

THE WAUWATOSA SPRING:  
The Flowering of the Historical Disciplines  
At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary  
(1900–1920)  
Part I

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**B**eginning in 1900, there was something decidedly novel about the Wisconsin Synod's Wauwatosa Seminary. About that everyone seems to agree.

Previous to the turn of the twentieth century, Professor Adolf Hoenecke had been the guiding light of the Wisconsin Synod's theological thought for nearly forty years, helping steer his young and burgeoning church body through tumultuous days in his own quiet and inimitable way.<sup>1</sup> The synod had finally divested herself of the unionistic relationships that had led others to call her Lutheranism into question. After a brief overture to the General Council, Wisconsin quickly established formal ties with the vigorously-Lutheran Missouri Synod and became a charter member of largest Lutheran church union in America at that time, the Synodical Conference. Under Hoenecke's theological leadership, the synod stood by the Missouri Synod during the tempestuous Election Controversy, with Hoenecke himself carefully refining and restating the Synodical Conference's public teaching on election when it was misunderstood and misrepresented by others.<sup>2</sup> These were indeed character-building years for the growing church body in Wisconsin, and Hoenecke's theological leadership throughout those four decades is easily recognized as a divinely-given gift.

Growth of any kind naturally requires energy and exertion, but when energy is exerted, it is only natural to seek rest, to fall back on

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout his *History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Publishing for the Protestant Conference, 1981), John Ph. Koehler highlights the firm yet quiet approach of Adolf Hoenecke, especially in the time of controversy. In his *History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Third Revised Edition, Burlington, IA: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), J. L. Neve commented on how "Dr. Hoenecke by gentle and conciliatory speech took the sting out of Missouri's offensive phraseology [during the early years of the Election Controversy], and accomplished much in the interest of peace in the church" (231).

<sup>2</sup>See Jonathan Schroeder, "The Contribution of Adolf Hoenecke to the Election Controversy of the Synodical Conference," (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlssays.net/node/1688>).

what has been accomplished, and even to say with the rich fool: “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19). That was the theological temptation the Wisconsin Synod and her seminary faced in 1900 when they found themselves in many ways straddling the confessional Lutheran hill in America. How easy it would have been simply to fall back on the intense theological plowing the fathers had done. How painless to repeat mindlessly the theological conclusions of the past without doing the same, original work others had undertaken.

Even before he arrived at the Wauwatosa Seminary in 1900, Professor John Ph. Koehler saw the fruits of that temptation cropping up within the Synodical Conference, within his own church body, and within himself. He observed, “A degree of mental inflexibility (*Geistesstarre*) has begun to assert itself, coupled with a hyperconservative attitude which is more concerned about rest than about conservation. . . . This mental inflexibility is not healthy, for if it continues it will lead to death. Both in the mental activity of an individual and of a community, fresh, vibrant, productive activity is a sign of health.”<sup>3</sup> He went on to explain:

The inertia of which I am speaking shows itself in a lack of readiness again and again to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. For in the course of time, circumstances change and our views also change. . . . And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that all of this can become mere empty form without spirit or life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.<sup>4</sup>

What Koehler and his seminary colleagues, August Pieper and John Schaller, would propose, promote, and put into practice was a determined emphasis upon the historical disciplines of biblical exegesis and history in an effort to elude theological lethargy. The approach of these Wauwatosa theologians between 1900–1920 appeared to be new within the context of Midwestern Lutheranism, but in truth these men were simply following in the footsteps of Martin Luther and applying principles set forth in the days of the Lutheran Reformation.

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<sup>3</sup>John Ph. Koehler, “The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 434.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 434–435.

Koehler readily conceded: "There is only one Gospel, and no school or synod has a monopoly on it; but the historical exegetical approach to it of what has been called the Wauwatosa Theology has given the Wisconsin Synod a distinct educational character among its sisters. That needs to be recorded as a matter of its history."<sup>5</sup> And in so many ways, as we shall see, their approach brought about the theological flowers of a Wauwatosa Spring.

Some have disparaged the theological approach of the Wauwatosa professors, seeing it as a repudiation of the theology and theological method of Adolf Hoenecke specifically<sup>6</sup> and of confessional Lutheranism in general. Even some within our fellowship have characterized the Wauwatosa emphasis especially upon biblical exegesis as being "myopic," arguing that Wauwatosa's "fresh, exegetical understanding" seems at times to overlook or simply discard what the Church has long believed and confessed.<sup>7</sup>

Most in the Wisconsin Synod, however, see the flowering of the historical disciplines that took place at the Wauwatosa Seminary, especially from 1900–1920, as a seminal period in our synod's history. In his dedicatory preface to the *Wauwatosa Theology* volumes published in 1997 by Northwestern Publishing House, Pastor Wayne Mueller describes how "God raised up three men whose devotion to the Scriptures continues to define Wisconsin's approach," and how they "refreshed the church with a direct appeal to the Bible."<sup>8</sup> In his *Continuing in His Word*, Professor Max Lehninger outlines "the influence of this Wauwatosa theology"<sup>9</sup> within the synod, and in his 1957 synod con-

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<sup>5</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 191.

<sup>6</sup>Among others, the Concordia Lutheran Conference makes this charge publicly on their official website.

<sup>7</sup>This concern within our circles often revolves around determining the relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions within confessional Lutheranism. Are the Scriptures to be interpreted by the Confessions or vice versa? The Wauwatosa theologians were not afraid to emphasize the importance of keeping the Scriptures (*norma normans*) and the Lutheran Confessions (*norma normata*) in their appropriate order, while at the same time understanding that confessional Lutherans have bound themselves with an oath completely to both. For instance, Koehler once wrote, "I respect . . . the Lutheran concern to be loyal to the Confessions; it is evident, however, that this conception is clothed in the garment of legalism," since the Confessions have been twisted at times to argue that the Scriptures say something that they actually do not say ("Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music," *Faith-Life* 39, no. 4 [July/August 1966]: 7).

<sup>8</sup>Wayne Mueller, "Dedicatory Preface," *The Wauwatosa Theology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>9</sup>Max Lehninger, ed. *Continuing in His Word: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 148.

vention essay, “The Tie that Binds,” Dr. Elmer Kiessling detailed how “our Synod’s Lutheranism has a distinct quality of its own.” Kiessling recalled how “our Seminary with its faculty of outstanding personalities developed what has been called the Wauwatosa theology or popularly the Wauwatosa gospel. Its essential feature was a fresh approach to the study of the Bible.”<sup>10</sup> Generally speaking, most Wisconsin Synod pastors today who know anything about the term “Wauwatosa Theology” would seem to understand it to mean that we are well-served to take an honest, exegetical approach to the Scriptures and to ask ourselves diligently: what does God’s Word actually say?

It should be noted that the expressions “Wauwatosa theology” and “Wauwatosa gospel” seem to have been coined by members of the Protestant Conference of the Wisconsin Synod in the late 1920s,<sup>11</sup> but they have not always been readily acknowledged or enthusiastically employed by the pastors and theologians of the Wisconsin Synod. In a 1959 essay entitled, “The Theological Tradition of the Wisconsin Synod with Particular Attention to the Work of John Philip Koehler,” Leigh Jordahl asserted that there was a difference of opinion among leading Wisconsin men.

. . . the term *Wauwatosa Theology* . . . is generally objected to by Wisconsin Synod men who refuse to recognize that there was any peculiar point of view at Wauwatosa which is different from what now dominates the Thiensville Seminary. The writer has discussed the term with John Brenner, former President of the Wisconsin Synod, Oscar Naumann, present President and E. E. Kowalke, President of Northwestern College. Naumann has insisted that there was no specific approach at Wauwatosa that contradicted present position, although he feels that Koehler was “confused.” Brenner disliked the term but confessed that under Koehler things were different and that Koehler was an “original and stimulating” teacher. Kowalke agreed with the writer that there was a

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<sup>10</sup>Elmer Kiessling, “The Tie That Binds” *Faith-Life* 37, no. 5 (May 1959): 8.

<sup>11</sup>To the best of this author’s knowledge, the earliest printed record of the expression “Wauwatosa Theology” is found in an essay by Karl Koehler entitled “The Antinomian Controversy” (*Faith-Life* 1, no. 11 [August 27, 1928]: 7). Pastor Paul Hensel seems to have coined the term “Wauwatosa Gospel,” with his 1928 “*The Gutachten in the Light of the Wauwatosa Gospel.*” Karl Koehler would later comment, “Academically we speak of it as the Wauwatosa Theology. But no one has the right to take umbrage at the term ‘Wauwatosa Gospel.’ . . . The term sprang into life with Paul Hensel’s paper entitled thus. . . . Since then the expression ‘Wauwatosa Gospel’ has taken on a wider significance, to wit: that the Wauwatosa Theology, outside of its doctrinal position, has a special message, a gospel (as everybody understands the term ‘gospel’ in its wider use)” (*Faith-Life* 4, no. 3 [March 1931]: 11). While the term “Wauwatosa Theology” may not have seen print before August 1928, the author suspects that at least some Wauwatosa students and graduates—if not some on the Wauwatosa faculty—had already adopted the term to signify the unique theological approach of the Wauwatosa professors.

specific theological approach at Wauwatosa, that this was not appreciated and that it no longer has any great influence in the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>12</sup>

More recently there has not been as much reticence about utilizing these terms to describe the theological approach of the Wauwatosa professors<sup>13</sup> or to describe the Wisconsin Synod's current theological approach as being a continuation of the "Wauwatosa Theology," though some voices in our church body wonder how wise or beneficial it is to use the term at all. Be that as it may, it is exceedingly wise and beneficial to consider what these theological giants in Wisconsin Synod history espoused and to ask what was so unique about the Wauwatosa Seminary within American Lutheranism that it led many to attach special terms to its theological perspectives.

### **Breaking Up the Soil: Professor John Philipp Koehler**

When the Lord of the Church called the prophet Jeremiah to proclaim his eternal Word, he explained to the young man that he was not being given an easy assignment. Jeremiah was appointed as a prophet "over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:10). He was faced with the prospect of breaking up the hardened soil of the Israel's very heart and mind—baked by long years of often-mindless, religious routine—for the purpose of leading God's chosen people "to know our God aright," as Martin Luther put it so succinctly in his great Pentecost hymn, "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord" (CW 176). Indeed, the Lord had already said of them, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13). The proclamation of godly repentance was altogether necessary.

The history of the Holy Scriptures and a study of New Testament church history show us how necessary this preaching of repentance

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<sup>12</sup>Leigh Jordahl, "The Theological Tradition of the Wisconsin Synod with Particular Attention to the Work of John Philip Koehler," (Luther Theological Seminary, 1959), 21, footnote 2. Pastor Carl Mischke, the Synod President one generation later commented, "I'll have to admit I never associated the music, the art, the literature, or any of that with [the Wauwatosa Theology]," (Michael J. Albrecht, "The Faith-Life Legacy of a Wauwatosa Theologian: Prof. Joh. Ph. Koehler, Exegete, Historian and Musician" [A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2008], 233). See also Albert Meier, "... Neither Bound Up, Neither Mollified with Ointment," *Faith-Life* 32, no. 5 (May 1959): 11-12. Meier reports on at least one district president who "made a study of the *Quartalschrift* and couldn't see . . . what we meant by Wauwatosa Theology."

<sup>13</sup>The Northwestern Publishing House effort to publish a three-volume anthology entitled *The Wauwatosa Theology* is ample proof of the term's growing use within the Wisconsin Synod.

continues to be for the Lord's people. No matter how faithful they are to Jesus, sinful human hearts are forever tempted to fall prey to easy and comfortable spiritual patterns that do not quite square with God's holy Word and will, as Jesus' recurrent "But I tell you . . ." in his Sermon on the Mount so aptly demonstrates. Ironically, this temptation to hardened, spiritual thinking has proven to be most pervasive where the gospel predominates and the idea that we are "right with God"<sup>14</sup> unwittingly leads to a deadly self-righteousness.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, godly repentance in the light of God's holy Word will continue to be for us a necessary, daily exercise.

In many respects, this is what the Wauwatosa theologians and their approach exemplified. They asked the church of their day to critically examine on the basis of the Holy Scriptures whether or not their established forms and findings—whether their presentation of biblical doctrine and practice—really squared with the truth of God's Word. They also sought ways to develop and broaden their students' and church's understanding and appreciation for God's indelible fingerprint on all creation and for his ongoing gospel work through us and in us. Naturally, a call to godly repentance and a vigorous self-examination will be met with a measure of resistance, just as when farmers attempt to break up hardened ground with a hoe, yet how necessary is this preparatory work if sustainable fruits are desired.

The first of the so-called Wauwatosa theologians to undertake this painstaking labor was John Ph. Koehler. He had received a Divine

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<sup>14</sup>The truth of the Gospel and the assurance of forgiveness in Jesus has sometimes served as a soporific in the hearts and minds of Jesus' disciples. Instead of placing confidence in the truth of God's Word (the proper object of faith), confidence is placed in *my grasp* of that Word, that I have the *reine Lehre*, the right teaching, which can lead to what Koehler called the "bravado of orthodoxy" (see his "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology, Vol. III* [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 237-240). A classic biblical example of this phenomenon is Peter's failure to walk on the water as Jesus had commanded him. Peter ultimately placed confidence in *his faith* rather than in the truth of Jesus' words. As a result, Jesus deemed him to have "little faith" (Matthew 14:31).

<sup>15</sup>Old Testament Israel is the most famous example of this frightening reality. They stubbornly resisted the preaching of repentance and persecuted the prophets of the Lord and even crucified Jesus, as St. Stephen details (Acts 7:2-53). It is interesting to note that when Luther and Philipp Melanchthon organized the Saxon visitation of evangelical parishes in 1528, their chief concern was with those pastors who did not properly preach repentance or omitted the preaching of repentance altogether. "Many now talk only about the forgiveness of sins and say little or nothing about repentance. There neither is forgiveness of sins without repentance nor can forgiveness of sins be understood without repentance. It follows that if we preach the forgiveness of sins without repentance that the people imagine that they have already obtained the forgiveness of sins, becoming thereby secure and without compunction of conscience. This would be a greater error and sin than all the errors hitherto prevailing" (AE 40:274).

Call to serve as the professor of church history, New Testament, hermeneutics, and liturgics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and was installed on September 4, 1900.<sup>16</sup> The forty-one-year-old Koehler had long been recognized within the synod as a shining light among the second generation of Wisconsin pastors. His father, Pastor Philipp Koehler (1828–1895), had been a strong proponent of confessional Lutheranism from the time he entered the synodical ranks in 1855,<sup>17</sup> and his son had gained the reputation of a studied and serious, if not always traditional, theologian.<sup>18</sup> An 1880 graduate of the Missouri Synod's St. Louis seminary, Koehler had been called to serve as a professor and inspector at Northwestern College in Watertown already in 1888, after only seven years of parish ministry at St. John, Two Rivers, Wisconsin. He would later decline a Divine Call to serve as the director of Dr. Martin Luther College in 1893, a position eventually filled by Professor John Schaller, his future seminary colleague.<sup>19</sup>

Already as a young pastor, Koehler expressed the concerns he would later champion with respect to the theological approach too often taken in treating matters of doctrine and practice. In an Eng-

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<sup>16</sup>Almost immediately, Koehler was forced to take a year's leave of absence due to a throat condition. He spent the year in the American Southwest. His son, Kurt, explains: "He had lost his voice and it was thought that he had tuberculosis of the throat. As it turned out, the vocal chords on one side of his voice-box had grown together and a surgeon in Denver was able to separate them" (John Ph. Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 [November/December 2002]: 16).

<sup>17</sup>It seems best to describe Philipp Koehler as the "driving force" behind the Wisconsin Synod's turn toward a more confessional doctrine and practice. For instance, in his "The Significance of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke for the Wisconsin Synod and American Lutheranism," Professor August Pieper writes: "Koehler was the most determined of the men opposing the terrible looseness of the unionists" (*The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 372). In his "Anniversary Reflections," Pieper adds: "The chief champions of strict Lutheran doctrine and practice were first of all Philipp Koehler and then Adolf Hoenecke" (*The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III, [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 276). In a *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* article, "The Wisconsin Synod's Debt to C.F.W. Walther," Professor John Brenner reported: "Dr. Arnold O. Lehmann, who has been working for years to transcribe and preserve the early correspondence of the Wisconsin Synod, once suggested to this writer that on the basis of the correspondence Koehler more than any one else ought to be credited with leading our synod to a solid confessional stand. A thorough study of Koehler's influence based on his correspondence would be a major contribution to understanding the early history of our synod" (*Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 104, no. 1 [Winter 2007], 23fn.).

<sup>18</sup>Among other things, Koehler was brought up on charges during his professorship at Northwestern for suggesting that Job could possibly have been a poetic rather than a real, historical character. See John Ph. Koehler, "Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 76, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 18. Koehler seemed to find himself being questioned by leaders of the synod on a regular basis concerning some doctrinal point.

<sup>19</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 224.

lish sermon he preached during his days as pastor in Two Rivers, Koehler asserted:

God has given his word to us & we have nothing else to do but listen to what God says. It is not our buissness to tell the bible what it should say but it is our duty to accept all that what it presents to us. . . . I don't think it to be right way, to fix a doctrine or a dogma & then look into the scriptures to get proofs for what we have fixed before. In many cases it is then necessary to stretch and to press words & whole sentences, to turn them or separate their parts, so as to get out what we have fixed before already . . . . No the right way to study it, is to read it as we read any other book. To take everything as it is written & when certain ideas come before us which seem somewhat out of the way, it is not the right thing to explain them as we think they might have been or as it seems to us to be more agreeable, but we should understand everything as it is explained by the bible itself. . . . [This] is for us . . . the first question allways, what is written? Wether that is agreeable to us, wether we like it, or wether we believe it that may be a second question, although it ought not be any question at all. For those things which are good enough for God to reveal them, may be surely good enough for [us] to accept & believe & follow them.<sup>20</sup>

It was with this same resolve and perspective that Koehler now entered upon his Wauwatosa professorship in the fall of 1900, replacing Gottlieb Thiele, who had been asked to accept an early retirement the previous Easter. Thiele had served alongside Adolf Hoenecke since 1887 upon the latter's recommendation, but according to one synodical resolution he was "not equal to his position." Koehler reports that his predecessor had made the study of history a "mass of detail" due to his "lack of mastery of the subject" and that Thiele admitted to others that he "had no faith in his theological or even pastoral ability."<sup>21</sup>

Exegetical work had suffered as well, proven by the fact that Hoenecke felt compelled to dictate an exegetical commentary on Romans in his classroom, though Thiele was responsible for teaching exegesis. Koehler observes: "It was a stop-gap of a sort for the real exegetical work, but confined itself to the dogmatical systematizing of Paul's line of thought, without much attention to linguistics." Most students had simply "concentrated on copying and studying Hoenecke's dictated dogmatics and paid little attention to other subjects."<sup>22</sup>

Dogmatics was clearly the queen theological discipline at Wauwatosa, as was the case generally within Lutheran theological training.

<sup>20</sup>Koehler Family Collection, Concordia Historical Institute, Folder 244. *Spelling is the original.*

<sup>21</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 207.



The new professor lamented that “exegesis and history seem everywhere to have been considered secondary subjects . . . from the mistaken notion that they require less practical ability and training but more independent judgment than doctrinal and pastoral theology.”<sup>23</sup> The fact that the seminary’s most capable teacher, Hoenecke, taught dogmatics only reinforced its principal position at Wauwatosa. That most synodicals continued to regard dogmatics as the chief seminary discipline even after the advent of Koehler and later August Pieper would be confirmed when Hoenecke died in 1908 and the opinion prevailed that the new seminary director should teach dogmatics.<sup>24</sup>

The traditional approach that he found at Wauwatosa did not prevent Koehler from introducing new ideas to the seminary. The first innovation had to do with simple classroom procedure. Koehler recalled that some seminarians had the “mistaken idea” that each professor was “free to teach what he pleases and the student free to learn as and when he pleases.” Koehler countered this “academic freedom” by making clear from the beginning what kind of expectations he had of his students and what they could expect from him. “The new teacher did not follow the custom of dictating the subject-matter but expected the students to review the ground covered in the daily lectures with the help of a text-book and be prepared for a quiz the next day. In exegesis, the students themselves had to deliver weekly essays besides.”<sup>25</sup> As time went on, Koehler would himself write the textbooks for his exegetical course on Galatians and his survey of church history.<sup>26</sup>

Koehler recounted how “his classroom requirements soon aroused dissatisfaction and individual rebellion.” He explained:

It was mainly those of the students who had not known Koehler as a teacher at Watertown, or had not attended there at all, who now offered passive resistance, but the disciplinary action provoked by the general apathy to effective teaching served to make it clear to the whole coetus that students at our church institutions who

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 219. John Schaller was eventually called to replace Hoenecke as director and professor of dogmatics. When Schaller died in 1920, it was once again expected that the new director should assume the chair of dogmatics. When J.P. Koehler was called to replace Schaller, he declined to teach dogmatics. Professor John Meyer was then called to do so. See Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 252-253; also John Ph. Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 76, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 17.

<sup>25</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 210.

<sup>26</sup>Koehler published his *Der Brief Pauli an die Galater* in 1910. An English translation by Professor Ralph Gehrke was published by Northwestern Publishing House in 1957 and reissued by NPH, along with Koehler’s later commentary on Ephesians, in 2000. Koehler published his *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* in 1917. Both original German volumes were published at Koehler’s own expense.

receive free tuition (and in many cases free room and board besides) are under definite obligations to the church and school to improve each shining hour, and to the teachers as well who, under-salaried as they are, at least may expect to have the satisfaction of not wasting their time. That is the best way, too, for seminarians to show that they are grown up and "no longer preps" and equipped, for their later ministry, with the necessary sense of responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

Opinions about Koehler's teaching and classroom procedure seem to have been mixed among the student body. Professor Martin Westerhaus maintained that Koehler "was quite formal in his classroom manner and kept students conscious of the difference in rank, learning, and experience. . . . He was demanding of his students and was not particularly popular with the majority of them. He probably was 'over their heads.'"<sup>28</sup> Koehler himself would claim that he lacked "the technique of teaching,"<sup>29</sup> perhaps leading some students to have little appreciation for him as a professor.

Other students were impressed after just one day in Koehler's classroom. In September 1914, E. Arnold Sitz reported in his journal, "*Kirchengeschichte* [church history] with Prof. Koehler is a deep study; Hermeneutics with him also."<sup>30</sup> The following year Sitz would write, "A number of us called on John P. Koehler this evening. There is hardly another man of his calibre living I am sure, who seems to intuit all that is worth knowing in *Kunst* [art] and *Wissenschaft* [science]. His conversation is very instructive. His dissertations in music were especially interesting to me."<sup>31</sup> A month later he could confide: "Prof. Koehler is sure a great thinker. This morning in the church history time he gave us enough thoughts to work over for life in order to come to the bottom of it."<sup>32</sup> By the time Sitz reached his final year at Wauwatosa he could not help but express himself boldly.

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<sup>27</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 210-211.

<sup>28</sup>Martin Westerhaus, "The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 31-32.

<sup>29</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 235.

<sup>30</sup>E. Arnold Sitz journal, September 10, 1914. It should be noted that from early on Sitz was quite generally impressed with the spirit at the Wauwatosa Seminary compared to what prevailed at Northwestern College, Watertown. He wrote on September 18, 1914: "I'd never exchange places with a senior at Watertown now. The purpose of a student there is diametrically opposed to that of a student here. There anything (e.g. sports, music) but study seems to be paramount reason for being at N.W.C.; here study takes first place in the student's mind. This is illustrated thus: In Watertown one hardly ever hears students discussing their studies or what a professor had to say; here the conversation is mostly concerning studies and the lectures of the professors."

<sup>31</sup>Sitz journal, October 29, 1915.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1915.

Every period we have with him is intensely interesting from start to finish. He is a master in analysis of history; he can grasp the controlling idea of a period in history covering centuries as, I almost believe, no other man of our time, certainly but few of our times can.<sup>33</sup>

That man has a wonderful grasp of thots [sic] and ideas that pervade a time and can summarize in peerless fashion whole centuries.<sup>34</sup>

I honestly believe him the greatest man of the times, not to say since Luther. Why? Because he is the only man of any outward importance who has [been] granted thought of the Gospel as he, and who has such a knowledge and insight into history as well as . . . painting, music, literature. And he criticizes these things in the only true light, the light of the Gospel, the Gospel of which he has his understanding, not from church fathers nor dogmaticians, but from the Gospel itself, from Christ and Paul.<sup>35</sup>

Another former student, Pastor Immanuel P. Frey, summed up his impressions of Koehler with similar admiration.

Professor Koehler at first glance impressed the students as an austere man and as of a reserved nature, but at the same time he had a gift for talking with the students and influencing them privately. His chief talent seemed to be the laying down of the fundamental principles of the Gospel. It appeared at times that he intentionally did not make his statements too specific, so that the students would do their own thinking. Consequently they were not always likely to understand him at first but after months, perhaps even years, the fuller meaning would gradually dawn upon them. His lectures were never dull but always stimulating. He put great stress on the revelation of God's ways in history, pointing out that the formulations of theology are not static but represent a constant struggle of God's unchanging truth against the ever-changing attacks of error. This made also church history a vital subject at our Seminary and the study of history a prominent feature in the pre-seminary training of ministerial students in our Synod.<sup>36</sup>

Just prior to Koehler's arrival, there had been debate as to whether or not it was time to introduce more English instruction at

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., February 22, 1917.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., March 18, 1917.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., November 9, 1916. Sixty years later Sitz would recall in a letter to his grandson, "When I finished [Northwestern College] in 1914 I came out quite indifferent, not too far removed from heathenism. I more or less just drifted into the Seminary. But how glad I am that I got there! For that is where I learned under wonderful teachers, among whom was your Great Grandfather, Prof. John Philipp Koehler, what Christianity really is."

<sup>36</sup>Immanuel P. Frey, "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (July 1963): 212.

the seminary level since Wauwatosa graduates were facing the real prospect of serving English-speaking congregations in the years to come.<sup>37</sup> "In the early to mid 1890s seminary students seeing the need for English facility organized on their own an English theological debating society in the dormitory. At the monthly meetings a student would read an original essay on a theological topic and two teams would debate a theological problem. A general discussion rounded out the meeting. In this way the students familiarized themselves with English theological terminology."<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately, it was decided that a fourth professorship should be established "to give the students at least some training in the use of English theological terms."<sup>39</sup> Pastor Reinhold Adelberg of St. Peter Church in Milwaukee served temporarily in this capacity from 1897-1901.<sup>40</sup> Professor Max Lehninger wrote, "This arrangement soon lapsed, and thereafter this work was done by the members of the regular three-man faculty,"<sup>41</sup> but a former student recalled that English was rarely used in his day.

I have no recollection of any subjects being taught in English at the Seminary fifty years ago [the 1910s] except for one period of Dogmatics and the requirement of delivering one English sermon during the course at the Seminary. It was a blessing that the students had had a good English course at Watertown under Dr.

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<sup>37</sup>Koehler reports: "The move looking to more emphasis on the English originated in Minnesota, and [Philipp von] Rohr's and [August] Ernst's incumbency of the two main presidencies in the general body may also account for its support" (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207).

<sup>38</sup>John M. Brenner, "Forward in Christ: Doctrinal Challenges and Language Change," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 97, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 172.

<sup>39</sup>Frey, 198.

<sup>40</sup>Adelberg seems to have been considered a full-time member of the faculty (still listed in the Seminary's yearly catalog), though he apparently was only an adjunct professor. His one-year replacement, Pastor John Jenny, was not considered full-time, and then the arrangement came to an end. Adelberg had experience serving as an adjunct professor who taught his classes in English. He had also served in this capacity at Northwestern College during his pastorate at St. Mark, Watertown (1869-1873). The 1872 synod convention minutes report: "Religion instruction, and also instruction in the English language is given by Pastor Adelberg, to whom we offer our sincere thanks for his time and effort" (*WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 [April 2007]: 8). See also the 1979 church anniversary booklet of St. Mark, Watertown, "Hearing Him Gladly for 125 Years," 26.

<sup>41</sup>Lehninger, *Continuing in His Word*, 146. In a report about the seminary's curriculum to the 1919 Synod Convention, it is reported that Professor Herman Meyer required one English catechetical lesson and one English sermon to be composed by each student. Meyer also taught his New Testament exegesis class on Matthew in English to familiarize the students with "English biblical language." See "The Goal of the work at the Seminary," (Philemon Hensel, Trans.), *Faith-Life* 62, no. 3 (May/June 1989): 16-17.

[Henry] Ott. However, those who were later forced to preach in English in their congregations were often at a loss for the right theological term to use since practically all their theological training had been in German. The German language continued as a medium of instruction even after the transfer of the Seminary to Thiensville, yes, into the early forties.<sup>42</sup>

Hoenecke was apparently not an advocate for English instruction at the seminary nor, it seems, English mission work in general. William Dallmann, a pioneer pastor in the English Synod of the Missouri Synod, recalled his request of Hoenecke that the Wauwatosa Seminary provide him with an assistant for English mission work in Milwaukee. Hoenecke replied that he would not object to such an arrangement, but he added: "I have no use for English Lutheranism." When Dallmann questioned Hoenecke's assertion, the seminary director claimed that "you cannot preach Lutheranism in English." When Dallmann charged Hoenecke with "rank heresy," the old professor's simple retort was, "Where is your English Luther?"<sup>43</sup>

For his part, Koehler protested that "the concern for the English language at the Seminary in 1900 as a future medium for spreading of the Gospel . . . was not genuine, in keeping with the truth, when the Gospel itself and the means of preserving it were not given due attention." Koehler suggested that "the sponsors of the English work were not alert to the greater need at all," which he believed to be the seminary's lack of a truly comprehensive theological training, grounded in the historical disciplines. While Koehler acknowledged that "to preserve the Gospel anywhere is wholly God's business, even as He alone has brought it into being," that did not excuse a seminary education that in his opinion lacked "an intensive study of the revealed word."<sup>44</sup> Koehler concluded that "our trouble is not only a matter of methods; it lies deeper than the plane of external methods. The spirit in us is sick, and you can't get at that except with Bible and hymnal."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Frey, 227. At least one Wauwatosa graduate, William Beitz, attended the General Council Seminary in Maywood, Illinois, from 1914-1916 for the expressed purpose of receiving theological training in English. Beitz would complete his final year of training at Wauwatosa during the 1916-1917 school year and be assigned to serve Grace Lutheran Church in Tucson, Arizona, an English-speaking congregation.

<sup>43</sup>William Dallmann, *My Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), 93. Dallmann reports that he did not back down, asking Hoenecke: "By the way, how long did the Lutheran Church really last in Germany in spite of the German Luther?" to which Hoenecke replied, "Yes, yes; I know what you mean."

<sup>44</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 208.

<sup>45</sup>John Ph. Koehler, "Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music Measured and Compared with the Forms of Scripture, of Luther, and the Lutheran Congregational Hymn of the Sixteenth Century" (Marcus Koch, Trans.), *Faith-Life* 60, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 12.

Koehler also expressed a common concern in those days that a hurried transition to the English language could bring with it a Calvinistic confusion of justification and sanctification and a "preaching of the Gospel with secular and political aims and ideals."<sup>46</sup> Finally, Koehler also believed that having regular English instruction at the seminary level made little sense if the preparatory and college training at Northwestern was still done almost exclusively in German.<sup>47</sup> If a transition to English was going to take place in the training of the synod's future pastors, Koehler insisted that it begin earlier than Wauwatosa.

Another important issue that Koehler addressed in his first years at Wauwatosa was the matter of a seminary library. Already in 1897 the Seminary Board report to the synod called attention to the need for a library, prompting the convention to urge its pastors and teachers to remember the library with donations of money and books. In 1899 the convention appropriated \$200 for library expansion.<sup>48</sup> Finally, in the winter of 1903 Koehler began work on organizing a library for student use. After the untimely death of Professor E. W. A. Notz in 1903, the institution benefited substantially from the purchase of the deceased professor's personal library. Koehler recalled how a Milwaukee layman donated \$1,000 to purchase the books when the seminary librarian approached him about the matter. Koehler was told, "If we men of means had been shown such confidence before, Synod might have long since profited by our wealth."<sup>49</sup>

Good church music, especially an emphasis on the Lutheran chorale, was another matter very close to Koehler's heart when he arrived for duty at Wauwatosa, and he worked diligently to secure its rightful place within the seminary curriculum and culture. Before Koehler's arrival, there was no seminary choir. In the 1890s a group of area singers had founded the A Cappella Choir of Milwaukee under the direction of William Boepler, who had been a Reformed preacher overseas but now had established himself in Milwaukee as a teacher of music. Whether any seminarians were members of his choir is unclear, but Koehler informs us that in addition to his directing Boep-

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<sup>46</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 208. See August Pieper, "Our Transition into English," for a further reflection upon these concerns (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1907>).

<sup>47</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 207. Instruction in English would not be undertaken in earnest at Northwestern College until the 1920s, when J.P. Koehler's son, Karl, asked the faculty's permission to teach all of his history classes in English (E. E. Kowalke, *The Centennial Story* [Watertown, Wisconsin: Northwestern College Press, 1965], 167).

<sup>48</sup>Frey, 198.

<sup>49</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 211.

pler “was musical instructor at the Wauwatosa seminary,”<sup>50</sup> perhaps even as late as 1902 when he relocated to Chicago.

Upon Boeppler’s departure a man named Franz Salbach took the baton and also gave music lessons at the seminary, as well as at Northwestern College. When he failed to measure up, Salbach sought relief. “Then Dr. Hoenecke, very likely at Salbach’s instance, prevailed on his colleague Koehler to assume the presidency of the organization, and at the latter’s instance the choir devoted itself to the *Volkslied* [German folk song], the chorale, and the St. Matthew’s Passion by Bach.”<sup>51</sup> Over the course of time, the A Cappella Choir disbanded, but “Koehler offered the seminary board to take charge of the musical work, in order that it might be integrated more with the theological course of the students.”<sup>52</sup> The board assented, and in 1909 the original Seminary Choir was founded.

Koehler would not be shy about divulging his agenda: “the chorale was chiefly to be studied and practiced. It was to be sung according to the original settings, which in the Reformation period were not for the organ but for a *cappella* chorus.”<sup>53</sup> The new director was interested in bringing “the pearls of church music to the attention of a larger audience . . . [especially] the old Lutheran congregational hymn, . . . so that our people recognize more and more the beauty of these hymns and be roused to sing them.”<sup>54</sup> Between 1910 and 1914, the choir performed two annual concerts to benefit the Lutheran high school in Milwaukee. In addition to the concerts, Koehler would offer lectures on the history and significance of the Lutheran chorale.<sup>55</sup>

As far as the vital relationship between this kind of musical training and a solid seminary education, Koehler expressed sentiments similar to Martin Luther, who argued that “next to theology there is no art that could be put on the same level with music”<sup>56</sup> and that “before a youth is ordained into the ministry, he should practice music

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 221. In his “Retrospective,” Koehler offers a slightly different account, suggesting that he actually became the director of the choir at this point, not just the president. See *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 (November/December 2002): 18.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>John Ph. Koehler, *Perlen alter Kirchenmusik* (Milwaukee: Rohlfing Sons Music Company). Quoted in Albrecht, 62.

<sup>55</sup>Several of these lectures would later be printed in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, the seminary’s theological journal, and two are included in *The Wauwatosa Theology* anthology.

<sup>56</sup>AE 49:428.

in school.”<sup>57</sup> Koehler lamented the fact that “at our seminaries one [subject] has been altogether neglected,” namely, “a thorough study of the congregational hymn.” The reason for music’s necessary place in the seminary curriculum was self-evident to Koehler.

The congregational hymn plays such a prominent role in the life of the individual congregation, and has also played it in the life of the church, that it ought to be obvious how little attention this fact has received in the training of our pastors. In the planting of the seed and in the sustenance of Christian growth among the people, the congregational hymn is of equal importance to the sermon, not merely because it takes in half the time of the church service, but because, having folk appeal [*volkstümliche Art*], which is timeless, it comes nearer the heart of the people than most sermons, and therefore its effect is more spontaneous and deeper. . . . Therefore it is not necessary first to bring proof that a pastor should learn to know the hymn in all its parts, in the composition of its text and music, in its history and its effectiveness, because it is quite obvious that, since the congregational hymn is of the most vital importance for the life of the church, a proper or improper employment of the same will be proportionately of far-reaching consequences, for better or for worse.<sup>58</sup>

Though there does not seem to be any mention of a formal seminary choir after 1915,<sup>59</sup> little by little Koehler was able to introduce the study and use of music into the seminary classroom. Eventually, “Koehler spent some time during the first period of each class day practicing the singing of four-part arrangements of these early German chorales. Because he had all the students first hour, this meant that all the students were involved, whether they liked it or not, in this practice session of Koehler’s.”<sup>60</sup> The hour was known as the “Singstunde.” A 1919 report to the synod convention tells us:

The whole student body participates in the instruction of liturgics.—Hymnology is closely allied with liturgics and pastoral theology. The pastor must be possessed of judgment in hymnology. The student choir sings chorales exclusively because the chorale represents the most sublime artistic product which the Gospel has

<sup>57</sup>Quoted in Robin A. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 278.

<sup>58</sup>Koehler, “Our Forms of Expression in Poetry and Music,” *Faith-Life* 60, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 11-12.

<sup>59</sup>James P. Tiefel, “The History of the Seminary Chorus: 75 Years—Singing New Songs to the Lord,” *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 20.

<sup>60</sup>William Stuebs, “An Evaluation of Professor Koehler’s Dealing with the Problem of Poor Singing and the Use of Poor Music in the Congregation with an Emphasis on How This Influenced the Musical Curriculum and Thinking of Our Seminary,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/1872>), 12.



achieved, and because the pastor should understand how to evaluate and take the lead principally in the congregational hymn.<sup>61</sup>

Though Koehler fought valiantly for the place of music and especially hymnology in the seminary curriculum, he also seemed resigned to the idea that the vigor of the Lutheran chorale would never again be matched. He maintained that “the era of the German Lutheran chorale is past. The church must create something new. For the time being, it is of paramount importance to rescue what can be rescued of the inherited and hitherto ignored treasure: distinctive melodies with marrow, principal hymns in translation, etc.”<sup>62</sup>

Related to Koehler’s interest in promoting a proper understanding and practice of church music at Wauwatosa was his determined introduction of other arts—especially ecclesiastical painting, architecture and sculpture—into his church history and liturgics courses. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler expressed himself on the natural connection between history and cultural forms.

Indeed, the evaluation of art, in all its forms, as the most intimate expression of the human spirit is part and parcel of the study of history, especially from the Christian point of view. And as a matter of the Christian life, there is no escaping the fact that art, the expression of the beautiful or what is thought to be beautiful, in some form is practiced or employed by every one, if it be only in the dress and manners of our daily life. Hence, the appreciation of what is truly pure and lovely is not a matter of indifference in the Christian home, school, and church and certainly [is] a ‘must’ subject in Christian education. That is in line with the Scriptures too (Phil. 4:8).<sup>63</sup>

Koehler had apparently included “a thoroughgoing consideration of the plastic arts . . . in his history courses” since being called to teach at Northwestern College in 1888.<sup>64</sup> Beginning in 1917, “lectures on the history of art” also found their way into the seminary liturgics course.<sup>65</sup> Koehler asserted that a “detailed examination of ecclesiastical art

<sup>61</sup>“The Goal of the work at the Seminary,” 16. Not only did Koehler spend classroom time on the subject of music, but he discussed it with the students informally as well. One seminarian recorded in his journal, “J.P. took me aside to talk music to me: his especial topic was the music of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nineteenth Century literature amounts to nothing, so also its music” (Sitz journal, January 21, 1917).

<sup>62</sup>“The Goal of the work at the Seminary,” 16.

<sup>63</sup>Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 220.

<sup>64</sup>Koehler, “Retrospective,” *Faith-Life* 75, no. 6 (November/December 2002): 23. In his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, Koehler writes: “The writer practiced [visual education] for ten years at the College, then also made use of negative slides that appeared on the screen like crayon drawings on a blackboard” (220).

<sup>65</sup>Keith Wessel, “A Brief Introduction to the Artistic Thought and Work of John Philipp Koehler,” (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File: <http://www.wlssays.net/node/922>), 10.

forms is to be recommended in church history, because they represent a crystallization of the total life of the church, and their development and formation can be understood only in context with the general intellectual drift and the total intellectual activity of the period in which they came into being."<sup>66</sup> The amateur-artist professor provided "2400 lantern slide reproductions of famous works of art, laboriously painted by Koehler himself on the small pieces of glass used for the projection. He dared not leave the slide in the machine too long lest the oils melt from the heat of the projection lamp."<sup>67</sup>

Not only did Koehler make use of these slides in his seminary classroom, he also offered "Illustrated Lectures on the History of Art" at Grace School, Milwaukee, under the banner of Philippians 4:8. In the prospectus he explained the purpose of these lectures.

Art is not a matter of indifference to the Christian. Being the most intimate revelation of the life of the spirit, art will at once engage the interest of the Christian whose own view of life centers around spiritual values. The architect, sculptor, and painter, the musician, poet, and writer have something to say to us, or not, as the case may be; in either case, however, we are confronted with the revelation of character and of a Weltanschauung [worldview]. In most cases, too, the artists of the world are the real spokesmen of their times and the prophets of the ideals of their people. Hence it cannot be a matter of indifference, in what way the Christian appraises art.

Nor is the practice of art by the Christian an indifferent thing. We all practice art, be it professionally or as amateurs or merely by the choice of the songs we sing or that our spirit responds to, by the choice of the decorations and appointments of our homes, the dress and manners of our every-day life. The question arises, whether our inward life that thus voices itself be 'true, honest, just, pure, and lovely'.

With these premises, it is obvious that the Christian ought to 'think of these things' and see to it that his appraisal of art and his own practice of it be in tune with the Gospel. It is the purpose of these lectures to give impetus to such thought and endeavor.<sup>68</sup>

It should be noted that Koehler's definition of art went well beyond the idea of simply spending your days haunting art museums

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<sup>66</sup>"The Goal of the work at the Seminary," 15.

<sup>67</sup>"Conference Report, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, February 4-5, 1967," *Faith-Life* 40, no. 3 (May/June 1967): 19. Koehler himself sets the number of slides at "between two and three thousand" (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 220). These slides currently reside in the "Koehler Family Collection" at the Concordia Historical Institute (<http://www.lutheranhistory.org/collections/fa/m-0017.htm>).

<sup>68</sup>John Ph. Koehler, "Illustrated Lectures on the History of Art," Author's Personal Collection.

and touring old churches. Koehler discovered art in every sphere of God's creation and understood true art to be everything that springs freely from God's creative creation. For instance, he marveled at the true art of a baby's babbling, when "the sounds the baby makes are filled with music. Just observe how all the laws of the tonal scale . . . come into play. And observe not merely as a teacher of acoustics [as a scientist!] would, because then one would most likely not even notice the main point. But study it as a musician would. The sounds of the child and those of the mother, who learns from the child, make music as beautiful as any to be heard the world around."<sup>69</sup> Koehler saw the "Wonderful" in matters that most would judge mundane, asserting that "this Wonderful is comprehended with the heart which rejoices in the truth and goodness and loveliness of God's governance, and swells in appreciation for these things."<sup>70</sup>

Later in life, Koehler would elucidate.

Art is always true; it is never studied, but always a natural gift and therefore free in its unstudied movements. It loves order as a part of beauty and omits all pretenses and showy appearance. . . . Art, in its wider and narrower sense, is of the natural spiritual gifts of God to man the greatest; of all the processes of the human mind and heart that which is at work in giving birth to art, and its relation to knowledge and understanding, comes closest to what Paul says [in] 1 Corinthians 8 and 13 about the relation between knowledge, love, and faith.

When a great thought, or truth, lays a compelling hand on the mind of man and makes his heart to burst with fullness and his soul to seek voice with whatever means of expression he has, and it then goes forth fair and free, honest and sincere, and great and true, to the honor of God and the edification of himself and of his followers: then you have art. And that is art, no matter by and in what occupation it be practiced, whether you rule men or serve in a menial position; whether you teach or learn; whether you deal with spiritual or mental or inanimate things; that is art, with whatever means, great and rich, or simple and lowly, it be uttered or acted.<sup>71</sup>

Though Koehler's purpose was noble, his goal of inculcating an understanding and appreciation that art is a window into the soul of all human history and experience seems to have been largely unrealized. "Even with such advanced teaching methods and excellent material, Koehler's labor to open his underlings' young minds to the world

<sup>69</sup> John Ph. Koehler, "The Wonderful in Luther's Poetry," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 495.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>71</sup> John Ph. Koehler, "The Art of Making Books," *Faith-Life* 4, no. 4 (April 1931): 14-15.

of art went largely unappreciated. Rev. Phil. Hensel recounts that many of the students slept through the lectures.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, "it was a grief of mind to him that [members of the Protestant] Conference never took an interest in these slides to the point of asking him to show them"<sup>73</sup> after Koehler's removal from the seminary in 1930. Koehler would also later recall that these lectures allegedly left him open to criticism, even contempt, by his colleagues.

. . . when I, in my history course, introduced illustrated lectures on the history of the arts in general, including music, in order to demonstrate *ad oculos et aures* [to the eyes and ears] the development of the general mentality during the different periods of history, this was called *allotria* [non-essential]. These incidents go to show a lack of interest and of understanding of these vital educational matters, and it seems that this unintelligence is especially marked in our circles, while the outside world is at work energetically to revolutionize the arts in question and its educational methods.<sup>74</sup>

Professor John Ph. Koehler had discovered the burden of every farmer. Breaking up the soil is challenging work.

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To be continued

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<sup>72</sup>Wessel, 10.

<sup>73</sup>"Conference Report, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, February 4-5, 1967," 19.

<sup>74</sup>John Ph. Koehler, "As to Appreciation of Art," *Faith-Life* 4, no. 5 (May 1931): 4. Elsewhere Koehler would name the source of the "*allotria*" remark: "When Koehler declared his reluctance to give up the teaching of Art History and History, Pieper called these subjects *allotria*" ("Retrospective," *Faith-Life* 76, no. 4 [July/August 2003]: 17). Leigh Jordahl offers a thoughtful critique of Koehler's conception of art in "The Wauwatosa Theology, John Philip Koehler, and the Theological Tradition of Midwestern American Lutheranism, 1900-1930," (Unpublished Essay, 1964), 133-135. According to Jordahl, Koehler exhibited "a dangerous tendency toward anti-intellectualism and an overemphasis on intuitive judgments. . . . What saved Koehler was precisely the fact that personally he never despised the careful intellectual task of scholarship, his conscientious attempt to avoid overstatements, his realization of the tentative character of human judgments, his realization, too, that a criticism of the methodology of dogmatics is no guarantee against dogmatism."