

## **Genesis of the LCMS -Week 5: February 21, 2011**

### **The End and Aftermath of Stephanism**

#### **The Beginning of the End for Stephanism**

In St. Louis, Pr. Loeber, preached a penetrating sermon on May 5, 1839 after which several women stepped forward, alleging sexual immorality with Martin Stephan. In the days following several other women stepped forward and alleged Stephan had also made advances towards them.

Walther was selected to go to Perry County and the colony was appraised of the problem. By May's end a large contingent of the St. Louis group came to Perry County to settle. A committee was formed to 'deal with the problem' and summoned Stephan to appear. When he refused he was removed from office and 'sent across the river' to Illinois.

The Saxons were in a state of sever turmoil and highly divided.

#### **The Aftermath and Turmoil**

- Who was the leader of their group? Who should decide their course?
- Were the pastors to be trusted? Had they sinned in leaving their calls in Germany? Were they still pastors?
- How had they all sinned? Following Stephan? Migrating to America? Condemning the Church in Germany?
- Should they return to Germany with hat in hand? Or should they stay in America? On what basis?

#### **The Altenburg Debate (April 15& 21, 1841); Attorney Adolph Marbach and C.F.W. Walther**

##### **Central Question: Are we church or not?**

Result: 8 Theses called the "Altenburg Theses":

1. The true Church, in the most real and most perfect sense of the word, is the totality (*Gesamtheit*) of all true believers, who from the beginning to the end of the world from among all peoples and tongues have been called and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Since God alone knows these true believers (2 Tim. 2.19), the church is also called 'invisible.' No one belongs to this true church who is not spiritually united with Christ, for it is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.
2. The name of the true church belongs to all those visible companies of men among whom God's Word is purely taught and the holy sacraments are administered according to the institution of Christ. True, in this church are godly men, hypocrites and heretics, but they are not true members of it, nor do they constitute the church.
3. The name church, and in a certain sense, the name true church, belongs also to those visible companies of men who have united under the confession of a falsified faith and therefore have incurred the guilt of a partial departure from the church, provided they possess so much of God's Word and the holy sacraments in purity that children of God may thereby be born. When such companies are called true churches, it is not the intention to state that they are faithful, but only that they are real churches as opposed to all worldly organizations (*Gemeinschaften*).

4. The name Church is not improperly applied to heterodox companies, but according to the manner of speech of the Word of God itself. It is also as such immaterial that this high name is allowed to such communions, for out of this follows:
  - A. That members also of such companies may be saved, for without the church there is no salvation.
5. B. The outward separation of a heterodox company from an orthodox Church is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian Church nor a relapse into heathenism and does not yet deprive that company of the name Church.
6. C. Even heterodox companies have church power; even among them the goods of the church may be validly administered, the ministry established, the Sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven exercised.
7. D. Even heterodox companies are not to be dissolved, but reformed.
8. The orthodox church is chiefly to be judged by the common, orthodox, public confession to which its members acknowledge and confess themselves to be pledged.

These theses became the basis of the constitution adapted for the LCMS at her inception. In 1852 Walther's *Kirche und Amt* would be published, which would be the official doctrine of the church from that time on. This work added 10 theses on the office of the Ministry in the latter section of the work.

Note also the May 31, 1845 account of the Stephanite debacle as the whole affair is aired, once more, in the first year of *Der Lutheraner*...