

Oppose False Prophets!

In the English translation of Adolf Hoenecke's *Dogmatics* one of the three translators made this remark at the beginning of the section on the doctrine of the ministry:

"The doctrine of the ministry was the focus of intensive study within the Wisconsin synod after Hoenecke's time. Some of the most important studies are in the *WELS Ministry Compendium*, compiled in 1992 by the WELS Board for Parish Services. A conclusion of the synod's study is found in the "Theses on the Church and Ministry," *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS*: Prepared by the Commission of Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1997" (Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, translators Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tackmier [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1999], IV, page 187).

Why did the unsigned translator insert this remark at this place?

It was his way of making a disclaimer, without having it sound much at all as if it were a disclaimer.

That is to say, he nudged the reader to check what the current position of the synod is, and not to be content with what Hoenecke would present on the following pages. Otherwise, what would have been the translator's point in bringing out those specific references; or why would there have been a need to point out that there had been a "focus of intensive study within the Wisconsin synod" unless it would have been important for a specific reason? Yet he did not give any reason, did he?

The fact of the matter is that this translator left a lot unsaid that could and should have been said.

The kernel of what the translator left unsaid is this: What Hoenecke wrote contradicts the current creed of WELS (the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) on the doctrine of the ministry.

Why did this writer not say so? Why did this translator not openly, candidly, and in all Christian truthfulness admit it?

First of all, it would have been embarrassing for him. The writer would have to confess that an esteemed sainted professor in the synod was contradicted by his own subsequent theologians. It would have been even more embarrassing to admit that Hoenecke was right, and that the subsequent theologians are wrong. Secondly, the peer pressure exerted on the translator by his clerical brethren in the synod would have

prevented it. Indeed, such a truthful admission never would have passed editorial muster.



Adolf Hoenecke

How and when did WELS change its creed on the ministry (and on the church, as well)? Adolf Hoenecke (1835-1908) had been a Lutheran pastor and later a professor for three decades at the seminary of the Wisconsin Synod. After he died in 1908, the three professors that were at the seminary after his death, Johannes Schaller, Johann Philip Koehler, and August Pieper, began teaching the subsequent students new doctrines on the church and on the ministry which contradicted Hoenecke's. They borrowed these different doctrines from a book by Johann Wilhelm

Friedrich Hoefling (1802-1853): *Grundsätze evangelisch-lutherischer Kirchenverfassung* [The principles of evangelical Lutheran church polity], dritte Ausgabe (Erlangen: Theodor Blaesing, 1853), a writer whom Hoenecke specifically mentioned by name in his own book (Volume IV, page 189) as among "some who oppose what Scripture teaches about the divine institution of the office" of the ministry. Franz Pieper of the Missouri Synod likewise criticized Hoefling at length (Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translator W.W.F. Albrecht [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970], III, pages 444-448) for his "denial of the divine command for the establishment of the ministry" (page 447).

Just the same, Hoefling's work found its converts in the Wisconsin Synod especially after Hoenecke's death, crucially in the seminary faculty of Schaller, A. Pieper, and Koehler. For instance, in his *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* [Instructional book of Church History] (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1917) seite 659, professor Koehler, in referring to the controversy regarding the church and the ministry in Germany during the 1800's, taught that "only Hoefling and a few colleagues [Thomasius, Hofmann, and Schmid] held entirely and correctly according to Scripture." In defense of the same seminary faculty the Reverend Immanuel P. Frey wrote in 1963:

"The Seminary faculty, particularly Professor [August] Pieper at first, published in the *Quartalschrift* what it regarded as the Scriptural teaching on the subject. As previously indicated, a number of prominent men in our own circles took exception.... Gradually the position of the Seminary faculty was widely accepted and has now become the recognized doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Synod" ("Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1863-1963," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 60, Number 3 [July, 1963], page 217f).

What is my point? It is this: The more recent clergy in WELS: the synodical officials, professors, and translators, do not demonstrate intellectual honesty. Instead, they lie.

In regards to Hoenecke's teaching on the public ministry (the office of the pastorate), his English translator could and should have stated the facts, and then, justly concluded: "Hoenecke is biblically right, WELS is biblically wrong. WELS should admit it, publicly apologize, and begin immediately to revert to what Hoenecke biblically taught." Indeed, whenever WELS' professors would teach their students in the seminary the WELS' ideology on the ministry, the Holy Spirit will not testify in anyone's heart that their words are biblical true. Furthermore, there would be no divine assurance coming from this false teaching as there would be from a biblical doctrine.

However, WELS' viewpoint is that its own post-Hoenecke teaching on the ministry is correct, and that anyone who would confess the teaching which Hoenecke taught will be wrong. So why will not WELS be intellectually honest, then, come out, and say so? Honestly admit: "Hoenecke taught it wrongly, but after he died the three seminary professors taught it correctly"!

In his 1949 essay before the WELS' centennial convention professor Max Lehninger, speaking on that synod's doctrinal history, remarked that "a reorientation relative to the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry" arose in WELS in the early years of the 1900's. Why cannot WELS' theologians drop this specious diction, stop these sophistries, quit lying, and tell the truth: "WELS changed its doctrine"? Admit it! In fact, confess frankly: "Prideful men cast aside biblical theology for Hoefling's ideology"!

The reason why they will not do this is that they know that the Bible forbids changes in doctrine (Revelation 22:18-19). To be sure, they will look awfully foolish if they frankly would admit it. Moreover, the apostle has sharp words to say about those who contradict the plain teaching of Scripture (Romans 10:21).

Nevertheless, false prophets will resort to additional measures in order to excuse their actions deceitfully. Professor Max Lehninger remarked, furthermore, in his aforementioned synodical centennial essay, that after Hoenecke's death Professor "J. Schaller spoke of the historical development of the pastorate through the centuries into what it is in our congregations today. And yet it is true; and the admission of such a development is in no way contradictory to the divinity of the pastoral call" ("The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of Its History," *Quartalschrift*, Band 47, Nummer 2, seite 104). Biblical doctrine does not

develop by itself nor by the efforts of petty men over a period of time from a beginning of obscurity to a maturity of transparency. “There can be no development of the Christian doctrine because the Christian doctrine given to the Church by the Apostles is a finished product complete and perfect, fixed for all times. It is not in need of improvement and allows no alteration” (Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, translator Theodore Engelder [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1965], I, page 129).

Thus, after synodical professors and essayists of WELS have shunned intellectual honesty in their public writings; after they have broken the Eighth Commandment by withholding the truth from their readers despite their better knowledge; and after they have exhibited a studied mastery at breaking the Second Commandment in their ongoing defense of their theological malpractice, the readers of their works have every right to resent being lied to, and to hold them in contempt for it.

To be sure, if ever the average synodical pastor or seminary student would be questioned at random regarding the doctrine of the ministry, experience has shown that commonly he will reply simply by reflecting the views of his teachers. On the other hand, this would not be entirely the case with an essayist or with a professor; for that person also would have to defend or to elaborate on the specified topic. In order to accomplish this, he would have to give much thought to the matter, and actively to organize his thinking. To that end he would have to assemble the biblical proof, formulate theses and antitheses, craft arguments, and handle objections, for example. If he would be given a teaching to present which, in fact, would be false, he immediately will run into trouble. For instance, the biblical proofs will not exist. If any biblical passages would be proposed, they will not state the case. Theses and antitheses will amount to mere ideology. The only possible arguments will end up being sophistries, and any answers to natural objections will be specious, vague, or miss the point. In fact, whenever WELS’ writers or professors would force an unbiblical teaching through their intellectual process, they will display the unregenerate nature of their religious thinking.

As you meditate on these matters, realize, in addition, that God has stated that he intentionally will send false prophets at times, even raising them up within a local congregation (Acts 20:29), in order to give a test to his believers through which they could and should stand up for the truth, and remain faithful to him and to his Word (Deuteronomy 13:3); in order that “the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35) as to whether they have the intent to be faithful to God’s Word or not; and in order “that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1st Corinthians 11:19), that is, so that those who faithfully pass their test may be evident to the rest of the

congregation. Indeed, a God-sent test, like any gospel reformation, will result in a winnowing process of the faithful from the unfaithful church members.

How many Lutheran clergy and laymen in America in the 1900's to the present time have failed their tests?

Those Lutherans from the 1900's to the present time who did not protest the introduction of any false doctrine or practice which was introduced into their respective synods and congregations, were accomplices to the same, and share the blame for the consequent deterioration in doctrine, in practice, and in saving faith - the cancer (2nd Timothy 2:17) and the leaven (Galatians 5:9) which was allowed to spread and has wreaked its havoc, as the apostle warned, in the downfall of the Lutheran churches from the golden age of Christianity in America.

Be different! Pass your test!

“Note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them! For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18). “Reject a heretic after the first and second admonition!” (Titus 3:10.)

Oppose false prophets! Know their methods! Know your Scripture!