

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD



LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 58, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2018)

THE YEAR 2018 MARKS THE ONE-HUNDREDTH anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). In 1918, several pastors gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church in rural Lake Mills, Iowa. Though standing solidly on Scripture's foundation, they represented a theological minority among the Norwegian-American Lutherans. Their spiritual heritage, however, was not unique to either Norway or America. The pastors and laymen met to reorganize on the same foundation upon which the "old" Norwegian Synod was built. They were encouraged by the words of Jeremiah: "Stand in the way and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls" (6:16). The reorganized synod has remained on the old paths in all its teaching where one can find rest for the soul—true rest found in Jesus our Savior. Our souls are never at rest until we are at rest in Him.

Our synod is continually striving to proclaim the gracious message of justification by faith alone in Christ as the Savior. We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in Him. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His resurrection declaring the whole world righteous. This wonderful treasure is offered to us in the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, and is received by faith alone in Him as the Savior,

which faith is worked, strengthened, and preserved through these same means of grace.

This issue of the *Quarterly* contains essays which present the history of the synod. These essays remind us of the sacrifice made by our fathers to maintain an orthodox, Lutheran synod of Norwegian origin. Important lessons are taught in this history concerning the preservation of confessional Lutheran theology and concerning the fulfillment of the Lord's Great Commission to proclaim the Gospel in every land and nation. Also we are encouraged in this anniversary year to thank the Lord for all His blessings as Koren does in his well-known hymn:

Ye lands, to the Lord make a jubilant noise;
 Glory be to God!
 O serve Him with joy, in His presence now rejoice;
 Sing praise unto God out of Zion!
 (ELH 56:1)

We are concluding a series of quotations entitled "Presidential Quotes From the Past." The series has included a number of relevant, Christ-centered quotes from the former presidents of the ELS as we celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the synod. This series has been produced by the Rev. John Moldstad, president of the ELS.

The essay, "A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod," gives an overview of the synod's history with its vital work in missions and education. The doctrinal discussions of the synod throughout the years are also included.

A reprint of an article from the *Lutheran Sentinel* (vol. 21, no. 15) is included in this anniversary issue. It explains why H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, and U. V. Koren are considered to be the predominant fathers in the Norwegian Synod. This article was first written in reaction to the centennial of Norwegian Lutheranism in America in the year 1943.

In his *Bondage of the Will*, Luther rejects Erasmus' claim that natural man has freedom of choice in the spiritual realm. This same error was found in the Norwegian merger document (Opgjør) of 1912 and in the infamous statement of F. A. Schmidt, "Salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone." This connection is made in the essay, "From De Servo Arbitrio to Opgjør." It was written by Prof. em. Erling Teigen.

The theology of the Norwegian Synod and the reorganized synod of 1918 was influenced by the Lutheran Renewal in Europe, which occurred in the early years of the nineteenth century. The renewal centered on a return to the Lutheran Confessions and the writings

of Luther. The doctrine of the synod was that which was revealed through God's Holy Word in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, interpreted in agreement with the symbolical books or confessional writings. This is the point of the essay "Following the Old Paths: The Theology of the Norwegian Synod (1853 & 1918)," written by Prof. em. Erling Teigen.

A document called the "Austin Agreement," written in 1916, stated that while the two positions expressed in the Opgjør or Madison Agreement were allowed to stand equally side-by-side, anyone who for conscience's sake could accept only Form I would be tolerated in the new united church body formed in 1917. This compromise document made it possible for a significant minority to enter the merger, creating the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. This history is reviewed in the essay "Enduring Impressions from the Austin Agreement of 1916," written by the Rev. John Moldstad, president of the ELS.

It has been said that no synod has remained conservative beyond the third generation. The first generation fought the battles. The second generation heard the stories, understood and appreciated them. However the third generation only has history and often becomes indifferent and goes astray. In this anniversary year of the ELS our membership is in the third generation. In his essay, "Unto the Third and Fourth Generations: A History of the ELS Within the Broader Context of American Lutheranism," the Rev. Craig Ferkenstad encourages our synod to remain in the confession and orthodox stand of our forefathers.

As we are all aware, last year we celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, and this year is the hundredth anniversary of the ELS. In addition to these important events, this year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of our worldwide fellowship, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Here we express fellowship with like-minded Christians from around the world as noted in "Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference—A Worldwide Fellowship."

Included in this issue of the *Quarterly* are three sermons, one of which is a Bethany Chapel sermon on John 6:48–51 by Dr. Thomas A. Kuster. The other two sermons are historical sermons written by the Rev. Milton H. Otto. The first is a sermon written for the Sunday after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the other is a sermon written for the installation of the Rev. Theodore A. Aaberg as the first president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1976. In addition, there is a book review of the hundredth anniversary synod history, entitled

Proclaim His Wonders and a book review of *The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century*.

– GRS

Presidential Quotes From the Past

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IN 1968 WE ARE COMMEMORATING THIS EVENT OF a half century ago, an event which was remarkable not so much for the bravery of the people who there resolved to continue in the old paths as for the grace of God which led them to this course of action. For the passage of time, with its many developments and revelations, has vindicated the action of a despised minority in 1918. Because it was the Lord's will to which they were obedient, their undertaking could not fail, and we today, as beneficiaries of their labors, rejoice in our inheritance.

During this 51st regular convention of our synod there will undoubtedly be much reminiscing concerning the events of the first half-century of the reorganized Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The sermons, the essays, the devotions, the discussion from the floor will all help to remind us of our rich heritage, for it is a heritage of God's grace. As we sound the trumpet of jubilee, may it not be to "blow our own horn" in a spirit of vanity and false pride, but rather to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The salvation of the righteous is still of the Lord alone, and we must confess that we, too, are unworthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which God has shown to us.

Our unworthiness does not exempt us from a diligent use of God's blessings, however. The plaintive question of the humbled Saul, who asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" must continue to be heard

from our lips, for we have been freed in order to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. [LSQ](#)

Excerpt from J. B. Madson, "The President's Message," *Synod Report* 1968: 9-10.

A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Early Beginnings

The Norwegian Ev. Lutheran Church in America

- Norwegian immigration to the U.S. began in 1825.
- Johannes Wilhelm Christian Dietrichsen was the first pastor ordained in Norway to come to America. On September 2, 1844, he preached his famous sermon under the oaks of Koshkonong, Wisconsin.
- A Constitution for the Norwegian Synod was adopted Feb 5, 1853, at East Koshkonong, Wisconsin.

On the first Monday of October (5), 1853, the first meeting of Norwegian Ev. Luth. Church in America occurred at the Luther Valley Church near Orfordville (Beloit), Wisconsin.

- Seven pastors were a part of the synod.
- At the organization there were 38 congregations, 12,000 baptized members, and 6,000 communicants.
- Early leaders
 - Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), president 1853–1894, **the Organizer**
 - Jakob Aal Ottesen (1825–1904), **the Model Pastor**
 - Ulrik Vilhelm Koren (1826–1910), president 1894–1910, **the Theologian**

In 1825 the first of a large number of people from Norway came to the United States. It took three months for these fifty-four Norwegians to cross the Atlantic in their Norwegian Mayflower, the *Restauration*. They settled in New York, but it was not long before the cheap land of the West appealed to them. In 1834, a Norwegian settlement referred to as the Fox River Settlement was established about seventy miles southwest of Chicago, and by 1839 there was a settlement at Muskego, Wisconsin.



The people brought their Bibles, catechisms, and hymnbooks but they were without the care of pastors. Elling Eielsen (1804–1883), a lay preacher, worked among these immigrants. In 1842, he walked all the way to New York City and back to get the Pontoppidan Catechism printed. This was the first Norwegian book printed in America. He was a part of the Haugean movement which advocated personal experience and lay preaching and had a strong tinge of anti-clericalism and pietism. Another early leader was Claus Clausen, a Danish school teacher who was ordained to serve among the Norwegians by Krause, the Buffalo Synod pastor at Freistadt north of Milwaukee.

The first Norwegian state church pastor to come to America was J. W. C. Dietrichson. On September 2, 1844, he preached his famous sermon under the oaks of Koshkonong, east of Madison, Wisconsin, and administered the Lord's Supper to sixty people. His preparatory address was from Psalm 78:19: "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" The text of the sermon was Matthew 11:28: "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."¹ God indeed did furnish a table in the wilderness. God established a Norwegian Lutheran church body that was ready to feed the 900,000 or so immigrants from Norway with the life-giving Word and the holy Sacraments.

In 1853, the Norwegian pastors gathered to organize a synod. They had met previously (1851) and established a synod, but its constitution

¹ J. W. C. Dietrichson, *A Pioneer Churchman*, ed. E. Clifford Nelson, trans. Malcolm Rosholt and Harris E. Kaasa (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. for The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1973), 78–79. For his connections with Nashotah House at Nashotah, Wisconsin, the oldest religious institution of higher learning in the state of Wisconsin, see page 35.

contained the Grundtvigian error.² Therefore the first organization was dissolved. The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was organized at the Luther Valley Church north of Beloit, Wisconsin, on October 5, 1853. It consisted of 38 congregations in three states, with seven pastors, and an estimated membership of 12,000 baptized souls and 6,000 communicants. Those seven pastors were H. A. Preus, G. F. Dietrichson, N. O. Brandt, H. A. Stub, A. C. Preus, C. L. Clausen, and J. A. Ottesen. Pastor A. C. Preus was elected its first president. Pastor U. V. Koren arrived in this country a few weeks later.³ This church body considered itself to be the spiritual daughter of the Norwegian state church, its *vivacious daughter*,⁴ if you will.

The Triumvirate

Three men stand out in the early history of the synod: Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), Jakob Aal Ottesen (1825–1904), and Ulrik Vilhelm Koren (1826–1910). All three of these men studied at the University of Christiania, which is Oslo today. The most important theologians at Christiania during that century were Gisle Johnson (1822–1894) and Paul Caspari (1814–1892). Johnson and Caspari were a part of the Lutheran Renewal (*Erweckungsbewegung*) of the nineteenth century in Europe, which was the origin of confessional Lutheranism in America. H. A. Preus was the organizer of the early synod. He was born in Christiansand, Norway, and in 1851 he arrived at Spring Prairie, a little north of Madison, Wisconsin, where he spent his entire ministry. He was president of the synod for thirty-two years (1862–1894). At his funeral, Koren preached, calling him a *skrift teolog*, that is, a scriptural theologian.



Ottesen was the model pastor laboring tirelessly in feeding and gathering the scattered sheep in the Midwest. His birthplace was Fet,

² According to the Grundtvigian Error, the Apostles' Creed was of divine origin and a basis for Christian doctrine and teaching.

³ H. Larson and J. B. Madson, *Built on the Rock* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992), 8; Craig A. Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders: A Pictorial History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017), 49–52.

⁴ See Herman Amberg Preus, *Vivacious Daughter: Seven Lectures on the Religious Situation Among Norwegians in America*, ed. and trans. Todd W. Nichol (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990).

in the area known as Romerike, close to Oslo. He served as pastor first in the Manitowoc (1852–1860) and then the Koshkonong area of Wisconsin (1860–1891). At the same time he was co-editor of the church paper. Ottesen traveled an average of 30–50 miles a day on horseback in summer heat and winter storm. As a result of these difficult journeys, Ottesen contracted chronic rheumatism which worked havoc with the nerves of his legs. It was difficult for him to walk or stand long. Because of this, Ottesen was often forced to sit in the pulpit when delivering his sermons.⁵ In 1891, he moved to Decorah, Iowa, where he died in 1904.⁶

One of the vivid scenes from the life of Ulrik and Elisabeth Koren was their first crossing of the Mississippi in December of 1853. A man who said he was a doctor went ahead with a long stake to test the ice on the frozen river. Koren followed pulling a light buggy in which sat Elisabeth wrapped in buffalo robes with all their earthly possessions. In the rear walked a little Norwegian boy who helped by pushing the buggy.⁷ It was quite an ordeal for a couple from the gentry tradition in Norway. The Korens were more than willing to make those sacrifices for the kingdom of God. Koren served in Washington Prairie, east of Decorah, Iowa. Through his tireless efforts, about twenty parishes were formed from this, his original congregation, among them: King of Grace (Waukon, Iowa), Trinity (Calmar, Iowa), Saude (Lawler, Iowa), and Jerico (New Hampton, Iowa) of the present Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He was beyond a doubt the leading theologian in the synod. At times he is referred to as the Norwegian Walther. Many of his theological writings were published in a four-volume set of books under the title *Samlede Skrifter Af Dr. theol. V. Koren* (Collected Writings of Th.D. U. Koren).⁸ His warm relationship with Walther and other leaders of the Missouri Synod drew the two church bodies ever closer together.

⁵ George Orvick, *Our Great Heritage: A Popular History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (n.p., n.d., 1968), 17.

⁶ For an English biography of J. A. Ottesen see P. Lauritz Larsen, *Jacob Aal Ottesen*, trans. George A. R. Gullixson (Wenatchee, WA: Webpc, Inc., 1987).

⁷ Elisabeth Koren, *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren: 1853–1855*, trans. and ed. David T. Nelson (Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1955, reprint 1978), 92.

⁸ These works have been translated into English. See U. V. Koren, *U. V. Koren's Works*, 4 vols., ed. and trans. Mark DeGarmeaux (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company & Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society, 2013–2017).

Growth and Fellowship

Home Missions

- Pastors such as H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, and U. V. Koren were typical of the synod home missionaries. They covered extensive areas, sometimes serving up to a dozen or more congregations.
- The main mission work was done in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota because here the Norwegian immigration was the largest.
- The Dakotas were also a vast mission field.
- By 1900, there were congregations in much of the West, especially the Pacific Northwest.
- The synod maintained the Seamen's Missions because there were many Norwegians in the Merchant Marines.
- In 1884, Wittenberg, Wisconsin became the base for mission work among the Winnebago Indians.
- In 1894, work was begun among the Eskimos in Alaska.

Foreign Missions

- The mission to China was begun in 1912.
- Chinese Term Question⁹
- Some of the synod pastors had connection with the Schreuder Mission in South Africa.

Higher Education

- In 1876, Luther Seminary was opened in Madison, Wisconsin and in 1888 was moved to the Twin Cities area in Minnesota.
- The college of the synod was located at Decorah, Iowa.

Fellowship

- Fellowship was declared between the Norwegian Synod and the Missouri Synod in 1857.
- **The Synodical Conference was organized in 1872 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.**
- Charter members: Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Norwegian Synod

⁹ The question centered on which Chinese term should be used to express the name of the one true God, whether it should be the term *Shang-Di*, which was the name of the main Chinese deity, or *Shen*, the generic name for a god. The ELS maintained that only the generic name should be used.

- First permanent officers of the Synodical Conference: C. F. W. Walther, president; William Lehmann, vice-president; Friedrich A. Schmidt, secretary; and John Schmidt, treasurer.

During its infant years, the Norwegian Synod used the Missouri Synod's seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, to train its pastors. But in 1876 it established Luther Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin, which in 1888 was moved to the Twin Cities area in Minnesota. The college of the synod, Luther College, was in Decorah, Iowa. The synod organized a number of academies which were basically equivalent to the upper grades of high school and junior college. There was also an interest in Christian day schools among the leaders of the Norwegian Synod.

The nineteenth century was a time of Protestant mission expansion. Missionaries were sent to Africa, the Far East, and Polynesia—to the far corners of the earth. The Norwegian Synod was not sitting idle. The home mission program of the synod followed the Norwegian immigration from western Minnesota and Iowa to the Dakotas and the Pacific Northwest. Mission work was carried out among the Winnebago Indians in Wisconsin, and in 1892 work was begun among the Eskimos in Alaska. Later the Rev. H. M. Tjernagel would serve them. A mission to China was begun in 1912 centering in the city of Kwangchow in the Honan Province of central China. The Rev. George Oliver Lillegard was a synod missionary in this mission.

The Norwegian fathers yearned for fellowship on the empty plains of the Midwest. This longing would not be satisfied by those of their own nationalistic ties. They sought long and hard to be joined with other Norwegians in this country, but their former countrymen had embraced Haugeanism. Rather, they found a kindred spirit in the Missouri Synod, and formal fellowship was declared in 1857.¹⁰

The leading light in the Missouri Synod and in confessional Lutheranism at this time was Dr. C. F. W. Walther. Walther's influence was evident in a whole generation of confessional Lutheran pastors. They were firmly grounded in the inerrant Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Concerning Walther it was said, "He is as orthodox as John Gerhard, but as fervent as a Pietist; as correct in form as a university or court preacher, and yet as



¹⁰ For more information about the synod's relationship with the Missouri Synod, see Carl S. Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Minneapolis: Luther College Press, 1963).

popular as Luther himself.”¹¹ In many ways he was indeed the American Luther.

This fellowship with like-minded Lutherans would lead to the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference. In July of 1872 the constituting convention of the Synodical Conference was held at St. John’s (Bading’s church) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Norwegian Synod was represented by the following: Pres. H. A. Preus, the Rev. U. V. Koren, the Rev. P. A. Rasmussen, the Rev. A. Mikkelsen, and the Rev. F. A. Schmidt. The following church bodies were represented: the Ohio Synod, the Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Illinois Synod, and the Minnesota Synod. The Synodical Conference soon began work among the freed slaves in the South. In the twentieth century, the Synodical Conference would carry out extensive mission work in Nigeria in which the Rev. Paul Anderson of our synod would participate. The Synodical Conference possessed the gospel, pure and unadulterated, and it made every effort to share that saving message of Christ crucified.

Conflict and Controversies

The Election or Predestination Controversy (Gnadenwahlstreit; Naadevalgstrid)

- There were controversies concerning the **doctrine of Sunday, slavery, and absolution**.
- Election in view of faith (*intuitu fidei*) was used to delve into the question of why some are saved and others not (*Cur alii prae aliis*), which the Bible does not answer.
- Schmidt said among other things, “We believe and teach now ... that salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.”
- In the 1880s, about one-third of the congregations and pastors left the synod.
- After the turn of the century there was a strong sentiment to unite into one Norwegian church body.
- Madison Agreement 1912 (Opgjør)
 - It tried to allow both “versions” of election to stand.

¹¹ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 5th ed., American Church History Series (New York: The Christian Literature Col., 1907), 403–404.

- It rejected all errors that “weaken man’s responsibility in relation to the **acceptance** or rejection of grace.”¹²
- Synodical Conference analysis stated that the agreement is deficient also in relation to the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.
- Majority leaders claimed that the merger would result in more Christian work being done with better and more blessed results.
- The minority showed that full doctrinal agreement had not yet been reached between the participants in the merger plan.
- Austin Agreement—allowed the minority to bring their doctrine of Scripture into the merger while at the same time calling for them to grant mutual recognition to those who held that salvation is not by grace alone.¹³
- The merger was finalized in 1917 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The church here on earth is never at peace. It will always be engaged in constant warfare. The Norwegian Synod faced controversies concerning **lay preaching, the doctrine of Sunday, slavery, and absolution**.¹⁴ However, the most devastating conflict was the Election Controversy. Prof. F. A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod accused Walther and his synod of teaching John Calvin’s doctrine on conversion and election. Walther maintained the scriptural doctrine that we are elected unto salvation not on the basis of anything in us—our works, deeds, faith, or non-resistance of the Spirit—but alone by God’s grace. Faith in the Savior is the result of divine election, not the cause of election. Schmidt said among other things, “We believe and teach now ... that salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.”¹⁵ Schmidt and his followers held that God elected and converted some in view of the faith (*intuitu fidei*) that they would someday possess. This implied that faith was a work of man on the basis of which God elected us. Some said that God elected some because they did not resist the Spirit as much as others. In all this something in man helps in our salvation and with such an understanding one is again on a work righteous path. This was a sly but vicious attack on the central article of the faith.

Koren and the leaders of the synod stood with Walther and the doctrine of Scripture but at a terrible price. The strife ripped families apart, brother against brother. In the 1880s, about one-third of the

¹² T. A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴ Larson and Madson, 27–32.

¹⁵ Paul Ylvisaker, *A Blessing in the Midst of the Land* (n.p., 1958), 20; Aaberg, 36.

congregations and pastors left the synod. The synod maintained its doctrinal integrity, but after the turn of the century there was strong sentiment for one Norwegian church body in America. Union fever got the better of them. In 1917, on the basis of two compromise documents, the Madison Settlement and the Austin Agreement, a majority of the Norwegian Synod decided to merge with various other Norwegian Lutheran synods in America to form a new church body.¹⁶ This Norwegian merger was named the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA). It was later changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Church which became a part of The American Lutheran Church of 1960 (TALC) and then the ELCA in 1988.¹⁷

The Reorganized Synod

June 6–8, 1917, St. Paul, Minnesota, at the Aberdeen Hotel a small group met and adopted this statement:

1. We cannot for conscience's sake join the new church body on the present basis.
2. We continue to stand on the old confession and organization, which we as Christians have the liberty to defend and under which we may work from now on as heretofore.

Since their congregations had not yet had the opportunity to react to the merger vote, the group which met in St. Paul effected a temporary organization.

1. Elected provisional officers: Pastor Bjug Harstad, president; Pastor John Moldstad, vice-president; Pastor C. N. Peterson secretary; Pastor O. T. Lee, treasurer.
2. They resolved to publish a bimonthly periodical, *Luthersk Tidende* (*Lutheran Times*).
3. They issued an invitation to whomever was interested to meet at Lime Creek Lutheran Church just north of Lake Mills, Iowa, in 1918.

On June 14–19, 1918, thirteen pastors met at Lime Creek Church in Winnebago County, Iowa, to reorganize the synod.



¹⁶ John M. Brenner, *The Election Controversy: Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 137–187.

¹⁷ See Addendum I.

- The pastors gathered at Lime Creek: Christian Anderson, L. S. Guttebo, Emil Hansen, Bjug Harstad, Henry Ingebritson, L. P. Jensen, George O. Lillegard, J. A. Moldstad, G. P. Nesseth, Holden M. Olsen, C. N. Peterson, J. E. Thoen, and A. T. Torgerson. These were Hearts of Oak!
- These resolutions were adopted:
 1. The name of this organization shall be The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church.
 2. The only source and rule for faith and doctrine is the Word of God as revealed in the canonical books of the Old and New Testament.
 3. The Norwegian Synod adopts as its confession all the symbolical books of the Lutheran church contained in the Book of Concord.
 4. We elect a committee of three to propose the necessary changes in the old constitution of the Synod. The committee report shall be published as soon as possible, in order that congregations so wishing can consider and adopt it. The committee report [is] to be presented for final adoption at the next annual meeting of the Synod.
- The incumbent officers were reelected. Pastor A. J. Torgeson was elected to replace Pastor Lee who had died.
- The name of their periodical was changed to *Evangelisk Luthersk Tidende* (*Evangelical Lutheran Times*).
- In 1920, the reorganized synod was accepted into membership of the Synodical Conference. The “old” Norwegian Synod had been a charter member of the Synodical Conference (1872), but had withdrawn in 1883 because of the election controversy.
- In 1958, the name of the synod was changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The Lord’s grace and mercy had not come to an end for Norwegian Lutheranism. The same Lord who had been with Augustine and Luther in difficult times was with the small remnant that knew it was contrary to the Scriptures to enter the merger of 1917. In June, 1917, a small group of pastors met at the Aberdeen Hotel in St. Paul to evaluate the situation. They issued an invitation to whoever was still interested in the pure doctrine of the Norwegian Synod to meet at Lime Creek Lutheran Church north of Lake Mills, Iowa, in 1918.

On June 14–19, 1918, thirteen pastors met at Lime Creek to reorganize the synod. The first officers of the reorganized synod were Pastor

Bjug Harstad, president; Pastor John A. Moldstad, vice-president; Pastor C. N. Peterson, secretary; and Pastor A. J. Torgerson, treasurer. The official name of the reorganized synod was The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 1958, it was changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. These men, assembled at Lime Creek, faced much harassment and derision for not entering the merger. The Rev. Harstad encouraged them with the words of Jeremiah: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls” (6:16). The little synod would remain on the old path where alone one could find rest for the soul. An interesting aside to this meeting was the fact that it was illegal to use a foreign language at public gatherings in Iowa (World War I was in progress). The assembly had to travel about a mile north of the church to conduct some of its Norwegian services and sessions in a tent just across the Minnesota border.¹⁸

In 1920, the reorganized synod was accepted into the membership of the Synodical Conference. Were it not for the safe haven and nurturing of the Synodical Conference brethren, the little group might not have survived. The initial thought of the remnant had been to become a Norwegian District of the Missouri Synod. This was discouraged by Pieper, who was now the leading light in Missouri, and by others. It was hoped that the reorganized synod would serve as an island of refuge to other Norwegians who might abandon the ship of the merger, and indeed it did.

Forward in the Lord

Mission Expansion

A. Expansion in the U.S.

1. Home missions

- In 1967, the ELS had 83 congregations; only five were outside the Midwest.
- Today the ELS has around 130 congregations with over 40 of these outside the Midwest.
- The greatest geographical expansion has been in Florida and along the West Coast from California up through Oregon and Washington.

¹⁸ Ferkenstad, 21–28.

2. Confessional gains
 - Federation for Authentic Lutherans (FAL)
 - Several LCMS congregations left that synod and founded the FAL in 1971.
 - FAL declared fellowship with WELS & ELS in 1972.
 - August 1975—FAL disbanded, congregations joined either ELS or WELS
 - Other independent Lutheran congregations have also joined ELS.
 - Between 1967 and 2006, the ELS gained 57 congregations.
- B. World Missions
 1. Peru (1968)
 - First missionaries: Pastor & Mrs. Theodore F. Kuster and Mr. & Mrs. Orlin Myrlie
 - 2018 is the fiftieth anniversary of the Peru mission.
 - 1500 members, 50 congregations and preaching stations
 - 4 elementary schools, 1 high school
 - Seminary now taught by national pastors
 - 13 national clergy no longer require the presence of American missionaries
 2. Nicaragua (1973)
 - First missionary: Pastor Theodore Kuster
 - ELS resolved to withdraw from this field in November 1979 because of the volatile political situation.
 3. Chile (1992)
 - First missionaries: Pastor James P. Olson and Pastor Dan McMiller
 - 2017 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of ELS mission outreach to Chile.
 - 150 members, 4 congregations
 - 2 seminary students and 3 pre-seminary students
 4. India (2005)
 - Lutheran Mission of Salvation—India
 - 22,000 members, 250 congregations
 - 14 national pastors
 - 200 lay workers serving congregations and under training at monthly seminars
 - 300 orphans cared for in 20 homes
 - 350 students enrolled in 3 schools

5. South Korea (2006)
 - First missionary: Pastor Young Ha Kim
 - 225 members at Seoul Lutheran Church
 - 40 students enrolled in US Lutheran high schools
 - Began Seoul Lutheran Theological Institute in 2016 to train pastors and gospel-workers
6. Thoughts of Faith
 - Ukraine
 - Founded by Pastor John Shep; radio broadcasts to Ukraine began in 1979.
 - The Ukrainian Lutheran Church is an independent church body with 3,000 souls.
 - The leader of this church body is V'yacheslav Horpynchuk.
 - Czechia
 - Three missionaries were sent to Czechoslovakia by 1990: Pastors James Krikava, Steven Sparley, and Matthew Luttman.
 - Today two Czech pastors serve the church bi-vocationally.
 - Latvia
 - Gundars Bakulis was the founding pastor.
 - Approximately 600 members
 - 8 Latvian pastors

C. Publications

1. The official synodical periodical is the *Lutheran Sentinel*.
2. The ELS theological journal is called the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.

At the time of the Lime Creek meeting it was sarcastically said on the streets of one of the towns in northern Iowa, "That little synod is nothing but a plucked chicken." The man who said it was obviously in favor of the merger. But a sensible down-to-earth Norwegian farmer is reported to have responded, "Yes, but if the chicken is healthy the feathers will grow back." (*Den Norske Synode er bare en ribbet høne.—Ja, men naar høne blir frisk og bra igjen så skal fjærene vokse tilbake.*)¹⁹ With the Lord's help the feathers did start to grow. The synod became a haven for many who knew that the merger was wrong. Small groups in the Midwest and other parts of the land called for help and the synod answered the call. After the break in fellowship with the Missouri

¹⁹ The writer received this anecdote from President George M. Orvick.

Synod, the synod became a refuge for many in Missouri who wanted to remain faithful to the truths of Scripture. By 1967, the synod had grown to 83 congregations with 15,000 members. Today the ELS has about 130 congregations with 17,000 members and an active home outreach program. Outside the Midwest, the greatest geographical expansion has been in Florida and along the West Coast.

The ELS supported world missions in Nigeria through the Synodical Conference. It also worked in Cornwall, England for a time. In 1968, the synod entered foreign missions in earnest when it established its own world mission field in Lima, Peru. Today a national church named the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru has been organized. National workers are being trained to continue spreading the gospel as pastors and teachers. The seminary in Lima is an important part of the work in Peru. Here, the future leaders of the church receive their theological training. Mission work was carried out in Nicaragua and Costa Rica but the synod withdrew from the field in 1979 because of the political situation and because of difficulty in maintaining two mission fields. Neither the money nor the manpower were available for doing the work properly. In 1993, the synod began mission work in Chile. New local congregations continue to be established as the missionaries spread the Good News of salvation in Christ in these South American countries. In 2005 and 2006, India and Korea were added to the ELS mission fields.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod worked with Thoughts of Faith, a church-related organization with missions in Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Latvia. A church body, the Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church, with two congregations and a Christian day school, has been established in the Plzen area of Czechia. In Ukraine, a new church body, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, has been formed. A seminary was established and many congregations and preaching stations are served by national pastors. Also an orthodox Lutheran church body was established in Latvia, the Confessional Lutheran Church of Latvia.²⁰

²⁰ Former ELS missionaries:

Peru—James Olsen, Martin Teigen, Timothy Erickson, Daniel McMiller, Kurt Smith, David Haeuser, Terry Schultz

Chile—Karl Kuenzel, Ralph Martens, Timothy Bartels, Oto Rodriguez, Timothy Erickson

Czech Republic— James Krikava, Steven Sparley, Matthew Luttman, Mark Grubbs

Ukraine—John Shep, Roger Kovaciny, Melvin Schwark, Jay Webber, Joel Rakos, Wayne Borgwardt, John Vogt

Educational Program

A. Worker training in the early years

- A working agreement was made with the Missouri Synod's Concordia College in St. Paul, Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and Concordia Seminary in Springfield to provide training for those desiring to enter the pastoral ministry of the synod. Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker became the Norwegian Synod's professor at St. Paul.
- Some students later on went to Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.
- Teachers were trained at DMLC in New Ulm. Professor Oscar Levenson of the ELS was called to New Ulm.

B. Bethany Lutheran College

- The college had been founded in 1911 by a group of pastors and laymen as Bethany Ladies College in Mankato. In 1919, it was reorganized as Bethany College.
- In 1925 the financially struggling college was offered to the Norwegian Synod and then to the Wisconsin Synod.
- In 1926 an association of ELS members bought the college.
- **In 1927 at the Lime Creek Convention, Pastor G. A. Gullixson, an ardent advocate of Bethany College, moved that the synod take over the school.**
- In 1930, Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker became president of the institution. Under his leadership the school prospered and drew students from the other synods in the Synodical Conference.
- From 1962 through the 1980s, the Wisconsin Synod sent second-career students to Bethany to receive the necessary undergraduate courses for entrance to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.
- **In 2001, Bethany College graduated its first baccalaureate students.**
- Presidents of Bethany Lutheran College: H. Olsen (1927–1929), W. E. Buszin (1929–1930), S. C. Ylvisaker (1930–1950), B. W. Teigen (1950–1970), Raymond Branstad (1970–1977), Theodore Aaberg (1977–1978), Norman Holte (1978–1982), Marvin Meyer (1982–2003), Dan Bruss (2003–2015), Gene Pfeifer (2015–present).

C. Bethany Lutheran High School

- Operated in conjunction with Bethany College
- Closed in 1969

D. Bethany Lutheran Seminary

- Authorized by the 1943 convention
- **Opened in the fall of 1946**
- Pastor Norman A. Madson became first “Dean of the Theological Seminary Department at Bethany Lutheran College.”
- Deans of the Seminary: Norman Madson, Milton Otto
- Presidents of the Seminary: T. Aaberg (1976–1979), G. Reichwald (1979–1980), W. Petersen (1980–1997), G. Schmeling (1997–present)²¹

E. Lutheran Elementary Schools

- Today we have 18 Lutheran elementary schools and preschools.

Education was an important concern of the reorganized synod as it had been for the “Old” Norwegian synod. No church body can exist a long period of time without its own educational institution. Bethany opened its doors as a coeducational high school and liberal arts junior college of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1927. A small group of pastors and laymen purchased the former Bethany Ladies College in Mankato in 1926 and presented it to the synod for the education of young people. There were fears that the fledging synod could not financially manage the responsibilities of a college. But at the Lime Creek synod convention in 1927, the Rev. G. A. Gullixson, an ardent advocate of the college, moved that the synod take over the school, and Bethany has been a great part of the synod ever since. Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker became president of the institution in 1930. Under his leadership the school prospered and drew students from the other synods in the Synodical Conference. To be sure, there were financial difficulties during the Depression years, but the synod always managed. It is interesting to note that Bethany’s purpose was different from the schools of Missouri (LCMS) and Wisconsin (WELS). Bethany’s purpose was not only to train pastors and teachers but to provide a Christian education for all walks of life. In 2001, Bethany College granted its first four-year degrees.

²¹ For biographies of these individuals, see *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 46, nos. 2–3 (June & September 2006).

From its reorganization in 1918 the ELS was without its own theological seminary for twenty-eight years. It depended on its sister synods for the seminary training of its pastors. But during these early years the hope of establishing its own seminary had



been kept alive. Finally in 1946 the synodical delegates, assembled in convention, resolved in the name of the Triune God to adopt fourteen resolutions relating to a new seminary, the first of which was: "To establish a full theological seminary course at Bethany Lutheran College, this course to begin in the fall of 1946." On September 24, 1946, a dedicatory service officially opened Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. The first dean of the seminary was the Rev. Norman A. Madson. Originally the president of the college was also the president of the seminary but the two positions were separated in 1976, when the Rev. Theodore Aaberg was called as the first president of the institution.

"The Christian Day School, as an institution, represented the largest item salvaged by the ELS from the storm of 1917." This is the conclusion of the Rev. Theodore Aaberg in his 1968 history of the Norwegian Synod.²² The leaders of the old Norwegian Synod were interested in Christian day schools, but few were organized. Only fourteen parishes had schools at the time of the merger. Of these fourteen, three were soon found within the reorganized synod, namely Parkland, Washington, and Somber and Lime Creek, Iowa. While the schools in the merger slowly dwindled into nothing, the ELS added more schools so that today there are eighteen in number. The 2004 synod convention began the Lutheran Schools of America (LSA). The purpose of the LSA is to encourage congregations to begin Lutheran elementary schools and to solicit funds for establishing such schools. The synod operated a high school in conjunction with Bethany College until 1969. Today several congregations of the ELS are members of area high school associations together with congregations of the WELS.

Originally the synod had no fulltime positions. But as the administrative duties increased, the synod called a fulltime president. The Rev. George M. Orvick was called to that position in 1986. He had become president of the synod already in 1970, but until 1986 he also served as a parish pastor. The only other president of the synod during this period of time was Dr. Wilhelm Petersen who held the office from

²² Aaberg, 92.

1976–1980. The Rev. Orvick faithfully served the ELS as its president for nearly 30 years.²³ His presidency continued until 2002 when the Rev. John A. Moldstad was elected president.²⁴

Faithful to the Confessions

The ELS broke fellowship with the LCMS in 1955 and WELS broke in 1961.

WELS and ELS

1. Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum (1967)
 - Representatives from the various divisions of WELS & ELS meet to discuss matters of common interest & concern and to review the doctrinal essays presented at each other's conventions.
 - At first, the Confessional Forum met annually; in the early 1980s, the Confessional Forum switched to biennial meetings. The two synods alternate hosting the meeting.
2. The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (1993)

One of the saddest chapters in the history of Lutheranism in America was the demise of the Synodical Conference. The LCMS had been the bastion of orthodoxy throughout the world. Yet in the 1930s this mighty defense began to crumble. In 1935, the Missouri Synod accepted separate invitations from the American Lutheran Church (ALC)²⁵ and the United Lutheran Church (ULC) to negotiate for the purpose of establishing pulpit and altar fellowship. The ELS and WELS rejected those invitations because they felt that the ALC and ULC merely wanted union without real doctrinal agreement, which conjecture soon became evident. In the negotiations between the ALC and LCMS, the ALC drew up a document called the *Declaration*, which was ambiguous on many important doctrines (Scripture, salvation, church and ministry, Sunday, and the last things). Missouri's adoption of it in 1938 alongside its own *Brief Statement* began its slow but steady decline. Discussion between the two churches continued. In 1950, the LCMS and the ALC produced a new union document called the *Common Confession*. Still, it too was an ambiguous and compromising statement.

²³ See Addendum II.

²⁴ See Addendum III.

²⁵ This is the American Lutheran Church of 1930 made up of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods.

The rift between Missouri on the one hand and the ELS and WELS on the other continued to widen. Missouri began to make a distinction between prayer fellowship and joint-prayer so that they could pray at meetings with church bodies with whom they were not in fellowship.²⁶ In 1945, forty-four of their pastors drew up a statement known as the *Statement of the Forty-Four* in which they openly rejected the old Missouri stand on church unity and related doctrines. There were even questions concerning inerrancy at the St. Louis seminary.²⁷ As the hope of settling these differences gradually faded, the ELS with deep regret declared at its convention in 1955 that its fellowship relations with the LCMS were suspended. Still, this suspension was not without the loss of some members to both the Missouri Synod and the Church of the Lutheran Confession formed in 1960. The WELS broke fellowship with Missouri in 1961. At its 1963 convention the synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference. This ended the synod's association with the LCMS and the Synodical Conference, which had been such a blessing through the years. In 1967 the two remaining synods in the Synodical Conference, the LCMS and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (SELC–Slovak), dissolved the organization. The SELC then merged with the LCMS.

The Doctrine of the Church

During the 1970s and earlier there was considerable discussion in the ELS concerning the doctrine of the church. In 1978, articles in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* were printed concerning this doctrine, indicating the intense discussions concerning church and ministry that were occurring in the synod. This doctrine was also the subject matter of the 1978 Reformation Lectures which had this theme: *The Pulpit and the Pew in Luther and the Confessions*. The first lecture dealt with the office of the ministry and the second with the role of the laity. The presenter was Dr. Herman A. Preus. The discussion concerning the doctrine of the church came to a God-pleasing resolution at the 1980 synod convention when the ELS church theses entitled “The Doctrine of the Church,” mainly under the authorship of the Rev. Wilhelm Petersen, were adopted.²⁸

²⁶ This occurred at the 1944 LCMS convention at Saginaw which also opened the doors to scouting.

²⁷ Orvick, 42–44; Aaberg, 135–242.

²⁸ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Sixty Years at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 46, nos. 2&3 (June & September 2006).

The Lord's Supper Discussions

In the 1980s there was considerable discussion concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper both within the ELS and outside of it. Several articles concerning the Sacrament are to be found in the issues of the *Quarterly* during this period. In fact, the entire December 1988 *Quarterly* was reserved for the Doctrine Committee's presentation of the Lord's Supper entitled, *The Theology of the Lord's Supper*. This essay summarized the biblical and confessional doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The words of institution as spoken by the pastor by virtue of our Lord's original institution effect the real presence of Christ's body and blood in a valid administration of the Lord's Supper (consecration, distribution, and reception). One cannot fix from Scripture the point within the sacramental *usus* when the real presence of Christ's body and blood begins, yet we know from Scripture and we acknowledge in the Confessions that what is distributed and received is the body and blood of Christ.²⁹ The ELS statement on the Lord's Supper was completed in 1997.

The Public Ministry of the Word

In the early 1900s, questions began to arise in the Synodical Conference concerning the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the public ministry. The questions centered on the following issues:

- a. Some restrict the concept of a divinely instituted church (the Church of Christ as it appears on earth—*ἐκκλησία*, Matthew 18) to the local congregation and consider all gatherings of believers, groups of Christians beyond the local congregation, such as synods, conferences, etc., purely human arrangements.
- b. Others find in the descriptive name of church (*ἐκκλησία*, they who are called out) a term which applies with equal propriety to the various groupings into which the Holy Spirit has gathered His believers, local congregations as well as larger groups.
- c. Some restrict the idea of a divinely instituted ministry to the pastorate of a local congregation and consider such offices as teachers, professors, synodical officials, etc., branches of

²⁹ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "The Theology of the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (December 1988).

this office without a specific command of God, established in Christian liberty.

- d. Others see in “ministry” a comprehensive term which covers the various special offices with which the ascended Lord has endowed His Church.³⁰

In addition to this, outside of the Synodical Conference there were questions concerning the office of the keys. Individuals such as Johannes Grabau (1804–1879) maintained that the keys (proclaiming the gospel, administering the Sacraments, and forgiving or retaining sin) had been given only to the ministerium and were handed down through the rite of ordination. The Synodical Conference maintained that God gave the keys to the church and therefore to each Christian. The authority to administer the keys publicly is conferred by God on those who are properly called into the public ministry through His church.

This doctrine was discussed in the 1930s and 1940s, but no conclusion was reached because the doctrine of church fellowship came to the forefront in Synodical Conference relations. The departure of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the biblical doctrine of church fellowship led to the demise of the Synodical Conference.

With the breakup of the Synodical Conference in the early 1960s the study of the doctrine of church and ministry resumed in the ELS. In 1980 theses on the church entitled “The Doctrine of the Church” were adopted by the ELS (see above). It was assumed that theses on the doctrine of the public ministry would be soon in coming. This was not the case because the synod was engaged in a discussion on the Lord’s Supper for most of the 1980s and 1990s.

In the early 1990s, the study of the doctrine of the ministry continued in the ELS. A number of papers were written on this subject and the General Pastoral Conference took up the topic. In 2005, theses on the public ministry entitled “The Public Ministry of the Word” were adopted by the ELS.³¹

A New Alliance

The ELS and the WELS continued to work together in the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum which meets biennially to discuss mutual concerns. Yet there was a desire to have an organization more international in scope: an international synodical conference.

³⁰ *Proceedings of the Synodical Conference* 1948: 141.

³¹ Schmelting, “Sixty Years at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.”

The 1986 convention of the ELS officially resolved that the synod support the creation of a new confessional Lutheran conference.³² A committee began planning for the new conference and its work came to fruition in the constituting convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). This committee included Professors Wilbert Gawrisch, Lyle Lange, Armin Panning, Wilhelm Petersen, Juul Madson, and Pastor Gaylin Schmeling.

This historic event took place April 27–29, 1993, at Oberwesel, Germany. It was in this beautiful place overlooking the Rhine River that the new Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference was officially established. Delegates from eleven church bodies gathered there on the Rhine to take part in the constituting convention. The conference is the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference. It was certainly a joyous and strengthening experience. Those who attended the meeting expressed the same sentiments as Dr. Walther at the constituting convention of the Synodical Conference, “O blessed and blissful day!” Here delegates from throughout the world confessed their adherence to the pure marks of the church, the Word and the Sacraments. The CELC has continued strengthening its member churches through mutual encouragement and consultation.

The CELC has met triennially in the following locations:

1. 1993—Oberwesel, Germany—Theme: God’s Word is Our Great Heritage
2. 1996—Quebradillas, Puerto Rico—Theme: Justification by Grace through Faith
3. 1999—Winter Haven, Florida, USA—Theme: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
4. 2002—Göteborg, Sweden—Theme: Jesus Christ the Same Yesterday, Today and Forever
5. 2005—Tokyo, Japan—Theme: Eagerly Await the Savior
6. 2008—Kiev, Ukraine—Theme: Make Known God’s Manifold Wisdom. (This was the fifteenth anniversary of the CELC.)
7. 2011—New Ulm, Minnesota, USA—Theme: The Church: Unity of Spirit—Bond of Peace
8. 2014—Lima, Peru—Theme: We are God’s Workmanship—Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works
9. 2017—Grimma, Germany—Theme: Reformation: Then and Now

³² *Synod Report* 1986: 62.

The first president of the CELC was Professor Wilbert Gawrisch. The subsequent presidents were the Rev. Armin Panning, the Rev. Steven Petersen, and the Rev. Daniel Koelpin. The present officers of the CELC are: president, Gaylin Schmeling; vice-president, Thomas Nass; secretary, Timothy Buelow; planning committee, Larry Schlomer and John Hartwig.

In order that the essays presented at the triennial meetings might become available to a wider audience than just the participants at the conventions, the Theological Commission of the CELC has been given the assignment to edit and summarize the essays of the previous conventions into booklet form. These booklets are entitled *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*. Article I is a study of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, Article II of the doctrine of justification, Article III of the work of the Holy Spirit, Article IV of the person and work of Christ, Article V of the doctrine of eschatology, Article VI of the church's mission, and Article VII of the church. These statements may be found in PDF form on the CELC website under the heading "Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession" (www.celc.info).

The present members of the Theological Commission of the CELC are John Brenner, Andreas Drechsler, Davison Mutentami, Ugis Sildegs, and Michael K. Smith.

The CELC is the third largest worldwide Lutheran fellowship, following the larger Lutheran World Federation³³ and the International Lutheran Council.³⁴ It has approximately 450,000 members in thirty-two church bodies.³⁵ The conference accepts the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments (the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God) as sole authority for doctrine, faith, and life. The conference also accepts the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, not *in so far as* but *because* they are a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God. The CELC continues to strengthen each of its member churches through mutual encouragement and fellowship as it prepares to proclaim the saving gospel of forgiveness to future generations. We praise and thank our Triune God for having permitted us to establish

³³ The LWF was established in 1947, and 144 church bodies belong to this organization with an approximate membership of 72,000,000.

³⁴ The ILC was founded in 1952, and 35 church bodies belong to this organization with an approximate membership of 3,450,000. The largest church body in this organization is the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS).

³⁵ See Addendum IV.

this confessional organization on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ and His Word.³⁶

A Look to the Future

We have entered a new millennium and have celebrated the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and the one-hundredth anniversary of the reorganization of the ELS as the spiritual descendant of the Norwegian Synod. In all this, Christ Jesus the Savior is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He took upon Himself our flesh made from dust so that through union with His divinity He might conquer sin, death, and all our foes in the flesh and raise us to His divine glory, eternal life in heaven. We have seen His love, grace, and compassion throughout the past history of the church, and He continues to care for His bride, the church, all the way through this earthly journey until the church militant is the church triumphant.

As we face the future, the prospects of the church are, humanly speaking, not that promising. Our situation is much like that of the Irish missionaries in the sixth century. Their missionary houses were Christian outposts in a continent that had lapsed into paganism. In much the same way our ELS and the other members of the CELC are outposts in a world gone pagan. Still those ancient missionaries did not say, "Woe is me," and hide in their monasteries. They did two things: they *preserved* and they *spread*. They preserved the Christian literature of the ancient world and they spread the Gospel. Likewise we will strive to preserve the Word of God in its truth and purity and we will spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We will make our stand with Augustine, Luther, and Koren. The strength to go forward and do all things through Him—that strength He gives us in the life-giving Word and the holy Sacraments. As we move forward may our prayer be that of the great twentieth-century hymn writer Martin Franzmann:

³⁶ For a more complete history of the CELC, see Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom: The Fifteenth Anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference* (unpublished).

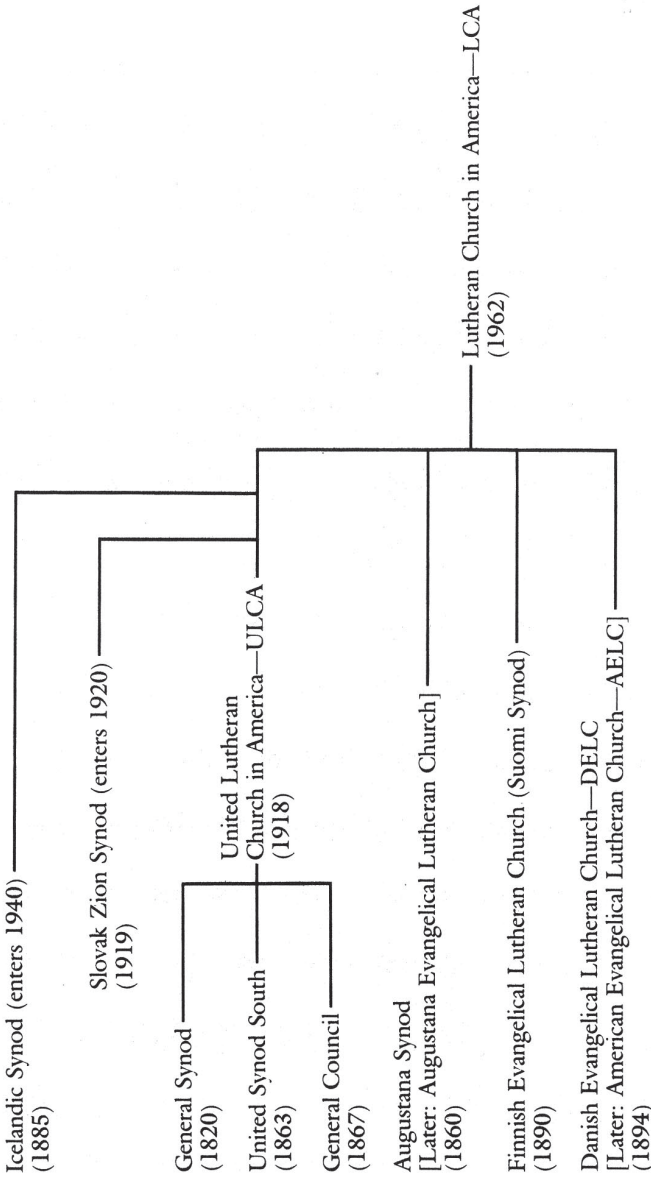
O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy Church that it may be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be men whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
Unto the Blessed Trinity. Amen.³⁷ [LSQ]

³⁷ *The Worship Supplement*, hymn 758.

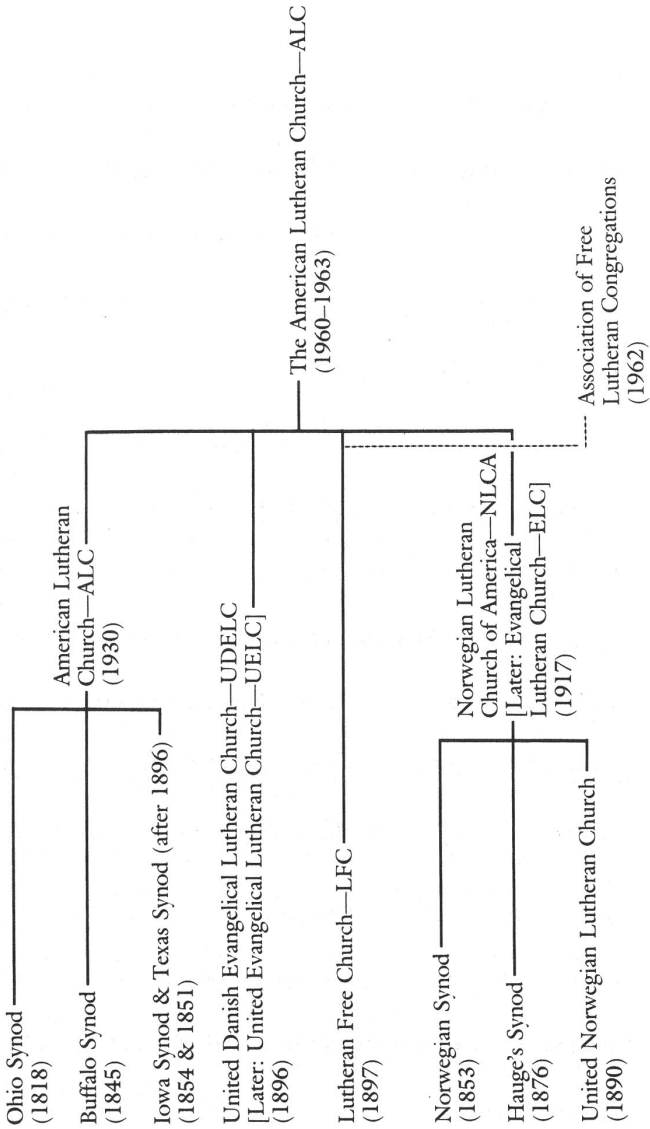
Addendum I

Lutheran Churches in America

FORMING THE LCA, 1820-1962



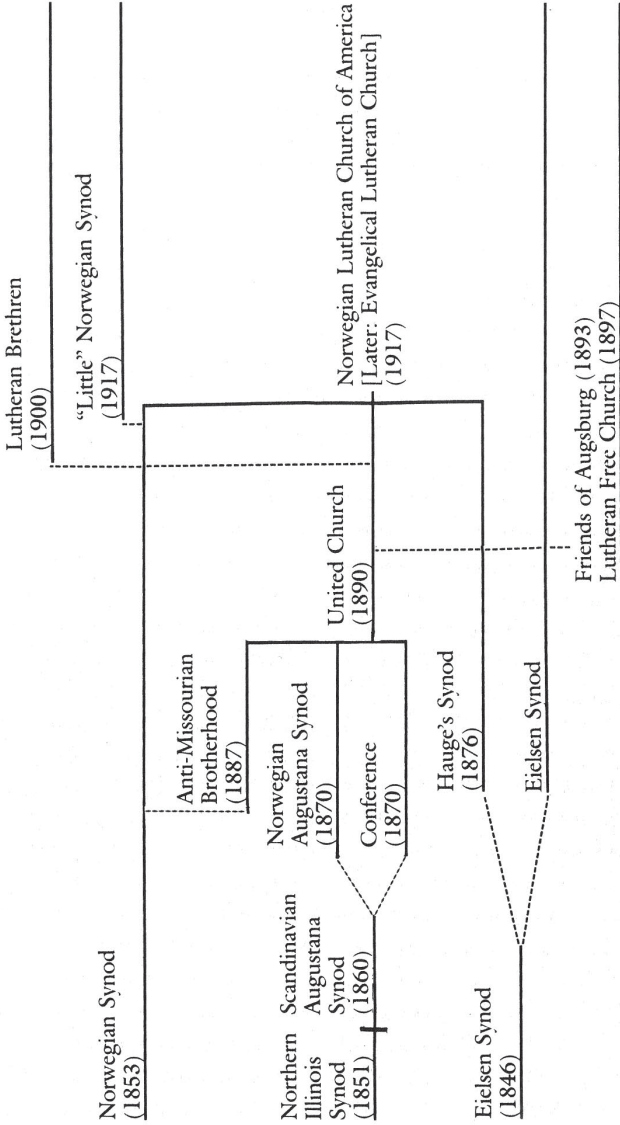
FORMING THE ALC, 1818-1963



Todd W. Nichol, *All These Lutherans*, 90.

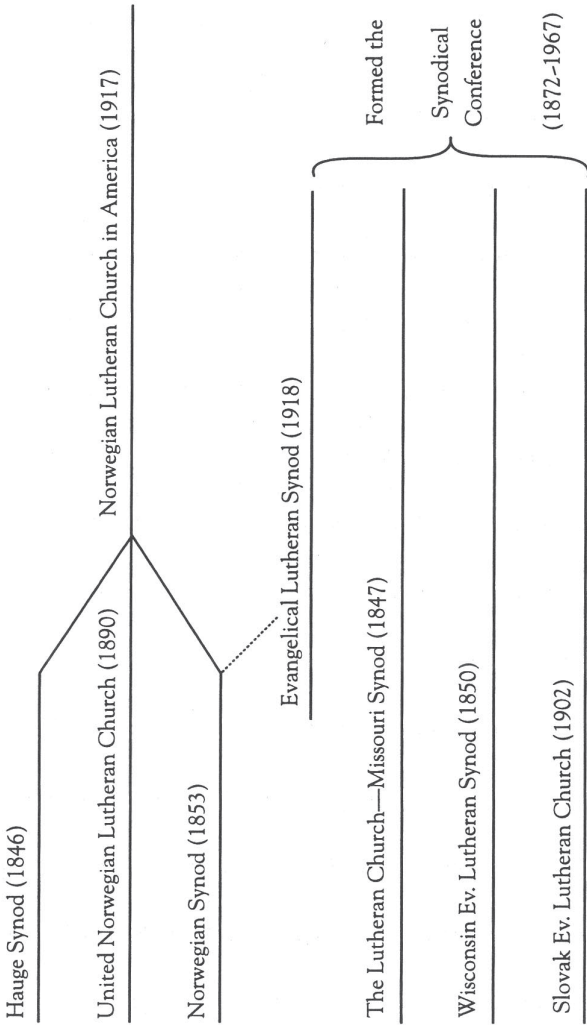
The Lutheran Church in America of 1962 (LCA) and The American Lutheran Church of 1960 (TALC) became a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988.

NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN LUTHERANISM, 1846-1917



Todd W. Nichol, *All These Lutherans*, 84.

Norwegians in the Synodical Conference



John A. Moldstad, Jr., *Predestination*, 94.

Addendum II

George Orvick: The First Full-Time Synod President

The first full-time president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) was the Rev. George Orvick. For many years, the synod had no full-time officers, but when the administrative duties for the president's office had greatly increased, the synod resolved in 1986 to establish the office of president as a full-time position. It then immediately called the Rev. George Orvick to that position. He had already served as president for two periods, 1970–76 and 1980–86, during the time when the president had to be concurrently the pastor of a synodical parish and the consecutive years of such service had been limited to six. The only other president of the synod during this time was Dr. Wilhelm Petersen, who held the office from 1976–80. The Rev. Orvick served as president until 2002.

President Orvick was born on January 9, 1929, near Hanlontown, Iowa. When his family moved to a farm near Thornton, Iowa, they joined the synod church. Here began his love for the synod which has not waned over the years. After attending high school in Thornton, he went to Bethany to prepare for the pastoral ministry. He graduated from Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota (1948), Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin (1950), and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota (1953).

While at Bethany Lutheran College, he met Ruth Hoel of De Forest, Wisconsin, who became his dearest friend and lifelong mate. They were married on August 25, 1951. Ruth was educated as a Lutheran elementary teacher and taught at Somber Lutheran School in Iowa and at Western Koshkonong Lutheran School in Wisconsin. Ruth has been a faithful support for her husband throughout his ministry. She is known throughout our synod for her kindness and consideration. Her hospitality and breakfasts are legendary. Their marriage has been blessed with four children and eight grandchildren.

President Orvick was ordained into the public ministry and installed as pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Amherst Junction, Wisconsin, on June 21, 1953. In 1954, he accepted a call to The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Cross, Madison, Wisconsin, where he served until 1986. While pastor at Holy Cross it grew into the largest congregation in the synod, numbering over 1,700 souls. During his ministry, he has also been a member of the Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary and of the Doctrine Committee of the ELS.

President Orvick's ministry began during the difficult days of inter-synodical disputes which ended with the demise of the Synodical Conference. He was president of our church body as the doctrine of the church was discussed. This discussion came to a God-pleasing resolution at the 1980 synod convention when the ELS statement *The Doctrine of the Church* was adopted. In the 1980s and 1990s, questions arose in our midst concerning the Lord's Supper. It

was President Orvick who guided our synod to a resolution of these questions in 1997. During his presidency, the administration and the structure of the boards and committees of the synod were shaped through his guidance.

Through the years President Orvick has been a strong advocate of nurturing ties with confessional Lutherans around the world. Through frequent visits he strengthened relationships with our brethren in Scandinavia and Germany. On a trip to Australia he was instrumental in the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia. All these contacts were part of the process which resulted in the formation of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) that held its constituting convention at Oberwesel, Germany, in April of 1993.

The synod grew during the Orvick years. The synod grew from 87 congregations with 15,663 baptized members in 1970 to 141 congregations with 21,729 baptized members in 2000. Outside the Midwest, the greatest geographical expansion has been in Florida and on the West Coast. Most of the congregations that joined the synod for confessional reasons were personally visited and encouraged by President Orvick. The members of many of these congregations have expressed the sentiment that President Orvick's personal interest and concern had much to do with their decision to join the ELS. His care and concern for all the members and pastors of the synod is indicated by the fact the he has visited and preached in most of its congregations. In addition, he has been an avid supporter of missions at home and abroad, visiting the missions fields and encouraging our synod to support its missions in Peru and Chile and our work in Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Latvia through Thoughts of Faith, Inc.

Addendum III

John Moldstad: The Second Full-Time Synod President

John Arthur Moldstad was born on April 6, 1954, the son of the Rev. John and Gudrun (née Madson) Moldstad. He was born in Bagley, Minnesota and baptized by his father in the hospital. While his family lived in Lengby, Minnesota at his birth, his childhood was spent in Thornton, Iowa as well as in Mankato, Minnesota after his father received a call to Bethany Lutheran College. He was confirmed by the Rev. Hugo Handberg at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato in 1968.

After attending one year at Bethany Lutheran High School in Mankato, Minnesota, he finished his remaining three years of high school at Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm, Minnesota. John completed his AA degree at Bethany Lutheran College in 1974 and attended Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. He enrolled at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato and served as a vicar at Bethany Lutheran Church, Princeton, Minnesota. His supervisor was the Rev. Wayne Dobratz. He graduated from the seminary on May 16, 1980 with the Master of Divinity degree.

President Moldstad was united in marriage with Joslyn (née Wiechmann) on July 30, 1977, who was a graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. Over the years, Joslyn wrote a number of children's devotional books and a Christian novel entitled *Megan's Mountain*. Joslyn has a deep love for Christian education. She has had a Christian daycare in her home and at present is the director of Jesus' Lambs at Peace preschool in North Mankato.

The first child of John and Joslyn, Rachel Renee, was born on March 17, 1978. Their second child, John Andrew, was born on June 3, 1980. President Moldstad was ordained on July 20 of the same year and installed as pastor at Bethel Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He also served Oslo Lutheran Church in Volga, South Dakota. During his time at Bethel, on April 19, 1982, his third child, Matthew James, was born.

In 1984, he was called to Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Lake Havasu City, Arizona. Here the Lord blessed his diligent work as a home missionary for the synod. His fourth child and third son, Michael John, was born in Arizona on February 14, 1985, and his fifth child, daughter Andrea Elizabeth (Hopkins) was born September 18, 1987. He served at Our Saviour until 1990, when he accepted a call to Faith Lutheran Church in Oregon, Wisconsin. Here his sixth child, Joshua Ryan, was born on December 9, 1991. In 1994, he was called as the New Testament professor at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. At the seminary he proved himself to be an excellent New Testament professor. On April 23, 1995, his seventh child and third daughter, Brittany Rachelle, was born. As part of the People's Bible Teachings series, President Moldstad wrote *Predestination: Chosen in Christ*, which was published by Northwestern Publishing House in 1997. The book provides an interesting and readable study of the biblical doctrine of election. In May 2002, he received a Master of Sacred Theology (STM) degree from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. From 1998 until 2002 he also served as Vice President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In 2002, he was elected president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) at the 85th annual convention, held June 17–20 in Mankato. He succeeded the Rev. George M. Orvick, who had served as president for twenty-eight years prior. Upon accepting the call to this office, President Moldstad also became a member of the Board of Trustees and an ex-officio member of the Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary.

His presidency began during the challenging days of the ministry discussions in the ELS. He was instrumental in appointing an ad hoc committee to discuss this issue in the synod. These discussions came to a God-pleasing resolution at the 2005 synod convention, when the ELS statement *The Public Ministry of the Word* was adopted. Always willing to listen to the concerns of others and take their advice, he has shown himself to be a diplomatic leader. His care and concern for our pastors and members of the synod is indicated by the fact that he has visited and preached in most of our congregations.

During his ministry, President Moldstad served as circuit visitor (1987–1988, Circuit #9; 1988–1989, Circuit #10), as a member of the Doctrine Committee (1988–2002), and as a Synod Convention Essayist (1992, “His Truth For Our Youth”). In 2009, he joined the Centennial Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

President Moldstad served as secretary of the newly formed Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) 1996–2002 and 2002–2008 as member of the planning committee. He is a strong advocate of this organization that provides fellowship for lonely, orthodox Lutherans around the globe. He is a leader that has a concern for our synod, our fellowship in this country, and our fellowship internationally.

Addendum IV

Member Churches of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria
Bulgarian Lutheran Church
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Nigeria
Concord Evangelical Lutheran Church, Russia
Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mexico
Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia
Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church, Puerto Rico
Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Germany
Evangelical Lutheran Synod, USA
Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia
Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru
Gereja Lutheran–Indonesia

Lutheran Church of Cameroon
Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Malawi
Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Zambia
Lutheran Confessional Church, Finland
Lutheran Confessional Church, Norway
Lutheran Confessional Church, Sweden
Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church–Japan
Ukrainian Lutheran Church
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, USA

*Associate Members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran
Conference*

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries, India
Christian Church of the Lutheran Reformation of the Republic of Chile
Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Albania
East Asia Lutheran Synod
Lutheran Church of Ethiopia
Lutheran Church of Portugal
Lutheran Mission of Salvation–India
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Finland
Seoul Lutheran Church, South Korea
South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission

Our Pioneer Church Fathers

H. M. Tjernagel

LSQ Vol. 58, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2018)

Editor's Note: The article is reprinted from the *Lutheran Sentinel* (Vol. 21, No. 15). It explains why H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, and U. V. Koren are considered to be the predominant fathers in the Norwegian Synod. This article was first written in reaction to the centennial of Norwegian Lutheranism in America in the year 1943.

WE CANNOT AND THEREFORE DO NOT DENY the historical fact that Elling Eielsen and C. L. Clausen were the first ordained pastors bearing the Lutheran name to work among Norwegians in this country. The first named, an itinerant lay-preacher from Norway, came to this country in 1839 and was ordained by pastor F. A. Hoffmann in Chicago, October 3, 1843. The last named came to Muskego, Wisconsin in 1843 to serve as school teacher among the Norwegian immigrants, but was ordained as a pastor by Rev. L. F. E. Krause of the Buffalo Synod October 18 of the same year.

On the strength of these ordinations and the work done by these men, great preparations are in the making to celebrate the centennial of Norwegian Lutheranism in America in the year 1943.

As an orthodox Lutheran Synod and as Lutheran Christians, we are not at all interested in that centennial celebration because Elling Eielsen was a full-time opponent of orthodox, scriptural, and confessional Lutheranism, while C. L. Clausen, a less stable character, was

such only periodically during the first decade or two after which he also became an avowed and consistent opponent. Written history is replete with evidence of this. We do not, therefore, count them among "our fathers."

Neither do we count J. W. C. Dietrichson, an ordained pastor from Norway who came to Koshkonong in 1844. His mission was to bring ecclesiastical order among Norwegian Lutherans in America. Confessionally he was not a true Lutheran and came near to stamping Grundtvigianism on organized Lutheranism here. He was, furthermore, absurdly high church. He returned to Norway in 1850.

Neither do we, without reservations and explanations, name H. A. Stub, who came over in 1848, nor A. C. Preus, who came in 1850, among the fathers who founded an orthodox Lutheran Synod among Norwegians in America.

These two together with C. L. Clausen had made the preliminary arrangements and were all set to found a Synod which would have acknowledged Grundtvigianism. This was in 1851.

In 1852 a meeting was held in the month of February. At this meeting, Rev. H. A. Preus, Rev. G. F. Dietrichson, and Rev. Nils Brandt, who had arrived from Norway the previous year, were present. Thus there were now six pastors and thirty-seven representatives from twenty-one congregations at this meeting.

In view of the fact that the last named pastors, H. A. Preus, G. F. Dietrichson, and Nils Brandt, had not been present, and that many congregations had not been represented at the meeting which adopted a constitution for a synodical organization the previous year, it was now decided unanimously to consider the adopted constitution as merely preparatory work and that it be taken up for renewed consideration.

This reconsideration led to a notable change in paragraph II. where Grundtvigianism was definitely lodged in four words.¹ On motion of Rev. H. A. Preus, a resolution was presented to eliminate those four words. To the credit of H. A. Stub and A. C. Preus, it shall be said that they were convinced of their error and voted affirmatively for the resolution which lacked one vote of being carried unanimously. The one dissenting vote was cast by Rev. C. L. Clausen.

Let us not fail to note here this, the first profoundly important service rendered American Lutheranism by the doughty Rev. H. A. Preus.

¹ According to the Grundtvigian Error the Apostles' Creed was of divine origin and a basis for Christian doctrine and teaching.

A meeting was again held in February 1852, where the constitution was further discussed, revised, adopted, and submitted to the individual congregations for approval. In October of the same year, 1853, pastors and representatives of congregations who had subscribed to the proposed constitution, met and formally organized what has since been popularly known as the Norwegian Synod.

Seven pastors and representatives of 28 congregations² constituted this historic convention of 85 years ago. The seven pastors were the six named above and Jakob Aal Ottesen, who had arrived from Norway the previous year, 1852. Of these seven pastors, two, H. A. Preus and Ottesen, remained active and in unbroken service to orthodox Lutheranism in America throughout their entire working day. As to the other five, Clausen became a bitter opponent, H. A. Stub shifted back and forth to Norway, A. C. Preus returned to Norway in 1872, G. F. Dietrichson went back in 1859, and Brandt retired at the age of 61.

We regard H. A. Preus as the father of the Norwegian Synod and of orthodox Norwegian Lutheranism in America. He was scripturally and confessionally solid and, as such, fearless defensively and aggressively. His strength was not in diplomacy but in open, uncompromising loyalty to "It is written." As president, he was the judicious, democratic, humble pilot of the Synod from 1862 to 1894, the year of his death.

Jakob Aal Ottesen was a power felt rather than seen. He was a scholar, a wit, a counsellor sought by all and a gifted editor. His polemical articles had a keen cutting edge; his devotional writings had the Christian warmth and love of a John.

While the convention which launched the Norwegian Synod was watched over by the Lord of the church, the same Lord was also piloting a storm-tossed sailing vessel out on the Atlantic Ocean which bore a young pastor and his bride. This young man was destined to become the Peter, that is, the principal spokesman, of the Norwegian Synod.

Who was he? Ulrik Vilhelm Koren. In the student body at the university of Christiania he was known as "løven," the lion. To his intimates he was the gifted and earnest seeker after Christian faith and knowledge. His slogan became "Grace Alone," and as those words are engraved upon the obelisk which marks his resting place in the Washington Prairie Cemetery, so was the truth expressed by those words the back ground to every sermon he preached, every article he wrote,

² The number of congregations was 38 (H. Larson and J.B. Madson, *Built on the Rock* [Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992], 8).

and there were many, and every battle he waged against false doctrine through a long, militant life. Lutheranism has had few spokesmen in this or any other land that has excelled Koren in wielding the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Though in form, features, and bearing he was the very incarnation of the Viking chieftain and was often misjudged because of his commanding presence, yet he was in reality a mellowed, humble Christian, a mendicant at the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The Lord of the Church also gave many other able and consecrated pastors to our Synod in its early days as well as later, but these three, H. A. Preus, Ottesen, and Koren must stand as the fathers who under God as His ambassadors, gave a soundly scriptural direction and a firm confessional Lutheranism to Norwegians in America. We remember with deep gratitude that the fathers of the Missouri Synod were their close and intimate associates and their fatherly counsellors.

The outstanding characteristics of our fathers was not diplomacy, pussy-footing, and compromise, but unswerving loyalty and fidelity to the written Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. Whether it was false teachers from without, as in the case of Elling Eielsen and his followers, or false teachers from within, as in the case of C. L. Clausen and later of F. A. Schmidt, the Sword of the Spirit, the two-edged weapon, the Word of God, was unsheathed and wielded with the strength and fearlessness that only Christian love and conviction can give.

Such were the men who were at the helm of our beloved old Synod during the stormy days of its early period. God grant that we may emulate them in Christian courage and fidelity to the Word and orders of the head of our church and the Savior of souls, Jesus Christ. LSQ

From De Servo Arbitrio to Opgjør

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I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like trifles.... You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges and have aimed at the vital spot; for which I sincerely thank you, since I am only too glad to give as much attention to this subject as time and leisure permit.¹ (LW 33, 294)

SO SAYS LUTHER AFTER A BLUNT, BUT RELATIVELY restrained, refutation of the book by the admired Erasmus *De Libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* (Concerning free choice: Discourses or Comparisons). Because of the fourth word in the title, it is also referred to as *Diatribes*.² Luther's kind words to Erasmus are to be taken seriously here; he is not merely shining an apple for the

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1955–). Volumes 25, 31, 33 are used in this paper, hereafter (LW volume, p.#).

² The meaning of *diatribe* is not as strong in Latin as in English; Erasmus would have used it simply to denote a learned discussion. Justus Jonas translated Luther's Latin text into German, with the title *Vom unfreien Willen*.

great champion of human letters, nor is he being sarcastic. As serious as they are, the Roman Catholic aberrations—the papacy, purgatory, and indulgences, etc.—fade into the background, or are tempests in a teapot, compared to the problem of the will. Everything else in the salvation of the sinner hinges on the question whether or not man has any power to cooperate with God in his salvation.

Two twentieth-century conservative Anglicans, writing in 1957, J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, in their edition of *Bondage of the Will* see the Luther–Erasmus debate in a similar way:

Much modern Protestantism would be neither owned nor even recognized by the pioneer Reformers. *The Bondage of the Will* fairly sets before us what they believed about the salvation of lost mankind. In the light of it, we are forced to ask whether Protestant Christendom has not tragically sold its birthright between Luther's day and our own. Has not Protestantism today become more Erasmian than Lutheran? ... Have we not grown used to an Erasmian brand of teaching from our pulpits—a message that rests on the same shallow synergistic conceptions which Luther refuted, picturing God and man approaching each other almost on equal terms, each having his own contribution to make to man's salvation and each depending on the dutiful co-operation of the other for the attainment of that end?³

*The Bondage of the Will*⁴ is one of the richest of Martin Luther's Reformation writings. Luther himself counted this treatise, along with the Catechisms, as one of his most important writings. One can hardly say that they know Luther's theology without *The Bondage of the Will*. Dozens of topics are embedded in it, enough to keep one writing conference papers for a long time.

In spite of a very broad reach, this treatise presents a unified argument, carefully crafted, intended to refute and demolish Erasmus' proof of what turns out to be a foundational Roman Catholic teaching which supports Rome's entire system. In one sense, the organization is not Luther's, since he responds to Erasmus on the basis of Erasmus' own

³ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, New Jersey: Revell, 1959), 60.

⁴ In the preface to the American edition of Luther's Works, Philip Watson notes that *De servo arbitrio* is better translated *Concerning Unfree Choice*, but the traditional title is kept for the sake of uniformity. However, the text always translates *arbitrium* as "choice," and reserves "will" to translate *voluntas*.

organization. Nevertheless, within that organization, Luther's response is not the blunderbuss it might appear to be; it is highly focused and disciplined.

Luther's own understanding of the level of importance to be assigned to the problem of the will must be taken seriously—is the will free or bound? Luther congratulates Erasmus, genuinely and seriously, for seeing this as the fundamental issue. It is not so clear that that is what Erasmus set out to do, but nonetheless, Luther recognizes the matter of the will as penetrating to the very heart of a theology of grace and faith.

While justification must stand as the article on which the church stands or falls, there may be some good reasons for nominating the teaching of the bound will or unfree choice for that position, since it is foundational for the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. The doctrine set forth in *De servo arbitrio* is, in fact, the doctrine of absolute divine monergism, that is, God alone brings one to salvation, by grace alone, as opposed to “synergism,” that man cooperates with God in conversion. Absent grace alone, any teaching on justification lapses into synergism, as one can see from a careful analysis of the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification. Furthermore, the effects of the synergistic theology of F. A. Schmidt, which disrupted Synodical Conference Lutheranism in the 1880s, lingers today. The synergism of faith, based on a doctrine of the free will, has afflicted the church in nearly every period of its existence. And that is another reason for placing the doctrine of the unfree choice at the core of Christian doctrine.

This paper does not aim at a thorough analysis of Luther's entire treatise. The back story—the relationship between Luther and Erasmus, the tremendous contribution of Erasmus who “laid the egg that Luther hatched,”⁵ and the philosophical and linguistic underpinnings of the debate—are all important studies in themselves. For a good read on those issues, read the excellent study of the Reformation debate in Robert Kolb's *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method*.⁶

Luther takes Erasmus' argument piece by piece as Erasmus had laid it out. The pieces are all important, but it is in Part VI that Luther delivers a carefully constructed, affirmative statement on the issue of the bound will. For this paper, we will restrict our attention to Luther's affirmative statement of his position over against Erasmus, which he

⁵ Erasmus' response to hearing that is variously reported, but his retort amounts to: “Luther hatched an altogether different bird.”

⁶ Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Lutheran Quarterly Books/Eerdmans, 2005).

has thoroughly buttressed in the preceding five parts.⁷ Thereby, we will miss a lot of gems, but if you haven't yet read *Bondage of the Will* in its entirety (unthinkable!) you will have to find them yourselves.

We must be clear at the outset that, for Luther anyway, the argument of *Bondage of the Will* is not a philosophical argument advancing a Christianized theory of the problem of freedom and determinism. The philosophical determinist holds that all events are caused, without considering the problem of a first cause, so that for every human action there is a necessary cause apart from a will that can generate actions without being physically compelled to do so. That includes decisions on which color of socks one ought to wear on this day and similar questions, but ultimately, determinism finds that human beings are not really responsible for their actions. Luther won't enter that arena, and recognizes a freedom of action in the kingdom of the world, or in civic righteousness. Luther's battle is on the spiritual will *coram deo* (before or in relation to God), that is, whether man has it at all in his power to turn himself to God or not. The debate is about divine monergism as opposed to the synergism of man's cooperation; is there a human part in the conversion of the spiritual will? Luther's most concise answer to the question is his third article confession: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith."⁸

When Luther responds to *Diatribes*, it is not as though Erasmus had raised a question, Luther says, "I'll get back to you on that," and then for the first time works his way through this biblical doctrine. Luther had arrived at clarity on the matter much earlier than 1525. In the 1517 *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, which argued for a return to the Augustinian doctrine of grace, it is already clear that Luther sees this issue as crucial for the reformation of the church. In these one and

⁷ The division in the English editions, whether the Watson translation in *Luther's Works* or the widely used translation by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, the British evangelicals (1957), are editorial additions. They make sense, and are helpful, but the text is subject to different divisions, and, for example, what the *Luther's Works* text calls Part VI, Packer-Johnston has as Part VII. In any case, the real meat of Luther's argument is that Part, VI or VII which Packer-Johnston labels "The Bible Doctrine of the Bondage of the Will" and Watson has as "A Display of the Forces on Luther's side." The anthology of Luther's writings we have used in the Luther course at Bethany Lutheran College has the Introduction, Part VI [Watson], and the short conclusion.

⁸ SC II.6 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 355.

two, Luther sets up the issue in the context of Augustine's refutation of Pelagius and anticipates the vocabulary in the Erasmian debate:

1. To say that Augustine exaggerates in speaking against heretics is to say that Augustine tells lies almost everywhere....
2. This is the same as permitting Pelagians and all heretics to triumph.
10. One must concede that the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good.
71. Law and will are two implacable foes without the grace of God.
87. Since the law is good, the will which is hostile to it, cannot be good. (LW 31, 9 ff.).

Luther again addressed the issue in the 1518 Heidelberg theses:

13. Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits mortal sin.
14. Free will after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity, but it can always do evil in an active capacity.
15. Nor could free will endure in a state of innocence, much less do good, in an active capacity, but only in its passive capacity. (LW 31, 40)

In the proofs, Luther offers an illustration of thesis fourteen: "Just as a dead man can do something toward life only in a passive capacity, so can he do something toward death in an active manner while he lives. Free will, however, is dead, as demonstrated by the dead whom the Lord has raised up" (LW 31, 49).⁹

In *Exsurge Domine* (1520), forty-one statements of Luther were condemned, the thirty-sixth one being Heidelberg Thesis 13 quoted above. John Eck was probably the one who assembled the list. Luther responded with several treatises, one of which was entitled *Assertio omnium articulorum...*, dated December 1520.¹⁰ Erasmus addressed

⁹ In *Bondage of the Will* (LW 33, 246) Luther refers to the Heidelberg thesis and other treatises where he has made this point.

¹⁰ *Assertio omnium articulorum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X novissimam damnatorum*, translated in LW 32, 7 ff. by George Forell. Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio* can be found in a complete translation by Gordon Rupp in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, Volume XVII in *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969). The volume also contains Philip Watson's translation of *De servo arbitrio*.

Luther's defense of his statement in Part III of *De libero arbitrio*, and Luther responded in Part V of *De seruo arbitrio*.

Luther had still earlier in his Romans commentary of 1515 made it clear that he was onto the problem of the will and anticipates his later treatise: "The free will without grace has absolutely no power to achieve righteousness, but of necessity it is in sin. Therefore blessed Augustine is correct in his book *Against Julian* when he calls it 'a bound will rather than a free will'" (LW 25, 375). However, by 1515, it is not clear how much distance Luther had put between himself and the Roman treatment of grace as a quality infused into the human heart which then enables the will to participate in conversion. Luther's treatment of the will in *Romans* is not nearly as precise as in the Scholastic and Heidelberg disputations. In commenting on Romans 7:18, Luther makes the distinction between "to do" and "to fulfill" (I can will, but I cannot fulfill) and focuses on that, as he later does in *Bondage of the Will*, but has not yet sharpened his assertion of the full depravity of the human will. In later writings, Luther doesn't speak of adding grace to the will so that with it, the will *can* do something in conversion.

In *De Seruo Arbitrio*, Luther calls Romans 7 [14ff.] "that truly Achillean text of mine, which *Diatribes* has bravely passed over" (invoking not Achilles' heel, but his strength). In sharper language than in the *Romans* commentary, Luther argues, "If human nature is so evil that in those born anew of the Spirit it not only does not endeavor after the good but actually strives and fights against it, how should it endeavor after the good in those who are not yet born anew but are still 'in the old man' and in bondage to Satan?" (LW 33, 288).

That brings us to the affirmative summary of Luther's position on the question of the will in Part VI of his refutation of Erasmus. Using Watson's scheme, Luther's points are:

- Universal sinfulness nullifies free choice.
- Free choice may do the works of the law but not fulfill the law.
- "Congruous" and "Condign" merit
- The righteousness of works and of faith
- Summary of St. Paul's testimony against free choice
- Summary of St. John: Free choice is of "the world," "the flesh." Grace is of Christ, by faith.
- The Two Kingdoms—of Christ and of Satan
- The assurance of faith

- The mercy and justice of God in the light of nature, grace, and glory

The centerpiece of the argument is St. Paul's statement in Romans 1:18, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness." According to Luther, this points not only to the work of the unbeliever: "[Paul] lumps all men together in a single mass and concludes that, so far from being able to will or do anything good, they are all ungodly, wicked, and ignorant of righteousness and faith" (249). Furthermore, according to Romans 3:10 f. (Paul's series of citations from the Old Testament), "free choice is completely abolished... and nothing good or virtuous is left in man." Luther's focus remains on grace: "[Paul's] whole concern here is to make grace necessary for all men" (255).

The distinction between the two kinds of merit—congruous (*congruus*: fit or suitable) and condign (*condignus*: very worthy)—was a scholastic distinction. Congruous merits are attained by man's natural efforts, whereas condign merit was that attained with the help of grace. That merit is attained in the latter way is the reason that Melanchthon restrains himself from calling the Roman Catholic teaching of justification "Pelagian." A justification on the basis of congruous merit would be gross Pelagianism, which, since St. Augustine's refutation of Pelagius' teaching, has always been rejected by Rome. For the scholastic theologians, there can be no condign merit without the assistance of grace, though it was debated how much of this assistance was needed. Here Luther rejects the scholastic use of these terms: "Suppose they do attribute as little as possible to free choice, nevertheless they teach that by means of this minimum we can attain to righteousness and grace" (267). In Apology IV, Melanchthon writes, "And when they invent a distinction between a merit of congruity and a merit of condignity, they are only masquerading lest they appear to be outright Pelagians" (Ap IV, 19). That is as close as Melanchthon gets to calling the scholastics semi-Pelagian. Luther, however, tends to lump the scholastics together with the followers of Pelagius.¹¹

¹¹ Luther and Melanchthon do not use the term "semi-Pelagian." It does occur once in the epitome of the Formula of Concord, Article II, 10. "3. We reject also the error of the Semi-Pelagians, who teach that man by his own powers can make a beginning of his conversion, but without the grace of the Holy Ghost cannot complete it" (Triglotta). The preceding paragraph is a rejection of "gross Pelagians." For Semi-Pelagian, the Latin text used that term, and the German text has *halbpelagianer*. It is not clear whether the Concordists are pointing to the Tridentine Catholics, or to the Pelagian hangers-on in the 5th century (the Massilians). A Kolb-Wengert footnote takes it to refer to the late

The heart of Luther's argument on the distinction between a righteousness of works and righteousness of faith is Romans 4. Luther argues that "if righteousness is not reckoned to the one who works, then clearly his works are nothing but sins, evils, and impieties in the sight of God" (271). Furthermore, if grace comes from predestination, then it is not by our own effort or cooperation.

Following Paul's testimony, Luther appeals to St. John whom he calls "an eloquent and powerful devastator of free choice." Luther focuses first on the way John speaks of the world (both in the gospels and epistles): "John speaks of the world antithetically, so that 'world' means everything that has not been taken out of the world into the Spirit." For Luther, free choice belongs to the world and the flesh, which is now referred to as the kingdom of the left. Grace, on the other hand comes from Christ and faith. "If you grant that Scriptures speak antithetically, you will be able to say nothing about free choice but what is contrary to Christ. If you do not grant that they speak antithetically, then you enervate the Scriptures so that they lose their point and fail to prove that Christ is necessary" (277).

In *De Servo Arbitrio*, Luther's reference to "two kingdoms" is not to his usual distinction between the kingdoms of the right and left. Here the two kingdoms are one of Christ and the other of Satan, which is not equivalent to the kingdom of the left or the world. The Christian is one who has been transferred from Satan's kingdom to Christ's kingdom

scholastic theologians (493n19). Most encyclopedia articles say that the term originated around 1590–1600, but can't be quite correct because the Formula of Concord used the term in 1577. *New Advent*, the online version of *Catholic Encyclopedia*, as well as other sources, apply the term Massilians (the monks of Marseilles) who attempted to blend Pelagius' and Augustine's doctrines, and this doctrine was referred to by Augustine and others as "relics of the Pelagians"; their view was condemned at the Council of Orange in 529 (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13703a.htm>). Calvinist theologians apparently have used the term against Arminianism. Since modern Roman Catholic sources continue to reject "semi-Pelagianism," holding to a stricter definition of it, it is confusing and maybe shouldn't be used—especially if speaking with a well-informed Roman Catholic. Nevertheless, we are left with Melancthon's question, "What is the difference between our opponents and the Pelagians?" which was a statement, not a request for information.

For an even more complex view of semi-Pelagianism, see Harry McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, simultaneously published by Newman Press: 1969). McSorley gives a thorough account of the Semi-Pelagianism condemned by Augustine and the 2nd Council of Orange, the difference between that and the view of Thomas Aquinas, and the later scholastics, whom he calls "Neo-semi-Pelagian." McSorley further demonstrates why we in our polemics probably should avoid referring to Roman Catholic theology as semi-Pelagian.

“not by his own power, but by the grace of God, by which we are set free from the present evil age and delivered from the dominion of darkness” (287). And knowing this alone “should be sufficient to confute the dogma of free choice” (288).

Luther closes by appealing to the three lights—nature, grace, and glory. By the light of nature one cannot understand how it is that good people suffer and the evil do not, but the problem is solved by the light of grace. By the light of grace, it is an insoluble problem how God can damn one who by his own power can do only evil, and here both the light of nature and grace can only point me to an unjust God. But the light of glory will show us “that the God whose judgment here is one of incomprehensible righteousness is a God of most perfect and manifest righteousness. In the meantime, we can only believe this” (292).

Luther’s final conclusion is this: “If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost; otherwise, we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man, which would be blasphemy and sacrilege” (293).

Did Luther get it right? Did he understand the Roman Catholic teaching correctly? Has anything changed in the Roman Catholic presentation?

Luther correctly understood that the point at issue was at the heart of the gospel. So far as Luther was concerned, the most fundamental difference between him and Rome was not simply the doctrine of justification. The Roman aberrations on justification were rooted in their aberrations on the biblical doctrines of the fall of man and its effect on the nature of human will, as well as in an unclear Scripture. To understand the nature of the will that is not free to choose the spiritual good requires an understanding of the nature of sin, and so already in Augustana II, on Original Sin, the Roman Catholic theologians saw their problem with the Lutherans. They accepted the teaching that children are born with original sin, but they rejected the teaching that that meant that children were born without fear and trust in God, and especially the teaching that original sin is concupiscence which remains even after baptism. From the Apology to the Formula of Concord, the problem of the human will begins in the article on original sin. In the Roman scheme of things, inherited guilt is removed, leaving a *tabula rasa*. Rome objected to the Lutheran teaching that the child is born without fear and trust in God, that concupiscence remains after baptism, and that concupiscence is itself sin. For the scholastics, the

will that remains must be illuminated by the inspiration or infusion of grace, provided by the Holy Spirit, which aids and incites faith, and that grace brings the illumination enabling one to apply that grace to living meritoriously. Thus the good works of the converted are a righteousness of grace and faith—but in quite a different way from the Lutheran teaching.

Article 18 of the Confutation of the Augsburg Confession actually accepted Augustana Article XVIII on free will (“they confess that the free will has the power to effect civil righteousness but that it lacks the power apart from Holy Spirit, to produce the righteousness of God”).¹² However, the Confutation went on to boast that the Roman church avoided the extreme positions and took the middle way, avoiding the error of Pelagius on the one hand and the Manichaeans on the other. So, they confirmed the Aristotelian love of the golden middle.

In Confutation Article IV on Justification, the Roman Catholic theologians also anathematized Pelagius, but they went on to say, “To reject human merit, which is acquired through the assistance of divine grace, is to agree with the Manichaeans and not the catholic church.... All Catholics admit that our works of themselves have no merit but God’s grace makes them [the works] worthy to earn eternal life.”¹³ That response encapsulates the Roman Catholic position.

In Apology XVIII, Melanchthon wonders (rhetorically) what the difference is between “the Pelagians and our opponents,” and while granting to the will freedom to perform human works, Melanchthon rejects ascribing to the will any spiritual powers. One can sense in Melanchthon’s writing a softness in comparison with Luther’s arguments in *De Servo Arbitrio*, but on the fundamental point Luther and Melanchthon in 1530 are agreed in denying any spiritual power intrinsic in man to cooperate with God in conversion, or an infusion of grace enabling one to perform meritorious works.¹⁴

In the sixth session of the Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, chapter V, the council decreed:

[I]n adults, the beginning of the said Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ, that is to say, from His vocation, whereby, without any

¹² Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 116.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴ See Kolb, *Bound Choice*, Chapters II and III for the widening gap between Luther and Melanchthon on free choice.

merits existing on their parts, they are called; that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through His quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly without doing anything while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it; yet is he not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in His sight. Whence, when it is said in the sacred writings: Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you, we are admonished of our liberty; and when we answer; Convert us, O Lord, to thee, and we shall be converted, we confess that we are prevented by the grace of God.¹⁵

We have already referred to *Luther Right or Wrong* by Harry McSorley. A Roman Catholic theologian, McSorley anticipated the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* and is most helpful in showing more precisely the doctrine that Luther was arguing against (what he had learned in school from the later scholastics), and that the position that Erasmus was presenting was not really the position which had been expressed in the Roman Catholic councils, especially the Second Council of Orange in 529.

McSorley divides the Roman Catholic views on freedom of the will into several different camps. On the one hand, there is Pelagianism. After Augustine had led the condemnation of Pelagianism, there arose the “relics of Pelagius” (see footnote 11 above) who, contrary to Pelagius, found grace to be necessary for growing in faith, but that the beginning of faith was an act of free will. For this reason, Augustine led the opposition also against semi-pelagianism. Augustine’s doctrine demanded that man has a free will, but that the free will is not capable of doing what is truly good. McSorley believes that the Council of Orange (529) was the most important council to deal with the matter of free will because it denied any possibility of loving God without the preceding grace of God, and that free will does not have any power in conversion.¹⁶

¹⁵ J. Waterworth, trans. and ed., *The Council of Trent: The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), scanned by *Hanover Historical Texts Project*, http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1545-1545,_Concilium_Tridentinum,_Canons_And_Decrees,_EN.pdf. “Prevented,” in the archaic sense, “preceded by.”

¹⁶ McSorley, 120.

However, McSorley holds that between the tenth and sixteenth centuries, there was almost complete ignorance of the results of the Council of Orange, and that the Augustinian view was not restored until Trent. There are two key conclusions in McSorley's view that are important for understanding the Luther–Erasmus debate.

First, Anselm and Aquinas both were faithful to Augustine. Anselm could speak of a free will which was completely bound in servitude to sin, and thus could not be turned to God apart from God's grace. Luther was in error, according to McSorley, when he made Thomas a representative of the worst form of Pelagianism. Similar to Anselm, Thomas could not conceive of conversion without divine grace, but he could not deny free will either. McSorley also believes that Luther, at least early on, was in agreement with Augustine and Thomas, which was also the doctrine affirmed at Trent.

On the other hand, there were the late scholastics, William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel, whom McSorley calls "Neo-semi-Pelagians." In a longer analysis of Biel, McSorley writes that "nowhere in Biel can one find a doctrine of the preparation for justification [that] is from God's prevenient grace."¹⁷ The view taught by Biel was exactly the view that was denied by Trent. The upshot of this part of McSorley's analysis is that Erasmus' view of freedom of the will did not reflect the view even of Thomas, but rather of the unclear position of the late scholastics, and that Trent clarified the doctrine of the will to be more in line with Augustine. What Luther learned, and then rejected, was the doctrine of the Biel school, and whether he understood Erasmus correctly or not, he was in effect arguing against the view he himself had earlier held.

At the same time, McSorley finds, that "Erasmus did not do justice to the traditional Catholic doctrine.... Moreover, he was not aware of the fact that he was not dealing simply with an opinion of Augustine, but with the authentic teaching of the church,"¹⁸ which was in fact the decision of the Second Council of Orange which adopted Augustine's position.

Today, the Roman Catholic Church appears to affirm the synergism of faith as well as the synergism of works. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* spells it out: "In faith, the human intellect and will co-operate with divine grace: 'Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace.'"¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 205.

¹⁸ Ibid., 369.

¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994), (CCC) §155, 42. The citation for the quotation is given as Thomas'

And §180: “Believing’ is a human act, conscious and free, corresponding to the dignity of the human person.” The thorough intertwining of freedom of the will and justification can be seen in §1993: “Justification establishes cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom. On man’s part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.”²⁰ This is fortified by a text from Canons and Decrees: “When God touches man’s heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it; and yet without God’s grace, he cannot by his own free will move himself toward justice in God’s sight.” §2001: “The *preparation of man* for the reception of grace is already a work of grace. This latter is needed to arouse and sustain our collaboration in justification through faith, and in sanctification through charity. God brings to completion in us what he has begun, ‘since he who completes his work by cooperating with our will began by working so that we might will it.’”²¹

Luther and Erasmus were therefore clearly on target in identifying the problem of the will as being the essential issue dividing the reformers from the Roman Catholic Church. It also seems clear that one cannot separate the issue of the will from the doctrine of justification. Still, care must be taken to understand exactly what the Roman Catholic position is. Luther and the others were correct in identifying the Roman Catholic Church of teaching a salvation by works. But Rome’s formulation of the doctrine of salvation provides some deniability to the charge. It amounted to that, but the Roman Catholic doctrine of conversion and justification is much more subtle than any form of Pelagianism. One has to take the Roman church at its word in rejecting Pelagianism, and it appears that most of the popes of the last century reiterated the anathema against Pelagianism. The Roman Catholic Church did not teach that the individual takes the initiative, turns himself to faith, and performs good works that earn God’s favor. It did and still does teach what is called *prevenient grace*, and holds that one cannot believe without that grace. At each point, as Erasmus says it, they attribute a minimum of freedom to man’s will—just enough, apparently, to cease resistance to God’s grace.

Summa Theologica II,II, 2, 9.

²⁰ CCC, § 1993, 483.

²¹ CCC, § 2001, 484. The internal quotation is cited as being from Augustine’s *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 17: PL 44, 901.

At the beginning of this paper, I cited the preface of the Packer-Johnston translation of *Bondage of the Will*. They went on to say, "Have we not grown used to an Erasmian brand of teaching from our pulpits—a message that rests on the same shallow synergistic conceptions God and man ... each having his own contribution to make to man's salvation and each depending on the dutiful co-operation of the other for the attainment of that end?"²²

In Merton Stromen's *A Study of Generations* (1972), his survey showed that among Lutherans more than half of the laity in one way or another believed that they were saved by good works. No record in the book indicates that there was a question that would get at our topic here, or which would show what percentage understood Luther's "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength..."²³

However, for American Lutheranism in the 1880s and then again in the post-World War I era, there was that controversy called the election controversy which showed that not all Lutherans could agree with the main principles established by Luther in *De Servo Arbitrio*, Apology XVIII, or FC SD.II.

The election controversy was never really about the doctrine of election *per se*; i.e., it was not a question of whether or not God elects, chooses, or appoints those who are to have eternal salvation. What was at issue was the basis for this choosing. More precisely, it is the doctrine of conversion: whether or not there is something in man, even a spark of recognition of his separation from God. That is a hinge in grasping the issue. But at the heart of it is whether or not the impact of the original sin, the disobedience of our first parents, was absolute or partial, total or moderated. Luther's point is that the sinful will is absolutely incapable of any spark of recognition of true good or of a desire to let God do his will.

The Synodical Conference churches, especially the Norwegian and Missouri synods, were the most internally affected. Of course, the Conference lost Ohio over the matter, and Wisconsin lost no more than a handful. The main provocateur, though not the originator, was the once Missouri Synod, then Norwegian Synod professor, F. A. Schmidt. In *En Redegjørelse (An Accounting, theses on conversion and election)*, U. V. Koren wrote, "We reject the synergistic doctrine...that 'salvation in a

²² Packer and Johnston, *Bondage of the Will*, 60.

²³ Merton P. Strommen, et al., *A Study of Generations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), especially chapters 5 and 6, and page 369 Scale 15, questions and results for the section on works. In the index, all pages dealing with salvation by works are collected under the index entry "Pelagianism"!

certain sense does not depend on God alone.” He was quoting a remark by Schmidt.²⁴ Schmidt’s response was, “I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God’s Word and our Lutheran Confessions, that ‘salvation *in a certain sense* does not depend on God alone.” Schmidt explained himself further by saying, “It is the called person himself who here must *make a certain choice* between the two possibilities, whereby it is decided whether he will *let himself* be helped and saved or he *will refuse to let himself be helped*.”²⁵ It would seem that Schmidt did not understand how close his view was to that of Erasmus, anathematized over and over again in the Lutheran confessional writings and also by the Roman Catholic Church.

While not based on an exhaustive survey of election controversy literature, I don’t recall any reference to the Luther–Erasmus debate. The majority of citations to Reformation documents are to SD II and XI, AC/Ap XVIII, and SA III.1. And of course, they did their exegesis and clearly knew Luther’s Galatians commentary and the catechisms.

At the same time, their arguments on the doctrine of conversion and man’s will were much the same as Luther’s. If Packer and Johnston were to know about the American election controversy, which was as much about the freedom of the will in conversion, I would think they would recognize its commonality with the Erasmus–Luther debate, and would see in the *Opgjør*/Madison agreement an attempt to blend Erasmian synergism with Lutheran monergism and grace theology.

Packer–Johnston also wrote, “Do we not too often try to minimize and gloss over doctrinal differences for the sake of inter-party peace? Are we innocent of the doctrinal indifferentism with which Luther charged Erasmus? Do we still believe that doctrine matters? Or do we now, with Erasmus, rate a deceptive appearance of unity as of more importance than truth?”²⁶ (Not bad for Anglican Evangelicals.) And of course, that would also describe the program being run in uniting three Norwegian–American church bodies on the basis of *Opgjør* and

²⁴ *En Redegjørelse*, III, 21; originally published in *Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidende* 11, no. 45 (Nov. 7, 1884): 701–716. A translation appears in S. C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), also available on the Evangelical Lutheran Synod web site, els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/an-accounting.

²⁵ *Lutherske Vidnesbyrd—Gamle og Nye (Lutheran Witness—Old and New)* 3, 33 (Nov. 20, 1884), trans. from Theodore Aaberg, *City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 36 (emphasis added). Schmidt began publishing his views in this paper in January 1882.

²⁶ Packer and Johnston, *Bondage of the Will*, 60.

the Austin agreement, which tricked the larger part of those opposed to *Opgjør* into going along with it.

So synergism, old and new, synergism of faith and synergism of works, is always with us. Luther's words about Enthusiasm in the Smalcald Articles (SA III, VIII.9) may be appropriated: synergism "clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world—fed and spread among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power and might of all the heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed."²⁷

*There is nothing new under the sun
Is there anything of which it may be said,
"See, this is new"?*
It has already been in ancient times before us.
(Ecclesiastes 1:9–10) LSQ

²⁷ Kolb and Wengert, 323.

Following the Old Paths: The Theology of the Norwegian Synod (1853 & 1918)

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AT THE 1918 FOUNDING CONVENTION OF WHAT became the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Bjug Harstad set the course for the Reorganized Norwegian Synod with the biblical imagery from Jeremiah 6:16: “Stand ye in the ways, and ask for the old paths.” He said, “The faith which the founders of our old organization these many years fearlessly professed, in speech and writing, and manifested in their church order, is given us of God.”

As one reads Harstad’s sermon, it is certainly clear that those old paths had not to do with the culture that they shared as Norwegian immigrants, but with the faith, the belief, and trust they had learned to know from the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and the doctrine confessed by their Lutheran fathers in the Book of Concord.

As the reader is aware, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod was, until 1955, the Norwegian Synod, or more completely, The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. Its founding in 1918 was a reorganization of their former church, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, founded in 1853, but dissolved in the 1917 merger of that church with two other Norwegian/American church bodies, neither of which was firmly oriented toward a strict doctrinal unity. Both have been referred to as “The Norwegian Synod.” This essay will treat them as one, but will distinguish them when necessary by the dates 1853 or 1918, or the terminology, “the Old Synod,” and “the Reorganized Synod.”

Bjug Harstad's exhortation to follow the old paths consciously pointed back to the Norwegian Synod of 1853. By investigating the formation of that church and its own declarations of its doctrine, we will be able to discover something about the paths that Bjug Harstad urged his hearers to follow. In much that they said and did, the founders in 1918 showed that they *were* the Old Norwegian Synod, including the name they gave their church paper. The Old Synod had published *Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidende*, "Evangelical Lutheran Church Tidings." The paper begun in 1918 took the name *Evangelisk Luthersk* [picture of a church inserted] *Tidende*, with the motto inserted underneath the church, *Der Staar Skrevet*, "It is Written." They didn't consider themselves a new body, but were a reorganization of the old one. In their 1918 convention, the synod resolved, "We elect a committee of 3 to propose the necessary changes in the old constitution of the Synod."¹ The constitution at the time of the merger was the 1868 revision of the 1853 constitution. The Reorganized Norwegian Synod's constitution was revised and adopted in 1919 but was not translated into English until the 1940s.

The Norwegian Missourians

So what was the theology of the Old Norwegian Synod, which the 1918 Reorganized Norwegian Synod inherited as "the old paths"?

One view that has enjoyed wide acceptance was espoused by E. Clifford Nelson in his influential history, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans*. Nelson wrote that "the synod flourished as the champion of an uncompromising orthodoxy. The general position it assumed and defended was supported and significantly colored by the Synod's fateful alliance with the Missouri Synod."² That view holds that under the spell of Walther and the Missourians, the Norwegians became hyper-confessionalists. Behind that idea is the supposition that the Norwegians departed from what they had learned in Norway and uncritically drank the poison of the Missouri Synod (the name at the time was "The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States"). In other words, the Norwegians pretty much adopted the theology of the Missouri Synod.

¹ *Beretning om Synodemødet...1918 [Report on the Synod meeting...1918]*, 5. The Report is in Norwegian, but with important resolutions on legal matters given in English. The Report has an addendum of English translations of sermons and convention essays.

² E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 180.

In support of that thesis, Nelson sketches the history of the synod's doctrinal controversies, along the way referring to various leaders in the synod as "Norwegian Missourians" who "considered themselves champions of Lutheran orthodoxy." They are described as holding that "correct doctrine was a necessary prerequisite for a saving faith," a malicious caricature which simply cannot be excused. Nelson remarks, "Convinced also that Scripture was to be equated with the Word of God and that exegetically each verse allowed only one interpretation, the pastors became unyielding in their orthodoxy." Nelson's conclusion is that this "was the mind of the Synod, theological orthodoxism bordering on uncharitableness."³

Views contrary to Nelson's on the theology and character of the Norwegian Synod of the nineteenth century have been offered by J. Magnus Rohne, Carl S. Meyer, Torald N. Teigen, and J. C. K. Preus.⁴

Sorting out Grundtvig's "Unparalleled Discovery"

One of the first indications of what the Norwegian Synod would become came in the process of organizing their synod. In 1844, J. W. C. Dietrichson, the first duly ordained Lutheran pastor to work among the Norwegian immigrants in the United States, presented a constitution to the Norwegian congregations in the Koshkonong area near Madison, Wisconsin. The second paragraph read:

The doctrine of the Church is that which is revealed through *God's holy Word in our baptismal covenant* and also in the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, interpreted in agreement with the symbolical writings of the church of Norway, (1) The Apostolic Creed, (2) The Nicene Creed, (3) The Athanasian Creed, (4) The Unaltered Articles of the Augsburg Confession which was delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg 1530, (5) Luther's Small Catechism.⁵

³ Ibid., 188-190.

⁴ J. Magnus Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926); Carl S. Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Decorah, IA: Luther College Press, 1962), Torald N. Teigen, review of *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, by E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *Clergy Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (December 1960): 16-22; J. C. K. Preus, *A Critical Look* (privately printed review), 1978.

⁵ S. C. Ylkvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), 35f.

This constitution was provisionally adopted in 1851, with the understanding that the congregations would ratify it, or not, during the coming year. But also during the coming year, Pastor H. A. Preus arrived from Norway, and when he read the proposed constitution (either after arriving in Wisconsin, or while still in Norway), he was alarmed. At the 1852 meeting, he called attention to the problematic second paragraph. The problem was that what was called the Grundtvigian error, among other things attributing divine authorship to the Apostles' Creed. Preus pointed out the fallacy of the expression, and the previous year's action was withdrawn and a revision of the second paragraph was inserted. What was dropped was "in our baptismal covenant," but the rest remained: "The doctrine of the church is that which is revealed through God's holy Word in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, *interpreted in agreement*" with the Symbolical Books or Confessional Writings.⁶

The problem with the phrase "in our baptismal covenant," may become more apparent in light of a paragraph from Grundtvig's writing:

The verbal Creed at Baptism is independent of all Scripture, and as the congregation's unanimous testimony of its faith, it is the most valid historical testimony of what all Christians have believed from the beginning which can be given. This Creed as a condition of admission to the Christian community is the unchangeable rule of faith and constitution of the church, which in indissoluble unity with Baptism sets the only defensible boundary between the church and the world. The spoken word at the Sacraments, and especially the Creed, is the fundamental rule for the interpretation of the Bible. The Bible has not originally been, and in consequence of its nature cannot be, a rule of faith.⁷

Danish pastor Kai Baagø, in an article on the web site *Grundtvig Studier*, finds four core components behind Grundtvig's *Mageløse Opdagelse* ("matchless discovery"):

- 1) That rationalism is to be opposed with the church's confession, not with the Bible.

⁶ Translated in Rohne, 129, and Nelson, 344; emphasis added.

⁷ G. Everett Arden, *Four Northern Lights* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 107.

- 2) That the Bible can only be understood and explained by believers through the Holy Spirit, that is, in the church [*menigheden*].
- 3) That there is one church [*kirke*], Christ's church, Christ's body, which has been, is, and always will be until the end of the world, and whose marks are the sacraments.
- 4) That this church's original faith is expressed in the apostolic confession.⁸

In Norway, the chief theological refutation of Grundtvig's theology, especially on his elevation of the Apostles' Creed to a position above Scripture, was C. P. Caspari, whose influence on the founding pastors of the Old Synod will be discussed later. He wrote a criticism of Grundtvig's historical assumptions about the Apostles' Creed, which was first published in 1866,⁹ and since his students had most likely heard those arguments even before they were published, the founding pastors were well aware of it. Soren Kierkegard was also a vehement foe of Grundtvig's theology, and his objections were on orthodox grounds.

Two things can be concluded about the theology of the Norwegian Synod from the Grundtvigian episode. (1) When it was pointed out that such "in our baptismal covenant" made the Apostles' Creed something to be divinely given when it was not, and when it appeared that something other than Scripture was the highest authority, it was rejected. In the dealings of the synod with others, it always became one of the first points of order that nothing could be claimed to have divine sanction without a clear word of God for it. The motto engraved in the synod's seal was *γέγραπται*, "It is written."

(2) How the founders in 1853 viewed the confessional writings is also underlined in the second article of the church's constitution: "the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, interpreted in agreement with the Symbolical Books." The phrase had already appeared in J. W. C. Dietrichson's 1849 draft of the constitution.¹⁰ The expression does not make the Confessional writings the *norma normans*, or the

⁸ Kai Baagø, "Grundtvigs Mageløse Opdagelse," *Grundtvig Studier*, <https://tidsskrift.dk/grs/article/viewFile/13229/11245>. This is a web site devoted to articles on N. F. S. Grundtvig. The articles are primarily in Danish. The translation is mine.

⁹ C. P. Caspari, *Historisk-kritiske af handlinger over en del virkelige og formentlige orientalske daabsbekjendelser* (Kristiania: P. T. Mallings, 1881); *Alte und neue Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel* (Christiania: Mallingschenbuchdr., 1879).

¹⁰ Nelson and Fevold, 114.

source, but the *norma normata*, the norm derived from Scripture as a standard for the preaching and teaching of the church.¹¹

Gisle Johnson [the name is pronounced Gis'lee Yohn'son] had expressed the status of the Confessions in his preface to the translation of the Book of Concord:

For those who desire to become members of this church, it must be presupposed that its confession has already passed this test, and accordingly acknowledge its confession as grounded and conformed to God's Word. Of such, it ought to be expected that none of them will think ill of us that we derive from them an explanation and decision of the articles in controversy, and that, as we lay down God's Word, the eternal truth, as the foundation, so we introduce and quote also these writings as a witness of the truth and as the unanimously received correct understanding of our predecessors who have steadfastly held to the pure doctrine [Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 13].¹²

In 1858, C. F. W. Walther delivered an essay at the convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod. In it, he wrote:

The symbols should be subscribed by ministers in the church in order to assure the church that they acknowledge as correct the interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures which is set forth in the symbols and consequently intend to expound the Scriptures as the church does which they bind themselves to serve.

Consequently if the church conceded that its ministers should not be required to interpret the Scriptures according to the symbols but interpret the symbols according to the Scriptures, subscription would not give the church any guarantee that the pledged minister would understand and expound the Scriptures as it does but rather as he himself thinks right.

¹¹ See my paper, "The Book of Concord and Confessional Subscription Among Norwegian Lutherans," in *The Pieper Lectures, A Sesquicentennial Celebration*, vol. 6, *The American Book of Concord*, ed. John Maxfield (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 2003), 80–96.

¹² *Konkordiebogen eller den evangelisk-lutherske Kirkes Bekjendelsesskrifter*, 2nd ed., trans. C. P. Caspari and Gisle Johnson (Christiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1882), forward, unnumbered page. This is my English translation. The first edition was published in 1868. Most of the theological libraries of the old synod pastors we have seen contained the Johnson/Caspari translation of the complete *Book of Concord*. However, the earliest synod pastors would have used a German edition.

Thus the church would actually set up the changing personal convictions of its ministers as the symbol to which it would obligate them.¹³

It is certainly improbable, if not impossible, that Dietrichson would have gotten such a way of speaking from the Missourians, and neither would those adopting the 1853 constitution know that language from the Missouri Synod. While Walther in 1858 used language similar to that found in the Dietrichson constitution, he was not the source of the language in the Norwegian Synod's constitution, let alone its confessional orthodoxy; the Norwegians had found that view somewhere else: back in Norway. Gisle Johnson's wording in his preface to the Norwegian translation of the Book of Concord is not as pointed as Walther's, but it expresses the same high view of the confessional writings.

The Norwegian Synod's Survey of Seminaries

Another signal of the stand the synod would take is found in its 1855 decision to send two young pastors, Jakob Aal Ottesen and Nils O. Brandt, on a trip to survey the Lutheran seminaries in the United States and to make a recommendation as to which would be most suitable to use for educating pastors for the synod. They were instructed to visit the Missouri Synod seminary in St. Louis; the Buffalo Synod's school in Buffalo, New York; and the Ohio Synod's Capital University. It was significant that Gettysburg was not included. At the time, the General Synod was reeling from the effects of what was essentially a Prussian Union theology on American soil under the influence of S. S. Schmucker and the *Definite Platform*, but the disruption of the General Synod and formation of the General Council was several years off. The Norwegians probably knew of Charles Porterfield Krauth and the other more confessional men of the General Synod, but there is no mention of them in the trip report.

On their trip, Ottesen and Brandt added Fort Wayne, concerning which Ottesen adds in the trip report "we visited outside our prearranged itinerary." They express the hope "that we may be excused for including Fort Wayne in our trip and our report." But they report that they found there too "the deepest love for pure and genuine Lutheranism."¹⁴

¹³ Theodore Tappert, *Lutheran Confessional Theology in America 1840-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 66; see also C. F. W. Walther, "Confessional Subscription," *Essays for the Church*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 19-29.

¹⁴ Meyer, 69.

Concerning the Ohio Synod's seminary, visitors noted that ten years earlier, one could say that "the Ohio Synod was Lutheran in name only."¹⁵ While they could say that Ohio was returning to a Lutheran practice and that they now accepted "all of the Lutheran symbols" they found that there was in the Ohio Synod "a certain vagueness and indecision" and that "[c]ertain un-Lutheran views" were "still tolerated in the synod."¹⁶

Regarding the Buffalo Synod seminary, they found J. A. Grabau to be warm, friendly, and energetic. They noted that the synod had sought to preserve "old-Lutheran liturgical usage," and "sought with great zeal and care to preserve and defend old-Lutheranism." Also laudable was the fact that that "private confession and private conversation with the pastor prior to Holy Communion are practiced without exception."¹⁷

However, because of a dispute over the doctrines of the church and ministry, the Buffalo Synod had not been able to come to terms with the Missouri Synod. They report that the Buffalo Synod "emphasizes the idea of the visible character of the church, in its confession and in a particular form of order as well as in Word and Sacrament. The Missouri Synod stresses the notion that the church is invisible and discernable only in Word and Sacrament." They also comment that unlike Missouri, the Buffalo Synod "asserts that the ministry of the Word and Sacraments (the office of the keys) is not given to the whole church, but only to the apostles and through them to their properly appointed and ordained successors, the clergy."¹⁸ The Norwegian visitors hoped that "they [Buffalo] might find it possible to agree in love and brotherhood with their assuredly more confessional brethren in the Missouri Synod."¹⁹

The Decision for Missouri

In their trip report, written in 1857, Brandt and Ottesen reported that at St. Louis, they had not learned anything new: "We can truly say that we found the same faith in which we were raised as well as the same idea of how a Lutheran free church ought to be ordered." What they found in Missouri, they said, "is the genuine Lutheran spirit.... [T]hey have the symbols and the writings of the oldest and

¹⁵ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶ Ibid., 76.

¹⁷ Ibid., 77.

¹⁸ Ibid., 79

¹⁹ Ibid.

most famous Lutheran dogmaticians on their side.”²⁰ The visitors rejected the Ohio and Buffalo Synod schools, which were certainly not wild-eyed liberal schools, as suitable places to train their pastors, but recommended instead Missouri’s St. Louis seminary. While both of the former certainly had already demonstrated a commitment on some level to the Lutheran Confessions, Missouri stood out as holding to a strict commitment to the Confessions (Walther’s essay on confessional subscription was given in 1858, soon after this visit). In other words, they discovered that the theology they found in St. Louis was exactly what they had been taught in their theological training in Norway. They did not learn it anew from the Missouri Synod fathers.

The Norwegian visitors finding in St. Louis and Fort Wayne the same “old-Lutheran faith” and confession they had learned in Norway doesn’t quite yet answer the question as to how it came about that these two groups of immigrant pastors from Norway and from Germany happened to be theologically on the same page when in their homelands, the Lutheran Confessions had been lost in so many places because of the ravages of pietism, rationalism, and most recently, the Prussian Union. How did it come about that these men from Norway came to a conservative confessionalism with a pronounced commitment to confessional, doctrinal theology?

The Leipzig Connection

While the theory that the Norwegian Synod got its conservative, confessional theology from the Missouri Synod is not supported by the evidence, it is clear that the Missourians and the Norwegians had some common influences in Europe – much of which is traced back to Ernst Hengstenberg and Franz Delitzsch. This story is told in greater detail by Carl S. Meyer in *Pioneers Find Friends*, a series of lectures given at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa in 1962. A graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Meyer, after a pastorate in Rochester, Minnesota, was called to Bethany Lutheran College where he served as historian from 1934 to 1943, and there came to know the Norwegian Synod’s history very well. Some material in this account is also found in the papers of Torald N. Teigen in the ELS archives and in this writer’s personal collection.

While we often think of H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, and U. V. Koren as the prime theologians of the Norwegian Synod, Prof. Laur. [Peder Laurentius] Larsen should be included in that group as well because of

²⁰ Ibid., 74 f.

the influence he had on generations of pastors and on the theological stance of the synod. Having taught at both St. Louis and Luther College, he may have influenced more Norwegian Synod pastors than the other three and was trained in Norway also under Caspari and Johnson. The Norwegian Synod men were never reticent about their debt to their professors at Christiania. The two professors had been especially prominent in the battle against the Grundtvigian theory which had become popular in some Norwegian circles, and they had become committed to the Lutheran confessional writings in a way that will be seen.

Karen Larsen, daughter of the long-time Luther College president Laur. Larsen, gives a glimpse of the influence Johnson and Caspari had on her father and the others who were at the core of the Norwegian Synod's theology. Larsen reports that the greatest influence on her father's outlook was the teacher Christian Thistedahl, whose teaching also touched various others of the immigrant pastors. He had taught both at the university and at the Kristiansand Cathedral school. Thistedahl, she says, was regarded as Norway's most eminent Hebrew scholar, though he also taught Latin and German as well. Thistedahl's theology, according to Karen Larsen, was "characterized by conservative orthodoxy and implicit acceptance of the doctrine of inspiration."²¹

However what she has to say about the influence of Caspari and Johnson speaks more to our thesis:

The decade of the fifties was a fortunate period in which to be a theological student in Norway. At that time there came to the university the culmination and, I think we may say, the blending of those religious currents which had swept rationalism almost out and had again brought to the fore evangelical Lutheranism with much of its original spirit. It was an epoch-making event in the history of the church in Norway when, in the late forties, two young men, Gisle Johnson and Carl Paul Caspari, were added to the theological faculty. Through their influence the last remnant of rationalism disappeared, and a new interest in theological matters was awakened in university circles. Both men were striking personalities and bold, original thinkers. Both were scholarly theologians, orthodox Lutherans in their confession, and at the same time very simple in their faith.... While Johnson probably exerted a more far-reaching influence in the

²¹ Karen Larsen, *Laur. Larsen: Pioneer College President* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1936), 15.

church outside the university, Caspari seems to have made a greater impression on the students.”²²

The influence Johnson and Caspari had on the the leaders of the Norwegian Synod was also transmitted to another generation in America: their orthodox Lutheran faith, their high esteem for the Lutheran Confessions, and a high view of Scripture and Lutheran hermeneutics. That certainly accounts, at least in part, for the theological stance of the synod. While the last part of the influence of Johnson and Caspari came after our fathers emigrated, their influence continued through their 1868 translation of the Book of Concord into Norwegian. That is not to say that the Book of Concord was not available to the theological students before then. It was available in German and Latin, both of which were required languages (requiring more than a passing facility) for study in the theological schools. For example, the Norwegian boys who were sent to St. Louis to study had to master German as well as the other theological languages in order to hear the lectures of Walther and the other St. Louis professors.

However, there is yet another important connection that was decisive for the immigrant pastors. In the background of this history is the revival of Lutheran confessional theology which surged in 1817 when Klaus Harms republished Luther’s Ninety-five Theses and added ninety-five of his own on the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1817. The Confessional Revival arose not simply because of the Reformation anniversary but also because of the Prussian Union, which was a syncretistic union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Prussia. In that Revival, there was a decided return to the Lutheran Confessions and to the writings of Luther, which some might call “repristinatio.”

This movement was felt in America in some strange ways. While S. S. Schmucker was introducing his “American Lutheranism” and “The American Recension of the Augsburg Confession,” some others were reawakened to what Lutheranism meant, especially Charles Porterfield Krauth and some of his colleagues. In Germany, it was fostered by men like Hengstenberg. A number of people in Germany were likewise influenced in that way, including Martin Stephan, C. F. W. Walther, Franz Delitzsch, Wilhelm Loehe, and J. A. Grabau, as well as the Norwegians Christian Thistedahl and Gisle Johnson.

²² *Ibid.*, 29–30.

Carl Meyer has sketched the series of relationships that can be uncovered between some of those mentioned above in the third chapter of *Pioneers Find Friends*.

Gisle Johnson went to Germany from Norway for further study. The places he went were places where one would find professors sympathetic to the confessional movement. In Berlin, he met Ernst Hengstenberg, who recommended Carl Paul Caspari, a brilliant Old Testament doctoral graduate at Leipzig, for a teaching position at Christiania. Hengstenberg edited *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, which became a vehicle for confessional theology, and was quoted frequently in Walther's *Lehre und Wehre* and *Der Lutheraner*, both of which were known to the Norwegians.

Even if Caspari became an important influence on the young pastors who were persuaded to emigrate from Norway to serve the growing immigrant community in midwestern America, that still wouldn't explain the relationship between the Norwegians and the Missourians in the United States. But the following does.

Caspari was a German Jew. He had a facility for languages and was sent to Leipzig for his university training. While there, he drifted into an association of theological students who were called "The Holy Club." The group may have harbored some pietistic notions, but it was a gathering place for those interested in the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions. Many of those who were associated with it became prominent leaders in the early Missouri Synod; C. F. W. Walther also had associated with that group. However, Walther left Leipzig in 1833, and Caspari arrived in 1834, so no direct connection with Walther can be shown there. However, another member of that group was Franz Delitzsch, who became a very close friend of Walther at the University of Leipzig. That friendship was tight enough that Walther later attempted to get Deilitzsch to join the faculty at St. Louis. Delitzsch was a Christian of Jewish ancestry, which might explain the bond between the two. Apparently Delitzsch's attempts to convert Caspari were unsuccessful. However, others in the group were more successful, and Caspari was baptized in Leipzig.

Sometime after Caspari had gotten his Ph.D., Prof. G. A. Tholuck, then teaching in Berlin, invited Caspari to Berlin for further study under Hengstenberg, and it was Hengstenberg who later recommended Caspari to Gisle Johnson. Caspari's theological character is indicated by a decision he made while in Berlin. In 1844, he had an opportunity to go to Königsberg in Eastern Prussia to teach, but he declined to go

to the Prussian-Union-dominated university since he was opposed to the syncretism of the Prussian Union. Over the course of his career, he declined calls to the Universities at Rostock, Dorpat (Tartu), and Erlangen.

Caspari's move to the University at Christiania was decisive for the theological character of the early Norwegian Synod pastors. Caspari and Gisle Johnson together translated for the first time the Book of Concord into Norwegian. Even though it was completed after those pastors left Norway, it was found in the libraries of many of the immigrant pastors, and during their various controversies they quoted from it. Karen Larsen also reports that Gisle Johnson and Caspari took turns gathering students and theologians in their homes on Saturday evenings to discuss theological topics.²³

It is likely that, given the connection between Caspari and Delitzsch, Caspari may have known already in the late 1840s about the Missouri Synod in America and would have shared that information with his students Herman Preus, Jacob Ottesen, Vilhelm Koren, Nils Brandt, Gustav Dietrichsen, Laur. Larsen, and others, all of whom became pastors of the Norwegian Synod. It is very possible, maybe even likely, that either Johnson or, more likely, Caspari had specifically suggested to the emigrating pastors that they get in contact with Walther and his group. But more importantly, it was specifically that they had been taught a high view of Scripture and biblical inspiration and a reverence for the theology of the Book of Concord, along with their rejection of Grundtvigianism, rationalism, and theological pietism, that they recognized the theology being taught in St. Louis and Fort Wayne as what they had always known.

On the basis of his research, Carl Meyer offers the following conclusion:

In the period from 1847–1861... the Missouri Synod did not exercise a dominance over the Norwegian Synod. It was an attraction to each other, not the dominance of one over the other. The magnetic field which attracted the Norwegians to the Missourians lay in the theology of Caspari, Hengstenberg, the young Franz Delitzsch, Friedrich Brunn, Gisle Johnson, Christian Thistedahl, and others. This attraction was reinforced by a mutual dependence on the Lutheran fathers of the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries. It was deeply imbedded in a

²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

mutual respect and reverence for the Lutheran Confessions and the Bible. Concordia [Book of Concord] and Luther meant for them theological concord.²⁴

The Synod's Early Controversies

A final factor that sharpened the confessional, theological position of the newly minted Norwegian Synod can be found in the controversies they faced in the first twenty-five years of the synod's existence. Those controversies have been thoroughly reviewed in *Grace for Grace*, so we will not attempt a detailed description of them. But there are some conclusions in general terms that contribute to an understanding of the "old paths" that Bjug Harstad in 1918 had urged following. More than making clear what they believed on certain controverted teachings, the resolutions of those controversies showed how the synod fathers practiced theology.

"Legalism" does not only describe rigid views. It would most properly be defined as the attempt to condition the gospel with legal demands or to make legal demands binding on consciences in matters where God's law does not. That meant that the pietistic spirit was going to be the opponent in several cases.

Except for the Election controversy, none of the controversies of the Old Norwegian Synod had an internal origin in the sense that someone within the synod became the adversary. That is true even of the Election controversy, in that it began as a dispute between C. F. W. Walther and his former colleague F. A. Schmidt, who was educated and ordained in the Missouri Synod but on Walther's advice was called to teach in the Norwegian Synod. When his dispute with Walther began, Schmidt was a member of the Norwegian Synod and was teaching at the Norwegian Synod seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. He had also been one of the architects of the Synodical Conference.

Slavery

Two of the controversies, election and slavery, arose partly because of the synod's association with the Missouri Synod. The dispute over slavery became an issue at a time when the Norwegian Synod's ministerial candidates were being trained at St. Louis. As a border state and a slave state, the issue of slavery was highly incendiary in Missouri. When C. F. W. Walther was unable to state that slavery was in and of

²⁴ Meyer, 58.

itself sinful, the word quickly spread that he was proslavery, and when that was spread by the students to their families back in Wisconsin, it became a heated discussion in the synod.

While it is not completely clear how much agreement or disagreement there was between the synod pastors and Walther on the matter of slavery, it was and still is widely maintained that the Norwegian pastors were blindly echoing Walther. A closer look at their arguments reveals that there was something more principled behind the position taken by most of the Norwegian pastors. As we will see in some of the other controversies, the Norwegian Synod clergy regularly had to face off with pietism and its proclivity for labeling all sorts of things as sin, even if not condemned in Scripture or contradictory of biblical principles. So, for example, if using alcohol sometimes causes much suffering and often leads to wrong doing, is it in and of itself sin? A more extreme case would be the matter of the fifth commandment's "Thou shalt not kill." Some interpret "kill" very broadly to forbid even self-defense; but phrased that way it is not the case that in and of itself all killing is sin—considering self-defense, defense of one's country, or capital punishment, one cannot say the all killing is categorically wrong. But murder, since by definition it is wrongful killing, *is* wrong categorically. Thus the question is: which acts are categorically or inherently wrong in every case, and which are wrong depending on certain circumstances?

In the slavery controversy, the Norwegian Synod pastors argued, for one thing, that the Bible refers to slavery, both in the Old Testament and in the case of Paul's letter to Philemon, without condemning it as sin, so one cannot say that slavery is categorically or inherently wrong. That, they thought, was adding to Scripture. The arguments raged in the synod, and while the laity initially agreed that slavery was sin, the pastors, most of them anyway, stated that one could say that slavery as practiced in the American south was wrong, and they did not hesitate to condemn the American practice of slavery. Koren and others readily admitted that they would go to war against that slavery, if required. Even so, they would not label as sin anything the Bible did not explicitly condemn as inherently sinful.

The slavery controversy, whatever else might be said about it today, did show the synod's unwillingness to condition their reliance on Scripture as the sole authority and held that God's Word alone, objectively considered, determines what is to be called sin. While the matter of slavery did indeed become a serious moral issue, they would not permit themselves to be drawn into the trap of adding anything

to Scripture (not that they always followed their own principles on the matter in forbidding card playing, games of chance, movies, and other amusements, as well as life insurance).

The Sabbath Day

Another case where the underlying issues were somewhat similar to the slavery question was in a controversy labeled “The Third Commandment and the Christian Sunday.” This was chiefly a confrontation with the Seventh-Day Adventists, who had been active in some of the Norwegian settlements, though there were likely some in Lutheran congregations who followed the same reasoning.

I have not seen any evidence that the synod pastors argued on the basis of Luther’s sermon “How the Christian is to Regard Moses,” where the substance has to do with the relationship between the Ten Commandments and law preached by Jesus, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount. Luther had argued, against the radical reformers, that the Ten Commandments only applied to Christians insofar as they agree with natural law: “We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver – unless he agrees with both the New Testament and the natural law.”²⁵ Luther’s case in point was the matter of the Sabbath. The Norwegians did not duplicate Luther’s argument in that essay, but they did take their stand on Article XXVI of the Augsburg Confession and Luther’s explanation of the third commandment in the Large Catechism. The theses prepared by J. A. Ottesen were thoroughly based on Scripture passages from Colossians, Galatians, and Romans. Thesis 1 says, “When the Third Commandment says: ‘remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,’ the word Sabbath does not for us Christians refer to a specific day, as it did for the Jews,”²⁶ which is followed by the citation of relevant Bible passages. Following the cue of Luther’s warning against trying to incorporate Old Testament ceremonial law into the Christian life and the understanding of sin, they rejected the arguments of the Adventists that the third commandment means that Christians were wrong in worshiping on the first day rather than the seventh. The target in Ottesen’s theses was not just Adventism, but included the general Reformed approach to the law and sin, as well as pietism’s inclination to expand the list of sins and to ignore the

²⁵ Martin Luther, “How the Christian is to Regard Moses,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 161–174.

²⁶ *Grace for Grace*, 145.

distinction established in the confessional writings between *jure divino* and *jure humano*, divine ordinance and human ordinance.

Lay-preaching

One of the challenges faced by the early synod pastors was the fact that many, perhaps even a majority, of the early Norwegian immigrants were involved to one degree or another in the pietistic movement in Norway and were followers of Hans Nielsen Hauge. Especially in the Illinois and Wisconsin settlements, the Haugean lay-preachers were very active.

One of the most problematic was Elling Eielsen. The lay-preaching controversy drew a sharp line between the Norwegian Synod and the pietistically inclined Norwegian groups, especially with the so-called Eielsen Synod (officially named the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). A segment of that group later came to be known as "Hauge's Synod." The controversy forced the synod to examine the doctrine of the ministry and to look closely at the relevant biblical texts and the confessional writings, especially Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession. The fact that the Norwegian Synod represented Norwegians who were oriented more toward the State Church of Norway and the university training of pastors generated in some places an intense distrust of the synod in the more pietistic communities.

The issue that required attention in that context was the matter of the call. The synod fathers clearly took what would be termed a "high view of the ministry," emphasizing the divinely instituted office of preaching as spelled out in AC VII and XIV, and Melancthon's "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope." At the same time, the synod stressed that it was through the Christian congregation and the laity that God calls and ordains pastors. H. A. Preus outlined the synod's conflict with the Eielsen Synod and its view of the ministry and the call in his 1867 Norway lectures.²⁷ It should also be remembered that Brandt and Ottesen also noted the problems of the Buffalo Synod.²⁸

Even though their church organization and ministry which they brought along from Norway was that of the church of Norway, they left behind them some episcopal parts of that polity and followed a polity firmly based on the congregation (this well before they met the Missourians). However, it seems clear from the forms they adopted

²⁷ H. A. Preus, *Vivacious Daughter*, trans. Todd Nicol (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990), 199ff.

²⁸ Meyer, 78, 79.

and their doctrine of the ministry that they were well aware of Melancthon's "Treatise." The polity they arrived at through the lay-preaching controversy was based on a high view of the ministry. H. A. Preus in his Norway lectures described the polity of the synod in some detail, and noted that while "the ecclesiastical government so-called in our church body is substantially different from that here in Norway, there is a resemblance in the way it specifically distributes authority and offices."²⁹ While avoiding the sacerdotal and hierarchical tendencies they might have seen early on in the Buffalo Synod, as well as in Norway, their doctrines of the church and ministry were not at all those followed by the Haugean pietists, or especially those of Elling Eielsen.

Absolution

Two other controversies showed the synod's dependence on the Lutheran Confessions as the correct understanding of God's Word. In its more extreme manifestations, the pietistic movement placed a heavy emphasis on the subjectivity and emotional response of faith. This led to a conditional absolution, that sins were forgiven *if*, or on the condition that, they believed it. This would, of course, have a parallel in the later election controversy. The synod retained an emphasis on absolution, both the absolution offered in private confession and the absolution which is simply the public proclamation of the gospel. The confessions argued against the Roman Catholic demand for an enumeration of conscious sins and for acts of satisfaction as a part of repentance, since that placed conditions on God's declaration of forgiveness. The synod pastors saw the conditional absolution of pietistic Lutheranism as equally wrong.

One aspect of this controversy that raised some eyebrows in the synod was the expression that absolution is a "powerful impartation" of the forgiveness of sins. That expression was used in a set of theses by Prof. Brohm of the Missouri Synod in a set of theses translated and presented to the Norwegian Synod by Prof. Laur. Larsen. The expression was not retained in the final theses of the synod, but they did say, "The absolution is always a real and valid absolution of God, although it does not benefit without faith."

Although the synod faced no controversy over the sacraments, the treatment of confession and absolution as a sacramental act, i.e., a means of grace that must not be made conditional, remained an important part of the synod's public confession.

²⁹ Preus, 51f.

The Gospel

Closely related, or perhaps even part of the same controversy, was the dispute labeled “The Gospel and Justification.” *Grace for Grace* introduces its subject: “The controversy on the doctrine of absolution soon brought out the fact that the real difference between the Norwegian Synod and its opponents lay in the very definition of ‘gospel.’”³⁰ The same could be said about the controversy involving conversion and election, so that in three of the five controversies the very heart of the Christian faith is at issue: the doctrine of the gospel. In the Augsburg Confession and Apology, as well as the rest of the Book of Concord, one of the most important sub-texts is the same question, “What is the gospel?” Once it is announced in AC IV, it is present at every point.

The particular point at issue was whether or not faith is a condition for an efficacious gospel. As *Grace for Grace* put it, “The opponents in accordance with the errors of Pietism, made the Gospel conditional on man’s faith in such a way that without faith there was in reality no Gospel either.”³¹ In other words, the opponents are criticized for presenting the gospel in such a way as to suggest that faith is the one work I must do in order to make God like me better. The synod argued that that faith does not validate the gospel promise of grace, but argued for the objectivity of the gospel or justification; they held that faith simply clings to the objective promise of forgiveness in the gospel or absolution, and that faith itself is solely the work of God in the sinner. Or, in Augustine’s terms, faith is the empty hand that receives God’s gift. Likewise, they argued, the opponents are wrong to suppose that justification becomes valid only when it is received subjectively by faith. Rather, faith as trust simply holds to the objective promise of God.

The vital conclusion of the disputes about absolution, the gospel, and justification, is that the gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the righteousness of Christ is an objective reality that is delivered to the individual and is received through faith; it is not validated or made real by faith, so that it is given conditionally and only real when faith is present. They also stressed that this takes place through the gospel which is proclaimed in absolution, preaching, and the sacraments. For that reason, the theology of the synod stood firmly on the powerful, efficacious Word of God and his sacraments as the means by which God the Holy Spirit works.

³⁰ *Grace for Grace*, 161.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Conversion and Election

It is not so difficult to see how all these issues come together in the controversy over conversion and election. Neither would it be a surprise to know that it was through ambiguation—the compromise of *Oppgjør* or *Madison Agreement* of 1912—that the Old Synod gave up the ghost.

The dispute that rocked the Old Norwegian synod and ultimately led to the formation of the Reorganized Synod, or ELS, in 1918, is usually referred to as “the Election Controversy.” The doctrine of election was involved, inevitably, but the critical question involved conversion: “How do I come to faith?” When one peers beneath the sometimes verbose and ponderous arguments in the various disputes, the issue always comes back to the same question: whether or not the gospel itself is conditioned by anything at all in man. If it depends on a human act, then the election of grace is not really *of grace* (Romans 11:5).

We won’t review the historical details of the election dispute, except that it was F. A. Schmidt, a former student and colleague of the Missouri Synod’s Professor Walther, who took issue with what Walther taught in a paper on the doctrine of election. Schmidt, though trained in the Missouri Synod, was called by the Norwegian Synod to its seminary, and he had for many years defended the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions. The position defended by Schmidt was that in eternity, God foresaw those who would come to faith, and therefore elected them to salvation on the basis of this foreseen faith, which thus conditions God’s grace on an act of man.

Schmidt, in responding to U. V. Koren’s theses on election in *Redegjørelse* [*ray’de-yurelse*, “An Accounting”],³² which was a critique of Schmidt’s position, wrote, “I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God’s word and our Lutheran Confessions, that ‘salvation *in a certain sense* does not depend on God alone.’”³³ Schmidt explained himself further by saying, “It is the called person himself who here must make a certain choice between the two possibilities, whereby it is decided whether he will let himself be

³² S. C. Ylvisaker, Christian Anderson, and G. O. Lillegard, *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), 173–188.

³³ *Lutherske Vidnesbyrd: Gamle og Nye* [*Lutheran Witness – Old and New*] 3, no. 33 (November 20, 1884), tr. T. A. Aaberg, *City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 36. Schmidt began publishing his views in this in this paper in January 1882.

helped and saved or he will refuse to let himself be helped.”³⁴ In 1912, Schmidt, on the first Union Committee, rejected the following thesis:

11. When a man is converted, the honor belongs to God alone, because He throughout, from first to last, without any cooperation on man's part, works conversion in the man who is converted, i.e., acknowledges his sin and believes in Jesus.

It was that same issue which permitted the Old Norwegian Synod to merge with two Norwegian churches which had disputed the position defended by the Norwegian Synod in the earlier dispute.

Conclusion

There can be many ways to sum up the theology of the Old Norwegian Synod and the “old paths” urged by Bjug Harstad. In their history of the ELS, *Built on the Rock*, Juul B. Madson and Herbert Larson called it “The Synod's flavor.”

Stated as simply as possible, the flavor of the Norwegian Synod was evangelical in contrast to legalistic; the Gospel of God rather than the Law of God was the dominant theme in its work....Established upon and building upon the foundation that the Scriptures are the Word of God and that justification by grace alone through faith alone is the central teaching of Scripture, the synod produced a flavor that was pleasant to many persons and extremely distasteful to others. If Christ was hated and persecuted, His servants can expect to be hated and persecuted. Disciples are not above their Master.³⁵ [LSQ](#)

³⁴ Quoted in translation in Ylvisaker, et al., 173. The quoted material was originally published in *Lutherske Vidnesyrde* by Schmidt.

³⁵ Juul B. Madson and J. Herbert Larson, *Built on the Rock* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1992), 33.

Enduring Impressions from the Austin Agreement of 1916: An Unintended Compromise with Far Reaching Effects

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IF THERE IS A SEGMENT OF EVANGELICAL Lutheran Synod history with which our pastors are most familiar, it is the controversy involving the doctrine of predestination. Much has been written on the subject in our circles.¹ Our centennial preparations, as you would expect, will reference the past struggles on election and conversion. What may not be so readily known, however, are the sad but significant occurrences between the time of the compromising Madison Settlement in 1912 (*Opgjør*) and the Lime Creek event of 1918. Here we are speaking of the background and the regrettable signing of the unfortunate agreement at Austin, Minnesota, at the close of 1916. Aside from marking that 100 year-old oft-forgotten session as one stone among many to be turned in reviewing ELS history, the Austin Agreement deserves our attention for what succeeding generations—plowing critically over the past—can glean as kernels of wisdom for their own circumstances. To any who dare imagine the story is *boring*, we retort, “This story has a *bearing*!” The story of Austin, for

¹ T. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: ELS Board for Publications, 1968); S. C. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943); A. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), esp. 91–128; W. W. Petersen, “Our Great Heritage,” 1993 ELS convention essay; Craig A. Ferkenstad, “A Table Set in the Wilderness,” 2003 ELS convention essay; J. Gernander, “The Drive to Opgjør,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 44, nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2004): 160–200; C. Ferkenstad, “The Way of Opgjør,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1993): 3–19; also cf. J. Moldstad, “Grace Before, In, and For All Time,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December 2013): 315–387.

example, has a bearing on the way members of a confessional Lutheran synod approach and/or carry on inter-church discussions.

Yes, Doctrine Counts!

Few who know anything about our ELS would question that we are a church that takes the Bible seriously. If they do, they generally confuse us with another “Evangelical Lutheran”—something. Included in our synod’s three-fold foundational purpose² we have this verse highlighted: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3 NKJ).

A church body worth its salt will work mightily to convey the simple, straightforward and powerful gospel message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. But it will also strive conscientiously to uphold and confess *every* scriptural teaching (i.e., God’s doctrine taken as a unit, “**the** faith”). When a church fails to do the latter, even a well-intentioned focus on the plain message of salvation erodes and eventually evaporates. Conversely, when a church properly adheres to and orthodoxly confesses *all* dogma in the Word, the predominance of the gospel of Christ and the inter-connected nature of each tenet to this one saving truth must prevail. Dr. Luther offered this assessment: “The most important article of the entire body of Christian doctrine is how we are saved. All theological disputations ought to look to this article and center in it. . . . If this article remains pure, the church also remains pure; but if it is falsified or fails, the church has become a harlot and is gone.”³ Furthermore, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession stresses the way in which the *Hauptartikel*—justification—both “illuminates and amplifies the honor of Christ,” and also is “of especial service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures and alone shows the way to unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and alone opens the door to the entire Bible.”⁴

² Section 120: The Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Chapter III: “The synod exists to carry out the command of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19–20), to contend for the faith (Jude 3), and to promote the development of Christian life (Galatians 5:22–25) within its membership.”

³ E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), #1253.

⁴ *Concordia Triglotta* (Minneapolis: Mott Press, 1955), Ap IV.2 (cf. translation from the German edition), 121.

Defining the Doctrine of Election

Did the church-goers really understand the issues involved? Could they explain how the Latin phrase *intuitu fidei* posed difficulties? The average person in the pew may not have grasped all the nuances, but—if listening carefully—realized it ultimately boiled down to a matter of the Third Article. It is either all by God’s grace, or else it is in some sense man-dependent.⁵

The biblical teaching of election or predestination can be viewed as a “double-whammy” on how a poor sinner as self is saved only and in every way by God’s grace alone! Election is not, nor is it to be seen as, the chief teaching in Scripture. Yet the proper presentation of this doctrine inescapably causes the eyes to shift center stage to the chief doctrine (justification) shining brightly in the limelight. There is no grace from God for sinners apart from the justifying work of Christ. Therefore, since God’s act in electing souls from eternity is *all grace* and never to be viewed as separated from it, the doctrine of predestination presupposes the atoning work of His Son and brings comfort to an individual by directing the soul wholly to the work of the holy Savior.⁶

How can election be defined in such a way that it presents the full package of God’s grace? Frankly, this is what was at stake in the old debates. If Christ’s grace is all in the mix, and if faith is needed to apprehend this grace, what role—if any—does faith have in the realm of predestination? Those who stayed only with Scripture (e.g., Ephesians 1, Romans 8, and John 15:16) rightly contended “faith flows from election.” They rejected the idea that “election flows from faith.” In order to include the totality of God’s saving grace in his divine election plan, we can speak of predestination as “the truth that God from eternity has in his mercy chosen people to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, and that this faith is worked in them by means of God’s Word and sacraments.”⁷

⁵ In 1884 F. A. Schmidt stunned people by saying, “... salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.”

⁶ We think here of the advice given to young Martin Luther from his father-confessor, Johann Staupitz. Luther had doubts about his own election, but Staupitz wisely counseled, “Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to make you sure about predestination” (LW 5:47).

⁷ Here referencing my publication, *Predestination: Chosen in Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 17.

Our Lutheran confessors link God's eternal decree of election with the way he in time has individuals apprehend his grace: "In this his eternal counsel, purpose and ordinance God has not only prepared salvation in general, but he has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted he wills by his grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end."⁸

Bringing us to the time of the Madison Settlement (1912) and what followed at Austin (1916), it serves us well to do a quick overview of the first round in the old debates. Remember, grace alone was at the forefront. Remember, even a slight variation in the interpretation of Scripture was the door opener for further falsehood.

The 1880s Election Controversy

You've heard of F. A. Schmidt⁹ and his false doctrine charges of Calvinism¹⁰ against Dr. C. F. W. Walther. Walther correctly stressed God's grace alone in an essay (1877) on election, but Schmidt countered¹¹ that Walther was making a disconnection between salvation by election and salvation by faith. In Schmidt's mind, this was a new kind of "crypto-Calvinism." Walther knew how faithful Lutherans in the past (e.g., Johann Gerhard, Pontoppidan) had made use of the expression "intuitu fidei," yet he discouraged its use because many were using it to afford an opening for synergism.

⁸ Theodore Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), FC SD XI.23, 619.

⁹ His dates are 1837–1928. He served as the Norwegian Synod's professor at Concordia Seminary from 1872–1876. In 1876 when he became president of the newly formed Norwegian seminary in Madison, WI.

¹⁰ Aaberg, 27: F. A. Schmidt reasoned that, since Walther and his supporters in the Norwegian Synod "taught an election of some, and yet refused to make faith the cause of that election, [they—according to Schmidt –] could not really teach that God wills the salvation of all."

¹¹ O. Asperheim first raised the charge against Walther and Missouri in 1878 at a pastoral conference for the Norwegians. Schmidt strongly took exception to Asperheim's accusation. Not long afterward, however, Schmidt changed his mind. He and H. A. Allwardt (who went from the Missouri Synod to the Ohio Synod) teamed up and especially became heated with Walther when Walther and Missouri countered that Schmidt and Allwardt were synergists. Schmidt says he became upset with the "tyrannical spirit" of Missouri. See the reprinted essay on F. A. Schmidt's life by C. Anderson, "Biographical Essay on F.A. Schmidt," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (March 2015): 91–102.

A prime reason why the Norwegian Synod became so embroiled in the election controversy, especially between 1883¹² and 1887, was not simply Schmidt's popularity. There was the wide use of Erik Pontoppidan's catechism ("Truth Unto Godliness") by the Scandinavians. An answer given on predestination in that book states, "God has appointed all those to eternal life whom he from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end." Lest we think those who framed the election doctrine in the pattern of Schmidt had a careless disregard for Scripture, we note there were favorite passages to which Schmidt and others made their appeal, e.g., Romans 8:29 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Neither of these verses make *faith* in the heart of an individual a proleptic *cause* for one's election by God from eternity (Ephesians 1:4-8; 2:8-9).

In 1884, Ulrik V. Koren, a district president in Iowa (later, Norwegian Synod president, 1894-1910), authored "An Accounting" (*En Redegjørelse*).¹³ In this historically revered and definitive writing, Koren exposed Schmidt's error through a comprehensive treatment of Scripture and the Confessions. For example, he states, "Since everything good in man is God's free and undeserved gift of grace, there is nothing in man which could induce God to elect him. Man's faith could not induce God to do this either, for faith is itself a free gift of grace from God..."¹⁴ Koren stopped short of condemning Pontoppidan of false doctrine. But he did express reservations about his definition. He described it as a tolerable "incomplete concept," as long as the doctrine of sin and grace would be kept pure.

The split in the Norwegian Synod occurred in 1887. One-third of the pastors and congregations left the synod. Schmidt and his followers formed the "Anti-Missourian Brotherhood." Not long after, they formed the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (1890). Here are the statistics on the damage: "Whereas in 1886, the Norwegian Synod consisted of 193 pastors, 723 congregations, and 143,885 souls; three

¹² This is the year the Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference (rejoining later in the ELS time).

¹³ For access: <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/an-accounting/>. We include the concluding portion of "An Accounting" in **Appendix C**.

¹⁴ "An Accounting" also is found in S. Ylvisaker, ed., *Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 173-188.

years later it numbered 138 pastors, 512 congregations, and 93,891 souls.”¹⁵

As one century was drawing to a close and the curtains were opening to another, merger-enthusiasm ruled the day. The old faithful Norwegian Synod soon became an unsuspecting victim. The cries were there for one large Norwegian body—urged by a desire for a unified English hymnbook (1913), by a Norwegian royal visit requesting cultural preservation, by a call for joint work in missions, and by hope for a united 400th Reformation anniversary celebration. Sadly and ironically, the Norwegian Synod, suffering with a faithful leader (Koren) who was physically ill, soon began holding union talks with the former Schmidt group. The Hauge Synod had issued the invitation, and the new president for the Norwegian Synod, H. G. Stub (1910), went along for the ride. At first, Stub did so cautiously.¹⁶ Then, Stub moved avidly for reaching an agreement with the very church bodies judged previously as erring.¹⁷ So much had he flipped,¹⁸ that, in a later address (1923) to the new merger body, Stub aimed this jab at those who had

¹⁵ C. Ferkenstad, “A Table in the Wilderness: Our Legacy as the Spiritual Successors of the Norwegian Synod,” in *ELS Synod Report* 2003, 50.

¹⁶ He was a staunch defender of the truth early on. Concordia Seminary in St. Louis even conferred on him an honorary doctorate, and “this was more than a mere courteous gesture....” (*Concordia Theological Monthly* 2, no. 10 [October 1931]: 778).

¹⁷ The liberal element backed Stub. The cry was: “Let’s break the Decorah ring!” In 1910, with Koren about 84 years of age and close to death, Stub as vice president delivered Koren’s presidential address. Conveniently, Stub omitted part of the address from Koren that seemed—for Stub’s purposes—too strident. The paragraph omitted reads as follows: “The doctrinal discussions which have been carried on with other Norwegian Lutheran church bodies have not, it is my conviction, led to any reliable results. The disagreement which appeared in the discussion of the last point in which we follow the Book of Concord word for word surely rests on disagreement in the doctrine of conversion. That a series of theses on this doctrine is adopted does not prove that there is thorough agreement. This we have experienced before when all our positive theses were accepted while violent objections were made to the antitheses although these were only inevitable conclusions of the former. If only insignificant things were at stake, then it would not be right to separate; but when the question is raised whether God *alone* is our Savior, then we cannot be too careful. Perhaps the necessary antitheses may yet be submitted. If agreement concerning such things could be attained, then there would be real rejoicing” (Ylvisaker, *Grace for Grace*, 98, 99).

¹⁸ See Bjug Harstad, *Pioneer Days and Other Events Briefly Sketched for the 75th Anniversary of the Synod for the Norwegian Evang. Lutheran Church of America* (Mankato: Bethany College, 1928), 63. Harstad records a Sioux Falls, SD, street conversation (1914) where Stub was asked whether he had changed his doctrinal position. He replied, “No.” When asked if the United Church had changed, he also replied, “No.” Then, how could he claim there was unity in doctrine? Stub answered that “all this must now be forgotten and stricken out.”

helped organize the ELS: “Our hearts can be touched when we think of the fact that those with whom we want so much to be brethren can be captivated with a position which can only be designated as an expression of fanaticism.”¹⁹

*Opgjør*²⁰ was the documentary tool used for merging the three synods: the Norwegian Synod, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the Hauge Synod. A sizable number of pastors and laity in the Norwegian Synod objected to any doctrinal compromise, but Stub defended and promoted the “Madison Settlement.”²¹ Quickly, a minority formed and issued reports against the acceptance of the document. But finally—after many efforts, including Austin—even most of the men who originally cast their lot with the minority ended up joining the majority and entering the 1917 merger. This was done with little change to the *Opgjør*.

The Issue with the Madison Settlement

The 1912 document was a compromise. It lived up to its intended purpose of letting doctrinal disagreements stand with no demarcating fellowship repercussions. The election error of the 1880s—championed by Schmidt, Allwardt, Stellhorn, et. al.—had wormed its way into this union statement. It was sold to the Lutheran membership as “faithfully preserving” the doctrinal position of the old Norwegian synod.²² In reality it was a sell-out to unionism at the price of truth—*God’s* truth. *Opgjør* permitted either “Form One”—as it was known (the election teaching of the Formula, expounded well by Walther and Koren)—or “Form Two” (the teaching set forth in Pontoppidan’s catechism) to have equal footing “without reservation.” The “Form Two” expression, using

¹⁹ Found in G. A. Gullixson’s presidential address to the synod in 1924; translated by J. H. Larson in 2004. Regarding Stub’s jab, Gullixson remarked, “We are reminded by it of the Philippists’ crass attack against and judgment upon the orthodox Lutherans who testified against them.”

²⁰ Norsk for “settlement;” sometimes spelled *oppjør*. In our circles, the word has become synonymous with “compromise.” In a brief entitled “The Norwegian Synod” by Rev. G. A. Gullixson (cf. his files C–D 215 A in the ELS Archives, c. 1925), he records this apropos assessment: “The doctrinal basis of this union known as the ‘Opgjør’—‘agreement’ did not and does not now represent the Lutheran stand which the conservative body—the Synod of the Norw. Ev. Luth. Church of America held through all the years of its existence, but is a compromise on the very questions which had been an issue for more than thirty years.”

²¹ See **Appendix 1** for the full and final edition of “The Madison Agreement.”

²² Aaberg, 52. Further, “There was, of course, this distinct difference that in the 1880’s the Synod, in granting toleration for the Second Form, actually did reject all synergistic errors... (Aaberg, 60).

“in view of faith,” had been permitted earlier by Koren (*An Accounting*) *only* as an “incomplete concept of election” and to be understood only “in the manner in which it was developed by John Gerhard.”²³ Never was the intent to let the two ways of expressing election stand side-by-side without explanation or without strong preference given.

Reflecting back on *Opgjør* over a decade later, Rev. G. A. Gullixson, then-president of the reorganized synod (ELS), expressed a deeply critical sentiment shared by many:

We and many other Lutherans with us were struck with terror when we saw that in *Opgjør* a doctrine of election which is not the teaching of the Word of God and which is not the teaching of our Lutheran Confessions was openly acknowledged in *Opgjør* alongside the biblical and Lutheran doctrine set forth in the 11th Article of the Formula of Concord. No less were we astounded when we saw that in order to achieve the merger of the three Norwegian Lutheran church bodies it was necessary to omit ten paragraphs of the 11th Article of the Formula of Concord so that the teaching which was to be equal with the teaching of the Confessions could receive a more prominent place alongside the biblical teaching. Our people were, however, to believe that this came from the Lord and that it was presented to our people as if unity in doctrine was now achieved which would justify a merger. There is deceit in the composition of the compromise and deceit was used in forcing the union of the three church bodies through.²⁴

There was more to the Madison Settlement than the “two forms” issue. Even more egregiously, the document contained an error on the doctrine of conversion since it spoke of natural man has having “a sense or feeling of responsibility regarding the acceptance of grace.” Aaberg rightly defines the problem: “Only when regeneration has taken place in a man can he be said to possess any spiritual sense or responsibility regarding the acceptance of grace, therefore he has already been converted and has accepted God’s grace in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.”²⁵ The wording in the agreement may not have been

²³ Gerhard had said, “The merit of Christ is the cause of our election. But since the merit of Christ does not benefit anyone without faith, therefore we say that the regard to faith is a component part of the decree of election.” See Ylvisaker, 183.

²⁴ Presidential address to the synod in 1924; translated by J. H. Larson in 2004.

²⁵ Aaberg, 50.

obvious at first (“... weaken man’s sense of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace”). But upon closer examination, it had to be recognized that *Opgjør* confused the order between election and faith, attributing in fallen man some inkling toward responsibly accepting Christ as having a bearing in the decree of election.

A Sizable Minority Raises Concerns

The *exact* number of Norwegian Synod pastors who objected to the compromise has not been easily determined. One might reasonably conjecture that between the 1912 Madison Agreement and the larger Minority meeting (dealing with the Austin Agreement), just six months prior to the 1917 summer merger, those numerically opposed would have been more in force earlier than later. However, it is noteworthy that from the time *Opgjør* was accepted by the three church bodies in 1912 as the basis for merger, a growing number of pastors and laymen who studied the document began to have doubts. J. E. Thoen, one of the original thirteen pastors at Lime Creek in 1918, reflected on the intervening years: “As time passed, however, the number of those who objected to ‘Opgjør’ as a basis for union, increased rapidly. The reason for this was, that it became more and more apparent, that an agreement in doctrine had not been attained by the adoption of ‘Opgjør.’ The very fact, that leaders of both parties declared, they found their doctrine in ‘Opgjør,’ and that they had not changed their doctrine, led to a conclusion that it was a compromise.... The opposition within the Norwegian Synod grew to a considerable minority.”²⁶ We know that by the time of the Minority meeting at the West Hotel in Minneapolis (dealing with the Austin Agreement), January 17, 1917, the low number reported is 100, while the high is 200.²⁷

A special convention of the Norwegian Synod was called for May 18–24, 1916. The Minority demanded that three changes would need to be made to the Madison Agreement before they would consent to entering the merger. The changes were adopted by 150–200 pastors and laymen. We can summarize these changes as: 1) removing the “unreserved acceptance” of the Second Form; 2) including a lengthier citation of Formula of Concord, Article XI: pars. 1–10, not just 10–20;

²⁶ J. E. Thoen, “The Austin Agreement,” *Luthersk Tidende and Lutheran Sentinel* 8, no. 18 (May 6, 1925): 275.

²⁷ A. Harstad, “The Story of the Austin Agreement,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (June 1983): 14. In 1913 at a special convention of the Norwegian Synod, 394 votes were for the Madison Agreement, while 106 were registered against.

and 3) the removal of the reference to natural man's "acceptance" responsibility in conversion.

On a side note, following that special convention in May of 1916, congregations served by the Minority were passing resolutions. Recently our ELS Archives came into possession of a hand-written resolution passed by St. Mark's Lutheran, Chicago, Illinois, in the month of September of 1916. The resolution reads: "On all motions regarding the Union Question passed by the Norwegian Synod at its meeting in May 1916, St. Mark's Ev. Luth. Congregation of Chicago votes No. The Congregation protests against transferring the Norwegian Synod's property to the new Norwegian Church body.' Resolution moved by John Jacobsen and seconded by Carl T. Olsen. Unanimously adopted Sept. 11th, 1916."²⁸

The Minority in 1916 was well represented. Dr. Christian Keyser Preus,²⁹ then-president of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and his local pastor, Rev. Isaac Bertinus Torrison³⁰ who served First Lutheran Church, Decorah, ably led the initial charge against *Opgjør*. From those representing the pro-Madison side, we should mention two influential

²⁸ Rev. J. A. Moldstad served the Chicago, Illinois, parish from July 15, 1906 until his death on June 4, 1946. The official notice of the meeting is in his personal handwriting.

²⁹ Christian Keyser Preus (1852–1921), son of Herman Amberg Preus, was vice president of the Norwegian Synod in 1911. He became the second president of Lutheran College, Decorah, Iowa in 1902. C. K. was the grandfather of J. A. O. Preus and Robert Preus. C.K., along with his father H. A., was deposed as pastor of the Norway Grove congregation, DeForest, WI, on Good Friday, 1883. (This writer's grandfather, J. A. Moldstad [1874–1946], was a nine-year-old member of the congregation who had to witness the sad event.)

³⁰ Torrison's dates are 1889–1929. Before coming to Decorah, he had served as pastor in Waco, Texas, and also at the well-established congregation of St. Paul's in Chicago, Illinois. When he came to First Lutheran he also was appointed a professor at Luther College, but with limited teaching duties—a two-hour a week class in Erik Pontoppidan's *Forklaring* (Explanation) to Lutheran's Small Catechism. He was a graduate of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and had studied under C. F. W. Walther. Torrison married Elisabeth Koren (one of U. V. Koren's nine children) in 1889. Leigh Jordahl sums up Isaac Torrison this way: "He was thoroughly conservative, had no interest in novelties, and his sermons were crafted accordingly. 'Walk in the old paths, wherein it is good to walk,' was a motto of the Norwegian Synod, and everything in Torrison's ministry reflected his respect for tradition.... If Torrison's orthodoxy was strict and, according to some, unbending, his pastoral practice was not rigoristic. Known as a gentleman, he was formal in relationships but was also known for his warm heart.... Torrison was a house-calling pastor and won the deep affection of his flock. He made regular rounds of calls on horseback. He shared with his brother-in-law, Paul Koren, an affection for horses" (text provided by Jordahl, found in Dr. Robert Preus file, C-D 284, ELS Archives).

United Church representatives: Dr. John Nathan Kildahl,³¹ president of St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, and Prof. Lars Wilhelm Boe, who at the time was serving as the general secretary for the UNLC. The latter two, at their invitation, made a trip in the fall of 1916 to Decorah to meet with Preus and Torrison. The purpose for the informal meeting was to see if something could be done to prevent a split and still bring the Minority group into the proposed union set for the coming year (NLCA). “The conversations were carried on informally and in a completely frank and friendly spirit. No doubt the friendship which had existed between Dr. Kildahl and Pastor Torrison since college days (they were classmates and fast friends at Luther College) had not a little to do with the spirit that pervaded the discussions.”³²

Meeting at Austin, Minnesota

Shortly after the informal gathering at Decorah, the four men drew up a statement attempting to address the three main challenges with *Oppljøer*. It was passed along to the Joint Union Committee for the new church body. Would the committee accept what the four had written? That is, would the committee accept the fact that the Minority could enter into the merger on its own terms: “to adopt an agreement with us in which these three things, which cause us scruples, are omitted or changed”³³? The committee, meeting in Minneapolis on October 10, 1916, dismissed the statement, saying it would cause some misunderstandings and legal issues. But rather than completely give up trying to work with the Minority representatives, they decided to have that same evening a newly formed subcommittee (Prof. Wee, Rev. Tangjerd, and Rev. I. D. Ylvisaker) meet with Preus and Torrison. The men from this Union-assigned three-member committee suggested a plan whereby the Minority could list reservations to the Madison Settlement and yet go

³¹ A letter addressed to F. A. Schmidt by Kildahl on January 9, 1913, reveals an interesting insight. Kildahl, a Schmidt friend and sympathizer, wrote, “As I have said before, your battle against the false doctrine of the Missouriians has not been in vain. It has led to victory among the Norwegians in this country.... And finally you can have the satisfaction that your struggle has borne fruit, and that you have saved the Norwegian people in America from Calvinism.... It is oft thus, that he who has taken the lead in a great cause, and has of necessity had to make many enemies, has not from his contemporaries always gotten the thanks due him; but history has rendered a more righteous judgment” (from the ELS Archives).

³² J. C. K. Preus, who died in 1983 at age 102 and was the son of C.K., wrote in 1958 a kind of “defense” for his father’s actions in the Austin matter: “The Union Movement and the ‘Minority’” (Minneapolis: J.C.K. Preus, 1917), 3.

³³ Aaberg, 63.

into the merger *without* entering any special agreement.³⁴ Both Preus and Torrison would not consent to this arrangement.

However, the October 10th evening meeting seemed to set the stage for what would soon occur at Austin, Minnesota, only a month later. When Preus and Torrison returned home to Iowa they received an interesting notice from the Union Committee. The notice stated that, while the committee could not approve the “method of procedure” (felt it would cause confusion) proposed by Preus and Torrison, they nevertheless said they would grant the request of the two men as far as “the substance” was concerned. But Preus and Torrison also rejected this invitation. They were not sold on the idea that their request (to make the changes in *Opgjør*) would be honored in the formation of the Merger church.

Once again, the Union Committee, wanting to keep the communication lines open with Preus and Torrison, elected a new subcommittee, this time to arrange a meeting at Austin, Minnesota, in November of 1916. The men chosen by the Union Committee for this particular subcommittee were Kildahl, Wee, and Jordahl.

The Austin Agreement

The upshot of this November session was acknowledging the request coming from Preus and Torrison—a request also on behalf of a group of men and congregations they represented—to be “an adequate expression for unity of faith” and therefore inviting them to join the union “under complete equality and mutual fraternal recognition.” Yet, a very significant notation was added: **“NOTE: It is self-evident that the above stated resolution must not be interpreted to mean that ‘Opgjør’ as the basis for union between the three contracting churches, is thereby abbreviated or changed.”**³⁵ Technically, this amicably mutual resolution is termed “The Invitation,” while *Opgjør* and the Preus/Torrison proposed emendations to it comprise what is known as the “Austin Agreement.”

J. E. Thoen, writing on behalf of those who had to bear the “Pharisee” label³⁶ for not entering the merger, assesses how the Austin

³⁴ Thoen, 277.

³⁵ Thoen, 279; Aaberg, 65. The note was affixed by the official Joint Committee, upon the advice of the reporting subcommittee, at a meeting on December 5–7, 1916.

³⁶ “The pastors of the Synod have been called a ‘bunch of pharisees,’ who regard themselves wiser than others, and pride themselves on the fact that they did not join the union.” Thoen, 275.

Agreement was frequently misused in the days and years following its transaction:

It has been claimed by some of the minority who joined the merger on the basis of the “Austin Agreement,” that this document is the doctrinal basis of the union. Even if this were true, we are glad we did not join because the union would be of the same character as under the old “Opgjør.” It is not true, however, that the “Austin Agreement” has taken the place of “Opgjør” as a basis of union. The “Austin Agreement” itself was not even voted on by the three churches according to the official records.³⁷

Before critically analyzing the Austin Agreement³⁸ we need to be aware of some communication involving Dr. C. K. Preus and Rev. I. B. Torrison with respected leaders from the Missouri Synod, namely Dr. Franz Pieper, Dr. W.N.T. Dau, and Dr. Theodore Graebner. In order to prepare for a meeting of the minority leaders in the Norwegian Synod, set for January 17–18, 1917, where the Joint Union Committee’s action on the Austin Agreement was to be explained for the purpose of enlisting support, Preus and Torrison decided to contact Pieper, Dau, and Graebner to see what these trusted friends might advise. Although the Norwegian Synod had pulled out of the Synodical Conference while the election controversy was underway (1883), many Synodical Conference leaders such as the three from Missouri were more than sideline observers. Pieper, for example, had written a booklet entitled *Conversion and Election—A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America* (1913)³⁹ where the stakes were raised on the issue of *Opgjør*. It was right after Christmas on December 28, 1916, that the five men held a five-hour meeting in St. Louis, Missouri. Preus and Torrison were looking for the answer to this question: “Whether we instead of separating and forming a separate body could, on the strength of the concessions made to us in the Austin Agreement, join the new body.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Thoen, 282.

³⁸ Which one can find in great detail in J. E. Thoen’s *Sentinel* article (pp. 278–286), as well as in Aaberg, 65–70.

³⁹ The German title is: *Zur Einigung der amerikanisch-lutherischen Kirche in der Lehre von der Bekehrung und Gnadenwahl*. The booklet closes: “For the sake of the matter under discussion we cordially request both the Norwegian Lutherans and the Lutherans speaking other tongues: ‘Do hear and examine what the Missourians have to say!’”

⁴⁰ Johan Carl Keyser Preus, son of C. K. Preus, wrote a “set the record straight” apology for the minority men who went into the Union, known as “The Union

With a date of January 9, 1917, a little over a week before the minority was to meet in Minneapolis, a letter came from the Missouri professors. Aaberg reports, “[The Missourians] could not advise anyone to enter the new body, but did advise the Minority to remain in the Synod for the present and to testify.”⁴¹ By the way, we cannot overlook the statement in *Grace for Grace* that is rather telling concerning the way in which the doctrinal dialogue was being conducted at that point in time: “Some of the chosen Minority leaders felt sure that the United Church would give them fairer treatment than they had received from the Majority party in the Synod...” [Stub, et. al.].⁴²

In fairness to C. K. Preus and Torrison, it appears that Pieper’s letter “did not address itself directly to the question submitted... which was in effect whether, on the basis of the Austin Agreement, the ‘Minority’ could enter the new body then in the making.... Naturally Preus and Torrison were not a little nonplussed and perturbed at the content of the communication.”⁴³ While it is true that Preus and Torrison may have used the advice letter (wrongly or rightly) as a call to stay in there and join in the merger in order to bear testimony to the truth, others—including my own grandfather⁴⁴—fully disagreed with this

Movement and the ‘Minority,’ 1917.” J.C.K. Preus was brother of the former governor of Minnesota and uncle to Jack and Robert. The question cited is found on pp. 4 & 5 of the pamphlet.

⁴¹ Aaberg, 65.

⁴² Ylvisaker, 109–110.

⁴³ J. C. K. Preus, “Union Movement,” 9. The Preus family points to letter correspondence between 1922–1938 involving Dr. Nils Ylvisaker and Dr. Theo. Graebner, which *supposedly* illustrates that Pieper had written a “meaningless letter” that contributed to misunderstanding and “evasive tactics.” In the September 1, 1917, issue of *Luthersk Tidende*, Dr. Th. Graebner submitted the English translation of the Pieper letter (German) and added a note: “This letter concerns itself only with the period of time from January to June. Absolutely.”

⁴⁴ The minutes of a meeting at the Aberdeen Hotel on June 5, 1917 (four days later, the merger occurred), record this conversation: “Rev. J. A. Moldstad: Did you and do you now advise to stay in the Norwegian Synod and enter the new body with the Synod? Prof. Dau: We did not so advise. It was our understanding that the Austin Document would be presented to the three bodies for discussion. Our answer does not look beyond the point when this document is presented to the Synod and acted upon. We did not say what to do, if it so happens that the Synod rejects the Austin Agreement; or if they invite you to enter the new body with the privilege of your views. Rev. J. J. Strand: Would it be right to enter the new body if the Austin Agreement is adopted? Dr. Dau: Yes. Rev. J. A. Moldstad: I think that Prof. Dau has misunderstood the question or else he would not unreservedly answer ‘Yes.’ Dr. Pieper: If demands by minority agree with Scripture, then Opgjør must be changed....” *Clergy Bulletin* Supplement, found in ELS Archives, Rev. T. N. Teigen Files, C–D 204.

interpretation of Pieper's letter. Aaberg includes a lengthy section at the end of his book (pp. 274–282) where he evaluates the documentary evidence. He concludes, "The writer is of the opinion that there should be no question in anyone's mind as to what advice the Missouri professors gave Preus and Torrison in this letter, namely, not to enter the Merger itself, but to remain in the Norwegian Synod before the Merger and bear witness to the truth, seeking to secure recognition for the truth."⁴⁵

Examination of the Agreement

Here we will list briefly both the positive and negative aspects of the results of what ostensibly occurred at Austin, Minnesota, at the end of 1916. For a more thorough explanation, we refer you to the J. E. Thoen article in the *Lutheran Sentinel*, May 6, 1925.

Positive: The first paragraph of *Opgjør* is to be omitted. This means that the stated view of the United Church putting both forms of election on an equal par with each other, apart from any reservations, was removed.

Negative: The paragraph (originally, second) which, as a result of omitting the first, now leads *Opgjør*, speaks of the two forms of doctrine "that should not cause division, and disturb that unity of spirit in the bonds of peace which God wills should exist among us." Since the purpose of the paragraph is to minimize the concerns of synergism by any who were using the so-called "second form" in presenting election, how could the minority concede that the teachers of the United Church were agreed with them in their understanding and use of the second form?

Positive: The extended reference of the Formula of Concord Article XI,⁴⁶ now to include paragraphs 1–20 and not only 10–20, is helpful; it clarifies how the Formula is not including universal redemption in the decree of election.

Negative: By extending the number of paragraphs, however, the compromise already occurring in the (new) introductory paragraph of *Opgjør* is not alleviated.

Negative: The third paragraph in *Opgjør* contains the word "duty" instead of "responsibility," and this is somewhat better but does not change the false doctrine of the original. The original said that man

⁴⁵ Aaberg, 280.

⁴⁶ There is an error in the May 6, 1925, *Lutheran Sentinel* article. Roman numerals (II) are used for what obviously is to be the number "11."

has a “feeling of *responsibility* over against the acceptance of grace.” The substitute reads, “... feeling of *duty* over against the acceptance of grace.” In either case, it is man in his natural state, i.e., dead in trespasses and sin from conception and birth, being referenced. How can natural man be described as conscious (prior to conversion) of such a feeling, let alone that such a feeling might be “weakened”—when this is a *non ens*? This flies in the face of 1 Corinthians 2:14: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

In regard to this last point, Thoen expressively replies to what some in the “larger minority” were asserting by way of persuasion. Of this *feeling* of duty by natural man, he writes:

If anyone will insist, that the intention is merely to emphasize the necessity of preaching the law in its full force, and that the guilt of the sinner be pressed upon him, so that he may realize his need of God’s grace in Christ, he gives the phrase a sense which the words and connection do not convey. We must keep constantly in mind that this is to present *an agreement in doctrine* between those who teach that man’s good conduct is the deciding factor in election, and those who deny this. Any ambiguous statement concerning the point of difference cannot be accepted as an expression of unity in doctrine.⁴⁷

Positive: The fourth and fifth paragraphs of *Opgjør*, according to the Austin proposal, were to remain unchanged from the original. This was fine. Synergism is clearly rejected.

Negative: The trouble, however, is that when it follows the compromising third paragraph the thrust is lost. It begs the question: Is synergism rejected or allowed to stand?

Finally, it should be noted that the whole “Austin Agreement” did not receive the kind of attention the minority at first had envisioned. Here is why. A layman by the name of L. S. Swenson brought the resolution to the Joint Committee meeting on January 23, 1917. Preus and Torrison had to be absent for the day. At the moment Swenson presented it, he was asked if the resolution (Austin Agreement) was meant for publication in the records. Unfortunately he responded, “It is not the intention that this shall be published. That which the

⁴⁷ Thoen, 281.

communication concerns itself with is that the so-called minority has accepted the union committee's invitation to be along in the union."⁴⁸ As a result, even though C. K. Preus eventually read orally the whole resolution at the 1917 merger convention,⁴⁹ the official record for the merger does not cite the agreement.

Historians may debate among themselves as to whether Preus and Torrison and their supporters were "outwitted" or "hoodwinked" or "tricked." Some may call it so, while other would say that is simply how negotiations with synergists or crypto-synergists come out in the wash. Theodore Aaberg captures well the appropriate synopsis:

There is much evidence in the negotiation of the "Austin Settlement" to show that they not only cherished the truth but also intended that it should sound forth, and eventually prevail over the synergistic error in the new church body. They undoubtedly have proclaimed the truth in their own teaching and preaching in the classroom and in the pulpit where they have served, and have thereby been a blessing to the Merger. Yet the final basis on which they entered the new church body effectively denied to them the opportunity for a true state of confession (*status confessionis*), and they, by their acceptance of that basis, denied it to themselves.⁵⁰

Austin's Impact on Lutheran Unity Efforts

History is never a study unto itself. Always lessons are to be learned. Any generation giving scant attention to the records of the past treads new ground at its own peril. While experiencing present blunders, people characteristically reflect with a sigh, "Why didn't we listen and learn?" You've heard it said: There are two kinds of people in the world—those interested in history and those who soon will be. Whenever history and doctrine intersect, the heirloom for any intended

⁴⁸ Aaberg, 67.

⁴⁹ The speech by C. K. Preus is in *Concordia Theological Monthly* 9, no. 1 (January 1938): 48–49. Among his remarks is recorded this interesting explanation of how he viewed the closing note by the Joint Committee: "A footnote was added by the committee, which, however, did not alter the content of the invitation." In the same *CTM*, Preus is quoted in the *Report of 1917* (460) as saying, "Now the invitation has been extended by this body, and we are convinced that it grants us what we have desired, if not according to the letter (*formaliter*) then according to the content (*realiter*) as it is expressed" (47).

⁵⁰ Aaberg, 69.

or unintended recipients increases in value. How will the treasure that is transmitted be handled?

Earthly inheritances can be handed down from generation to generation more or less automatically, but not so the *great* heritage. Truth, as a body of doctrine, can indeed be set before a people by the preceding generation, but each succeeding generation must, through the Holy Spirit, make this truth its own as part of its very faith and life before it can actually be said to possess it.⁵¹

What can we as heirs of ELS history observe particularly from the Austin misfortune? What enduring impressions have we inherited from what occurred a hundred years back at this time? For starters, we could list seven takeaways for our generation:

1. The rush for unity at all costs: a powerful incentive

This can be seen in the way H. G. Stub forged ahead.⁵² The push for the use of English language and a common hymnbook in 1913 played a role. There was the visit by Norwegian royalty, invoking a desire for a cultural unity on American soil. Clearly, too, a compelling pressure existed to leave behind and bury the wounds from the old doctrinal battles. Even the numbers involved in the 1917 merger presented a formidable incentive. C. Nelson reports, "... over 92 percent of Norwegian Lutherans, comprising over 30 percent of all Norwegians in America, combined to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America." He goes on to note, "At the time of the merger there were 1,031 pastors, 3,009 congregations, 474,715 members."⁵³

2. Compromising truth inevitably fortifies falsehood: Note ELCA's history.

It was C. P. Krauth who well described the course of error. "It begins by asking toleration.... Indulged in this for a time, error goes on to assert equal rights.... From this point error soon goes on to its natural end,

⁵¹ Ibid., 265.

⁵² At the time of Stub's death, the October 1931 *Concordia Theological Monthly* (2, no. 10) said, among other things, "Our explanation of Dr. Stub's attitude in 1917 is that, imbued with a zeal for uniting warring elements in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, he became too enthusiastic and thus was led to endorse a union which was not resting on true unity in doctrine and practice" (778).

⁵³ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Norwegian Lutherans in America*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 372.

which is to assert supremacy.”⁵⁴ We can use expressions like the slippery slope, the muddy stream, the crack in the door, the dominoes falling, the poisoned well, etc. No matter how we picture the insidious nature of evil and its right-hand cohort in crime—false doctrine—we see the pattern where error once discovered but permitted becomes not only embraced but entrenched. Who could have imagined a one-time conservative church body with members like Torrison and Preus moving in less than a century to embrace and celebrate homosexuality? “If a person first begins to be indifferent in little things, it quickly goes further, so that in the course of a generation a person can become ripe for the greatest apostasy.”⁵⁵ There always exists a crucial inter-connection among all of the doctrines of Holy Scripture. Permitting majority opinion to determine truth can never be the method of sound exegesis. The proper cry must be, “Back to the Word alone!”⁵⁶

It is our duty who have the whole truth of God to reject every compromise with unscriptural teaching and to insist on the Bible doctrines at every point. We are bound by the Word of God,—a clear word which leaves no room for differences of opinion in any Christian doctrine. We must oppose those who contend against that word, whether they do so willfully or blindly, though it be with sorrow in our hearts and with fear, lest we fail in our task of being faithful to the truth while showing true Christian charity to those who deny it.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963 reprint), 195–196.

⁵⁵ From a 1928 ELS Presidential address by Rev. Christian Anderson; 2004 translation by H. Larson.

⁵⁶ We are pleased to note that in recent years a number of former ELCA pastors and members have taken a stand for which they have paid a price, forming the NALC and the LCMC. Rather than gloat and become smug in our own confessional synodical sanctuary, what can we do to assist those who may be searching for a return to Bible-based dogma and practice? “Since we cannot practice church fellowship with them since we are not in doctrinal agreement, we can find ways to encourage and support them that do not involve joint prayer or joint worship. Free conferences are a way to discuss issues in light of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.... We can also pray for these church bodies and their members, that through their renewed emphasis on the authority of God’s Word, they would be led to study that Word and grow stronger in their faith and confession” (S. Stafford, “Lutherans in America: The NALC and LCMC,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 55, no. 4 [December 2015]: 390).

⁵⁷ George Lillegard, *Faith of our Fathers* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1953), 4.

It is painful to observe that even now only individuals from our former brethren in faith have declared themselves free of responsibility for un-Lutheran doctrine and un-churchly practice in “The Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.” I wonder if they really comfort themselves with the deplorable statement which the majority in the Norwegian Synod adopted in 1913, that “the Synod, as a church body, will not be responsible for the statements of individual men, whether orally or in print, unless it is in one or another manner the same as the synod has sanctioned.” The Lord certainly does not bow before what a majority wants or does not want. Because he says to everyone in Leviticus 19:17: “You shall in any wise rebuke your neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.” And Ezekiel 33:8: “If you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand.”⁵⁸

3. ELS origination: In trials, the Lord also presents opportunities and blessings.

As difficult as it was to begin anew, the thirteen pastors and congregations which met at Lime Creek in 1918 had every reason to believe the Lord was behind them. Oh, they did not know if the synod they were forming—or better, reorganizing—would amount to anything in terms of recognized churchly standards. Nevertheless, they pressed on.⁵⁹ On the very same day when “merger mania” was celebrated in St. Paul, Minnesota, the small group of faithful pastors gathered across the street. Their meager and inauspicious beginnings at the Aberdeen Hotel would

⁵⁸ From a 1922 ELS Presidential Address by Rev. G. A. Gullixson; 2004 translation by Rev. H. Larson.

⁵⁹ In a paper Rev. Walther C. Gullixson delivered to the Concordia Historical Institute in 1987, he relates an interesting anecdote from the Gullixson family history. It shows the pressure and inner-family tension that existed in connection with the 1917 merger. (Walt’s father [and Ted’s grandfather] was G. A. Gullixson, who was one of twenty-one pastors present in May 1919 when the ELS formally adopted its constitution at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, Albert Lea, MN.) Walther writes, “In 1917 my father and his younger brother, Dr. T. F. Gullixson, both decided the night before the grand parade to leave for home and not join the union. My father left for Chicago on an early evening train; and his brother Todd was waiting for a train to leave for Minot, N.D., when a number of the officials talked with him at the station and persuaded him to stay and join the union. He later became President of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. Thus families were split and were no longer in church fellowship” (presented at the 19th Conference on Archives and History, Nov. 4–6, 1987).

result in a church body today which, by God's grace and that alone, is centered in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith; owns and operates its own college and seminary; has an active world mission program, as well as home missions; has approximately 130 congregations in 18 states; has about 175 men on its clergy roster and over 95 male and female school teachers; and is blessed to have 21 Lutheran elementary schools and preschools.⁶⁰

In 1928 when the synod observed its tenth anniversary and also the seventy-fifth of the formation of the Norwegian Synod (1853), Rev. Christian Anderson stated, "When we celebrate the 75th Jubilee of the Norwegian Synod, then it is not as some seem to believe, in order to try to exalt ourselves and to bask in the glory which the achievements of the fathers cast around us; but it is in order that we thereby can be encouraged to hold fast to the glorious heritage which the fathers have left behind, and in order to witness as they did. And we sorely need this encouragement."⁶¹

4. "Triple U" produced—sharpening the way to go about unity efforts

The ELS in 1936 approved for publication a useful document known as "Triple-U" (Unity, Union, Unionism).⁶² The series of six theses first appeared in 1935. The Triple-U sets a cautious path for official inter-church doctrinal discussions. Later that same year, essays by various pastors covered aspects of the theses. From those essays a revision was produced that went before the synod's 1936 General Pastoral Conference. There was much concern at the time for the way

⁶⁰ At the time of the merger in 1917 the Norwegian Synod had 986 congregations with 150,550 souls, served by 351 pastors, but only 14 Christian day schools. When the ELS came into existence in 1918, the desire for having parochial schools was so strong that three out of the fourteen churches with schools came with the new little synod.

⁶¹ From an ELS Presidential Address in 1928; translated by H. Larson in 2004.

⁶² See **Appendix 2** for the six theses. In the 1936 *ELS Synod Report*, where the theses and corresponding commentary are provided, we find an admonitory reference to the Austin Agreement, as cited under Theses V: "The last act in breaking down the resistance of the objectors was the so-called Austin Agreement, a shrewdly formed, but meaningless document, intended to soothe the consciences of those who lacked the courage to stand up for the truth to the bitter end. We, who have observed at close range and studied the history of the efforts made to bring the Norwegian Lutherans into agreement by means of committees, are constrained to say, when asked to follow this method again: 'Vestigia terrent' [frightening footsteps]. We are afraid of history repeating itself, and therefore consider it a God-given duty to sound a warning to all earnest defenders of the truth against exposing the welfare of the Church of Christ to the dangers involved in this procedure" (47).

Missouri was holding meetings with the ULCA and the ALC as these bodies desired closer relations. History had proven to the ELS a need for tightened parameters on inter-church dialogue. “That the members of the synod were quite wary of such committee negotiations is understandable in the light of the negotiations that resulted in the merger in 1917.”⁶³

5. Focus on doctrinal purity for succeeding generations, with sola gratia at the forefront

Here we wish to highlight former ELS President G. Orvick’s address to our 1975 synod convention:

May it always be said of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod that we are a church body which proclaims God’s saving grace in pulpit and classroom and whose people rejoice in it and take comfort in it. Here pastors and teachers will have to make certain that they are known as those who love to preach about the grace of God. At Luther’s time comforting Gospel preachers were criticized and sarcastically called “sweet preachers.” But Luther didn’t mind that reproach nor should we. Walther expresses his sorrow over some ministers in his day when he says, “in some there is a legalistic trend, which does great injury to their own and to their hearer’s souls. They do not administer their office with genuine cheerfulness and do not make their people cheerful Christians. But that is what you will have to do to achieve wonderful results” (Law and Gospel, p. 408). We must also take great care that the doctrine of grace is not neglected

⁶³ J. H. Larson and J. B. Madson, *Built on the Rock* (Mankato: ELS, 1992), 85. It could be noted that, while the ELS rejoined the Synodical Conference in 1920, it did not—because of previous experience—care to be involved with the so called “Intersynodical Movement,” i.e., the Chicago Theses of 1925. The Chicago Theses, which certain voices in the SC regarded as being doctrinally sound on predestination, were accepted by representatives from Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo. Yet, Ohio, et. al. were going into fellowship arrangements with the Norwegian Lutherans who had accepted the “Madison Settlement.” This shows how the wariness of the ELS toward official inter-synodical talks was not without warrant. Brenner raises a strange twist, however: “Ironically it was also reported that the Norwegian Synod of the American Ev. Lutheran Church, which had broken with the merged Norwegian Church [sic] because the merger had been based on doctrinal compromise, was now requesting permission to send its theological candidates to Missouri’s seminary in St. Louis. The Norwegians would supply a professor of their own for the St. Louis institution” (John Brenner, “The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Underlying Problems” [Ph.D. dissertation, Marquette University, 2012], 201).

in favor of other ideas and human imaginations. Luther goes on to say, “A true minister, however, urges this article most of all, yea, without ceasing, since on it is based everything that pertains to the knowledge of God and our salvation” (Law and Gospel, p. 409). And we would go on to urge the dear members of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod to cherish the doctrine of grace and let it be your chief source of joy and comfort. In the doctrine of grace you can be certain that you have the forgiveness of your sins. You can know that you are a child of God and have eternal life. You can face the future with the assurance that when your earthly pilgrimage is over there is reserved for you a mansion in heaven. Do not let a Sunday pass without wanting to be in the house of the Lord eager to hear of Christ and His love. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” Matt. 5,6.⁶⁴

In the spirit of Dr. Luther, armed with the Word of God against the temptations and challenges evoked by the evil world and the old wily foe in conjunction with our own sinful nature, our synodical forefathers saw the vitality and the absolute necessity of sticking with the Word of God at all costs. All else goes by the wayside, but the Word of our Lord stands forever (1 Peter 1:25). One of the leading founders and fathers of the old Norwegian Synod, Rev. Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), identified the spiritual glue holding the then-fledgling organization together: “It is obvious that what binds and sustains our church body are not ordinances of human devising and still less external power or temporal advantages or privileges under civil law, but only ... God’s Word. It is only the common faith in this Word that preserves ‘unity of spirit in the bond of peace.’ This is what is essential and what is needful.”⁶⁵

Dear assembled brothers in the ministry and delegates of the congregations, there is nothing more important for a congregation and a synod as well as for the individual person than uncompromising obedience in doctrine and life toward the revealed will of God. Certainly it can lead to situations where the eye of reason sees only complete and total darkness, utter hopelessness, and a person says: “There is no future for us,” but

⁶⁴ *ELS Synod Report* 1975, 16–17.

⁶⁵ H. A. Preus, *Vivacious Daughter*, ed. and trans. Todd Nichol (Northfield, MN: The Norw.-Am. Historical Assoc., 1990), 53–54.

that is where getting to see with the eye of faith comes in. If by the grace of God you get to see in that way, you will always see that “they that are with us are more than they who are with them,” and that “the mountains are full of horses and flaming chariots of fire round about.”⁶⁶

6. *Importance of scrutinizing advice from respected leaders: Pieper, Dau, etc.*

Theological giants, as great as we esteem them, have flaws like the rest of us. They too put on their pants one leg at a time and must kneel at the side of the bed for daily forgiveness from the wounds of Christ and for daily guidance from the lamp of God’s Word. Checking the word of men with the Sword of the Spirit must occur for readiness in a world teeming with temptations.

Truth cannot be compromised. And why not? Because it is in its very nature **unalterable**. You may seek to get away from it by subterfuge, but you will only be led into blind alleys, whence there is no escape. Try to write the biography of that child begotten in 1917, and which fittingly bears the name “The Norwegian Lutheran Merger,” and you will not have to go very far in the records before you discover its illegitimacy. To call H.A. Preus, J.A. Ottesen, and U.V. Koren your spiritual forebears, while you also want an Elling Eielsen, a C.L. Clausen, an F.A. Schmidt and a B.J. Muus to be listed in that category, will simply not do. You may erect massive monuments in honor of our sainted fathers and write glowing tributes in praise of their noble work, but it will be but a mockery to their very memory if their principles be trampled into the dust.⁶⁷

7. *Prayers needed for vigilance in the search for true unity*

We return to what was said earlier. Jude urged his readers to “contend for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints” (v. 3). The body of doctrine—*the* faith—must be preserved and passed down from generation to generation. Jude knew the times were evil, and so he finishes his brief letter by urging *prayer* for the Christian cause: “But

⁶⁶ H. M. Tjernagel, ELS Presidential Address, 1931; translated by H. Larson in 2004.

⁶⁷ Norman A. Madson, ELS Presidential Address, *ELS Synod Report* 1943, 10–11.

you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (vv. 20, 21 NIV 84).

Notice how the focus is not just on remaining in the true doctrine, but praying for the attention to rest on God's love and mercy in God's Son, Jesus Christ, our dear Lord and Savior.⁶⁸ With that, we can do no better in closing out this essay than to let the sainted Rev. Milton H. Otto speak to us pastorally and personally:

In this connection it is not out of order to remind ourselves to be on guard against assuming a negative complex in which we emphasize everything we are against instead of letting the glorious comforting and soul-saving Gospel, which we have and are contending for, be the hallmark for which we wish to be known. No Church can grow or expect to attract many people to its standard if it does not have something positive to offer men, something to give them which they, perhaps unknown to themselves, are longing for and which can make them happier and more blessed for this life, to say nothing of the life still to come. What better reputation could we have than to be known as a Church which has an anxious passion and an earnest zeal for sharing the precious Gospel-heritage we have with everyone who is still without it?⁶⁹

**The Word of God can never fail;
It is the rock of ages,
When Satan doth my faith assail,
Or doubt its battle wages.
No more shall fear my soul enfold,
Since I by faith God's grace behold,
Which ev'ry fear doth banish.**
(ELH 229:4) LSQ

⁶⁸ Larson and Madson, 59: "Did everyone who joined in the union perish in eternal condemnation? No, no one should say that, because it is only unbelief toward Christ as Lord and Savior which condemns souls. Yet if the Water of Life is poisoned even a little, souls who drink from it are in danger."

⁶⁹ Milton H. Otto, ELS Presidential Address; *ELS Synod Report* 1957, 9.

Appendix 1

1912 Madison Agreement

1. The Union Committees of the Synod and the United Church, unanimously and without reservation, accept that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, the so-called First Form ... and Pontoppidan's *Truth Unto Godliness* ... the so-called Second Form of Doctrine. ...

2. Since both the conferring church bodies acknowledge that Article XI of the Formula of Concord presents the pure and correct doctrine of the election of the children of God unto salvation as taught by the Word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, it is deemed unnecessary for church unity to set up new and more elaborate theses on this article of faith.

3. However, since it is well known that in presenting the doctrine of election two forms of doctrine have been used, both of which have won acceptance and recognition within the orthodox Lutheran Church;

Some, in accordance with the Formula of Concord, include under the doctrine of election the whole order of salvation of the elect from the call to the glorification ... and teach an election "unto salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

While others, with Pontoppidan, in conformity with John Gerhard, Sriver, and other recognized teachers of the Church, define election more specifically as the decree concerning the final glorification, with faith and perseverance wrought by the Holy Spirit as its necessary presupposition, and teach that "God has appointed all those to eternal life who He from eternity has foreseen would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ and remain constant in this faith unto the end"; and since neither of these two forms of doctrine, thus presented, contradicts any doctrine revealed in the Word of God, but does full justice to the order of salvation as presented in the Word of God and the confession of the Church;

We find that this should not be cause for schism within the Church or disturb that unity of the spirit in the bond of peace which God wills should prevail among us.

4. Since, however, in the controversy over this question among us, there have appeared words and expressions—justly or unjustly attributed to the respective parties—which seemed to the opposite party to be a denial or to lead to a denial of the Confession;

We have agreed to reject all errors which seek to explain away the mystery of election ... either in a synergizing or a Calvinizing manner ... every doctrine which ... would deprive God of His glory as only Savior or ... weaken man's sense of responsibility in relation to the acceptance or rejection of grace.

5. On the one hand we reject:

a) The doctrine that the cause of our election is not solely the mercy of God and the holy merit of Christ, but that there also in us is a cause on account of which God has elected us to eternal life;

b) The doctrine that in election God has been determined by, has taken into account, or has been influenced by man's good attitude or anything which man is, does, or omits to do "as of himself and by his own natural powers";

c) The doctrine that the faith in Christ which is inseparably connected with election is in whole or in part a product of, or depends upon, man's own choice, power, or ability ... ;

d) Or that this faith is the result of an ability and power imparted by the call of grace, which therefore now dwell within and belong to, the unregenerate heart, enabling it to make a decision for grace.

6. On the other hand we reject:

a) The doctrine that God in the election acts arbitrarily and unmotivated, so that He points out and counts a certain arbitrary number of any individuals whomsoever and appoints them to conversion and salvation while all others are excluded;

b) The doctrine that there are two kinds of saving will in God, one revealed in Scripture in the general order of salvation and one that is different from and unknown to us, which concerns only the elect and brings to them a more cordial love, a more powerful call from God and greater grace than to those who remain in their unbelief and lost condition;

c) The doctrine that when the resistance, which God in conversion removes from those who are saved, is not removed from those who are finally lost, the cause for this different result lies in God and a different will to save in His election;

d) The doctrine that the believer can and shall have an absolute assurance of his election and salvation, instead of an assurance of faith, drawn from the promises of God, connected with fear and trembling and with the possibility of falling away, which, however, he believes by the grace of God shall not be realized in his case;

e) In brief, all opinions and doctrines concerning election which directly or indirectly would conflict with the order of salvation, and would not give to all a full and equally great opportunity to be saved, or which in any way would do violence to the Word of God which says God "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"—in which gracious and merciful will of God all election to eternal life has its source.

On the basis of the above agreement the committees on union recommend to their respective church-bodies the adoption of the following resolutions:

Whereas, our confessional writings establish that "to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments"; and

Whereas, our previous committees by the grace of God have attained unanimity with respect to the doctrines concerning the call, conversion and the order of salvation as a whole, and we all confess as our sincere faith that we are saved by grace alone without any cooperation on our part; and

Whereas, the deliberations of our new committees have led to a satisfactory agreement concerning the doctrine of election and to an unreserved and unanimous acceptance of that doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI, Part II of the Formula of Concord and Question 548 in Pontoppidan's *Truth Unto Godliness* ... we therefore declare hereby, that the essential agreement concerning these doctrines which has been attained is sufficient for church union....

(Taken from F. C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966], 232–235.)

Appendix 2

The Six Theses of the Triple U⁷⁰

In view of the fact that continued efforts are being made to unite all Lutherans in one fellowship, we adopt the following theses as expressing the principles which must guide us in seeking to effect such fellowship.

- I. The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.
- II. We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

⁷⁰ The entire document of “Unity, Union, and Unionism” (1936), including expansion of the six theses, can be found at: <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>.

- III. Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.
- IV. We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only a) when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact, or b) where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).
- V. Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly,” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view to church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of these committees will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God’s Word and thus promoting unity, rests at all times upon all Christians. Cf. I Peter 3:15.
- VI. Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, 1 Timothy 6:3–5). Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full-fledged unionism, as history also attests.

Unto the Third and Fourth Generations: A History of the ELS Within the Broader Context of American Lutheranism

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TODAY WE STAND AT THE START OF THE SECOND century of the reorganized Norwegian Synod. We who observe this noteworthy event can only imagine the difficulties experienced by those who bequeathed to us the spiritual legacy of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). For many of us, it was our grandparents or great-grandparents who established this legacy. We now stand at a pivotal point in the history of our church body. It has been said that no synod has remained conservative beyond the third generation. The first generation fought the battles. The second generation heard the stories, understood and appreciated them. But the third generation only has history. This is where we stand during this centennial year. As we reflect on the past, it is important to ask how the Lord of the Church has so directed events that the ELS yet has retained the conservative stance under which the synod was organized one hundred years ago.

During the 1928 ELS convention, the Rev. G. A. Gullixson preached the Synod Sunday sermon. The occasion was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the organization of the Norwegian Synod. He spoke about the final years of the old synod prior to 1917:

Untold sorrows took the place of joy. Methods not of love and mercy, but more like those of human warfare, were called forth and employed in the furtherance of the end in view. The tyranny of might making right stalked abroad among us like a specter in the gloom. Doubts and fears followed that frenzy of unionism

that had seized our people and many noble souls were bewildered and fell a prey to the machinations of unfaithful leaders.

When the storm was over only a few faithful souls found each other, scattered as we were over this broad land.

When finally, at bay, one of the vanquished was asked by one of the victors, gleefully, "What will you do now?" The answer came spontaneously, "We can only leave that to God." We did that—we left it to God. And, my brethren in Christ, what the Lord has done for the shattered forces of the Norwegian Synod you and I know.¹

We here do not laud the actions of the men and women who reorganized the Norwegian Synod in 1918 but rather the God who empowered them. In Psalm 115, the inspired writer says, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, because of your mercy, because of your truth" (Psalm 115:1 NKJ). We now attempt to answer the question of how the Lord has upheld the ELS in each generation in spite of what was happening in the broader spectrum of American Lutheranism.

First Generation

In the first generation, God raised up hearts of oak that stood strong in the winds of change. In his golden jubilee volume, the Rev. Theodore Aaberg applied that title to those who gathered at Lime Creek in June 1918. He wrote,

"Hearts of Oak" is the designation given by Dr. Theodore Graebner to the sturdy confessors of the truth who presented the Lutheran Confession to Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. The confessors of the truth who gathered in the Lime Creek congregation, June 14–19, 1918, and there effected the reorganization of the Norwegian Synod deserve no less a title: HEARTS OF OAK. There is, of course, a great difference between Augsburg and Lime Creek in historical scope and significance. The essential ingredients, however, are the same, namely, a bold and determined confession of the truth of God's Word in the face of crushing earthly circumstances.²

¹ G. A. Gullixson, "Sermon Delivered at the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Celebration, Sunday, June 17," *Beretning* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1929), 29.

² Theodore Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Board of Publications, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 79–80 (emphasis original).

The men and women who gathered at Lime Creek and those who followed after them were the first generation who fought the battles. They knew why the synod was reorganized because they experienced it themselves.

It was not easy to come to Lime Creek. It has been said that only three locations that were strong enough to host the 1918 convention. They were Lime Creek Lutheran Church (Lake Mills, Iowa), St. Mark's Lutheran Church (Chicago, Illinois), and the Saude-Jerico parish (Lawler, Iowa). The meeting had been announced in the April 1, 1918 issue of the *Luthersk Tidende*. On March 12–14, 1918, a pastors' conference was held at Lake Mills with the Rev. L. P. Jensen serving as the chairman. The Rev. J. A. Moldstad, who was the vice-president of the temporary organization, traveled from Chicago for this meeting. It likely was a preliminary meeting where plans were made for the June convention. Ten weeks later, on May 23, the governor of Iowa issued what is as "The Babel Proclamation." While other states passed laws banning the use of the German language during World War I, no other state went as far as Iowa to outlaw the use of *all* foreign languages "in public places, on trains, and over the telephone." It further stated that "all public addresses should and must be in the English language." Plans already had been made for the discussions, especially of doctrine, in the Norwegian language, and it would have been a great disappointment for many if that could not happen. To make this possible, a sixty-foot square tent was erected one mile north of the church building across the state line in Minnesota. Here the Norwegian language could be spoken without the appearance of disloyalty. It was not easy to meet at the tent and walk one mile to the church building for noon dinner and back again to the tent. It is no wonder that a long noon break was scheduled for beneath the oak trees. The time for the sessions was 10:00–12:30 p.m. and 2:00–4:30 p.m. Then it rained! The rain came on Sunday evening. Again the rain came on Monday night. It was likely this rain prevented the use of the tent site on Tuesday. It was not easy to come to Lime Creek.

The spiritual storm also made it difficult to come to Lime Creek. In the opening sermon, Bjug Harstad said,

Under exceedingly strange circumstances we greet one another here today. ... We are, as it were, clustering around the old building site which is storm swept and waste.³

³ Bjug Harstad, "Opening Sermon," *Beretning* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1918), 78.

These words were fitting. By this time, a minority of members from the Lime Creek congregation had withdrawn their membership, the parsonage was lost, and since a new parsonage was not yet completed, the host pastor was living in the barn where he entertained convention guests. Even more, the spiritual storm had swept away much of the physical existence of the old Norwegian Synod. Gone were the college, the seminary, the normal school, and the publishing house, along with the mission field in China. Also gone were the institutions supported by groupings of congregations including two hospitals, three orphans' home, three old-peoples' homes, and twelve academies.⁴

While this was occurring, the three eastern Lutheran synods of the Muhlenberg tradition (General Synod, United Synod of the South, General Council) were struggling with their commitment to the Lutheran Confessions and their American Lutheran identity. The western Lutheran synods had a stronger Lutheran character, yet there were two doctrines which defined these synods. These doctrines were church and ministry and predestination.

Lutherans in America faced the issue of defining the church and ministry in particular because of situations they had not experienced in Europe under the state church. The Rev. C. F. W. Walther responded to the confusion among the 1839 Saxon emigrants in Missouri by assuring them that they were yet a part of the Christian Church because of their faith apart from any human hierarchy and they had the authority to call men to be their pastors. On the opposite end of the spectrum was the Rev. J. A. A. Grabau who also had emigrated from Germany in 1839 and was instrumental in organizing the Buffalo Synod. The following year, he issued a "Pastoral Letter" to far-flung congregations under his care but which were without a regular pastor. He was concerned that "vaga-bond ministers and lay preachers" would come as wolves and destroy the flock. His letter expressed strong views that ordination existed by divine command, the ministry gave validity to the sacraments, and the office of the keys can be exercised by the ministry alone. In addition, he taught that the laying-on of hands was regarded as an essential part of

⁴ The hospitals were located at LaCrosse, Wisconsin and St. Paul, Minnesota. The orphans' homes were located at Twin Valley, Minnesota; Stoughton, Wisconsin; and Parkland, Washington. The old-peoples' homes were located at Glenwood, Minnesota; Stoughton, Wisconsin; and Stanwood, Washington. The academic institutions were located at Albert Lea, Minnesota; Fergus Falls, Minnesota; Glenwood, Minnesota; Red Wing, Minnesota; Willmar, Minnesota; Grand Forks, North Dakota; Portland, North Dakota; Clifton, Texas; Albion, Wisconsin; Galesville, Wisconsin; Wittenberg, Wisconsin; and Parkland, Washington.

ordination and a congregation owes obedience to its pastor in all things not contrary to God's Word. Wilhelm Loehle, although remaining in Germany, was an early sponsor of the work of the Missouri Synod. Although not as radical as Grabau, he shared some of the same concerns and considered the organization of the Missouri Synod to be too democratic. "The experiences of his followers among unruly congregations in Ohio and Indiana filled him with fear lest unworthy laymen might gain control by means of a majority of votes on all questions. Walther's theory of the ministerial office ... was criticized by him."⁵ Those who supported his view eventually organized the Iowa Synod.

The second doctrine which defined the western synods was predestination or eternal election. The Rev. F. A. Schmidt succeeded the Rev. Laur. Larsen as the theological professor for the Norwegian Synod at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Here he taught side-by-side with C. F. W. Walther and after 1876 at the Norwegian Synod seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. Prof. Schmidt objected to an essay on eternal election which Walther had presented to the Western District of the Missouri Synod in 1877. During the previous eight years, this district had heard a series of essays under the leadership of Walther under the general theme, "Only through the doctrine of the Lutheran Church is God alone given all glory, an irrefutable proof that its doctrine is the only true one." In this ninth essay, Walther's thesis was "The Lutheran Church teaches that it is false and wrong to teach that not the merit of God and the most holy merits of Christ alone, but that in us also there is a cause of the election of God for the sake of which God has elected us unto eternal life."⁶ Eventually Schmidt accused Walther and the Missouri Synod of false doctrine. The result was that the Synodical Conference lost two of its strongest synods: the Joint Synod of Ohio and the Norwegian Synod.⁷ The Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1883, although this was not because of any doctrine or practice of the Synodical Conference but because the synod wanted to discuss the doctrine of election entirely on a religious basis without any nationalistic influences. At the same time, this controversy had the effect of strengthening ties between certain

⁵ J. L. Neve, *A History of Lutheranism in America, 1619-1930* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Press, 1979), 128.

⁶ W. H. T. Dau, *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod During Three Quarters of a Century* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 408.

⁷ Interestingly, in 1877 the Ohio Synod's Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary of Columbus, Ohio (Capital University) awarded the title of Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) to C. F. W. Walther.

groups of Lutherans: between the Missouri and Wisconsin synods, between the Iowa Synod and the Joint Synod of Ohio, and among the three Norwegian groups which formed a new church body in 1890. It was also this doctrine of eternal election which was at issue in the reorganization of the Norwegian Synod in 1918.

The previous year marked the quadricentennial anniversary of Luther's posting of the 95 Theses. Observances were limited because any celebration of an event from German history was suspect due to World War I. Yet the event did coincide with a number of synodical mergers. The Joint Reformation Committee of the three eastern synods was a factor in the 1918 merger of these synods as the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA). The year 1918 also saw pulpit and altar fellowship established between the Ohio and Iowa synods which, with the addition of the Buffalo Synod, led to the formation of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in 1930. The same year witnessed the Germans in the northwest form the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Other States. Among the Norwegian Lutherans, the Norwegian Synod, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the Hauge's Synod merged to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA) in 1917.

Most of these mergers were a result of a desire for unity and organization rather than theology. The General Council had been organized in 1867 as a more conservative body than its predecessors with the goal of uniting all conservative Lutheran synods in this country. The synods eventually forming the American Lutheran Church found their unity in their opposition to C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod. Among Norwegians, the desire for external unity also dominated the thinking. Ethnic unity became paramount and any doctrinal divisions of the previous years were set aside. The Norwegian Synod even published a commemorative booklet in 1914 in honor of the centennial of the signing of Norway's constitution.⁸ There would be union no matter what. This has been referred to as "Syttende Mai Theology" where union was based upon nationalism rather than scriptural doctrine.⁹ In 1912,

⁸ *Den Norske Synode Hilsen til Hundrekaarfesten i Norge 1914* (Decorah: Decorah-Posten's Trykkeri).

⁹ Theodore Grabner quoted in Peter Harstad, *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, 1884-1959: A Commemorative Volume at the Centennial of his Birth* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1984), 35. The Norwegian words "syttende mai" translate as "Seventeenth of May" and are a common designation for Norwegian Constitution Day, which celebrates the events of May 17, 1814 when Norway's constitution was signed. The sentiments of national pride were strengthened in 1905 when for the first time

the doctrinal compromise known as *Opgjør* was overwhelmingly adopted by the districts of the Norwegian Synod.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this document was flawed in that it was written in a way as to allow different interpretations of the scriptural doctrine of eternal election to stand side-by-side.¹¹

In September 1918 at a meeting at Parkland Lutheran Church in Tacoma, Washington, the Rev. H. A. Stub, president of the merged Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC), said of the reorganized synod (ELS) that “a teeny weeny church body has been established.”¹² This label of the “little synod” became a nickname of mockery and derision. Yet as the Lord did at the time of Othniel and the other judges in the Old Testament, He raised up faithful leaders to deliver His own people (Judges 2:16). The “hearts of oak” that gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church on June 14–19, 1918 continued to testify that salvation is a gift of God completely given in Jesus Christ “without any merit or worthiness in me.” They had fought the good fight and experienced the battle for the truth.

As Bjug Harstad said, these men and women did not “covet the big body’s doctrine (‘Opgjør,’ etc.) nor its principles and practices.”¹³ The men and women who reorganized the ELS were not motivated by ethnic unity or large organizations. They were not united by a common enemy but rather chose to take their stand upon God’s unfailing Word and grace. The first generation fought the battle and reorganized the synod. They know the ground upon which they stood because they had walked upon it.

in five hundred years, Norway had a national king independent of either Denmark or Sweden.

¹⁰ The 1912 district votes endorsing *Opgjør* were announced at the 1913 special convention held at Zion Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Of *all members* (both voting and advisory), there were 568 in favor, 15 opposed, and 19 not voting. (Cf. *Beretning*, 1913, 46–47, Theodore Aaberg, 73n10). The convention sent the union matter to the congregations which reported to the 1914 convention as 359 in favor and 27 opposed; there also were 231 congregations which did not report (E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960], 195n39). The 1914 convention then adopted the union by a vote of 360 in favor and 170 opposed (Aaberg, 60).

¹¹ The word “Opgjør” is still used today in Denmark as an accounting term which meets “to settle” or “balance” the books.

¹² T. N. Teigen, “The Trumpet Call to Freedom,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 28.

¹³ Bjug Harstad, “Pioneer Days: And Other Events Briefly Sketched for the 75th Anniversary of the Synod for the Norwegian Evang. Lutheran Church of America,” *Beretning* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1928), 64.

Second Generation

The second generation heard the stories from their parents. They were not far removed from these events, so they understood and appreciated them. But they faced new challenges to the faith and new difficulties to remain conservative.

With a new generation, a new round of attacks came upon the church. For example, the Augustana Synod was organized by Swedish immigrants because of a lax doctrinal stance regarding the Lutheran Confessions within the General Synod. In 1857, these Swedish Lutherans withdrew from the Northern Illinois Synod and formed the Augustana Synod. By today's standards, the Augustana Synod was a fairly conservative body which established a seminary at Rock Island, Illinois. But a change of teaching took place in the second generation. In the 1930s, there was new leadership for both the synod and the seminary which tolerated the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. This met with only mild resistance since the new teaching of "Lundensian theology" was also being promoted in the Swedish homeland. As among the Norwegians Lutherans two decades earlier, nationalism triumphed over theology and doctrine.

This was neither the first nor the last time that a seminary faculty caused a synod to forsake its conservative moorings. In 1855, the Rev. S. S. Schmucker, who was the chairman of the faculty of the General Synod's Gettysburg Seminary, wrote the "Definite Platform" which was a reinterpretation of the Augsburg Confession in terms of nineteenth-century American Lutheranism. In later years, professors at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri) introduced teachings which eventually led to the formation of Seminex and an exodus of members from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

The Norwegian Synod had found higher education and seminary instruction in the institutions of the Missouri and Wisconsin synods. In 1855, J. A. Ottesen and Nils Brandt recommended that arrangements be made to train future Norwegian Synod pastors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. This continued until 1876 with the establishment of a Norwegian Synod seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. Luther Seminary was later relocated to Robbinsdale, Minnesota and then Hamline (St. Paul), Minnesota. Following the merger of 1917, the synod again reached out to her sister synods. In 1931, a call was heard to establish a seminary. This was for practical rather than doctrinal reasons. In 1944, the Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran College reported:

The question of establishing our own Theological Seminary is not new. It has been discussed frequently ever since our Synod was reorganized better than 25 years ago. We knew from the very outset that if our work was to continue for any length of time and prosper, we needed to train workers who could be placed in new fields as well as take the place of the older workers who no longer could serve. (The supreme importance of establishing our own schools was also impressed upon us by leaders of the Missouri Synod)

Well as these institutions of our sister Synods have served us, nevertheless we have felt that eventually we ourselves ought to provide for the training of our future workers. There are special problems which continue to confront us as a Synod, problems which those not intimately acquainted with [sic] cannot be expected to take into account in a manner conducive to our needs. There is a very important background, too, such as the Norwegian language, theological literature in that language, Norwegian culture, the history of our Synod, and the understanding of our church people resulting therefrom. Without an acquaintance with this background and all that it implies, our pastors cannot be expected especially in some fields to work as effectively and fruitfully as the Lord of the Church would have them work. These things can with any great success be supplied our future church workers only in our own schools, where they are in contact therewith, and can be given special guidance by teachers with this background, having themselves lived through a large part of the history of our church.¹⁴

The first seminary classes began in the theological department of Bethany Lutheran College in 1946. This spared the ELS from the struggles which came to a head thirty years later at Concordia Seminary. We give thanks for the conservative teachers in both Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and Bethany Lutheran College who have taught the second, third, and fourth generations of the synod that God's Word is truth (John 17:17).

Inter-synodical work also caused many to fall away from their conservative moorings. Whereas we would not say that the synods which formed the ULCA were conservative, cooperative efforts to

¹⁴ Board of Regents, "Theological Seminary," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1944), 50–51.

promote and publicize the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Reformation played an important role in the 1918 merger forming the ULCA. Simultaneously, World War I saw the formation of the “National Lutheran Commission for Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Welfare” among many Lutheran synods.¹⁵ Following the war, this commission gave way to the “National Lutheran Council” (NLC). The ULCA was ready to involve the council in supporting the preaching of the word of God in the war-torn areas of Europe. The midwestern synods wished to limit the work of the NLC to activities which could be considered humanitarian or administrative.

As ELS members watched the formation of the NLC and witnessed their former president H. G. Stub elected as the first president, it confirmed in their minds that the merger of 1917 was made on a unionistic basis. The membership of the NELC (merger body) in the NLC even prompted the 1919 resignations of the Rev. S. C. Ylvisaker and Mr. Oswald Overn from the faculty of Luther College. S. C. Ylvisaker explained:

The problems confronting the civilized world at the conclusion of the war were stupendous, but the problems of the Church were none the less so. Let no one find fault with those who see the problems, who feel the burden, and face the task. Ours is a duty and a privilege such as the Church probably never has seen. ... It would also be folly to deny the fact that the National Lutheran Council has accomplished certain remarkable things. ... The pity is that those who have been misled to adopt unionistic principles are unable anymore to distinguish clearly between external and internals. ...

A calamity, for through the organization and work of the National Lutheran Council the floodgates of unionism and lodgery have been opened still wider and further sections of the Lutheran Church are being subjected to their destroying power. It is seeking to building up, in one part, but destroying in another; it seeks to unite, but has caused further strife and dissension; it seeks to save Lutheranism in America and Europe, but is robbing it of its real strength and making it an easy prey to the spirit of the Reformed Churches.¹⁶

¹⁵ Synodical Conference congregations supported Missouri Synod’s “Board for Army and Navy.”

¹⁶ S. C. Ylvisaker, “The National Lutheran Council,” *Proceedings* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1920), 79–80.

The work of the NLC was expanded as a result of World War II to coordinate the work of social welfare, home missions, and military chaplaincy. It is interesting that the NLC made no demand at this time, as it had in 1919, for doctrinal agreement before it could engage in joint work. E. Clifford Nelson remarks, "The National Lutheran Council was unmistakably involved in a 'churchly' ministry." In no sense could its activity be interpreted as merely cooperation "in externals," and "common calamity had opened the door to better relationships with the Missouri Synod."¹⁷ However, such cooperation allowed the synods to respect each other and to work together in a common cause. They came to know each other and discover that they "weren't so bad after all." The external cooperation led to closer friendship which then gave way to spiritual expressions of unity. The ELS responded in 1949 with the convention essay "Cooperation in Externals" where the Rev. George Lillegard expanded upon the statements of the general pastoral conference:

Since the National Lutheran Council, as well as the Lutheran World Federation, was organized to promote cooperation in church work between all Lutherans, without regard to doctrinal differences, we object to them as unionistic organizations and refuse to take any part in their activity.¹⁸

The NLC, which was faced by the first generation of ELS members, gave way to the "Lutheran Council in the USA" (LCUSA) in 1966 and was faced by the second generation of ELS members.

The ELS was spared from these things because of issues occurring within the Synodical Conference centering on the doctrine of church fellowship. The first generation of the ELS was still alive and watchful. The Rev. Henry Ingebritson said:

Because of the sad experience which we had during the merging of Norwegian church bodies, consummated in 1917, we have found it necessary to be alert watching closely present union deliberations carried on between the Missouri Synod and the A.L.C. which affect our whole Synodical Conference. After careful study of the Declaration of the A.L.C. And its

¹⁷ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, revised 1980), 478–80.

¹⁸ George O. Lillegard, "Cooperation in Externals," *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1949), 31.

implications, claiming “to supplement,” and, “in part also to emphasize” points of the Missouri Brief Statement, our union committee has found this Declaration unclear and misleading, giving no assurance of unity of the Spirit between the conferring church bodies. Like “Opgjør,” it gives no assurance of settlement of old controversies.¹⁹

The demise of the Synodical Conference forced the pastors and congregants of the ELS again to reexamine the doctrinal basis upon which the synod stands. The second generation of the ELS remained watchful with this 1952 convention recommendation:

Your committee calls attention to the President’s counsel to the Synod to be on guard against the persisting temptation to give up the truth through unionistic practices or tendencies; and at the same time ... to consider that it is also our God-given mission to make use of every opportunity to publish and spread the truth of the Word,—to use the trowel as well as the sword.²⁰

This stance cost the ELS dearly. The 1955 suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod and subsequent withdrawal from the Synodical Conference was tantamount to what occurred in 1917. Students were lost to Bethany Lutheran College, ten pastors and two congregations resigned their membership, the dean of the seminary withdrew as did a majority of the seminary students, a new source eventually would be needed for Sunday School and devotional materials. Even the foreign missions field in Africa was lost. Yet the Lord of the Church has promised “that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose ...” (Romans 8:28 EHV). These events had the salutary result of resetting the timeclock and instilling a first-generation conviction for both the ELS and the WELS.

Third Generation

Very few people of the third generation of the ELS remember the events of the 1950s and ’60s. Many of today’s ELS members were not yet born. Sadly, we are so far removed from the events of 1918 that they

¹⁹ H. Ingebritson, “The President’s Report,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1940), 10.

²⁰ “Recommendation of the Convention Committee on President’s Message and Report,” *Synod Report* (Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1952), 18.

are only history. Yet the commitment to remain conservative in the face of contemporary trends remains.

The doctrinal issues facing the ELS did not end in 1963 with withdrawal from the Synodical Conference. While Christians do not seek controversy for the sake of controversy, the ELS has faced several doctrinal discussions. In His inspired Word, God says through His apostle, “Brothers, I am making an appeal to you using the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I ask that you all express the same view and not have any divisions among you, but that you be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10 EHV). The third generation of ELS members have faced a number of doctrinal debates. The doctrine of Church and Ministry, which had been discussed since the days of the old Norwegian Synod, continued to be debated resulting in the synodical statements *Doctrine of the Church* in 1980 and the *Public Ministry of the Word* in 2005. *The Role of Men and Women in the Church* was adopted in 1990. A statement on *The Lord’s Supper* was approved in 1997. Through these discussions and debates, the synod has not been able to coast along on the easy highway of complacency but has been forced to deepen its study of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The Proverbs say, “Iron sharpens iron, and a man sharpens the insight of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17).

The doctrinal discussions were not limited to congregations within the ELS. As the fight to remain conservative raged within the fourth generation of the Missouri Synod, a group of pastors and congregations withdrew for doctrinal reasons and organized the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL). Nine of these congregations were received into ELS membership in 1975–76. Their battle and commitment again brought a “first generation” spirit of doctrinal steadfastness into the ELS. In 1960, the Rev. J. B. Madson quoted from a former *Lutheran Sentinel* editor’s statement about the connection between the name of the *Lutheran Sentinel* and its purpose. He wrote:

By the very nature of our Christian testimony our church publication, too, will often be constrained to sound forth an alarm. . . . But if we are to cease our watchfulness to cry out, we might do better to change the name of our beloved little paper.²¹

A purpose of the *Lutheran Sentinel* is to sound the alarm. This is also of the work of the synod’s Doctrine Committee, which is “[t]o

²¹ J. E. Thoen, quoted by J. B. Madson, “There is a Reason for the Name,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 43, no. 16 (25 August 1960): 254.

keep abreast of doctrinal trends and issues and keep laity and clergy informed." Only by serving as a sentinel can the camp be warned, the trumpet sounded, and the weapon of "It is written" be employed.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod also has been spared from the unifying effects of shared hymnbooks. One of the early activities of the various Lutheran synods in eastern United States was the production of the "common service" for all English speaking Lutherans in 1888. This created a bond of unity between the synods that resulted in the publication of the *Common Service Book and Hymnal*, which preceded their merger in 1918. The *American Lutheran Hymnal* corresponded with the formation of the American Lutheran Church. The year 1958 witnessed the publication of the *Service Book and Hymnal* by eight synods and, although in the short-term two synods were formed, the ultimate result was that the synods merged in 1988 to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The *Lutheran Book of Worship* became the hymnbook of the synod after an aborted plan that Missouri Synod congregations would also adopt the book. As congregation members sang from common hymnbooks, a consciously-made cultural shift occurred and the road to merger was made smooth.

The ELS also used a merger hymnbook. *The Lutheran Hymnary* was published in 1913 with the stated goal that it "may prove no small factor in the efforts made to unify the various Norwegian Lutheran Church bodies of our land."²² For example, there was compromise in the wording of the absolution because the United Norwegian Lutheran Church was not accustomed to a universal absolution. There also was compromise with the inclusion of the Preface/Sanctus for the Sacrament of the Altar with the understanding that it would not be used by Norwegian Synod congregations because this liturgical element was not a part of the Ritual of 1685 and had only been introduced in Norway with the "New Liturgy" of 1887. It also has been pointed out that *The Lutheran Hymnary* contains no hymns concerning the doctrine of eternal election as the book was published upon the heels of *Opgjør*.

It was the ELS who, in 1926, made the first call for the preparation of what would become *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Nothing came of this until three years later when the Missouri Synod appointed a committee that prepared the outline and scope of a hymnbook and then invited the other synods to join the project. Whereas the Synodical Conference sought to provide doctrinally sound Lutheran materials, *The Lutheran*

²² "Preface," *The Lutheran Hymnary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1913), 4.

Hymnal, which was published in 1941, was not intended to be tool for external union. In fact, the events which ripped apart the Synodical Conference dashed any such hopes.

The congregations of the ELS continued to have a varied hymnic tradition until the publication of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* in 1996. In this way, the third and fourth generations of the synod have been spared from the uniting force of common hymnbooks. The hymnbook is something which unites people and shapes their culture, but it is also the book that holds a synod together. Already in 1877, the Synodical Conference pointed out:

And where an unsound hymnal or catechism is used, there is a denial of the Confessions. ... A hymnal is a confessional writing in a special sense of the word. When a congregation sings a heterodox song, it confesses false doctrine, even though the congregation pledges adherence to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession in its constitution.²³

Conclusion

It has been said that no synod has remained conservative beyond the third generation. The first generation fought the battles. The second generation heard the stories, understood and appreciated them. But to the third generation, this is only history. Yet this is where the Evangelical Lutheran Synod stands today. We now stand at the fourth generation when it is easy to forget why we were formed and why we exist. But we hear the words of the apostle: "As for you, continue in the things you have learned and about which you have become convinced. You know from whom you learned them and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, well equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14–17 EHV).

It is good to observe anniversaries and remember the rock from which we were hewn (Isaiah 51:1). As the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, Joshua commanded them to gather twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River. When Joshua set them up as a memorial at Gilgal, he said,

²³ Carl F. Schalk, *God's Song in a New Land: Lutheran Hymnals in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 166.

In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, “What do these stones mean?” tell them, “Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.” For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God (Joshua 4:21–24).

Anniversaries are the reminder that it is the Lord Almighty who raised His Son from the grave, brought us to this day and placed us here for His specific purpose. God has preserved us in spite of what has happened within American Lutheranism. He has delivered us from the hands of those who hate us. He has preserved us through His Word and His sacraments. We, who are the third and fourth generation of those who love him, think back to 1918 and to the first generation of those who reorganized the ELS. We remember the words the Rev. B. W. Teigen spoke upon the occasion of the funeral of Bernt H. Tweit in 1963:

[His] name appears in 1918 along with 192 others who “announced themselves as participants” in the meeting and declared that they wanted to be allowed to continue the Synod’s work on the old basis. ...

There are not many living today who signed that declaration. We, of the present Evangelical Lutheran Synod, owe them a great debt of gratitude for having the courage of their convictions, and the Christian knowledge to take the step in 1918. Quite a few came along in later years, but humanly speaking, it is doubtful whether our Evangelical Lutheran Synod would have come into existence if these Norwegian Synod people such as Bernt Tweit did not have the courage of their convictions.²⁴

Even greater, we remember what God in His mercy has done for us. Nothing which we have received is of ourselves. In this centennial year, we say with Martin Luther:

²⁴ B.W. Teigen, “Funeral of Bernt H. Tweit,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 46, no. 8 (25 April 1963): 126.

Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument—but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all. (LSQ)

Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference— A Worldwide Fellowship

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AS WE ARE ALL AWARE, LAST YEAR WE CELEBRATED the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, and this year is the hundredth anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In 1918 at Lime Creek, the Norwegian Synod was reorganized as The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the name of which in 1958 was changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). This year is also the twenty-fifth anniversary of our worldwide fellowship, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). Here we express fellowship with like-minded Christians from around the world.

The constituting convention of the CELC took place April 27–29, 1993, at Oberwesel, Germany, a beautiful site overlooking the Rhine River. On the trip along the Rhine to Oberwesel, thoughts were not centered on Heine's *Die Lorelei*, the castle ruins, the vineyards, or the beauty of the Rhine Valley but on far more important things. We were travelling to Oberwesel to establish an international organization which would unite confessional and orthodox Lutherans throughout the world.

We in the ELS were only a small church body by human standards, a remnant of Norwegian mergers in 1917. In 1918, the synod men had hearts of oak in the tradition of the oaks of Koshkonong, establishing a reorganization. We were sarcastically called the plucked chicken, but the healthy chicken began to grow feathers. We experienced the devastation

of the demise of the Synodical Conference and its aftermath in the 1950s and 1960s. We were gathering remnants of confessional congregations in various places in the Midwest and elsewhere in the States, but what could be done to reach out to confessional groups in other lands? There were many lonely Lutherans spread across the globe. Yet there were men of vision in our midst, such as the Rev. Edgar Hoenecke, who called for a worldwide Lutheran fellowship already in the late 1960s.

Many people advocated such an international organization over the years and did much to bring it to fruition. However, three names stand out as individuals who worked to promote such an organization and make it a reality: Pres. Gerhard Wilde of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK), Pres. George Orvick of the ELS, and Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Pres. Wilde emphasized again and again the need for such a fellowship for lonely Lutherans throughout the world. He had experienced that loneliness in his own country during Soviet times and later when his church body struggled to maintain its confessional stand. Pres. Orvick expended considerable effort throughout his presidency to make contact with confessional Lutherans in the United States and around the globe who were in need of a new confessional home. Prof. Gawrisch worked tirelessly for this organization. He put in more time and effort than anyone else to organize, promote, and establish such an international synodical conference.

We experienced some amazingly heady days in the spring of 1993. We in the ELS were mainly a rural Midwestern synod and now, on the twenty-seventh of April in Germany, the cradle of Lutheranism, we were establishing an organization including church bodies from Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and Australia. The CELC has continued to reflect its international outlook with conventions in Puerto Rico, Sweden, Japan, Ukraine, and Peru. This past year the ninth triennial convention of the CELC commemorating the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation took place in the German heartland of Lutheranism, and the 2020 convention will be held in South Korea. The members of the CELC have now reached thirty-two orthodox Lutheran church bodies worldwide.

The *Proceedings* and the essays from all of the conventions are found on the CELC website (www.celc.info). The Theological Commission continues to produce *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*. Article I is a study of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, Article II of the doctrine of justification, Article III of the

work of the Holy Spirit, Article IV of the person and work of Christ, Article V of the doctrine of eschatology, Article VI of the church's mission, and Article VII on the doctrine of the church. These statements also may be found on the CELC website.

The CELC was established as the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference and it is definitely fulfilling its purpose. The purpose of the CELC has been to preserve the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in our midst and to proclaim the message of salvation in Christ throughout the world. The CELC has done this through mutual encouragement and strengthening of the member churches. Hearing brothers from across the seas confess the same doctrine and proclaim the same Gospel that we do in southern Minnesota is a wonderful encouragement and blessing. Having had the privilege of being able to attend every convention of the CELC since its establishment, I have seen firsthand the mutual consolation of brethren and strengthening that is the result of this gathering of orthodox and confessional Lutherans. Because of this international organization, I can count among my personal friends men and women from nearly every continent.

The CELC stands ready to give answer to the confident hope of salvation in Christ that is within us. It is a refuge for those seeking confessional homes and a beacon shining the light of the Gospel in a sin-darkened world. Here the central truth of the Reformation, justification by faith alone, continues to be proclaimed. We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His resurrection, declaring the whole world righteous in Christ. This treasure is brought to us personally through the means of grace and is received by faith alone in the Savior which is worked through those very means of grace.

We are filled with gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord for all the blessings He has bestowed on us through the CELC. Here He has preserved His Word in its truth and purity and His sacraments rightly administered, providing a refuge for lonely Lutherans in an ever more secularized world. On this, the hundredth anniversary of the ELS and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CELC, we pray that as He has been our refuge and strength in the past, He would continue to be with us in the future through Word and Sacrament. LSQ

Sermon on John 6:48–51: Two Reasons to Turn Away Are Two Reasons to Stay

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HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED, IF YOU HAD BEEN living at the time Jesus walked this earth and heard His teachings from his own lips, would you have been His follower? It's easy for us—most of us have been Christians from infancy, since our baptism—to say, “Surely I love Jesus; certainly I would have followed him.” And yet there were people in that day who heard Him and chose not to be His followers. The words before us this morning come from the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, where we find a difficult conversation Jesus had with some people around him. And after that conversation, we read that some of them decided to leave, to “walk with Him no more” (6:66). Here from the middle of that conversation are some of the words that these people found so hard, that caused them to walk away. Jesus said,

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” (John 6:48–51)

Since the world began bread has been considered essential for life. That truth is embodied in our very language. Bread has been called “the staff of life.” A person who provides all that an entire family

needs is called its “bread-winner.” The region of a country that is most prosperous is called the “breadbasket of the nation.” Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and Luther correctly explained that to mean “all that we need for this body and life” (LC 1). Bread is sometimes hidden deeply in our language. The word “companion,” for example, comes from two Latin words: *cum* which means “with” and *panis* which means “bread.” A companion is someone with whom we share our bread. Even the English word “lord,” a title we give to our Lord Jesus, comes from the old Anglo-Saxon *hlāfweard*, meaning “loaf guard” or “bread keeper.” Bread is essential. It sustains life.

When Jesus announced to these people “I am the bread of life,” they heard two things, two things that made some of them turn away and leave him. Today let us hear the same two things and find in them reasons to stay.

First of all He said, “I am” (6:48). In those words, the people listening to him heard a claim: that this man standing in front of them was saying He is God. They heard in those words “I am” an echo of Old Testament history, when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and commanded him to go to Egypt to set His people free from slavery. Moses asked, “Who should I say is sending me, what is your name?” And God replied, “Tell them ‘I AM’ is sending you; my name is ‘I AM’” (Exodus 3:13–14). So when Jesus said “I am,” as he did frequently in His ministry, people recognized He was claiming to be God.

And then when Jesus said, “I am the bread of life that came down from heaven” (6:51), they also recognized that He was expecting, in fact demanding, total commitment to him.

So why did people turn away? Well, God’s demands are hard. You and I both know from experience how hard it is to give up our sin, do we not? We know how hard it is to turn away from those precious things we consider so important in this life: our pursuit of money, of fame and popularity, of fashions, of gadgets. We know how hard it is to give up finding our own way to heaven, to stop thinking “I’m a good enough person,” “I come to chapel,” “I can earn God’s favor,” “I’ll get to heaven because of what I do.” It is hard to give all that up.

When Jesus says He is the bread of life, he is saying that for real life what we need is not anything in this world, nor anything in ourselves, but what we need comes down from heaven.

Jesus said “I am” many times in His ministry: “I am the vine,” “I am the door,” “I am the good Shepherd,” and many others. This one, “I am the bread of life,” is one of the hardest. Because it requires us to

depend fully on Him. “Eat this bread” (6:50, 51) means to believe, not just intellectually, not just assenting in our head that something is true, but it means to depend on him, to commit our entire lives totally to Him. And that’s not natural. It’s not natural to depend totally on Jesus, in fact it’s impossible—for us.

It becomes possible only when it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The people in this room, and everyone hearing my voice this morning, has this unsurpassed blessing: we have been called by the Holy Spirit to eat this bread of life of which Jesus speaks. The Lord has opened our hearts to hear His message in His Word, so that we know our sin, so that we come to Jesus as poor, needy, wretched sinners, throwing ourselves on His mercy, believing that He alone can save us. The Holy Spirit has taught us that Jesus is the bread of life come down from heaven, that this bread is His flesh which He gives for the life of the world. And that he did on the cross, so that you and I might have the full and free forgiveness of all our sins.

The Holy Spirit has taught us that when this great I AM, our God, comes to us and says, “I am the bread of life that has come down from heaven” (6:51), it is not a fearful and difficult demand, but rather it is a beautiful and gracious promise. “Those who eat this bread will live forever” (6:51).

And so we can say, “We will stay with our Lord Jesus for life.” That phrase resonates on three levels. First, “We will stay with our Lord Jesus for life” means that we will cling to Jesus alone as our only source of life. “We will stay with our Lord Jesus for life” means that this will be true for us our entire life long, beginning to end, for life. And, “We will stay with our Lord Jesus for life” means that even now, each day, we live our lives in Jesus, in His peace and in His service, because Jesus is the bread of life that came down from heaven, and that bread is his flesh which he gave for your life, for mine, and for the life of the world. [LSQ](#)

Sermon on Ezekiel 22:28–31: Day of Humiliation—December 14, 1941

Milton H. Otto

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Editor's note: This sermon was preached at English Lutheran Church in Cottonwood, Minnesota, on December 14, 1941, the Sunday after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Prayer: O Christ, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! O Christ, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! O Christ, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us, and grant us your peace! Amen.

Text: *“Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ when the Lord had not spoken. The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord God. (Ezekiel 22:28–31)*

IN CHRIST JESUS, FELLOW-SINNERS AND FELLOW-redeemed,
Little did we dream as we left our house of worship last Sunday that some of the very things of which we had spoken were even then in

the process of fulfillment. You will recall that our Gospel lesson spoke of the signs of the last times, of distress among nations, of men's hearts failing them for the expectation of terrible things to come. Within a few short hours after hearing that Word of God we received the shocking news that outlying territories of our country had been attacked by force of arms. Since that time we have been hearing of new developments daily; we are filled with fright and dread of things that are still to come. Hundreds of lives have already been lost, and our beloved government assures us that thousands more will shed their blood before this conflict forced upon us has been brought to a successful termination.

In keeping therewith, I have chosen a Word of God that is most appropriate in this hour. This really ought to be a day of humiliation and prayer. We may have become exceedingly angered over the treachery committed, find fault with our leaders, and in general give evidence of our hatred for the enemy in no uncertain terms. However, I shall not dwell on the guilt of the enemy, nor on the sins of this land alone, but also on ours, on the sin and guilt of this congregation. Think not of the speaker and his person, but of God, whose message he is proclaiming. You require that I, as your pastor, preach the whole counsel of God: the law in all its severity and the gospel in its everlasting sweetness. It then is my duty to lay before you our share in the guilt of this nation that brought on this calamity. Even if you did not desire to hear it, which I hopefully doubt, nevertheless, the final authority, God, demands that I do so. Woe to me if I should flatter you, or for fear of losing your favor I should lightly pass over your sins and mine. The wrath of God would overtake me for not warning the sinner of the error of his way; I would be a hireling; and on Judgment Day you would arise and accuse me of having murdered your souls. Forget everything that may distract your attention and lend an ear to the Word of the Lord which endures forever. Give heed to this Word, for the sake of our country, for God's sake, and for your own salvation. Yet what can I do, if God does not take our hearts and cleanse them? Of what use is any admonition, if Christ does not give us true repentance. May God's richest blessings attend our meditation, as we on the basis of His Word consider: **Our Portion or Share in the *Guilt* of Our Country.**

I. We did not make ourselves a wall or stand in the gap for the land.

The thought that we are guilty of the present mortal combat into which our country has had to enter is a terrible, unbearable, and all-destructive one. Yet, it is only too true! Those already dead, the countless

ones yet to sacrifice their lives to satiate the appetite of the god of all evil, the innumerable wounded, the bereaved homes, the incalculable material losses—all speak only too loudly of also our guilt and responsibility. Most clearly does the Word of God proclaim this bitter truth unto us, “He will give those who are wicked to the sword’ says the Lord” (Jeremiah 25:31).

At the time Ezekiel was proclaiming the Word of God, a horrible evil had also come upon Israel. Jerusalem had been besieged by the Chaldeans and Assyrians, and the king and all his subjects, rich and most of the poor, old and young, were carried off to Babylon. Also then there was a true church existing in Israel. There was still a remnant of believers. But doesn’t the Lord free them from the cause of the misfortune that had come upon them? On the contrary, after mentioning the deep depravity of the people, a whole catalogue of sins, the Lord says, “So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezekiel 22:30). Here God patently accuses just His church, the believers; yes, He holds them above all responsible for the coming of His judgment upon the land. He says He looked about for one who would “make a wall,” if any had tried to ward off the sword dangling over their heads by sincere repentance and fervent prayer, thus to avert the threatening calamity; but none of His people stood in the gap before Him. “Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,’ says the Lord God” (22:31).

Do not think, dear friends, that this condition obtained only at the time of the Babylonian captivity. No, as often as a land in which Christians live experiences ill fortune, war, famine, pestilence, and the like, just so often is it a visitation of God on the land because of its sins. But that the evil was not warded off, God holds the Christians above all others accountable, for they have much more than others; they are the only ones who can pray, who thus could “make a wall.” Before such judgments come, God seeks for someone to stand in the gap, that the land be not destroyed. Our God is a holy and righteous God who, however, has compassion in the midst of His wrath. Before He punishes, He seeks after souls that come before Him in Jesus’ name, trusting in His blood, death, and satisfaction with a confident faith. He would thus gladly be prevailed upon to have mercy. By heeding Jonah’s prophecy of doom, Nineveh repented and was spared. If there had been, according to the Lord’s own words, only ten righteous people in Sodom, that would

have put up a wall like Abraham did. God would have spared the city in spite of its crying sins. By standing in the gap, Moses spared rebellious Israel from extermination on more than one occasion. By putting up the wall, King Hezekiah staved off a threatening destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Sennacherib. Because of Luther's incessant prayer, there was no war foisted upon Germany by the enemies of the true gospel during his lifetime, though he knew it would surely come someday.

The Christians are called the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They are the pillars and props of a nation. They are the dam that holds back the waters of God's wrath. Occasionally it happens that the divine counsel has concluded to destroy a destruction-ripe people, and there is no warding off by any man. The prophet Ezekiel writes, "Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord God... 'they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate'" (Ezekiel 14:14, 16). Here you see that God first delivers the righteous. When the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was imminent, Lot was told, "Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there" (Genesis 19:22). Similarly, the early Christians were first permitted to flee to the mountains before Jerusalem could be destroyed. This land of Judah was also invaded in spite of the good reign of King Josiah, but after his death (2 Kings 23).

Wherein, then, lies our guilt, that, even though we Christians live in this land, our national security has been threatened? In what way are we guilty that need and lamentation, death and destruction are mounting daily like a deluge? Are we merely going to decry, blame, and scold those who began this war, as Israel did concerning the Chaldeans? Are we not yet ready to acknowledge that the unsheathed sword and the flames and ruins of destruction are none other than the flames and swords of God's wrath? Are we still, like the unbelievers, going to look upon men and forget what is God's, who often carries out His judgments through men, who called even the wicked King Nebuchadnezzar his servant (Jeremiah 25:9)? Won't we even believe the words of Amos, "If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?" (Amos 3:6b) Are we going to say with the Pharisee, "I thank thee, God, that I am not as other men are" (Luke 18:11), that we are innocent of the blood of this war? Did we receive God's goodness in vain during the years of peace and quiet, "not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance," as Paul says (Romans 2:4b)? Didn't we have warning enough during these last two years when war and destruction had been loosed

upon the other parts of the globe? Did we earnestly pray for peace, for the welfare of our country, for those in authority? Didn't we have time enough to make up the wall and to stand in the gap for the land before the Lord? Rather, we must say with Job (9:30) that no matter how we wash ourselves, we shall never be clean. The right attitude is that of David when Shimei cursed him, "Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him" (2 Samuel 16:11b). Yes, when a pestilence was snatching thousands from Israel because David had in pride numbered the people, he cried, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house" (2 Samuel 24:17).

Now, then, to whom do the words in our text apply, "I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (Ezekiel 22:30)? They apply to us, us Christians. We Christians have not made up the wall; we Christians have not stood in the gap before the Lord for our country. Therefore this present evil is come upon our land. Oh, that God would grant us true repentance in view of this guilt.

II. We have frequently taken part in the prevalent sins of the land.

However, our portion in the guilt of our land consists not only in the sin of neglect, but also in this, that we have frequently taken part in the prevalent sins of the land, which we shall consider next.

That war is a divine judgment, also for those whose cause is right, will be denied only by those who do not believe God's Word. The invasion of the Chaldeans into the land of Judah was an unjust and unrighteous conquest, and yet the prophet says it was a punishment for Israel: "Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord had not spoken. The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger" (Ezekiel 22:28–29). Two classes of sins are mentioned in our text: those of false doctrine and unbelief, and those in life and conduct. Both of these are, without a doubt, the cause of our present distress.

It is only too true that from thousands of American pulpits an adulterated Gospel is proclaimed, and under a cloak of piety many souls are led astray. No country is so cursed with fanatic and visionary sects as is ours. What was said of Judah applies even more to America: "According

to the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah” (Jeremiah 11:13a). God’s holy, verbally inspired Word is no longer sufficient for the vast majority of men, and when they forsake it, the “lamp to their feet” is gone (Psalm 119:105).

And as for unbelief, it seems to be the popular thing today. According to a recent census, only 49% of the people claim any church connection; in other words, there are over 65 million outright heathen in the United States. Add to that the fact that many of the present-day religions are false and Christ-less; hence their followers are also unbelievers, and the number of unbelievers becomes far greater still. The total number of Lutherans is about 5 million, and not all of them are true Bible Christians. Not only do many who want to be numbered with the Christians go through life unbaptized, with no interest or concern for religion, church, divine worship, and salvation, but one daily hears and reads mockery and blasphemy against the Christian religion. Do you know that “postal authorities refuse to permit 64 magazines printed in this country to pass through the mail, and [that] many of them are not allowed to cross the Canadian border on the ground that they are immoral and have a bad effect on immature minds” (*Lutheran Homiletical Journal*, December 1941)? Then there are many others that should be banned. Look at the recent “best sellers,” filthy and suggestive books. The sad part of it is that some of this trash finds its way into Christian homes, warping and poisoning the minds of young and old. Is it any wonder that God’s wrath has descended upon us?

As the tree is, so will the fruits be; as the spring, so the stream; as the elders, so the youth. In general, the people of today live in disobedience and lawlessness, despising the God-ordained authority of parents, teachers, masters, and government. On the other hand, those in authority often use their office to gain their own selfish ends, as our text says, committing robbery, and mistreating the poor and needy (Ezekiel 22:29). Cursing, swearing, and false oaths seem to be the trend today. And what has happened? All these sins have brought God’s wrath and displeasure upon us as a nation in the form of a long and bloody warfare, as far as man can today determine.

If it could only be said that this congregation and this village shone forth as a light on a high hill! What God said to the congregation at Sardis also applies to the church of our day: “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments” (Revelation 3:4a). As a congregation we have increased in numbers, but have we had a corresponding increase in church attendance? This hearing of God’s

Word, the first and least requirement of Christianity, is not as it should be at all times. If the parents won't attend services and use God's Word in their homes, how can their children be taught to do so? Children that are being instructed should, yes, must, be diligent in their church attendance, if they are to be received as communicant members of the church; they must show that they have actually learned the principles of the Christian religion. What a responsibility then rests on the parents, yes, on all of us. By our staying away we give offense, and Jesus says, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

It is true we seek after the kingdom of God, but not always first; we often strive after wealth and honor just like the world; we would like to serve both God and Mammon. The borderline which God's Word establishes between the world and the children of God is often almost entirely obliterated. We no longer want the hatred of the world, and it is gradually ceasing its hostility toward us, which is a very bad sign, for Jesus says, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Matthew 10:22). It has come to such a pass that we are now offended at being called narrow-minded by the world. Contrary to Scripture, we want to be looked upon as friendly to the world, while we are at times hostile to such who are fellow Christians. But know this: Christianity has never been popular; the majority of men are, by being what some call "broad-minded," traveling down the broad way to hell. Those who seek and uphold the truth have always been in the minority. Formerly, we could at least trust that the youth would be the hope of the future. Yet in keeping with the spirit of the times, they are becoming selfish, independent, deceitful, stubborn, irreverent, indifferent, and pleasure-mad. And the parents and elders—may God have mercy upon us—quietly sit by enjoying the role their children play in the world, perhaps even encouraging them in questionable pursuits; they sometimes speak a word of admonition, but in all too many cases the stern voice of authority is a thing of the past. And in all this, we want to hear only the sweet gospel promises, be called "good people"; we despise the preaching of the law and become angry when taken to task for our sins.

In short, dear friends, we are not only just as guilty as the nation as a whole, but because of our knowledge of Scripture and its requirements upon those who would be Christians, even more guilty in the sight of God. We should know better, but we don't live and do better as we ought. And because of our sins, our young men, and those from

many other Christian homes, now have to put their very lives at stake to defend us against this recent aggression which God has permitted to take place. Some may have to give their lives in so doing, all, all because of the sins of this nation, your and my sins.

What shall we do? Are we going to seek to justify ourselves with respect to these things, condemning others but boasting that we have the pure gospel? If we do, God will say to us, "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things" (Romans 2:1). May such an attitude be far from us. Let us rather get down on our knees and confess our own iniquities. God sometimes has to send such affliction upon us in order to humble us, to bring us to repentance; therefore despise not His rod, but let us penitently confess that we have justly deserved God's righteous anger. Yes, let us praise Him for His holiness and justice, for His reminding us that we are sinners. Not only will we repent today, but every day, if we are to be true children of God. In the very first of his 95 theses, Luther writes, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, when He said, 'Repent,' intended the whole life of the believer to be one of repentance."

And yet, if we bewailed our sins by the hour, we could not atone for the guilt of one of them, much less our whole multitude of sins. There is only one course left open to us, and by repenting of our sins, we are ready to hear it; let us go to Bethlehem where the Christ is become flesh to save us from our sins. It was because we couldn't save ourselves that he came into the world. In spirit look to Calvary where He seals His work of our redemption with the cry, "It is finished!" Our reason cannot comprehend how that can save us; we must believe when Scripture says, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7b). To us also the words were spoken that Isaiah first spoke to sin-laden Jerusalem and to treacherous Judah: "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:2). Yes, the Lord invites us, "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). This, dear friends, is God's holy gospel. Believe it with all your heart. If this war brings us to God in humble submission and to a firmer faith in Him, it will be a blessing to us. This we do know: the church has always grown stronger after passing through a conflict;

it will also this time. With such contrite hearts we are truly prepared to receive the coming Savior and the salvation He brings with Him.

In days to come, we shall hear discouraging news from the battle-front; we shall feel the effects of this war in our daily lives. Now that we know where the root of the trouble is, let us apply the remedy, sincere repentance, and a confident faith in the words of Jesus: “Neither do I condemn you”; let us also observe His exhortation, “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11). Let us pray for our country and for those who are waging our battles for us. With this confidence, we can comfort our souls, “Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance” (Psalm 42:5c). God grant us such repentance and faith, and then His chastisement will not have been in vain, for Jesus’ sake. Amen. LSQ

Sermon on 2 Timothy 2:1–2 at the Installation of Seminary President Theodore Aaberg

Milton H. Otto

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Editor's Note: This sermon was preached by Dean Milton Otto at the installation of the first seminary president, Theodore Aaberg, on October 28, 1976.

Text: *You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:1–2)*

IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO THROUGH HIS PROPHET says, “He who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully” (Jer 23:28), college and seminary students, faculty and staff, guests and friends of Bethany, and especially you, dear President-elect: The stock of the organized church is not very high today. Many people, a large number of them members of various denominations, are of the opinion that the church as an institution has failed. They charge that the church has become so pre-occupied with its own inner conflicts and tensions that it has more or less lost sight of the world it is supposed to be serving. This comes to light when it is said that the church is no longer in touch with reality, that it has failed to keep up with the times, that it is not meeting the needs of mankind, that it has lost its credibility, that it is more interested in organization, prestige, and buildings than in the people who are in need.

In our service this morning a man is to be installed in an office which touches the very heart of the work of the church. He is to supervise the

preparing of men who are to supply to the church with what its Chief Shepherd calls “The One Thing Needful.” It is a task that many do not regard as very necessary or important, and which is often more tolerated than appreciated. He will be helping train men to work amongst and for a class of people who are becoming more of a minority every day.

With that in mind, let us in this solemn hour, on the basis of our text, with God’s Holy Spirit assisting us, direct our attention to **The Task of the Theological Educator Today.**

I. The task of the theological educator of today is the same as it has been since the beginning of the Christian Church. What it is we learn from the inspired Apostle’s word to a church worker of another day. The Apostle Paul tells his young co-worker, Timothy, “The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2). What those things were which Timothy had heard and which he should “commit to faithful men” is well summarized in a statement that Paul made in his first letter to Timothy: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tm 1:15). Paul lists himself as “chief” of these sinners because he had persecuted the church of Christ for a time. But instead of continuing to oppose the God-man Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk 19:10), Paul at his conversion was literally turned around to become the chief spokesman for that Savior. He was so convinced that Jesus was the Savior of sinners, so appreciative of the fact that he, too, had been redeemed and forgiven by Christ, that he had to tell people wherever he went, “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Co 2:2).

In our text Paul is laying it on the heart and conscience of Timothy to seek out other men who should continue to proclaim this gospel of life and salvation in Jesus Christ, as he and Timothy had been doing, because there just was no salvation in any other. By calling Timothy’s attention to the fact that he had preached this gospel of Jesus’ blood and righteousness before many witnesses, Paul was saying that it was not an underground movement, not something for a select few, but a message which should be made known to all people because it concerned the eternal wellbeing of all people.

The objective of our seminary is to carry out this same assignment that Paul had given to Timothy, committing this precious gospel to faithful men who shall go out and teach others also. It is a most necessary

and vital work, this training of qualified men to become ambassadors for Christ, because these ambassadors are to direct the great missionary task of pointing sinners to their Savior.

II. This is the task of which you are to be in charge in our midst, dear President-elect. However, as we shall next note, **it is a task that is made more difficult by the atmosphere in which we find ourselves today.** The very nature of those to be trained indicated that the task is not an easy one. Each of these students who enters the seminary, unlike in personality and temperament, is to be trained and molded into a faithful under-shepherd who will be apt to feed and lead Jesus' sheep and to bring others into his fold. In addition, each such student has a fair measure of the Old Adam, as does each instructor. So there is, in a sense, also an inner problem that has to be contended with continually.

But the problem goes deeper than that. Consider the type of world which we have today and in which these men are later to serve. It is one in which there are not many moral standards left. Everyone is more or less free to do his own thing, and if some do not go along with the disrespect for authority, the immorality, the dishonesty that is to be found among people of both high and low estate, they still will not condemn those who are involved in such things. Much in the publication and entertainment industries bears out the fact that ours is a corrupt world. We have unparalleled violence on our streets and banditry even in the skies above now and then. Just scanning the front page of the average daily paper will tell us that mankind is in a bad way, but also that it for that reason needs the very thing the men in our seminary are being prepared to bring to it.

We cannot expect much else from the world. What is both disheartening and difficult to comprehend is the erosion that has taken place in many sectors of the organized church. So-called scholars take an approach to the Old Testament of our Bible that turns facts into fiction and fables, that distorts the truth as God gave it through His holy men of old, and which destroys the very basis for the good news of a Savior sent from heaven to set the sinner free. In the same way, the New Testament is downgraded. Just last week the official organ of one of the major Lutheran bodies in our country stated that a section of Paul's letter to Timothy "might not be Paul's directly, but reflects a later approach by one of Paul's followers writing in the Apostle's name. A careful reading of first and second Timothy suggests that these writings—at least in their final form—emerged from the late first-century

church and not from Paul's time (AD 50–65).” That would mean that the epistles to Timothy, as we have them in our Bible, are not really the inspired word of God. And yet, such theology should not surprise us, for this same Paul in his second letter to Timothy warned us, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Tm 4:3).

As a result of such an attitude toward Scripture, which Scripture our seminary still upholds as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God, as a result of the low regard that many now have for this sacred record, many churches ignore what the Bible says on some things. To mention just a few: they approve, or at least condone, the murdering of the unborn; they, contrary to Scripture, are ordaining women into the office of the ministry; they are entering into various unionistic and syncretistic alliances; and they are becoming more vocal in dictating to the State what it should be doing in both domestic and foreign affairs. No wonder that the average man is becoming more and more disenchanted with the one institution he had thought should be above all this. But this is another aspect of the unfavorable climate that confronts those who are being trained for the office of the holy ministry; and remember also that they are to win disciples for Christ from among the very people affected by all this.

Behind all this, of course, is the real enemy, Satan himself. No matter what form his opposition takes, in the end he has but one aim, either to keep people from hearing the message of salvation in the first place, or, if they do hear it, to come in, as Jesus says, and to take the Word out of their hearts (Mt 13:19), lest they should believe and be saved. So it gets to be a contest, the old evil foe versus the church which is dedicated to carrying out God's will, to dispense the means of grace which can save men for time and eternity. Still, if Christians are to be able to call men to serve them with this Word that saves, if Christians are to send men out to tell people elsewhere of the wondrous saving grace of God in Christ, then men will have to be trained for that, no matter how difficult or how unfavorable the environment in which this is to be done.

III. When taking a look at the task of the theological educator of today, let us finally be assured that **despite all the obstacles, it is possible to carry it out.** You, dear President-elect, have been called to supervise this task of committing the gospel “to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2). You have over a quarter-century of preaching and teaching experience behind you. You know what lies in man; you know what the church that has called you needs and what it wants of you in

your new field of labor. You are asked to set the theological tone for the seminary, to make certain that everything in our seminary is taught according to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, and you are to do what you can to promote this Scripture-based doctrinal stance in this country and abroad. Where will you find the strength to render the service asked of you? That is what we would briefly underscore for you and for the church which has called you: You can be strong in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul encourages you with the same words that he first addressed to Timothy, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1). In him there is an abundance of grace for your personal faith, for the Apostle says that in Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7). When you look at your own weaknesses and wonder whether you are equal to the new task laid upon you, the Scripture reminds you of what the Lord once told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). When you remember that in this work the Lord promises you, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20), you can cheerfully and boldly take up your new task and confidently say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). This grace that is available to you is there also in the same rich measure for those whom you are to help instruct. As surely as they present themselves to go forth as laborers in the kingdom of their and our God, so surely may you hope and trust that, with the help of the God and Savior whom they wish to serve, they will be given the grace to become mighty witnesses for him.

In that connection, we will do well to note what a congressman from our state and active Lutheran layman said just a few weeks ago. Addressing the national convention of the church, he reminded the delegates that the first and foremost business of the church was to help individuals become transformed by the power of God through the preaching of the Gospel, not to become involved in political and sociological issues. These issues were secondary for the church and more the business of the individual Christian wherever he might find himself throughout the world. So we should be training our future pastors not to waste their time on extra-curricular matters, as important as they might be for their country, their community, but to spend all their time and energy and efforts on matters that have to do with the one and only utopia there ever will be, eternal life in the mansions of heaven. And they, and we with them, can hope for success in that endeavor

because the Lord has long ago told us that His Word shall not return void (Is 55:11); it is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16).

So, dear President-elect and all who “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tm 5:17), “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1). Go forth with the Lord of the church at your side, “for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Jo 1:8b). You will have success in training ever more urgently needed laborers for the Lord’s vineyard, and countless souls will be blessed for time and eternity through the care and attention given them by those who serve them with Word and Sacrament. May that be the blessing that follows you as long as the Lord grants you grace to live and do, for the glory of His gracious Savior-name! Amen. LSQ

Book Reviews

LSQ Vol. 58, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2018)

Book Review: Proclaim His Wonders

Craig A. Ferkenstad. *Proclaim His Wonders*. Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017. 312 pages. Order from our Bethany College Bookstore at 1-800-944-1722. Price: \$20.00.

This year marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), originally named the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1918. A major portion of the observance included the production of a new synod history. It was unveiled at the 2017 Synod Convention so that the members of synod would have ample opportunity to familiarize or refamiliarize themselves with the synod's history. Because of a generous grant, the pastors and delegates at the 2017

convention received complimentary copies.

The author of this history is Craig Ferkenstad, who has served a number of ELS congregations, the most recent of which is Norseland Lutheran Parish, one of the historic parishes of the synod. Pastor Ferkenstad was raised in the heartland of Norwegian Lutheranism in northeast Iowa. As a member of Jerico Lutheran Church, New Hampton, Iowa, living near Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa, and U. V. Koren's grave, he was imbibed with Norwegian Lutheran history from the cradle. He has always had an interest in synod history and has written numerous articles on the subject, a number of which received awards. He is one of the most qualified individuals to produce such a historical volume. Valuable assistance was received from his faithful wife Teresa, who proofread the book, and from his daughter Elsa, who also

proofread and, most importantly, is publications-savvy.

Many histories of the ELS have been written over the course of time: *Grace for Grace, Faith of Our Fathers, City Set on a Hill, and Built On The Rock*, to name a few. This history, however, is different from these. It is a pictorial history of our synod laid out as a coffee-table book. The variety of the pictures from the history of the synod is amazing. In the volume, photographs are offered so that one can visualize the synodical stories that are so well known. This illustrates the old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. The one negative concerning the photos is the fact that they are black and white. This is probably because most of the pictures were originally produced in black and white and to have some colored and some black and white could appear rather odd.

On pages viii–xiii a timeline of the history of the ELS is given. It includes important dates from the old synod beginning in 1844 and continues through the reorganization to the present. This timeline is of assistance to those who find Scandinavian Lutheran history in the U.S. a bit unfamiliar. On pages 293–307 one finds a list of all the convention essays from 1918–2018.

The first chapter, entitled “Reorganization,” gives the background of the merger in 1917. Here is described how the Norwegian Synod, the United Church, and the Hauge Synod merged on the basis of the *Opgjør* agreement, which was a compromise document. The large minority in the Norwegian Synod

that was opposed to the merger entered the new church body on the basis of another compromise document, the Austin Agreement. The faithful few, the minority of the minority, gathered at the Aberdeen Hotel planning their future, which resulted in the reorganization of the synod at Lime Creek, Iowa, in 1918. The iconic picture of the faithful confessors sitting in front of the Lime Creek church is portrayed on page 25. The early years of the reorganization are depicted in chapter 2. Chapter 3 speaks to the preservation of the faith. It points out that the reorganized synod was preserving the faith and confession of the three great fathers of the Norwegian Synod: Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), Jakob Aal Ottesen (1825–1904), and Ulrik Vilhelm Koren (1826–1910). That faith was founded on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Interesting pictures of these fathers and their families are presented. Pastor Ferkenstad also adds a possible fourth father, Laur. Larsen. He was the long-time president of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

Chapter 4, “Synodical Fellowship,” recounts the blessings of the Synodical Conference and the tumultuous days that led to its demise. These were difficult days, but from the ashes arose the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum in 1967 and the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in 1993. The CELC is the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference on an international scale. Today it has thirty-two member church bodies. The church leaders at the inaugural convention

of the CELC in 1993 are pictured on page 85, and the members of the Forum are pictured on page 84.

One of the main reasons that synods are organized is to work together to share the gospel in home and world outreach. Chapters 5–8 are set aside for this purpose. The ELS has been diligent in supporting missions from its beginning, first in China through the Missouri Synod missions and Nigeria through the Synodical Conference. Unique pictures of Paul Anderson in Nigeria are offered. Starting in 1968, mission work began in Peru, which this year is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. Pictures of all the mission fields are presented, including the synod's more recent work in Chile, Korea, and India. A detailed summary is given of the work done through *Thoughts of Faith*. The synod has also been active in home outreach. Many of the congregations that were formed as home missions are portrayed, with a full list of all the congregations supported by the Board for Missions on page 166.

Chapter 9 presents the various boards of our synod. Chapter 13 summarizes the publications of the synod. In chapter 14, "Synod Conventions," the mechanics of the convention are explained with a list of officers found on page 286 and all the presidents pictured on 287.

Christian education has always been a predominant theme in the

ELS, and it is the other main purpose of a synod. Chapters 10–12 illustrate this theme. Many of our synod's Lutheran elementary teachers are depicted in the group photos on pages 201–203. A list of our Lutheran elementary schools is found on pages 204–205. Pastor Ferkenstad does not neglect the significance of Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary for the educational system of our church body. Many seldom-seen photographs of the two institutions are given in these pages, together with an excellent history of the two schools.

Pastor Ferkenstad has produced a superb history for the hundredth anniversary of the ELS. Priceless pictures allow the reader to relive the great events of this history. They make the days at Lime Creek, the obtaining of the college, and the founding of the seminary come alive even for those of a tradition other than Norwegian. This coffee-table book is the finest keepsake that this reviewer can imagine for the anniversary. This book is a valuable resource for the study of ELS history and Scandinavian Lutheranism in general. The publication of this history is a significant contribution to the study of our history, and Pastor Ferkenstad is to be congratulated for all his diligent work and efforts.

– Gaylin R. Schmeling

Book Review: The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century

John M. Brenner. *The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017. 373 pages. Price: \$34.99.

Few events have had as great an impact on the history of American Lutheranism as the Election Controversy that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. More to the point, few events have had as much influence on the events leading to the formation of the church body that we know today as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. At the same time, the history of the controversy has largely faded from the consciousness of everyday Lutherans. Mention of that history, even among the members of churches which were born out of the controversy, often brings raised eyebrows of curiosity. Therefore, as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod celebrates its centennial anniversary, Dr. John Brenner's *The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century* arrives at an appropriate time to provide a historical account of the doctrinal controversy that in many ways led to the founding of the ELS.

Astute readers of this review have already noticed something interesting about the title: the book is about the Election Controversy "in the Twentieth Century." This wording is intentional. True, the controversy

began in the nineteenth century and Dr. Brenner devotes considerable time to this portion of the history. However, Brenner's primary focus is on the controversy as it continued to play out in the twentieth century and impacted events as recently as fifty years ago. According to Dr. Brenner, earlier analyses of the Election Controversy failed to explore efforts to resolve the controversy in the early twentieth century or neglected to address how the controversy impacted fellowship relations among Lutherans in the mid-twentieth century (v). Brenner's book seeks to correct these oversights.

Dr. Brenner's dual thesis with regard to the Election Controversy is this: first, "that the two sides in the controversy had a basic difference in approach to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and in understanding the historic Lutheran emphasis on the importance of agreement in doctrine for the unity of the church," and second, that "the genuine Lutheran emphasis on doctrinal purity was compromised to some extent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." This caused the Intersynodical Controversy in the Synodical Conference from the late 1930s through the early 1960s, "which resulted in a break between the Missouri and Slovak synods on one side and the Wisconsin Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod on the other side" (vii–viii).

The heart of the controversy had to do with the nature of divine election. Did God from eternity choose people to be saved by grace alone, or did he choose people to be saved based on his

foreknowledge of who would believe the gospel message (*intuitu fidei*, “in view of faith”)? Brenner traces seeds of the controversy back to the Reformation and Post-Reformation eras, from Philip Melancthon positing “something within us” as a cause of election and conversion (25) to the Lutheran dogmaticians in the Age of Orthodoxy and their usage of the term *intuitu fidei*, which largely happened as a reaction to Calvinism and as a result of introducing Aristotelean causation into Lutheran theology. The dogmaticians tended to police one another in terms of their understanding of the “in view of faith” phraseology, and while one can understand an Aristotelian instrumental cause as not being a *cause* so much as being a *means*, as Brenner puts it, “These expressions opened the door to later misunderstanding” (40).

From the Age of Orthodoxy, Dr. Brenner turns his attention to the nineteenth century. After briefly tracing the rise of a resurgent confessionalism among Lutherans in Europe and outlining the history of Lutheranism in the United States, he leads us into the background and substance of the controversy between C. F. W. Walther and F. A. Schmidt, which initially centered around Walther’s 1877 theses on the doctrine of election (67–74). Schmidt reintroduced the terminology of *intuitu fidei*, of election in view of faith, dividing his own church body, the old Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853.

However, as the controversy wore on, it became apparent that there were disagreements over more than just the doctrine of election. For

example, one of Schmidt’s justifications for his position was his use of the hermeneutical tool known as “the analogy of faith.” Yet Schmidt’s use of “the analogy of faith” differed from his opponents’ understanding of this term:

Walther’s opponents contended that the doctrines of Scripture were to be harmonized so that they fit together according to human reason using the analogy of faith ... that the doctrine of election was to be harmonized with the doctrine of justification by faith. Walther contended that the proper understanding of the analogy of faith meant that one must draw a particular doctrine only from those passages of Scripture that teach that particular doctrine. (107)

What becomes evident throughout the history of the controversy and its attempted resolutions are not only the different understandings of biblical interpretation with regard to the analogy of faith, but also a different approach to theology, and eventually differences over the doctrine of church fellowship.

Brenner devotes a whole chapter to the free conferences that took place in the early part of the twentieth century in an effort to resolve the difference over the doctrine of election. He also devotes an entire chapter to the history of the Madison Settlement and the Norwegian Merger of 1917. Dr. Brenner recounts the history of the Intersynodical Movement that

began in Sibley County, Minnesota in 1915, along with the declaration of fellowship between the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods. He points out that efforts to resolve the Election Controversy ultimately failed because the synods participating in discussions with one another “were not unified in their understanding of church fellowship and how much doctrinal agreement was necessary for the expression of fellowship” (237).

What makes *The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century* interesting, though, is the connection that the author makes between the Election Controversy and the dissolution of the Synodical Conference. Brenner places part of the blame for Missouri’s changing doctrine of church fellowship on weariness over the fight in the Election Controversy. Beginning in the 1930s, a growing number of men in the Missouri Synod “chafed under a legalistic spirit and an unhealthy synodical pride in Missouri’s orthodoxy and correctness. They thought that their synod was too inflexible and isolationist and they set out to change it” (252). And the change they sought—and achieved—was a change in the synod’s doctrine of church fellowship. “Failure to resolve the

doctrinal differences of the Election Controversy resulted in another division in American Lutheranism” when the ELS and the WELS broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod and Slovak Synod (284).

Carefully working through the history of these time periods, Brenner avoids confusing the reader by trying to remember all the various individuals, church bodies, and synods involved. He even includes extra help in the appendices: an outline of the various Lutheran Federations, a running list of the changing membership of the Synodical Conference, a catalogue of the various Scandinavian Lutheran church bodies in America, a list of the major individual participants in the controversy organized by church body, and even a list of major Lutheran mergers (285–301).

There is a need for books like this, especially as we reflect on our more recent history, that honestly assess what happened on one hand, while educating current and future generations on the other. In the case of the Election Controversy and its aftermath, this book helps turn raised eyebrows of curiosity into head nods of understanding.

– S. Piet Van Kampen

2018 Bjarne W. Teigen Reformation Lectures

October 25–26, 2018

Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Three Perspectives

ELS: A WELS Perspective—Dr. John Brenner

ELS: An LCMS Perspective—Dr. Lawrence Rast

ELS: An Introspective—Rev. Craig Ferkenstad

The lectures will take place at Bethany Lutheran College,
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