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Gerald Perschbacher

Dietrich Blaufuss (ed.), *Wilhelm Löhe—Theologie und Geschichte / Theology and History*. Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 2013. 352 pages.

WILHELM LÖHE IS RECOGNIZED FOR a number of stellar achievements: He was a mission-minded Bavarian pastor who never left Germany, instrumental in sending many so-called *Nothelfer* (“emergency pastors”) to provide pastoral care for German immigrants who had settled on the American frontier. Löhe played a major role in the founding of Concordia Theological Seminary Ft. Wayne, and was passionate about Christians living out Christ’s commands to serve one another (Matthew 25:35-37)—hence his establishment of a thriving deaconess program that continues to this day. He was also a proponent of Confessionalism and “High-Church” liturgy—in an age when Rationalism had already corroded sound Lutheran doctrine and the dominance of Calvinism after the Prussian Union of 1817 had stripped most *unierte* church services of historic liturgy.

This fascinating book is a compendium of German and English language papers from fourteen contributors, delivered at the Loehe Theological Conference III of the International Loehe Society, held in Ft. Wayne in 2011. Blaufuss’ collection documents that Löhe’s *Lebenswerk* was much richer than the three or four bullet points listed above might suggest.

For instance, as Klaus Detlev Schulz notes, Löhe saw “the plights of the people a result of them having turned away from God’s word and as a result of a breakdown in morality,” (43). Löhe is, of course, referring to Bavarians of his day, yet his assessment rings a bell with observers of 21st century America. Truly, “*there is nothing new under the sun,*” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Schulz also discusses Löhe’s “distinctly Lutheran character in mission” (51), which was—for some perhaps surprisingly—driven by the man’s Confessional approach of “proclamation of the Word of God through the dynamism of law and gospel,” (Paul S. Chung, 68). Similarly, describing how Löhe founded the diaconate in Neuendettelsau (the descendants of which are the deaconess programs at both LCMS seminaries), Cheryl T. Naumann examines Löhe’s influence on the deaconess movement both in Germany and North America. John T. Pless offers a detailed biography of Löhe, stressing the Bavarian pastor’s self-recognition as *Seelsorger* and “ambassador of divine reconciliation,” (270).

Yet this book also reveals lesser-known facts about Löhe. Who would have thought that he was a proponent

of homeschooling (Thomas Kothmann, 235)? Presumably taking a cue from the opening words of each Chief Part of the Small Catechism, Löhe places the responsibility of the children’s *entire* education on parents, whom parochial school teachers and pastors should only *assist*. Surely, any Lutheran pastor today, trying to teach the Small Catechism to confirmands whose parents contribute little to their children’s Christian instruction, would heartily agree. Yet Löhe’s catechesis does not stop there, emphasizing that adults, too, need to memorize the “prayers and hymns that regularly occur in church” (250).

In addition, Löhe’s reception among American Lutheran contemporaries, plus his views on chiliasm, the Enlightenment, ecumenism, and much more are included in this volume, which also provides valuable information for serious Löhe research—featuring details on the *Wilhelm-Löhe-Archiv* in Neuendettelsau, other printed sources elsewhere in Bavaria, and data on the *Mission EineWelt* archive, also located in southern Germany.

One drawback: With eight of the sixteen papers (including the Prologue) in German, this excellent book is perhaps somewhat inaccessible for those not familiar with the language of our Saxon forefathers, even though every German article features an English summary. Nevertheless, this bi-lingual book contains material that is remarkably timely for today’s readers—a must-have for anyone interested in the “missionary who never left home,” as John T. Pless once quipped.

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