can also come to faith in that same church, I can belong to the church of Christ, that is, the communion of saints and believers, and thereby be saved; I need not for that reason join myself to the orthodox church."<sup>54</sup>

Even that line of reasoning did not hold up. The Missouri representative said that hypocrites can always find ways to justify themselves and that no one who sins against better knowledge will be saved.

In one sense, von Rohr was being driven into a corner by his own arguments. By trying to cover all the practical questions with a dogmatical resolution he separated himself from the others.

This became even more evident in the discussion of the sects. von Rohr asked if the sects were part of the church. The answer came: not insofar as they are sects but only because they have believers. But he could not understand how they could be believers if they did not confess

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<sup>54</sup>Hochstetter, "Beleuchtung," Vol. 15, No. 3 (March 1, 1867) p 22



the truth. The response that they were weak in faith led to another question, what is a false church? Again a simple answer, one that does not have true doctrine. But von Rohr just was not able to see how false believers could be numbered in the church. It was finally explained to him that they could not be excluded anymore than hypocrites could be excluded from his congregation.

The final major discussion on the doctrine of the church concerned orthodox and particular churches. von Rohr maintained that the only particular church in the church was the orthodox, Lutheran church. The Missouri men pointed to the confessions which call the reformed church. Then von Rohr went too far. He said, "Only the orthodox church is church, outside of which there is no salvation." Missouri responded: "Whoever teaches that there is no salvation outside of the Lutheran church is a papist."<sup>55</sup> von Rohr recognized he had gone too far and corrected himself as much as he could. "Whoever teaches that a visible, orthodox particular church is the only church, outside of which there is no salvation, is on the way to Rome. But I understand the orthodox church as the catholic, universal church."<sup>56</sup> The Missouri representative answered that there were sects in the catholic church who were not part of the orthodox church.

At this point von Rohr submitted his summary of the difference. "The Missouri Synod terms all who have the Word of God essentially, likewise the sacrament of baptism, the church of the called; the Buffalo Synod terms the church of the called all who confess pure doctrine."<sup>57</sup> The Missouri representatives accused him of contradicting his previous agreement, and

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p 23

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p 23

<sup>57</sup>Das Buffaloer Colloquium, p 4

they were right.

von Rohr now stood alone. Hochstetter, Brand, Schorr, Krull, Christiansen--all these submitted statements to protocol in agreement with the Missouri position. A goodly share of the Buffalo Colloquy hereafter is devoted to retractions of old Buffalo Synod doctrine by Hochstetter, et al.<sup>58</sup>

The doctrine of the church was a major portion of the Buffalo Colloquy. It covers over a third of its pages. Probably the most important difference between von Rohr and the Missouri Synod was evident in regard to this doctrine. It was not remarkable that no agreement was reached. But at least the differences were aired in an open forum. One could then see clearly that von Rohr's views were based to a certain extent on reason and practicality while the Missouri Synod relied completely on revelation and theory.

The doctrine of the ministry was the next one taken up. There was not nearly as much dialogue here. von Rohr questioned why the Missouri Synod taught no essential difference between ministry (Predigtamt) and the pastoral office (Pfarramt). The Missouri men replied that there was a distinction, but no essential difference. All Christians have the ministry but a call is necessary for the pastoral office. And the pastoral office is exercised through the congregation. von Rohr felt that degraded the pastoral office. But it was explained to him that he was making too much of the pastoral office, and besides, the Missouri Synod confessed that the pastoral office was a divine institution, not human.

The Missouri representative also correctly pointed to the fact that the pastoral office belonged to the congregation because the gospel is its source and is the property of the congregation. von Rohr countered

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp 5-12

that the pastor was the source of the congregation. He reasoned that there is no congregation without faith, no faith without hearing and no hearing without a preacher. Therefore there could be no congregation without a preacher. All must have seen through that specious argument when the Missouri representative called God the first preacher.

After that, von Rohr became more practical. He thought if that was true, then a congregation can get along without a pastor. But he was informed that a Christian congregation must follow God's Word. He then conceded that a congregation has the ministry (Predigtamt) but not the individual Christian. The Missouri man said no, that each Christian had the ministry, that they were like individual parts of a mirror. When the mirror reflects, each part reflects. All von Rohr could see was possible abuse. "Then if each Christian has the ministry, he can set himself up as a public preacher."<sup>59</sup> Again, that abuse would be negated if he followed God's Word.

In the text of the Colloquy, von Rohr made certain statements which taught that the efficacy of the sacrament depended on a properly called pastor. He wanted to be orthodox but he spoke in contradictory terms.

"The words of the Lord's Supper are effective neither by the speech of a layman or a preacher, but, our Lord Jesus Christ will work the presence of His body and blood only then, when such a man speaks the words, whom He has commanded to in ordinary circumstances in the call and ministry, or in extraordinary circumstances in an emergency, e.g., in baptism, where each Christian, man or woman, has the command to perform the necessary baptism for salvation."<sup>60</sup>

He also allowed the efficacy of the Lord's Supper when administered by a layman on a desert island.

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<sup>59</sup>Hochstetter, "Beleuchtung," Vol. 15, No. 8(August 1, 1867), p 58

<sup>60</sup>Das Buffaloer Colloquium, p 18

This was properly denounced by the Missouri side.

"Then if the Word of God, be it preached or handled as the visible Word in the sacrament, were no more powerful and sufficient of itself to be effective for saving faith, then our salvation would be bound to a human person, and, if ever a doubt arose concerning the propriety of the call of the pastor, then even together with that holy baptism, the holy Lord's Supper and the holy absolution would be in doubt. Therefore the confidence of faith would be shattered!"<sup>61</sup>

Again von Rohr stood alone. The other Buffalo representatives came to an agreement on this major point (eight pages in the published colloquy) and rejected the "Hirtenbrief." It is ironic that when von Rohr was in Wisconsin in 1839-40, he probably would have agreed with the Missouri doctrine. He played a role in the issuance of the "Hirtenbrief." Now he was separated from the orthodox because he clung to its teaching.

The chronology becomes a little confusing at this point. According to the colloquy, von Rohr left Buffalo on Friday, November 30 to go to Wolcottsville. He went there to remove from "incessant spiritual distress and pressing ministerial matters."<sup>62</sup> He planned to return on Monday. In the colloquy this<sup>is</sup> noted between the doctrine of the ministry and the doctrine of excommunication. But in Hochstetter's running dialogue in Kirchliches Informatorium, the discussion of excommunication is inserted in the discussion of the ministry. According to him, these discussions took place in part before von Rohr left and in part after he returned, after the other statements on adiaphora and ordination had been formulated. In the colloquy there are no references by von Rohr under excommunication, adiaphora or ordination. But the statement does occur, "Pastor von Rohr declared the following concerning this (ordination) and likewise the

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p 19

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p 20

discussion in his absence."<sup>63</sup> Then follows his views on excommunication, adiaphora and ordination. The questions remain: How long was von Rohr gone? How long did discussion on excommunication, adiaphora and ordination take without von Rohr present? When did discussion on ministry recorded in Kirchliches Informatorium take place?

It is interesting to note that in the following discussion on excommunication, Hochstetter specifies von Rohr and Walther as the two parties in the debate. von Rohr continued to argue from the practical but added a new consideration, the old church ordinances.

Especially before he left, he relied heavily on those old church ordinances. When it was held that the power to excommunicate lies in the congregation, von Rohr appealed to the ordinances. Then Walther pointed out to him that he was going against Luther and the confessions. That left von Rohr confused as to the pastor's role. Walther said the pastor announces the judgment of the congregation. von Rohr did not argue that point but claimed that the Buffalo Synod properly carried out its excommunications according to the old Saxon and Pomeranian church ordinances. Walther replied that von Rohr was wrong because those ordinances did not take the power of judgment from the congregation.

At this point a listener interrupted the discussion. He told how he had been excommunicated during the Cent-Kasse strife without admonition. Both Walther and von Rohr agreed that was improper. But von Rohr said that often opposition to the Cent-Kasse was used as a pre-text to excommunicate malcontents.

After he returned, von Rohr became very practical in his approach. Walther noted that in the greek in 1 Cor 5, an excommunication is to be

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p 27

carried out and voted on by the entire church, not just the pastor. von Rohr wanted to know if that meant a majority rule. When he was told it had to be unanimous he asked what would happen if a friend would vote against it. Walther said that if a mortal sin had been committed, only an unbeliever would vote against an excommunication. All von Rohr could see was a long process. Walther agreed but said it was worthwhile if the sinner repented.

von Rohr submitted his own very confusing view on excommunication to protocol.<sup>64</sup> He based his argument on an obscure reference to the political power of bishops in article 14 of the Apology. What was there allowed as an adiaphoron he developed into canon law with a discourse on potestate ordinis and potestate jurisdictionis. He cited nothing from Scripture, and <sup>carried it out in a</sup> scholastic way.

von Rohr was left by himself after this point also. While he was gone, the Buffalo party probably grew even closer to Missouri. At any rate, he had his own doctrine of excommunication, as well as adiaphora and ordination. But his views on these last two were much more orthodox.

von Rohr wanted the laity to be fully obedient to the pastor, he felt this obedience was necessary. He did not hold it to be a necessity of conscience on the part of the people as a fulfillment of the fourth commandment. It was rather a necessity of order. He believed, without someone firmly in charge, disorder would erupt. This was just another case of the practical determining theology. Perhaps his military background made him more susceptible to this false doctrine.

In reference to ordination, von Rohr came as close to an orthodox view<sup>2</sup> as he could. "According to a more precise and stricter dogmatic formulation,

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp 27-28

a definite command of God is needed for a divine regulation. One can be content to call the ordination of apostolic usage the confirmation of the election."<sup>65</sup> Although he earlier maintained the necessity of ordination for an orderly call, he appeared orthodox here.

Before he left for Wolcottsville, von Rohr had requested that the colloquy also deal with opposition churches. Walther, at the end of the colloquy, said that the Missouri Synod had nothing to apologize for and no retraction would be forthcoming. After all, how could they have sent sheep back to a stranger(Grabau)?

von Rohr also made a curious request toward the end. He wanted the colloquists to follow the example of the Wittenberg theologians in their dealings with Spener. They carried on their discussion in latin so the laity would not become bewildered. von Rohr was probably more concerned about how he appeared. The resolution was rejected.

It is difficult to tell just what subscription von Rohr entered to this colloquy. All the Buffalo pastors except him, and all the laymen declared themselves in agreement with Missouri. But von Rohr registered no recorded protest at the end of the colloquy. He seemed to have viewed the Buffalo Colloquy as a step toward fellowship. The last proposal he submitted is as follows: "That an opinion of both sides of the colloquists be published how a peaceful juxtaposition of both synods might be accomplished 1. in view of what has happened 2. in view of future church affairs."<sup>66</sup>

The interplay between von Rohr and Walther is not really documented too well. They did write articles against each other for a number of years.

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p 28

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p 29

Their face-to-face meeting in Ft. Wayne seemed amicable enough. von Rohr even wanted Walther to preach to open the colloquy.<sup>67</sup> No trace of personal animosity was evident at all. Perhaps some developed during the course of the colloquy. After all, von Rohr was at the mercy of the Missouri arguments. If Walther was leading the charge, as was likely, von Rohr could have taken it personally. Certainly Walther had no reason to hold anything against von Rohr on the basis of their discussion at the colloquy. Walther came across as very evangelical even in the light of von Rohr's previous polemic against him. In the Lutheraner, the report said there was no bitterness and only a very few sharp words disturbed the peace.<sup>68</sup>

Doctrinally however, the two men were very different. von Rohr had a marked tendency to operate without much Scripture support, to lean heavily on somewhat ambiguous phrases in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, and to formulate doctrine on the basis of practicality. Walther, as evidenced from Kirche und Amt, drew heavily from the Bible, quoted the confessions as witnesses and put into practice what Scripture taught. This comparison is exaggerated a little against von Rohr, but it is done to show the clear difference involved. von Rohr was not an out-and-out heterodox teacher who dealt fast and loose with the Bible. He did use the wrong approach though.

Walther can be faulted during the colloquy too. At one point early on he had the opportunity to present the doctrine of the church more clearly. He and von Rohr were talking past each other by using the same terms to

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<sup>67</sup>Chr. Hochstetter in "Zehnter Synodalbrief," Kirchliches Infomatorium, Vol. 15, 1867 (between pages 24 and 25), p 4

<sup>68</sup>"Das Buffaloer Colloquium," Der Lutheraner, Vol 23, No. 8 (December 15, 1866), p58



define different concepts. Walther had great intellectual ability. Although this does not excuse von Rohr, Walther should have been more patient and instructive.

His participation in the Buffalo Colloquy revealed a great deal about Heinrich von Rohr. His theology, especially his doctrine of the church was presented more fully. That was a very confusing doctrine however. Hochstetter received a letter from someone in attendance who wrote concerning this point:

"Whatever Pastor von Rohr wants with his point of difference in the question of the church is really puzzling to me. What is its purpose? Should our honor be somewhat endangered through the whole agreement? I think, not at all! On the whole, I believe this point of difference may really be a "Rohrscher" point, and, in the end, will never become accepted as valid by the synod."<sup>69</sup>

von Rohr himself was probably even confused about his beliefs. He told Krull in 1863:

"Meanwhile nevertheless in such congregations and external gatherings of the church under bishops and popes the Word of God and sacraments remain, although partly with additions, partly with violent truncation, and therefore at all times it has been possible to find whole masses and nations in which Christianity and the elect existed and also a few men were saved, not only children but also grown-ups who did not receive the error in their hearts but finally recognized and held simply to the chief part of Christian doctrine."<sup>70</sup>

Even applying the eight commandment though, one is not forced to describe von Rohr as crypto-orthodox.

He definitely showed courage throughout the colloquy. The Missouri had sent some very learned and respected men. His own fellow Buffalo delegates opposed him. Yet he stood where his heart directed him, just

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<sup>69</sup>Hochstetter, "Das Buffaloer Colloquium," p 6

<sup>70</sup>Chr. Hochstetter, "Wie Herr v. Rohr mit den Lehren der lutherischen Kirche stimmt," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 15, No. 12 (December 1, 1867), p 96

as firmly as he opposed the Union in Germany.

After the colloquy, events happened fast on three fronts. The Buffalo Synod took action on the basis of the agreement that had been reached. von Rohr allied himself with several other pastors in a new synod. And a split occurred in the neighboring parishes of Bergholz and Walmore.

Maschhop was the senior pastor at this time. He had attended the colloquy along with most other Buffalo pastors. After the colloquy, Hochstetter led a group of pastors who appealed to Maschhop to call an assembly of the ministerium. He refused, so Hochstetter called one for February 25, 1867.

At that assembly von Rohr was commended for his role in initiating the colloquy. But he was also condemned for not agreeing with it. While this assembly was taking place, Maschhop and von Rohr were planning their own assembly in Roseville, Michigan, an assembly which excluded most Buffalo pastors. That fact and von Rohr's church divisive doctrines led to the following resolution: "We recognize in them such who have separated themselves from the Buffalo Synod, and we hereby admonish the same that they recognize their errors and give honor to the truth."<sup>71</sup> With that, von Rohr, the last remaining charter member, was out of the Buffalo Synod.

He became instead a charter member of the so-called Roseville Synod. This group met in Roseville, Michigan on March 15, 1867. Four pastors attended, Maschhop, Heinrich von Rohr, Philip von Rohr and Schadow.

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<sup>71</sup>"Zehnter Synodalbrief," p 4

Within a year old Pfeiffer Mueller had joined also. Heinrich von Rohr was elected senior pastor although he had always declared he would never accept such an office.<sup>72</sup>

This group turned out to be a transitory synod. They added some members in Minnesota, Keibel and the two Hillemanns.<sup>73</sup> The synod disbanded in 1877. Philip von Rohr joined the Wisconsin Synod. Heinrich von Rohr's two New York parishes eventually joined Grabau's new Buffalo Synod.

The Bergholz and Walmore disputes developed into an interesting story. The pastor at Walmore was Weinbach. He arrived there in 1865 and seems to have been a pushy sort. On December 30, 1866, he preached a sermon against von Rohr's doctrine of the church. That upset a lot of people. When he called for a congregational meeting that afternoon to explain the Buffalo Colloquy, no one showed up. He was already suspicious of von Rohr's interference.

Shortly after von Rohr was elected senior pastor of the Roseville Synod, he attempted to conduct a church visitation at Walmore. Weinbach related this in an article he wrote which is naturally anti-von Rohr.<sup>74</sup> He attributed a Catholic notion about the territorial rights of a bishop to von Rohr. But perhaps von Rohr reasoned this way: The Roseville meeting was the proper meeting of the Buffalo Synod because Maschhop, the senior pastor attended. The ministerial assembly in Buffalo was improper because he was absent. Therefore, von Rohr was really Weinbach's senior pastor

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<sup>72</sup>J. W. Weinbach, "Die Roseviller," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 15, No. 4(April 1, 1867) p 27

<sup>73</sup>John P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod(St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing, 1970) p 252

<sup>74</sup>Weinbach, p 27

and had the perfect right to conduct a visitation. But added to that must be the dissatisfaction with Weinbach on the part of the Walmore congregation. He was a relative new-comer. von Rohr had served Walmore for eight years after Ehrenström. von Rohr also maintained that Weinbach had accepted his call in a state of opposition to Missouri. If he then supported Missouri, he needed a new call.

On March 25 Heinrich and Philip von Rohr came to Walmore for their visitation. Weinbach wanted nothing to do with them. He would not even come out of the school. They wanted the keys to the church but he refused to give them up. So the visitation with the trustees was conducted in Friedrich Haseley's home.

The ~~result~~ result of the visitation was the ouster of Weinbach. The trustees demanded that he condemn the Missouri Synod. He gave them a copy of the Buffalo Colloquy. Without looking at it, they threw it on the table and said it was full of false doctrine (how right they were--von Rohr's false doctrine!). On March 26 Weinbach was ordered to surrender the keys to the church and school and to vacate the parsonage. von Rohr was called to be the vacancy pastor.

von Rohr won a victory in Walmore, but he was soon to lose in Bergholz. It did not take too long for Weinbach to get involved in Bergholz. He, of course, claimed innocence. He said the only reasons he came to Bergholz were because von Rohr had interfered in Walmore and Friedrich of Bergholz (later von Rohr supporter) made the initiative.<sup>75</sup>

It was also true the Bergholz church was ripe for picking. About 56 Bergholzers had attended the Buffalo Colloquy. Weinbach maintained

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<sup>75</sup>J. W. Weinbach, "Wallmow und Bergholz," Kirchliches Informatorium, Vol. 15, No. 5 (May 1, 1867), p 37

that von Rohr's troubles in Bergholz arose because these people saw how inadequate and incompetent he was at the colloquy.<sup>76</sup>

Weinbach related an incident from his dealing in Bergholz. A certain Br. Plaister asked von Rohr after the colloquy, "Do you hold for yourself the earlier doctrine of the Buffalo Synod concerning adiaphora and ordination as the correct one?" von Rohr replied, "That is a sinful, insidious question! I will remain with the old doctrine as long as I live and will not depart from it a hairsbreadth even if I remain standing alone."<sup>77</sup> If such an incident is true, then it is no wonder that the congregation split.

The split must have come in May/June, 1867. The preliminaries to the split are dealt with in the May 1 issue of Kirchliches Informatorium and the resulting division in the July 1 issue. The Weinbach party and the von Rohr party negotiated for the church and school property. The Weinbach group was willing to give up the school but wanted to retain the church because they had pure doctrine. The von Rohr group, as a protest against the Weinbach group and as a confession of their convictions, told them to keep everything. 52 families went with Weinbach and 37 remained loyal to von Rohr. They began <sup>the</sup> Trinity Lutheran Church which von Rohr served as a dual parish with Walmore.

Heinrich von Rohr's last years must have been a time for reflection on his part. He published the Kirchliches Informatorium but no copies were available to this writer. There are indications that he remained active. He made visitation trips to Wisconsin and Minnesota. But his last days can probably be summed up in MacArthur's words about old soldiers. von Rohr's importance on the Lutheran scene grew less and less. Two years

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p 38

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p 38

after he died in 1875 his synod dissolved. The Walmore and Berholz congregations eventually rejoined Grabau. Philip von Rohr joined the Wisconsin Synod.

## VI

What kind of man was Heinrich von Rohr? How was he viewed by those who knew him? Grabau's son, Johann, a later pastor at Walmore, had some things to say about him in his father's biography. He condemned von Rohr for his contention with Grabau and called the split in Bergholz a punishment from God for opposing Grabau. "Pastor von Rohr, who in vain tried to take away the church, school and parsonage from his old friend Pastor Grabau and from his congregation, fell into the ditch he had dug for another."<sup>78</sup>

Johann Grabau also had some comments on von Rohr at the Buffalo Colloquy: "He entered upon an unequal battle with Walther . . . at the Buffalo Colloquy, without the aid of his old teacher." "He did not lack courage, for he did not let himself be taken in by the enemy. Yet because of his foolhardy campaign all of those who fought with him, whom he believed he could lead, were moved to surrender to the enemy and lay down their arms."<sup>79</sup>

Chr. Hochstetter was also a contemporary of von Rohr. He was somewhat evangelical in his references to him. There is no harsh condemnation of von Rohr in his book. Hochstetter always pictured him as one who was searching for unity and peace, though misguided. He gave him credit for going to Walther and hoped that those who left with him would someday see the light.

Weinbach was much harsher than Hochstetter. He spoke of von Rohr's

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<sup>78</sup>Grabau, p 60

<sup>79</sup>Grabau, p 61

doctrine of the necessity of a new call after the Buffalo Colloquy for those who agreed with Missouri by saying, "Anyone who believes that is like a crazy person in the nuthouse who believes he is the Kaiser."<sup>80</sup> He blamed the Walmore-Bergholz troubles directly on von Rohr. "Pastor von Rohr had the custom for years to meddle in the affairs of other congregations, especially if it meant the job of a hangman."<sup>81</sup> He said of von Rohr's method of persuasion: "To accomplish his plans he especially used the emigration story. . . . that(emigration story)is the firm foundation for the infallible truth and purity of the 'Rohrischen' doctrine."<sup>82</sup> But perhaps Weinbach's harsh criticism would have been tempered had he not been one of the contestants. He did make some valid points but his criticism is exaggerated.

Philip von Rohr had a great love and respect for his father. In his autobiography he wrote,

"Only in our home was there a friendly spirit. What<sup>a</sup> gave me strength and vigor throughout my entire youth and upheld me all my life was my intimate relationship with my sainted father. The profound love and complete trust which I felt toward him was deeply engraven in me, and I thank God that this relationship remained steadfast and unshaken until his death! He was and remained my true friend and guide in whom I could confide everything, whose unalterable love nothing could destroy."<sup>83</sup>

But Philip must have been objective also, especially in doctrine. When his father died, he could have picked up the flag and continued to lead the troops. He had that ability also. But he chose not to; perhaps partly because of the widely separated congregations and lack of a common leader

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<sup>80</sup>Weinbach, "Die Roseviller," p 28

<sup>81</sup>Weinbach, "Wallmow und Bergholz," p 37

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p 37

<sup>83</sup>von Rohr-Sauer, "Philip von Rohr--Devoted Pioneer Pastor," p 3

like his father. Instead he joined a synod his father most likely would not have, the Wisconsin Synod.

Philip von Rohr-Sauer treats his great-grandfather evangelically in his biography. He dwells at greater length on the German <sup>per</sup>secution and immigration. He clearly shows the heart of Christian faith and love <sup>which</sup> Heinrich von Rohr possessed.

Of all three major characteristics which made Heinrich von Rohr prominent, his leadership ability shone more brightly than his strong faith and his practical theology. This leadership ability was evident throughout his life. He was promoted regularly in the military. If he had continued in the service he probably would have been a general in the Franco-Prussian War. In the early years of persecution he was still his own man and displayed the ability to get the command of dire situations. His role in the emigration was the epitome of his leadership. He was really the man in charge. In Wisconsin he continued to be looked to for advice and guidance. But when he went to Martin Luther College and studied under Grabau, the light of his leadership ability was dimmed.

What could he have done differently? He could have seen Grabau for what he was. Humility could have given way to conviction. He could have stopped Grabau before he became so oppressive and dictatorial. But, when von Rohr's theological background is considered, it would have been a lot to expect him to oppose Grabau. After he became a pastor he remained a weaker number two man until the Buffalo Colloquy. But by then his faulty theology was thoroughly ingrained. He was called upon to lead again. He did an adequate but he was 25 years too late. Heinrich von Rohr was just the man the Buffalo Synod needed to grow, to expand and to become a major entity in American Lutheranism. He was just the man they needed, but he was also just the man they did not use.



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