

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 59 • NUMBER 1
MARCH 2019

**2018 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation
Lectures: Evangelical Lutheran
Synod: Three Perspectives**
ELS: A WELS Perspective

ELS: An LCMS Perspective

ELS: An Introspective

Sermons

Watch Your Mouth!: Sermon
on Ephesians 4:29–32

See What God Can Do With Clay Jars!: Sermon
on 2 Corinthians 4:5–12, Commissioning
Service for Dr. Michael Smith

**Sermon on Romans 8:1–4 for the
Funeral of Wilhelm W. Petersen**

**Sermon on Psalm 23 for the Funeral
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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Gaylin R. Schmeling
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Nicholas D. Proksch,
Timothy R. Schmeling
LAYOUT EDITOR Daniel J. Hartwig
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Foreword

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IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *QUARTERLY*, WE ARE PLEASED to share with our readers the annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures delivered October 25–26, 2018, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the fifty-first in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967. The format of the Reformation Lectures has always been that of a free conference and thus participation in these lectures is outside the framework of fellowship.

This year there were three presenters. The first presenter was the Rev. Dr. John M. Brenner of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. Dr. Brenner is a 1977 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He served as a dean's assistant at Northwestern College, 1977–1979; a parish pastor in Big Rapids, Michigan, 1979–1985; and Dean of Students at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan, 1985–1991. Since 1991 he has taught church history, the Lutheran Confessions, Christian education, and systematic theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS). He also served as the dean of students at WLS, 1995–2015. Prof. Brenner has done additional study at Saginaw Valley State University, the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, and Marquette University where he has completed a Ph.D. program in Historical Theology. He is the author of *Conversion: Not by My Own Choosing* in the People's Bible Teachings series, *The Election Controversy*

among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century, and co-author of *Jars of Clay*, a history of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He currently serves as chairman of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and is a member of the Theological Commission of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Prof. Brenner and his wife Patricia have a son, Nathanael, who serves as a WELS pastor in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Nathanael and his wife Jennifer have two children.

The second presenter was the Rev. Dr. Lawrence R. Rast, Jr. who is the sixteenth president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and professor of American Christianity and American Lutheranism. Dr. Rast joined the Department of Historical Theology in 1996 after serving as a pastor in Madison, Tennessee (1992–96). He received his B.A. in Theological Languages with a minor in Theology from Concordia College (now University), River Forest, Illinois (1986), and his M.Div. (1990) and S.T.M. (1995), both with a major in Historical Theology and a minor in Systematic Theology, from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. In 2000, he received the M.A. degree and in 2003, he successfully defended his dissertation, “Joseph A. Seiss and the Lutheran Church in America,” earning his Ph.D. in American Church History from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Rast is a member of the Board of Directors for the journal *Lutheran Quarterly*. He is the chairman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) Commission on Theology and Church Relations on which he has served since 2006. His other professional associations include: Editorial Committee, *Concordia Historical Quarterly* (2000–2010); President, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri (2001–2007); Board of Governors, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri (1995–2009); Commission on Doctrinal Review (1998–2001); American Society of Church History; Concordia Historical Institute; American Academy of Religion. He has authored numerous articles on a wide range of topics with special interest in the growth and expansion of Lutheranism in the United States in the mid to late 19th century. He is also working on an ongoing oral history project dealing with African-American ministry in both the LCMS and the old Synodical Conference. In 2012, the Concordia Historical Institute recognized him with the Distinguished Service Award for his dedication to Lutheran history. He and his wife, Amy, have three children: Lawrence III, Karl, and Joanna.

The third presenter was the Rev. Craig A. Ferkenstad, secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Pastor Ferkenstad is a native son of the

Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He was baptized by the Rev. M. H. Otto and confirmed by the Rev. M. E. Tweit at Jerico Lutheran Church at New Hampton, Iowa. He is a graduate of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota (A.A., 1974) and Luther College in Decorah, Iowa (B.S. in secondary education and history, 1976). In 1980 he graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary with an M.Div. degree. He and his wife, Teresa, were married at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Belview, Minnesota in 1979. They have been blessed with three children all of whom graduated from Bethany Lutheran College. Pastor Ferkenstad served as a parish pastor from 1980–2017 serving congregations in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. He also has served the synod as a member of the Board for Education and Youth, Circuit Visitor, chairman of the *His Truth for Our Youth* thankoffering (1992–94), executive secretary for the *Messengers of Peace* thankoffering (1996–98) and as a member of the 2001 Catechism Review Committee. He serves as the chairman of the ELS Centennial Committee and will teach ELS history at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary during the spring 2019 semester. Pastor Ferkenstad was the 2003 ELS convention essayist commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Norwegian Synod. He compiled *This Generation of Grace: a pictorial directory of the ELS* as a part of the synod's seventy-fifth anniversary (1993) and was the author of the 2018 centennial history, *Proclaim His Wonders: A pictorial history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod*. He has received three awards of commendation from Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. He has served as the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod since 1996.

This year the theme of the Reformation Lectures was “Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Three Perspectives.” The first lecture, given by Dr. John Brenner, was entitled “ELS: A WELS Perspective.” The second lecture, given by Dr. Lawrence Rast, was entitled, “ELS: An LCMS Perspective.” The third lecture, given by the Rev. Craig Ferkenstad, was entitled, “ELS: An Introspective.”

The theme of the Reformation Lectures centered in the one hundredth anniversary celebration of the reorganization of the ELS in 1918, and its relationship with the other church bodies in the Synodical Conference. The first lecture, given by Dr. Brenner, was entitled, “ELS: A WELS Perspective.” In this essay there was a discussion of the relationship between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), a sibling relationship. The mutual counsel and advice between the synods has been advantageous for

both synods. This fellowship is a wonderful blessing. The second lecture, presented by Dr. Rast, was entitled, “ELS: An LCMS Perspective.” This essay points out that the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) was an important big sister to the ELS in its early years. Both the Norwegian Synod and the reorganized synod received considerable support in their infant years from the LCMS. The break in fellowship with the LCMS was tragic for the ELS. The third lecture, given by the Rev. Ferkenstad, was entitled, “ELS: An Introspective.” As a native son the essayist indicated the synod’s positive contributions to the world, and at the same time, pointed out its weaknesses. He showed the unique flavor of the ELS.

Also included in this *Quarterly* are a number of significant sermons: a sermon on Ephesians 4:29–32, entitled “Watch Your Mouth,” by the Rev. Andrew Schmidt; a sermon on 2 Corinthians 4:5–12, entitled “See What God Can Do With Clay Jars,” at the commissioning of Dr. Michael K. Smith by the Rev. John Petersen; a sermon on Romans 8:1–4 for the funeral of President emeritus Wilhelm W. Petersen by the Rev. Timothy Hartwig; and a sermon on Psalm 23 for the funeral of President emeritus George M. Orvick by the Rev. Mark Bartels.

– GRS

ELS: A WELS Perspective

*John M. Brenner
Professor, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Mequon, Wisconsin*

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IT IS A REAL HONOR TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO BE A presenter at the Bjarne W. Teigen Reformation Lectures in the year that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is celebrating the 100th anniversary of its founding. Anniversaries offer the opportunity to take stock of the past and thank the Lord of the Church for his amazing grace and blessings.

The question you have asked me to address is “how a WELS member perceives the history of the ELS and its relationship with the WELS.” The topic is a bit problematic because I cannot speak for the average member of the Wisconsin Synod who knows little about the history of the ELS and, unfortunately, not much more about the history of his own synod. Most WELS pastors have general knowledge of the history of their sister synod, but most have not had the opportunity to study that history in detail or to interact with the ELS in any official capacity. That’s a shame because the more we understand about the history of our two synods and how our synods have interacted, the more we will be amazed at God’s grace and faithfulness to his promises.

This essay will be a personal reflection offering an overview of the historical relationship between ELS and WELS. It will describe a history and relationship that demonstrates God’s grace in preserving each as a confessional Lutheran synod and preserving a fellowship that provides benefits for both synods. That fellowship should never be taken for granted.

18th and 19th Century Background

To understand the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Synod we need to look at the historical roots of each. Those roots stretch back to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That confessional Lutheranism came to America from Europe and survived can be attributed to God's grace alone.

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment with its exaltation of human reason and the development of the various critical approaches to Scripture had a devastating impact on Lutheranism in Europe. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, opposition to the Enlightenment mentality began to be apparent. Bible-believing Christians started to band together to present a united front over against the rationalists and those who were robbing Christians of the central truths of the Bible. One such organization was the *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* founded in Basel in 1780. "Our purpose is that in days when men seek to weaken the foundations of Christianity, the Christians of all confessions must be kept together."¹ Such organizations were unionistic by their very nature, willing to overlook what they considered the minor doctrinal differences between Lutherans and Reformed in order to oppose the greater danger posed by the unbelief of the age. A number of mission houses or training schools and mission societies grew out of these "Christian" societies. The Wisconsin Synod was founded by men trained and sent out by such unionistic groups. Depending on who was the head of the institution at the time, some of these pastors came to America with better Lutheran training than others.

Prussia was an overwhelmingly Lutheran territory yet had German Reformed rulers beginning with Elector John Sigismund who converted to the Reformed faith in 1613. His conversion set the stage for problems because of the *cuius regio, eius religio* (the ruler determines the religion) principle that governed much of Europe after the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Some two hundred years later, Frederick William III, distressed because he could not commune with his Lutheran wife or the majority of his subjects, attempted to remedy the situation by forcing the Lutherans and Reformed in his realm to unite into one Evangelical Christian Church in the infamous Prussian Union. He encouraged other German territories to follow suit.

¹ Quoted in *Continuing in His Word: The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1850–1950*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), 11–12.

On September 27, 1817, he announced the union of the Lutherans and Reformed into one congregation at the court and in the military at Potsdam. By 1834 the union agenda (drawn up in 1821 and published in 1822) was prescribed.

Confessional Lutherans began to stand up in opposition. Writing from outside Prussia in Schleswig-Holstein in 1817, Claus Harms (1778–1855) issued a new edition of the Luther's Ninety-Five Theses together with Ninety-Five Theses of his own. Harms's work served as a wake-up call. His theses opposed rationalism, Kantianism, and the Prussian Union and had a profound effect in Prussia and throughout Germany.² His seventy-fifth thesis declared, "As a poor maiden the Lutheran Church is now to be made rich by being married. Do not perform the ceremony over Luther's bones. They will become alive at it, and then—woe to you!"³

After the death of Frederick William III in 1840, the government allowed the establishment of free churches. However, before and after his death the religious conditions in Germany prompted some confessional Lutherans to emigrate to the United States and Australia.⁴ The Prussian emigration in 1839 under John Grabau (1804–1879) and Heinrich von Rohr (1797–1874) resulted in the founding of the Buffalo Synod (officially "The Synod of the Lutheran Church Emigrated from Prussia") in Milwaukee in 1845. Reacting to religious conditions in their homeland a group of Saxons under the leadership of Martin Stephan (1777–1846) emigrated to Missouri and settled in Perry County and in St. Louis. The Saxons and the Franconians joined to form the Missouri Synod in 1847.

The confessional revival also produced a couple of mission societies that were much more strongly Lutheran than the others. The Neuendettelsau Missionary Society was founded in 1841 by Wilhelm Loehe (1808–1872). Loehe sent numerous pastors and candidates for

² Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 2, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 335.

³ An English translation of Harms's theses are included in *The Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs and John A.W. Haas (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 512–514.

⁴ For an overview of these emigrations, see Martin O. Westerhaus. "The Confessional Lutheran Emigrations from Prussia and Saxony around 1839." WLS Essay Files, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/970/WesterhausEmigrations.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. The article originally appeared in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Fall 1989): 247–264; (Winter 1990): 38–60; (Spring 1990): 123–136; (Summer 1990): 192–208; (Fall 1990): 28–293; (Winter 1991): 34–63.

the ministry as well as whole colonies of immigrants to the United States. Loehle also provided for the establishment of seminary in Fort Wayne in 1846 which he graciously gave to the Missouri Synod in 1847. Louis Harms's (1808–1865) Hermannsburg Mission Society sent men to Africa and America. John Bading (1824–1913), the second president of the Wisconsin Synod and one of the prime movers in leading Wisconsin to a greater confessionalism, received his training at Hermannsburg.

The number of those involved in the confessional revival in Germany was never large, but they had an influence in both Germany and America. The rising tide of confessionalism raised Lutheran consciousness in nearly every synod in America. But only in a few did it have a lasting impact.

Lutheranism in Norway in the nineteenth century had a number of competing tendencies. Pietism had made an impact by the early eighteenth century. Because Denmark ruled Norway until 1814, religious developments in Denmark affected Norway as well. Most notably the exposition of Luther's Small Catechism by the Norwegian/Danish professor and bishop, Erik Pontoppidan (1698–1764), entitled *Truth unto Godliness*, was as influential as it was popular. Pontoppidan's exposition was mildly pietistic and taught election *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith). Pontoppidan did not go into much of an explanation of the doctrine of election but merely used the expression that had become popular among the Lutheran dogmatists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵ The popularity of his exposition of the Small Catechism served to engrain the expression in the minds of the Norwegian laity. This catechism was brought to America by Norwegian immigrants and was rather quickly translated into English.

A new pietistic awakening took place in Norway in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through the efforts of Hans Hauge (1771–1824), the son of a farmer and the champion of the working and middle class. Hauge read Luther and Pontoppidan in his youth and was familiar with some of the literature produced by the pietists in Germany. On April 5, 1796, Hauge had a profound religious experience which led him to believe that he had a call from God to

⁵ Question 548 of Pontoppidan's exposition of Luther's Small Catechism taught election *intuitu fidei*. "What is election? 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." Quoted in E. Clifford Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1967), 460n2.

arouse his fellow countrymen from their spiritual sleep. For the next several years he traversed Norway as an itinerant lay preacher. He was repeatedly arrested for violations of the Conventicle Act, which forbade any religious gatherings not supervised by a state-approved minister. Most of the time the authorities released him after a short imprisonment, but in 1804 he was arrested and imprisoned for seven years. He was released in 1811 but sentenced in 1813 to two more years of prison and in 1814 to pay a fine for violations of the Conventicle Act. After his release he retired on a farm near Oslo, a broken man but also somewhat of a national hero. Unlike many of the pietists in Germany, Hauge cautioned his followers against separatism from the state church. His followers developed a low church party within the Lutheran Church of Norway, emphasizing lay preaching, simple worship, obedience, and sanctification rather than justification.⁶ The Haugean lay-preaching movement made its way to America. Its most famous representative in America was Elling Eielsen (1804–1883).

In Denmark Nikolai Grundtvig (1783–1872), a university-trained Lutheran pastor, was refused a parish for many years because of his dedication to confessional Lutheranism. In 1824 Grundtvig experienced what he called his “matchless discovery” in which he determined that the Bible was the dead word of God and the Apostles’ Creed and the words of institution of the two Sacraments constituted the living word of God. He believed that the words of the Apostles’ Creed had literally been given by the apostles themselves. Since the creed and the words of institution were used in the church from the beginning, they constituted the living word of God. This “living” word of God could serve as the basis for church union. Grundtvig was also a nationalist who became an authority on Anglo-Saxon and Norse literature. He promoted “folk” high schools and authored many hymns. His followers became the most rationalistic of the church parties in Denmark.⁷

There was also a confessional Lutheran movement in Norway. The University of Christiania (later the University of Oslo) was founded in 1811. Here Gisle Johnson (1822–1894) exerted a strong influence on

⁶ Julius Bodensieck, ed, *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 988–989. See also Einar Molland, *Church Life in Norway, 1800–1950*, trans. Harris Kaasa (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957, Greenwood Press reprint, 1978), 1–34; and G. Everett Arden, *Four Northern Lights: Men Who Shaped Scandinavian Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 51–76.

⁷ *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, vol. 2, 964–965. See also G. Everett Arden, *Four Northern Lights*, 78–113.

Norwegian church life through his teaching at the university. Johnson had studied under Adolf von Harless (1806–1879) at the University of Leipzig. He brought to Christiania a confessional Lutheran spirit that embraced Lutheran orthodoxy and that sought to awaken the spiritual life of the church in Norway. He “sought to imbue his students with a spirit of orthodoxy which blended the passion and subjectivity of a revival preacher with the intellect of an orthodox systematician.”⁸ Many in the state church were opposed to the Haugean lay-preaching movement, but Johnson believed that in an emergency an unordained layman could preach. He worked to establish congregational rights in selecting and calling pastors and tried to establish a national church assembly to separate the administration of the church from the state. He supported the inner mission movement in Norway that aimed at evangelism, the distribution of Christian literature, missions, charitable work, etc.⁹ He also took an interest in the Norwegians who had emigrated to America. Johnson’s work was augmented by Carl P. Caspari (1814–1892), a Jewish convert to Lutheranism. Caspari was an Old Testament scholar of confessional Lutheran convictions.

Most of the early pastors of the Norwegian Synod received a confessional Lutheran training at the University of Christiania. They brought to America an antipathy toward Grundtvigianism and a suspicion of the lay-preaching movement.

Early Relations between the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod

The Wisconsin Synod was founded in 1850 by men who had been sent to America by unionistic mission societies. They founded a “New” Lutheran rather than an “Old” Lutheran synod.¹⁰ In fact, they did not want to have anything to do with the Old Lutherans of the Buffalo

⁸ E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 159–160.

⁹ *The Lutherans in North America*, 160.

¹⁰ The name “Old Lutheran” was originally applied to Lutherans who refused to join the Prussian Union. In America the name was given to confessional Lutherans who had migrated to this country from Prussia and Saxony. The name eventually referred to those who took the Lutheran Confessions seriously and who had a strict understanding of the scriptural principles of church fellowship. “New Lutheran” was the name given to those who were willing to go along with the Prussian Union in Europe while striving to remain Lutheran. In America “New” Lutherans were willing to serve German Reformed congregations. Although they subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions, they were sometimes inclined to view those confessions as “paper fences” which kept Lutherans from joint endeavors with the Reformed and interfered with mission work.

or Missouri Synods which were already doing work in and around Milwaukee. The Wisconsin Synod pledged itself to all of the Lutheran Confessions in the confessional paragraph of the synod's constitution, but they were willing to serve German Reformed congregations as well.

Soon pastors who had received a better Lutheran training were arriving in Wisconsin and joining the synod. Under the influence of men like John Bading, Philip Koehler (1828–1895), and Gottlieb Reim (d. 1882) the synod began to move in a steadily more Lutheran direction. Adolph Hoenecke (1835–1908), a university-trained theologian, provided important theological leadership. By 1868 the synod was ready to make a complete break with unionism. The synodical convention in Racine that year broke with the unionistic European mission societies, took a clear confessional stand on the “Four Points” of the General Council (which led to the synod leaving that organization the following year), and directed synod president, John Bading, to initiate talks with the Missouri Synod.

Walther and the Missouri Synod had been critical of the Wisconsin Synod's ties to the unionistic European mission societies and the synod's lax practice on the congregational level. In addition, there were problems between Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod congregations, particularly in the Watertown area. Missouri's periodicals, *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*, did not hesitate to point out and criticize Wisconsin's failings. As time went on, there was less and less justification for these criticisms.¹¹

Discussions with Missouri proceeded rapidly and with great success.¹² After the convention's close, Bading traveled to Milwaukee to present the resolutions to Missouri's Northern District which was then meeting in convention. Walther was present and suggested that the committee to be appointed by the Northern District should represent the whole Missouri Synod. The meeting between Wisconsin and Missouri took place on October 21–22, 1868, in Milwaukee. The two sides discussed all of the doctrinal questions at issue among Lutherans of that day. The discussion demonstrated complete doctrinal unity to the joy of all the participants. Walther, who had been a sharp critic of Wisconsin, showed himself to be a man of Christian humility and integrity by writing in the November 1 edition of *Der Lutheraner*, “All of our reservations about the dear Wisconsin Synod have not only faded

¹¹ Armin Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 38–40.

¹² J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, ed. Leigh Jordahl (St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970), 41.

but have been put to shame. God be thanked for his inexpressible gift!"¹³ Koehler reports that Walther closed the meeting with Wisconsin with this declaration, "Brethren, if we had known before what we know now we might have declared our unity of faith ten years ago."¹⁴ Both synods declared fellowship at their 1869 conventions, setting the stage for the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.

The Michigan Synod and the Minnesota Synod, both of which merged with the Wisconsin Synod in 1917 after having entered into a federation with that synod in 1892, followed a similar confessional development.¹⁵

Norwegian emigration to America in large numbers began in the decade of the 1850s, peaking in the 1880s and in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁶ The state church in Norway by the mid-nineteenth century had elements of a revived Lutheran confessionalism, Haugean pietism, Grundtvigian rationalism, low church tendencies, and high church tendencies. The Johnsonian revival of confessional Lutheranism was dominant, but Norwegian Lutherans brought all of these elements to America. To a certain extent, the divisions in the Lutheran Church in Norway became amplified in America.¹⁷

Already in 1851, three pastors, Claus Clausen (1820–1892), H. A. Stub, A. C. Preus (1814–1878), and representatives of six congregations formed The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In 1852, their numbers were augmented by newly arrived pastors, Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), G. F. Dietrichsen, and Nils O. Brandt (1824–1921). H. A. Preus soon recognized a Grundtvigian error in the constitution of the newly founded synod. The confessional paragraph "tended to place the baptismal confession (Apostles' Creed) above Scripture as the criterion of Christian teaching."¹⁸ Preus moved to strike

¹³ *Der Lutheraner*, Nov. 1, 1868: 37 (translation mine).

¹⁴ Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 74.

¹⁵ For an account of the early history of the Michigan and Minnesota Synods and the developments that led to the merger of 1917, see Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 18–26, 49–61, 93–105, 119–131.

¹⁶ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), 165.

¹⁷ Jane Marie Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870–1970* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 120.

¹⁸ Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 187. The confessional paragraph stated, "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 Testaments,

the error and, when the motion passed, the synod had to dissolve itself because it had changed one of the unalterable articles of the constitution. In 1853 a new constitution was adopted and the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was founded a second time.¹⁹ This group was popularly known as the Norwegian Synod.

The Norwegian Synod soon developed very close relations with the Missouri Synod and entered into a worker training agreement with Missouri in 1857. The Norwegian Synod agreed to supply a professor for Missouri's Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and Concordia would train Norwegian students to serve as pastors in the Norwegian Synod. The synod resolution stated,

This temporary arrangement would bring a threefold advantage: 1) provide teachers for the Church in the near future; 2) help the Synod to gain experience before starting its own school; 3) bring the Synod into contact with a church body which had been established on a truly Lutheran foundation and thus help it to become strengthened in the knowledge of Christian doctrine and of matters pertaining to church government.²⁰

The close relationship between the Missouri Synod and the Norwegian Synod led the latter to become a charter member of the Synodical Conference in 1872. At the founding of the Synodical Conference the Norwegian Synod was asked to pledge itself to all of the confessions in the *Book of Concord*. The Lutheran Church in Norway pledged only to Luther's Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. Since the Norwegians had neither been a part of the controversies leading to the writing of the Formula of Concord nor involved in the gathering of the *Book of Concord*, the Norwegian Lutheran Church had never subscribed to the other confessions contained in the *Book of Concord*. The minutes of the founding convention of the Synodical Conference offer this explanation:

interpreted in agreement with the Symbolical Writings of the Church of Norway, which are: 1) the Apostolic Creed, 2) the Nicene Creed, 3) the Athanasian Creed, 4) the Unaltered Augsburg Confession which was delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg 1530, 5) Luther's Small Catechism."

¹⁹ J. Herbert Larson and Juul B. Madson, *Built on the Rock: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod – Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, 1918–1993* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992), 7–8.

²⁰ English translation in S. C. Ylvisaker, Chr. Anderson, and G. O. Lillegard, *Grace for Grace: 1853–1943, 1918–1943* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 69.

But since the honorable Norwegian Synod has attached to its complete assent to the Constitution the question whether it could enter the Synodical Conference as a member, even though as an individual synod it pledge itself, as is well known, only to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, the explanation was given by the Synodical Conference that the Scandinavian Lutherans had always been regarded as orthodox, even though not all symbolical books had achieved official ecclesiastical recognition among them; nevertheless the Synodical Conference naturally demands that the honorable Norwegian Lutheran Synod, in so far as it is a part of the Synodical Conference, pledge itself to all the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and in the event of a doctrinal controversy to be guided and judged thereby. Since this was agreed to by the representatives of the honorable Norwegian Synod, the Conference found no impediment to its acceptance.²¹

Both the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod were active in the events leading up to the founding of the Synodical Conference and the early history of the organization.

A preliminary meeting was held January 11–13, 1871, at a Missouri Synod church in Chicago. Representatives from the Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Norwegian Synods attended. The president of the Illinois Synod²² was present but did not actively participate because his synod was still a member of the General Council. Meeting in six three-hour sessions the representatives drafted a constitution for consideration and adoption by their respective synods.

When the November meeting convened at Pastor Wilhelm Sihler's (1801–1885) St. Paul's Church in Fort Wayne, representatives of the Minnesota and Illinois synods were also present. Both of these synods had recently left the General Council for confessional reasons. The proposed constitution with a few minor changes was to be presented to

²¹ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1872*, 13. English translation by Edward C. Fredrich, "The Formula of Concord in the History of American Lutheranism," in Arnold J. Koelpin, ed., *No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord, 1580–1980* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), 114.

²² The Illinois Synod was formed in 1846 when the Synod of the West divided. In 1848 Illinois joined the General Synod. In 1867 Illinois left the General Synod to join the General Council. In May 1880 the Illinois Synod merged with the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod.

the constituent synods for approval as the basis for the formation of the Synodical Conference.

Professor Friedrich Schmidt (1837–1928) of the Norwegian Synod presented a paper entitled, “Memorandum containing a Detailed Explanation of the Reasons Why the Synods that are Uniting into the Synodical Conference of the Ev. Lutheran Church Are Unable to Join One of the Already Existing so-called Associations of Synods in Our Country.”²³ His essay pointed out the deficiencies in the General Synod, the United Synod South, and the General Council.

The first convention of the Synodical Conference was held at the church of Wisconsin’s president, Pastor John Bading, July 10–16, 1872. One hundred thirty-six pastors, professors, teachers, and laymen assembled. Sixty of these were voting delegates chosen by the individual synods according to the provisions of the proposed constitution. Walther delivered the sermon at the opening service. He preached on 1 Timothy 4:16 using the theme, “How Important It Is That We Above All Make the Saving of Souls the Purpose of Our Joint Work in the Kingdom of Christ.” Walther was also elected the first president.²⁴

The delegates heard two essays. Matthias Loy of the Ohio Synod presented, “What Is Our Task toward the English-Speaking People of Our Country?” Loy reminded his hearers of their mission responsibilities as confessional Lutherans.²⁵ Friedrich Schmidt presented his “Theses on Justification.”²⁶ The essay involved a lengthy exposition of the cardinal teaching of Scripture on the basis of twelve theses. Among the problems that were troubling American Lutheranism and would continue to cause trouble well into the future was the question of the universal aspect of justification. Schmidt addressed the relationship of

²³ This was published under the title *Denkschrift enthaltend eine eingehende Darlegung der Gruende, weshalb die zur Synodal-Conferenz der evangel.-luther. Kirche von Nord-Amerika* (Columbus, Ohio, 1871). The publication also included a brief history of events leading up to the 1871 meeting and the proposed constitution.

²⁴ Besides Walther, Prof. Lehmann of Ohio was elected vice-president, Pastor P. Beyer of Missouri was elected secretary, and Mr. Joh. Schmidt, a layman from Ohio was elected treasurer. *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1872*, 13. The following served as president of the Synodical Conference during its ninety-four year history: C. F. W. Walther (Missouri) served 1872–1873; W. F. Lehmann (Ohio) 1873–1876; H. A. Preus (Norwegian) 1876–1877; W. F. Lehmann (Ohio) 1877–1880; P. Larsen (Norwegian) 1880–1882; J. Bading (Wisconsin) 1882–1912; C. Gausewitz (Wisconsin) 1912–1927; L. Fuerbringer (Missouri) 1927–1944; E. Benjamin Schlueter (Wisconsin) 1944–1950; G. Chr. Barth (Missouri) 1950–1952; W. Baepler (Missouri) 1952–1956; J. S. Bradac (Slovak) 1956–1960; John Daniel (Slovak) 1960–1966.

²⁵ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1872*, 14–20

²⁶ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1872*, 20–68.

universal justification and the individual's appropriation of justification in several of his theses. The essay was timely because of a dispute between the Norwegian Synod and the Augustana and Iowa Synods.²⁷

The founding of the Synodical Conference brought the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod into fellowship and a working relationship.

1872–1890

The Synodical Conference started on a positive note, but it soon had disagreements. The first was the State Synod controversy involving the attempt to organize all the German synods along geographical lines. The Norwegian Synod was not involved in this controversy because it was not a German synod. Although the controversy involved some heated exchanges, it did not really disrupt the Conference because it involved adiaphoron. The Election Controversy, however, disrupted both the Synodical Conference and the Norwegian Synod and remained a significant factor in the relationship of various Lutheran synods well into the twentieth century.²⁸

The chief protagonist in the Election Controversy in the Synodical Conference was the Norwegian Synod's Professor Friedrich Schmidt. Schmidt had been a student of Walther's and a colleague of his at St. Louis. Schmidt had learned Norwegian while a student at St. Louis so that he could serve as a proofreader for the Norwegian Lutheran paper, *Kirketidende*. He soon also began to preach occasionally for a group of Norwegian Lutherans in St. Louis. While serving as a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland, he was visited by the Norwegian Lutheran leader, Herman Amberg Preus. Preus was surprised during their conversation when it became evident that Schmidt could speak Norwegian. He asked Schmidt to teach at the Norwegian Synod's Luther College at Half-Way Creek, Wisconsin (the college was later moved to Decorah, Iowa). In 1872 Schmidt left Luther College and came to St. Louis to serve as the Norwegian Synod's professor at Missouri's seminary. When the Norwegian Synod founded a seminary of its own in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1876, it was only natural for Schmidt to be called to serve at that institution.²⁹

²⁷ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, 61.

²⁸ See John M. Brenner, *The Election Controversy among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017).

²⁹ Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events: Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 148–151.

In 1879 Schmidt challenged Walther's teaching on election and soon had about one third of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and congregations on his side. Part of the appeal in Schmidt's teaching came from the nearly universal use of Pontoppidan's catechism among Norwegian Lutherans. Question 548 of Pontoppidan's exposition of Luther's Small Catechism taught election *intuitu fidei*. "What is election? 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."³⁰

Schmidt was opposed by the leaders of the Norwegian Synod including, President Herman A. Preus, Pastor Jakob A. Ottesen (1825–1904), and the "Norwegian Walther," Pastor Ulrik V. Koren (1826–1910). Koren was especially noteworthy for his theological leadership. Schmidt and his followers accused the leaders of the Norwegian Synod of blindly following Walther and his "new" doctrine of election. Koren maintained that the doctrine that Walther taught was the doctrine that they had learned from Gisle Johnson at the University of Christiania. Koren explained,

The claim was made that a new doctrine had come into being in Missouri. This frightened many. How untrue this was has been demonstrated by Professors Frich and Stub, by President Halvorson, the Rev. J. A. Thorsen and other pastors, and besides, by several laymen. The Norwegian pastors had this doctrine with them from Norway. It was taught at the university and, in the main points, just as in the Missouri Synod.³¹

In 1882 Schmidt was chosen to be one of the Norwegian Synod's delegates to the Synodical Conference convention. Missouri refused to seat him as a delegate because he had accused the synod of false doctrine. Wisconsin joined with Missouri because Schmidt had interfered in Wisconsin's congregation in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. His interference resulted in the majority of the Oshkosh congregation leaving the synod and a minority founding a new Wisconsin Synod congregation.³² Fully ten of the eleven sessions of the 1882 convention dealt with Schmidt and the Election Controversy. In 1883 the Norwegian Synod withdrew

³⁰ Quoted in *The Union Movement among Norwegian Lutherans*, 460n2.

³¹ Ulrik V. Koren, "Why Is there No Church Unity among Norwegian Lutherans in America?" *Kirketidende* (1905). English translation by C.U. Faye, <http://www.blts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/UVK-No-Unity.pdf>. The quote is on page 16 of the English translation.

³² Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 61.

from the Synodical Conference in order to deal with the growing problem in their midst. The synod, however, remained in fellowship with the Conference.³³ A later historian offers this explanation:

In 1883 the Norwegian Synod also resolved to withdraw from the Synodical Conference, not because of disagreement in doctrine with the other synods, but because it hoped that a settlement of the controversy that raged within the Synod itself might more easily be reached. Since the discussions in the Synodical Conference were carried on for the greater part in the German language, which was not understood by the majority of the Norwegians, it was feared membership in this body would complicate matters and make a settlement more difficult.³⁴

Prior to the withdrawal from the Synodical Conference the dispute within the Norwegian Synod had become quite heated. Both sides printed pamphlets and published articles in periodicals. "Schmidt's battle against Walther had become a civil war in the Norwegian Synod."³⁵ Through the influence of Schmidt, the congregation at Norway Grove, near DeForest, Wisconsin, deposed their pastors, father and son. On Good Friday 1883, supporters of Schmidt actually carried President Herman A. Preus physically out of his own church.³⁶

In 1884 the Norwegian Synod convention in Minneapolis discussed a set of theses produced by a "Peace Committee" but did not succeed in bringing about a reconciliation.³⁷ That fall the General Pastoral Conference met in Decorah, Iowa, and discussed a document prepared by Ulrik Koren entitled, "An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod."³⁸ In the introductory paragraphs Koren complained that the Norwegian Synod majority had been charged with errors of two kinds. The one set consisted of doctrine they had never taught and actually had repudiated. Koren, no doubt, had in mind the accusation that they taught irresistible grace and contradictory wills in God. Nevertheless, their opponents continued to accuse them of teaching what they had indeed rejected. The second set consisted of doctrine

³³ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 106–111.

³⁴ *Grace for Grace: 1853–1943, 1918–1943*, 60–61.

³⁵ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 109.

³⁶ John A. Moldstad, Jr. *Predestination: Chosen in Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 87.

³⁷ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 109.

³⁸ An English translation of this entire document is provided in *Grace for Grace: 1853–1943, 1918–1943*, 173–188.

which they taught and confessed because it was the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Koren undoubtedly meant the rejection of faith as a cause of election and the rejection of the teaching that some unregenerate human beings resist the Holy Spirit less than others. He continues by explaining the purpose of this “Accounting.”

We owe our congregations an accounting for what we teach and confess; and although we dare to believe that our hearers both know our testimony and will judge it by what they hear of us and not by what others say, we have still considered it our duty to present to you now this our common complete accounting, in which we hope no essential question that concerns the disputed doctrines has been unanswered.³⁹

“The Accounting” included theses on universal grace, conversion, election, and the certainty by faith of preservation in faith and salvation. His theses on these doctrines echoed the teaching of Walther.

Koren’s approach to theology was also the same as that of Walther, Hoenecke, and the other theologians of the Synodical Conference. Reason must be taken captive to allow clear, but apparently contradictory statements to stand and one must formulate doctrine from the passages of Scripture that treat that doctrine, not from passages that treat other doctrines.

There is no real contradiction between Scripture’s doctrine of universal grace and that of election, although these doctrines cannot be harmonized by reason. He who seeks to harmonize them before the judgment of reason will not succeed in doing so, except by limiting or changing one or the other of them, and must, on the one hand, depart from the Scripture doctrine concerning election, and, on the other hand, from the Scripture doctrine of the universality of God’s grace (Calvinism) or from the Scripture doctrine concerning man’s complete corruption (Synergism). Scripture gives us no other explanation than that in Hos. 13,9: “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.” II Cor. 1,18–19, I Cor. 2,12–13, I Tim. 2,4; cf. Acts 13,48; Matth. 23,37; cf. Rom. 9,16.

Every article of faith must be sought in those Scripture passages in which the respective doctrine is specially and thoroughly treated by the holy writers. Other passages in which the

³⁹ “An Accounting” in *Grace for Grace: 1853–1943, 1918–1943*, 173–174.

doctrine is only incidentally mentioned must be explained in accordance with those passages. Rom. 12:6; I Pet. 4,11.

It is therefore an improper way to treat Scripture when people in the doctrine of election partly set aside more or less those passages where this teaching is specially and thoroughly treated, partly want to explain these in accordance with such passages as either treat this doctrine only in passing or do not treat it at all.⁴⁰

The majority of the Norwegian Synod's pastors and professors signed "The Accounting," but Schmidt and an "Anti-Missourian" minority refused. The latter group met in Red Wing, Minnesota, in October of 1885 and adopted some far-reaching resolutions. They resolved that all who signed "the Accounting" and did not recant were to be deposed from office. Bjug Harstad (1848–1933), the president of the Minnesota District, and Ulrik Koren, the president of the Iowa District, were among those they believed should be removed. They also resolved that Hans G. Stub (1849–1931) and Joh. Ylvisaker (1858–1917) should be removed from their teaching positions as seminary professors at the Norwegian Synod's seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. In 1886 the Anti-Missourians established a seminary of their own at St. Olaf's School in Northfield, Minnesota.⁴¹ St. Olaf's had been founded in 1874 by an independent group from the Norwegian Synod. Since the school was independent, the synod did not have direct supervision and St. Olaf's became affiliated with the Anti-Missourians and their successor synod.

In 1887 the Norwegian Synod took action, declaring that the opening of an opposition seminary was divisive. The synod in convention passed the following resolution by a vote of 230 to 98:

1. The Synod cannot but consider the erection of a new theological school at Northfield
 - a) as an act of opposition to break down the Synod's schools which have been established in accordance with its constitution;
 - b) as a breach of the Synod's constitution and of the obligations those who enter the Synod have assumed over towards resolutions regarding how the schools are to be

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 182. See also Koren's 1881 essay, "Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?" English translation in *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 43, no. 2–3: 148–188.

⁴¹ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 110.

- erected, how teachers are to be appointed at them, and how the Synod is to exercise supervision over them;
- c) as an act which in itself is divisive, and which, as surely as it is continued, will steadily tend more and more to tear asunder and split the Synod and thus undermine not only its constitution and schools but also the Synod itself.
2. Therefore the Synod cannot tolerate in its members that such an activity is continued and must earnestly admonish those who have been along in it to admit their error and withdraw from it.⁴²

That same year the dissenters left the Norwegian Synod and formed the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. In 1890 the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood joined with the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.

It is amazing after such animosity that the Norwegian Synod merged with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America only twenty-seven years after the latter's founding. The time allotted for this essay does not permit a detailed account of the events that led to merger. Please permit a brief overview.

Already in 1890 there were some efforts to reach mutual understanding between the new United Church and the Norwegian Synod. The Norwegian Synod actually took the lead by inviting representatives of the United Church and the Hauge Synod to discuss the possibility of union.⁴³ Responding to a memorial sent in by its Minnesota District, the Norwegian Synod passed the following resolution at its 1890 convention:

1. The Synod acknowledges its obligation to work for unity among Norwegian Lutheran church bodies here in this country, and shall according to ability seek to fulfill this obligation.
2. The further development of this matter shall be the task of the committee elected by the Synod.⁴⁴

⁴² English translation in *Grace for Grace: 1853–1943, 1918–1943*, 189–190.

⁴³ Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Board of Publications–Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 45.

⁴⁴ Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian–American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*, 407–408.

The Norwegian Synod's resolution resulted in a preliminary meeting in 1891 to determine how to proceed. Representatives of the Norwegian Synod and the United Church decided to have each synod choose thirty representatives to discuss some of the issues that separated them. An invitation was also sent to the Hauge Synod. The meeting took place in Willmar, Minnesota, January 6–12, 1892. Interestingly enough, the meeting was better attended by the Norwegian Synod than the United Church. The Hauge Synod did not participate. Three issues emerged: whether the two groups ought to join in prayer fellowship,⁴⁵ whether the inspiration of the Scriptures ought to be a condition of union, and whether subscription to the entire *Book of Concord* would be required.⁴⁶ The United Church reluctantly agreed that the meeting would begin only with a devotional reading without joint prayer. In the other two matters the opinion of the United Church prevailed.⁴⁷ The Norwegian Synod had pressed for a statement on inspiration because it was a burning issue of the day and some Norwegian Lutheran pastors had forsaken the old Lutheran doctrine of inspiration. Some were questioning the divine character of the Bible. The meeting ultimately did not accomplish anything substantial. However, there remained an openness to meet in spite of the new issues that had been raised.

The issues dividing the various Norwegian groups were discussed at free conferences in 1897 and 1899 without resolving the differences. In 1900 the district conventions of the Norwegian Synod issued an invitation to the United Church to discuss doctrinal issues in a colloquy, which was to include the presidents of the two synods and their theological faculties. The meetings went nowhere because of the participation of Friedrich Schmidt of the United Synod. From 1902 until 1905, there were no more inter-synodical discussions to resolve the doctrinal and practical issues separating the various Norwegian groups.

The Hauge Synod issued an invitation to begin meetings again in 1905. Both the United Synod and the Norwegian Synod responded favorably. Although progress toward merger was not steady, and in fact,

⁴⁵ Historically confessional Lutherans insisted on complete doctrinal unity for every expression of church fellowship, including joint prayer.

⁴⁶ The Norwegian Synod for some time had subscribed to the entire *Book of Concord*. The United Synod followed the pattern of the Church in Norway, subscribing only to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. They declined to subscribe to the other confessions in the *Book of Concord* because they were unfamiliar with them.

⁴⁷ Nelson, *The Union Movement among Norwegian-American Lutherans from 1880 to 1917*, 410–417.

seemed to be at a dead end in 1910, the meetings eventually resulted in the infamous *Opgjør* or Madison Settlement in 1912. The *Opgjør* was a compromise agreement that allowed both “versions” of the doctrine of election to stand.

There were a number of factors that eventually led to the merger. People, particularly the laity, were tiring of doctrinal disputes. There was also a rising tide of pride in Norwegian heritage bringing Norwegian-Americans together. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there arose a number of Norwegian-American societies that attempted to preserve Norwegian culture and foster socializing. Athletic and musical clubs sprang up in communities where there were sufficient numbers of Norwegian immigrants and their descendants. The Norwegian musical heritage was particularly strong in binding together those of Norwegian descent. Performances of secular and religious music by Norwegian composers and even Norwegian folk music were weekly occurrences in some areas. Norwegian-American cultural pride and identity began to have a moderating influence on religious disputes. Common culture was beginning to trump doctrine.

Churches drew strength from the fact that ethnic identity was closely tied to religion among immigrants, and eventually class hostilities brought from Norway and expressed in the doctrinal battles faded in importance. The result was a distinct weaving of traditions of both the Norwegian peasant culture and the Norwegian elites in the American environment.⁴⁸

At the same time, Ulrik Koren was aging and his influence was waning. The same convention that accepted the invitation of the Hauge Synod to meet also elected a new vice-president. Dr. Koren, the leading theologian of the Norwegian Synod, had served as president of the synod since the death of Pres. Herman Amberg Preus in 1894. Koren had now reached the age of seventy-nine and would not be able to serve as president much longer. The convention showed him the honor of reelecting him, but most delegates realized that the vice-president would have to take over much of the work. The synod elected Dr. Hans Stub (1849–1931) to the latter office. Since Stub was a professor, he did not have the right to vote at the convention. The synod’s constitution stipulated that the president must cast his vote in case any convention vote ended in a tie. To enable Stub to serve, the synod quickly passed a resolution that in the future any tie vote would be considered lost. One

⁴⁸ Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*, 135.

opponent of the eventual merger gives this opinion of Stub's election: "He was the candidate of the more liberal element which considered that the leadership of the Synod hitherto had been too strict. During the convention much propaganda was carried on, and the slogan of the more liberal element was: 'Let us break the Decorah ring!' ... Stub was elected by 181 of the 328 votes cast."⁴⁹

The "Decorah Ring" was a group of pastors and theologians in and around Decorah, Iowa, led by Koren, which was opposed to the union if it meant compromising the synod's doctrinal position. Koren died in 1910. Thereafter Stub became a strong proponent and leader of the union movement in the synod. Stub at one time had been a defender of the Synodical Conference position in the Election Controversy. It is somewhat difficult to understand his change in attitude. He may have been caught up in the spirit of Norwegian nationalism and ethnic pride or had grown weary of doctrinal controversy or was gripped by the desire for the prestige that would be his as a leader of a larger church body or perhaps by a combination all three.

There was a sizeable minority in the Norwegian Synod opposed to the Madison Settlement. Their opposition was bolstered by the support of their brothers in the Synodical Conference. The Norwegian Synod's English periodical, *Lutheran Herald*, edited by the Missouri Synod's Theodore Graebner (1876–1950), was critical of the Settlement. In May of 1913, the periodical contained a warning that if the Madison Settlement was accepted in its upcoming convention, the synod would be serving "notice to the world that it no longer stands where it stood with Dr. Preus, Dr. Koren, Dr. Larsen, and Dr. Stub thirty years ago." The article declared that in the past the Norwegian Synod had tolerated the "second form" in others, but it had never accepted the expression without certain "well-defined conditions." To accept that expression as coordinate and equal to the "first form" after the "second form" had been used by others for thirty years to cloak false doctrine simply was something quite different.⁵⁰

The leaders of the Norwegian Synod sought approval for the Madison Settlement from the Synodical Conference at the latter's convention in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1912. The convention devoted two days to the discussion of the Settlement and then directed the praesidium to write a letter expressing concerns about the document. The

⁴⁹ *Grace for Grace 1853–1943, 1918–1943*, 95.

⁵⁰ "If Opgjør Stands Unmodified," *Lutheran Herald* 8, no. 21 (May 22, 1913): 478–479.

letter was dated August 19, 1912 and was signed by Wisconsin Synod pastors Carl Gausewitz (1861–1928) and John Meyer (1873–1964), the president and secretary of the Synodical Conference, respectively. The Synodical Conference made these requests:

- a) To eliminate from Theses 1–3 of the *Opgjør* the coordination of the so-called first and second form of doctrine, because only the first form represents the truth of the Scriptures and of the Confessions, while the second form is not found in God’s Word and the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, and hence is not entitled to such recognition in the Church.
- b) Inasmuch as the present state of affairs in our American Lutheran Church demands a proper antithesis to synergistic doctrine, we pray you to take steps to bring about a rejection of the teaching that man’s conduct, in particular, his omission of the so-called willful resistance, either by his natural powers or by the power conferred by divine grace, is the reason by which we may explain why some are converted and elected rather than others, as our opponents in the American Lutheran Church teach.
- c) We pray you to enter into a fraternal discussion with us, according to the Scriptures and Confessions and in the spirit of truth and love, of your former theses on the Call and Conversion and your present theses on Election.⁵¹

Missouri’s Franz Pieper published an evaluation of the Madison Settlement with an appeal for Lutheran unity.⁵² Pieper’s evaluation was relatively mild. He noted that the *Opgjør* stated that the “Missourian” view was the doctrine of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.⁵³ He declared that it was a great achievement that the *Opgjør* rejected synergism.⁵⁴ He believed that discussions of election and conversion might be quite profitable and that agreement could be reached by a modification

⁵¹ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1912, 24. The entire letter is printed on pages 23–24.

⁵² Pieper’s little book was published in both a German and an English edition. *Zur Einigung der amerikanisch-lutherischen Kirche in der Lehre von der Bekehrung und Gnadewahl* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913). *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913). All references are to the English edition.

⁵³ *A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

of the *Opgjør*.⁵⁵ He still objected to the “second” form of the doctrine (*intuitu fidei*) as an unscriptural expression that often provides a convenient cover for synergism.⁵⁶ Pieper also noted that the problem historically was that the two sides had a different theological approach.

The director of the Wisconsin Synod’s seminary, John Schaller (1859–1920), critically commented on the *Opgjør* in the seminary’s theological journal, *Theologische Quartalschrift*.⁵⁷ He objected to the *Opgjør*’s allowing two version of the doctrine of election to stand and the Norwegian Synod’s attitude toward doctrinal differences. The synods of the Synodical Conference were concerned about the theological direction of the Norwegian Synod. Union based on a compromise agreement would result in a break in fellowship between the Synodical Conference and the Norwegian Synod.

By the time of the 1917 convention, most of the minority changed their position on entering the merger. Representatives of the minority had been meeting with the Joint Committee of the three synods in another attempt to have changes made to the *Opgjør*. A sub-committee offered this statement in an attempt to appease the minority:

The annual meeting is expressly aware of the three reservations concerning paragraphs one, three and four of *Opgjør*, contained in a request from Prof. C. K. Preus and Rev. I. B. Torrison, and declares that in said request nothing is found which contradicts the Scriptures and Confessions, but regards the position expressed in the above quoted request as an adequate expression for unity of faith, wherefore that group of men and congregations, whose position is declared in the above quoted request, are invited to join the new church under complete equality and mutual fraternal recognition.

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.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 131–132.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15–16, 71–72.

⁵⁷ John Schaller, “Die Norwegische Sache auf der Synodalkonferenz,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 9, no. 4 (October 1912): 269–286; “Die Norwegische Extrasynodalsitzung und ihr Resultat,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 10, no. 4 (October 1913): 225–247; “Ein lutherische ‘Opgjør,’” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 11, no. 1 (January 1914): 59–60.

⁵⁸ J. E. Thoen, “The ‘Austin Agreement,’” *Lutheran Sentinel* 8, no. 18 (May 6, 1925): 277–278.

In other words, the subcommittee was taking note of the objections to the *Opgjør* but was inviting the minority to join anyway. This invitation and statement became known as the Austin Agreement or Settlement. The Austin Agreement was the *Opgjør* with the changes suggested by the minority. The problem was that the three merging churches never adopted the Austin Agreement, yet most of the minority joined the merger on the basis of the Austin Agreement. The Agreement itself was an indication that those who were behind the merger did not consider the doctrinal differences to be divisive of fellowship.⁵⁹

The first convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (later renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church) was held June 9–14, 1917, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. “The merger was finalized ... to a great deal of popular acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and the heartbreaking dismay of the Minority”⁶⁰ in the Norwegian Synod. The spirit of the times downplayed doctrinal differences in favor of outward unity. Hans Stub, the president of the Norwegian Synod and prime mover in the union movement, was elected the first president of the new synod.

A small number of pastors and laymen from the Norwegian Synod who could not in clear conscience enter the new church body met at the Hotel Aberdeen in St. Paul. They were joined by the Synodical Conference committee, which had come to the Norwegian Synod convention in an attempt to carry out the directive to meet with representatives of the Synod in a last attempt to dissuade them from merging on the basis of a compromise agreement. The members of the Synodical Conference committee included Dr. Franz Pieper and Dr. W. H. T. Dau of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and Professor Theodor Schlueter of Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. The Synodical Conference committee had requested a meeting with the Norwegian Synod prior to the 1917 convention but their offer was declined. They came to the convention anyway and encouraged the small number of those who refused to go along with the merger. Franz Pieper is reported to have told the minority in these meetings in the hotel before the convention, “What I am especially interested in is that you *testify*. Your testimony may not bear fruit for a hundred years, but it will bear fruit.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ For a fuller treatment, see John A. Moldstad, Jr., “Enduring Impressions from the Austin Agreement of 2016: An Unintended Compromise with Far-reaching Effects,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 58, no. 2–3 (June & September 2018): 241–269.

⁶⁰ Larsen and Madson, *Built on the Rock*, 59.

⁶¹ John A. Moldstad, “Lest We Forget,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 26, no. 8 (April 27, 1943): 114.

The minority decided to rebuild the old Norwegian Synod on the synod's old foundation. They elected interim officers but did not officially organize as a synod because they wanted and needed the approval of their congregations. Pastor Bjug Harstad of Parkland, Washington, was elected president. Harstad had founded the school which became Pacific Lutheran University. That school remained with the merged synod. Pastor John A. Moldstad of Chicago was elected vice-president. Pastor C. N. Peterson of Minneapolis was elected secretary, and Pastor O. T. Lee, Northwood, Iowa, was elected treasurer. Lee died some nine months later.

The group decided to publish a bi-monthly periodical, *Luthersk Tidende* (*Lutheran Times*). The April 1, 1918 issue contained this notice: "Pastors and members of congregations who desire to continue in the old doctrine and practice of the Norwegian Synod will, God willing, hold their annual meeting in the Lime Creek congregation, Pastor H. Ingebritson's charge, June 14 and following days."⁶² Lime Creek is in Winnebago County, Iowa, close to the Minnesota border.

Thirteen pastors and approximately 200 others gathered for the founding convention of the "Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church." However, because the governor of Iowa, in the heat of the nativism that was so prominent during World War I, had decreed that only English could be used in public gatherings, the group had to travel about one mile north into Minnesota and hold their convention in a tent.

The newly founded synod considered itself the legitimate heir and continuation of the original Norwegian Synod. And indeed, it was and is.

1918–2018

In 1919 the little Norwegian Synod⁶³ applied for membership in the Synodical Conference. The old Norwegian Synod had withdrawn from the Synodical Conference in the midst of the Election Controversy without severing fellowship with the members of the Synodical Conference. Reacting to the application of the little Norwegian Synod, the Synodical Conference passed this resolution in 1920.

⁶² Larson and Madson, *Built on the Rock*, 64–66.

⁶³ For many years after the founding of this synod, it was called the "little" Norwegian Synod by members of the Synodical Conference to distinguish it from its predecessor and from the merged synod.

1. *Resolved*, That the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Synod be accepted as a member of the Ev. Luth. Synodical conference of North America.
2. *Resolved*, That we welcome these brethren with great joy, encouraging them in their fight for the truth, and wish them God's richest blessings for the future.
3. To our great sorrow we are compelled to state that "The Synod for the Norwegian Ev. Luth. Church of America," by holding fast to the *Opgjør* and its union with the other two Norwegian synods in "The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America," has severed its bond of faith and church-fellowship with the Synodical Conference.⁶⁴

The Synodical Conference *Proceedings* notes that thirty pastors and twenty congregations belonged to the new synod. The Synodical Conference had suffered significant losses as a result of the Election Controversy. The reception of the little Norwegian Synod brought joy to the three other members. In 1920 the Synodical Conference consisted of the Missouri Synod, the newly merged Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, the Slovak Synod, and the newly established Norwegian Synod. The doctrines of election and fellowship continued to divide the Synodical Conference from other Midwestern Lutheran synods.

From the time the Norwegian Synod re-entered the Synodical Conference, the close relationship among the synods could be seen in their cooperation in educational endeavors. Norwegian Synod pastors and teachers were trained at the colleges and seminaries of the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod. In 1920 a committee of the Norwegian Synod asked permission to send young men and women to Dr. Martin Luther College to be trained for the teaching ministry. Since the synod wished these future teachers to have a working knowledge of the Norwegian language, Oscar Levorson joined the faculty in 1922 and was called to serve as a full-time professor in 1923. He served faithfully at DMLC until his retirement in 1963.⁶⁵

The Norwegian Synod generally sent students studying for the pastoral ministry to Missouri Synod schools. However, because of developments in the Missouri Synod in the 1940s, some students came to Northwestern College in Watertown and, until Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was founded in 1946, to the seminary in Mequon.

⁶⁴ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1920, 23*

⁶⁵ Morton A. Schroeder, *A Time to Remember: An Informal History of Dr. Martin Luther College, 1884-1984* (New Ulm: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1984), 74.

The Norwegian Synod demonstrated commendable concern for Christian education by purchasing Bethany Ladies College in 1926 for \$90,000.⁶⁶ The action was a leap of faith for such a small group, but it has paid lasting dividends. No one today would think about the Evangelical Lutheran Synod without at the same time thinking about Bethany Lutheran College. Who would have dreamed in 1926 that Bethany would grow into the college we see today with its many course offerings and beautiful campus?

Bethany has been a blessing for the Wisconsin Synod as well. Not only have many Wisconsin Synod students over the years attended this school in their pursuit of a variety of careers, Bethany for a time filled an important role in the Wisconsin Synod's ministerial education system. Before Wisconsin's break with the Missouri Synod, most second-career or non-traditional students received training for the pastoral ministry at Missouri's practical seminary, Concordia in Springfield, Illinois. The Wisconsin Synod did not think that Northwestern College was well suited for married students, so the synod entered into an agreement with the ELS for Wisconsin's second-career students to receive their pre-seminary training at Bethany. The last of the graduates of the Bethany Program, as it was called in Mequon or the Mequon Program as it was called in Mankato, came to the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the fall of 1988. By synod resolution, the second-career program was moved to Northwestern College and the college was allowed to enroll married students. From 1962 through 1988 more than 200 men had enrolled in the Bethany Program. In 1988 *The Northwestern Lutheran* commenting on the blessings of the program reported that there were between 100 and 120 pastors currently serving in the synod who had received their pre-seminary training at Bethany. In 1988 that amounted to about ten percent of the active pastors in the Wisconsin Synod! The Bethany Program served the Wisconsin Synod and its seminary well for twenty-six years⁶⁷ and the synod owes Bethany and the ELS a debt of gratitude.

The two synods stood side by side in the Inter-Synodical Controversy which ultimately led to the end of the Synodical Conference. The Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod were opposed to Missouri's

⁶⁶ Craig A. Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders: A Pictorial History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017), 220.

⁶⁷ Richard Wiechmann, "The WELS-ELS Connection," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 75, no. 15 (Sep 1, 1988): 295.

move toward fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC).⁶⁸ The ALC had extended an invitation to Missouri to meet for discussions on future fellowship. Neither the Norwegian Synod nor the Wisconsin Synod received this invitation. In 1938 the ALC declared at its Sandusky convention: “We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines.”⁶⁹ Earlier that year, the Missouri convention resolved that its 1932 confessional declaration, the Brief Statement, together with the “Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church” be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship.⁷⁰ The convention also declared “we endeavor to establish full agreement” and indicated that the practice of the ALC needed to be in harmony with their doctrinal position, particularly in regard to the issue of lodges. The president of the Missouri Synod was given authority to declare fellowship when full agreement was reached. The sticking point was the discussion of non-fundamental doctrines (particularly those which had historically been at issue between Missouri and Iowa—the Antichrist, the total conversion of the Jews, the Millennium, etc.) The ALC also had some problems with the wording of the Brief Statement.⁷¹

Both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin synods reacted with concern to Missouri’s agreement with the ALC. The Norwegian Synod declared that they could not regard the documents as an adequate basis for future church fellowship.⁷² The Wisconsin Synod held that the ALC’s Sandusky resolutions indicated that doctrinal agreement had not been reached. The synod also declared, “Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement, a single joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically and accepted by both parties to the controversy, is imperative; and furthermore, such doctrinal statement must be made in clear and unequivocal terms which do not

⁶⁸ The ALC was a result of the merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods in 1930. There were a number of doctrinal issues that had historically separated these synods from Missouri and Wisconsin including the various doctrines in contention during the Election Controversy of the 19th and early 20th centuries and Iowa’s historic position on “Open Questions.”

⁶⁹ *American Lutheran Church Proceedings*, 1938, 255.

⁷⁰ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1938, 231.

⁷¹ *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1938, 232. For a more detailed discussion of the St. Louis resolutions and the implications of those resolutions see Mark Edward Wangerin, *A Historical Evaluation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Fellowship Principles* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1978), 13–15.

⁷² Larson and Madson, *Built on the Rock*, 90. For the ELS account of the entire controversy with Missouri, see 84–107.

require laborious additional statements. The sincerity of the statement must also be evidenced by a clean church practice.”⁷³ Negotiations between representatives of the ALC and ULCA and the agreement reached between the two at Pittsburgh in 1940⁷⁴ made it evident that there was no real doctrinal agreement between the ALC and Missouri.

Part of the problem for the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods and for some in Missouri was the ALC’s continuing membership in the American Lutheran Conference.⁷⁵ This conference included the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America⁷⁶ formed by a merger based on the doctrinal compromises of the Madison Settlement. Those who were faithful to the doctrinal position of the Synodical Conference could not ignore this.

In 1940 the Synodical Conference asked Missouri not to enter fellowship with the ALC and to consider the advisability of framing one document of agreement.⁷⁷ Missouri’s 1941 convention resolved to continue negotiations with the ALC but recognized the desirability of having one document establishing doctrinal agreement. Missouri asked its sister synods to send representatives to the joint meetings of the committee to prepare this document. Both the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods declined. Dr. J. Michael Reu (1869–1943) of the ALC in a published article intimated that the ALC might object to the inclusion of the Norwegian and the Wisconsin synods in the discussions because his church body had not invited the other two synods previously for reasons of its own.⁷⁸ The document produced by Missouri and ALC representatives was called the Doctrinal Affirmation.

Both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin synods saw this effort as an improvement over using two documents for the resolution of

⁷³ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1939*, 60.

⁷⁴ The Pittsburgh Agreement between the ULCA and the ALC was an attempt to resolve the differences which precluded fellowship between the two synods, particularly on the issues of secret societies and the inspiration of Scripture. “Although both bodies technically accepted the Agreement it was with such reservations and limiting conditions that the document proved ineffectual.” Richard C. Wolf. *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 372. Wolf includes an abridged version of the Pittsburgh Agreement on 378–379.

⁷⁵ The American Lutheran Conference was a federation of the ALC, Augustana Synod, ELC (Norwegian), Lutheran Free Church, and UELC (Danish). The Conference was formed in 1930. In 1953 the Augustana Synod withdrew and in 1960 the remaining synods merged to become The American Lutheran Church.

⁷⁶ In 1946 this synod adopted the name *The Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

⁷⁷ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1940*, 89, 92. See 81–92.

⁷⁸ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1943*, 65. See Schuetz, *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, 278.

doctrinal differences, but neither synod saw the document as a satisfactory statement or settlement of the historic differences between the ALC and Missouri. The Norwegian Synod believed that the Doctrinal Affirmation had weakened the Brief Statement. Wisconsin was not satisfied that all previous errors had been excluded.⁷⁹

A new joint ALC/Missouri document, the Common Confession, was presented to both the Missouri and ALC conventions in 1950. Missouri accepted the confession as a statement of doctrine in harmony with the Scriptures. The Norwegian Synod pastoral conference meeting in November concluded that the Common Confession fell far short of its intended purpose. Some in the Norwegian Synod were already recommending an *in statu confessionis*⁸⁰ declaration over against Missouri. The Wisconsin Synod meeting in convention in August 1951 declared that the Common Confession was unacceptable in its statements on justification, conversion, election, the means of grace, Scripture, and inspiration.⁸¹

In 1952 the Norwegian Synod directed an overture to the Synodical Conference that sufficient time be allotted on the agenda for a thorough discussion of the Common Confession and the continued doctrinal negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. The preamble of the Synodical Conference's floor committee's report concerning the Common Confession stated that the confession in its present form was inadequate as a settlement of differences and that the document had disturbed the unity of the Synodical Conference. The convention, however, dominated numerically by the Missouri Synod, struck the preamble. A substitute motion was passed to postpone all further action on the subject until Part II of the Common Confession was available.⁸² The voting showed a deeply divided Synodical Conference with the Missouri and Slovak synods on one side and the Norwegian and Wisconsin synods on the other. Because of the size of their synod, Missouri had the majority of delegates at the convention. That majority reacted vocally in approval or disapproval of those who spoke in favor or against the Common Confession. The Wisconsin

⁷⁹ Schuetze, *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, 279

⁸⁰ An *in statu confessionis* declaration is a declaration that a group is in a state of protesting fellowship, the final step before declaring a break in fellowship.

⁸¹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1951*, 145. See 110–149.

⁸² *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1952*, 158–159.

delegation met privately and declared that they were *in statu confessionis* (state of confession) with the Missouri Synod.⁸³

As requested by Wisconsin in 1953, the 1954 Synodical Conference convention gave all of its attention to seven essays on the issues in controversy. Three essays concerned the Common Confession, one each by a representative of the LCMS, Wisconsin Synod, and the Norwegian Synod. Two essays presented the military chaplaincy and scouting, one by an LCMS representative and one by a Wisconsin Synod representative. Two essays covered various other issues related to fellowship, one each by Missouri and Wisconsin.⁸⁴

After hearing the essays, a majority in the Synodical Conference passed a resolution requesting that the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod not use the Common Confession as a functioning union document without, however, passing judgment pro or con on the doctrinal content of the Common Confession. The resolution asking Missouri not to use the Common Confession as a functioning document was not an indication of any change in Missouri's position. The Common Confession was passing from the scene anyway because the ALC was moving toward union with the other members of the American Lutheran Conference. Thirty delegates from the Norwegian and Wisconsin synods asked that their negative votes be recorded. An additional twenty-three advisory delegates had their protest recorded.⁸⁵ An overture presented earlier in the convention asking the Synodical Conference to reject the Common Confession because it did not define or safeguard the Scripture doctrine taught in the Brief Statement was signed by fifty-one Missouri Synod members.⁸⁶ Missouri was a house divided.

⁸³ Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference*, 299–303. Armin Schuetze was present at this convention.

⁸⁴ The titles of the three essays are “The Military Chaplaincy and Scouting,” by E. C. Fredrich, “The Inadequacy of the Common Confession as a Settlement of Past Differences,” by E. H. Wendland, and “Unionism, the Communion Agreement, Negotiating with Lodges, and Joint Prayer,” by E. E. Kowalke. Prof. Schuetze provides a summary of the essays on the *Common Confession* presented by Pastor Wendland, LCMS Pastor Nickel, and ELS Prof. Norman Madson in *Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor*, 308–317. The Missouri Synod essays: Th.F. Nickel, “A Defense of the Common Confession in Order to Preserve the Wonderful Gift of Fellowship of Truth as Found in the Synodical Conference These Many Years.” M. Scharlemann, “The Boy Scouts of America and the Military Chaplaincy.” A. Grumm, “Other Issues Causing Tension between Wisconsin and Missouri.” Norwegian Synod essay: N. Madson, “The Norwegian Synod's Reasons for Rejecting the Common Confession.”

⁸⁵ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1954*, 193–196.

⁸⁶ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1954*, 200–202.

By 1955 the Norwegian Synod became convinced that the Missouri Synod had fallen under the condemnation of Romans 16:17–18 because of their persistence in error and suspended fellowship. The Norwegian Synod remained in the Synodical Conference and in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod.

The Synodical Conference met in December of 1956. The convention resolved that the Union Committees of the member synods were to meet jointly and draw up a list of problems stating clearly the *status controversiae* of each case, set each synod's view properly expressed in thetical and antithetical form, discuss them throughout the various synods, and present their evaluations to the 1958 convention. It also suggested a "conclave of theologians" of overseas brethren to assist in the solution of the unresolved doctrinal problems.⁸⁷ The Synodical Conference in convention in 1958 received a statement on Scripture.⁸⁸ It was also reported that a statement on the Antichrist was nearing completion, and that extensive agreement respecting the principles underlying an evaluation of the scout movement was brought to light. In October the Joint Committee adopted the final form of the statement on Scripture and on the Antichrist.

All four constituent synods of the Synodical Conference met in 1959. Missouri, Wisconsin, the ELS, and the Slovak Synod all adopted the statement on Scripture. Wisconsin also adopted the statements on the Antichrist.⁸⁹ The Wisconsin Synod had instructed its theologians on the Joint Committee to continue to work until agreement in doctrine and practice had been attained or until an impasse was reached revealing a doctrinal difference and indicating that no agreement could be brought about. In May 1960, the Committee declared that such an impasse had been reached on the doctrine of fellowship. The Wisconsin Synod and the ELS produced statements in accord with the historic teaching of the Synodical Conference that no fellowship can be practiced without full doctrinal agreement. In opposition to this "unit concept" of fellowship, the Slovak and Missouri Synods maintained a distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship and contended for a "growing edge" of fellowship toward those outside their synods. The 1960 Synodical Conference convention had been recessed until May 1961 but could not resolve the impasse on fellowship when the convention reconvened. The Wisconsin Synod in convention, having received the report of the

⁸⁷ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1956*, 144–146.

⁸⁸ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1958*, 42–46.

⁸⁹ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1959*, 200–205.

impasse on fellowship, voted to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod by a vote of 124–49.⁹⁰

In 1962 both the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod asked the Synodical Conference to dissolve itself. When that did not happen both synods withdrew from Synodical Conference membership in 1963. Throughout the Intersynodical Controversy the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Synod stood side by side, united in doctrine and practice during a controversy that was often heartbreaking and bitter.⁹¹ That they did is evidence of God's grace toward two small church bodies.

God's grace has also been evident in the mission efforts of both synods. Both synods supplied a number of missionaries to the Synodical Conference Nigerian mission.⁹² The mission-mindedness of the ELS can be seen in the remarkable number of countries of the world to which the ELS has either sent missionaries or provided financial and educational support to groups already existing. The countries include England, Peru, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Chile, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Australia, Norway, India, and South Korea.⁹³ Not every effort has been successful by human standards, but the Lord of the Church grants the success he desires in his own good time. Many of these countries have established confessional Lutheran churches today because of the faithful efforts of the ELS.

Home mission efforts have also been impressive. From 1926–2013, some fifty-eight mission congregations were planted.⁹⁴ Other established congregations have joined the ELS for confessional reasons. God has blessed the ELS with numerical and geographical growth. Over the past fifty years, the greatest geographical expansion has been in Florida, California, Washington, and Oregon. The ELS in 1967 had eighty-three congregation, five of which were outside the Midwest. In 2018 the ELS numbers some 130 congregations with more than forty outside the Midwest.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1961, 197–199*. See also 168–197.

⁹¹ For an example of how this controversy was often bitter yet served to bring the Norwegian Synod and the Wisconsin Synod together, see Paul S. Meitner, "The Mankato War (1949–1953)," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 2–19.

⁹² See Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 169, and Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders*, 103–107.

⁹³ Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders*, 111–158.

⁹⁴ Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders*, 166. See 160–174.

⁹⁵ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 58, no. 2–3 (June & September 2018): 175.

Many thought that the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod would have difficulty surviving a break in fellowship with the Missouri Synod. They were wrong. Our synods have continued to survive and even prosper. Our fellowship has proved to be a real blessing to both synods.

Our forefathers recognized the need for official contact between our two synods to preserve that precious fellowship. In 1967 they began meeting in the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum (popularly called the ELS/WELS Forum). Representatives from the various departments of WELS and ELS meet to discuss matters of common interest and concern and to review the doctrinal essays presented at each other's conventions. The Forum also provides the opportunity to express concerns and raise questions about the work and practice in each synod. It provides mutual encouragement and helps prevent duplication of effort or unhealthy competition. 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. The ELS Doctrine Committee meets with the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations to discuss areas of concern in the years the Confessional Forum does not meet.

One of the most significant developments in the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Synod is their cooperation in the founding and promotion of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). After the two synods left the Synodical Conference, there was a longing for the establishment of a similar organization to express fellowship and to provide mutual encouragement and support. There were repeated suggestions from ELS and WELS leaders to do so. By the mid-1980s, the time seemed right to pursue the organization. Representatives of the WELS CICR met in Leipzig, Germany, April 8–9, 1986, with representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church to discuss, among other things, a new "Synodical Conference." The CICR report in the 1986 WELS Report to the 12 Districts included a proposal for a new international conference. The ELS reacted favorably to the proposal. In January 1987, the WELS CICR & ELS Doctrine Committee resolved that the two committees seek approval from their respective synods in 1987 for the appointment of a committee of six (three to be appointed by the ELS Doctrine Committee and three by the WELS CICR) to begin preliminary planning for a new conference and to present its recommendations to the ELS Doctrine Committee and to the WELS CICR. Wisconsin Synod professors Wilbert Gawrisch, Lyle Lange, and

Armin Panning, and ELS Pastor Gaylin Schmeling, Professor Wilhelm Petersen, and Professor Juul Madson were appointed to the committee. On October 18, 1988, at the meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum, Pastor Duane Tomhave, administrator of the WELS Board for World Missions, read an essay entitled, “Synods of Mission-Minded Confessional Lutherans,” stating that gospel outreach goes hand in hand with the objective of preserving the truth of Scripture. The proposed conference was to carry out that two-fold purpose.

After much planning, the first convention of the CELC took place on April 27–29, 1993, at the *Deutsches Jugend Herbergs Werk* (a youth hostel) on the Rhine about an hour’s drive from Frankfurt. Invitations had been sent to several churches and synods including WELS and ELS missions. Some of the younger mission churches did not consider themselves ready for active participation in such an organization. Thirteen accepted the invitation.⁹⁶

Today on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the CELC, the organization numbers thirty-two church bodies. More will be seeking reception as members at the next CELC convention in 2020. The grace of God is truly amazing. Both of the synods are evidence of that fact. God has used both of the synods to proclaim his message of salvation worldwide and to preserve the legacy of confessional Lutheranism.

What about the Future?

The history of our two synods is intertwined. Those histories are an account of God’s grace in leading our forefathers to a clear confession and preserving them in his truth.

Yet, we would be naïve if we were to think that there will be no challenges to the fellowship we enjoy. We remain sinners living in a sin-filled world. We are the church militant. We can be certain that Satan will do his best to disrupt the relationship we treasure. On the one hand, false doctrine and practice can arise. On the other hand, it is human nature to jump to conclusions, even wrong conclusions,

⁹⁶ See Lyle Lange, “The Constituting Convention of the CELC—A Mountaintop Experience,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 218–223; Armin Schuetze, “The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference: How It Came to Be,” *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 12, no. 2 (October 1994): 20–41; and especially Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Make Known God’s Manifold Wisdom,” presented at the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, June 3–5, 2008, Kiev, Ukraine, <https://celc.info/wp-content/download/history/CELC-History.pdf>.

about each other's words and actions. Misguided synodical pride can contribute to the problem. Thoughtless words and actions can cause irritations. Because each synod has come from a unique background and experience, we may approach opportunities and problems in different ways leading to misunderstandings. In our practice, we dare not run roughshod over consciences, run ahead without brotherly consultation, or imply that matters of adiaphoron are divisive of fellowship.

At times we may say the same things but with a different accent. We need to listen carefully to each other so that we do not talk past each other. Asking questions first rather than making accusations is important in fraternal relations. There is a difference between concern for each other's synod and suspicion. In times of doctrinal strife, we will strive to retain the hermeneutics or approach to theology that characterized the work of Hoenecke and Koren. We will want to do our best to follow in the footsteps of our synodical fathers in faithfulness to Scripture and a cooperative spirit in the work our God places before us.

The Lord of the Church led our forefathers to support each other in times of controversy, to cooperate in ministerial education, and more recently, to establish the CELC which is providing comfort, encouragement, and assistance to small confessional Lutheran church bodies around the world. As we look at our intertwining history, all we can do is thank God for his grace in preserving our blessed fellowship and pray for his continued blessings in the future. [LSQ](#)

ELS: An LCMS Perspective

*Lawrence R. Rast Jr.
President, Concordia Theological Seminary
Ft. Wayne, Indiana*

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“FIRST IT WAS THE 1938 ST. LOUIS ARTICLES OF Union,” “then came the Saginaw Resolution of 1944,” “in 1945 the Chicago Statement appeared,” “then came the agreement with the National Lutheran Council,” “then, in 1950, came the Common Confession.”

These words come from the resolution where the ELS suspended fellowship with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in 1955. They read something like a litany, recalling the stages by which, from the ELS’s perspective, Missouri abandoned the old paths and disrupted the fellowship of the Synodical Conference. It is the recounting of a kind of confessional Lutheran domino effect, where a series of events ultimately resulted in severing fellowship between two church bodies, with the consequence, that sixty-three years later, we are still experiencing the effects.

The theme of this year’s Bjarne W. Teigen Reformation Lectures is “Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Three Perspectives.” My particular topic is: “ELS: An LCMS Perspective.” My specific task is to address how an individual member of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod perceives the history of the ELS and its relationship with the LCMS.

I’m very happy to have the opportunity to address this and thank the committee for the invitation. I’m delighted in that this is a significant year in the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. One hundred years is an important milestone in the history of any institution. For a

smaller church body like the ELS, it is all the more important. Some have thought of the ELS as a “remnant,” those remaining faithful to the Word, whatever that might mean for their size in the larger scope of American denominations.¹ For the Scriptures tell us that size is not an infallible indicator of importance. And I believe the history of the ELS and its interaction with Missouri demonstrates just that. The following paper will seek to reflect this conviction.

Entering the New Century

An at least fivefold reality confronted the Lutheran synods of America in the early part of the twentieth century: 1) the end of the era of immigration and the beginning of Americanization; 2) the game-changing character of World War I; 3) the controversy between Fundamentalism and Modernism; 4) the 400th anniversary of the Reformation; and 5) the ecumenical movement.²

Each of these, in its own way, impacted the life of the Lutherans synods of the United States. Together these issues helped American Lutherans realize that one era had passed and that they were entering a different, in some ways entirely new, period in their unique and shared histories.

Some were overjoyed that the past was gone. Among these was a man who was among the most radical advocates for Lutherans to enter the new era with abandon. Otto Hermann Pannkoke was a Missouri Synod man who crossed synod boundaries with ease and enjoined others to do the same. His basic argument was that a new day had dawned and the Lutherans had a great opportunity to shape America’s religious future.

The central overshadowing fact before us of this generation is that the America of our fathers is gone-forever. A new social order is here. We will be judged to all eternity by the insight, resourcefulness, initiative with which we deal with it. The answers to our tasks are not found in the past, ready made by others. We must fashion the answers ourselves out of the

¹ Robert Preus, “Our Mission as a Remnant,” *Clergy Bulletin* 12 (May–June 1953): 111–15. See especially 112: “And so the church of God must be content to remain a struggling, militant minority. Thus it has always been and always will be. God will have it no other way.”

² This is not an exhaustive list. It is simply meant to illustrate the many cultural pressures that shaped the activities and responses of the many Lutheran church bodies of the United States.

clarity of our insight into life today and out of the depth of our devotion to Him who was crucified also for this troubled and confused generation.³

It seemed that many of the Lutheran church bodies were caught up in the excitement of the era. Take the following as examples.

In 1917 three larger bodies of Norwegian Lutherans—Hauge's Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America, the Norwegian Synod, and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America—joined together to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA, later the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the ELC).

In 1918 the United Lutheran Church of America (ULCA) resulted from a merger of the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South. Later it adopted a position statement that claimed that for fellowship acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions was necessary, but it refused to define whether such subscription was *quia* or *quatenus* [unconditional or conditional]. Further, it declared itself in fellowship with all other Lutherans on this basis.

Also in 1918 the National Lutheran Council (NLC) was organized. The church bodies that officially ratified this organization were the United Lutheran Church in America, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, the United Danish Church, the Lutheran Free Church, the Danish Lutheran Church, the Icelandic Synod, and the Buffalo Synod.

The formal establishment the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States took place in 1917 and 1918, as well as the formation of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁴ The establishment of what we today know as the ELS was aided to a point by the LCMS. Franz Pieper, William Dau, and Theodore Graebner all advised men who would be affected by the proposed 1917 Norwegian merger on possible paths forward.⁵ Thus,

³ Otto Pannkoke, "An Attempt to Outline a Progressive Program," *American Lutheran* (May 1935): 8. For an overview of Pannkoke's life, see O. H. Pannkoke, *A Great Church Finds Itself: The Lutheran Church between the Wars* (Quitman, GA: 1966). For a discussion of his role in the Reformation Quadricentennial, see Sarah K. Nytroe, "The American Reformation Quadricentennial, 1917," *Lutheran Quarterly* 26 (Spring 2012): 57–82.

⁴ I will refer to these two synods in paper by their later names and acronyms: The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS, 1959) and The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS, 1957).

⁵ "Documents of Historic Interest," *Clergy Bulletin*, Supplement (November 1956): 1–9.

when the remnant of those of the Norwegian Synod who could not enter the union established the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, it is no surprise that within two years they had found their way into the Synodical Conference and fellowship with Wisconsin and Missouri. There was a shared recognition of the inerrant Scriptures as the Word of God and an unconditional *quia* commitment to the Lutheran Confessions as a faithful exposition of the Scriptures.

Finally, in 1930 the American Lutheran Church (ALC) was formed. The ALC was a merger of the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Iowa Synod, and the Buffalo Synod. Two months later the ALC joined with the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA, the Augustana Synod, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELC), and the Lutheran Free Church in a federation called the American Lutheran Conference. The doctrinal basis of this new conference was the “Intersynodical,” or “Chicago Theses,” of 1928. Both Missouri and Wisconsin had been involved at least tangentially in the discussions leading to the formulation of the Chicago Theses.⁶

The result was that by 1930, there were three large groupings of Lutherans in the United States: 1) The United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA); 2) The Synodical Conference (of which Missouri was by far the largest member); and 3) The American Lutheran Conference.⁷

Missouri in 1930

The 1930s were a time of transition for the LCMS. Missouri’s icon of the second generation, Franz Pieper, died June 3, 1931. In 1935 John Behnken unseated Friedrich Pfothenhauer, the first time in the Synod’s history a sitting president was ousted from office. That same year the LCMS accepted an invitation from the ALC to continue the fellowship discussion that had broken off in 1929 with Missouri’s rejection of the Chicago Theses. The Synod appointed a committee to this end, consisting of William Arndt, C. F. Brommer, F. H. Brunn, Theodore Engelder, and Karl Kretzmann.

⁶ Charles F. Bunzel, “The Missouri Synod and the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses” (STM thesis, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, 1964).

⁷ Fred W. Meuser, “Pulpit and Altar Fellowship among Lutherans in America,” in *Church in Fellowship: Pulpit and Altar among Lutherans*, ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963): 1–24. Immediately following the article, the volume includes a series of helpful “Documents on Altar and Pulpit Fellowship,” pages 25–72.

It is a common thing to think of the Missouri Synod as thoroughly unified in 1930. Indeed, some called it “monolithic.”⁸ But it was not. There were different emphases, movements, hopes, strategies, and activities that characterized the Missouri Synod in 1930. New opportunities for engagement of the culture would initiate a period of explosive growth, and, in 1932, the Synod adopted with almost no fanfare *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*. The Synod was simultaneously old and new.

In that setting, it is not at all surprising to hear Dr. Walter A. Maier, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and new speaker of the Lutheran Hour, make the following statement on what is essential for Lutheran unity.

[C]omplete and absolute agreement in all articles of faith is imperative. A Church in which one group insistently and unre-servedly holds to the complete inspiration of the Scriptures with all the implications of that doctrine, but in which another maintains that the Bible may be regarded as an infallible norm and rule only so far as it is inspired; in which one group denies the visible millennial presence of our Lord on the face of the earth, but in which another maintains this belief; or in which one division regards predestination as the pure and unconditioned gift of God’s grace, while another division insists that we are predestined to salvation because God has foreseen our faith,—in such a Church, with all its external union, regardless of how well organized and coordinated its joint efforts may be, there can be no inner, spiritual unity....

But it would be obviously incongruous and destructive of even the most elementary conceptions of valid unity if in an outwardly united Church there were on the one hand those who insist on Lutheran clergymen for Lutheran pulpits and on the other hand those who are ready to put the privileges of their pulpits at the disposal of men who are essentially hostile to Lutheranism; on the one side the advocates of a male clergy,

⁸ Alan Graebner, “The Acculturation of an Immigrant Lutheran Church: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1917–1929” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1965), 7. John Warwick Montgomery (“Missouri Compromise,” *Christianity Today* [January 17, 1969]: 49) called old Missouri “a utopian model of conservative theology.” Montgomery goes on to say, “Now, that unity has disappeared and it is openly stated that a portion of the Synod is conservative, a portion, super-conservative, and a portion, liberal.”

close Communion, the repudiation of antichristian secret societies, and the worship only with those who are truly united in faith—and on the other side large company of those who by plain practise [*sic*] and profession support a female clergy, open Communion, the American lodge system, and unionism. No reputable and successful business concern would tolerate such divergence in the practical affairs of every-day business; and certainly in the King's business, which is placed under the close scrutiny of a carping generation, the effect of the Gospel must not be vitiated by the open contradiction of an antithetical yes and no when only one alternative of practise [*sic*] can be correct and enjoy the sanction of the Scriptures.”⁹

At the same time, however, there were those who were growing impatient with the pace of the synod's participation in post-World War I America. They pushed for Missouri to engage other Lutherans in meaningful discussions toward possible union. A spectrum existed within the synod. Some were radical in their perspectives, others more moderate in what they proposed. Chief among the former was O. H. Pannkoke, whom we noted above.¹⁰

Less impatient, but equally as committed to Lutheran unity, were the men associated with the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and its publication, the *American Lutheran*.¹¹ The ALPB, as it came to be known, originally provided materials designed to help churches engage their communities in practical ways. In time, though, it became more and more interested in advancing the cause of Lutheran union. Its patience was tried initially by what might be labeled the lethargy of the Pfotenhauer administration. Friedrich Pfotenhauer, last German-born president of the LCMS, had been slow to encourage the adoption of the English language and the feeling became increasingly present that the

⁹ William Arndt, “What Is Essential for a Union of the American Lutheran Church-Bodies?” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 3 (November 1932): 866–67. This little note mainly quotes material that Walter A. Maier provided to another publication on the question of Lutheran unity.

¹⁰ Pannkoke was regularly at odds with the LCMS. See, for example, “Otto H. Pannkoke, Plaintiff, vs. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States a Missouri corporation, J. W. Behnken, individually and as President of Synod: et al., Defendants,” Box 26, file 324, LCMS, Office of the President, Behnken Administration, Concordia Historical Institute.

¹¹ Richard O. Johnson, *Changing World, Changeless Christ: The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau 1914–2014* (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2018).

LCMS was stuck in a German ghetto from which it must escape if it were to continue as an influence in the American religious scene.

The LCMS had come close—very close in the minds of some at least—to being a part of the ALC merger in 1930. That is, until Synod’s 1929 River Forest Convention failed to adopt the Chicago Theses. Synod declined to adopt the Chicago Theses not on the basis of what they stated, but for what they failed to address. This failure to engage meant to these men that Missouri was about to miss a great opportunity—the chance to bring together a sizeable portion of American Lutherans over against the more “liberal” ULCA. Not a few of those who held this opinion were aligned with the ALPB and its increasing emphasis on Lutheran unity.

Missouri had multiple hopes and ideas about its future.

The Beginning of the Behnken Presidency

When John Behnken was elected president of the Missouri Synod at its 1935 Cleveland convention, it marked the beginning of a new era for the LCMS.¹² Behnken, who had served as Texas District president and on the praesidium of the Synod, was the first president of the LCMS to be born in the United States and was, at the very least, open to new methods of connecting with English-speaking Americans.¹³

At the same convention that elected him, the Synod instructed Behnken to engage the ALC in dialogue. The old ALC had its roots in the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods, and, in fact, the Joint Synod of Ohio had for a time been member of the Synodical Conference (1872–1881), prior to the outbreak of the Predestination Controversy in the late 1870s. Buffalo and Iowa both had long, difficult histories with Missouri. But for all the differences—and they were significant—there were no synods in America outside of the Synodical Conference closer to Missouri than these three. And so, when the ALC was formed in 1930, it is not surprising that ecumenical discussions with Missouri quickly followed.

¹² Lawrence Meyer, *The Story of the Cleveland Convention* (St. Louis: Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, 1935); Walter A. Maier, “The Convention Afterglow,” *Walther League Messenger* (August–September 1935): 10–11.

¹³ In his autobiography Behnken recounts Alfred O. Rast’s ordination, which, Behnken approvingly noted, occurred in a tent. Had it been in a church, many people who attended would likely have absented themselves. John W. Behnken, *This I Recall*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014): “In one case a missionary, Rev. A. O. Rast, was ordained in a tent service and continued for several weeks to have regular services there. He is now Executive Secretary of Missions for the Texas District.”

Missouri's partners in the Synodical Conference, however, were concerned with this move. ELS, having had the bitter experience of a compromised merger in the 1910s, repeatedly expressed its concern to its sister synod of Missouri about the dangers of doctrinal compromise.

In 1936 the ELS took up the question of Lutheran unity and published the document that has continued to define its thinking on this subject to the present: *Unity, Union, and Unionism*.¹⁴ This document captured the ELS perspective on the contemporary drive toward fellowship and merger.

The forces thus set in motion within the early Lutheran Church, and which have their deep-set roots in natural man's reason and inclination, are today bringing forth a bountiful harvest of indifferentism to, and misuse of, God's Word, of compromise and of related sins. Throughout the length and breadth of our land a strong, influential voice is now reverberating, bearing the message "God's Moment is Now" for "recognition and fellowship" among American Lutherans. Voices are also lifted in the interest of the "whole problem of American Church Unity" which express the hope that "the tide toward a true, free national church in America" may set in.¹⁵

Perhaps fearing or even seeing such "indifferentism" showing itself already in Missouri, theses four and five of *Unity, Union, and Unionism* stated robustly:

Thesis 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

¹⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "Unity, Union, and Unionism," <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/> (accessed October 14, 2018). *Unity, Union, and Unionism* features a very helpful historical summary of the events leading to the formation of Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, particularly the compromise by which the *Opjør* was approved. See also "A Necessary Statement," *Lutheran Sentinel* (March 13, 1944).

¹⁵ *Unity, Union, and Unionism*, 1.

fact. b) or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.” Acts 18:26.

Thesis 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.

And so the resultant concluding thesis is not at all surprising.

Thesis VI

Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17. Titus 3:10. I 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.

Was this a warning to Missouri? If it was, it went largely unheeded, at least officially.

In 1938, the Committee on Lutheran Union, established in 1935, brought its report to the Synod. It chronicled a series of six meetings with representatives of the ALC and noted that these meetings considered primarily the Minneapolis Theses and *A Brief Statement*, both of which affirmed, in no uncertain terms, the “inerrancy” of Scripture. The report went on to state that the ALC participants had framed a new document for consideration, included in the minutes of the Synod, titled *Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church*. While admitting that the “Declaration” would require careful examination, particularly in light of *A Brief Statement*, the Missouri representatives quickly moved on to note the circumstances that might lead to a of declaration of fellowship: 1) “action taken by both bodies with reference to the Brief Statement and the Declaration”; 2) establishment of doctrinal agreement between *A Brief Statement* and the *Declaration* on

the part of church bodies with which the American Lutheran Church is in fellowship; 3) submission of the *Declaration* to the bodies comprising the Synodical Conference; 4) smaller gatherings of ALC and LCMS pastors to consider the doctrinal basis for union and issues of practice. It concluded this section of its report by respectfully suggesting “that Synod pass a resolution approving these points and that it also . . . state its position on the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church representatives.”¹⁶

Convention Committee Sixteen made the official reply to the report of the Committee on Lutheran Union. It divided its report into four sections, and then submitted several resolutions. First, it addressed those areas of significant doctrinal agreement. It emphasized two points: predestination and inerrancy. The committee was especially encouraged with the progress made toward agreement on predestination, stating: “It is with great joy that we note that in the chief difficulty which separated our Synod from the constituent bodies of the American Lutheran Church, the doctrine of predestination, unanimity has been reached and that false teachings held by some Lutheran teachers have been repudiated.”¹⁷ It seemed to many that the old problem had been resolved.

In turn, the ALC adopted its *Declaration* in October 1938 (just a few months after the LCMS convention). Further, the ALC declared itself willing to accept *A Brief Statement* “in the light of” the *Declaration*.¹⁸ This move had two outcomes. It permitted the Missouri Synod to maintain its position as articulated in *A Brief Statement*, while simultaneously allowing the ALC to understand *A Brief Statement* in the light of its own *Declaration*.¹⁸ It appeared that an expression of formal church fellowship was imminent.

¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at St. Louis as the 22nd Delegate Synod, June 15–24, 1938* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938): 221–227.

¹⁷ *Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Convention*, 228.

¹⁸ The ALC resolutions stated (*Official Minutes*, Fifth Convention of the American Lutheran Church, 1938, 255; emphasis added):

2. That we declare the brief statement of the Missouri Synod, together with the declaration of our commission a sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.
3. That according to our conviction and the resolution of the Synod of Missouri passed at its convention in St. Louis, the aforementioned doctrinal agreement is the sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship, and that we are firmly convinced that *it is neither necessary or possible to agree in all*

However, these resolutions produced a storm of protest in both the Synodical Conference and within the Missouri Synod itself. The ELS particularly noted several deficiencies: 1) the statement that “it is neither necessary or possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines”; 2) the refusal of the ALC to give up its membership in the American Lutheran Conference, despite the existence of significant doctrinal differences; and, most importantly, 3) the phrase affirmed in the *Declaration*, “God purposes to justify those have come to faith.”

Among the first reactions was the following resolution of WELS at its 1939 convention: “That the Sandusky resolutions and the Pittsburgh Agreement [the Agreement reached between representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church of America chiefly on the doctrine of inspiration] have made it evident that there was no real doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Honorable Synod of Missouri and the American Lutheran Church”; and “that under existing conditions further negotiations for establishing church fellowship would involve a denial of the truth and would cause confusion and disturbance in the church and ought therefore be suspended for the time being.”¹⁹

Frustration Within and With Missouri Mounts

The negotiations were continued, and the concerns grew more pronounced. One example of frustration was that of well-known Missouri professor and theologian, Theodore Engelder (1865–1949).²⁰

non-fundamental doctrines. Nevertheless, we are willing to continue the negotiations concerning the points turned in our Declaration as not divisive of church fellowship and recognized as such by the Missouri Synod’s resolutions, and instruct our Commission on Fellowship accordingly....

5. That we believe that the Brief Statement *viewed in the light of our Declaration* is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses, which are the basis for our membership in the American Lutheran Conference. *We are not willing to give up this membership.* However, we are ready to submit the aforementioned doctrinal agreement to the other members of the American Lutheran Conference for their official approval and acceptance.

¹⁹ Cited John W. Behnken, “The President,” *Lutheran Witness* (November 22, 1955): 6.

²⁰ He is one case in point. There were others, including but not limited to Dr. William Oesch, who began editing the *Crucible* in 1939 and Pastor Paul Burgdorf who, with others, established the *Confessional Lutheran* in 1940 with the hope of overturning the 1938 St. Louis Union Resolution. John Brenner notes that Memorials to future Missouri Synod conventions “also called for the rescinding of the 1938 resolution.” John M. Brenner, “The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Underlying Problems,” PhD diss., Marquette

As noted above, Engelder was part of the committee appointed to work with the ALC in 1935. By 1941 he was frustrated to the point that he resisted President Behnken's requests to continue to serve on that committee. He explains his reasons in a note to Behnken as follows:

Since you spoke to me last week I have been seriously considering the matter, but I can come to no other decision. Today I received your letter asking me to serve three more years on the Committee on Doctrinal Unity, and, much as I regret it, I must repeat that it will be impossible for me to serve. I am convinced that because of the Pittsburgh Agreement, the Sandusky Resolutions, the additional reservations made, the action at Minneapolis and the fact that we could get no straight answer on the question of objective justification—not even on this important matter—a halt should be called in the negotiations. The fact that Synod took a view different did not change my convictions.

Besides, my usefulness on the committee is ended. What I could and would say on the need of calling a halt till those important matters are settled would make no impression on the joint committee. They would tell me that the body which I represent is not back of me.

In view of this I will not go through the agony of another three years opposing members of our own committee and facing the prospect of having all my efforts nullified in the end.²¹

Behnken responded quickly, stating that he wanted to speak to Engelder personally.²² If he did, it was successful, and Engelder continued to serve for another two years. However, by the summer of 1943 Engelder had truly had enough. He wrote to Behnken that disagreement between himself and all the members of the committee had reached the point where he must resign. As he put it: "I deeply regret that I and the other members of the committee disagree on the

University, 2012, 251. For a brief note on Engelder, see "Theodore Engelder, 1865–1949," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 20 (August 1949): 561–63.

²¹ Theodore Engelder to John W. Behnken, September 23, 1941, LCMS, Office of the President, Behnken Administration, Concordia Historical Institute.

²² John W. Behnken to Theodore Engelder, September 27, 1941, LCMS, Office of the President, Behnken Administration, Concordia Historical Institute. See Behnken's letter to Engelder of July 28, 1943, where he says he has "pleaded with you repeatedly and by all means to continue as a member of the Committee."

wisdom of keeping up the negotiations with the Am. Luth. Church. But each one of us must act according to his convictions.”²³

If Behnken would not listen to his immediate household, could he be expected to listen to others? On June 3, 1943, Norman A. Madson and George O. Lillegard, wrote formally and pointedly to the Missouri Synod (with copies to its president, secretary, and district presidents, as well as the president of the Synodical Conference) asking that the negotiations with the ALC be halted:

Whereas “The St. Louis Union Articles of 1938” (Proceedings of the 37th Regular Convention of the Missouri Synod, pp. 221–233) stand as a confession on the part of the Missouri Synod so long as they are not revoked, and

Whereas the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church accepts unreservedly the “Brief Statement” of the Missouri Synod, but cannot and does not accept the other articles of Union in all points, and considers said points church divisive for the following reasons:

a) They contain false doctrine, for instance, the statement on justification in the “Declaration”: “To this end He also purposes to justify [th]ose who have come to faith...” (Proceedings, p. 222) (II Cor. 5, 19; Rom. 5, 18; Rom. 3, 28.);

b) They do not require full agreement regarding the doctrine of the Church and the Last Things as a prerequisite for Church-fellowship, and thus make room for the false principle that it is not necessary for a church to agree in all matters of doctrine. Matth. 28, 20; I Cor. 1, 10)

Therefore, in the interest of the truth committed to us by the Lord, out of charity toward the brethren, to safeguard its own confessional position, and to clear the way for true unity in the Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Synod entreats the Missouri Synod at its forthcoming convention to revoke The St. Louis Articles of Union, and thus let the “Brief Statement” stand unqualified and unsullied as our clear and joint confession.

Yet, even as Engelder was leaving the Committee on Doctrinal Unity and the ELS was pleading that negotiations with the ALC be

²³ Theodore Engelder to John W. Behnken, July 25, 1943, LCMS, Office of the President, Behnken Administration, Concordia Historical Institute. See also “Union Committee Meeting,” *Clergy Bulletin* 1 (January 13, 1942).

halted, the union negotiations proceeded even more vigorously. William Arndt (1880–1957) had gone “all in” on union and was followed shortly thereafter by Theodore Graebner (1876–1950). The *American Lutheran* consistently advocated for union with the ALC. By 1944 the distinction between “prayer fellowship” and “joint prayer” had been affirmed by Synod. In 1945 *A Statement* appeared, signed by “Forty-Four” leaders in the Synod, including district presidents, the former president of the Springfield seminary, and several sitting professors at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. *A Statement* rejected the traditional interpretation of Romans 16:17, 18, argued that fellowship decisions should be made at the local level, and argued, in its own way, that agreement in non-fundamental doctrines was not necessary for church fellowship. In other words, it sounded like the argumentation of the ALC had found a home in Missouri.

What would President Behnken do? It appeared that the LCMS might divide on the way to celebrating its centennial. In response, Behnken first appointed a Committee of 10 and 10—ten men representing the president and ten of the signers of *A Statement*. When this arrangement failed to bring about a resolution, Behnken’s praesidium met directly with the ten signers of *A Statement* and persuaded them to “withdraw” the document as a public basis for discussion. That kept things together through the 1947 convention, where Missouri reaffirmed *A Brief Statement* and tempered the status of the 1938 fellowship resolution.

But talks with the ALC continued and concern with and within Missouri increased. A failed *Doctrinal Affirmation* was supplanted in 1950 by the *Common Confession*. The *Common Confession* was received in some ways as the Chicago Theses were. Much of it was acceptable, but it did not adequately and specifically address some of the older theological concerns.²⁴

So, again, the question was, what would President Behnken do? And, again, he pressed forward. At a meeting of the ALC Commission, the LCMS Committee on Doctrinal Unity, and eight district presidents from each of the two bodies, President Behnken offered a summary

²⁴ “Synodical Conference Meeting,” *Clergy Bulletin* 9 (July 1950): 91: “We are grief-stricken over the fact that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has adopted the Common Confession by a majority voice vote.... Shades of *Opgjør* (the Madison Agreement), are now raising their specter of Melancthonian compromise in the Synodical Conference!”

of the history of ALC/LCMS fellowship discussions.²⁵ “The Way We Have Come” is, in a sense, disappointingly descriptive. Anticipating Behnken’s autobiography, he merely notes that “I hope that my humble efforts will serve to recall some of the important features of these negotiations and thus furnish at least a partial background for our present discussions.” Why the desire only to remember? Why not offer meaningful insight into the challenges and opportunities, the hopes and disappointments, that this process offered? We get little insight into the man himself and what drove him in the midst of the rapidly shifting and challenging circumstances of emerging Lutheranism in the critical period 1930 to 1960.

The one hint, perhaps, that he offers in this piece, is the seemingly offhand comment on the impact that immigration might have had on the shape of twentieth-century Lutheranism: “Someone has said that if all the Lutherans who came as immigrants to our country had remained loyal to the church, there would probably be something like twenty to twenty-five million Lutherans in the United States today.” On the one hand, there is that typical Missouri drive toward growth that is so characteristic of our Synod. In 1961, shortly before Behnken retired from the presidency of the LCMS, Missouri had finally overtaken the ULCA as the largest Lutheran synod in the United States. But that victory was short lived, for in 1962 the merger that resulted in the formation of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) put Missouri back into second place.

It might be easy to dismiss Behnken as simply interested in growth. I believe, however, that there is a real doctrinal and, just as importantly, a pastoral concern behind his remarks. Behnken hints at this when he writes: “[T]his much is certain, indifference to doctrine and carelessness about its promulgation have resulted in the loss of great numbers of one time Lutherans to other church bodies.” Behnken himself was consistently recognized as a “conservative” Lutheran and he was certainly not indifferent to doctrine. At the same time there is this simple reality that

²⁵ Behnken also presented this material, in some form, to a meeting between leaders of the WELS and LCMS May 11–14, 1954. See “Representatives of Wisconsin and Missouri Synods Meet,” *Lutheran Witness* (June 8, 1954): 13. The article notes that the meeting was chiefly “devoted to the discussion of prayer fellowship and joint prayer,” but concluded “that the two sister Synods are in doctrinal agreement and that the differences which have strained and disturbed the relationship between them are in the field of interpretation and application of certain Bible passages.” Behnken’s study was not published for over a decade. John W. Behnken, “The Way We Have Come,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 39 (July 1966): 51–63.

the historian has to grapple with: he allowed Missouri to shift in its doctrinal and practical commitments in ways that affected the LCMS's relationship with its Synodical Conference colleagues, and thus the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.²⁶

What is unquestionable is the fact that Behnken was experiencing pressure from without and from within. He was beset by increasingly intense expressions of dissent within Missouri. At one end of the spectrum were those who were convinced that an adequate biblical and confessional basis for fellowship with the ALC existed. Earlier concerns about ALC positions had been dispelled in their minds, largely through repeated contact with the ALC men. The iron was hot and the time to strike was now. Knowing that there was at least a portion of the American Lutheran Conference, if not within the ALC itself, that leaned towards the United Lutheran Church in America, these men, often associated with the ALPB, pushed as hard as they could for speedy fellowship with the ALC. On the other side, there were those within Missouri who were deeply committed to its historical positions and relationships. They worried that continued contact with the ALC would lead the LCMS into not just doctrinal compromise, but false doctrine and practice. Behnken, in many ways, was the man in the middle. He tried to appease both and satisfied neither.

The Crisis Becomes Acute

Whatever one's assessment of Behnken's actions (or inactions), by 1954 a crisis point had been reached. At its 37th Regular Convention, the ELS carefully considered the future of its relationship with Missouri. It seemed like the 1910s all over again. In a powerful essay titled "Christian Cross-bearing in Today's Twilight Hour," George Lillegard reflected on what most members of the ELS probably considered the inescapable path that they would have to walk.

But the hardest test that we as Lutheran Christians must meet today is the temptation to go along with those who would compromise our faith and confession in some way, in order to

²⁶ Behnken, "The Way," 51–52. How do we explain this? In some ways it seems that Behnken lived in a world that was characterized by a fundamental incongruity. On the one hand, he presided over a period of incredible growth. The synod nearly doubled in size over the course of his presidency and became a significant presence on the American denominational scene. What could possibly be wrong when the church was experiencing this kind of growth? Was this not concrete evidence of God's blessing? My research has not yet settled the "Behnken enigma" in my own mind.

heal the sad breaches in the walls of our American Lutheran Zion. It is not easy to stand alone, or to break with old friends and associates over differences in doctrine, as we learned in 1918 when our Synod was formed in protest against the unionistic Merger of 1917. There were many then whom we knew as staunch Lutherans, but who fell by the way-side, leaving but a pitifully small minority to carry on the teachings and principles of the old Norwegian Synod. Now, after a long generation, it appears that history may repeat itself. We may have to decide again whether to stand alone rather than compromise the doctrines and principles for which our Synod has stood for a century. If we do find ourselves forced to separate from former brethren, we may be sure that we will again hear the cry: "The Norwegian Synod has no right to exist." "It is a separatistic sect." "It should not leave those who after all are as orthodox as anyone else." No doubt we will be exposed to even greater opposition and ridicule than in 1918. It will surely not be an easy cross to bear for any man.²⁷

For his part Behnken called 1954 an "abnormal year," but also entered the new year by noting that "prospects for 1955 are far from bright."²⁸ By February of 1955 the leadership of the Synodical Conference had met in Chicago to seek a way to address the crisis. A series of committees were developed to address the substantive issues threatening the Conference. However, Behnken pleaded with his own synod—at least certain portions of it—to restrain themselves from acting irresponsibly. "It is urgently necessary," he wrote, "that we follow orderly procedure. It would not be right and proper for individuals to take the matter into their own hands and, on the one hand, judge and condemn what the convention of the Synodical Conference resolved and what the officials are now attempting to carry out in an orderly way, or, on the other hand, act independently and write, or say, or do things which will only aggravate the situation."

What does this mean? In the Missouri setting Behnken's words make the application clear:

²⁷ George Lillegard, "Christian Cross-bearing in Today's Twilight Hour," in *The Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church*, June 21–27, 1954: 27.

²⁸ John W. Behnken, "The President," *Lutheran Witness* (January 4, 1955): 4.

Synod by resolution has reminded our constituency in 1938 and again in 1950 that no fellowship is to be practiced with those with whom we are not yet united. The 1950 resolution reads: “*Resolved* That when by the grace of God everything necessary for fellowship had been accomplished, this fact is to be announced officially by the President of the Synod. Until then no action is to be taken by any member of Synod which would overlook the fact that we are not as yet united.” Every member of the Synod is herewith urged to take this resolution seriously.²⁹

Behnken’s appeal to the members of the Synod not to practice fellowship before it was formally declared, suggests that it was already happening. This, of course, was one of the specific, repeatedly expressed concerns of the ELS.

And so perhaps it was inevitable that at its 1955 convention, The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church formally suspended fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Here are the precise words of the ELS:

As for ourselves, we affirm that we want to remain true to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. We want to continue in the old paths in which our fathers walked, together with the fathers of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Before God, therefore, we feel that we have only one choice. Since the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has shown us in its official proceedings that it no longer walks in the old ways with us, we must declare that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has broken the bond that has bound us together for 100 years. The time has come when we must testify by action against the unionism which has become so common in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in recent years. To continue the arguments by word and pen will be more likely further to aggravate than to resolve our differences.

THEREFORE WE HEREBY DECLARE with deepest regret that fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are suspended on the basis of Romans 16,17, and that the exercise of such relations cannot be resumed until

²⁹ John Behnken, “The President,” *Lutheran Witness* (March 1, 1955): 4.

the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner.³⁰

President Behnken described the report of the ELS's action as "shocking information." Noting the various charges included in the larger ELS resolution, Behnken claimed that they "were made, *but never proved*," and, he continued, "we definitely deny" them. Noting that WELS also had levied charges against Missouri, Behnken responded: "Lest any silence on our part be interpreted as an admission, I want to go on record at once and say that we by no means admit the charges which you have now printed and which you are presenting to your convention." And the same applied to the ELS. "It is one thing to make charges; it is another to furnish convincing evidence from the Word of God. The latter definitely is lacking."

But Behnken was not finished. Defensively reacting to the preceding, Behnken characterized them as "a loveless misstatement of facts and a glaring and deceptive misrepresentation of the situation," and he promised two things to the readers of the *Witness*. First, that there would be a refutation of the charges; and second, that "discipline has been practiced and is being practiced today by the proper officials." Behnken's basic point was this: "We are shocked. We are saddened beyond words."³¹

I certainly understand President Behnken's sadness. It is a sadness that many in the Missouri Synod still share. But should he have been shocked?³² By this time the Missouri Synod had been involved in discussions with the ALC since 1935. It had passed the controversial resolutions on union with the ALC in 1938 and though it tempered them in 1947, it continued to meet and, after the 1944 distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer, had prayed with the representatives of the ALC. There were the *Doctrinal Affirmation* (failed) and the *Common Confession* (passed), as well as agreements with the National Lutheran Council and the exploration of relations with the

³⁰ *Report: 38th Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church*, June 20–26, 1955: 45–46.

³¹ John W. Behnken, "The President," *Lutheran Witness* (August 2, 1955): 6. Behnken responded with an entire series of articles responding to the charges.

³² C. M. Gullerud of the ELS had written a long and pointed piece on the events leading to the 1955 crisis. See "Facing the Facts," *Clergy Bulletin* 14 (April 1955): 78–91. See also "The History of the Negotiations between the A.L.C. and the L.C.—Mo. Synod," *Clergy Bulletin* 14 (October 1954): 17–25.

Lutheran World Federation. And there were other matters as well.³³ So why the surprise?

We can only take John Behnken at his word. For his part I am sure that he was shaken by the charges and that he was personally confident that such charges had not been proven. That, however, may indicate the degree to which he had been influenced, knowingly or unknowingly, by others within the Synod who were arguing for a broader understanding of the practice of fellowship.³⁴

So what would President Behnken do now? The Synodical Conference was fully disrupted.³⁵ The ALC was on the verge of halting discussions with Missouri because it was now fully committed to merger negotiations with the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the 1917 Norwegian merger church body), the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and, later, the Lutheran Free Church. E. Clifford Nelson locates a key moment in a meeting that occurred in 1957 between Presidents Schiotz (ELC) and Schuh (ALC) and President Behnken and A. H. Grumm (LCMS) that Behnken described as a conversation “with regard to the possibilities of beginning doctrinal discussions with the groups planning to merge into The American Lutheran Church.”

³³ For a summary of some of the other issues, see “Synodical Group Evades Decision,” *Christian Century* (September 24, 1952): 1103.

³⁴ “[I]t is my honest conviction that the Missouri Synod has not changed its doctrinal position since the time when we have sought to establish doctrinal unity with the American Lutheran Church.” John Behnken to “Taffy” (W. F. Klindwirth), August 19, 1955, in LCMS, Office of the President, Behnken Administration, Concordia Historical Institute, Suppl. 1, Box 15, f9; Cited by Thomas A. Kuster, “The Fellowship Dispute in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: A Rhetorical Study of Ecumenical Change” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1969), 269.

³⁵ Whatever the case may be, Behnken’s words served to heighten the disagreement. In the immediate aftermath of his *Lutheran Witness* articles, the Wisconsin Synod met. Its floor committee responsible for intersynodical matters noted that Behnken’s articles had “intensified these divisions and offenses by attempting to justify” the LCMS’s position. Further, it suggested that the WELS give the LCMS one more chance. Because the LCMS would next meet in convention in 1956, the committee recommended that WELS consider the following resolution at a recessed session in 1956 following the LCMS’s convention: “*Resolved*, That whereas The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17, 18, terminate our fellowship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.” In the end, WELS would not suspend fellowship with Missouri until August 1961, which created issues for WELS itself. However, in many ways, the ELS action had established the path and it was only a matter of time before WELS would act in a similar fashion. Cited in “The Wisconsin Synod,” *Lutheran Witness* (September 14, 1955): 13.

Nelson identifies this as “the first public utterance regarding an alliance between the Missouri Synod and the projected American Lutheran Church.”³⁶ If he is right—and I believe he is in this instance—then Missouri’s path was set as of 1957.

What could have been the motivation for such a move. Again, citing Nelson:

On June 25, 1957, the writer [E. Clifford Nelson], returning to Minneapolis from a speaking engagement in Iowa, was seated on the airplane next to a highly-placed member of the Joint Union Committee who produced [an] article from the *Chicago Tribune*, and commented: “Why wait till 1960? We are ready to unite with Missouri now. As soon as this plane reaches Minneapolis, I am going to Fred’s [ELC President F. A. Schioltz] office and tell him to get on the next plane for St. Louis to talk to Behnken. If we can persuade Missouri to join its strength with ours, we’ll show Mr. [sic] Fry who is king!”³⁷

The “Mr. Fry” here is Franklin Clark Fry, second president of the ULCA and first president of the LCA. Within a few years, it seemed that Missouri was determined to move not only into fellowship with the ALC, but ultimately into a relationship with the LCA. Nelson’s *Lutheranism in America 1914–1970* operates on the assumption that fellowship between the LCA, ALC, and LCMS is the larger story of twentieth century American Lutheranism. His last chapter, “Facing a New Decade,” concludes with the following prediction: “American Lutheran unity, fifty years overdue, will come eventually because Missouri cannot forever escape the implications of its own confession.”³⁸

This is why you must never place any value on the predictions of church historians. Nelson was captive to his own theological commitments and they determined the outcome of his narrative. That said, even he noted that in 1969 the LCMS was “still being pulled in two directions,” and was experiencing what he called “the smell of fear.”³⁹ So a word to the wise is sufficient: Never trust the conclusions of historians.

³⁶ E. Clifford Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America 1914–1970* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 251.

³⁷ Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America 1914–1970*, 296n27.

³⁸ Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America 1914–1970*, 293.

³⁹ Nelson, *Lutheranism in America 1914–1970*, 257, 259.

Conclusion

So please allow me to conclude. I'll do so by raising a question: what do we make of all this? Obviously, Nelson's prediction was simply wrong. True, Missouri finally declared fellowship with the ALC in 1969. But it then moved to protesting fellowship in 1977, and broke off fellowship in 1981.⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter the ALC merged with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA, 1962) and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC, 1976) into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA, 1988). However, that avenue has closed more and more. In 2001 the LCMS stated that the ELCA could no longer be considered "an orthodox Lutheran church body" (2001 Res 3.21A). Since 2010, relations with ELCA have cooled to the point that joint discussions are no longer held.

However, as most of you likely know well, informal conversations are continuing between the ELS, LCMS, and WELS. They have been held since 2012 and have been fruitful in helping us get to know one another again. I have been a part of all but the first of these conversations, and, speaking only for myself, I have found them to be encouraging beyond my expectations. Several years ago participants were able to publish "A Report on the Meetings of ELS, LCMS, and WELS Leaders 2012–2015." Under the heading "Plans and Hopes for the Future," the participants reported:

In view of the progress we have made, we intend to continue to meet to pursue additional topics. The tone of our discussions has been positive and friendly, and we have come to a level of mutual respect and trust.

Perhaps God may guide us to a reestablishment of fellowship at some point in the future, a goal for which we pray and work. But even if we are not able to practice church fellowship, we have found benefit in talking together about church work, in patiently trying to understand the issues better, and in providing a measure of encouragement in our lives of repentance and fidelity to Scripture. Gradually we may also look for ways to include others from our synods in these inter-synodical discussions. Around us in America we see a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. It is good to be in conversation with the few who are still committed to confessional Lutheranism. This is something that the LCMS especially has been trying to do

⁴⁰ Ironically, the years of J. A. O. Preus's presidency, 1969–1981.

around the world, bringing Lutherans together and encouraging them to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.⁴¹

While any talk of fellowship is premature, these informal conversations have helped dispel stereotypes and have helped us to reengage in a meaningful way the issues that continue to divide us. What might come of it all? Honestly, I do not know. More than that, I will not attempt any long-term prognostications, lest a future historian note my failure in providing an accurate prediction.

I will, however, say this. The witness of the ELS has played and, I hope, will continue to play, an important role in inter-Lutheran conversations amongst those who bear the name of the great Reformer in North America. We do not carry name Lutheran because of the man. We seek to confess faithfully what he recovered in the sixteenth-century Reformation, namely the divine and unchanging biblical truth that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever and that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, because Christ alone, as taught in the Scripture alone. As ELS enters its second century I am thankful for the role it has played in the North American Lutheran setting. And I look forward to the continued fruitful conversations as we move into a challenging future, but one that is already established by the will and purpose of our gracious God.

My hope is that we will not need a future generation of church historians to continue to untangle the knot of Lutheran relationships. My prayer, and suspect it is also yours, is simply that our Lord Jesus would fulfill his promise soon: “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20 ESV). ^{LSQ}

⁴¹ “A Report on the Meetings of ELS, LCMS, and WELS Leaders 2012–2015,” <https://www.LCMS.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3864>; see also <http://blogs.LCMS.org/2015/LCMS-wels-els-report> (both accessed October 14, 2018).

ELS: An Introspective

Craig A. Ferkenstad
Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Mankato, Minnesota

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IT IS GOOD TO OBSERVE CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES. Anniversaries provide several opportunities. They give the reminder that “the gates of hell” have not overpowered God’s church (Matthew 16:18). Anniversaries offer special opportunities to remember the leaders “who spoke the word of God” to us (Hebrews 13:7). A centennial offers a special occasion to give thanks and proclaim the wonders God has done (Psalm 145:6). It also compels a church body to give an introspection of who it is and how it got where it is (Isaiah 51:1).

This year, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) observes the centennial of her reorganization. Having initially been organized in 1853 as the Norwegian Synod, she was reorganized in 1918 as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.¹ We here wish to provide an introspective view of the ELS. This lecture seeks to answer the question of not only *who* the ELS considers herself to be, but more importantly also *why* the ELS is who she is.

The relationship between the ELS and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) has been described as that of a big sister and a little sister. This has been the case since the Norwegian Synod established a professorship at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri) and Prof. Laur. Larsen officially began his duties on October 14, 1859. The ELS and the WELS have been in fellowship since 1872 with the

¹ In 1918, the name of the synod was “The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church” which was retained until 1957 when the synod adopted its present name.

formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America with a relationship described as that of a friend of a friend.²

Even though the ELS has been in close relationship with both the LCMS and the WELS since the early days of her existence, the closest physical relationship of the ELS is not with the LCMS nor with the WELS but with congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). But this relationship was severed in 1917. Mark Granquist in *Lutherans in America* yet refers to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod as the “Little Norwegian Synod.”³ He seems unaware that at first this was a derogatory title implying that the reorganized Norwegian Synod did not have the right to exist. This was a term which the ELS did not use of herself during the first fifty years of her existence. The title was imposed upon the synod by such men as the Rev. H. G. Stub, president of the merged Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA), who queried if such a little synod had a right to exist. Those indicting words implied questions such as—What can you accomplish with your small numbers and struggling congregations? Who are you to stand in the way of what is called progress? Who are you to say that you are right? Who are you to claim to be the rightful continuation of the Norwegian Synod?

Although the doctrine of eternal election should not be the defining element of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, it is of significance to ELS history. This is not the case with the ELCA. In *Christian Dogmatics*, the standard dogmatics textbook of the ELCA, election is attributed not to the work of the Father or the Son but to the Holy Spirit as the “predestining God.” The author states, “. . . we must remember that the doctrine of predestination is then itself hermeneutic, that it is instruction to speakers of the gospel, and not an attempt at third-person description of God’s ways with humanity.”⁴ The author continues, “‘God alone ordains your salvation’ is a necessary form of the gospel, and ‘God alone ordains all’ is a necessary corollary of it. Rightly understood as pneumatological statements, these are assurances and solicitations from the last future, promises of the encompassing sovereignty of the transformation to come: the winds that sweep through history and your life are but eddies and current of the breath of new creation.”⁵ In other words, although our eternal election remains within the infinite wisdom of God, it provides no redeeming comfort but only the hope that all will work out in the

² Meitner, 9.

³ Granquist, 236.

⁴ Braaten, 134.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

end. In contrast, the *Catechism/Explanation* of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod says, “God has chosen me to be saved, not because of anything in me, but only because of His grace and mercy in Christ.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod traces her heritage to the Church of Norway. This is significant because being Norwegian isn’t necessarily having a Norwegian citizenship or living in Norway but rather being a part of a Norwegian community. The author of the article “A Singing Church” which was published in *Norwegian American Studies and Records*, writes,

The co-operation of the talents of these two geniuses [Landstad and Lindeman] furnished the emigrant with useful as well as effectual tools for the transfer of spiritual culture to the new home in America. It may well be assumed that a like condition has resulted in every country where emigrants were sufficiently numerous to organize New-World Christian congregations. The grandmother, with her hymnbook wrapped in a clean white handkerchief, ready to go to church on a Sunday morning, might well serve as a model for the artist seeking to represent in stone or brass the true spirit of the Norwegian immigrant. **The Landstad hymnbook, Luther’s Catechism, and the Bible formed a trilogy which in their unity have done more to make the Norwegian-American people what they are than any other combination of instruments or racial traits.**⁶

This trilogy also explains who the ELS is and what it is that has shaped the synod. These cultural factors affect the synod’s liturgy and hymnology, doctrine and teaching, preaching and practice.

1. “The Landstad hymnbook, Luther’s Catechism, and the Bible formed a trilogy which in their unity have done more to make the Norwegian-American people what they are than any other combination of instruments or racial traits.”

The first part of the trilogy says that the culture of the ELS is that of a liturgical Lutheran church body. Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–80) and Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812–87) shaped the liturgy and hymnody of the church. But first, consider the broad context of the history of the Lutheran Church in Norway.

Twenty years after Martin Luther posted the *95 Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the Lutheran faith was established

⁶ Glasoe, “A Singing Church,” 92, emphasis added.

as the official religion of the kingdoms of Denmark and Norway.⁷ Previous to this, King Christian II (reigned 1513–23)⁸ had welcomed the Reformation, but for reasons of establishing a state church. His successor, King Frederick I (reigned 1523–33), had promised to uphold Catholicism, but he also allowed the advancement of Lutheranism. In his accession charter, the king pledged,

not to allow any heretics, disciples of Luther or others to preach or to teach secretly or openly against the heavenly God, the church, the holiest father, the pope or the Catholic church, but where they are found in this kingdom, We promise to punish them on life and property.⁹

However, by 1526, the king offered his personal protection to Hans Tausen (1494–1561) who is known as the “Danish Luther.”

The situation was such that in 1530 both the Roman bishops and the evangelical preachers were asked to present their views to the national assembly that met in Copenhagen. Hans Tausen along with others, prepared Forty-three Articles which became known as the *Copenhagen Confession*. Because of other matters that dominated the meeting, no debate of these articles took place. Yet Lutheranism was well established in Denmark when the king died in 1533.

When Christian III (1534–59) became king, he was known as “one of the most passionately Lutheran princes in northern Europe.”¹⁰ As a youth, he attended the Diet of Worms. Five years later, he entered into Copenhagen following a bloody civil war which lasted from 1534–36. The first thing he did as king was to arrest the Danish bishops, confiscate the church’s properties, and proclaim Lutheranism as the realm’s only permitted religion. This action was approved by a national assembly in October when the new king issued his accession charter.

Following his accession, the king contacted his uncle, John Frederick, Elector of Saxony, asking if either Philipp Melancthon or Johannes Bugenhagen could establish a new church order to govern the church in Denmark and Norway. In preparation, the king called upon a number of well-known Danish theologians to prepare a draft for the new church constitution. Among them were Hans Tausen, Jørgen

⁷ Since 1397 the Union of Kalmar had united Norway and Denmark in a personal union under a single monarch.

⁸ Christian II was the brother-in-law of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

⁹ Lautsen, “The Early Reformation in Denmark and Norway 1520–1559,” 18.

¹⁰ Lautsen, *A Church History of Denmark*, 107.

Sadolin, Frans Vormordsen, and Peder Palladius. The Odense Articles drew upon the *Copenhagen Confession*, Luther's *Formula Missae*, the *Saxon Visitation Articles* and various *Church Ordinances* that already had been prepared. These articles, written in 1537, sketched the organization of the reformed church in the kingdoms of Denmark and Norway. They were forwarded to Martin Luther who, with the theologians in Wittenberg, gave his approval.¹¹

In July 1537, Johannes Bugenhagen arrived in Copenhagen where he resided for the next eighteen months. Preparing a church order was not new to Bugenhagen as he had prepared church orders for Braunschweig (1528), Hamburg (1529), Lübeck (1531), and Pommern (1534). After revisions by Bugenhagen, the church orders prepared at Odense were signed by King Christian III on September 2, 1537 as the "Church order of the kingdoms of Denmark and Norway and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein etc." (*Ordinatio ecclesiastica regnorum Daniae et Norwegiae et ducatum Slesvicencis, Holstiae etc.*). A Danish translation was prepared by Peder Palladius, adopted by the national assembly in 1539, and published in 1542. The Ordinance was a practical theological handbook for the organization and function of the church.

Within the months of August and September 1537, four significant events took place:

- 1) The coronation of the king and queen.
- 2) The ordination of seven new superintendents for the church of Denmark.
- 3) The king signed the new Lutheran Church Ordinance.
- 4) The University of Copenhagen was re-opened as a Lutheran university.

Bugenhagen's first task was to crown the King and Queen. The ceremony took place with much pomp in the Church of Our Lady (*Vor Frue Kirke*) in Copenhagen on August 12, 1537. Shortly thereafter on September 2, the Church of Our Lady also was the scene of the ordination of seven Lutheran clergy to be Superintendents of the Church of Denmark.

The ordination of these seven men by a divine [sic] from Wittenberg was a deliberate act on the part of Christian III and his Lutheran advisers. It would have been possible to have found a regularly consecrated bishop, such as Hans Reff [Rev], of Oslo, a man of few scruples, or, as has been suggested, one of

¹¹ Dunkley, 81.

the older bishops might have been prevailed upon to help... It was moreover, a new beginning, not only for the Church of Denmark, but of the Christian Church as a whole; for as Bishop Stubbs noted, "up to the period of the Reformation there was no other idea of episcopacy except that of transmission of apostolic commission: that the ministry of the episcopal government could be introduced without such a link was never contemplated until Bugenhagen reconstituted a nominal episcopate in Denmark."¹²

In summary, it has been said:

When Christian III rode into humbled, starving Copenhagen in August 1536 and proclaimed the end of Catholic religious dominance, Denmark became not just the only Lutheran kingdom in Europe; it became the one truly *Protestant* kingdom. In Denmark the Reformation was effected more rapidly and more completely than in any of its Protestant contemporaries. Sweden remained confessionally ambiguous until the end of the century; England can hardly be said to have been "Protestant" at the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558. While Mary Tudor was still queen of England, while confessional strife wracked France, the Netherlands, and the Empire, the Lutheran state church was flourishing virtually unopposed in the Oldenburg state [Denmark]. Only in the remote corners of the realm did any subjects of the Danish king dare to resist the new religion, and that resistance was insignificant. It was with good reason that Protestant statesmen later in the century would look to Denmark for support and often for leadership. The king of Denmark ruled over the largest, most solidly Protestant state in all of Europe. Denmark's ties with the German princes gave its rulers undeniable influence in the heartland of the Reformation.¹³

The implementation of a Lutheran church order in Norway proved more difficult. Unlike Denmark, Norway had not undergone a reform movement prior to 1536.¹⁴ The people of Norway regarded the

¹² Ibid., 78–79.

¹³ Lockhart, 58, emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Although already in 1526, a German monk preached to his fellow countrymen in Bergen (Derry, 92) and by 1529, the king had ordered letters of protection to two

reforms occurring in Denmark as political rather than spiritual. With Christian III's accession to the throne, an agreement was made with the Danish nobility that Norway should no longer be regarded as an independent kingdom but be governed directly from Denmark.¹⁵ The Norwegian Council and the Catholic episcopacy were dismantled. Archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson of Trondheim fled the country and the other bishops were arrested. Only the bishop of Oslo, Hans Rev, who converted to Lutheranism, retained his post.

The Danish Ordinance of 1537 dictated that Christian III was to appoint superintendents in Norway as quickly as possible and that evangelical pastors should be found for all Norwegian parishes. It further said that the king personally was to go to Norway and, together with the new superintendents, introduce a Church Ordinance specific to Norwegian conditions.¹⁶ However, the king never found either the time nor inclination to visit Norway and the Norwegian church followed the Danish Church Ordinance for seventy years. Except for appointing a superintendent in Bergen, the other posts remained vacant for years.

Given the prospective working conditions confronting the clergy in Norway, it is small wonder that life as a parish priest did not attract the best men. Educational opportunities were poor for Norwegians; pay was worse even than in Denmark, and the workload was heavier. The average Norwegian parson served twice as many parishioners as his Danish counterpart did, and over a geographic area five times as large as the typical Danish parish. Worst of all, the Norwegian people—whom one person characterized as “priest-haters”—were not at all cooperative. In the more remote regions, they stubbornly defied any attempt to make them give up their old “superstitions,” frequently resorting to violence.... Lutheranism would not make substantial inroads into the Norwegian hinterland until the next century.¹⁷

In 1607, the Church of Norway received her own church ordinance. Anders Foss¹⁸ who was the superintendent of Bergen became the head of a committee which submitted proposals for changes in the Danish Church Ordinance. This was published in 1604 as the “Draft preachers in Bergen (Lautsen, “The Early Reformation in Denmark and Norway 1520–1559,” 97).

¹⁵ Sweden had seceded from the Union of Kalmar in 1523.

¹⁶ Lautsen, “The Early Reformation in Denmark and Norway 1520–1559,” 32.

¹⁷ Lockhart, 73.

¹⁸ Anders Foss was the grandson of Hans Tausen.

of a Norwegian Church Ordinance—After King Christian IV's Order, written by Norway's Superintendents" (*Utkast til en norsk Kirkeordinants—Etter Kong Christian IV's befaling forfattet av Norges Superintendenter*). The recommendations, however, were not followed and Norway's 1607 church ordinance was based on the Danish Church Ordinance of 1537.

In 1660, the Danish crown was made hereditary. A new constitution was adopted which stated that the king was the supreme head of the church.¹⁹ A major revision of the Ordinance now was undertaken which resulted in Denmark and Norway's Church-Ritual (*Danmarks og Norges Kirke-Ritual*) of 1685 which incorporated many of the recommendations from 1604. The King's forward reads:

We King Christian V, by God's Grace, King of Denmark and Norway, the Goths and the Vandals, Duke of Slesvig and Holstein, Stormarn and Dytmer, Count of Oldenborg and Demnhorst.

Make it public to everyone, that, for some time by the Grace of God we have recommended to some of the chief clergy in our country of Denmark that, according to the opportunity which Danish law gives, they should write and introduce to all, the ceremonies of God's service and the Church's ceremonies in our Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway ... [and] now at last [it] has reached perfection that it is ready for official printing; so we command you, all of our dear and faithful citizens in our countries of Denmark and Norway, both clergy and laity, both in the Danish as well as the German congregations, that you in every way direct and keep this Ritual, under suitable punishment.

Given at our palace in Copenhagen the twenty-fifth of July, sixteen hundred and eighty-five and the sixteenth year of our reign.²⁰

From 1685–1814, the history of the churches in Norway and Denmark became the same.²¹

In 1852, a royal resolution commissioned Magnus Landstad (1802–80) to prepare a hymnbook of hymn texts for the Church of Norway.

¹⁹ Lyby, 142–43.

²⁰ *Kirke Ritual*, 3–4.

²¹ In 1814, as a result of the Treaty of Keil, Denmark ceded the Kingdom of Norway to Sweden. Norway declared its independence and adopted a constitution. After a short war, Norway entered into a personal union with Sweden. This union continued until 1905 when Norway elected its own king.

His hymnbook (*Kirkesalmebog*) included fifty of his own hymns and was authorized for use in 1869. It quickly was adopted for use by the congregations. Within ten years 70% of the congregations in Norway were using Landstad's Hymnbook.²² Seven of Landstad's original hymns appear in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*.

Landstad's hymnbook contained only the text for the hymns and its publication necessitated the need for a book of musical tunes. This task fell to Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812–87). His influence on Norwegian hymnody was so profound that he is remembered as the man who taught the Norwegian people to sing.

He believed in making haste slowly; he began by using his new melodies as preludes and postludes, playing them in the tempo in which he wished them to be sung. Gradually this took hold of the people's imagination ... It simply was not to be resisted; before long he had the most dignified Christiania congregation breaking with the old tradition of dragging congregational song. He brought new life and interest into the service. Lindeman could make his organ laugh for joy or weep in sorrow and now he had the whole congregation following him in the spirit of the hymn.²³

Between 1871 and 1875, Lindeman published the musical tunes for Landstad's hymnbook (*Melodier til Landstads Salmebog*). His chorale-book was adopted as the standard melody book for the Norwegian state church.²⁴ Fourteen of Lindeman's original hymn tunes appear in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. Landstad and Lindeman so shaped the liturgy and hymnody of the Norwegian church that it is said, "In 1870 we find the Church of Norway united on the basis of one hymnbook, one chorale book."²⁵ Landstad and Lindeman lived contemporaneously with the early emigrants who organized the Norwegian Synod. Although these men and women likely packed either Kingo's hymnbook (1699) or Guldberg's hymnbook (1798) in their immigrant trunks, the works of Landstad and Lindeman influenced the future of the Norwegian Lutheran church in both the homeland and in America.

²² DeGarmeaux, "O Come, Let us Worship!" 85.

²³ Glasoe, "A Singing Church," 96–97.

²⁴ A desire for a more extensive liturgy in Norway led to the adoption of the New Liturgy in 1889, which was revised in the Altar Book of 1920. In 1952 and 1996 new liturgical reforms were issued for the Norwegian Church.

²⁵ Glasoe, "The Landstad-Lindeman Hymnbook," 23.

The Ritual of 1685 provided an Order of Service for the liturgy of the church in both Denmark and Norway. Years of pietism and rationalism took their toll on this liturgy.

Thus, Dietrichson carried to America a truncated liturgy. Despite the truncation, the *Kirkeritual* concretized two practices in the Dano-Norwegian church, and by extension, the Norwegian-American church. First, by featuring seven hymns, it established the church of Denmark-Norway as a singing church. Second, by making the sermon the unquestioned highpoint of the service, it established the church of Denmark-Norway as a preaching church. In addition to its emphasis on singing and preaching, the Dano-Norwegian liturgy exhibited two particular structural peculiarities. First, the liturgy lacked an absolution after the confession; the lack came about from the Norwegian practice of individual absolution through a laying on of hands on the Saturday before a communion service. Two, the liturgy began and ended with the *klokkerbønner* [klokker prayers]. A layman with an untranslatable title and myriad responsibilities in the church, the *klokker* prayed prayers which laid out the subject, the goals, and the means of the Norwegian worship.²⁶

This was the Short Order of service which was published in the English language by the Norwegian Synod in 1891 under the title *Church Liturgy for Evangelical Lutheran Congregations*.

The result is that the ELS ...

1) ... is a liturgical church body which finds its basis in the Danish-Norwegian Ritual of 1685.

A description of the liturgy of the Norwegian Synod comes from First Lutheran Church in Decorah, Iowa which was constructed in 1876 as the temple of the Norwegian Synod.

The service adapted at First Lutheran ... consisted, in modified form, of the Catholic mass up to the communion. According to that church order, the bell was rung during which the pastor stationed himself facing the altar, the *klokker* read the opening prayer (by the 1900s *klokkers* were disappearing and the pastor himself read the prayer), then an opening hymn, followed by

²⁶ Coffman, 151.

the confession of sins with a sung *kyrie* (*Oh God, the Father in Heaven...*), the absolution pronounced by the pastor, the so-called “short gloria” sung as versicle and response by pastor and congregation, then the collect for the day chanted by the pastor, followed by the epistle or gospel for the day. The sermon hymn was sung, and the pastor mounted the steps of the pulpit. The text was read (depending upon which of the two lessons for the day had been read at the altar) and the sermon preached. Sermons, even as late as Pastor Ofstedal’s day [1947–57] rarely lasted less than thirty minutes. Up until about 1930 the long “general prayer” was read from the pulpit after the sermon and concluded with the Lord’s Prayer. A hymn followed during which an offering might be taken. On Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and “mission Sunday” the people walked in procession to the chancel where they deposited their offerings on the altar. The three festival offerings went to the pastor and with Christmas Day usually the biggest church day of the year, every pastor must have prayed fervently for good weather that day! The Sunday service concluded with the pastor chanting both the “collect for the word” and the benediction. (There were some pastors who couldn’t chant and that was always regarded by the people as a liability.) A closing hymn was sung and the final prayer was read by the pastor, or, in early days, by the klokker. The Lord’s Prayer was sometimes prayed a second time and then the bell was rung nine times.

Norwegian Synod pastors invariably wore the old church gown. It was a slightly loose black robe coming to the ankles. Over the gown was a stiffly padded, inch wide satin yoke which hung down the full length of the gown. It symbolized the yoke of Christ. The yoke was raised in the back so as to support the white, three inch wide ruff (a “Sir Walter Raleigh collar”). These ruffs gradually fell out of common use during the 1920s, though the pastor at Calmar continued wearing one until the late 1940s. On the three major festivals the pastor wore an ankle length white surplice open in the back like a hospital gown and tied together with a string. By the 1930s a fuller preaching gown had been adopted at First Lutheran and elsewhere and a shorter version of the surplice was worn on ordinary Sundays. Never until recent years did a pastor wear a clerical collar (and in fact they were regarded with distaste as pretentious), and

stoles in the various liturgical colors were unknown until Pastor Oftedal's day.

Communion services at First Lutheran were mostly scheduled, at least from Pastor Torrison's day through Pastor Hoff's, for a Sunday afternoon or evening. They were occasions of great solemnity and prospective communicants announced themselves to the pastor the afternoon before in the sacristy or during the hour before the service. The liturgy began with a hymn, a Bible reading, and then a confessional sermon. Following the sermon the entire congregation crowded into the chancel area where they knelt in turn at the rail for individual absolution with the laying on of hands. With no ushering, the crowd sometimes got confused. And even in the days when men and women sat separately, families usually came to the communion rail as a unit. Women often took their hats off for the laying on of hands and left them off until after receiving communion. Following the sermon and absolution, the pastor proceeded with the communion liturgy. It reached its climax when the pastor sang the Lord's Prayer and the Words of Institution. Again without any ushering, the communicants came up to the chancel and took their places at the rail. The bread was always placed directly on the tongue and never were there lay assistants at the rail. In fact, pastors generally waited to receive communion until they could go to a pastors' conference. What is certain is that no one went to communion without serious thought. It had, after all, been drilled into Lutheran confirmants [sic] that communion was a most awesome event and that it was better not to go at all than to go unworthily.²⁷

Another reminiscence is told:

I recall that while at Luther College, a custom was observed in the First Lutheran Church of Decorah, which made a powerful impression upon me. During the Holy Week and Good Friday the beautiful "Good Shepherd" painting on the Altar was hidden by a frame covered with white cloth, upon which was a large black cross. Easter Sunday morning, the painting greeted us again with its silent but impressive sermon."²⁸

²⁷ Jordahl, 1-2.

²⁸ Stub, *Vestments and Liturgies*.

The congregations of the Norwegian Synod and the reorganized Norwegian Synod (ELS) used the 1913 *Lutheran Hymnary* (LHy) until 1941 when *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) was published. This hymnbook was produced by the synods belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America which included the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. However, the ink was hardly dry on *The Lutheran Hymnal* when ELS President Henry Ingebritson said:

The new Synodical Conference Hymn book is finished and on the market. We miss many of our favorite hymns in the new book. It has been suggested that members of our hymn book committee confer with the publishers, asking for an edition for our Synod with an appendix containing some of our hymns.²⁹

The following year, the Report of the Hymnbook Committee was presented under the title "Hymns and Tunes You'll Miss." This report described the fate of "65 of our most treasured hymns in the new Lutheran Hymnal; about 30 are not there at all; some had variations in the text, and many variations or even different tunes.... Of the approx. 30 hymns of Scandinavian origin, only 13 appear exactly as we have them in our present Hymnary.... Best solution seems to be to print supplement containing treasured hymns omitted."³⁰

Some ELS congregations adopted *The Lutheran Hymnal* and made use of its orders of service. Other congregations made use of the service but pasted a modified copy of the order of service from the *Lutheran Hymnary* inside the cover. Still other congregations continued to use the *Lutheran Hymnary* until only tape held the books together. It is remembered that it was once said at a pastors' conference that when the announcement was made that the "Bugenhagen Service" would be used, "a small smile" would creep across people's faces.

2) ... *sings the way we do.*

The publication of Landstad's hymnbook and Lindeman's chorale-book had the dual effect of establishing a distinctive Norwegian hymnody. Magnus Landstad's work occurred after Norway regained its independence from Denmark in 1814. Following this significant event, a distinct Norwegian nationalism arose of which Landstad's hymns form an important part. Landstad is remembered for introducing popular, contemporary Norwegian language into the hymns he wrote.

²⁹ Ingebritson, "President's Report" (1941), 13.

³⁰ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *The Convention Sentinel*, 1.

He also significantly contributed to a romantic nationalism which was growing in Norway at this time.

Ludvig Lindeman's work had the result of unifying the music of the Norwegian church. Much musical diversity had developed in Norway. A *klokker* sang the hymns according to local folk tunes or his own personal preferences. Gracia Grindahl says: The *klokker*

assigned a well known folk tune, frequently local, to the text. To be sure, tunes traveled with texts, but on the whole, this was still an oral culture, and it was the work of the *klokker* to choose suitable tunes for the various texts in the people's hymnbook. Even if the *klokker* sang the same tune as he had heard it elsewhere, his variations often gave the tune a regional flavor and sometimes the unique local sounds which musicologists noted in the nineteenth century, with some distaste, when they gathered these tunes in the mountains and valleys of Norway.³¹

Lindeman visited the Norwegian mountain villages and documented the people's hymn singing as he collected the melodies from the elderly, the fiddlers, and the *klokkers* who led the singing in the churches. After recording more than 2,500 different melodies, Lindeman harmonized and published many of them, along with some original compositions, in his Chorale-book. Lindeman did not favor the return to the original rhythmic forms of the chorale tunes because he considered it inappropriate to change the forms that were currently in use. He rather put new life into the singing of hymns in the church by replacing the uniform rhythms and slow tempos with dotted rhythms, more rapid tempos, and rests at the end of phrases. He promoted the folk tunes of the mountains and the valleys of Norway. As such, hymns sung to his tunes incorporate a distinctive Norwegian "lilt."

Lindeman also served as the cantor and organist at the Church of Our Savior in Oslo for forty-seven years. This is where theological students frequently attended services. He also taught liturgics at the university and would have instructed many of the early pastors of the Norwegian Synod.

3) ... has tensions in matters of liturgy.

There are at least four different hymnbooks currently in use throughout the ELS: *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, *Christian Worship*, and *Lutheran Service Book*. This results from

³¹ Grindal, 258.

congregations which have a cultural heritage stemming both from the Ritual of 1685 and the Common Order of 1888.

The Danish-Norwegian Ritual of 1685 was prepared in the tradition of Martin Luther's *Deutsche Messe* (1526). Lutherans in the eastern United States prepared the Common Order in 1888 based upon Luther's *Formula Missae* (1523) and this service was quickly adopted by Lutherans throughout the United States. The Common Service incorporated the English wording of traditional liturgical elements directly from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and this wording is also what the Norwegian Synod used in 1891 when publishing the Short Order. As a result, the Germans and Norwegians adopted the forms of "thee" and "thy" and became tied to an archaic form of English which they themselves never spoke or would speak.

The Danish-Norwegian Service and the Common Service first came together in the 1913 *Lutheran Hymnary*. Christian Anderson comments:

[W]hen "The Order of Morning Service or Communion" was printed in the *Hymnary*, it was not because of any official resolution to that effect, but the committee decided to print it for the convenience of those who wanted to use this order, since, after all, the matter of the liturgy is an adiaphoron so long as it does not contain or help to promote false doctrine.³²

When the ELS was reorganized, the 1919 constitution stated that the recommended order of service was the Ritual of 1685 or the Service adopted in Spring Grove in 1899.³³ This was the case until 1986, when the synod's bylaws recommended the Order of Worship based upon the Danish-Norwegian liturgy of 1685 or the Common Order of Worship. This was unique among Lutheran synods which usually do not specify an order of worship for use by their congregations. The 2011 ELS Committee on Worship remarked that this demonstrates "that we place a high value on fostering and maintaining liturgical unity."³⁴

Uniformity in liturgical practice continued until the 1970s following of the work of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW). Although the ELS did not participate in the commission, the results affected the Lutheran church throughout North America. In 1996 the

³² Anderson, *Our Liturgy*, 12.

³³ The Norwegian Synod had modified Norway's New Service of 1889 and adopted it for use at the 1899 synod convention held at Spring Grove, Minnesota.

³⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "Report," 90.

ELS Worship Committee published the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. In this hymnbook, Rite I looks to the Ritual of 1685 and Rite II looks to the Common Service of 1888.

In the ELS today there seems to be tensions regarding the liturgy. Whereas there are those who wish to have idealistic historic liturgical elements of the Reformation era reintroduced, there also are those who wish to maintain the romantic order of service as it was practiced about one-hundred years ago. There are those who want to update the historic services to reflect present-day language and usage and there are yet others who wish to introduce modern elements to the divine service. There also is variety of opinions as to the use of rhythmic tunes or isometric tunes for the hymns. Examples of this are the two settings in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* for the hymns *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* and *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. In addition, there also seems to be an *a priori* sentiment among some that the hymns by Luther and those written during the Age of Orthodoxy are the pinnacle of Lutheran hymnody. In some congregations, the weekly printing of the entire order of service can lead one to wonder if a change is being made from what has been memorized and one must follow the service folder with bowed head rather than recite from the heart. ELS worship discussions are not the same as in other Lutheran bodies. The discussion is not between traditional verses contemporary services but rather confessional verses more confessional—as if there could be such a thing.

All of this is not necessarily unhealthy. Martin Luther commented concerning liturgy and hymns:

In short, this or any other order shall be so used that whenever it becomes an abuse, it shall be straightway abolished and replaced by another, even as King Hezekiah put away and destroyed the brazen serpent, though God himself had commanded it be made, because the children of Israel made an abuse of it [II Kings 18:4]. For the orders must serve for the promotion of faith and love and not be to the detriment of faith. As soon as they fail to do this, they are invalid, dead and gone; just as a good coin, when counterfeited, is canceled and changed because of the abuse, or as new shoes when they become old and uncomfortable are no longer worn, but thrown away, and new ones bought. An order is an external thing. No matter how good it is, it can be abused. Then it is no longer an order, but a disorder. No order is, therefore, valid in itself—as the popish orders were

held to be until now. But the validity, value, power, and virtue of any order is in its proper use. Otherwise it is utterly worthless and good for nothing.³⁵

The variety of hymnbooks used in the ELS demonstrates the individuality of the ELS. The synod is advisory to the congregations and it frequently has been said that trying to get ELS pastors and congregations to move together is “like trying to herd cats!” This is seen no better than in matters of the liturgy and hymnody.

4) ... *has several unique features in the liturgy.*

There are several features that are especially dear to those who were raised in the tradition of the *Lutheran Hymnary*: the Opening Prayer, the Closing Prayer, the prayer of John 17:17 following the reading of the sermon text, and the exhortation on the three great festival days of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Seminary liturgics professor Raymond Branstad even taught that the post-communion hymn *O Jesus, Blessed Lord, to Thee* could have been printed directly into the liturgy as it was used without variation. With the 1996 publication of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, the chanting of the Lord’s Prayer became a hallmark of the synod being included in all five main orders of service. This remains as a chanted portion of the liturgy by the pastor (as in the Danish-Norwegian Rite) for the three morning services, but has been incorporated as a congregation chant in the orders of Matins and Vespers.

In all of this, it is important to remember that the immigrant church of the Norwegian Synod and the Reformation church are not the same! In the same regard, the immigrant church and the ELS of today are not the same! The liturgy has been given to us but it is a living liturgy. We *think* we are Norwegians, yet our culture is unique. A citizen of Norway comments about Norwegian-Americans:

They are proud of their Norwegian heritage and identify themselves with all things Norwegian, even though most of them don’t speak the language and have never even visited the country they call “home.” I remember one of the first days of college in America. I introduced myself to another student. When she asked where I was from, I told her that I came from Norway. “Oh! Me too” she replied and my response was an enthusiastic “Åh, så koselig! Hvor er du fra?” I could see the confusion in her

³⁵ Luther, 90.

eyes as she looked at me and said “Oh, I don’t speak Norwegian” and slowly moved away from me.³⁶

The culture of the ELS is that the synod is a liturgical Lutheran church body whose historical culture is that of the Danish-Norwegian *Ritual of 1685* coming from a folk tune tradition combined with the tradition of the Common Service.

2. “The Landstad hymnbook, Luther’s Catechism, and the Bible formed a trilogy which in their unity have done more to make the Norwegian-American people what they are than any other combination of instruments or racial traits.”

The second part of the trilogy says that the culture of the ELS is an orthodox confessional Lutheran church body which is evidenced in the synod’s doctrine and teaching. The catechisms of Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Erik Pontoppidan (1616–78) shaped the church. When writing about the Norwegian heritage, O. E. Rølvaag comments, “we can only get to know our people through knowing their history and their literature. This knowledge of our own past we *must* have, otherwise we become rootless.”³⁷ And I may add—we will become generic Lutherans.

Martin Luther published the *Small Catechism* (enchorion) in 1529. Over the years, Luther had contemplated the need for a catechism out of compassion for the people who were spiritually starved. As a result of the church visitations which had taken place in Saxony (1526–28), he discovered a shocking ignorance of basic Biblical knowledge. In 1528 he preached three series of sermons which would become the basis of the five chief parts of catechism. By Lent 1529, the catechism had been printed on wall charts for use by parents and children in their homes and by May of that year the catechism was published in booklet form. Luther’s catechism was translated into the Danish language by Peder Palladius in 1538 and served the Danish and Norwegian churches for the next two centuries.

When the Norwegian Church Ordinance was adopted in 1607, it mandated that the pastors and *klokkers* were to gather the children and youth for instruction in the catechism. Prior to this time, Palladius had regarded examination by the parish priest as confirmation.³⁸

³⁶ Fjellseth.

³⁷ Rølvaag, 20, emphasis in original.

³⁸ Holloway, 205.

The School Act of 1736, which corresponded with the 200th anniversary of the Reformation in Denmark, established universal elementary education in Denmark and Norway and mandated that all children must attend school until their confirmation. The act necessitated a more extensive book of instruction. In that same year, the king directed his court pastor, Erik Pontoppidan, to prepare an explanation of the catechism. This explanation of Luther's enchiridion was entitled "Truth Unto Godliness" (*Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*)³⁹ and contained 759 questions and answers. Sufficient numbers had been printed by 1738 that the King could decree that all new pupils in Denmark and Norway should use the book.⁴⁰

Pontoppidan's explanation espoused the pietistic flavor of the age. It also allowed the *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith) understanding of eternal election. In this matter, Pontoppidan's explanation was in accordance with Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) who said, "God chose us in faith because he is not able to elect in Christ except under the consideration of faith apprehending Christ."⁴¹ Pontoppidan explained, "God predestined to eternal life all those who He saw from eternity would accept the offered grace, believe in Christ, and remain steadfast in this faith to the end." Only later in America was this teaching misused where it became known as the "second form" of election in contradiction to the "first form" set forth in the Formula of Concord. ELS President John Moldstad summarized the distinction very succinctly saying, "Does faith flow from election, or does election flow from faith?" The answer is the former.⁴²

The Rev. U. V. Koren, who calls Pontoppidan our "dear old teacher,"⁴³ writes,

Therefore we acknowledge, not indeed as a complete definition of the concept of election, but still as a correct presentation of the last part of it, the answer given to Q. 548 of Pontoppidan's *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, which reads: "That God has appointed

³⁹ The full title of the book was "Truth unto Godliness: In a Simple and, as Much as Possible, Short, Yet Sufficient Explanation of Sainted Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, containing all that as one who will be blessed, needs to know and give" (*Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed, udi en eenfoldig og efter Muelighed kort dog tilstrekkelig Forklaring over Sal. Doct. Morten Luthers Liden Catechismo, Indeholdende alt det, som den, der vil blive salig, har behov, at vide og giøre*).

⁴⁰ Hortsbøll, 146.

⁴¹ Brenner, 37 (quoting from Gerhard, *Loci*, Locus Septimus, caput IX, 162).

⁴² J. A. Moldstad, 333n40.

⁴³ DeGarmeaux, "Revisiting Pontoppidan," 23.

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. Rom. 8,28–30.” II Tim. 1,13.

This is to be understood in the manner in which it is developed by John [sic] Gerhard in the following quotation:

“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. We confess with loud voice that we teach: that God has not found anything good in the man who was to be chosen to the life eternal; that He has not taken into consideration either good works, or the use of the free will, or, what is more, not even faith itself in such a way that he was influenced by it, or that He has elected some on account of it; but we say that it is solely and alone the merit of Christ whose worthiness God has taken into consideration, and that He has resolved upon the decree of election out of pure grace. However, since the merit of Christ is found in a man only through faith, therefore we teach that election has taken place in view of Christ’s merit which is to be appropriated by faith. We say, therefore, that all those, and only those, are by God in eternity elected unto salvation, of whom he has foreseen that they by the operation of the Holy Ghost through the ministry of the Gospel would come to a true faith in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and would persevere in the faith until the end.” (Gerhard, *Loc. de electione*, par. 161.)

Therefore, we declare also that we stand in fellowship of faith with those who like Pontoppidan and Johann Gerhard teach correctly regarding sin and grace and who, like them, reject the doctrine that God has been influenced in electing men by their conduct.⁴⁴

When Norwegian Lutherans began to immigrate, they brought with them the catechism which they had used in Norway. In 1903, the Norwegian Synod published the *Forklaring* (Explanation). This was a modified version of Pontoppidan’s explanation prepared by Johannes Ylvisaker, J. A. Ottesen and others. Two years later, it was published in the English language. This book was used in the Norwegian Synod and continued to be used after re-organization. Since that time, it has been published in three revised versions by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

⁴⁴ Koren, 183–84.

Today's ELS *Catechism/Explanation* is yet based on Pontoppidan's catechism.

It is the historic edition of Pontoppidan's catechism that has influenced the history of the Norwegian Synod and its continuation as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In the 1880s a controversy arose in the Synodical Conference of which the Norwegian Synod was a member. Norwegian Synod pastor, F. A. Schmidt accused the Missouri Synod president, C. F. W. Walther of false doctrine based upon the latter's 1877 essay on eternal election. F. A. Schmidt and others argued that Pontoppidan taught election "in view of faith" (*intuitu fidei*) and now defined this to mean that there must be something in a person, such as a better attitude, that caused God to choose to elect them. Schmidt equated eternal election with God's foreknowledge. By the time the controversy had subsided, most Norwegian Synod congregations had been split into two congregations and one-third of the pastors and congregations of the Norwegian Synod had withdrawn their membership. These dissident members formed the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood and later merged with two other Norwegian Lutheran bodies to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1890.⁴⁵

The question of eternal election again was raised prior to the merger of three Norwegian Lutheran synods in 1917. Already in 1890, the Norwegian Synod had sought to restore unity by arranging a meeting with the United Church and the Hauge Synod to discuss church union. Several free conferences also took place. Finally in 1905, the Hauge Synod extended a formal invitation for the three synods to discuss church union. After many meetings, no agreement was achieved on the doctrines of conversion and election. Negotiations ended.

All three synods then elected new committees. These committees consisted primarily of younger men who had not experienced the strife and division of the 1880s. At a meeting conducted February 14–22, 1912 in Madison, Wisconsin, the committees agreed to a joint statement on eternal election. This document was known as *Opgjør* (Settlement).⁴⁶ This word is an accounting term still used in Denmark meaning to balance accounts.

It is difficult to say that this document was not a correct statement regarding eternal election. It is even a simplification to say that it was

⁴⁵ At the end of his life, in 1928, F. A. Schmidt admitted "that the so-called 'first form' of election may be used without involving Calvinism" (Anderson, "Biographical Essay on F. A. Schmidt," 102).

⁴⁶ The text of *Opgjør* can be found in Faugstad, 77–79 and Evangelical Lutheran Church, *The Union Documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 38–57.

crafted as a compromise document where the synods agreed to disagree and ignore Scripture. The document even contained antitheses.⁴⁷ A member of the Union Committee recalls, “There are not many articles in ‘Opgjør,’ nor are they long. But we endeavored to make them clear and concise.”⁴⁸ Dr. Franz Pieper also wrote,

That which finds expression in thesis 5 must be regarded as ‘etwas Grosses’—magnificent. They have agreed to condemn synergism, the cause of so much schism and offense in the American church. *This is a result of the union movement which good Lutherans will appreciate and for which they will thank God from all their heart. This is a tremendous step forward in the direction of true union. Indeed a common foundation has now been found proceeding from which such inequalities as remain may be removed.*⁴⁹

While believing that *Opgjør* was a step in the right direction, Pieper objected to the use of the term “second form” of the doctrine of election (*intuitu fidei*) as a term that provides a convenient cover for synergism.⁵⁰ The Synodical Conference expressed similar concerns.⁵¹

A sequence of events then followed:

1912 – *Opgjør* was written and received overwhelming approval by the five districts of the Norwegian Synod being assured that it set forth the Synod’s position on the doctrine of election. The votes totaled 590 for; 18 opposed; 12 not voting.⁵²

⁴⁷ Pastor J. E. Thoen was later to reflect, “The fifth paragraph rejects synergism, and the sixth paragraph rejects Calvinism, but it cannot be the intention of the committees to reject what is defended in the foregoing. We are obliged to suppose that the committees intended to produce a document that would be in harmony with itself. The purpose of this document was not to present an agreement in doctrine as we see from the foregoing. The differences are left standing as they were before....” (*Beretning*, 61).

⁴⁸ J. E. Jorgenson, 509.

⁴⁹ Pieper, quoted in *Lutheran Herald*, “Justifiable Criticism,” 435, emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Brenner, 170 (quoting from Franz Pieper, *A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America*).

⁵¹ The words “first form” and “second form” were eliminated from *Opgjør* by the committee in 1913.

⁵² The vote in the district conventions was:

Minnesota: unanimous, 209 votes

Eastern: 116 for, none opposed, 12 not voting

Iowa: 101 for; 17 opposed

Northwestern: unanimous, 122 votes

Pacific: 42 for; 1 opposed. (Evangelical Lutheran Church, 18)

- 1913 – Minneapolis – Both a majority report (to proceed with union) and minority report (to first clarify unsettled questions regarding *Opgjør*) were presented. The majority report was adopted by a vote of 394 in favor and 106 opposed. The reports were submitted to congregations for consideration and action.
- 1914 – Sioux Falls – The referendum from the previous convention resulted in: 398 congregations reporting with 359 for the majority report and 27 against the majority report. There were 629 congregations in the synod, meaning that 231 did not report. President Stub declared: “According to the constitution of the Synod, all congregations which did not vote within the time limits set by the constitution are regarded as having endorsed the resolutions of the body.”⁵³ “Conditions on Union” were adopted.
- 1915 – San Francisco – President Stub announced that no protests against the action of the previous synod meeting had been received from any congregations.⁵⁴ A draft constitution was presented but no action taken.
- 1916 – Minneapolis – The Constitution was adopted.
- 1917 – St. Paul – The Merger was consummated.

But problems had arisen. ELS president Christian Anderson later explained,

The faithful teachers of the Synod did not refuse to recognize as brethren those who like Pontoppidon, Gerhard & other old teachers in the Lutheran Church used this expression, provided that they like those old teachers otherwise taught rightly concerning sin and grace. To be sure, they did not recognize this so-called form of doctrine as Scriptural, since no passage is found in Scripture which speaks in this way about Election; neither is such expression found in our Lutheran Confessions....⁵⁵

H. G. Stub and others tried to explain that *Opgjør* preserved the biblical teachings of the Norwegian Synod and the writings of C. F. W. Walther. At the Norwegian Synod’s 1912 Minnesota District convention, the Union Committee explained,

⁵³ Evangelical Lutheran Church, 19.

⁵⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church, 21.

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Why the Norwegian Synod?* 19.

No form of doctrine is accepted, but the doctrine in two forms. The Synod's Committee unconditionally accepts the first form of doctrine as that of the Scripture and Confessions, but can nevertheless recognize as brethren in the faith those who hold the second form of doctrine construed in the light of the following sections of this "Agreement."⁵⁶

The United Church did not share this understanding. The editor of the *Lutheran Herald* wrote in 1913.

Dr. Stub has declared that, also, after accepting Opgjør, the Norwegian Synod stands doctrinally where Dr. Walther and the Missouri Synod stood thirty years ago, "This," says Dr. Kildahl, "I cannot admit. The doctrine against which Dr. Schmidt and others have fought all these years, is not *that* doctrine, which is found in Opgjør. The doctrine contained in the Missouri Synod's reports of the 1877 and 1879 conventions, is the doctrine against which we fought; and *that* doctrine I do not find in Opgjør."⁵⁷

Such conflicting statements caused confusion in the Norwegian Synod and revealed that doctrinal differences yet existed between the two church bodies. This situation brought about the formation of the so-called Minority group within the Norwegian Synod. This Minority then did something that was uncharacteristic of the Norwegian personality—they spoke up! These individuals were not unionists but neither were they schismatics. It is said that a Norwegian may know something but does not feel it is his place to embarrass you by telling you that he knows something you do not know. "Norwegians won't try to strike up a conversation with you on the street, just in case you are busy with something else. Norwegians won't sit next to you on the bus in case it might inconvenience you.... If a Norwegian is unlucky to bump into you on the street, they've already interrupted you once. Don't think you'll get an apology—that would mean interrupting you again!"⁵⁸ But the situation in 1913 was so grave that the conscientious Norwegian spoke!

Three difficulties ultimately were seen in *Opgjør*:

- Paragraph One accepts "unanimously and without reservation that doctrine of election which is presented in Article XI of the Formula

⁵⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church, 17–18.

⁵⁷ *Lutheran Herald*, "Dr. Kildahl," 456–57.

⁵⁸ Fjellseth.

of Concord and in Pontoppidan's *Sandhed til gudfrygtighed*. The minority acknowledged, "There is a great deal of difference between 'tolerating' a definition of a doctrine under certain definite circumstances and accepting this definition 'without reservation.'"⁵⁹

- Paragraph Three says "it is generally known that concerning the doctrine of Election two forms of presentation have been used, both of which have gained prescriptive right and recognition within the orthodox Lutheran church." The article contains a reference to the Formula of Concord, Art. XI, 13–24.⁶⁰ It was argued, "The Synod interpretation is expressed in thesis 3 itself, whereas the United Church's interpretation is indicated in the parenthesis with its reference to Paragraphs [13–24] of the Article. Only by extending the reference so as to read Paragraphs [1–24], will the thesis and the parenthesis correspond."⁶¹ These additional paragraphs, which the minority in the Synod wanted included, explain "the difference between God's eternal foreknowledge and the eternal election of his children to eternal salvation."⁶² These paragraphs stand in contrast to those who sought to use Pontoppidan's catechism to defend the teaching of *intuitu fidei*, that "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."
- Paragraph Four speaks of "man's feeling of responsibility when face to face with the acceptance or rejection of grace." In 1913, Prof. Johannes Ylvisaker said, "This paragraph is very misleading (without speaking of it that it is really wrong.). It seems to want to give room for a good deal of synergism."⁶³

Ultimately, it was on the basis of *Opgjør* that the Norwegian Synod merged on June 9, 1917 to form the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC). A remnant of the Norwegian Synod reorganized on June 17, 1918 as the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (since 1957, Evangelical Lutheran Synod).

Opgjør continues to color the ELS. Its memory remains so strong that when the current ELS *Catechism/Explanation* was published

⁵⁹ S. C. Ylvisaker, 101.

⁶⁰ The original Norwegian text references Art. XI, 10–20 according to the Norwegian edition of the Book of Concord by Johnson and Caspari.

⁶¹ Harstad, 59.

⁶² Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XI:4.

⁶³ Johannes Ylvisaker, 59.

in 2001, question 231 was added, “Can a person know whether he is one of the elect?” The answer is, “Yes! Whenever one hears the Gospel and trusts in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins, that person can be confident that he is one of the elect.” At that time, the Catechism Review Committee also considered adding words to the effect that this doctrine defined the formation of the ELS. The memory of *Opgjør* remains strong.

The result of this is that the ELS ...

1) ... proceeds cautiously with doctrinal statements.

The memory of *Opgjør* was yet fresh in the minds of the members of the ELS when the Missouri Synod began to conduct discussions with the American Lutheran Church. In 1940, ELS president 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 ALC which affect our whole Synodical Conference. After careful study of the Declaration of the ALC and its 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.⁶⁴

The memory of *Opgjør*, however, can lead to skepticism amongst the members of the synod. This is not because of any disunity in confession or practice, but often because of a differing opinion over which words best express a doctrinal truth. Whereas one would think the small size of the ELS would allow a quick response, the synod also is hesitant to enter into anything without study. After all, many Norwegians think that decisions are better made after a good night’s sleep or a cup of coffee.

In March 1912, just after *Opgjør* was written, the editor of the *Lutheran Herald* wrote:

⁶⁴ Ingebritson, “President’s Report” (1940), 10.

The joint committee appointed by the United Church and the Norwegian Synod Feb. 29 [sic]⁶⁵ agreed on a set of theses dealing with the doctrine of Election. Naturally the announcement brought joy to many who have followed the negotiations between the two bodies with an interested eye. The theses were written in Norwegian. We regret to state that no authoritative translation into English will be issued. As in a matter of this kind, every turn of phrase, every connective, every comma is of importance, and as any change, be it ever so slight from the original text will give the rise to misunderstandings and confusion, we shall not undertake to translate the theses for our readers....⁶⁶

This means that the ELS proceeds slowly with the adoption of a doctrinal statement and takes “every turn of phrase, every connective, every comma” as being of great importance. In the course of discussion the ELS will move, strike, amend, and recommit a doctrinal statement many times in assuring itself that what is said truly is Biblical and confessional. The “95 Theses for the Twenty-First Century” was prepared by the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in 2017. This took two years to produce and one convention to be adopted. If this had happened within the ELS, it likely would have taken a decade; not because of a disunity in doctrine but rather to reach an agreement in the proper wording.

Every ELS pastor can pronounce the word “Opgjør” [OP-yer] and has come to regard the word as synonymous with compromise. Didrikke Anderson Conn, daughter of ELS Pastor Christian & Inger Anderson, recalls, “Sometime around 1916 there was a church division in the synod, called “Opjor” [sic] or something like that. We kids called it the ‘Uproar.’ It separated the Wulfsbergs, as most of them went with the ‘majority.’ Father went with the ‘minority’ and later built Fairview Lutheran Church at 31st and Colfax North [in Minneapolis].”⁶⁷

In 1953, Pastor Christian Anderson presented a paper to the General Pastoral Conference entitled “Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown of the Old Norwegian Synod.” In that paper he explained:

⁶⁵ The committee actually met February 14–22, 1912 and issued a report on February 22 (Evangelical Lutheran Church, 15).

⁶⁶ *Lutheran Herald*, “Committee Completes,” 242–43.

⁶⁷ Conn, 131.

In the period following the withdrawal of the Anti-Missourians there arose a number of very able leaders within our Synod. For a long time they were thoroughly sound doctrinally, and they worked diligently for the true welfare of the church. While this no doubt was a blessing, it however tended to encourage a greater part, at least of the clergy, to be satisfied to follow the leaders without seeking diligently to inform themselves on the issues, so that they would be prepared to hold back in case those leaders should go wrong. A spirit of indifference developed both among the clergy and the laity. New elements gradually entered the ranks of ministers, which did not fully appreciate the historical position of the Synod. Those needed only the right kind of opportunity to cause mischief.

He continued:

The custom of continuing the same men in office for a long time helped to centralize power and influence in a few. It is no doubt an advantage to let those who have proven their ability continue at the head of the organization, rather than have frequent changes. Experience surely counts for much in carrying out the duties of the office. But on the other hand there is the grave danger that the prestige connected with holding office a long time may be abused when a crisis arises. After all, even the best among us are only human. Because of the experience we had in the formation of the late merger, there was a gentlemen's agreement among us, when we re-organized the Synod, that the term of office of the President was to be only two years, and that no one was to be re-elected more than once. We have hereby no doubt lost some of the valuable service of experienced men, but this loss has been offset by the safeguard against anyone wrongfully usurping power which this arrangement has given us.⁶⁸

This has led to the unique polity within the ELS, that each member congregation is entitled to send two voting delegates to every convention of the synod. This has the result that delegates can outnumber clergy by at least a two-to-one majority. This is also seen in the administration of Bethany Lutheran College where there are two administrative boards for the institution. Bethany Lutheran College came under the

⁶⁸ Anderson, "The Underlying Causes," 5.

ownership and operation of the ELS in 1927. The following year, the secretary of the Board of Regents reported:

To establish Bethany College as a higher institution of learning for our synod is not a thing which can be put lightly into the hands of a number of teachers, or a Board of Regents, or any other small group of men, no matter how reliable these may be. This must be a matter of the whole synod.⁶⁹

2) ... *is compassionate toward those individuals and congregations who find themselves in difficult confessional situations.*

The ELS constitution has another unique provision in that it makes allowance for *individual* membership in the synod beyond that of congregations and clergy. This dates back to the early days of the reorganized synod when individual members of the old Norwegian Synod were left without a congregation where they could confess their faith. The founders of the reorganized synod understood that, for many people, it was more difficult to stay in the merger synod and testify than leave in protest.

The ELS still considers herself to be a home for the homeless. Over the years congregations and pastors have joined the ELS coming from other synodical backgrounds. By this author's count, 38 of the synod's 131 current congregations have their origin in other synods and two-thirds of the current clergymen were not baptized in ELS congregations.

The ELS rejoices that there will be other Christians in heaven! Faith in Jesus Christ alone saves. There is a great empathy for those who find themselves in difficult situations. In 1959, Prof. George Lillegard spoke to the ELS General Pastoral Conference:

In this way, someone may be a member of such a synod (which tolerates false doctrine) under protest for a while, so long as his testimony is not prohibited, and he may still hope that it will bear fruit.—There is a great difference between entering a unionistic body and being forced to leave it. The first is not permissible under any circumstances; in the latter case it may be necessary to remain for a shorter or longer period of time for the purpose of testifying against error.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ S. C. Ylvisaker, "Report," 533 .

⁷⁰ Lillegard, 64–65.

Yet this situation only can continue so long! ELS President Milton Otto explained the meaning of the word suspension in regard to the ELS fellowship action taken regarding the Missouri Synod:

That phrase “suspend fraternal relations” means that we for the time being do not practice any fellowship with the Missouri Synod. If she will in a God-pleasing way remove the offenses she has caused, we can again lift that suspension. It is therefore a break in relationship which we hope will be only temporary. For, it certainly is the prayer of everyone in our Synod that matters will be adjusted in such a way that we may again be permitted to resume fellowship with our former brethren in the Missouri Synod in a real unity of mind and of oneness in spirit.

May He preserve unto us an unconditioned Gospel for the glory of His Church and His Savior’s Name!⁷¹

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Professor Juul Madson also wrote:

There surely remains a remnant of God’s people within even unionistic and heterodox church bodies who are not pleased with—and often very troubled by—such developments as those above⁷² that eat away at the vitals of Christ’s church and threaten to obscure the true Gospel beyond recognition. Therefore we have additional reason to hold firmly to, and to defend with all the grace and knowledge our Lord places at our disposal, the true heritage of the Lutheran Reformation, that the remnant may be helped to see that this option is also for them.⁷³

3) ... *has had her compassion abused.*

In the early years following the merger of 1917 and the reorganization of the synod in 1918, the title “synod man” was applied to someone whose loyalties yet remained with the Norwegian Synod. Yet even at that time it was said, “Not all the black sheep went with the merger.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Otto, “The Meaning of our Resolution of Suspension,” 228.

⁷² In 1998 the Lutheran World Federation’s adopted the Joint Declaration on Justification with the Roman Church and the ELCA approved full communion with three Reformed church bodies.

⁷³ Madson, 173.

⁷⁴ Larson, 69.

The compassionate view towards individuals who find themselves in difficult confessional situations also has led the synod to be abused at times. It is similar to what occurs in a congregation when parents seek confirmation instruction for their child. During those years of instruction, the student is regular in class and the family is regular in worship. But after the Rite of Confirmation, the family becomes more and more sporadic until they are rarely, if ever, seen again. This should not be a surprise. The Savior told the parable of Matthew 13:

A sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil. Immediately the seed sprang up, because the soil was not deep. But when the sun rose, the seed was scorched. Because it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on good ground and produced grain: some one hundred times, some sixty, and some thirty times more than was sown. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 13:3–9)

This also occurs on a synodical level. Former ELS President George Orvick related that on occasion he would receive a telephone call from someone outside the synod seeking guidance. The individual would say that he knew something wasn't right in his congregation but couldn't explain exactly what was amiss. What was missing was the gospel of Jesus Christ! Although there are those individuals who have been happy to embrace the ELS, there also are those who have not been able to adjust to the culture of the ELS and the Norwegian personality. It is true, the scriptures tell us to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), but there are those who are so accustomed to fighting for the truth of Scripture that they do not know how to live apart from skepticism and debate. They remain with the synod only a short time and through them the Bride of Christ becomes dirty. Yet this does not mean that the synod should cease to have empathy for such individuals. It was said of our Savior, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

Sometimes, the phrase still is used of an individual being a "synod person." This undefined term refers to an individual who has a humble *appreciation* for the history and culture of the synod. It can only be hoped that in the ELS, one is a "synod person" by conviction rather than convenience.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod must give prime consideration to this matter as it enters a new era of synodical history. 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 forth before a people by the preceding generation, but each succeeding generation must, through the Holy Spirit, make this truth its own as a part of its very faith and life before it can actually be said to possess it. There is in this sense no continuity to synodical history. Each succeeding generation must start all over again. In this way alone is a synod spared from offensive pride, dead orthodoxy, and liberalism. In this way alone is a new generation enabled to sing: "God's Word is *our* great heritage."⁷⁵

The ELS considers herself to be an orthodox confessional Lutheran church body. In the book, *The Religious Bodies of America*, F. E. Mayer describes a confessional Lutheran as someone having

an unqualified submission to the divine truth as it is revealed in the sacred records of Holy Scripture; acceptance of the Word of God as the absolute and final statement and rule of all Christian proclamation; the conviction that the Lutheran Confessions are a full and correct witness to this divinely revealed truth; a deep concern to preserve and cultivate the true ecumenical spirit which recognizes the spiritual unity of all Christians through faith in Christ, transcending all denominational lines, *but which at the same time is conscious of the obligation to censure and to correct every doctrinal trend which threatens to undermine or destroy the unity of the faith.*⁷⁶

The memory of *Opgjør* remains so strong in the minds of the ELS, that the synod considers itself to be a bastion of confessional Lutheranism. This is as it should be for any church body. C. P. Krauth writes, "No particular church has, on its own showing, a right to existence except as it believes itself to be the most perfect form of Christianity, the form which of right should and will be universal."⁷⁷ The ELS is not just another gathering of confessional Lutherans. The ELS is not about either Missouri Synod's *Brief Statement* nor Wisconsin Synod's

⁷⁵ Aaberg, 265, emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ Mayer, vii, emphasis added.

⁷⁷ Krauth, xiv.

This We Believe. The culture of the ELS is yet defined by the Lutheran Confessions and *Opgjør*.

The culture of the ELS is that it is an orthodox confessional Lutheran church body who remembers Luther's *Small Catechism* and *Opgjør*.

3. "The Landstad hymnbook, Luther's Catechism, and the Bible formed a trilogy which in their unity have done more to make the Norwegian-American people what they are than any other combination of instruments or racial traits."

The third part of the trilogy says that the culture of the ELS is an evangelical church body. Gisle Johnson (1822–94) and Carl Caspari (1814–92) shaped the hermeneutic of the synod.

The opponents of the former Norwegian Synod accused the Synod of both Wisconsinism and Missouriianism. The Norwegian Synod was labeled as being a monster of Wisconsinism which must be destroyed.⁷⁸ This referred to the teaching of H. A. Preus and J. A. Otteson both of whom resided in Wisconsin and were leaders of the Norwegian Synod. The Synod also was accused of developing its confessional stance in America from its close association with the Missouri Synod.

But an adherence to the Lutheran Confessions was brought from Norway. Until 1811, Norwegian Lutheran clergy were trained at the University of Copenhagen. In that year, Royal Frederick's University was established in Oslo (after 1939, University of Oslo—*Universitetet i Oslo*). In the 1840s two significant professors began to teach at the university. They were Carl Paul Caspari and Gisle Johnson. Caspari taught courses in the Old Testament and Johnson first taught systematic theology and later both dogmatic theology and church history. These men were the instructors of the founding fathers of the Norwegian Synod: H. A. Preus, J. A. Ottesen, U. V. Koren, and others.

King Christian III had declared that the Augsburg Confession was to be the standard of the church. In 1862, a significant event occurred when Gisle Johnson and Carl Caspari translated the Book of Concord (*Konkordieboken*) into the Norwegian language. The Book of Concord was not unknown to the Norwegians. It already had been translated into the Danish language in 1588 yet it was not adopted by the Church of

⁷⁸ In 1874, Pastor Sven Oftedal of the Danish-Norwegian Conference made this charge against the Norwegian Synod in newspaper *Skandinaven*.

Norway as a doctrinal symbol.⁷⁹ In 1784, King Frederick II prohibited theological debate saying, "... in this book [of Concord] is to be found teachings with which we and our church are strangers and unfamiliar and will easily disturb the unity which according to God's promise these kingdoms have enjoyed."⁸⁰ Although it did not have official sanction, the Book of Concord had acceptance among Norwegian Lutherans as a correct interpretation of the Bible.

In America, the Book of Concord generally was accepted by the Norwegian Synod.⁸¹ At the 1863 convention of the Missouri Synod, the question was asked

"If, then, we required that our congregations acknowledge *all symbols* (at least *indirectly*), when the servants of the Church are pledged to all symbols, do we thereby regard it as necessary that the same pledge must be made also in other churches, e.g., in the Norwegian, if they wish to be recognized as truly Lutheran churches?" The answer, presumably given by C. F. W. Walther, stated that the Norwegian Lutherans had not been confronted with the same controversies with which the churches in Germany had been confronted. He concluded:

"If the Danish-Norwegian Church had wished to introduce this confession [The Formula of Concord], it would have run the risk of evoking the gravest of controversies and unrest. This, too, is also the reason why this confession was not accepted officially in that church. It is false and erroneous, as one so often reads, that the Norwegian Church is *not confessionally constituted* as is the German; for even if the Symbols *have not all been accepted officially* there, theologians such as Brockmann [sic], Lassenius, et al. prove, nevertheless that the Book of Concord has always been regarded *as the book of Lutheran faith and confession*. Besides that, not only are the present faithful Norwegians trying to have the complete Book of Concord accepted, but it is also being translated in Norway into the vernacular itself."⁸²

⁷⁹ Evjen, 251, citing Caspari-Johnson, ed., *Konkordieboken* 2nd ed. (Christiania, 1882), 20.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Teigen.

⁸¹ In 1892, the Norwegian edition was printed and published in Decorah, Iowa.

⁸² Meyer, 44-45, emphasis in original.

Caspari and Johnson also taught their students the hermeneutical principles that came from the Reformation. Prof. John Brenner explains this well:

Luther and Chemnitz were generally content to let apparent contradictions and paradoxes in Scripture stand. The theologians of [the Time of Orthodoxy] were not always willing to do so. Their method of asking questions led to ever more subtle distinctions and definitions as they attempted to harmonize all of the teachings of Scripture. The questions they answered often raised new questions to be addressed.⁸³

This led men such as Johann Gerhard and Johan Quenstedt to seek a systematized answer as to “why some and not others.” Even though these men were concerned about distinguishing themselves from Calvinism, they introduced new terminology and logical explanations that would later cause confusion within the Lutheran Church. This dichotomy in hermeneutics continued among Lutherans in America.

The result of this is that the ELS ...

1) ... upholds the Biblical hermeneutic that Scripture interprets Scripture.

Different approaches to biblical interpretation existed amongst Norwegian Lutherans in the United States. The Norwegian Synod believed that the clear passages of scripture—*sedes doctrinae*—must explain the more obscure. The United Norwegian Lutheran Church and the Hauge’s Synod had a more systematic approach holding that all scripture needed to be systematized according to faith as a whole. Thus, whereas the Norwegian Synod was willing to let the teachings of God’s will and justification stand within the hidden wisdom of God, the other synods sought to explain these matters in a logical manner. The issue at hand was more than just a matter of a definition of terms. In writing about *Opgjør*, Dr. Franz Pieper explains:

In the recent controversy, *Bible-text* and exegesis stood in opposition to each other. The other side insisted with much emphasis that the few Scripture-texts treating of Predestination were “obscure,” and must needs be “interpreted” in order that universal grace might be preserved. We on our part maintained that the texts treating of Election are sufficiently *numerous* and

⁸³ Brenner, 33.

clear. Just so our Confessions: "Holy Scriptures are not only in but one place and incidentally, but in many places, thoroughly discuss and urge the same" (doctrine of Election). The texts concerning Predestination require, as little as the *sedes doctrinae* of other articles, an "interpretation" in the sense that obscure words must first be explained. What Luther says concerning Scripture texts for all Christian doctrine applies also to the texts which treat of Election: "When Faith only hears the Bible, it is so clear and bright to him that he says without any fathers or glosses: That is right, that I believe." We have on occasion, requested the other side repeatedly to make the test.⁸⁴

A division within Norwegian-American Lutheranism was inevitable, the only question was the issue that would bring it to the forefront. In 1884, U. V. Koren wrote in *An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod*:

There is no real contradiction between the Scripture's doctrine of universal grace and that of election, although these doctrines cannot be harmonized by reason. He who seeks to harmonize them before the judgment of our reason will not succeed in doing so, except by limiting or changing one or the other of them, and must, on the one hand, depart from the Scripture doctrine concerning election, and, on the other hand, from the Scripture doctrine concerning the universality of God's grace (Calvinism) or from the Scripture doctrine concerning man's complete corruption (Synergism). Scripture gives us no other explanation than that in Hos. 13,9: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." II Cor. 1,18-19; I Cor. 2,12-13; I Tim. 2,4; cf. Acts 13,48; Matth. 23,37; cf. Rom. 9,16.⁸⁵

Within the reorganized synod, the same holds true. In a 1968 anniversary essay, Prof. Milton Otto spoke about the "Trumpet with a Certain Sound." In describing the 1918 reorganization of the synod, he said that trumpet sound was the simple truth of scripture that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). He went on to say: "it must be noted that the Norwegian Synod was re-organized, not out of stubbornness, or to take on a martyr complex, or to preserve

⁸⁴ Brenner, 170, quoting Franz Pieper.

⁸⁵ Koren, 182.

a name, but to preserve and to testify to the central truth of Scripture.”⁸⁶ Doctrinal discussions—such as those about the Lord’s Supper or the ministry—have sharpened the theology of the ELS.

The result is that since the ELS has never stopped speaking about *Opgjør*, the synod continues to have a hermeneutical principle in which Scripture interprets Scripture.

2) ... *finds the gospel as the central focus of preaching and teaching.*

Whereas the Evangelical Lutheran Synod does not excel at providing Christian compassion and aid to those in physical need, she finds her focus in preaching the gospel and proclaiming the Means of Grace. The central truth of scripture that Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, by His death and resurrection has overcome sin, death, and hell, stands at the center of the ELS and colors the synod’s preaching and teaching. When preparing a Bible study or a sermon, the ELS pastor remembers the instruction which the risen Savior gave to the two disciples who were walking toward the village of Emmaus. On that magnificent journey, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24: 27). As such, every sermon very specifically is to direct the hearer to the risen Christ as the fulfillment of the text and the only hope and source of forgiveness and eternal life. Former synod president George Orvick related that early in his ministry an individual spoke to him following a Sunday morning service and said: “When I go to work, my boss is mad at me. When I come home from work, my wife is mad at me. And when I come to church, you’re mad at me too.” That man wanted to hear the sweet gospel come from his pastor’s lips as God’s Word was preached from the pulpit. The law serves its place, but the gospel of forgiveness, which is “sweeter than honey” must predominate in any sermon. The ELS strives to be what her name says—“evangelical.”

Following the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation to Norway, the appearance of the interior of church buildings began to change. This consisted mainly of removing the lesser altars with images of saints. The pulpit was given a more central location and raised from the floor so that the preacher could better be seen and heard. Sermons in the Lutheran service were often lengthy which led to the need for pews in the nave for the congregation. The pulpit, altar and baptismal

⁸⁶ Otto, “The Trumpet with a Certain Sound,” 33.

font constituted the three main points in the church interior. Altarpieces now began to contain quotations from the Bible and Luther's Small Catechism. All this served as an indication of the primary importance of the Word and the Catechism in the service. Allowance was made for the service of Word and Sacrament to be normative for Sunday worship but the attempts were not successful "and actually the four-time-a-year pattern that emerged meant that from an old Catholic point of view, Lutherans communed more often than many Catholics."⁸⁷

The Lutheran Church is known as the "singing church" but it also known as the "preaching church." This speaker recalls a conversation with an individual who spoke with glowing praise about his congregation and pastor and then said, he almost always preaches about Jesus Christ. That's not good enough! In his 1928 convention essay "Justification by Faith," G. A. Gullixson said: "There is nothing in our Christian faith that has been more carefully guarded, more sincerely confessed by the worthy fathers in our Synod than this doctrine of a sinner's justification before God."⁸⁸ This is in accord with Theses XXV of *Law and Gospel*:

In the twenty-first place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching (XXV thesis).⁸⁹

In the twenty-seventh evening lecture, C. F. W. Walther then explains:

You may be assured that the Lutheran Church is distinct from all others by the fact that it preaches a perfect redemption and hence does not represent faith as a work, but merely as the receiving hand by which the sinner accepts the gifts of God; furthermore, that it invites all sinners who are alarmed over their sins, no matter how abominable their conduct may have been, to come, for all things are ready for them.⁹⁰

During a recent daily chapel service at Bethany Lutheran College, the text was Acts 14:15–18. In this account, the apostle Paul had just healed a crippled man. The people of Lystra called the apostles Paul and Barnabas "gods," but the apostles said "We too are only men, humans like you." Then in testifying to the Triune God, the apostles appealed to nature: creation, rain, and harvest. The preacher then said:

⁸⁷ Jordahl, 1.

⁸⁸ Gullixson, 57.

⁸⁹ Walther, 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 292.

Something rather noteworthy is missing from that list. Did anyone pick up on it? Yeah, you got it—salvation! Absolutely! Salvation! Eternal life! Literally the point of the book! The gospel message is not explicitly included here. It's just talking about the good things of the natural world. —They beat you to it “sem guys!”— It's just talking about these normal good things.... Yet, all of these amazing gifts seem so small by comparison to the “big gift” that he gave us. That God gave us *more* than the earth. He gave of himself in sending his Son to the earth as the sacrifice for us. He did more than just create the earth. He recreated us when Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and turned that life in its entirety over to us—rewards and all. He did more than just rule the earth. He obeyed the perverted laws that were created when we invented sin and became obedient even unto death. What God did and the value of this message dwarfs all of these other things to the point we hardly even remember them—to the point that we hardly even remember to thank God for them. This is particularly striking because without Christ none of these things actually belong to you....

None of the good things that this world offers and takes away actually belong to you until Christ holds you and you hold Him. It is Christ who actually makes the good things in this world ours. The things that are worthy of our thanks and praise.⁹¹

Even if the explicit gospel of Christ is not directly included in a text, it is the preacher's task to find the gospel of Jesus' obedience, death, and resurrection from that text because every page of scripture is dipped in Jesus' blood. Jesus says that all of the scriptures “testify about me” (John 5:39). The ELS pastor finds himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) and is more concerned about the content than the form of preaching. This is not legalism. This is consistent with the Norwegian sense of humility because if ones praises a Norwegian person he will take a deep breath, look skeptical, and scratch the back of his head while looking around for an exit, and then quickly scurry away. The ELS is not about how we live for Christ but how Christ has lived for us.

This preaching of the ELS is seen in an appreciation of the Means of Grace. The gospel of Christ is not something which is taken down on Sunday morning, admired, and then placed back on a shelf. It is a

⁹¹ Klebig.

priceless treasure to be received through the Word and Sacraments. Again and again, the believer is directed to the objective Means of Grace as the surety of salvation rather to our own subjective works or emotions.

Here stands the font before our eyes,
 Telling how God did receive us;
 Th'altar recalls Christ's sacrifice
 And what His table doth give us;
 Here sounds the Word that doth proclaim
 Christ, yesterday, today, the same,
 Yea, and for aye our Redeemer.⁹²

3) ... *has a concern about liberal arts education.*

In a 50th anniversary essay, Milton Otto says: "These intrepid souls of a half century ago had no choice but to raise a trumpet with a certain sound for the sake of their own abiding hope for salvation and that of their children and children's children."⁹³ An introspective question also has been raised, "Would the storm of 1917 have destroyed the old Synod house, if the Synod had practiced what it preached with regard to the Christian Day School?"⁹⁴ This is an honest question, but it must be admitted that the old Norwegian Synod's concern for Christian education was evidenced in ways that differ from her sister synods. The members who formed the Missouri and Wisconsin synods immigrated to America largely due to spiritual reasons. The Prussian Union prompted a great exodus from Germany and Lutherans left their homeland for the sake of their own souls and the souls of their children. As a result, many of these German immigrants quickly established Christian day schools. School buildings often were erected before a church building was constructed.

Not so for the Norwegian emigrant. Typical Norwegian emigrants of the 19th century were seeking a better economic life for themselves and their children. They wanted their children to be Americans and felt sending their children to anything other than the American public school was un-American. At the same time, they also considered that religious instruction should be provided in the public school. This was the practice of the state church of Norway. When the control of the

⁹² *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, 211:6

⁹³ Otto, "The Trumpet with a Certain Sound," 33.

⁹⁴ C. A. Moldstad, 83-84.

schools in Norway became the responsibility of the local congregation, the pastor became responsible for obtaining a teacher. The Lutheran state church and the school were synonymous as can be seen from the list of required books: the Bible, a book of prayers, a book of hymns, the New Testament, copies of Norway's constitution, and an arithmetic book. In America, the Norwegian immigrant expected the same pattern. When this did not happen, the Norwegian immigrants established both Sunday schools and Norwegian schools which lasted for several weeks in the summer to provide additional instruction in the Bible, hymnody, and the Norwegian language. Even in 1889 when the Synod established Lutheran Normal School in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, a major purpose was to prepare teachers for positions in the public schools rather than in parochial schools. The ELS has a Scandinavian view of education and the liberal arts. Long-time president of Bethany Lutheran College, the Rev. S. C. Ylvisaker, wrote:

Side by side with the general, the specific, and the Christian training goes the cultural, the indefinable something which adds richness, beauty, mellowness, refinement. The source and wellspring of all true refinement is Christian faith, and no one is truly refined who does not own this faith. Christian education is therefore not true to itself if it does not include in its training some way to provide a mode of expression for this culture and appreciation of it in others.⁹⁵

The various Norwegian synods in the United States found their thrust of Christian education in higher education. In addition to the three schools operated directly by the Norwegian Synod, numerous academies were operated by associations of congregations. Even the Synod's premier school, Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, was not limited to pre-seminary education. Liberal arts quickly became an important focus of the school as individuals received the Christian instruction they would use in their various adult vocations. Likewise, Bethany Lutheran College has operated as a liberal arts institution. Yet today, Bethany Lutheran College's purpose is stated as:

Bethany Lutheran College engages students with the saving knowledge of Christ and assists them in developing their God-given talents and abilities for meaningful lives of service in the family, church, and society. A program of study grounded

⁹⁵ S. C. Ylvisaker, quoted by Orvick, *Forget Not All His Benefits*, 84.

in the liberal arts and taught through the discerning lens of a Christian worldview equips students with knowledge, understanding, and adaptable skills.⁹⁶

As it stands high amid the trees, Bethany Lutheran College attracts students from various backgrounds and for various courses of study. Students come seeking education and receive the truth of the gospel of Christ.

This is the “flavor” of the ELS. Twenty-five years ago, as George Orvick addressed the 75th anniversary convention, he penned these words,

As we study our heritage we will see that there is something special about our Evangelical Lutheran Synod. I like to call it a “flavor.” Things do have a flavor. The psalmist writes, “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusts in Him.” Ps. 34, 8. [Herbert] Larson describes this in the anniversary book soon to be published. He writes, “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. There was conscious effort always to make a proper distinction between Law and Gospel so that sinners would seek their salvation in Christ and not in the deeds of the Law. . .

The heritage of love for the Word of God and for the spreading of the blessed message of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was passed on from the forefathers of the old Synod to the forefathers of our reorganized synod whose anniversary we are celebrating.⁹⁷

The culture of the ELS is that it is an evangelical church body where the gospel predominates for the lives of its members.

Conclusion

“The Landstad hymnbook, Luther’s Catechism, and the Bible formed a trilogy which in their unity have done more to make the Norwegian-American people what they are than any other combination of instruments or racial traits.” The pioneers on the prairie are as distant from contemporary Americans as the Vikings are from

⁹⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Guidelines,” 157.

⁹⁷ Orvick, “President’s Message,” 24.

Norwegians of today. Those who reorganized the Norwegian Synod in 1918 are as distant from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of today as the Reformation church is from the immigrant church. Yet, there is something in common. The heritage of the ELS is the eternal truth of God who in Jesus Christ reconciled the world to Himself.

The ELS yet remains a little synod. Shortly after her reorganization, S. C. Ylvisaker wrote:

A small body such as our synod still enjoys certain privileges and advantages.... It is a fairly simple matter to keep the membership informed on the needs and activities of the synod. The pastors are on terms of intimate friendship, as well as connected by ties of a common faith. The laity is not as yet a vast number where the individual cannot be heard.⁹⁸

It is hoped that those ideals yet apply to the ELS. Annual conventions keep the members close. Clergy relate to each other on a first name basis which is characteristic of the non-hierarchical approach Norwegian life where, most people address their child, their neighbor, their boss or even the King in the same way—simply by first name. The voices of lay members are heard. The ELS may always be small in numbers and her theology will not attract great numbers, yet the gospel of Christ is heard to the eternal salvation of souls. The ELS is insignificant in the eyes of the world. Yet, the ELS does have a special flavor and the ELS does hold a place in history.

The early Norwegian-American Lutheran church fathers belong to the Norwegian-Americans as a group, and in a broader sense to all Americans. Consequently the records of their activity are of general rather than of merely local or partisan interest. The task of the Norwegian-American historian is to have constantly wider groups view the church and other Norwegian-American institutions as integral parts of the great American life about us. The Norwegian-American *skolemester* did not realize that he was writing American and even world history when he, like the monk of old, bent over his papers in the bleak log hut and wrote his records in Norwegian script. Those who are entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the church records should get some of the spirit of the old monks who were vividly conscious that they were “making” history. Let them feel that it is to the

⁹⁸ Ylvisaker, “Report of the recent meeting of the Board of Regents,” 272.

interest of generations not yet born that none of these records be lost.⁹⁹

The words of Milton E. Tweit (1908–2005) are of such significance that they serve as a fitting conclusion:

Esteemed members of the ELS in convention assembled:

At my age I do not know if the Lord our God will grant me the privilege of attending another convention of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod. I hope you will not deem it presumptuous of me if I address a few words of concern, suggestion and encouragement to you before you leave for your homes and your occupations.

I thank God that I have had the great privilege and honor of serving our Lord God in His church through the work done by our synod in carrying out the command of our Savior (cf. Matt. 28:19–20). I love and respect our synod for its faithfulness to the Word of God. I pray and hope that our synod will, by the grace of God, remain a true confessor of His Word. Whatever I have been able to accomplish has not been due to my efforts, but alone by the grace of God given me.

As you know, our synod has been involved in several controversies of doctrinal discussions. Some have been with other church bodies and some have been in our own synod. There have been congregational controversies and problems as well. It has been given me to take part in several of these discussions and to work for an agreement in doctrine and practice as set forth in the Holy Scriptures and Confessions. Too often the meetings have not been conducted in a manner that has served to the glory of God or a true defense of the teaching of His Word. (I plead guilty.) It is my hope that all discussions and deliberations regarding the true teaching of God's Word may be carried on in a spirit which is in accordance with God's Word. Let there first of all be a careful study of the verse/verses and context from which the doctrine is established. Let scripture interpret scripture. Bring in all the scripture verses that have a bearing on the doctrine. Then there will also be a better way of applying other statements and sources.

Therefore: "Be followers of God as dear children and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us"

⁹⁹ Rohne, 73.

(Eph. 5:1–2a; Love for Christ, His Word and for each other). As Paul writes, Eph. 4:1–3, “Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” But “always be ready and diligent in contending earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

It is good to be zealous in the preservation of the true teaching of God’s Word. Let it always be with knowledge, humility and gentleness. “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5). Carry on at all times as in the presence of God, for He is at hand.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (I Cor. 15:58). Finally, “May you be kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.... receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:5b and 9).

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (I Cor. 16:23).¹⁰⁰

*“We especially commend to Your care and keeping this your congregation which You have bought with a great price. Keep from us all offenses and bind us together in the unity of Your holy love. Grant that the little ones who are baptized in Your name may be brought up in Your fear. At Your table give to those who there commune with You peace and life everlasting. Amen.”*¹⁰¹ LSQ

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¹⁰¹ *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, The Prayer of the Church, 49.

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Watch Your Mouth!:

Sermon on Ephesians 4:29–32

Andrew M. Schmidt
Dean of Students, Bethany Lutheran College
Mankato, Minnesota

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Text: *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:29–32)*

GOOD MORNING FRIENDS FORGIVEN IN CHRIST!

Watch your mouth! Sounds harsh, but that's really the admonishment St. Paul gives in these verses. That's the tone of this warning against sins of the tongue, especially as they relate to such sins against fellow believers.

Watch your mouth! Stop speaking to fellow believers that way (or anyone for that matter)! This is such an important warning because it's a constant temptation for all of us—and how much more now with the creation of social media and hiding behind screens?

But let's remember temptation isn't the actual problem. It's not a sin to be tempted. Think of it this way: Temptations for our tongues come our way in all shapes and sizes. Our minds are like a hotel. Typically the manager can't keep someone from entering the lobby for a short time. However, the manager can keep that person from renting a room. Likewise, it's not a sin when a temptation aimed at our tongues passes through our minds. The sin comes when it doesn't pass through our minds; when we give it a room and let it dwell in the mind.

St. Paul just doesn't warn us about this, but he shows us just how true this is by showing us the progression of these sins of the tongue: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (4:31). When you hand out a room key to temptation, it checks into the room and turns into "bitterness," relating to your overall mood. Then it turns on the TV and becomes "wrath," that uncontrollable passion. Next it kicks its shoes off and jumps onto the bed, turning into "anger," that isolated expression of emotion and hostility. It's only a matter of time before it sprawls itself out and becomes "clamor" (loud quarreling) and "evil speaking," sins that affect and ruin our social life; sins that manifest themselves in cruel and hurtful words causing pain to our family, our friends, our classmates and professors, our coworkers and teammates, to the people we should be showing love to the most. Sometimes it manifests itself as self-pity, causing us to wrongly lash-out at those around us or even ourselves. And then when the manager opens the door to look inside the room, St. Paul says he finds an absolute mess—"malice"—that desire and intention to do evil in everything.

The result is "corrupt words" proceed from our mouths (4:29). The result is that we harm our spiritual life by disregarding this warning and we "grieve the Holy Spirit" (4:30). When we act contrary to the Holy Spirit and His warnings, in time He'll no longer speak to us and we revert to our old life; when the sinful, Old Man is in charge, the New Man ceases to grow under such conditions and faith shrinks and dies bringing about eternal consequences. The prophet Isaiah wrote: "But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them" (Isaiah 63:10). We must heed St. Paul's warning and when those temptations wander in, we need to let them know there's *no room in the inn* for them!

Despite the fact that we don't let those temptations and sins of the tongue know that there's no room for them, our Triune God took pity on us. Humanity chose to have no room in the inn for our Lord and Savior, and yet He left the glories of heaven to be born in Bethlehem's stable so that He could shut and destroy the mouth of the devil and all his lies. When He was slandered, mistreated, and abused by our words and actions, Jesus never opened His mouth, but walked the perfect life to the cross, silently like a sheep before its shearers (Isaiah 53:7). While we hurled insults and the devil and the demons hurled their lies at Him, the sinless, holy Son of God hung on Calvary's cross showing "kindness" to the repentant thief and you and me, praying "tenderhearted" prayers in which He asked the Father to forgive us because we didn't

know what we were doing, bowing His holy head in silence, paying for all our sinful words so that God the Father would forgive you, me, and all believers in Christ, His Son.

As we sit here before the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit today, as baptized children of God and washed clean of all our words and actions in the blood of Christ by faith, may we heed the Holy Spirit's warning through St. Paul. Return to these words and all of God's Word so that just as right now, the Holy Spirit "may impart grace to the hearers" (4:29). When temptation to speak hurtful words, to lash out, or to wallow in words of self-pity show up in the lobby of your mind, drop to your knees in prayer, asking your God and Lord to give you strength to watch your mouth, and strengthen you through His redemptive forgiveness offered to you in the means of grace so that you and I may rather "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32). Amen. [LSQ](#)

See What God Can Do With Clay Jars!:

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 4:5–12, Commissioning Service for Dr. Michael Smith

John J. Petersen
Pastor, Mount Olive Lutheran Church
Mankato, Minnesota

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Text: For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Corinthians 4:5–12)

TODAY WE ARE GATHERED FOR THE COMMISSIONING of the Rev. Dr. Michael Smith to his work at Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong, China. This is a tall order, Mike! God has called you to a very different position. While the basic work will be the same as you have so faithfully carried out here for the past sixteen years, it will be done in a different way, in a different culture, and in a very different place. You will be teaching New Testament to students who are primarily Asian, while living in an enormous city, about 8000 miles from Mankato. No doubt adjusting to all this, there will be times in the coming months when you and Anita will feel that you are now living on a different planet altogether.

And to top it all off, Mike, you are a crack pot. And as your brother-in-law, I mean that in the nicest way. I know I'm taking liberties with the imagery St. Paul uses in the verses of our text, but he does refer to those who are tasked with preaching and teaching God's word as being "earthen vessels": Things like little clay jars or pots. We know that clay pots sometimes do get cracked.

If this was all there was to say about it, that you are like a clay pot, susceptible to cracking, then this would not be a very hopeful occasion. We could only wish you the best in your new calling, and thank you for trying. That would be true for any one of us here today, confessing as we do the fall into sin, and our own weaknesses and failures, and our natural lost condition resulting from it.

But there is a lot more to be said. In fact, in these verses the apostle Paul gives us real encouragement, such that we say: **See What God Can Do With Clay Jars!**

I. First, we see that He puts a precious treasure into them. Paul writes, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (4:7) If you owned a rare antique statue or an expensive piece of jewelry, you might want to display it in a gold-leaf case or in a specially carved mahogany box. You wouldn't think to store that valuable possession in a glass mason jar on a shelf out in the garage, or leave it in a brown paper bag in a closet. You would want to put it in something worthy of its value.

But think of it! God puts the most precious treasure of all into earthen vessels. That is, He puts a treasure into our hearts and into our voices. He makes known the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ through cracked pots like you and me.

So, we trust that God will use you, Mike, to share this treasure of His forgiveness and life eternal won by Jesus with your students, and through them, to many, many people in that part of the world. Through you and your coworkers and your students, the Lord will offer free of charge what no amount of money could ever purchase—His grace, by which He offers life, instead of the death sinners deserve. The entire treasure of Christ's holy life and innocent suffering and death to obtain forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation is offered through you, a weak earthen vessel.

This Gospel made known to us in Scripture brings us to faith so that we possess it for ourselves. By the power of the Holy Spirit who came upon the disciples and worked so powerfully on Pentecost, we are

brought to trust in Him so that we have peace, strength, and hope for heaven. In fact, this Gospel treasure can create life out of what was dead. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

As we’ve noted, the word translated as “earthen vessels” here, may be also translated as clay jars or clay pots. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul may have been thinking especially of the little clay lamps which were made in Corinth and used all over the Roman world. Those lamps were fragile, but they could hold light. So the apostle writes, “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (4:6).

II. God casts a glorious light from those clay jars. When a candle is placed in something so common and plain as a clay saucer, our eyes focus, not on the saucer or pot, but on the light. So as little pots which bear the glorious light of Christ, we don’t seek to draw attention to ourselves, but to the light.

When the Spirit descended on the disciples in Jerusalem He came as a flame of light hovering over their heads. Suddenly they became brave and effective preachers of the Gospel.

Still today, we who are called to preach and teach the Gospel are not ourselves the source of light that we share. God is. The same divine Creator who caused light to shine in the original darkness has now caused His light to shine in us and through us. “For you were once darkness,” Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “but now you are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8).

What a blessing that God has called you to be a witness to the Light of the world in such an interesting and unique place. And what a comfort to know that being the light and spreading the light doesn’t depend on you. It all comes from God who will attract and draw to Himself poor sinners living in the dark. Simply by faithfully speaking and instructing, the Holy Spirit will light up the hearts and lives of those brought to faith in Jesus!

What an amazing thing it is that little clay pots like us get to bear the life-giving and life-changing Light of the world, and cast it in the places God puts us!

Our commissioning service today is a significant event—surely for you and Anita, who will use her talent and experience as a therapist to

bring help to many coworkers in China, and surely for Asia Lutheran Seminary. We can be sure that God will use you to bear the precious Gospel and so to enlighten those drawn to it, just as He has done throughout your parish ministry and through the years here on the Bethany Campus and through the work you've done as chairman of our Home Outreach Board, as an officer of the CELC, and as the secretary of our synod's General Pastoral Conference. Still, knowing what we know about ourselves, our own weaknesses and our vulnerabilities, even that we are in some ways all cracked pots, it's only natural that you have some trepidation about the future.

III. But here's the third wonderful thing God can do with a clay pot—**He can make it indestructible.** Paul writes, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; we are persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (4:8–9).

The apostle's jar, his "earthen vessel", was severely tested. He had been pressed hard in every aspect of his life as he traveled about preaching and teaching the Gospel. Later in this epistle he cataloged some of the problems and dangers he faced as he compared himself with others who wanted to belittle his ministry. "I have worked harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again" (2 Corinthians 11:23). All those things may have broken him completely. But none of them did. He endured, because in every instance, God's power protected him and his faith.

We might ask why God permitted His servant to go through all that. Why did God allow Paul to be perplexed and persecuted and struck down? And we might ask this about ourselves as we face the frustrations and disappointments which can occur in the ministry. And we might ask this especially about those who are called to move far away and proclaim the Gospel in strange places. For no doubt there are problems which will have to be faced and fears which will need to be overcome. Troubles come along, and they hurt. So, we might ask about our friends who embark on mission work: why does God sometimes allow these frail, fragile vessels to be tested so harshly? Paul answers, "We carry about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (4:10–11).

As Christians our bodies and lives are connected to Jesus. As He was pressed hard and persecuted and struck down, so it is with the cracked

pots who serve Him. But just as Jesus' suffering resulted in victory over His enemies and salvation for us, so the trouble we endure is meant to reveal His victory and salvation to others. "So then," Paul concludes, "death is working in us, but life in you" (4:12).

I'm always impressed by people who can find some old object, a piece of wood, for example, and carve it and stain it and turn it into something useful and beautiful. Mike, you and I have a mother in law who can do that. She can turn common and discarded things into a work of art!

What an amazing privilege that the Lord uses fragile and sometimes broken pots like us to hold and convey the precious Gospel! What an honor to cast His glorious light into this sin-darkened world. How great to know that He preserves and supports us in our service. May God be with you and Anita as you make this change and as you serve Him in Hong Kong and trust Him always! Amen. [LSQ](#)

Sermon on Romans 8:1–4 for the Funeral of Wilhelm W. Petersen

Timothy A. Hartwig
Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church
North Mankato, Minnesota

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Text: *So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Indeed, what the law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin. God condemned sin in his flesh, so that the righteous decree of the law would be fully satisfied in us who are not walking according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. (Romans 8:1–4)*

IN CHRIST JESUS, DEAR FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF Wilhelm Walther Petersen, fellow redeemed,
Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus the Christ. Amen.

I. Set Free in Christ.

Alzheimer's was holding Bill captive. You could see it taking control of his life as the disease progressed. When I first began visiting Naomi and Bill at their home, Bill would often be agitated. However, once we started reading the Bible, praying, reciting a part of the liturgy, or saying the words of consecration for the Lord's Supper, a focused calm would come over him. Those familiar things, those important things, were able to draw him back through the fog of his disease to reality and the present. Sadly, through the years, those familiar things had less and less ability to draw him.

It was hard to witness. Bill was a man with a sharp mind. Even in his old age, he would catch me unprepared with a quick come back. His students and the pastors of our fellowship respected him for his knowledge of the Bible, the Lutheran Confessions and especially his keen eye for the proper distinction of law and gospel in sermons. On the surface, Alzheimer's took most of that away, but not all. Pastor Matthew Moldstad told me that when he visited Bill the last time, he could still remember all the words to "Jesus, Loves Me." Alzheimer's may have decimated his mind, but it could not touch his soul. Under the disease was a childlike faith. "Jesus, loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Dear family and friends of Wilhelm, this is sufficient. This strong and simple faith in Christ sets a person free. Today, not only is Bill free from the ravages of Alzheimer's, he is free from its cause: sin! As we mourn his departure from this life, let us take to heart the words of our text and be set free in Christ.

When I arrived in Mankato to attend Bethany, there was no room for me in the dormitory. Pres. Petersen and Naomi kindly rented me a room in their house on Marsh street. It gave me a glimpse into their personal lives. Little did I know that one day I would be their pastor. Here is what I want to share with you about that glimpse. Every morning I would get up early to study Greek, Bill would already be up. He would be downstairs reading a devotion or the Bible and praying. See, theology wasn't just something that he taught at seminary. It was personal.

For Bill, theology, the study of God and His Word, was not just a subject for academics. It applied to everyday life. It applied to his life. Bill took theology so seriously and personally because he knew this day was coming. He knew that one day his family and friends would be gathered around a hole in the ground and that his cold corpse would be lowered into it. He knew the reality of the "law of sin and death." Do you?

We can live our lives as if sin and death are not real. We can pretend that it doesn't matter how we live and therefore we should just try to enjoy this life. That is a delusion. Death is real. Therefore, sin is real because the "wages of sin is death."

You are most likely going to share Wilhelm's fate. Many of you are descended from him and you have inherited his weak flesh and sinful nature, which he inherited from his fathers all the way back to Adam. Are you ready for that day when you will breathe your last because of your sins? How will you be set free from the law of sin and death?

What great words God has for us in this regard! “Indeed, what the law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin” (8:3) I love that phrase, “to deal with sin.” God sent Christ to deal with sin. Jesus did this in part by being strong and living the perfect life that God’s law demands. “I am weak but he is strong.” You and I are too weak. We cannot live the perfect life that God requires. So, Jesus came and lived it for us. This is not just some theological jargon. This is real and personal. Jesus took your place and lived for you. He satisfied God’s law in your place so that now God sees you as perfect in Christ. You have been set free from the demands of the law.

Paul continues in his line of reasoning: “God condemned sin in his flesh” (8:3). This is the second part of the salvation that Jesus won. The law not only tells us what to do and not to do, it pronounces punishment upon those who break it. It condemns. Jesus did not want its condemnation to come crashing down on our heads. He stepped underneath the law and allowed its punishment to fall on him. “The wages of sin is death.” Jesus suffered, died and gave his body into death, fully satisfying the condemnation that was hanging over you. This is why theology is personal. It is talking about you. It is talking about what Jesus has done in your place. So that your sins are forgiven. It is laying before you the path of salvation. Paul is right: So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1). For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (8:2). If you fear your sins, if you fear death, run to Jesus. “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

How do we view the death of a saint? We often view it, at least from this world, with sadness. Death, after all, is the curse of sin. As the last point today, I want to share a poem with you that Bill had memorized. The poem was written by his namesake, C. F. W. Walther.

II. It is a blessed year.

A blessed year in which he dies who has a Savior! It is the year of his true birth; it is the year of his everlasting salvation; it is the year in which he celebrates his wedding; it is the truly “acceptable year of the Lord,” the eternal year of jubilee, in which all his lamentations will sink into everlasting silence. Then at last will he take his harp from the willows of grief, encircle his brow with its never-fading flowers of spring, and sing and play with

angelic choirs forever and ever the new song to God and to the Lamb. (C.F.W. Walther)

Sunday was a blessed day for Bill. A day that causes sadness in our lives, but one that causes great joy for him. It was a blessed day for Bill because Jesus was waiting on the other side of death. Bill has heard those wonderful words of the Savior, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). Those words wait for you, too. But only in Jesus. Only Christ can set us free. That is because only Christ has risen from the dead. Why could Bill memorize this poem and know that it is true? It is because God has given mankind a sure and certain sign. In Christianity, we do not speak in vagaries and uncertainties. We speak with confidence, not in ourselves, but in what God has done on our behalf. He has raised Jesus from the dead as a sign that he has accepted Jesus' life and death on our behalf and as proof that we, too, will rise from the dead.

Today is a blessed day for you, you who grieve the departure of a brother in the faith, a soldier of the Lord, because you once again have been able to hear that death is not the end of the story. Jesus has life for us all. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:1-2). To God be the glory now and forever. Amen. LSQ

Obituary for Wilhelm Walther Petersen

Reverend Wilhelm W. Petersen, age 89, was called home to be with his Lord and Savior on August 26, 2018, while living with his daughter in Wayzata, Minnesota. In his waning years, he suffered from Alzheimer's. The funeral service for Wilhelm was conducted on August 30, 2018, at Peace Lutheran Church in North Mankato, Minnesota.

Wilhelm was born on October 17, 1928, in Scarville, Iowa to Rev. Justin and Netti (Knudson) Petersen. He attended Scarville Lutheran School, Bethany Lutheran High School and College in Mankato, as well as Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin. Wilhelm then attended Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in Mankato, graduating and being ordained in 1953.

Wilhelm served parishes in Oklee, Minnesota, Madison, Wisconsin, and Mankato, Minnesota. He also served as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). In 1980, he was called to be president of Bethany Lutheran Seminary, until his retirement in 1997. He served his Lord faithfully for over fifty years as a pastor, teacher, and synodical official.

On July 19, 1953, he was united in marriage to Naomi Madson at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Mankato. God blessed their union with six children, Ruth, Joel, Thomas, Philip, Carol, and Kristen.

Wilhelm is survived by his children, Ruth (Eric) Jahn and their children Paul (Daisy), Stephen, and Andrew; Joel (Carol) Petersen and their children, Brent (Marlene), Meg, Aaron (Rebecca), Lisa (Christian) Preus, David (Chellsea), Timothy, Jenny (Nik) Schultz; Thomas (Joann) Petersen and their children, Benjamin (Wendy), Lindsey (Mark) Di Steffano, Brian (Jen); Philip Petersen and his son, Tillman; Carol Petersen and her children, Jenna and Jacob Mueller; and Kristen (Kevin) MacIntosh and their children, Natalie and Turner; great-grandchildren, Benson, Meg, Lily, Reid, David, Abraham, Christine, Martha, Mary, Isaac, Alice, Norman, Ella, Clayton, Ava, Aubrianna, Olivia, Joseph, and Brody; and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents; wife; brothers, Joseph, Justin, and Paul; and sister, Camilla.

Blessed be his memory!

Sermon on Psalm 23 for the Funeral of George M. Orvick

Mark F. Bartels
Pastor, Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Madison, Wisconsin

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Text: *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. (Psalm 23)*

GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE ARE YOURS FROM God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ruth, you gave me strict orders when I was at your home the other day. You said, "I don't want this service to be about George." So, I'm going to follow your orders, because, I agree with you that this funeral is not about George. It's about the Lord, our Good Shepherd.

Your husband compiled a book of some of his sermons and talks entitled *Forget Not all His Benefits*, taken from Psalm 103:2, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

Let's consider what the Lord did: not what George did, but what the Lord did for George, what the Lord did to George, and what the Lord did through George. Let us "forget not all His benefits!"

First, the Lord blessed George with two daughters and two sons. The Bible tells us that "children are a heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3). Children are a gift from God. Dan, Emily, Mark and Kirsten, your dad

saw you as a gift from God. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits!" Your dad did what a good Christian father should do. He placed before you the Great Heritage of the Christian faith. He couldn't make it yours. However, he had the blessing of seeing you pick up the Great Heritage by the power of the Holy Spirit and make it your own by faith. He knew that in Christ you had a bond stronger than death itself. He knew that you passed that Great Heritage of the Christian faith on to your children and grandchildren. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

The Lord gave George a wonderful Christian wife. The Bible tells us that "a prudent wife is from the Lord" (Proverbs 19:14). Ruth, your dear husband understood that you were a gift from God. I'm guessing everyone here today heard him tell more than once the wonderful story of how he went to Bethany Lutheran College, and on his first day there, he saw you, and the two of you fell in love. He loved to talk about what a blessing, support and help you were to him all his years in the ministry. The Lord enabled you to be joint heirs of the gift of life. You held hands as you walked together on the way to heaven. Ruth, especially these last years, it was a privilege to see your faithfulness to your vows to be together for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. George saw you as a great blessing. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

The Lord gave George the wonderful blessing of being a pastor. George did not choose his own strengths and abilities. The Lord gave him the abilities that he had. And George didn't choose the church where he would serve as pastor. The Bible says to pastors, "Keep watch over the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). The Holy Spirit made George overseer for thirty-two years over the flock called "Holy Cross Lutheran Church." The Lord enabled George to be a faithful shepherd by giving George the Lord's tools, the simple tools of Word and Sacraments, to feed and grow the flock at Holy Cross. The Lord enabled George to be faithful in the use of Word and Sacraments.

He faithfully preached law and convicted sinners of sin. He comfortingly preached the evangel, the good news, leading sinners to their gracious Savior. How many young ones did George baptize at the font by power of the Holy Spirit working through water and the Word, as those little ones came to believe in Jesus as the Good Shepherd? How many souls were comforted with the Lord's Supper as he placed in their hands and mouths the body and blood of our Lord Jesus as assurance

that their sins were forgiven? He was beloved by this congregation and he loved this congregation. It was the flock the Lord had given him to tend. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

The Lord blessed George by calling him through the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to be president of the ELS. He was given the task of "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). What a blessing that he was given that task by the Lord. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

All of this was from the hand of the Lord.

But I know that George would count all of those things a loss compared to one thing—he would say the same as St. Paul, "Indeed, I count everything as loss ... in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:7–9).

George knew something about himself. I love reading George's sermons. He did something every pastor should do. Whenever he was preaching law, he used the words "we" and "us," which are just the plural of the word "I." And so he was preaching to himself. It was as if he was sitting in the pew preaching to himself when he was preaching the law. He understood that we are like lost sheep. We are helpless, hopeless, can't defend ourselves spiritually, have no reasoning ability in spiritual matters, and when in grave danger cannot defend ourselves. We are in the gravest danger from sin, hell and death. The Bible describes us in such a way that we have no way of freeing ourselves from any of that danger. And yet George was able to say this, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (23:1).

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (23:1). George knew the good news that we have a Good Shepherd. He knew that although all we like sheep have gone astray, the Lord has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). He knew that Jesus the Good Shepherd had laid down his life for him.

George preached and taught and knew that Jesus died for him, that Jesus paid for all sins including George Orvick's sins. He knew that God through Christ had reconciled the world to himself, not counting our sins against us. George knew that because the Good Shepherd, this loving, great, powerful Shepherd, had faced the worst of enemies, our damnable sins, that Jesus had calmed wrath of God. Now, the Father looks at us for the sake of our Good Shepherd and says to every one of us including George, "I don't see your sins anymore. They are gone. They

are forgiven.” George knew that. He knew his Good Shepherd had gone into the face of his enemy, death, and then taken up his life again and defeated death. George, by the power of the Holy Spirit, having been brought to faith in Jesus at his baptism, could confidently say, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (23:1).

Psalm 23 is about the Holy Christian Church, Christ’s flock. George was and is a member of Holy Christian Church, a member of flock of Christ. Therefore, he could say, “‘The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.’ With the Lord as my Shepherd, nothing can hurt me, nothing can harm, no heights, no depth, no powers can separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord (Romans 8:38–39). ‘The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.’”

The whole rest of Psalm 23 is about how Jesus keeps his church, his flock, and protects it, tends it, and holds it close to his heart. How does he do that? He does it through his Word and Sacraments.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters” (23:2). What a beautiful picture of feeding and being refreshed by the Word of God, being nurtured and built up. The Lord did that throughout George’s life.

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (23:3). What a beautiful picture of how the Word guards, protects, guides, and directs his sheep. The Lord did that throughout George’s life.

“[His] rod and [his] staff, they comfort me” (23:4). What a beautiful picture to show how Jesus uses his Word to drive away our enemies and pull us close to keep us from sin and false doctrine. The Lord did that throughout George’s life.

Ruth, what do you do when your husband is dying? What do you do? I love what you did. You took him to the safest, most secure place he could be. You took him right to his Good Shepherd. Do you know what Ruth did? She put on cassettes of George preaching. Ruth, you put George right in the pew, preaching to himself. Jesus says, “He who hears you, hears me” (Luke 10:16). So George wasn’t listening to George Orvick. He was listening to his Good Shepherd, and there, through those messages preached from the Word, he was fed, built up, comforted, sins forgiven, assured that heaven was his, that the Lord would watch over him, that the Lord would watch over you, Ruth, and protect you and keep you safe. He was able to say, “The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”

It was a privilege for us pastors, Pastor Tweit, Pastor Marozick, and me, to come to your home and bring the Lord's Supper. At times when George communed, something really precious happened. This great preacher, great pastor, former president of the synod, would get tears of thankfulness in his eyes because he knew what was happening in the Sacrament of the Altar. He knew that in that room were his most terrible enemies. Sin was in that room. Sin can damn. The Devil was in that room, prowling around like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). He knew in that room was death creeping up on him. A terrible enemy. But he knew he was safe from all of those enemies. Hence the tears of thankfulness.

What does the Psalm say? How does God protect us from those enemies? Not by building walls and ramparts all around us. How does he protect us from our enemies? Here's what it says, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" (23:5).

That's exactly what Jesus did. He prepared a table: the Lord's Table. George came with his sin, confessed, and called out for the Lord's forgiveness. What did Jesus do? He came with his very body that died on cross and the very blood shed on the cross and gave them to George, guaranteeing that what happened on the cross happened for him.

At that table, his worst enemy, sin, was totally defeated. The devil could accuse him all he wanted, but George heard the voice of Jesus say, "This is my body and blood given for the forgiveness of your sin." When Jesus tells us we're forgiven, we are forgiven, because he's the one who paid for our sins. George heard the voice of Jesus defeating the devil and death, because whoever has their sins forgiven has the promise of eternal life and salvation. Truly, George could say, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."

Ruth, three hours before George died, I had the privilege of being at your house. I noticed, as I was sharing the Word, that by his bedside were taped simple little drawings of sheep. They were drawings made by his great-grandchildren. Such beautiful pictures! A Christian says about his Good Shepherd, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (23:4). A Christian can say,

"Who so happy as I am,
Even now the Shepherd's lamb?
And when my short life is ended,
Then by angels hosts attended,
He will fold me to his breast,
There within his arms to rest." (ELH 177:3)

A Christian can truly say, “The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”

When George closed eyes for last time, his Good Shepherd took him by the hand and led him through the valley of the shadow of death, and then what happened? The Psalm ends this way: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (23:6).

George closed his eyes here and opened them there and what did he see? He saw what Saint John described:

I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb...” Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their...” (Revelation 7:9–17)

Their what? Their Shepherd! “He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17).

George Orvick has been gathered to that Holy Christian Church triumphant, that holy flock of Jesus, and he proclaims for eternity, “The Lord is my Shepherd! I shall not want!”

And Ruth, you can say that too. You can say, “The Lord is my Shepherd! I shall not want!” You are part of his flock. He knows you dearly. He knows your needs. He knows your burdens. He knows your wants. He will lead you, feed you, support you, guide you, watch over you, strengthen you and keep you safe. No one can snatch out of his hand. You can truly say, “The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”

George used to say in Norwegian, “We have it good.” We do have it good! The Lord is our Shepherd! We shall not want!

Postscript

This year, 2018, happens to be 100th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In the Old Testament, every 50 years was a Jubilee year, so that makes the 100th anniversary of the ELS a Jubilee year. In the Jubilee year, those in bondage were set free. This was a great year to die, to be set free, the Jubilee year.

Wilhelm Petersen, George's really good friend, also died this Jubilee year. Wilhelm was also a former president of the synod and of the seminary. There's a quote from C. F. W. Walther that Bill Petersen often used in funeral sermons. What a fitting quote to end with today, during this Jubilee year of our synod:

A blessed year in which he dies who has a Savior! It is the year of his true birth; it is the year of his everlasting salvation; it is the year in which he celebrates his wedding; it is the truly "acceptable year of the Lord," the eternal year of jubilee, in which all his lamentations will sink into everlasting silence. Then at last will he take his harp from the willows of grief, encircle his brow with its never-fading flowers of spring, and sing and play with angelic choirs forever and ever the new song to God and to the Lamb.

Amen. [LSQ](#)

Obituary for George M. Orvick

The Reverend George M. Orvick died peacefully at his home surrounded by family on September 27, 2018, and his funeral service was conducted on October 8, 2018, at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin. George was born on January 9, 1929, near Hanlontown, Iowa. After attending high school in Thornton, Iowa, he went to Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota. While at Bethany Lutheran College, he met Ruth Hoel of DeForest, Wisconsin, who became his dearest friend and life-long mate. They were married on August 25, 1951. Their marriage was blessed with four children, Daniel, Emily, Mark, and Kirsten. George was ordained into the public ministry and installed as pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Amherst Junction, Wisconsin in 1953. In 1954, he accepted a call to Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin and served as their pastor for thirty-two years. George was elected as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from 1970–1976 and from 1980–2002. George and Ruth made their home in Mankato, Minnesota, from 1986 to 2010. After his retirement, George and Ruth moved back to Madison to be closer to family. George was blessed with many opportunities to use the gifts that God had given him. He and Ruth had the privilege of traveling to many places on behalf of the synod, and cherished the friendships that they made all over the world.

George will be remembered for his leadership, and his kindness and compassion. He dearly loved the members of Holy Cross and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. He appreciated his Norwegian heritage, his family, and his wife, Ruth. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, his children, Daniel (Kris) Orvick, Emily (Robert) Goetzke, Mark (Lisa) Orvick, and Kirsten Orvick; nine grandchildren: Erica (Jason) Gavin, Chelsea Orvick, Danny (Nicole) Orvick, Arabelle Orvick; Elizabeth (Nick) Jessen, Kristoffer Goetzke, Marisa (Shaun) Opsahl, Briana (Matthew) Caron, and Nathan (Chelsea) Orvick; and thirteen great-grandchildren: Quintin, Jackson, Harper, Payton, Rylan, Nels, Brynja, Jens, Jorgen, Magdalena, Corrina, Miles, Ryder, and Ellery. Other survivors include his brother-in-law Michael Hoel (and special friend Evie), and sisters-in-law Barbara Hoel and Leona Orvick, and nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, Mabel and George Orvick, brother and sister-in-law Sherman and Lucile Orvick, brother Hubert Orvick, sister and brother-in-law Eileen and Marlin Field, and brothers-in-law Orville Hoel and Norman Hoel.

We rejoice in the surety of Christ's resurrection, knowing that George is enjoying eternal life with his Savior in heaven. Blessed be his memory.



Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato MN 56001

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