

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

VOLUME 65 • NUMBER 1

MARCH 2025

2024 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures: The Fiftieth Anniversary of Seminex

The LCMS Perspective

**The Class of 1974: Personal
Reflections on the Walkout**

The ELS Perspective

Sermons

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Book Review

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The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 65, No. 1 (March 2025)

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE LSQ, WE ARE PLEASED TO share with our readers the annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation lectures delivered October 31–November 1, 2024, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the fifty-sixth in the series of annual Reformation Lectures. The purpose of these lectures is to increase an interest in and knowledge of the Reformation period and the application of Reformation theology for today. Justification by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone, is the heart and center of the Lutheran Reformation and its theology. It continues to be the article upon which the church stands or falls and therefore, it remains as the heart and center of the church today. Just as the Old Evil Foe fought against Martin Luther and the Reformers, he continues to attack the church today so that the Gospel in Word and Sacrament might be lost again. We belong to a church militant.

This year's lecture series is focused on "The 50th Anniversary of Seminex." On February 19, 1974, the faculty and students walked out of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and became Seminex, the seminary in exile. You could view the walkout as a volcano erupting. For decades, almost imperceptible forces were working under the surface. The eruption makes those forces visible. What were those forces in the case of Seminex? To name just three: the Historical Critical Method, Gospel Reductionism and Ecumenism. Those three forces put the heart of the church at risk by attacking the doctrine of justification.

Just as it took years for these forces to build to the walkout, it will also take years for the effect to subside. Seminex in many ways was a relief for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, but the church is still suffering the effects fifty years later.

The three lecturers presented on the impact of Seminex on their respective synods. Pres. Matthew Harrison spoke to the impact on LCMS, Dr. Mark Braun gave the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod, and Pres. Glenn Obenberger addressed the impact of Seminex on the Evangelical Synod.

Here is a little more information about the presenters:

The Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison has served as president of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) since 2010. As president, he is the chief ecclesiastical supervisor of the synod and is responsible for the national program ministries of the LCMS, including the Office of International Mission, which calls and employs some 150 missionaries globally.

Before becoming president, Harrison served for nine years as executive director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. During that time, LCMS World Relief and Human Care coordinated the \$14 million LCMS response to Hurricane Katrina and the multi-million-dollar responses to the tsunami in Asia and the earthquake in Haiti; managed relationships with some 120 LCMS Recognized Service Organizations and other inter-Lutheran social ministry organizations; worked in consultation with LCMS partner/sister churches to build capacity during numerous mercy outreach efforts; and managed LCMS pro-life efforts.

A native of Sioux City, Iowa, Harrison holds a bachelor's degree in religious studies from Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa, and M.Div. and S.T.M. degrees from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Harrison has pursued additional graduate study at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and has received honorary doctorates from Concordia University Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the seminary in Fort Wayne.

Harrison has written, translated and edited a number of books, including *Christ Have Mercy, A Little Book on Joy, At Home in the House of My Fathers, The Church and the Office of the Ministry* by LCMS founder C.F.W. Walther, and five volumes of essays and letters of Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse including *The Lonely Way* and *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*.

Harrison also serves as chairman of the board of the International Lutheran Society of Wittenberg (Old Latin School), which hosts some forty students and church planters from the European Union and beyond who are studying to become ordained pastors. In addition, Harrison chairs the board of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty and serves on the executive committee of the International Lutheran Council.

Harrison is active in the pro-life movement and frequently speaks at such events. He was one of a select group of pro-life leaders asked to take part in the D.C. March for Life during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Harrison and his wife, Kathy, live in Ballwin, Missouri, and are members of Village Lutheran Church in Ladue, Missouri, where he also serves as assistant pastor. They have two married sons and one granddaughter. Harrison is an avid bluegrass banjo player and builder of guitars, banjos and mandolins, as well as a vintage Jeep enthusiast.

Mark Braun grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and attended Mount Lebanon Lutheran school. He graduated from Northwestern College in Watertown in 1974, completed a Master of Divinity Degree from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon in 1978, completed a Master of Sacred Theology Degree also from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1992, and earned a Ph.D. in Historical Theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 2000.

Dr. Braun served as a vicar in Anchorage, Alaska, in summer 1975 and again during the 1976–77 school year. He was assigned in 1978 to be an assistant pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, St. Joseph, Michigan. In 1983, he accepted the call to be pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Sparta, Wisconsin. In 1987, Wisconsin Lutheran College called him to be the Director of Spiritual Life Programming and an Instructor of Theology. He retired in 2021.

Dr. Braun is the author of *The People's Bible* volume on Deuteronomy; *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split Between Wisconsin and Missouri*; and *Time Between the Testaments*, all published by Northwestern Publishing House. He is the author of the *Concordia Commentary* volume on Judges, to be published by Concordia Publishing House.

He is married to Sue, a veteran Lutheran elementary school teacher. They are blessed with four adult children and nine grandchildren. Mark and Sue live in Hartland and are members of Christ Lutheran Church in Pewaukee.

Since 2021 Glenn Obenberger has been serving as the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Ordained in 1983, he has also been the pastor of a dual, rural parish in northeast Iowa, Jerico and Saude Lutheran Churches (1983–1988), and then of Parkland Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington (1988–2021). Concurrently, he also was elected and served as the vice president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for two different periods (1994–1998; 2002–2021).

Glenn grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, having been baptized and confirmed in Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod congregations. He attended St. Peter Lutheran school grades 1–8 (deciding to become a pastor in the fourth grade) and Concordia Lutheran High School, graduating in 1972. After attending Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, for over a year, he desired to be married and, because of the rule that students there could not be married, decided to attend Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, in order eventually to enter the WELS seminary.

After working as an orderly in a WELS nursing home and St. Joseph's Hospital, in 1976 Glenn was united in marriage to Elizabeth (Lisa, nee Ferrie, an LPN, now retired). They have been blessed with one daughter, three sons, and now five grandsons.

Glenn graduated from Bethany Lutheran College in 1977 with an AA degree, Mankato State University in 1980 with a BS degree in liberal arts. Even though completing the courses needed to apply to the WELS seminary, he experienced in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod a welcoming spirit which was reminiscent of the Old Missouri Synod of his youth, so he stayed in Mankato to complete his education. He graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1983 with a Master of Divinity degree.

During his career he has contributed many periodical articles, presentations in a variety of venues, and the many sermons preached as a parish pastor. Along with these, he has essays published in *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* (Until I Finally Please Everyone ... Or *Non Nobis Domine, Non Nobis!*, XXVI:2) and the *Festschrift* in honor of the Reverend Doctor Erling Teigen: *Today I Was My Savior's Guest* (Confessions of a Recovering Pietist Honoring His Dragon Slayer). He has also compiled two alternate preaching pericopes for the One-Year Historic Series: an Old Testament Lectionary and an Alternate Gospels Lectionary.

Also included in this issue are three sermons and a book review.

–TAH

The LCMS Perspective

Matthew C. Harrison
President
Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

LSQ Vol. 65, No. 1 (March 2025)

Editor's Note: Pres. Harrison did not have a prepared manuscript at the time of the lecture. The recorded audio has been transcribed and is included below. Our thanks are extended to the LCMS staff for this transcription work.

THIS IS A VERY DIFFICULT TOPIC TO SPEAK ON for many reasons. Fundamentally, the entire Seminex movement and, in fact, the entire at least postwar movement of the Missouri Synod toward one Lutheran church in America was a gross mistake and failure. And it was the most costly failure in the history of the Missouri Synod.

I was just told by a panelist up here that our book from Concordia Historical Institute on the Walkout is triumphalism, according to somebody in the ELCA. I disagree with that, of course, but the whole event has shaken us to our foundations and, I think, all but eliminated Missouri Synod triumphalism. As Larry Rast points out, there was nothing the Missouri Synod could do after the war, really after 1950, that was wrong because everything was working.

They projected in 1960 that by 1980 or '90, the Missouri Synod would have 8 million people. Things were going so magnificently. Then you had a little something called the sexual revolution, the drop of the birth rate in half and then in half again. And things look much different. The signers of the *Book of Concord* in the preface asserted that the tasks before them were, “with the greatest earnestness and utmost ability”:

- to attend to those matters that promote the extension of God's name and glory;
- to attend to the spread of His Word (from which alone we hope for salvation);
- to attend to the peace and tranquility of churches and schools; and
- to attend to the instruction and consolation of disturbed consciences.

The entire Seminex movement and the Missouri Synod failed grossly at every one of those points.

I noticed when we all talk about this (and Professor Mark Braun's paper will also highlight this), you can't help but think about where you were. When Seminex occurred, I was a 12-year-old in Sioux City, Iowa, riding my bicycle and generally having a good time in life, completely oblivious to anything and everything.

I officially got a religious studies major at Morningside College, a Methodist school in Sioux City, but I really majored in football. It was in 1984 that I went to Seward [Concordia University, Nebraska]. I had begged the Methodists to let me finish my degree at Seward, and they finally let me go so I could get some Greek. I had decided to go to the seminary, and that's the first time I recall hearing about Seminex or Ralph Bohlmann or anybody else. Little did I know at the time that the effects of Seminex would shape the entire rest of my life, daily and intensely. And they still do.

I was talking to Bill Weinrich, a professor at our Fort Wayne seminary, a year or so ago, and he told me a story. He was the grad assistant to Martin Scharlemann. This was around 1970 in St. Louis at the seminary. And some of the professors had invited several leaders of the Black Panthers to the seminary campus in St. Louis.

Bill told it vividly. He remembered they drove up in a yellow Cadillac convertible and parked under the Martin Luther statue, and Sieck Hall was packed with students and faculty. They began showing films of themselves disrupting court proceedings in Chicago and causing general havoc and chaos. And at the end of their presentation—and forgive me for this depiction, especially in this space, but I think I must tell it—they raised the black power fist and started shouting, "F-you! F-you! F-you! F-you! F-you!" marching out to the rousing approval of the great majority of faculty and students.

Bill said, "You cannot imagine how radical that institution was." And anti-institutional. I said, "Well, Bill, how come you did not share in

that anti-institutional fervor?" He gave me the name of an author—the name escapes me at the moment—who wrote a book about the humanizing force of institutions for achieving human good.

That was a generation—and forgive me, I know many of you were there. One can't get through a discussion like this without some generalizations. But it was an era that did not build institutions; [it was] an era that was tearing down institutions. And certainly destroying the past.

Hermann Sasse said, and it burns in my mind, "Watch out when the fathers of the church are no longer regarded with veneration. It's the surest sign of demise in the church."

A friend of mine who was there in the isolation dorm told me that there were clouds, in his words, of "blue pot smoke" regularly emanating from the dorm. It was radical.

Robert Preus talked about Scharlemann coming in the 1950s to the seminary and Charlemagne, the great military general. Scharlemann spoke at the 1957 fall faculty forum of the seminary and asserted something like, "The Bible, which is inerrant for all matters of faith and life, contains errors."

And things began to change radically. I think [Kurt] Marquart is right: ecclesiology is the driving issue which gets Missouri off kilter. Certainly pre-war, but certainly postwar. Ecumenism coming out of the ghetto, rubbing shoulders with Europeans. We'll talk about some of that. Robert joked and said Scharlemann was the guy who led them all right up to the cliff. He stopped. But like buffalo, they all went over.

Scharlemann was heavily influenced by Sasse, a speaker for this event. It's a bit of a surprise that Sasse was invited here in '65, given the fact that the WELS had been publishing his letters to Lutheran pastors when they first came out in translation from 1947, 1948 or so, until the letter (I think, Letter 14) on the Scriptures, where Sasse denies absolute inerrancy. Sasse ends up in the strange position of, you know, having a real Adam and Eve fall in a mythical garden, much as I respect him.

But Sasse had gone to school at the University of Berlin, at the time the greatest university in the world. He studied under the greatest lights of scholarship, mostly liberal scholarship at the time. Whether [Gustav] Adolf Deissmann, great investigator of ancient papyri, whether Adolf von Harnack, who was the greatest historian of dogma, who denied all dogma, basically. Harnack's own father read his *History of Dogma* for the first time and said, "I don't know that I see anything of a Christian theologian in these pages."

Sasse was never a big-time liberal. He always believed in the basic stories of the Scriptures, the miracles of Jesus, the incarnation, etc. But he said, "We went into the trenches of World War I"—he was a chaplain of World War I—"We went into the trenches reading Pindar and Sophocles and came out with our Greek New Testaments."

He participated from the beginning in the Luther revival with Carl Holl, also at the University of Berlin.

It was after the war that he came to the United States. In 1926–27, he wrote *Amerikanisches Kirchentum*, the *American Churchdom*, but he came into contact with Lutherans in America, particularly in the LCA [Lutheran Church in America]. He was from the Prussian Union Church. And he came into contact with these American Lutherans and discovered, he said, what Lutheranism really was.

He read the Confessions. He read Wilhelm Löhe's, "Three Books on the Church." And that's when he says he really became a Lutheran. He went back and began advocating for orthodox Lutheranism and against the union of Lutheran and Reformed, which finally won the day in all of Germany. He moved tremendously from Harnack to teaching at Erlangen to dear friend of the Missouri Synod to lecturer at this founding event 65 years ago. But he never came all the way.

Interestingly, Scharlemann apologized for his position on the Scriptures after causing much consternation, at the convention in '62 or '63, if I recall. However, a couple of years ago, [Daniel] Harmelink at [Concordia Historical Institute] sent me a document from the Scharlemann files where Scharlemann wrote Sasse a letter that, actually, while it was on the way to Sasse, Sasse died in Adelaide. This is after the Walkout in 1976, and Scharlemann says, "If these guys knew my real position on Scripture, they would hang me. You alone, Dr. Sasse, have understood the issues in the case."

Sasse was wrong on inerrancy. You can see several of my books on that issue in the *Letters to Lutheran Pastors* footnotes. But things were moving very quickly in St. Louis. Bill Hecht, who was the dean of Republican lobbyists in D.C. and died a couple of years ago, was trained probably in the same class as David Scaer, for those of you who were unfortunate enough to know him.

In the late '50s, Hecht started the campus ministry at the University of Oklahoma, from which Bill Weinrich emerged. By the way, that entire vibrant campus ministry with its building that Hecht built was all lost to Seminex. Bill was at the seminary, and he was learning from

a former WELSian. Remember, we had several WELSians who helped us go right over the cliff.

One was Alfred von Rohr Sauer, teacher of Old Testament. von Rohr Sauer was lecturing on “multiple Isaiahs,” compatible with critical theory and denying prophecy in various ways in Isaiah. Bill Hecht raised his hand, stood up and gave a rousing advocacy for a united Isaiah. And when he was done, von Rohr Sauer asked him, “Mr. Hecht, that was very well done. Where did you learn that?” And Hecht said, “Last year in your isagogics class.”¹

The war and quest for fellowship with the American Lutheran Church were heavy on the agenda in Missouri. You had fine men like Michael Reu at the Iowa Synod and the old ALC. Reu wrote a famous piece on the inerrancy of the Scriptures as confessed by Luther. It’s a fantastic document. He had some of the Iowa Synod’s chiliastic views and a few other things on the open questions that existed prior to that for those of you who’ve studied.

But Reu’s genuine Lutheranism, Luther scholarship, and sacramental correctness was, of course, attractive. During the war, there was mutual aid, the founding of Lutheran World Relief, the founding of Lutheran Immigration Refugee Services. These serving Europeans, largely European Lutherans, being assisted by Lutherans in America. Postwar came LCUSA, Lutheran Church USA. And constant interaction between them.

Sasse was invited to come to St. Louis in 1948. What happened was that Sasse had lost favor, had a nervous breakdown as pro rector, clean of Nazism, pro rector of the University of Erlangen, and he quipped one time that after he had a nervous breakdown at the Nuremberg or Munich—probably the Munich—train station, he was sent to the sanatorium for a month. The doctor told him that he would never work again, which he chuckled about. But he came to St. Louis in 1948. It’s just this point that Missouri is feeling its strength. The Bad Boll meetings had begun. These were meetings between Missouri theologians and some other American theologians and Lutherans in Europe, like Werner Elert and Paul Althaus and others.

Werner Elert was a great influence for good in general but also denies the inerrancy of the Bible. Of course, none of them believed in

¹ By the way, there’s a tantalizing tale. After the Walkout, there was a wedding involving a Missourian family and a Walkout family, I think, at Valparaiso University in the early ‘80s. John Pless was present, and by that time von Rohr Sauer had grown his hair quite long. It was long, white, stringy hair, and he leaned over the fondue and caught fire, to which Pless quickly said, “Look! A flaming liberal.”

the inerrancy of the Bible. None of them were straight on the historicity of Genesis. And there were other issues that were going along there too. The Missourians naively thought they were having a huge influence on German Lutheranism.

What was happening at the same time was the formation of the EKID, the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, and that was a union church of the various Reformed, United and Lutheran churches in Germany. Already in 1817, the Prussian king forced a union in Prussia: 7,000 Lutheran churches forced to unite with 24 Reformed churches. No longer two different confessions, no longer closed communion, but now unity in the “true spirit of the reformers.”

The Prussians, also in the Treaty of Versailles, took Wittenberg and Saxony-Anhalt. It's a magnificent town. We should thank those people for upholding it and keeping the monuments and the churches beautiful and letting us use them. Make no mistake, when you go there today in front of the town hall and you see Luther's statue, go around the back and you'll see that statue was dedicated by Friedrich Wilhelm III, whom Sasse tells how he first unites the two churches, forces the union, and the next day goes down to Wittenberg to dwell near the spirit and feel the spirit of Luther. *Schwarmgeisterei!*

Prussia gains power through the 19th century. Church after church falls, state after state, and Germany falls to Prussia's influence, and the union expands. There are some churches that were intact. There were eleven Lutheran churches that still through the 19th century retain much of their identity and their confessional subscription. However, there have been several different unions along the way. Hitler forced one in 1933, in Wittenberg.

After the war, Sasse thought now we have a chance to have a Lutheran government of Lutheran churches. We can do cooperation in externals with non-Lutherans or United churches, but we can have our own Lutheran governance for Lutheran churches. His efforts failed. EKID was formed. Today, it is the purveyor universally of sexual deviance, of theological chaos. Even the most mild of theologians among us, a friend who knows the German situation better than anybody I know, told me it is unbelievable how far they have fallen. In Luther's own church, you have a lesbian ELCA clergy couple regularly leading worship, in the daily worship.

Well, Sasse's own Bavarian church went into the union. Just at this point, the Missourians are saying there's hope here. We Missourians have a tendency to get on the bandwagon when it's already 20 years

old and heading in the wrong direction, clearly, so much so that when Hanns Lilje (a bishop of the Hanoverian church, still with the Lutheran confession) asked the pastorate to vote on whether they would join the EKID, the first vote failed, and he asked the press to leave. He pulled out a letter from an older Missourian who said, based on his congregationalist belief in the church, that “there can be nothing to prevent you, Hanover, from joining the EKID.” That older Missourian was Theodore Graebner. Hanns Lilje asked the pastorate, “Do you wish to be more Missourian than the Missourians?” They voted again and joined the union with the help of Missouri.

[John] Behnken had thought Sasse would be helpful in St. Louis. Sasse was good on all the ecumenical issues, the fellowship issues, the confession issues, the nature of the *Book of Concord*. He invites him. Sasse meets a totally cold shoulder. Old [Ludwig] Fuerbringer had died in 1947, nephew of [C.F.W.] Walther. [Louis] Sieck had followed him. A local parish pastor, his entire goal was Lutheran union at the institution during his presidency, which continued with the younger [Alfred] Fuerbringer. And Sasse writes in '48, “I see black for this church.” He’s told by Sieck, “Do not get involved in any Synodical Conference controversies.”

Given the cold shoulder and then finally leaving town, he’s chosen to be professor in Australia in 1949. He goes to Australia, and he immediately joins the Intersynodical Committee, two Lutheran churches in Australia, both from Prussia. One more attached to Neuendettelsau, ALC, Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, the other Missouri. Same issues that differentiated them. Sasse brings a blast of confessionalism to the UELCA side of the church. The Neuendettelsau German side, to which he comes as professor. But for his investing in that kind of theological improvement, it is unlikely that the union ever would have occurred. However, Sasse, everybody knew, did not believe in absolute inerrancy. And so, when the documents came out preparatory to the Union asserting inerrancy, there remained a question, including the first president of the Lutheran Church of Australia himself, Les Grope.

I have a book of his—Robert Preus’ dissertation on the dogmaticians and the nature of the Bible. I’ve got a note in there from Grope asserting that the Bible does contain errors under his signature.

So, that church in 1965 starts out with a questionable confession on the nature of the Scriptures. It’s my contention that the Lutheran Church of Australia would not have been able to be formed with a

questionable starting point unless St. Louis had already gone completely wobbly. Another affected loss of Seminex.

Young men were sent to study in St. Louis in the '50s and '60s from Australia and, by the way, from all of our partner churches. And these students, many of them, ended up promoting the Lutheran World Federation, promoting women's ordination and, in cases, taking their churches out of fellowship with the Missouri Synod, which has happened. What happened in Australia is they agreed to break fellowship with both the Lutheran World Federation to get out of the Lutheran World Federation on one side and to break fellowship with Missouri on the other side. As a result, the Lutheran Church of Australia was in fellowship with nobody and therefore in fellowship with everybody.

They just voted to ordain women a couple of weeks ago. I feel for my brothers who are still there confessing. They have decisions to make, but we are supporting Lutheran Mission Australia. It's really, I think, probably fortuitous that Sasse did not come to St. Louis. The Lord was looking over us. As strong as he is on so many wonderful issues, it would have been a problem.

Just an aside on Australia. Norman Habel was part of the Walkout. He's still alive in his 90s, but he had at first, because of the influence of Henry Hamann, not been allowed to have any kind of activity in the Lutheran Church of Australia. However, about fifteen years ago, maybe more, he was on a finalist list to be principal of the Australian seminary. And he's written things since, eco Bible, universalism, all kinds of things. He was kind of the first to openly deny the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis, for those of you who remember his writings in the early '60s while on the faculty of St. Louis. So, a couple of the other candidates who were shoe-ins dropped out. He was the only guy left. I mean, he had the Aussie rules football, and he was like right there on the goal line, you know? And it was only him left. At that point, several women from the faculty came forward—from faculty assistants—and said, "If this guy is elected, we're all quitting because he treats women horribly." Truth is stranger than fiction. The Great Emancipator. I'll get letters about that one.

Of course, the ELS had to break in '55 with Missouri and the WELS in '63. You could not have done otherwise. You would have been dragged through the nightmare that the Missouri Synod experienced.

What happened with us, as we found out in our conversations over the last dozen years, which have been the highlight, I think, of

my career. But what happened was you, particularly WELS, fortified and extended its understanding of the doctrine of prayer fellowship and fellowship. And what happened with Missouri is Missouri simply forgot the issue altogether. Missouri changed its position on prayer fellowship to some extent, to be sure, although Marquart calls the period in the '20s "sclerosis, the prelude toward hemorrhage" or something like that, where there were some Missourians who were saying things like, "we don't have an agreed doctrine on whether churches can have bazaars, so we had don't have union." He argues that being too tight on some issues pushes, ultimately, to the other side of things. And I think I generally agree with him.

But for Missouri, the issues of prayer fellowship were just forgotten completely. Really, probably until the Yankee Stadium event in the Missouri Synod. Since then, thankfully, we had one or two events where people then apologized for action. And we've had calm. Our district presidents, our pastors are very careful about these civic events. In fact, I've gotten calls just in the last month or two. Pastor wanting to take part in an event for such and such. And I usually tell the [district president] who's got the question, "Let me talk to the [LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations] guys. [Joel] Lehenbauer has been around a long time. I see what they think, just kind of hash it over, and most of the time we get back to them and say, you know, probably not a good idea." Well, we always get back to them and say, "Not a good idea." Whatever the benefits might be purported to be, you can't control the situation. It's like our pastor who prayed at the Republican National Convention. He was told, in no uncertain terms, that nobody else would be praying on the same stage. And then right before he goes on, he finds out a Hindu is going to come on later on. Something always goes wacky. But we just forgot that issue totally.

The LCUSA continues through the '60s. There are a number of joint projects going on at the time. There's military chaplaincy working in cooperation. There's an agreement to serve conjointly. There are also numerous horror stories from our chaplains who are horribly mistreated. And long past the Walkout, into the '90s and even the 2000s, where our own military chaplains who have been trained in the '50s and '60s, did not uphold the rights of our own chaplains not to break their ordination vows.

[The Rev. Dr.] John Wohlrabe and the chaplains, the older chaplains, can tell all of those stories, which are so difficult, so painful. Wohlrabe was this close to being drummed out of the Navy because his

LCMS supervisor would not support his confessional conscience and what he had sworn he would abide by. Thankfully, someone intervened.

We lost so much. Families were split, destroyed. Virtually every, almost every, certainly theological or public family in the Missouri Synod has a horror story about how their family was divided over Seminex. We lost 250 congregations, including one or more of our founding twelve. We lost the identity of several of our LCMS colleges. And some of those colleges lost that identity and never recovered it.

I am very pleased—aside from the challenges we've had with Ann Arbor lately financially—but we are in the best shape with our universities that we have been in for sixty years or more, probably much more. The new system for governing the schools is working. Our university presidents are serious about Lutheran identity. Everything is codified, and we're working what the convention gave us to work. And I am so thankful as I meet with the CUS [Concordia University system] and just heard everything they and our university presidents have been doing on these issues. Thanks be to God.

You could say that Concordia University Texas is a casualty of Seminex. When I first was elected president, there was a vacancy at Concordia, Texas. The leadership in the district at that time, trained in the era leading up to Seminex, refused to abide by the bylaws and to insist upon them, and they chose a president of that institution and called him without the president's approval. So, what did I do? Do I want a fight with the Texas District right out of becoming elected? I thought, "No, we'll work with this. We'll make it happen." That individual, of course, led the movement to remove that college, to steal that university from the Missouri Synod, which it has done. It was stolen theologically long before. I maintain that is a loss of Seminex.

We had all kinds of challenges with worship and hymnals. If you criticize the new LCMS hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*, think of this. And Jon Vieker just gave a wonderful presentation on this last month. We came into this with a joint predecessor body to the ELCA, with a joint hymnal, *Lutheran Book of Worship*. If you look at that hymnal, it says Missouri Synod and the others in the preface. We had synodical changes in the conventions in the late '60s, and in the last minute we pulled out of that, re-edited it and dropped our own hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*, which has many challenges and deficiencies. Then, of course, we had *The Lutheran Hymnal*. So, when we went into this new hymnal fifteen years ago, we had at least three different hymnals operative in the Missouri Synod.

So, when you look at *Lutheran Service Book* and you want to criticize it or level criticism at its weaknesses, whatever they may be, just think about this. They had to pull together the tradition of churches worshiping with three different hymnals at the same time. And they succeeded to get that hymnal into something like 94% of our congregations. An amazingly costly challenge provided us by the whole era of Seminex.

After LCUSA ended—so there weren't a group of Lutheran churches in '87, with the formation of the ELCA—there was just the Committee on Lutheran Cooperation, Missouri Synod and the ELCA. And we had several things that were going. We had Lutheran World Relief (LWR), Baltimore, which was defined, I believe, as a ministry of each of the churches together. It's no longer that. It's an independent organization. It hasn't been Lutheran for many decades—or anything near it. When I was there, on that board for ten years as part of World Relief, I said many times, "I don't want you getting involved in the Gospel because you'll get it wrong." The one thing I and Bishop [Mark] Hanson of the ELCA agreed upon was that LWR should at least help our church bodies globally have capacity to care for people in times of disaster or other crises. That's the only thing we ever agreed on. And he was much more effective at being crabby with the board than I was. But they simply work with non-governmental organizations, and they do a lot of good. But there's no name of Christ anywhere to be found. Hasn't been for many decades.

We worked together with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Similar situation there. That is now an independent organization. They do provide assistance from time to time if there's an immigration issue, like a Missouri Synod person marries an illegal immigrant or undocumented immigrant, and that person wants to do right by the government. But he's facing a situation where he has to go back to Mexico for ten years, get in line, etc. They may be able to work some government strings to help that situation out, and they have helped in those situations where, you understand, there's a desire to be compassionate, if possible.

However, they did work a lot with agencies for resettling people. Remember the Cambodian boat people and all those that were in many of our churches? Today they support, very significantly, left immigration policies, and we have largely backed away. We backed away from any significant participation at all.

We had Lutheran disaster response jointly with the ELCA until my tenure. We were into it some years. The entire disaster effort of the Missouri Synod consisted of this. We sent money to Chicago, and Chicago sent that money to social ministry agencies, which did case-work among affected families. It was fine work for what it was.

However, they would not allow us any administration, even though we had the vice presidency of that organization. So, I began to tell the ELCA... Was it Rebecca Larson, Executive Secretary for Church in Society for the ELCA, who had led the sex study in '92? I began to tell her: No remuneration without administration.

And so, they did not get the message. Well, they got the message but refused to change. And so, we stopped sending money to the ELCA. And we turned especially toward recognizing and increasing Missouri Synod capacity for good things. And there are many, many wonderful things that have happened since. I'll just mention one that I'm very proud of. We have the only chainsaw manual that's ever gone through doctrinal review. Or the only chainsaw manual ever approved by a national denomination in the history of the universe. And it is a confessionally Lutheran chainsaw manual.

We lost many institutions. Fort Wayne Lutheran Hospital, in the wobbly years, allowed the ELCA predecessor bodies to come into the hospital association. By the time the hospital was sold—and they sold the name "Lutheran." You drive by Fort Wayne, and you see Lutheran Hospital. There's not one shred of Lutheranism about any of it. It's probably good advertising for us. But they sold the name, and by the time they sold it, one ELCA congregation in Fort Wayne had the majority of board members on that board.

The foundation was founded. Initially, it gave grants to a gay-lesbian dance. This is in the '90s already. The two grant advisors, one was ELCA at the church that left the synod across the street from our seminary. Gethsemane? And the other was down at Peace, both of them very strong supporters of the theology that had emanated from the Seminex period.

It's only been in the recent couple of years that we have new leadership at the foundation, which reflects the 2-to-1 dominance of Missouri Synod congregations and the board. And they've started to fund actual things that have a lot more to do with the Gospel.

We lost international schools. We lost social ministry agencies.

When I came to LCMS World Relief and Human Care under Al Barry, the board of directors and Al Barry had a hard time. Much harder

than I have had. But under Al Barry, the Board of Directors of synod had approved a policy whereby my staff on World Relief and Human Care could go to either ELCA or Missouri Synod old folks homes or social ministry agencies and say, "You're affiliated with the ELCA, would you like to be affiliated with the Missouri Synod?" Or vice versa. And both the ELCA and the Missouri Synod rep could do the same each way. Well, what does that entail? Nothing. You've already been approved for the ELCA, so you're going to be approved for the Missouri Synod.

Can you believe that? My employee bragged to me that in his tenure, before I got there, he had managed to get every single social ministry agency, old folks home, etc., in the state of Missouri that was Missouri Synod into a joint relationship with the ELCA.

Seminex was costly. And we continue to wind our way out of all that nonsense. With diligence, great diligence.

It was also costly in its effects long-term on churchmen. I noticed this on the previous generation of the Council of Presidents. We had the big Yankee Stadium blow up, which occurred now twenty years ago. And they had never once, as a Council of Presidents, talked about the theology or the event. Under the guise that somebody would have to serve on some adjudication or panel to determine the outcome of, guilty or not guilty verdict on, unionism or something.

Can you imagine? They never talked about it once. Biggest upheaval in the Missouri Synod since Seminex. I noticed ... and I love these guys. They have many gifts, and I can't make this generalization, but John Kleinig said something very telling. He said that generation has viewed theology as a negative, controversial thing. And so, they tend to not want to talk theology because it's controversial.

I'm a product of post-Walkout Fort Wayne. All I do is talk theology. It's the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I love theology, I love the *Book of Concord*, I love the Bible. I just remember going to seminary and having the Bible just pop. There it was. There it was in Greek, and I was reading the same dogma in Pieper. And then I was going to chapel where it all fit together.

Theology is everything. I'm happy to say the Council of Presidents today does an exegetical study every meeting, does a confessional study every meeting. We do other studies every meeting. Those are led by council members themselves. When the issue of the licensed lay reader was very controversial in the Missouri Synod some years ago, and we changed our bylaws on that issue so that those who are actually carrying out the functions of the office on a regular basis need to be ordained.

We were having one of our early conversations on this issue on the Council of Presidents. And I listened, and I was reminded of George Wollenberg's² saying, "Well, everything's been said, but not everybody has said it yet."

I listened, and after about forty-five minutes, I said, "You know, we've been talking about the Office of the Ministry, which is the most significantly studied issue in the history of the Missouri Synod from its founding. And I haven't heard one Bible verse, I haven't heard one reference to the Lutheran Confessions, and I haven't heard one reference to Luther."

We began studying Walther, and we also studied significantly Hellmut Lieburg, the first part on Luther, *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melanchthon*.³ I'm very happy to say that we have made lightyears in progress theologically with the council on this issue and many others.

Also, the Seminex period made hardball politics acceptable in the Missouri Synod. I talked to Ralph Bohlmann numerous times before he died, and I felt somehow that it would be the honorable thing to do. And I enjoyed those conversations with him. I agreed with him on everything up to Robert Preus's ouster, and I had to bite my lip on that issue because I was present during that period. I was a grad assistant to Robert. He was my thesis advisor.

But Ralph told about coming to the seminary, being invited by the seminary in 1960 or '62 to come and teach. He was a young pastor in Des Moines. He didn't want to come. He wanted to stay at his pastorate. And John Behnken and took him around the Quad, where the crosses would be placed at the Seminex event about fourteen or fifteen years later. John Behnken, president of Missouri Synod, put his arm around Ralph and said, "Ralph, we need what you have at this moment in this place very badly."

And that was his confession of the full authority of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Ralph's really good book on confessional subscription and the hermeneutics of the Lutheran Confessions was written while he was a student in the late '50s under Robert Preus. Robert was so pleased with the book that he went to Concordia Publishing House and said, "Please publish this wonderful book." Ralph ended up coming down twice, ended up coming to the seminary.

² Former LCMS Montana district president.

³ Hellmut Lieberg, *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melanchthon*, trans. Matthew Carver (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

After he was defeated by Al Barry, there were a number of unfortunate things said. Ralph had spoken ambiguously, if not pro, on women's ordination, as Oliver Harms had after he was unelected in '69 by Jack Preus's challenge. But Ralph never advocated that with me. I found it somewhat surprising he was intensely opposed to the Seminex movement. He disagreed totally and completely throughout the end of his life with what they had done, and I was happy to hear that.

Ralph had personal challenges in the family: a daughter who's married to her lesbian spouse, who's a UCC pastor, with, I think, an adopted child. And Ralph loved his daughter and his grandchild. And so, he struggled with that issue. He said, "I believe the Missouri Synod is right, but there's got to be some way we can approach it." So, he really wrestled big time with that. This is why I bring up Ralph.

Ralph said, "Herman Otten was right to publish those class lectures in the early '60s in his paper, because they were public." I was surprised to hear Ralph say anything positive about Herman whatsoever. But he didn't attack Herman; he just said he was right to do that. And Herman was right to do that. And it's hard to believe that the turnaround in Missouri would have happened without his action in the early '60s.

Unfortunately, Herman's reportage became very much problematic through the years. And if, like me, you were a subject of his reporting, and actually knew what was going on, you recognized that what was reported more often than not had very little to do with what was actually happening or had happened. And that made interaction with Herman very difficult and challenging.

But there was a lot said, a lot of hard-hitting stuff. And I think Herman had an obsessive-compulsive personality. And I think what happened in the Missouri Synod over those many years of controversy was that certain individuals with obsessive-compulsive personality traits who were willing to step up and blather forth the most outrageous accusations were basically used by either side instead of saying, "Stop doing that. That's not acceptable."

And that caused a lot of consciences to be hurt in the Missouri Synod. And the whole issue was a conscience affair. If you check out the *Book of Concord*, you have the issue of conscience, *Gewissen*. Just "conscience" alone occurs like 400 times in the *Book of Concord*. It is the kind of human issue at the Reformation. Not to mention the cognates that go with it, like "certainty" or "consolation." Conscience is so involved because if you don't believe your church's confession but can't

tell people you don't believe your church's confession, that causes the conscience to be seared.

This was a problem for the Seminexers because they had been lying prior to the Walkout. "Yes, we're Lutheran. Yes. Nothing has changed. No, we don't believe that." John Pless has shown in his article in the book on Seminex that what happened was, after Seminex, they all came out with their radical positions.

The conscience also can work very negatively among conservatives. If you're part of a church body that is so horribly affected by false doctrine and controversy, and you in good conscience know that you are to associate with a church body that teaches and preaches the truth, it throws you into a conscience difficulty.

I view myself as part of the confessional revival of the Missouri Synod post-Seminex. I work for it every single day of my presidency. I've worked for it every single day of my pastorate for 33 years. The conscience is hurt sometimes. It has been hurt in the past, but we've made progress—amazing, amazing progress. And we can be thankful for that progress. It has been enormous. It is a miracle that the Missouri Synod still exists, an absolute miracle.

The issues continue. Missiological confusion. From India and our partner church in India, you had kind of radical ecumenism coming out from the LCMS leadership there, which came to infect the mission endeavor in the Missouri Synod. And so, in that mission, they became deeply interested in the Union Church of South India.

Can you imagine the Missouri Synod having staff promoting the South Indian Union Church of Anglicans and a bunch of other Protestants? But that's what was happening. Remember, when the guys walked out at Seminex, where did they go to reside right away? Eden Theological Seminary. Eden Theological Seminary is a result of the mission of the Prussian Union, forming the *Evangelische Synode des Westens*, the Evangelical Synod of the West, which became the Evangelical Christian and Reformed Church, which became the UCC Eden Seminary.

I saw a document not long ago where the students themselves had confessed prior to the Walkout that the differences between Calvin and Luther on the Lord's Supper were not significant enough to prevent inter communion and church fellowship. You must remember that half the faculty at Springfield was pro-Walkout or pro-Seminex theology. Half. The internal notes, faculty notes, show the struggles they had internally over those issues.

I talked to a guy from about my era, from Fort Wayne. During his theological interview before being allowed to be certified and placed (you have that interview with theological profs), the question was asked by one professor, “Close, closed communion?” And the guy said for the entire rest of the interview, the three profs argued different positions in front of him. He never had to say one word for his theological interview.

The entire left push of Missouri confused so many pastors who could not discern that the word “close” is not something different from “closed.” They may have made something up, but the history of Lutheranism is ‘geschlossen.’ Franz Pieper wrote, “Auch die apostolische Kirche praktiziert nicht ‘open,’ sondern ‘closed Communion.’”⁴ He even puts it in English for you. But what happened in 1957, in the midst of this? Some clown, in editing Pieper’s *Dogmatics*, changed it to “close.” So, that issue is a gift that keeps on giving.

Just another one, and then I’ll close up. There’s an anti-institutionalism that we’ve inherited from the Seminex era. “All you’re doing is supporting the institution.” Uh, yeah. Let’s see. Christ instituted the Office of the Ministry. Christ instituted the church. Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper. Are we against institutions?

“Are we really about mission, or are we just trying to perpetuate the institution?” Which means when I say, “Lutheran missions lead to Lutheran churches,” they say, “You’re just trying to perpetuate an institution.” OK, so we spray John 3:16 out there like a hose and just see what the Holy Ghost does with it. See you all later. Good luck when you get to trying to write a new Nicene Creed.

Institutions need to be reformed. Institutions exist for good because when people come together for holy goals, biblical goals, they tend to accomplish goals, that is, the spread of the Gospel. We have spent so much money shooting the Gospel around without planting churches.

Where is that work now? Where are the converts? Where is the church there? Where is baptism going on? It’s not. We are pro-institution. “Oh, you’re just trying to promote the institution when you maintain that theological education should be overwhelmingly done on-site.” Well, when you do theological education at a seminary, people actually learn Greek. They learn Hebrew. They might even learn a little Latin and German.

I remember sermons in my time by leaders of the church at our seminary saying, “Now that you’re graduating and going into the

⁴ Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* vol. 3 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1920), 444.

world, you don't need Greek. You need the newspaper." Ridiculousness. Absurdity.

Thankfully, I think we're moving past that kind of anti-institutionalism. Seminex was extremely costly for us. It keeps costing us daily in many and various ways. But we are so blessed. We have strong global missions. We've got strong and getting stronger partner churches, with challenges here and there. We have united partners globally.

We have a synod convention that voted 94% or 95% to break fellowship with the Japanese Lutheran Church for ordaining women. Can you believe that? A Missouri Synod convention voting 95% against women's ordination? And I would hold that another half of the 5% probably just didn't want to be mean but wouldn't have women's ordination. Can you imagine Missouri Synod voting 88% for close Communion?

We are so blessed. Can you imagine two seminaries at this point in the synod's history, to have the kind of leaders we have? Tom Egger and Jon Bruss? We are so, so blessed. We've got many challenges, but we're blessed. All I want is *Book of Concord* Lutheranism, folks. The inerrant Scriptures. Part of the nonsense that got us going on this was from Edmund Schlink, who otherwise was a fantastic scholar, wrote a great book on the Confessions, but he said, "Not the authority of the Scriptures, but the Gospel is the authority."

Well, if you actually read the Confessions over and over again, they say that the authority in the church is the divine Scriptures. The divine Scriptures. Robert Preus wrote in a wonderful essay on the Power of God. He says, "The Scriptures participate in all the attributes of God. Eternally true, divine, powerful, able to convert. Eternal."

I want *Book of Concord* Lutheranism. Lutheranism does not need to be supplemented by episcopacy from somebody else. Lutheranism does not need obscure Roman Catholic rights. We're not lacking anything. Lutheranism doesn't need liturgical help from the Anglicans to be what we should be. *Book of Concord* Lutheranism does not need evangelicism. I say we may be able to borrow things from any and all those things that are neither commanded or forbidden or might be wise or unwise to use.

But my point is, the *Book of Concord* does not need to be supplemented by infant communion. *Book of Concord* Lutheranism is what we need, and the *Book of Concord* tells us who God is very clearly. The *Book of Concord* says, Article IV, that this is outside of me, *extra nos*. The Gospel comes from outside. And therefore, in order to obtain such

faith, Article V, the office is given. The *Book of Concord* says the office is from *oben* and *unten*.

That is, the office is a divine office. The lips of the pastor are God's lips. The lips of the pastor are God's hands when he speaks and acts. The words of the pastor are God's words, but also from *unten*. The keys belong to the church. The church calls, chooses, a pastor, and God works through the church to call pastors.

There is a spiritual priesthood that has all the gifts that they need to speak Christ effectively and savingly to their family, to their neighbors, their co-workers. The *Book of Concord* teaches that no one should come to the Sacrament unless he knows what he seeks or why he comes. The *Book of Concord* says that these Sacraments are signs of confession among men.

The *Book of Concord* says nobody should come to the Sacrament unless he has been explored—*explorati*—and absolved. That's confirmation, especially. And this is our great heritage. Thank you for your prayers for us and the ELS. Our working together with your folks and the WELS people in the last twelve years in conversations has been the highlight of our life ecumenically. Although you guys don't like to use the word "ecumenical." I should say we are unofficially having a unrecorded, marvelous time together.

There is no threat of fellowship anytime soon, so don't worry about that. The issues that remain are issues of women's service in the church, boards, voting, that kind of thing, and issues of fellowship, which are very difficult for us. I think we probably have come to the point, most of us, to say that the church and Office of the Ministry issues should not divide, or should not ultimately divide. If we ever are to get back together, it's going to be completely a divine act of grace. And the Lord can work surprising things, but it's not going to be forced by us or anybody.

And just one more thing. The conversations we have with your people, WELS and ELS, are, you know... We talk to the Anglicans, the ACNA, now we got some more conservative Anglicans we're talking with. They're fun to talk with. We're talking to the now North American Lutheran Church, which broke from the ELCA but kept women's ordination. Nobody compares theologically. Knowing the languages, knowing the sources, knowing the history. Nobody compares with WELS and ELS. And it's a pleasure, so thank you for listening to these random and, somewhat, uncontrolled thoughts. It's a pleasure to be with you. Thank you. 

The Class of 1974: Personal Reflections on the Walkout

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THOSE WHO GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE IN 1974 possess a trove of shared national memories:

- On February 4, Patty Hearst, the granddaughter of media mogul William Randolph Hearst, was kidnapped by a far-left terrorist organization calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army. Two months later came more shocking news that she had “renounced” her “class privilege” and joined this militant group. In April, “security footage showed her robbing a San Francisco bank owned by a childhood friend’s” father. She remained at large for 16 months until she was captured not far from her home.¹
- During February and March, an extraordinarily odd pastime grew in popularity, but mercifully soon played itself out: streaking, which was the act of racing naked across a public venue, often a sporting event or musical performance. *The New York Times* reported on March 29 that the Tonight Show on [NBC] “was visited by a male streaker as Johnny Carson was beginning his opening monologue.” But since the program was recorded on video tape, “the offender was edited out electronically before the broadcast began. This resulted in a blank area on the screen for about 10 seconds, the time it took for the streaker to pass through.”²

¹ Roger Rapoport, “Patty Hearst was Kidnapped 50 years ago. Was she a Victim or Terrorist?” *The Washington Post* (February 4, 2024).

² Les Brown, “TV Networks Seek to Avoid Streaking Incidents,” *The New York Times* (March 29, 1974).

- On April 8, Henry Aaron hit his 715th major league home run, surpassing the record that had been held by Babe Ruth. This was especially exciting news to anyone who had been a fan of the old Milwaukee Braves, for whom he played, but television announcer Vin Scully put the evening into far larger context. “What a marvelous moment for baseball,” Scully said. “What a marvelous moment for Atlanta and the state of Georgia. What a marvelous moment for the country and the world. A black man is getting a standing ovation in the Deep South, for breaking a record of an all-time baseball idol.”³
- Undoubtedly, the biggest national news of 1974 was the unfolding revelation of the Watergate scandal, culminating in the resignation of President Richard Nixon on August 9. Midwestern Lutherans, known for their deep political conservatism and sturdy obedience to the fourth commandment, may have considered President Nixon to be not guilty, perhaps even the victim of nasty press coverage, right up to the day he left office.

A much smaller group, students who attended Lutheran colleges and seminaries of the three church bodies represented at this gathering, and others around the world in sympathy with conservative Lutheran churches, share memories of the walkout at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and the formation of the Seminary in Exile—Seminex.

The troubles in the Missouri Synod did not loom large for many Wisconsin Synod students during their college years.⁴ “To my shame,” one admitted, “I was oblivious to all that was going on in the world outside Northwestern College,” the pre-seminary college of the synod, then located in Watertown, Wisconsin. Another recalled having a roommate who belonged to the LCMS, but the WELS student did not “ever recall his talking about anything brewing at St. Louis.” A third stated that the walkout had little impact on him personally. “I followed it somewhat closely but harbored little optimism for any real change in LCMS doctrine or practice.” Some recalled humorous variations on the name “Seminex.” In an article in the *Black and Red*, the student magazine of Northwestern, one student suggested that if such an

³ Vin Scully calls Hank Aaron’s historic 715th home run – YouTube.

⁴ Survey responses throughout this paper were collected from September through early November 2023 from thirty students who attended Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the years 1971–1981.

event occurred on their campus, the breakaway group would be called "Narthex." Another offered an alternate: "Sominex."⁵

Others, however, remembered the walkout as "a giant, dramatic event" which they "paid attention to and talked about a lot." The crisis "dominated the religious news," and they read the reports "with interest and a bit of horror at what had happened" in their former sister synod. The "irreverence and anti-establishment attitude" displayed by some who went on strike at Concordia and then walked out was "disturbing."⁶ Another's memories were more of a "big picture nature":

Being the kind of person I am concerning anti-war/government rebellion, the idea of students walking out, for the reasons they did, did not sit well with me. It seemed to be another example of radical, left-wing thinking that I could not understand or appreciate. I came from a "flag-waving America, love-it-or-leave-it" upbringing. ... I remember having little sympathy for the LCMS: "That's what you get for being so un-Lutheran to begin with."⁷

Several students were aided by the fact that their fathers were in the pastoral ministry and discussed the events with them. Others, however, with similar family connections did not discuss the walkout much. One professor's son recalled, "My father did not go out of his way to give me a crash course in church history so that I could keep up with events."⁸

Fellowship had been the key issue

The final Wisconsin Synod evaluation of the Chicago Theses,⁹ after they were rejected by both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods in 1929, declared:

Church fellowship, that is mutual recognition of Christians as brethren of the faith and their cooperation in church activities, presupposes, according to God's Word and our Confessions, their agreement in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the confession

⁵ Survey responses 129, 130, 133, 134, 147.

⁶ Survey responses 130, 149.

⁷ Survey response 150.

⁸ Survey response 128.

⁹ The Chicago Theses were also known as the "Sibley County Theses" or the "St. Paul Theses." See John C. Wohlrabe, Jr., *Zur Einigung: The St. Paul Theses—A Document Study*, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 56 (Fall 1983): 133–140; John Buenger, "A Brief History of Various Union Documents," *The Confessional Lutheran* 12 (September 1951): 99–100.

of the same by word and deed. ... Ignoring doctrinal differences existing at the time when church fellowship is being established and maintained or declaring them to be of no import is unionism, which fictitiously presents a unity that does not exist. ... Church fellowship with a church body which persistently clings to an error in doctrine and practice must ultimately be dissolved, because unity has already been disrupted by that error.¹⁰

Nine years later, following the Missouri Synod's announcement in 1938 that it was willing to accept the "Declaration" of fellowship proposed by the American Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Prof. Max Lehninger cited the ALC statement that it was "neither necessary nor possible" to agree on all nonfundamental doctrines.¹¹ He countered that Missouri's *Brief Statement* did not regard the doctrines of church and ministry, Sunday, chiliasm, or the Antichrist as open questions. "We are not at liberty to bargain with anyone for toleration of Christian teachings contrary to the doctrine which we have learned (Rom 16:17) and rejected by us on biblical grounds."¹²

During the early 1940s, Wisconsin noted that Missouri and ALC representatives were cultivating fellowship on various levels.¹³ For example, *The American Lutheran*, an independent publication within the Missouri Synod, praised "a growing sense of togetherness" shared by members of the Lutheran Editors' Association, a pan-Lutheran publishing group, who called it "not a forced togetherness nor a feigned togetherness" but "substantial and meaningful." The editorial, which originally appeared in the ALC's *Lutheran Standard*, further announced, "We prayed together." The Association boasted that it ...

has never lost any time in finely spun discussions of the propriety of joint prayer at our meetings. That is taken for granted—and acted upon. ... The editors (representing the five synods of the American Lutheran Conference, the United Lutheran Church in America,

¹⁰ A.C. Haase, secretary of the Wisconsin Intersynodical Committee, "Chicago Theses," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 26 (October 1929): 268.

¹¹ See J[ohn] T. M[ueller], "The Present Status of the Discussions of the Missouri Synod with the American Lutheran Church," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 10 (December 1939): 930.

¹² Max Lehninger, "The Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod and the Declaration of the A.L.C. as the Doctrinal Basis for Church-Fellowship," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 36 (April 1939): 89, 92.

¹³ Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split Between Missouri and Wisconsin* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 156–159.

and the Missouri Synod) are convinced that wide, fervent use of joint prayer will do much to promote togetherness throughout the Lutheran Church in America.¹⁴

Such occasions and pronouncements led Wisconsin Synod President John W.O. Brenner to protest to the Synodical Conference in 1944, "We feel constrained to state at this time that we have been seriously perturbed by numerous instances of an anticipation of a union not yet existing, or, as it has been put, not yet declared."¹⁵

Following inevitably came a restudy of Missouri's history of fellowship practices and the proclamation of a change in its fellowship understanding.¹⁶ Missouri's 1944 convention formally differentiated between joint prayer and joint witness, as long as "such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error."¹⁷ The *Statement of the 44*, sent to all Missouri Synod pastors in 1945, deplored the fact that Romans 16:17,18 had been "applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine" and further lamented that the term "unionism" pertained to "any and every contact between Christians of different denominations."¹⁸ The 1960 Synodical Conference reported that an "impasse" had been reached between Missouri and Wisconsin.¹⁹ Should church fellowship be treated as a unit concept, Wisconsin asked, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith? Missouri answered *no*, but Wisconsin said *yes*.²⁰

What remains disconcerting to the Wisconsin Synod even today is that the very issues over which the synods came into conflict had once been championed also by Missouri. Opposition to Scouting and the military chaplaincy, as well as opposition to prayer fellowship between church bodies not in doctrinal agreement, regarded in 1961 as distinct (some would even say "peculiar") Wisconsin positions, had been expressed by Missouri earlier, more broadly, and more repeatedly. For example,

¹⁴ Fred H. Lindemann, "The Churchman's Digest," *The American Lutheran* 26 (December 1943): 12.

¹⁵ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1944, 102.

¹⁶ See Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 170–177.

¹⁷ *Missouri Proceedings*, 1944, 251–252.

¹⁸ "A Statement," *The American Lutheran* 28 (November 1945): 4; see also Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 177–186.

¹⁹ *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1960, 45–46.

²⁰ *Fellowship Then and Now: Concerning the Impasse in the Intersynodical Discussions on Church Fellowship* (Milwaukee: WELS Commission on Doctrinal Issues, 1960), 6.

- Franz Pieper, in his 1889 essay, “The Difference between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches,” applied his principles of external fellowship to individual Christians: “They must avoid churches that do not teach the truth and join those that do. Not permitted are receiving communion and serving as baptismal sponsors in false churches.”²¹
- August Graebner, in an essay to the Nebraska District, 1903: “Where common worship cannot be practiced, Christians are not to carry on prayer fellowship.”²²
- Theodore Graebner, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1918: “Who is the man who dares to say that any portion of revealed truth may be regarded as unessential when doctrinal harmony is at issue?” Where the Word of God is silent, there is “latitude and freedom of action,” but “there is no liberty in matters of Christian doctrine and divinely established principle.”²³
- Theodore Graebner again, 1920: Any prayer “in which we are asked to join those who do not speak out of the same faith as we, cannot be pleasing to God. It is a prayer in which we cannot give free expression to our convictions. ... Mixed prayer is a violation of the principles governing a Christian’s life, that the simplest Lutherans in Reformation times preferred to suffer banishment, torture, and death rather than *give the impression* of denial by giving in to demands to regulate their services in a way which implied a concession to error.”²⁴

²¹ Franz Pieper, “The Difference between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches,” cited by David P. Scaer, “Francis Pieper (1852–1931),” *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (Autumn 2008): 306.

²² *Missouri Synod Nebraska District Proceedings*, 1903; cited in *Fellowship Then and Now*, 18.

²³ [Theodore] G[raebner], “In Non-Essentials, Liberty,” *The Lutheran Witness* 37 (February 19, 1918): 57.

²⁴ T[heodore] G[raebner], “Letters to a Young Preacher: Joint Prayers,” *Magazin fuer evangel.-Luth. Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie* 44 (May 1920): 231–34; cited by Seth Erlandsson, *Church Fellowship: What Does The Bible Say?* trans. S[iegbert] W. Becker (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979), 38–39, emphasis in the original. For additional examples, see Franz Pieper, “Unionism,” *Oregon and Washington District Proceedings*, 1924; cited in *Fellowship Then and Now*, 20; Theodore Graebner, “What is Unionism?” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 2 (August 1931): 581; “Dr. Behnken at the American Lutheran Conference,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 44 (January 1947): 68. See also Theo. Diercks, “The Doctrine of the Church with Special Reference to Altar Fellowship and Prayer Fellowship,” *The Confessional Lutheran* 6 (October 1945): 113–19; (November 1945): 127–34; (December 1945): 139–45; *The Confessional Lutheran* 7 (January 1946): 4–9; (February 1946): 17–23.

Implied in these and other statements was the assumption that Lutherans should practice the same principles of separation from heterodox Christians in their personal and private relationships as their church bodies did at public gatherings. That assumption, however, would be put to the test as the twentieth century unfolded.

In its 1961 action, when Wisconsin resolved to “suspend fellowship” with the Missouri Synod, it added that “the word ‘suspend’ as used in the resolution has all the finality of termination during the duration of suspension, but contains the hope that conditions might someday warrant the reestablishment of fellowship.”²⁵ Wisconsin leaders looked for evidence of such changed conditions, but less than a year after the resolution it became clear that events would not be moving in that direction.

Following Missouri’s 1962 convention in Cleveland, *The American Lutheran*, an independent publication within the LCMS, proclaimed that “a new era has dawned for the Lutherans of America.” Under the leadership of outgoing President John W. Behnken, Missouri “took a firm stand against the efforts of a small but extremely vocal minority to turn back the clock of history and commit the Synod to a policy of theological obscurantism and ecclesiastical isolationism.” The election of a new synod president, Oliver Harms, and manifestations of a progressive and evangelical spirit “promised exciting years ahead for the Missouri Synod.”²⁶

Wisconsin replied that the 1962 convention confirmed that the LCMS had “yielded to a considerable extent to the contention” that it was “neither possible nor necessary to agree in all doctrines,” which was being replaced by what was now considered “a wholesome and allowable latitude of theological opinion.” Missouri’s vision of achieving “greater confessional solidarity, to say nothing of doctrinal agreement by the practice of a greater degree of cooperation,” was “the exact reverse” of what its former synodical policy had been.²⁷

Wisconsin reacted to the 1965 LCMS publication *Theology of Fellowship*²⁸ that Missouri was attempting “to set up lax principles of church fellowship by reinterpreting those passages which bid us to avoid the persistent errorist.” Conspicuous by its absence in *Theology of Fellowship* was any definition of the terms “church fellowship” or

²⁵ *WELS Proceedings*, 1961, 198.

²⁶ “The Beginning of a New Era,” *The American Lutheran* 45 (August 1962): 3.

²⁷ [Heinrich J.] V[ogel], “Toward Cooperation Among American Lutherans,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 59 (July 1962): 216.

²⁸ See “Theology of Fellowship,” *LCMS Proceedings*, 1965, 264–91.

“unionism.” Wisconsin believed that Missouri’s statement “consciously” ruled out of the scope of church fellowship “things that have always among us in Synodical Conference circles been considered an essential part of the exercise of church fellowship.” In Wisconsin’s view, *Theology of Fellowship* revealed “a deterioration rather than an improvement in the teaching on Church Fellowship in the Missouri Synod, at least in its Commission on Theology and Church Relations.”²⁹

Missouri’s 1967 convention adopted *Theology of Fellowship*,³⁰ a decision which in Wisconsin’s view “documented the change in fellowship principles in the LCMS after disturbing evidences of the change had long appeared in the official life of the body.”³¹ The 1967 convention also concluded that there was sufficient scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between Missouri and the ALC and urged Missouri to “take the necessary steps toward full realization” of that fellowship.³²

Wisconsin’s 1929 response to the Chicago Theses had also contained this brief comment: “How an error of this kind must be treated in *individual instances*, however, and *how long the erring must be tolerated* in the hope that he can be led to forsake his error, *is a problem to be solved by the brotherly love of Christians.*”³³ It was apparently sufficient at that time to say that pastors would trust one another to make clear yet evangelical decisions in such circumstances. However, as tensions grew between Missouri and Wisconsin regarding private expressions of church fellowship, Wisconsin found it necessary to delineate and formalize the terms “weak brother” and “persistent errorist.”³⁴

Members of the college class of 1974, and members of classes several years on either side of 1974, were somewhere between 7 and 12 years old when the 1961 decision to suspend fellowship with Missouri was approved. How well did members of those graduating classes

²⁹ Gerald Hoenecke, “Supplement to the Report and Recommendation of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, re: Theology of Fellowship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 63 (January 1966): 57–61.

³⁰ *LCMS Proceedings*, 1965, 91.

³¹ Irwin J. Habeck, “Missouri Synod Convention,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 64 (October 1967): 307–10.

³² *LCMS Proceedings*, 1967, 102–103.

³³ Haase, “Chicago Theses,” 269; emphases added.

³⁴ See Joh. P. Meyer, “Prayer Fellowship,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 46 (July 1949): 184–95; (October 1949): 244–59; *Theologische Quartalschrift* 47 (January 1950): 33–45; (April 1950): 124–36; (July 1950): 197–206; (October 1950): 288–98; Carl Lawrenz, *Theologische Quartalschrift* 51 (October 1954): 258–91.

understand their own synod's teaching on church fellowship? Of course, we all knew we were not allowed to join the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, but how many of us knew why? How many of our parents knew why? A few of us enjoyed the privilege of growing up in families headed by fathers who were also pastors or professors, highly knowledgeable about fellowship issues, who shared that knowledge with their families. Many others of us did not grow up in such families. Some of us grew up in WELS-centric environments: a large neighborhood congregation with attached Lutheran elementary school, a Lutheran high school nearby, a prep high school readily available, in families containing no intersynodical tensions or divisions. Others of us did not grow up in such circumstances.

I wonder too whether our fellowship principles were clearly conveyed to us. At least once I was told that we could not pray with a Missouri Synod member (or with any other non-WELS or non-ELS person) because, since we had doctrinal disagreements, we worshiped "different gods." By the time I was no longer a 9-year-old entering fifth grade but a graduate student in my late forties, I first read Wisconsin's 1954 Tract 10, "Church Fellowship," which included this statement:

I may have an ALC grandmother who has always manifested a simple, childlike faith in her Lord and Savior, but who nevertheless is unaware of the intersynodical differences and their implications. When I visit her in the privacy of her home, it might be a grave mistake were I to assert the principle of refusing to pray with her under such circumstances. What would the Lord have me do? Should I trouble her simple faith in these matters which are apparently beyond her grasp? Or is it not my plain duty to support her and build up her faith by praying with her and otherwise expressing my own faith...?

We dare not forget that there are those Christians who may be caught in an error, not willingly, but because their understanding of Scripture is insufficient. They are willing to bow to Scripture, but as yet, through human weakness, do not see clearly how the truth of Scripture necessarily rules out their error. What does God say to us concerning such weak Christians? ... Receive, He says, receive such a weak brother and tenderly help him overcome his weakness. "Receiving" such a weak Christian means that praying with him

may well be in place and God pleasing, and we trust that God will help him to grow in knowledge and strength.³⁵

I also paid closer attention to Prof. Armin Schuetze's article, "May We Pray at Table with People Not of the Wisconsin Synod?" published only two months after Wisconsin's decision to break fellowship with Missouri. After repeating the distinctive WELS explanation of a "persistent errorist," Prof. Schuetze explained:

Membership in a church body is an act of confession. Through his membership a person confesses himself to the teachings of that church. ... To disregard this public confession would only create offense and confusion....

But now such a person from an erring church body is with you in your home, or you are in his home. From your private contact with him you know that he confesses trust in Christ as his Savior from sin. ... It is apparent that his membership in the false church body is the result of a still weak faith. ... In this case you have more to go by than the confession of his church membership; there is also his own personal confession before you. ... In your private relations where public offense is not involved, you may on the basis of a man's confession recognize him as a brother in Christ with whom you may then also join in prayer....

Scripture does not give an absolute *yes* or *no* as the answer to our question. And it does not set up a detailed set of rules that tells you exactly what you must do under every circumstance. But it does give the principles that are to guide you.³⁶

I showed excerpts from both of these statements to my colleagues at Wisconsin Lutheran College, most of whom had been educated almost entirely within our synodical school system. The repeated response I received from them was, "Those are wonderful statements. What church body did they come from?" Our church body. Had we been told much more about the separation principle than about the weak brother principle?

³⁵ *Prayer Fellowship*. Continuing in His Word, Tract Number 10. Milwaukee: Conference of Presidents of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1954.

³⁶ Armin Schuetze, "May We Pray at Table with People Not of the Wisconsin Synod?" *The Northwestern Lutheran* 48 (October 22, 1961): 342, 350.

Scripture became the main issue

Following the election of Jacob A.O. Preus as president of the Missouri Synod in 1969, and with growing revelations arising from President Preus' doctrinal investigations, Wisconsin expressed far greater concern about Missouri's shifting position on the doctrine of Scripture.

Earlier in 1969, President Alfred Fuerbringer announced that he was stepping down from his position at Concordia Seminary. Under his leadership, Concordia had already been undergoing "a quiet revolution" in which "biblical studies were receiving major attention, replacing dogmatic theology." Several faculty members were helping the seminary and the church body "come to terms with contemporary issues of biblical criticism."³⁷ In May 1969, Dr. John Tietjen was informed that he had been elected to become Concordia's next president.

In 1970, a group of Missouri pastors, professors, teachers, church officials, and laymen issued the statement, "A Call to Openness and Trust."³⁸ This group called for "greater freedom in the Lutheran Church." Reviewing the statement, Prof. Schuetze wrote:

From whose authority do they seek freedom? Is it merely from the authority of a denominational organization? Or of church leaders preoccupied with their own institutional power? ... They are asking for freedom to call Jesus a liar when He refers to a portion of the Old Testament as written by Moses. They are asking for freedom to declare the Bible factually false.... They are asking for freedom from the authority of Scripture, freedom from confessional commitment. That is not the freedom God gives us under the Gospel.... The freedom He gives us is from the tyranny of Satan and sin, so that the Christian freely and joyfully places himself under God's Word, under Scripture, and freely confesses the full truth therein revealed, as we do in the Lutheran Confessions.³⁹

The appearance of "A Call to Openness and Trust" provided additional evidence of a "deep doctrinal cleavage" within the LCMS.

³⁷ John H. Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 6.

³⁸ For the full text of "A Call to Openness and Trust," see *A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues*, ed. Herman Otten (New Haven, Missouri: Leader Publishing Co., 1973): 760–761.

³⁹ Armin W. Schuetze, "More Evidence of the 'Cleavage,'" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 67 (April 1970): 134–135.

President Preus in a 1970 letter to LCMS clergy warned: “Make no mistake about this, brothers. What is at stake is not only inerrancy but the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself, the authority of Holy Scripture, the ‘quia’ subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, and perhaps the very continued existence of Lutheranism as a confessional and confessing movement in the Christian world.”⁴⁰ Prof. Schuetze issued a challenge:

Will President Preus follow through? ... [Or] will he be content to have invited these “troublers of Israel” to leave [their] fellowship, something they themselves have already said they [did] not intend to do? The patient is very, very sick. Dr. Preus has diagnosed the illness. A few antibiotics won’t do. Radical surgery is called for. Is Dr. Preus ready to head a team of surgeons for the operation?⁴¹

More than two hundred overtures to Missouri’s 1971 convention in Milwaukee called for some form of suspension of fellowship with the ALC.⁴² Committee 2 submitted a resolution, “To Uphold Synodical Doctrinal Resolutions,” which would have made synodically adopted resolutions doctrinally binding throughout the LCMS. However, convention delegates rejected this resolution,⁴³ prompting Wisconsin’s Prof. Carl Lawrenz to comment:

Scripture, of course, at all times gives Dr. Preus full authorization to take a firm stand in his Synod ... to implement the kind of doctrinal discipline which becomes necessary to put this position into practice. We note, however, with sadness that the delegates of the Synod assembled in convention failed to supply him with a resolution which indicated that they would wholeheartedly stand behind him

⁴⁰ Portions of President Preus’ letter are reprinted in *Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout* (St. Louis: Concordia College, 1977), 19–20.

⁴¹ Schuetze, “More Evidence of the ‘Cleavage,’” 135–136. See *LCMS Proceedings, 1971*, 128–29: a resolution to “repudiate the weaknesses” of “A Call to Openness and Trust” was approved by a vote of 390 to 384. In an accompanying letter first addressed to President Preus on May 25, 1970, the authors of “A Call to Openness and Trust,” professors Holland H. Jones, Arthur C. Repp, and Gilbert A. Thiele, stated that they were “sorry that the document has been misunderstood by some to be a denial or a limitation of [their] confessional loyalty,” and they expressed regret for “whatever [they] may have done to contribute to such a misunderstanding.”

⁴² *LCMS Convention Workbook, 1971*, 150–183.

⁴³ See *LCMS Proceedings, 1971*, 30, 34, 39, 42, 117–120, on the deliberations and final decision on this resolution; see also J.A.O. Preus, “2–21 and 5–24,” *Affirm 1* (November 1971): 1–2; E.H. Zimmermann, “Much Good Happened at Milwaukee,” *Affirm 1* (November 1971): 4.

as he carried out his Scriptural mandate. The fact that the adoption of such a resolution was effectively and very deliberately defeated carries a very disturbing message.⁴⁴

Early in 1973, Concordia faculty members issued two booklets, both of which bore the title, *Faithful to Our Calling—Faithful to Our Lord*. The first booklet contained a joint confession of faith from the faculty; the second featured statements of individual faculty members.⁴⁵ Wisconsin Prof. Siegbert Becker charged that the second booklet made it

... as clear as any “investigation” of the faculty could that there is no longer any possibility of speaking about a “common consent” to any doctrinal position in the LCMS.... The first of the nine discussions opens wide the door to welcome evolutionary views into the theology of the Missouri Synod. The second makes a mythological view of the fall theologically respectable. The third adopts the neo-orthodox view of miracles, which, while not denying them in rationalistic fashion, does openly question the factual correctness of the Biblical reports of such miracles. The fourth offers an oblique defense of “Gospel reductionism.” The fifth and sixth cast serious doubt on the orthodox view of the Messianic prophecies.... The whole treatment of the Old Testament Messianic hope appeared to this reviewer to play fast and loose with the statement of the Confessions that “the patriarchs knew the promise of the Christ” (Ap IV, 57)....

The last two discussions, if they are adopted by the Synod as its position, will forever make it impossible to recapture the kind of unity of doctrine that once characterized Missouri, for it gives men freedom to read into the Bible or out of the Bible anything that does not please the interpreter. The true inerrancy of the Bible is surrendered. The historical-critical method is approved and the “new hermeneutic” is accepted.

⁴⁴ Carl Lawrenz, “The Subversive Theory of Open Questions,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 68 (October 1971): 267.

⁴⁵ The full texts of *Faithful to our Callings—Faithful to our Lord* parts 1 and 2 are available at [Faithful to our calling, faithful to our Lord : an affirmation in two parts Part 1. \(ctsfw.net\) and Faithful to our calling, faithful to our Lord. Part 2 \(ctsfw.edu\).](http://Faithful to our calling, faithful to our Lord : an affirmation in two parts Part 1. (ctsfw.net) and Faithful to our calling, faithful to our Lord. Part 2 (ctsfw.edu).) For a summary, see *A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues*, 819–828.

With David we can only say, “How are the mighty fallen!” As a former member of the LCMS, this writer feels constrained to add, “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan.”⁴⁶

In July 1973, 329 resolutions were brought to the floor of the Missouri Synod Convention in New Orleans, and more than 950 memorials were addressed to it. President Preus was easily re-elected on the first ballot, and his election was followed by 150 results favorable to conservatives, including synodical vice-presidents, secretary, treasurer, boards of directors, nominating committees, commissions, boards, and boards of control. The conservative element clearly won “the battle of New Orleans,” having asserted itself “in unmistakable terms as standing for the authority of Scripture” and having shown “a willingness to apply this theological stance to the problems afflicting” the synod. Wisconsin’s Prof. Heinrich Vogel cautioned, however, that “much will depend on the thoroughness with which these principles set down in the resolutions adopted at New Orleans are applied in the discipline which the responsible boards and commissions in the Synod must now carry out.” Both sides acknowledged that the synod was a “house divided,” but “neither is willing to concede leadership to the other.” If those not satisfied that the synodical leadership cannot gain control of the body, “they will have to separate themselves from it and join their forces with others of the same persuasion.”⁴⁷

Less than two months after the 1973 convention, more than 800 Missouri Synod members met in Des Plaines, Illinois, to protest “errant actions of the majority” and to form an organized “confessional movement.” The conference set in motion the legal incorporation of a national organization which would adopt the name “Evangelical Lutherans in Mission” (ELIM), a forerunner of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). The group’s stated purpose was “not to leave the Missouri Synod” but “to stay and work within” it. They insisted that they were “not schismatics and will not be responsible for schism” but would “continue [their] movement of confession and protest within our Synod.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Siegbert W. Becker, “Faithful to Our Calling—Faithful to our Lord,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 70 (April 1973): 131–132.

⁴⁷ H[einrich J.] Vogel, “The 50th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 70 (October 1973): 287–290.

⁴⁸ H[einrich J.] Vogel, “Evangelical Lutherans in Mission,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 71 (January 1974): 62–63.

Wisconsin's *Quarterly* contained a lengthy account of the tumultuous events in and around Concordia Seminary late in 1973 and early in 1974, including

- the suspension of Dr. Tietjen and the appointment of Dr. Martin Scharlemann as acting president of the seminary;
- the declaration by forty faculty members and a majority of the student body refusing to teach or attend classes;
- the board's dismissal of 45 professors and staff members from their positions;
- a meeting of more than 350 students who declared that they found it "impossible in good conscience to continue their education under the present Seminary Board of Control"; and
- the procession of students and faculty members walking off the Concordia campus, referring to their status as "exiles," and indicating that they planned to form a Seminary in Exile at facilities offered by Eden Theological Seminary and the St. Louis School of Divinity.⁴⁹

A summary of Wisconsin's reaction to Missouri's tragedy was provided by Seminary Prof. Joel Gerlach in Wisconsin's *Northwestern Lutheran*:

From our vantage point it appears that the action of the faculty majority was without justification. The constitution of the Missouri Synod makes the Board of Control, not the faculty, the responsible governing body of the Seminary. The faculty's mass action to force the Board of Control to submit to its demands was disorderly. If a professor serving under the jurisdiction of a governing board cannot in good conscience subscribe to its policies and directives, he is free to resign. But he is not free to refuse to do what he is called to do.

The Board's action on the other hand was inevitable. No other course was open to it. Either the Board as the governing body is responsible, or it is not. If it acquiesces to an ultimatum of its faculty, order is lost and anarchy rules.

Clearly there is a doctrinal issue involved. The controversy ought to have been resolved on the basis of that issue. Officials of the Synod complicated matters unnecessarily by including procedural matters and by attempting to solve the problem with diplomacy. We hope that the "moderates" in the Synod will not succeed

⁴⁹ H[einrich J.] Vogel, "Troubled Missouri," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 71 (April 1974): 142-144.

in beclouding the issue by shifting attention to procedural technicalities.

As members of a former sister Synod, we view the turmoil in Missouri with mixed emotions....

We are dismayed ... because a controversy among Lutheran Christians has been given so much play in the public press, sometimes even at the invitation and with the cooperation of the combatants. The world sees it and smiles smugly over our discomfiture.... We are dismayed because many of God's people are confused and confounded by it all, not knowing who or what to believe amid all the conflicting claims and counterclaims. We are dismayed because Concordia was for decades a symbol and a citadel of orthodox and confessional Lutheranism, and now she lies stripped of her former glory. We are dismayed also because the Synod with which we labored and toiled in fellowship for almost a century is now a house divided against itself.

Yet we are also hopeful because we have learned from Scripture and from history that turmoil is often prelude to renewal. We are glad that the malign cancer has been diagnosed, identified, and eliminated at least from one part of the body. We are hopeful that the surgery will have arrested the spread of the disease. And we are hopeful that the treatment, painful though it may be, will continue until the patient is healed. We are hopeful too that the Lord has given Concordia a reprieve....

Looking to the future, we wish Concordia's Board the help and direction of God's Spirit in restoring the authoritative "thus saith the Lord" to Concordia's once hallowed halls. We wish Missouri's leaders well in their continuing efforts to deal with teachers at other Synodical institutions who share the moderates' unscriptural view of Scripture. We hope too that Missouri's leaders will not succumb to the temptation to try to restore peace to their troubled church by attempting to reconcile irreconcilable views of the Bible within the Synod.... Scripture does not encourage us to sit down with those in error to try to find a way to live together in harmony without resolving the error on the basis of God's Word. Scripture urges us to speak the truth to them in love in the hope of leading them to repentance....

It behooves us all to pray earnestly and often for those in Missouri who share our view of Scripture. God bless their efforts to

establish and maintain the authority of the Word throughout their Synod!⁵⁰

The walkout was “front and center” at Seminary

That fall, the college class of 1974 began its instruction at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and there the issues surrounding the walkout became much more “front and center” than they had been in college. One survey respondent did not recall specific comments made by any of his professors, only a general mood of “sorrow and caution.” Others have more distinct memories of classroom discussions. One name mentioned repeatedly was that of Prof. Siegbert Becker, former Missouri Synod pastor and professor at Concordia Teachers’ College River Forest, who left to come to the WELS in 1963. One respondent recalled how he and his classmates “devoured class time” with Dr. Becker, who “had lived through the developing struggle” in Missouri and “was able to provide first-hand glimpses into the heart of the issues.” Frequently and “with great insight,” Becker spoke from his experiences “within the ministerium of the LCMS about the liberalism that had crept into that synod.” He seemed “always to remain in control of his emotions” when he discussed these experiences, yet one former student believed he could sense “the disturbed emotions that were percolating within him.”⁵¹

In particular, Dr. Becker excoriated Dr. Martin Scharlemann for “his role in allowing negative higher criticism to enter and even be encouraged at LCMS schools, seminaries, and congregations.” Becker expressed amazement that after the walkout, Scharlemann became the acting president of Concordia Seminary and was then considered part of the conservative minority. Becker had had lengthy dealings with Scharlemann before he left Missouri and remarked on Scharlemann’s transformed reputation as a conservative that “a leopard doesn’t change its spots.” At one particular encounter between the two, also present was President Behnken, who suggested that Scharlemann and Becker were simply talking past each other. Becker responded, “Dr. Scharlemann is saying the Bible isn’t the Word of God and I’m saying the Bible is the Word of God. We are not talking past each other.” According to Becker, Behnken replied, “The Missouri Synod cannot handle a bad press.” Students learned from Dr. Becker that “the core issue was the reliability and inspiration of the Scriptures.” Once commitment to the inerrancy

⁵⁰ Joel C. Gerlach, “Phoenix in St. Louis,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 61 (April 7, 1974): 106–107.

⁵¹ Survey responses 136, 132, 139.

and inspiration of the Scriptures was challenged and then abandoned, “there were no restraints on the spread of false theologies and practices.” Becker also maintained that Missouri’s troubles were attributable to its position on the doctrine of church and ministry.⁵²

A second source of information was Herman Otten’s weekly publication *Christian News*, which was delivered in bulk mailing to the seminary dormitory every week. “Many of us read his newspaper from cover to cover,” said one, and it played “a big part in the awareness of and interest in events surrounding the walkout.” Another said that Otten’s “cut-and-paste articles about the walkout provided whatever I knew about it.” Yet some pointed also to a darker side of *Christian News*, which became more pronounced as time went on. “It became difficult to differentiate truth from fiction. Most of us eventually caught on and read his newspaper with a growing sense of discretion and care. A few classmates never caught on and later allowed his attacks to color their feelings toward the LCMS.”⁵³

The college class of 1974 was joined by some who had left Missouri. One wrote:

I could not believe that such gifted, highly trained Christian men could throw their Christian faith overboard for their own rationalistic conclusions. I could not believe that they could discard the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture as well as the supernatural, miraculous feats and deeds of the Almighty God.... Nor could I believe that such men who continued to confess to be Christians could resort to preaching and teaching such deceitful, erroneous rationalizations as Christian truths to the detriment and the destruction of innocent souls.... I felt hurt emotionally. It bothered me deeply that such a thing as had happened with the professors of Seminex could ever have happened in Christendom.⁵⁴

Others were affected more personally by the troubling news they heard.

My recollections are more [about] intra-family discussions during the tense period when Chairman JAO (as they used to call him) began to clean house. One of my uncles was summarily fired from his teaching position, although he had a call. He and some other members of my family were all ELiM supporters, and I had cousins

⁵² Survey responses 145, 149, 152, 132,

⁵³ Survey responses 145, 148.

⁵⁴ Survey response 139.

who attended Seminex.... My recollections are more about the vibe: the sense of injury at high-handed power moves; the sense of righteousness in suffering for the gospel. The mystified question those at Seminex kept asking was, "What are you afraid of? So what if Paul didn't write 1 Timothy? We still have the gospel." For my part, there was more a sense of sadness and loss, sadness at the discord in the family, and the loss of what had been a close relationship with "Big Sister" Missouri. I understood that as long as Seminex grads were being "certified" by district presidents for service, the great seminary battle solved little in terms of making the LCMS a unified body doctrinally.⁵⁵

Now that we were seminary students, we paid greater attention to our faculty's *Quarterly*, which provided regular updates on events in the LCMS and explanations of doctrinal disagreements.⁵⁶ When we browsed the seminary bookstore, we wondered if we could still trust

⁵⁵ Survey response 143.

⁵⁶ *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* between 1974 and 1978 contained the following articles addressing the ongoing state of the LCMS: H[einrich] Vogel, "Missouri's Troubles Continue," 71 (July 1974): 227–231; Vogel, "Missouri Looks to Anaheim," 72 (April 1975): 165–169; Vogel, "The Issues Before the Anaheim Convention," 72 (July 1975): 258–264; Carl Lawrenz, "Discordant Messages at Anaheim," 72 (October 1975): 326–329; Vogel, "The Anaheim Convention of the LCMS," 72 (October 1975): 329–332; Vogel, "What Happened Since Anaheim?" 73 (January 1976): 60–65; Vogel, "What is Happening in the LCMS?" 73 (April 1976): 139–145; Vogel, "Further Developments in the LCMS," 73 (July 1976): 217–220; Vogel, "Missouri Controversy Drawing to a Close," 73 (October 1976): 305–310; Siegbert W. Becker, "The Historical-Critical Method of Biblical Interpretation," 74 (January 1977): 14–35; (April 1977): 132–156; Vogel, "Recent Developments in the LCMS," 74 (January 1977): 60–63; Vogel, "Realignment in the LCMS," 74 (July 1977): 175–178; Vogel, "The LCMS Dallas Convention Nears," 74 (July 1977): 255–257; Irwin J. Habeck, "AELC's New Fellowships," 74 (July 1977): 258; Vogel, "Supplementary Report of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations," 74 (October 1977): 332–334; Vogel, "The LCMS Dallas Convention," 74 (October 1977): 334–336; Vogel, "Seminex Gets a New Name," 75 (January 1978): 64; Vogel, "Dr. John Tiejen Dropped from LCMS Clergy Roster," 75 (January 1978): 64–65; Vogel, "Grace Lutheran Church of River Forest, Illinois," 75 (January 1978): 65; Vogel, "Florida-Georgia District Group Criticizes 'Tendency to Separate' in the LCMS," 75 (January 1978): 65–66; Joel C. Gerlach, "AELC Ordains First Woman Pastor," 75 (January 1978): 66; Martin Albrecht, "Missouri and the *Lutheran Book of Worship*," 75 (April 1978): 149–150; Vogel, "More LCMS Pastors May Resign," 75 (April 1978): 150; Vogel, "Dual Memberships," 75 (April 1978): 150–151; Becker, "LCMS and WELS Representatives Meet," 75 (July 1978): 220; Armin Schuetze, "Concordia Concord Colloquium," 75 (July 1978): 220–221; Vogel, "The AELC Convention," 75 (July 1978): 222–223; E[dward] C. Fredrich, "From Seminex to Methodism," 75 (July 1978): 229; Gerlach, "Seminary Enrollments in St. Louis," 75 (October 1978): 310; Vogel, "Districts Act on Dual Membership," 75 (October

publications with “CPH” stamped on their bindings.⁵⁷ A few of us resolved to read new Missouri theological journals.⁵⁸ An old saying has it, “A burnt dog doesn’t only avoid hot stoves; it avoids all stoves.” It

1978): 310–311; Vogel, “Seminex Placements,” 75 (October 1978): 312; Albrecht, “The *Lutheran Book of Worship*,” 75 (October 1978): 312–313.

⁵⁷ During the 1970s, many CPH publications still received favorable reviews in Wisconsin’s *Quarterly*; for example: Oswald C.J. Hoffmann, *God is No Island*; Harold J. Haas, *Pastoral Counseling with People in Distress*; Leslie Brandt, *Can I Forgive God?*; Herbert F. Lindemann, *A Sick World and the Healing Christ: Sermons for Lent and Easter*; Karl A. Volz, *The Church of the Middle Ages*; Karl H. Dannenfeldt, *The Church of the Renaissance and Reformation*; Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: Study of Theological Prolegomena*; Carl W. Berner, *The Power of Pure Stewardship*; Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*; Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*; Paul A. Zimmermann, *Creation, Evolution, and God’s Word*; J.A.O. Preus, *It is Written*; Carl S. Meyer, ed, *Walther Speaks to the Church*; Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*; Rudolph Norden, *The Gospel—Love It, Live It*; Raymond F. Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*; Gerhardt Maier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method*; Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By*; Eugene F. Klug and Otto F. Stahlke, *Getting into the Formula of Concord: A History and Digest of the Formula*; Theodore R. Jungkuntz, *Formulators of the Formula of Concord: Four Architects of Lutheran Unity*; Robert Kolb, *Andreae and the Formula of Concord*.

Other CPH titles, however, received mixed or unfavorable reviews: Richard Koenig, *If God Is God: Conversations on Faith, Doubt, Freedom, and Love*; John W. Constable, *The Church Since Pentecost*; Robert H. Smith, *Acts*; Ronald C. Starenko, *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry*; David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures*; Oswald C.J. Hoffmann, *God’s Joyful People—One in the Spirit*; Henry P. Hamann, *Unity and Fellowship and Ecumenicity*; Henry P. Hamann, *A Popular Guide to New Testament Criticism*; Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*.

⁵⁸ In 1930, the Missouri Synod initiated *Concordia Theological Monthly*, which during the 1930s through the 1950s presented traditional synodical teachings. However, as Ralph Klein has noted, “In the course of those four decades, the theology of the journal became more and more ‘progressive.’” In 1972, *CTM* became the actual name of the journal, and its final issue appeared in 1974. With most faculty and students having exited to Seminex, the initials *CTM* were preserved in a new journal, *Currents in Theology and Mission*. Klein, who became *Currents*’ first editor, never called the new journal *CTM* because, as he put it, “I wanted to move beyond that nostalgic/backward-looking focus and present the journal for what it was: something new.” Ralph W. Klein, *Currents in Theology and Mission: A History*, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 43 (January 2016): 3.

Those who remained on the St. Louis campus launched *Concordia Journal* in 1975. Walter Roehrs promised that this *Journal* would be “a new publication in name only” but would maintain “the same editorial policy which [C.F.W.] Walther proposed for *Lebre und Webre* in 1855.” It would “not be a friend of the church, but a servant of the church” and would serve not “as a sort of arena for those whose aim is to attack the church of the true doctrine and its sacred institutions.” It is “the hope of all faithful members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that in spite of the prevailing relativism, pragmatism, skepticism, and modernism, the spirit of loyalty to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions” would continue to live and show itself in this new vehicle. Walter R. Roehrs, “L.u.W., C.T.M., C.J.,” *Concordia Journal* 1 (January 1975): 3.

seems to me that a large percentage of graduates in the years immediately after the break in fellowship with Missouri and during and after the walkout decided it was better to play it safe and talk to few people outside the WELS.

A key article was that of Prof. Edward Fredrich in spring 1977, "The Great Debate with Missouri."⁵⁹ He had lived through the most difficult years and events of the synodical disruption. The next year, 1978, during a class period in a course on American Lutheranism, Prof. Fredrich opened with the comment: "Because of the events that have occurred during the past several years, many of you may have assumed that the break with Missouri was over the doctrine of Scripture. But the split occurred over the doctrine and practice of church fellowship," and he cited the wording of the 1961 resolution. He was correct, of course, and he may well have clarified the thinking of many of us. Things remained that way, for me at least, until the summer of 1992, when I began graduate school at Concordia Seminary and spoke with graduate studies director Dr. Wayne Schmidt, who had been a WELS pastor for almost two decades before coming to St. Louis. "I loved Prof. Fredrich," Dr. Schmidt said. "He was my 9th grade religion instructor at Winnebago Lutheran Academy. But I believe he was wrong. Even though the presenting issue was church fellowship, many delegates in 1961 voted as they did because they were more concerned with what they heard what was going on at St. Louis regarding the doctrine of Scripture." Since that time, I have had at least a half dozen conversations with veteran WELS pastors who said, "I would never have voted to break with the Missouri Synod over fellowship. We were concerned about what was happening in St. Louis."

In reviewing the thirteen years of articles in Wisconsin's *Quarterly* journal and *The Northwestern Lutheran* between 1961 and 1974, I found

After an absence of one hundred fifteen years, Concordia Theological Seminary returned in 1977 to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where it was first established in 1846. The newsletter/journal *The Springfielder*, appropriate for the seminary during its stay in Illinois, would no longer do. Its new name would be *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, a name already in use for several years. *CTQ* also promised to be "no new journal" but "the same old *Springfielder* under a new name," continuing "the enumeration already established for the Seminary's periodical" under its previous name. *The Springfielder* had insisted "on a strict form of Lutheran Orthodoxy," and it was the editors' "fervent prayer" that the Confessional Lutheranism which characterized *The Springfielder* would serve as the hallmark of this new *Quarterly*. "Concordia Theological Quarterly," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 41 (January 1977): 1-2.

⁵⁹ Edward C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate with Missouri," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 74 (April 1977): 157-173.

no indicators of a split theological opinion in the Wisconsin Synod concerning the issues that tormented and divided Missouri—although some would quickly qualify that statement by reminding that reports in Wisconsin's theological journal and its members' magazine were “managed news.” A few pastors and congregations left Wisconsin for Missouri, and perhaps a few more went from Missouri to Wisconsin, or to the Church of the Lutheran Confession. But during the 1960s and early 1970s, as many in Wisconsin watched with sadness, there was also a growing recognition that this was no longer their battle. That battle had been fought in 1961, and they would not be fighting it again in 1974. Every year a few more people with cherished memories of a once heartfelt fellowship with Missouri went to heaven, and every year a new class of seminary graduates entered Wisconsin's ministerium with fewer ties to Missouri and few if any friendships there.

To the best of my knowledge, there was not in any Wisconsin publication a tone of *Schadenfreude* or smugness; no “I-told-you-so’s; no rejoicing at Missouri's plight. Instead, there were repeated expressions of sadness and encouragements to pray for its “former sister.”

Carl Lawrenz wrote: “We can only pray that the doctrinally concerned members and leaders of the LCMS may seek and find their answers not in human strategy and ingenuity but in the edifying Word, including its injunctions relative to error and persistent errorists. May they at the same time find strength in the precious Gospel message which is at stake, strength for clear and resolute confessional action.”⁶⁰

Siegbert Becker addressed the impending “doctrinal examination of the faculty of a large Lutheran seminary, which was also once a great Lutheran seminary,” that “as members of a church body which was once a part of the Synodical Conference, we recognize this as a matter that strikes close to our hearts.” He added, “Far from viewing this news, therefore, with Pharisaic pride, which thanks God that we are not as other men, we can only thank God that by His grace we have kept the treasure he has given us in grace.”⁶¹

Carleton Toppe wrote, “To those who loved Concordia for what she once was—Misericordia!”⁶² And in a longer reflection, Toppe wrote:

⁶⁰ Carl Lawrenz, “The Denver Convention of The LCMS, July 11–18, 1969,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 66 (October 1969): 283.

⁶¹ Siegbert W. Becker, “Academic Freedom at a Confessional Seminary,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 67 (October 1970): 227.

⁶² Carleton Toppe, “Misericordia,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* 58 (February 14, 1971): 51.

Many of us have not forgotten our days of brotherhood, when we worshipped in each other's churches, preached in each other's pulpits, held joint mission festival services and Reformation rallies, and sang together at *Saengerfests*....

We who recall what Missouri was and who cherish the faith that many in her churches still cling to, shouldn't we pray for her in her troubled hour? Pray that she may stand in awe of every syllable and letter that God has inscribed in His Book. Pray that she may place fidelity to eternal truth above concord among her churches, above prestige in her halls of learning, above filial love for the church of her fathers. Pray that she may remember the crown God gave her, and pray that God may keep her for that crown.⁶³

Beyond school days

The college class of 1974 became in most cases members of the seminary class of 1978 or 1979. They learned that the effects of Seminex extended well beyond their seminary graduation. "I had been assigned two mission congregations in a community formerly reserved for the Missouri Synod," one recalled. "There was a long-time LCMS congregation in town that had drifted toward a more liberal position, so much that the LCMS had established a daughter congregation nearby." Soon the daughter congregation also received a new pastor who was "very progressive." This new pastor shocked his congregation by giving communion to his two year old child on the first Sunday he conducted worship there. "I was often dealing with 'refugees' from the local Missouri Synod congregations, as well as answering many inquiries about how the WELS was different from the Missouri Synod. Many Lutherans in town were asking, 'What is going on here?'"⁶⁴

Another "encountered numerous occasions when ministries that had traditionally been conducted jointly by the WELS and the LCMS were still being disentangled"—social services, nursing homes, radio and media ministries, etc. After Seminex, "it became hard to know which LCMS we were sharing ministries with. Old line Missouri pastors were refusing to work with Seminex followers, and we were caught in the middle." He was invited by a college in the city to participate in a round-table discussion with a local ELCA pastor and a local LCMS pastor to explain to students the differences between the church bodies. The

⁶³ Carleton Toppe, "A Prayer for the Missouri Synod," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 58 (July 4, 1971): 215.

⁶⁴ Survey response 151.

ELCA pastor served a progressive congregation known for celebrating the Lord's Supper with bread, wine, and cheese. "It became obvious that I was the lone 'conservative' while traditional LCMS doctrinal positions were being attacked." Afterward, conservative LCMS students told him that what they were hearing was not what they had been taught.⁶⁵

As young pastors, some respondents took note of changes in their neighboring pastors. "The conservative LCMS pastors in my area refused to go to conference and commune with other LCMS pastors who were supportive of the walkout" and Seminex theology. "My brother, also a WELS pastor, was contacted in the early 1980s by a neighboring LCMS pastor." He told my brother that Missouri President Ralph Bohlman had encouraged pastors to study the doctrine of fellowship, but "there weren't any nearby Missourians he was eager to study with, so he contacted the nearest WELS guy instead."⁶⁶

The effort to restore Concordia has been greeted with emphatic approval:

I believe that under the leadership of J.A.O. Preus, for the first time in American Lutheranism a synod that had begun to abandon the Scriptures turned back to a more conservative, confessional, and biblically-based course. We thank God that in the years since the LCMS has clearly confessed its commitment to the Scriptures as the inerrant and inspired Word of God. It has faithfully committed itself to the truth and power of the pure gospel. It has publicly affirmed that the synod's official position on the Lord's Supper is that closed communion should be practiced. It has worked tirelessly in recent years to draw Lutheran church bodies around the world out of the Lutheran World Federation and into genuine confessional Lutheranism.⁶⁷

Another wrote, "I along with many in the WELS were delighted to hear that our former sister synod was able to remove from its seminary many professors who refused to confess and teach that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God." President Harrison told us that "the problem he and others face is dealing with the many pastors those false teachers trained for a generation who remained in the synod, and the doctrine and practice they taught and established in the churches they served throughout their ministries." With the apostle Paul, "I

⁶⁵ Survey response 145.

⁶⁶ Survey response 152.

⁶⁷ Survey response 132.

rejoice wherever the Gospel is preached, and that certainly applies to that church body with which we were one for nearly a century. Our guys seem to respect Matt Harrison, and he seems to respect us. Such friendships would not have happened in those walkout days or in the years shortly after them.”⁶⁸

A final respondent added:

My wife grew up in the Missouri Synod, and many in her wider family belong to its congregations. After the walkout and the resultant investigations and reports, no one questioned anymore why WELS had ended its fellowship with the LCMS. Instead, the Missouri members ask, “What will it take for us to get back to what we once were?”⁶⁹

A Contrast in Generations

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Prof. Robert Wendland wrote two years ago that the Synodical Conference “came into existence during a difficult time in the history of American Lutheranism, and it died under the same conditions.” The conference collapsed “when unity could not be maintained even after decades of fraternal instruction, admonishment, and pleading. Because of how the Synodical Conference came to an end, members of the Wisconsin Synod do not always look back upon it with affection and thankfulness.”⁷⁰ Prof. Wendland graduated from seminary in 1998, so presumably he was born in 1972, eleven years after the Split was declared. During their growing years, he and his classmates may seldom have heard kind words about the Missouri Synod, while experiencing an era of growth and optimism in the Wisconsin Synod. We had proved we could make it on our own. Missouri was likely irrelevant to their thinking. References to “our former sister synod” did not evoke much misty-eyed nostalgia for the past. Why take on a divided, distressed church body as a ministry partner?

In 1961, I was a 9-year-old, far more interested in following Warren Spahn’s quest for his 300th major league victory with the Milwaukee Braves than reading any news about a synodical split. I studied the sports stories and box scores in the two daily Milwaukee newspapers

⁶⁸ Survey responses 152, 136.

⁶⁹ Survey response 151.

⁷⁰ Robert E. Wendland, “Defense of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions: Remembering the Synodical Conference, 1872–1967,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 119 (Summer 2022): 225.

each morning and evening in August 1961 (*almost* religiously); I paid no attention to the frequent news reports at the very same time about two Lutheran synods moving toward separation. I was a member of the college class of 1974 and the seminary class of 1978. I and my classmates reacted initially with confusion at the reported changes occurring in the Missouri Synod we knew from our childhood, a confusion that turned to horror as we watched Missouri falling from grace so publicly. We frequently revisited significant events and decisions of the two synods, and we formed our own lists of “villains”—Scharlemann, Jaroslav Pelikan, Behnken, Martin Marty, Tietjen, Arlis Ehlen, Ralph Gehrke, Richard Jungkuntz, and others. That history did not feel like our history.

Prof. Joel Gerlach graduated from seminary in 1953. During the first decade of his ministry, most of the issues dividing the synods had been fully determined and were undergoing intense debate. The time had come to take a stand and to count the cost. Members of his generation severed cherished relationships, as family members, classmates, congregations, and whole pastoral conferences found themselves embroiled in a civil war. His generation inherited a dispute rapidly moving unavoidably toward its denouement, and the fallout of that dispute has remained with them for the rest of their ministries and their lives.⁷¹

But the generation before his grew up at a time when the term “sister synods” was a reality—although even sisters sometimes fight. Pastors who graduated from seminary in the 1930s and 1940s recalled their years differently.

In the Saginaw area, where I grew up, there was a very close relationship between the two synods. A good number of our classmates at Michigan Lutheran Seminary came from Missouri Synod congregations.... I came and went in [the home of a nearby Missouri Synod pastor] almost as though it were my own. The joint Sunday afternoon Lenten services held in the city auditorium regularly drew all the way from 2,500 to 4,000 worshipers. The farthest thing from anyone’s mind was that this could all one day come to an end.⁷²

Ministers met in mixed conferences, socialized, preached at each other’s festivals, [and] accepted calls interchangeably. As I

⁷¹ See Joel Gerlach, review of *A Tale of Two Synods: Events that led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri*, in *CHARIS* 3 (Summer 2003–2004): 43–45.

⁷² In Mark Braun, “Those Were Trying Years!”—Recollections of the ‘Split,’ *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 18 (April 2000): 25.

remember, we got along well. The Missourians were cordial lovers of cigars and good humor. They looked and talked like good Christian men, as indeed they were....

One thing that bound us together powerfully in love and fellowship was the then-famous Lutheran Hour, and preacher Walter A. Maier. At two o'clock on every Sunday afternoon it was broadcast on countless radio stations across the country and beyond, including pricey first liners like WGN in Chicago. In its palmy days the program was called, "Bringing Christ to the Nations," and nobody laughed. Everyone we knew sat down and listened.... Maybe the best part of every broadcast, though, was when the smooth as silk student choir of "Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri" immediately opened the hour with the lovely strains of "Beautiful Savior, King of Creation, Son of God and Son of Man." ... In those days the Missouri Synod stood for something, and thanks to the Lutheran Hour everybody knew what that was.⁷³

We pray and we work, and we long for the day when the LCMS, the ELS, and the WELS will be blessed by our gracious Savior with a renewed recognition of doctrinal agreement, a heightened sense of common purpose, and new generations of brotherly affection and unity and joy. LSQ

⁷³ Clayton Krug, "Shifts of Fellowship Teachings in WELS, 1860–1996; a Personal View" (paper presented to the Winnebago Pastoral Conference, Northern Wisconsin District, Wisconsin Synod, September 17, 1996), 5–6; in Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods*, 58.

The ELS Perspective

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THE FOLLOWING NARRATIVE OF THE EVENTS and decisions surrounding the dramatically tragic events in 1974 come from a perspective of a caring familial relationship nurtured and developed over the past three centuries. The “Seminex” we are mainly addressing in these lectures should rightly be called “Seminex II,” which differs from and follows the events in Northfield, MN in 1886—“Seminex I.” Although hardly remembered, the first “Seminex” has an historical context which has shaped the response of the ELS in the past, present and will no doubt impact the future as well.

19th Century ELS Relationship with the Missouri Synod

In a time very much like today there was a family of four sisters. They all shared the same mother. Her late husband, was the father of the two oldest, Hilda and Edna. Her second husband, was the father of the two youngest, Helga and Lena. Growing up, Hilda and Lena had developed a special bond, especially as Hilda assisted Lena in her troubled youth.

The relationship between the Norwegian Synod¹ (NS) and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS)² was well established before the 1872 formation of the Synodical Conference. In 1867 Pres. Herman Amberg Preus acknowledged Dr. C. F. W. Walther, Missouri's leading theologian at the time to be one of the cherished church fathers even for the NS. The LCMS incorporated in 1847, whereas the NS formed six years later in 1853 (with a failed attempt in 1851).

In the early years the NS seminary students were sent to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. “[I]t had become evident that the ‘mother church’ in Norway would not supply the young daughter-church with sufficient pastors to shepherd the ever-increasing flock of the immigrants to America.”³ It was not until 1876 that the NS established its own Luther Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin (later moved to St. Paul, Minnesota).⁴

In writing about the Missourians and expressing their theological connection with them, H. A. Preus made this observation in 1867:

We are fully convinced of their deep earnestness and rectitude in holy things. There was no superficiality or triviality in their discussion or in their social behavior. No one could associate with these people without feeling how earnest they were for their own salvation and welfare of their church. There was no put-on (affected) air

¹ The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) considers itself as the reorganized NS, having separated itself from it when the NS joined the newly formed Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NCLA) in 1917. Officially the ELS took this name: “The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church,” sometimes was abbreviated as NSA and unofficially was nicknamed as “The Little Norwegian Synod” whose foes derisively called it a plucked chicken. Its members referred to themselves as the “The Norwegian Synod” or even the “Little Synod” but then in 1958 changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).

² Originally named The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States, the name was shortened to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1947 on the occasion of its 100th anniversary.

³ *Faith of Our Fathers: 1853–1953*, ed. George O. Lillegard (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co.), 23.

⁴ “In 1856, the old Norwegian Synod, soon after it was organized, had sent pastors Nils Brandt and J. A. Ottesen to visit several Lutheran seminaries in the U. S. to see whether any of them would be suitable for the synod [to] train men for its...pastoral ministry. They came back with the report that Concordia in St. Louis would be suitable. Nils Brandt wrote in the trip report that at St. Louis they had not learned anything new: “We can truly say that we found the same faith in which we were raised as well as the same idea of how a Lutheran free church ought to be ordered.” Erling Teigen, “The *Koren Forbundet* at Concordia Seminary,” *Oak Leaves* 26, no. 4 (2022): 1, 4.

of sanctity or refinedly sweet talk, but rather a healthy, manly way of expression which comes from an undaunted assurance of grace alone in the person and work of Christ. They are for the most part living Christians who preach Christ and him crucified powerfully and successfully.⁵

Desiring unity and cooperation with fellow Lutherans, the NS was among the co-founders of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (Synodical Conference–SC) along with the Missouri, Wisconsin, and Ohio synods. But it did not take long before the NS's participation would need to come to an end, so that the Election Controversy that arose in her midst might not spill over and affect the other synods.

This theological controversy centered upon the scriptural position regarding the election of sinners unto salvation being the work of God alone. Human beings cannot take credit for it even in the least. When a sinner is condemned eternally it is of his own doing. It is not the choice of God who rather wants all people saved. There would be some pastors and congregations who would leave the NS to form what was called the “Anti-Missourian Brotherhood.”⁶

It did not help that the main antagonist originally came to the NS from the LCMS, and who would eventually challenge the writing of Dr. Walther, accusing him of being a Calvinist. His name was Friederich August Schmidt who “represented the Norwegian Synod on the faculty of Concordia Seminary from 1872 to 1876.”⁷

⁵ Herman Amberg Preus, *Vivacious Daughter: Seven Lectures on the Religious Situation Among Norwegians in America, Lecture IV*, ed. by Todd W. Nichol (Northfield: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990), 117.

⁶ Here is a recounting from the perspective of those who left: “Probably more important to the Norwegian Synod’s development than its controversies with other Scandinavian synods was its friendship with the Missouri Synod.... The association with the Missouri Synod demonstrates once again that doctrinal convictions proved stronger than the ethnic factor in the development of the Norwegian’s Synod’s sense of Lutheran identity. The continuing history of the Norwegian body indicates that in both theology and practice the Norwegians learned much from Missouri, although this alliance also cost them dearly in the eyes of the Norwegian laity, who were often profoundly suspicious of the German-American Lutheran synod.” *Vivacious Daughter*, 23–24.

⁷ Ibid, 212, fn 17. “Friederich August Schmidt (1837–1928), a native of Thuringia, served as a pastor of the Missouri Synod becoming a professor at Luther College in 1861. Schmidt was later Norwegian professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and professor at the Norwegian Synod’s seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. After breaking with the Norwegian Synod, Schmidt became professor at the “Lutersk Presteskole” of the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood in Northfield, Minnesota; professor at Augsburg

Schmidt objected to one statement in Dr. Walther's 1877 essay, where he wrote: "God has from eternity chosen a certain number of persons to salvation; He has determined that these must be saved; and surely as God is God, so surely these shall be saved, and none except them."⁸

Schmidt maintained that God chose a number of sinners to everlasting life based on His foreknowledge "in view of" the faith of those individuals. Walther considered this to be synergistic and thus contrary to Scripture, since this divine election was purely by God's grace.⁹ While this controversy did not find much support in the LCMS, there were those, like Pastor Muus, president of the Minnesota District of the NS, who as an "Anti-Missourian" agreed with Schmidt and garnered support among pastors and laity alike.

Eventually a third of the NS would leave (over the years of 1884–1888, 50,000 souls, 200 congregations, and 55 pastors) and this caused untold disruption in families and communities. Both Pastors H. A. Preus and J. A. Ottesen were deposed from their pastorates. The former was physically removed from his congregation on Good Friday, 1883. In 1886 the NS experienced what could be called Seminex I.¹⁰

Seminary of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church; and professor at the United Church Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota" (212, fn 8).

⁸ Mo. Synod, Western District, *Proceedings*, 1877, 24.

⁹ "Prof. Schmidt said: 'When of two ungodly persons only one is converted, then there must have been a difference in their resistance; for if not, both would be converted, or else it is not true that God wills equally as much the salvation of all....Dr. Walther... said: ...'If my nonresistance is the final and real basis, I am virtually my own savior, my redeemer, my source of salvation and on the Last Day I could call out to those who then stand at the left hand of the Lord: "You could also have stood at the right side, could have been every bit as blessed as I, had you only acted exactly as I did. I just didn't resist" But, no, it will not be so; rather we will then profess that we were saved only out of grace, on account of God's free mercy....'" Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, (Mankato: Board of Publications Evangelical Lutheran Synod), 29.

¹⁰ The Rev. Craig Ferkenstad included these notes of interest in his lecture at BLTS in the fall of 2024:

1885–(March) Schmidt discontinued his lectures, announcing to the students that he was broken down in body and soul and in need of a rest [*LSQ* 55:1.100].

1885–(October) Anti-Missourians met at (Red Wing) and resolved that the pastors who signed "An Accounting" should be deposed and District Presidents U.V. Koren (Iowa) and B. Harstad (Minnesota) should be removed from office. [Aaberg-37].

1885–(November) Schmidt announces that he would lecture six times a week. Only one student reported for his class, so it was discontinued and Schmidt's connection with the seminary ended [*LSQ* 55:1.101].

1886–Anti-Missourians establish a seminary at St. Olaf's School (Northfield) with Schmidt and Bröckman as professors.

Despite F. A. Schmidt's LCMS origin, it would appear that this did not dampen the NS's attitude toward Missouri. As often happens, false prophets come in sheep's clothing, so prior to the schism Schmidt caused, H. A. Preus gave him a glowing report.¹¹ On the other hand, looking back upon the tumultuous times in the 1880s, the third great theologian of the early NS, Dr. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren, writing in 1890 and again in 1905, made remarks of commendation for his Missourian brethren recognizing their support more than their influence.¹²

So, it can be noted that from the early days of its existence, the NS established a close bond with the LCMS in its shared confession and sound Lutheran conviction in both doctrine and practice. Even in its weakened state the NS retained its sororal affinity with the LCMS despite the ridicule undergone from those in her midst who called themselves "Anti-Missourians."¹³

1887-Synod discusses the "Anti-Missourian" seminary and by a vote of 230 to 98 resolved that it could not but consider this an act of opposition and a breach of the synod's constitution. The Synod also called upon them to admit their error and withdraw from the project [Aaberg-37].

1887-Prof. Th. Mohn (president of St. Olaf's) protested this resolution and 30 pastors and 27 delegates added their names to the protest [Aaberg-37, *LSQ* 55:1,101].

1889-Convention (Stoughton): During a private meeting, the Anti-Missourians resolve to withdraw from the Synod [Aaberg-37].

¹¹ F. A. Schmidt was at least one of the main authors of a 1871 document called "Denkschrift" which served as a defense for forming the SC in the first place and avoiding to unite with the other major American Lutheran bodies. (cf. Dec. 1, 1871 *Maanedstidende* [The semimonthly church paper of the Norwegian Synod later succeeded by *Luthersktidende*].)

¹² "Much has been said about the influence which our connection with the Missourians exerted on the Norwegian Synod. It is true, this influence has been of inestimable importance—although not in the way which a great many people who know neither the Missourians nor us imagine. We have not learned anything new from them, that is, any new doctrine or any other doctrine than that which we brought with us from the university in Kristiania (Oslo)—Some have accused the Synod learning from the Missourians to lay all the stress on doctrine and to neglect the life. In other words, they have accused Missourians and the Norwegian Synod of orthodoxy... These two synods have always recognized and confessed, however, that the danger of falling into 'orthodoxy' is ever present... This consists in making pure doctrine the goal, though it should be only the means to attaining the right goal. The goal should be a true, real, living faith. For this is the life in God. As a man believes, so does he live. *Faith of Our Fathers*, 99.

¹³ "President Peter Laurentius Larsen of the Norwegian Synod's Luther College, speaking briefly at the graveside rites on behalf of the synod, expressed 'the sincere thanks which we feel toward God and His servant, the dear, and now sainted Dr. Walther, for all the good which has flowed to us through him.'" J. Herbert Larson and Juul B. Madson, *Built on The Rock* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1992), 38.

1917–1934

While Edna, like Lena, considered Hilda a dear sister as well, Helga grew more and more antagonistic toward Hilda.

Even though the NS remained in fellowship with the members of the Synodical Conference, it did not rejoin it. The NS celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1903 and had now grown to the size it had been prior to the election controversy, around 140,000 members. At the jubilee celebration letters were read from officers of the SC and the presidents of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. “Professor Fr. Pieper and A. L. Graebner of the Missouri Synod were present in person and addressed the assembly, the former on behalf of the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, conferring the degree of Doctor of Theology on President V. Koren and Professor Laur. Larsen.”¹⁴

However, by the turn of the century there were signs of a desire to unite with the other Norwegian church bodies. There were “secretive” meetings that took place with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America [established in 1890, comprised of the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood congregations, the Norwegian Augustana Synod and the Norwegian-Danish Conference].¹⁵

In 1905, Pres. Koren having reached 79 years of age, the NS elected a younger man as the Vice President as his apparent successor, Dr. H. G. Stub (recently widowed son-in-law of J. A. Ottesen). At that same time Hauge’s Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America¹⁶ extended an invitation to all the Norwegian church bodies to conduct joint doctrinal discussions. The NS accepted the invitation. “Thus began the negotiations which eventually led to the Merger of 1917.”¹⁷

In 1910 prior to Koren’s death later that year, the NS adopted his “An Accounting”¹⁸ (1884) in which he clearly rejected Schmidt’s doctrine of “in view of faith”. However, Koren was ill and unable to

¹⁴ *Grace for Grace*, ed. S.C. Ylvisaker (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943), 93.

¹⁵ “In 1900 the district conventions of the Synod had issued an invitation to the United Church for a colloquy on doctrinal matters between their respective presidents and theological faculties. Two meetings had been held with the understanding that minutes of the discussion were not to be kept, nor was a report from the meetings to be published. [F. A. Schmidt was one of the colloquents]” *Grace for Grace*, 93.

¹⁶ A pietistic synod formed in 1876 named after a revivalist lay preacher, Hans Nielsen Hauge.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 95.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 173–188.

attend the convention that year. VP Stub, whether inadvertently or purposely, failed to read a paragraph from Koren's message in which he expressed no confidence in the progress of the doctrinal discussions with the other Norwegian Lutheran churches and urged that the theses proposed by Stub be accompanied by antitheses. Thus the negotiations among the union committees continued, so that by 1912 they reached what was known as "The Madison Settlement" (Opgjør).¹⁹

President Stub attended the meeting of the SC in August of that year seeking its advice in regard to the settlement. The SC appointed a committee to work with the NS comprised of W. H. T. Dau, F. Pieper and J. Schaller. The committee considered the Settlement unacceptable in light of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. However, the leadership of the NS was not of the same spirit as Preus, Ottesen and Koren, since they valued unity with fellow Norwegians and the practicality of the union over faithfulness to the teachings of Christ. They pushed ahead for a merger.²⁰ The appeals of the minority asking for more time to discuss it within the NS went unheeded and in 1917 the merger with The United Church and Hague's Synod was complete.

Prior to the convention of the old Norwegian Synod which would establish a union with two heterodox church bodies, a SC committee met with some of the leaders who would be part of the reorganized NS. Dr. Franz Pieper, former president of the LCMS, who served on this committee is quoted to have said to some of the ELS' founding fathers: "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." Then it was observed by an eyewitness: "One important question was whether to continue our own Synod or to join the Missouri Synod as a district. The committee advised us to rebuild the Norwegian Synod on the old foundation."²¹

Based on this advice, the decision was made that instead of merging with its long-time trusted sister synod, the remnant of the NS would reorganize at Lime Creek, Iowa, in 1918. They immediately took steps

¹⁹ It could also be noted: A committee of the NS had been for years working at compiling material for a new English hymn-book, but at the 1908 convention, the United Church sent a telegram accepting an invitation by the NS to establish a formal working relationship on this project. The Lutheran Hymnary produced in 1913 was considered a compromise Lutheran hymnbook to be used by all Norwegian Lutherans in America.

²⁰ "Dr. Stub used every opportunity to accuse the Synodical Conference of having changed its former position, using liberally the term 'New-Missouri,' which Dr. Schmidt had used more than three decades before." *Ibid*, 106.

²¹ John A. Moldstad, "Lest We Forget," *Lutheran Sentinel* 26, no. 8 (1943): 115.

to apply for formal membership in the SC. At the SC's 1920 convention it unanimously resolved to accept the NS as a member. They also established a NS professorship at Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota, for pre-theological students.²²

The re-organized synod set about structuring itself to do work especially in missions and education. In 1927 the synod bought a Ladies College campus in Mankato, Minnesota, that had been run and funded privately by members of SC churches. Bethany Lutheran College (BLC) became co-educational and offered pre-theological courses in addition to the general courses for the high school and junior college.²³

1935–1955

In her middle-age, Hilda began exhibiting worrisome symptoms of an infection and Lena was bold enough to confront Hilda with what she observed. Edna too noticed these signs and voiced her concerns. But Helga dismissed them, denying along with Hilda what was becoming more and more obvious to the other sisters.

Sadly, the cherished fellowship outlined above and enjoyed for almost nine decades between Norwegian and German Lutherans began to show signs of deterioration. It came from some of the old sources of controversy spoken of above.

²² At the 1922 synod convention at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Madison, the synod resolved to authorize "negotiations with the Missouri Synod through its committee to establish, if possible, an arrangement for a Norwegian professorship at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. As soon as some Norwegian synod young man had finished the course at Concordia College, St. Paul, the usual route to theological training was to enroll at St. Louis. Due to a severe shortage of pastors, no Norwegian professorship was established at Concordia, St. Louis; nevertheless, by 1946 thirty sons of the Reorganized Norwegian Synod ... were graduated from the Missouri Synod seminaries and three from Wisconsin's Thiensville seminary.

²³ By 1952 it had provided Christian day school teachers for the LCMS (15); WELS (5) and some for ELS schools. Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker, president of BLC, brought many notable LCMS instructors to the campus to teach upon the recommendation of some St. Louis officials: Walter Buszin—Music; Alfred Fremder—Music; Robert Hoerber—classicalist; Oswald Hoffman—Music; Carl S. Meyer—Historian (Dr. Erling Teigen made the reference that Carl Meyer authored several books, "but one which was of value to the ELS was a set of lectures at Luther College: *Pioneers Find Friends* which refuted the myth in the ELC that Walther beguiled the Norwegians and converted them to Missouri's dead orthodoxy." He showed that The Norwegians were confessionally orthodox when they came and recognized the like-mindedness of Walther *et alii.*); Paul Zimmerman—Science.

In 1935 the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) invited other Lutheran church bodies to enter into discussions seeking closer relations. The LCMS accepted the invitation; the NS declined.

Pastor J. E. Thoen wrote in “The Lutheran Sentinel” in response to these invitations:

Do the churches which have resolved to ask us to meet them through committees ask us for the reason of the hope that is in us? They do not intend to ask us for that. It isn’t necessary. They know already what the reason for our hope is. We have told them long ago and recently, and they have not regarded it as a good reason or sufficient. They insist we must add something, like they do. And we say we can not and will not add anything, for the reason of our hope is based entirely and solely on the merits of Christ, then they would say to us: “Let us forget about all that now. The times are so evil that we need to stand together, to work together against sin and unbelief in the world and cooperate in practical things for the welfare of the Lutheran Church.”²⁴

Then in 1936 the synodical essay “Unity, Union and Unionism”²⁵ was adopted and still serves as a synodical statement today.

²⁴ J. E. Thoen, “Be Always Ready to Give an Answer” *Lutheran Sentinel* 18, no. 6 (1935): 82–84.

²⁵ <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>. Also see Appendix C.

“In 1935, a series of six theses on Unity Union, and Unionism was prepared by a committee of Norwegian Synod pastors and submitted to the Pastoral Conference of their Synod in January, 1936. Essays on the several theses were later contributed by various pastors. These essays were revised and edited by said committee and submitted to the Pastoral Conference June, 3–4, 1936. The theses together with the essays were unanimously approved by the Conference. At the synodical convention of the same year the theses and essays were heard and discussed and ordered printed in the Convention Report. Said Convention Report was approved by the Synodical Conference at its 1938 Convention in Watertown, Wisconsin.”

“Preface to the 1967 Reprint” During the years since 1938 a number of events have taken place in the Lutheran Church to which the contents of this pamphlet are very apropos. It was just because such developments were foreseen, if men would not heed the admonitions of Scripture, that this pamphlet was issued in the first place. It is being re-printed, with just a few minor editorial changes which in no way affect the theses or the argumentation in support of them, as a demonstration of what happens when Scripture is set aside. *Milton H. Otto, Chairman, E.L.S. Doctrinal Committee.*”

Theses IV, V and VI dealt with the matter of inter-synodical committees, and in these theses the ELS restricted the use of such committees much more than Missouri gave evidence of doing in its resolution of acceptance of the ULCA and ALC invitations. In Thesis IV the ELS stated that it held that inter-synodical committees were useful for promoting Christian fellowship “when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact” (p. 39). After speaking of the Free Conferences of an earlier day, with their public discussions and detailed public reports, enabling the general membership of a synod to keep informed on the situation, the ELS noted that for the past three or four decades the practice had become more and more common for groups and synods to negotiate through small committees. These committees while not usually vested with authority to make final decisions for their respective synods, did have official standing, and this gave them a certain prestige which helped to shape popular opinion in regard to their work.²⁶

While the ELS does not reject such non-fellowship joint committees out of hand, it does insist that real evidence of unity has to manifest itself before jointly written documents of agreement in doctrine and practice could be produced. The ELS had learned a hard lesson about such duplicitous maneuvering from those “secretive committees” in the 1912–1917 efforts to achieve a merger.

It should be noted that the LCMS in 1932 adopted the “Brief Statement” which included its positions on major doctrinal issues. This was well received by all the SC synods as a faithful summary of their shared confession. However, in these joint committees the ALC representatives developed what was called a “Declaration,” which was acknowledged by them as disagreeing with some of the Brief Statement’s expressions, but which, in their opinion, were not disruptive of church fellowship.

By 1938 the ALC made a qualified (*quatenus*) endorsement of the Brief Statement viewed in the light of its “Declaration.” The LCMS also in 1938 stated that it found the ALC’s “Declaration” to be an agreement in the disputed doctrines of the past and present and made concessions on what they called “non-fundamental doctrines” like the Church and

²⁶ *A City Set on A Hill*, 137–138.

the Last Things (Antichrist, millennialism, etc.). In the minds of many in the NS this was a sign of what had been going on in some quarters of the LCMS in the past decade and clearly exposed a spirit of indifferentism and compromise reminiscent of the merger spirit in the NS 1912–1917.²⁷

Consequently, the ELS in the reports and actions taken at its annual conventions regarding its cherished sister synod, along with synod essays and pastoral conference papers reflected the many issues troubling the fellowship of the SC.²⁸

Here are some of the more significant events and actions²⁹ which led to the suspension of fellowship:

- The 1938 St. Louis Articles of Union were drawn up and accepted as the doctrinal basis for union with the ALC. It was found to contain the old error of the Iowa and Ohio synods on the central doctrine of justification, as well as certain unscriptural principles on church fellowship. Neither the ELS nor the WELS could give approval, and their pleas were neither directly nor satisfactorily answered.³⁰

²⁷ In the *Lutheran Sentinel*, the editor, the Rev. Norman Madson, took issue with the Lutheran Witness caricature of the Norwegian Synod's response to talks between the LCMS and the ALC. He commented that the Norwegians were appearing to be an obstacle to the efforts to bring about unity. “[O]ur synod had from the start, as far back as 1936, adopted a policy of free conferences in such or similar circumstances rather than of negotiations by committees in closed sessions, since the danger of compromise with error in the latter case was greatly to be feared. In view of all of this, was it a true and brotherly presentation of the actual situation when our Synod in this way was declared before friend and foe to be a hindrance in the path of a God-pleasing union?” Norman A. Madson, “A Necessary Statement,” *Lutheran Sentinel* 27, no. 5 (1944): 69–70.

²⁸ Synod essays: besides the triple “U” in 1936 by the Union Committee, “Our Heritage and Our Responsibility” by J. A. Moldstad; 1938 “The Clearness of Scripture” by S. C. Ylvisaker; “The Question of Non-fundamentals in the Light of Scripture” by S. C. Ylvisaker; 1942 “The Scripture cannot be Broken” by T. N. Teigen and “The Importance of the Doctrine of the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible” by C. M. Gullerud. In addition, these examples of GPC papers: 1937 “Unionism”—S. C. Ylvisaker; 1938 “To What Extent can Liberty in the Interpretation of Scripture be Allowed?”—G. Lillegard; 1940—“Is Agreement on Non-Fundamentals Necessary to Church Fellowship?” C. M. Gullerud. This pattern would only intensify as the years leading to its declared suspension with the LCMS, e.g., this 1953 GPC paper: “Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and breakdown of the Old Norwegian Synod” by C. Anderson.

²⁹ Cf. *ELS Synod Report* 1955, 43–45.

³⁰ A letter of reprimand by The St. Louis Pastoral Conference (LCMS) dated 6/5/1939 was sent in response to an open letter sent to the pastors of the LCMS by the ELS Unity Committee: “Your ‘Letter’ to the clergy of the Missouri Synod was given earnest attention by the St. Louis Pastoral Conference on May 22. It gives expression to your ‘fearsome concern’ for the future of the Missouri Synod. We believe

- The Saginaw Resolution of 1944 attempted to draw a distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship—a distinction which the Missouri Synod previously had never made.
- In 1945 the Chicago Statement appeared, signed by 44 prominent Missouri theologians. It marked a change in the commonly held SC understanding of Rom. 16:17,18. No satisfactory doctrinal discipline was exercised, nor did these signers ever retract their Statement.
- Then came the agreement with the National Lutheran Council, a federation of heterodox Lutheran synods, by which the LCMS entered into joint welfare work and joint armed service work with these erring groups. To these acts of unionism, as well as numerous other instances, the ELS had repeatedly protested, but to no avail.
- In 1950, came the Common Confession, the document between the LCMS and the ALC, which was hailed as a settlement of the past doctrinal differences between them and a sufficient basis for union. The ELS found it to be a document of compromise which did not in any way reject the errors of the ALC.
- At the convention of the SC in 1954, the ELS sent an urgent and prayerful plea petitioning the LCMS to take some action to remedy these many offenses. It was the hope of the ELS that the 1954 SC would influence Missouri and thus avert the threatened break in our fraternal relations.

Keep in mind, that the ELS pastors trained in St. Louis (see Appendix A) bore witness to the truths they were taught in seminary but now were under attack. Sadly, all these efforts over the previous two decades came to no avail. The LCMS actions and inactions as outlined led to the ELS suspending its fellowship with them in 1955.³¹ Two

that your Committee was prompted by brotherly love, as you state, but we also believe that a mistaken zeal has driven you to draw conclusions and to use expressions which endanger the high esteem and respect in which the brethren of the Missouri Synod have always held the brethren of the Norwegian Synod. Again, your letter gives evidence of an unwholesome spirit of suspicion and doubt directed against your Missouri Synod brethren." (ELS archives, signed by Louis J. Sieck, chairman).

³¹ "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 the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner. It is our firm conviction that we and those who stand with us represent the Scriptural principles and spirit of the Synodical Conference, and that it is the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod which has departed from them.

prominent names that will appear in the LCMS in the 1960s were active participants in this decision by the ELS: the brothers J. A. O. Preus and Robert Preus.³²

Pres. Behnken of the LCMS responded in the 1955 August issue of the *Lutheran Witness*: “We do not admit the charges. On the contrary, we emphatically deny them.” The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC)³³ in its July issue of the *Lutheran Herald* had these derisive comments: “Missouri will manage to struggle along even without fraternal relationship with the most reactionary splinter group of Lutherans in America.” The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in its July issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* commented:

Surely no one can fail to detect the note of sadness in these words over the loss of a precious and historic relationship. But also, no one can fail to recognize the sturdy conviction, the bold determination, the simple sincerity of this confession. The Norwegians are a small group, but they have met a major test magnificently. They have

“Therefore we wish it to be clearly understood that we have no desire to suspend fraternal relations with those who agree with us in our stand and who testify with us against these present errors and unionistic practices. On the contrary, we wish to continue fraternal relations with them and to labor for re-alignment of Lutherans faithful to the Lutheran Confessions on more realistic lines than those which prevail under the present chaotic conditions in the Synodical Conference.

“TO THIS END WE HEREBY DECLARE our desire to maintain and establish fraternal relations with those synods, congregations and individuals who are of one mind and spirit with us in matters of Christian doctrine and practice.” (*ELS Synod Report* 1955, 46.)

³² At the 1954 convention it was reported: The Rev. Wilhelm Petersen was on July 25, 1954, installed as pastor in the independent parish at Oklee, Minnesota, Vice-President J. A. O. Preus officiating. And on April 24, 1955, the Rev. Robert Preus was installed as pastor of the Mt. Olive Lutheran Church at Trail, Minnesota, and of the Cross Lake Lutheran Church near Fosston, Minnesota.

Already in a letter dated June 21, 1947 J. A. O. Preus wrote to Dr. Behnken:

“My brother, Robert Preus, who is a member of the Missouri Synod [likely meant the SC instead, because he was an NS member] and a recent graduate of the Norwegian Synod’s seminary at Mankato, Minn., has asked me, as a member of the clergy of the “Evangelical Lutheran Church”, to send you a list of the teachings held by the faculty of the seminary of the ELC which are not in accord with Scripture and Lutheran Confessions. He has informed me that by so doing I may be able to help the cause of the Truth and the cause of Lutheran unity on a truly Scriptural and Confessional foundation.” (*Built on the Rock*, 106–107.)

³³ Formerly known as the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America formed as a merger group in 1917, after which in 1918 the NS was reorganized and eventually became the ELS.

measured up! God grant that we do as well when the time for our decision comes.³⁴

In 1961 WELS also suspended its fellowship with the LCMS.

1956–1973

Admitted finally into the hospital, an awful stench of rotting flesh filled Hilda's room, even cutting through the attempt of masking it with a deodorizer. Lena would be allowed by Hilda's children to spend a few minutes periodically to visit. Lena would urge her to forsake the experimental treatment and follow the more traditional approach.

The ELS concerns did not end in 1955, nor did its examination of its own difficult course of action subside. The ELS met for convention six weeks after the LCMS convention in 1956 and there were some positive signs. For example: Missouri expressed its gratefulness for “every fraternal expression of concern and guidance in matters of doctrine and practice which had come to it from brethren in the Synodical Conference.”³⁵ But it was also noted disappointingly that the suspension could not be lifted at this time since Missouri’s response did not satisfy the objections raised by the ELS.

Internally the ELS struggled with two points that eventually would lead to controversies of its own in years to come:

1. While suspending fellowship with the LCMS, the ELS remained in the SC as a full participant along with the LCMS, and
2. The ELS participated in joint committees with the other synods of the SC, including LCMS to determine whether unity in doctrine exists (in essence contradicting the Triple “U” Thesis IV). Obviously in the minds of the majority in the ELS at the time, a suspension did not equal a clean break and therefore an ongoing working together with Missouri in the SC was still allowable.

The next few years at the ELS conventions these issues continued to consume much of its business, so that in 1959 the Union Committee made this observation in its report under the heading “Our Own Problem”:

³⁴ *A City Set on a Hill*, 195–196. For a more complete recounting of the ELS and LCMS’ relationship from the ELS perspective during the years of 1935–1955, the reader is encouraged to read pages 134–196.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 205.

On the one hand, we must be ever so careful that in seeking to help the Missouri Synod back on the old paths where we walked together for so long, we ourselves do not go astray. In all meekness and earnest supplication we must ask our heavenly Father to keep us in the old paths, as Jeremiah writes... (Jer. 6, 16).

On the other hand, we must also be on guard that we do not become possessed of a false zeal for the Word of God which causes us to have a spirit like that of Jonah outside of Nineveh. Jonah's example is also given in Scripture for our warning.³⁶

Things remained the same. The suspension of fellowship with the LCMS was still upheld, while the ELS actively participated in the SC with Missouri as a member. However, two pastors and two congregations resigned that year from the synod on account of what appeared to be an inconsistency. President M. E. Tweit called for a special meeting of the ELS General Pastoral Conference so that the internal strife over these matters might be settled.³⁷

In his message at the opening of the 1960 Convention Pres. Tweit said this:

As usual, we have, before us at this convention, reports of our work in the fields of missions, of education, charity and the like. We must give earnest consideration to these reports. But above all, we must seek a God-pleasing settlement of the strife which has overtaken us in regard to our membership in the Synodical Conference and our relationship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, so that we can with one mind, faith and zeal go about doing the work which our gracious Lord assigns to us—the work of bearing witness to Him by our Christian missions, Christian education, Christian charity and the like. May God have mercy upon us for Jesus' sake!³⁸

But matters were not settled at this time, nor in the recessed session conducted a few months later in 1960. Another four pastors left the ELS because of this. Things would again heat up in the next years as the

³⁶ *ELS Synod Report* 1959, 27.

³⁷ There were four papers given: “*Towards a Truly Evangelical Practice*” by J. Anderson; “*Have We Sinned by Remaining as Members of the Synodical Conference?*” by G. O. Lillegard; “*Have the Union Committee Members Practiced Prayer Fellowship in a Unionistic Manner?*” by T. A. Aaberg; and “*When is the Charge of Unionism to Be Applied to Brethren?*” by M. H. Otto.

³⁸ *ELS Synod Report* 1960, 9.

ELS carefully took steps to leave the SC while maintaining fellowship with other church bodies within it besides the LCMS.

Sometimes this break-up is mischaracterized merely as a difference on the teaching of church fellowship. But in 1961 the ELS Unity Committee publicly repudiated some notable LCMS theologians for their errors regarding Holy Scripture.³⁹ But perhaps the most shocking development for the ELS that year was the resignation from the synod by Dr. Norman A Madson, the long-time and highly revered dean of the Bethany Lutheran Seminary and well-respected voice in the SC. He and his wife joined a congregation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC). These were truly tumultuous times in the ELS.

In 1958 the National Lutheran Council⁴⁰ invited the SC synods to meet. Initially this invitation was rejected by all the members of the SC. But in 1961 Pres. Behnken of the LCMS did disclose that they were intending to accept the invitation. In addition, in 1961 the St. Louis Concordia Seminary faculty developed "A Statement on the Form and Function of Scripture" which revealed a serious breach in the unity among the SC synods since Missouri did not publicly repudiate the errors taught therein. By 1963 the ELS resolved to withdraw from membership in the SC and the WELS subsequently did likewise. Thus, the long-cherished union of the NS/ELS and the LCMS came to an official end, but this did not end the care and concern of many of the members of the ELS towards their older sister synod.

In 1965 there was an invitation to re-enter the Lutheran Synodical Conference which was declined by the ELS. President Oliver Harms in 1966 invited the ELS to resume discussions with the LCMS but this too was declined since the LCMS continued its discussions with The American Lutheran Church (TALC)⁴¹ and therefore the ELS considered this to mean the LCMS remained heterodox.⁴²

³⁹ Examples include Martin Scharlemann, Jaroslav Pelikan, Martin Marty and Carl Krekeler. *ELS Synod Report* 1961, 56–57.

⁴⁰ The NLC was a cooperative agency of many Lutheran church bodies in America. It was established in 1918 and was replaced in 1966 by the Lutheran Council in the United States of America (LCUSA). One of the eight founding church bodies of the NLC was the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.

⁴¹ This church body formed in 1960 and was comprised in part by the old ALC and the ELC.

⁴² A sticky situation also needed to be resolved since the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Slovak Synod) remained in the SC with the LCMS and was also in fellowship with the ELS. This was discussed annually at the ELS Conventions from 1965–1967 with the result that the ELS finally terminated its fellowship with the Slovaks in 1968.

Meanwhile the ELS and WELS established the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum in 1966.⁴³ At first it met annually but transitioned to biennially and continues to this day.⁴⁴

After President J. A. O. Preus was elected in 1969, he invited representatives from the ELS and WELS to meet with representatives of Missouri. The main topic was the 1969 declaration of fellowship of the LCMS with the TALC. At its 1970 convention the ELS expressed on the one hand its regret that this indicated the continued devaluation of Church fellowship in the LCMS, but on the other its gratitude that there were a growing number in the LCMS who wished to be faithful to the Lutheran Confessions.

President George Orvick and other ELS representatives attended the 1971 convention of the LCMS in Milwaukee. It was observed that the cleavage between the moderates and conservatives in the LCMS was continuing to widen with the hope of doctrinal unity in its own midst vanishing as well.

The Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL) was formed in 1971 which was comprised of pastors and congregations that left the LCMS over doctrinal matters. Pres. Orvick acknowledged working with this newly formed group and an overture to establish church fellowship with it in 1972 was considered. The synod expressed its readiness for fellowship with FAL, but by 1975 FAL disbanded and the majority of the churches joined the WELS.

During the previous decades, even before the 1963 break, leading up to Seminex II, the ELS did participate in Lutheran Free Conferences on a regular basis, some initiated by LCMS men, and some by ELS and WELS.⁴⁵

In 1972, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the SC, Pastor J. N. Petersen delivered the essay entitled: "The Synodical Conference—A Champion of True Lutheranism." Some of his

⁴³ For one year, 1974, FAL was part of this Forum along with the ELS and WELS.

⁴⁴ Its latest gathering was in Mankato on Oct. 21 & 22 and plans to meet again in Waukesha in 2026.

⁴⁵ The annual Reformation lectures hosted at Bethany Lutheran College began in 1965 and while technically not called a free conference, it has served in the spirit of a free conference to this day. It should also be noted that many ELS pastors and laymen also read a new periodical begun in 1962 known as *Lutheran News*, which then changed its name in 1968 to *Christian News*. While it contained helpful articles chronicling some of the theological aberrations taking place within the LCMS, the reader needed to be aware of sensational distortions that could mislead in regard to the very serious charges that were often made. The editor, the Rev. Herman Otten, was a long-time supporter of BLC, even sending his children to this institution of higher learning.

concluding comments make a fitting conclusion for our review of this troublesome time period:

By their withdrawal from the Synodical Conference, the ELS and WELS have been charged by some of acting hastily, impatiently, prematurely, even in a loveless manner. But anyone conversant with the history leading up to the rupture and final withdrawal will determine that such charges do not square with the facts. In fact, the more one peruses the historical developments, the more must one be constrained to marvel at the patience, forbearance, even fraternal love, exercised by the two synods in all the laborious negotiations.

What the future holds in store for all of us is known to God alone. Many entertain the hope of forming a new Conference of like-minded Lutherans, a new federation built on the same foundation as the former Synodical Conference. This may or may not come to pass. But many things pertaining to the future are known to us: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). The Gospel remains the Gospel in all its saving power. The promises of the Lord are yea and amen....

Two lessons especially stand out in the writer’s mind: Firstly, a church body once dedicated to the principles of God’s Word does not deteriorate or degenerate overnight. It is a slow and gradual process. So often the crack in the dike seems so minute and insignificant that it seems ridiculous to worry about it. But, if that seemingly harmless crack is not recemented quite soon, it gradually grows wider and wider until the point comes when it cannot be repaired—a new one has to be constructed. Secondly, the fact that harmony and unity prevailed so many years among the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference is ample proof that the Holy Spirit through the Word can and does unify. That a number of synods can speak the same mind and be guided by that Word in all things was clearly evident in the former Conference.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *ELS Synod Report* 1972, 40–41.

A Soliloquy: Personal Observations 1954–1983

Hilda's Grandson Is Eventually Adopted into Lena's Family.

At the tender age of nine months the NS suspended fellowship with me, though I was completely unaware of it. They then severed ties with me at about age nine while I was attending an LCMS Christian day school at which time I first expressed my desire to become a pastor. I continued my education at a prep school, Concordia College—High School, in Milwaukee, graduating in 1972.⁴⁷ Up to that point I had been taught the historical grammatical approach to the Scriptures.

In my senior year of high school, I had a professor who taught a doctrine course which was faithful to the teachings that I had learned from small on. But I was challenged along with the rest of the students, since this was probably the first time we were confronted with the paradoxical teaching of God's eternal election of grace. We spent an entire week of class on that one doctrine with the professor faithfully defending the truth despite the many objections voiced by the sinful reason of the students.

However, the following school year entering the freshman class in the junior college, I had the same professor for Old Testament Survey. Now, though, in this class, unfamiliar approaches were put forth, so that the stories of creation, the flood, Jonah, etc., were presented as myths. The theory of evolution was taught as a viable explanation for Genesis 1 & 2. It was obvious that this teacher was what was called a "higher critic." Why the sudden change? Or was there a change in him, so that when he taught doctrine, he was very Lutheran, but when he taught Scripture, he used a different methodology that broke from the old Lutheran tradition?

There was a connection between this professor and the senior pastor of my home parish. My parents' dissatisfaction with the pastoral care received combined with my experience in the classroom, my family found refuge in a WELS parish. My plans therefore changed for me, planning to attend the WELS college, Northwestern, Watertown in order eventually to enroll in the seminary in Mequon. But before attending the first day of class I had met the woman whom I knew I would one day marry and since students on that campus must remain unmarried, a different educational route presented itself. I could attend Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato while married, taking the required undergraduate courses and still possibly be accepted into the WELS seminary.

⁴⁷ Last graduating class from Concordia College—High School, Milwaukee campus was in 1973.

When I attended Northwestern College in 1973–74, I noticed the frequency of chapel sermons being directed against the errors in the LCMS, though I was unaware of the tumultuous events unfolding in St. Louis at that time.

My wife Lisa and I were married early in 1976 and I enrolled in Bethany the following fall. While completing the course work that was required to apply to the WELS seminary, I noticed several things especially among the theologically trained professors at Bethany. They had a deep sadness about them as they referred to the current affairs in Missouri. Also, what I was hearing, their theological language, was warmly reminiscent of the “old Missouri” of my youth. So, I decided to stay and graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1983. The adoption into the ELS was complete and by God’s grace happily remains to this day enjoying what would come to be known by me and many others as the “ELS Flavor” (see Appendix B).

1974–Present

Finally, after there was no choice for Hilda but to amputate, the radical procedure was performed. From that point on she started accepting the more traditional treatments. Recovery from the infection and rehab after the surgery were a slow process but over time it did occur with only residual effects remaining.

Historical Developments

In his September 1, 1972, *Report of the Synodical President* Pres. J. A. O. Preus stated:

While the issues are many and complex, the St. Louis Seminary faculty and the synodical President at a meeting on May 17, 1972, agreed that the basic issue is the relationship between the Scriptures and the Gospel. To put the matter in other words, the question is whether the Scriptures are the norm of our faith and life or whether the Gospel alone is that norm²⁴⁸

What had been festering away since the 1930s in the LCMS grew into an urgent life and death struggle in 1969 with the elections that year. J. A. O. Preus became synod president, John H. Tietjen was selected

²⁴⁸ <https://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/PreusJAOReportoftheSynodicalPresident1971.pdf>.

as president of the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and the declaration of fellowship with the TALC also passed. Life support kept death away until the course of treatment radically changed at the end of 1973.

A new seminary board of control was elected at the 1973 convention, and it soon suspended Tietjen from the presidency of Concordia Seminary in August of that year. The suspension was reversed but he was again and finally suspended in January 1974. The next day a group of students organized a moratorium on classes. A majority of the seminary's students voted on February 19 to continue their studies at an off-campus site with the faculty members associated with Tietjen as their recognized instructors. Immediately they and a large part of the faculty staged a dramatic walkout from the St. Louis campus, an event which received national media attention.

The Rev. N. S. Tjernagel,⁴⁹ the editor of the ELS *Lutheran Sentinel*, responded to the Seminex II walkout with an editorial in a subsequent issue. He challenged the national secular media which described this doctrinal conflict as being a power struggle especially on the part of Pres. Preus and mischaracterized him as being "doctrinaire." Tjernagel summed up the issue with these words:

The question now runs to the matter of the integrity of Holy Scripture and the validity of the Lutheran Confessions. The question now is whether the Word of God which brings us the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true in its entirety. We reject as unscriptural the view of our theological opponents that the Gospel is contained in a book, the Bible, which is not true in its entirety, a book that is partly fable and fantasy.⁵⁰

President Orvick's empathetic report to the 1974 ELS convention made reference to his realistic but optimistic observations at the 1973 convention of the LCMS held in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the events that had recently took place in regard to Seminex II.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Neelak Tjernagel was born and ordained in the ELS, taught in Missouri schools and was a highly respected Reformation historian. When things began heating up at St. Louis, Neelak returned to serve in the ELS.

⁵⁰ N.S. Tjernagel, "Editorial Briefs," *Lutheran Sentinel* 57, no. 5 (1974): 66–67.

⁵¹ "The terrible conflict in our former sister synod still rages on. The two theologies held by the opposing parties are simply beyond any kind of reconciliation for they involve the most serious fundamental matter, that of our very attitude towards the Word of God.

"It is quite obvious, therefore, that there can be no reconciling of these two views. We should continue to remember in our prayers and give all the encouragement

The love of the ELS for her confessional brothers and sisters in Missouri who were engaged in their great struggle can be traced through both the ELS presidents' (Orvick and Petersen) and the Doctrine Committee's reports from 1974 through 1988. For example, Pres. Orvick reported in 1975 about an informal meeting of five ELS representatives with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the LCMS:

It was evident that the LCMS leadership was trying to rid itself of the cancer that had invaded its church body, but that it was attempting to do this without destroying the body itself. And it seemed to be making some progress. But it was evident that the problems that have plagued them would not be solved unless their July 1975 convention at Anaheim speaks once again to the theological issues and indicates that the LCMS as a whole intends to make these decisions stick.⁵²

Again, Orvick reported having attended the 1975 LCMS convention with the vice president and editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel*:

The convention attempted to deal with the staggering problems which confront that church body. Great efforts were made to bring dissident district presidents and liberal leaders into conformity with synodical policy and constitution and to handle the problem created by the Seminary-in-Exile. The president was given the authority to declare the office of district president vacant in case such president refused to conform. At this point in time, four of such offices have been declared vacant and it remains to be seen what action the various districts will take. There continues to remain a wide variety

we can to those embattled conservatives who wish to remain faithful to the confessional Lutheran position. We cannot help but think of the anguish and suffering which is caused by this sad controversy. But this is not something- new in church history. The same was the case at the time of the Reformation, and, of course, in the history of our own synod. We live in the church militant and must not expect to have a life of ease and comfort even in the church.

"It continues also to be our hope and prayer that someday there may be a realignment of all true Lutherans who wish to stand by our historical and confessional position. There is still a large group of conservative Bible believing people in the LC-MS and if the day would come when they could be separated from those who have adopted another theology, and reunited with their true and former brethren it would be a wonderful day for the cause of conservative Lutheranism throughout the world." *ELS Synod Report* 1974, 24.

⁵² *ELS Synod Report* 1975, 52-53.

and latitude of theological opinion in the church body, ranging from conservative, confessional Lutheranism all the way to extreme liberalism. Let us continue to pray that the Lord may strengthen and uphold all who contend for the truth.⁵³

After attending the 1977 LCMS convention in Dallas, Pres. W. Petersen observed that “the conservatives seemed to be in control as evidenced by resolutions passed and the elections” but while there is a long way to go progress appeared to be taking place.⁵⁴ In 1979 there was another informal meeting with the CTCR with some ELS representatives. It was noted that there appeared to be conservatives among them although they continued to defend the Lutheran Council in the United States of America (LCUSA) as a helpful service organization and were reluctant to deal with its fellowship with the TALC.

Dr. Ralph Bohlmann was elected as the synod president in 1981 and the CTCR recommended to discontinue fellowship with the TALC. In 1983 Bohlmann proposed a new International Lutheran Association to replace LCUSA and invited the ELS to consider joining it. But the invitation was declined due to its approach to prayer fellowship. However, it was expressed by the ELS that it was grateful that fellowship with the TALC had been dissolved by the LCMS, since it was a union not based on doctrinal agreement in the first place. In 1984 a joint meeting of sharing information was suggested to both the WELS and ELS. This did not happen but Orvick did indicate that if there are free conferences arranged in the future, ELS men would likely participate.

Another informal meeting among WELS, ELS and LCMS representatives took place to discuss the early signs of the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), but it was noted that the matter of church fellowship still remained a big issue among them.⁵⁵

Again, there was a meeting among the representatives of the three synods with the LCMS reporting on its dialogue with the ELCA, Episcopalians, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches. ELS and WELS men questioned such dialogue since Lutherans themselves cannot even come to agreement. It can then be noted that in 1989 there

⁵³ *ELS Synod Report 1976*, 29.

⁵⁴ *ELS Synod Report 1978*, 33.

⁵⁵ In 1986 W. Petersen, now president of the Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was an ELS Doctrine Committee observer to the LCMS convention and unofficially addressed the convention informing the delegates of the ELS history and its confessional stance.

were meetings that eventually became formal among the ELS, WELS and the CLC, but which came to end in 1993.

Rev. A. L. Barry (a Bethany Lutheran College alum) was elected president of the LCMS in 1992. There was regular correspondence between Barry and Orvick through the end of 2000 and a meeting of these two men in early 2001. Sadly, though, Barry died in March of that year.

There are no references to the LCMS in the ELS synod reports from 1989 through 2004. In 2004 Pres. J. Moldstad reports Pres. Kieschnick, elected as the LCMS president in 2001, invited the WELS and ELS to conduct formal doctrinal discussions. Both synods declined.⁵⁶ By the request of Pres. Moldstad, the ELS vice president attended the LCMS triennial synod conventions starting in 2004, reporting to the president and the Doctrine Committee. One observation that was made is that the theological language, even its categories seemed foreign to ELS ears.⁵⁷ However, after President Matthew Harrison's election in 2010, the familiar Lutheran vocabulary was once again heard and appreciated beginning at the 2013 LCMS convention.

President Harrison and his administration have been dealing with the many unsavory vestiges of the Seminex II era, whether in their districts, the Concordia University system or synodical boards and its bureaucracy. It has been observed by an outsider with recollections of the old ways that these confrontations and changes have been accomplished in an evangelically pastoral fashion. Wholesome changes harkening back to "Old Missouri" are happening slowly and methodically. The prayers from ELS brothers and sisters urged decades ago by Presidents Orvick and Petersen are being answered in ways that at the

⁵⁶ The ELS Doctrine Committee concurred with the President's decision stating: "This is the historic position of the ELS as found in the document entitled, 'Unity, Union and Unionism.' 'We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact; or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know "the way of God more perfectly"' (Acts 18:26 [*Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. 43, Nos. 2 & 3, p. 213]); *ELS Synod Report* 2004, Doctrine Committee, 76.

⁵⁷ At the 2007 LCMS convention, in its resolution 8-04, it can be observed that while the convention approved the wording of "inspired," "inerrant," "infallible" and "revealed" in regard to the Word of God used in congregational constitutions and bylaws, they did not take the step of insisting that these terms be used with the threat of discipline if denied. The best that could be said is that congregations "be encouraged to use" these terms, which was slightly better than the original "may be used."

time seemed impossible. But as we know—with God nothing is impossible! Such prayers continue to this day.

Regular mention of the LCMS at the ELS synod conventions did not resume in the president's and Doctrine Committee's reports until 2011 with the emergence of an ELS "free conference" in Tacoma, Washington. The Emmaus Conference began in 2008. In 2011–2013 Presidents Mark Schroeder, Matthew Harrison and John Moldstad made presentations touching on topics regarding fellowship, issues that separate the synods, etc.⁵⁸ Also starting in 2012 representatives of the WELS, LCMS and ELS met for informal gatherings,⁵⁹ which have continued to the present.

The Ongoing Impact

The impact on the ELS of what had gone on with Seminex II can be seen in its convention essays, general pastoral conference papers, and circuit papers, leading up to 1974 and following. Topics such as "fellowship," "Scripture," "Gospel reductionism," "Church," etc. can be found in those years with concerns that similar errors may creep into the teachings and practices of the ELS.

It can be observed that since 1938, 74 pastors with LCMS backgrounds have joined the ELS and taken part in its development.⁶⁰ The lion's share, 72%, came in the '70s through the '90s, finding their theological sanctuary in the ELS. However, not all these pastors continued

⁵⁸ Once again meetings among the WELS, ELS and the CLC resumed in 2014 picking up where things had left off with the Doctrine Committee calling it a formal meeting. In 2016 a "Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship" was produced and accepted by WELS and ELS. At the CLC 2021 Convention the joint statement was declined to be adopted. The CLC put forth three conditions for discussions to continue, both the WELS and ELS could not comply, therefore discussions have ceased at this time.

⁵⁹ Perhaps this is the 100-year fruit borne by the reorganized NS and Dr. Pieper's encouragement in 1917 not to merge with the LCMS (see Part II above).

⁶⁰ LCMS clergy have entered the ELS through the colloquy process either on their own to serve an existing ELS parish or with their own congregations entering the ELS as well:

- 1940s–6
- 1950s–2
- 1960s–5
- 1970s–8 (FAL–8; LCR–2) = 18
- 1980s–11 (LCR–1) = 12
- 1990s–24
- 2000s–3
- 2010s–3

with the ELS. Some returned to the LCMS, some moved to the WELS, and others went elsewhere. The ELS has been vigilant, but nevertheless cordial to these “newcomers.” However, the decision of many of its confessional brothers who chose to remain in the LCMS and battle the errors in teachings and practice has been respected and yes, even encouraged through words and prayers as expressed by ELS leaders.⁶¹

False teachers employ deception as our Lord warned us—*they come to us as wolves in sheep's clothing*. It could be granted that some suffered from self-delusion but still produced bad fruit. For example, the professor I mentioned above who faithfully taught Art. XI of the Formula of Concord on “God’s Eternal Foreknowledge and Election” at the same time played games (a so-called “neutral scholarship”) with his approach to the doctrine of Scripture by the use of the “historical-critical” method. Therefore, if asked a simple question: “Have you changed your doctrinal position as sworn to in your ordination vows?” he likely would have answered: “No” with a qualified sincerity.⁶²

Here is how John Tietjen using slippery words wrote about it in 1969:

The purpose of creeds is not to enforce theological conformity but to serve church unity. Together we accept the creeds as statements of the truth of the gospel. Ours is a confessional unity. Within that unity there is room—lots of it—for theological variety. While we each go about the theological task of articulating the gospel for our time, we are united by our common subscription to the creeds as witnesses to the gospel proclaimed in the Scriptures.⁶³

One hot button issue that would plague the ELS as a direct result of Seminex II was whether the synod could be considered “church.” The

⁶¹ A reciprocal relationship with the LCMS also can be observed over the years so that two men trained at the ELS seminary ended up being presidents of one its seminaries: Robert Preus and Jon Bruss. Also, other men trained in the ELS seminary have ended up in high positions in the LCMS working with foreign missions.

⁶² “Higher critics did not understand the impossibility of maintaining faith in Christ apart from the authority of the inspired Scriptures. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, increasing numbers of those teaching in Missouri Synod classrooms of higher learning were trying to convince their students that the real understanding of the Word of God was only possible through a skillful intellectual quest to find the authentic Jesus and the authentic Word of God *contained within* the Bible.” (*The Lutheran Witness*, Feb. 2024, “It’s All About the Gospel ...Isn’t It?”, by Daniel Harmelink, <https://witness.lcms.org/2024/the-walkout/>).

⁶³ J.H. Tietjen, “The Gospel and the Theological Task,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40, nos. 6–7 (1969), 122.

LCMS had its hands tied by those who insisted that the synod had no right to exercise discipline in the case of suspected errant professors and pastors, only local congregations had that right under Matthew 18. In truth, the debate over the doctrine of the church in the ELS predates 1974 in its discussions with WELS, and in much of its internal discussions through competing essays and papers. Having a wide variety of pastors and theologians from various synods it became a heated discussion in the ELS. The question was finally settled in 1980 by the ELS adopting a statement on the “church.”⁶⁴

Similarly, the debate regarding the office of the public ministry in the ELS would also need clarification on account of the wide variety of theological backgrounds represented on its clergy roster. This would finally be settled with a statement adopted by the synod in 2005.⁶⁵

A direct result of the “Battle for the Bible” waged from the 1930s to the ’70s in which a rightful defense of the teaching that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, is that the understanding of its power was not often readily recognized.⁶⁶ An example in the early 1980s is of a former LCMS pastor at an ELS conference who made the point that both the Law AND the Gospel are the means of grace. When challenged—pointing out that only the Gospel is the means of grace,⁶⁷ not only did the speaker seem befuddled, no others spoke up publicly in agreement with the challenge. However, it can be observed that this false understanding has virtually if not completely disappeared in the ELS today.

⁶⁴ <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/the-doctrine-of-the-church/>.

⁶⁵ <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/the-public-ministry-of-the-word/>.

⁶⁶ It would appear the battle concerning the formal principle of Lutheran theology, Scripture alone, its authority and reliability overshadowed the material principle. The material is the body of truth contained in Scripture which is believed and confessed by Christians. Justification by faith is the article of that body of truth by which the church stands or falls and this is “the strand on which all the pearls of Christian revelation are strung” (cf. F.E. Meyer, *The Religious Bodies of America* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961], 144–147).

⁶⁷ “When the Bible says that we are born again by the Word of God it is speaking only of the Word of the Gospel. The law is not a means of grace; it cannot incite faith; it can only kill. If the law leads a sinner to Christ, it does so only indirectly by showing him his lost condition, driving him to despair and thereby showing him a good reason for seeking Christ. Scripture is often spoken of as a means of grace, but this may be said by virtue of the fact that Scripture contains the Gospel, that the redemption in Christ is the heart and message of all the Scriptures; Scripture as such is not a means of grace, for all Scripture is not Gospel...The Gospel is a means of grace because it brings Christ Himself to those who hear it.” Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Edinburgh/London: Oliver and Boyd, 1955), 191–192.

Somewhat related, with the underappreciation of the Gospel being the power of God unto salvation, the Church Growth movement in the ELS was given undue consideration and even became influential in some quarters in the 1980s and '90s. God the Holy Spirit grows His Church, He gives the increase, through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament alone, not through man-made efforts that appeal to socio-logical methods.

While we must ever uphold the Lutheran principle that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ must predominate in our preaching, our study of the Holy Scriptures, along with every branch of Christian theology in its teaching and practice, Gospel reductionism is a real deceptive tool of Satan.

Gospel-Reductionism is the belief that the Scriptures are only authoritative because they contain the gospel. Everything that is not the gospel, or directly connected to the gospel can be thrown out at will. Although Luther believed that the gospel was the center of the Bible, he did not believe that everything in the Bible could be reduced to the authority of the gospel. God's law, as well as all the other articles of the faith (Trinity, creation, etc.), are present in the Bible and should be believed because Scripture is God's Word.⁶⁸

Gospel reductionism was a part of the Seminex II struggle and needed to be challenged. However, Gospel reductionism has been a charge falsely leveled at those who properly uphold the need for the Gospel to predominate in all that the Church speaks and does. Nevertheless, we need to be mindful that Satan wishes to deceive preachers, even well-intentioned ones, into the falsehood of Gospel reductionism.⁶⁹

In like manner an antinomian strain also surfaced among the liberal theologians in the LCMS. At first the previous matter was referred to

⁶⁸Jack Kilcrease, "The Authority of Scripture," posted August 20, 2017, <https://lutheranreformation.org/theology/the-authority-of-scripture/>.

⁶⁹ Dr. Kurt Marquart in his typical playful metaphors warned about this with this word picture: "To put it very crudely, the "formal principle" or "Scripture-principle" (that is, Scripture as sole authority, *sola scriptura*) is simply the door of the Gospel's hen-house. The door is there not for its own sake but precisely to protect the whole house. If it is gone, it would be foolish to say smugly, "O well, that was only the door—the rest of the hen-house is still safe!" Once the door is gone, the historical-critical fox is free to take whatever he pleases. The hen-house will be quite empty eventually, even if not after the first two or three visits!" Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), 125.

as the Law-Gospel Reductionism.⁷⁰ But in truth, Scripture in the minds of these theologians was reduced to the message of the Gospel noted above. At first the notion of God's Third Use of His Law, i.e., guiding Christians in the way of righteousness was eliminated. But in the end the Law of God was entirely judged unnecessary in the Christian's life.

This has not been a controversy in the ELS. But because it has been out there among confessional Lutheran circles since the 1970s, there again can be overreactions. Just as Gospel predominance is sometimes confused with Gospel reductionism, so, when it is pointed out that the three uses or functions of the Law are God's not the preacher's, an unwarranted cry can surface that this is antinomianism.⁷¹

However, do not misunderstand. While many of these theological debates and controversies arose in the ELS post 1974, they are not to be blamed solely on the LCMS's theological struggles. The ELS has had doctrinal controversies arise in its own midst, e.g., the Lord's Supper and worship practices.⁷² Be assured that the sinful natures of the pastors, theologians and laity alike in the ELS are all active and can be destructive all on their own—the undersigned not excluded. While many of the above false teachings and practices can be connected to those sad St. Louis events fifty years ago, the ELS is responsible for its own failures and foibles as it seeks to serve the Savior under His grace and forgiveness just as Missouri seeks to do the same.

Fifty Years Post Seminex II and Beyond

Lena and Edna's relationship with Hilda did improve over the years. However, Hilda's falling-out with Helga worsened over time to the point that communication between their descendants have become virtually nonexistent.

⁷⁰ Edward H. Schroeder, "The Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," April 1, 1972, <https://crossings.org/law-gospel-reductionism/>.

⁷¹ We are faithfully to proclaim God's Law in all its truth and severity and the Spirit alone will use it upon the Christian as a curb, a mirror and a guide when and how He wills. It needs no human manipulation to accomplish its divine purpose. Whenever Lutheran preachers talk about the Third Use of the Law as their own personal use, we need to be aware of the error of moralizing in sermons.

⁷² See <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/the-lords-supper/> and "Report of the Committee on Evangelical Lutheran Synod Worship—September 2011" <https://els.org/wp-content/files/worship/2011-Report-of-the-Committee-on-ELS-Worship.pdf>.

Hilda, Edna and Lena's Grandsons Have Resumed Conversing.

I am, of course, not a prophet. However, it was about twenty years ago I foolishly predicted in a Bible class that while homosexual marriage will eventually become the law of the land in the United States of America, it would not happen in my lifetime. Oops!—lesson learned. So how might the relationship between the two sister synods of old, the LCMS and the ELS, develop in the future? Only God knows, but He certainly desires that there be unity among Christian brothers as Jesus prayed in His High Priestly prayer (Jn 17:20-21).

The current annual informal meetings among the ELS/LCMS/WELS have been helpful to dispel some mischaracterizations that have been developed in the minds of many in all three synods since their separation sixty-one years ago. Various points of disagreement in teaching and practice have also been discussed. So, for example while all three church bodies taught and practiced the same in regard to church fellowship prior to 1944 and in regard to the role of women in the church before 1969, these and some other teachings and practices have changed in the LCMS since.⁷³

The WELS and ELS by God's grace work to preserve the old paths on which we all once walked together with Missouri. Under this same gracious working of God's Spirit, we continue to seek to be vigilant for the devil never lets up with his temptations to pride and self-righteousness.

President Moldstad over the years was teased by some for his insistence that these gatherings be characterized as "informal." But his sincere insistence was in keeping with the lessons learned by the ELS from her forefathers: those "formal" but concealed committee meetings that ended in merger of an ethnic unity not a doctrinal unity and the "formal" discussions by the LCMS and the ALC to establish a sentimental, but again, not a doctrinal unity. Remember, it was the ALC that held to doctrines contrary to those of the synods that made up the SC

⁷³ In its conventions from 2001–2010 there were resolutions to confirm Missouri's stance on close communion which received about 75% support, but now in the upper 90s. There still exists fellowship church bodies with Missouri that have a triangular relationship with the Lutheran World Federation associated with ELCA. It is also reported that there are charismatic congregations in Missouri that are being tolerated. But Pres. Harrison and his administration are working on addressing these and perhaps other confessional anomalies in an evangelical and pastoral fashion.

since 1872, and therefore caused the divisions and obstacles which led to the fateful Seminex II in 1974 (cf. Rom 16:17).⁷⁴

The ELS remains open to these “informal” discussions that are taking place and even desires her pastors, professors and laity to participate in non-fellowship free conferences. However, for things to change so that we might eventually enter “formal” discussions with the LCMS, there must be true evidence of unity.⁷⁵ Consider Thesis IV of the ELS doctrinal statement “Unity, Union, and Unionism”⁷⁶:

We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only: a) when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact. b) or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.”

Acts 18:26.

In the minds of some this may seem to expose a separatistic spirit on the part of the ELS. But it is our sincere intent to abide by the words of the Apostle in 1 Corinthians: “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10 NKJV).

The history outlined above should also demonstrate that the ELS with the Lord’s help has striven to fulfill these words of the Apostle to the Ephesians as well: “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience,

⁷⁴ In 2015 Pres. Moldstad gave this definition of informal vs formal meetings: “A distinction is made between informal and formal meetings. Informal simply indicates there are conversations to dispel caricatures, to better understand each other’s positions, and provide opportunities for encouraging toward a confessional Lutheran practice. Formal would imply among other things work by joint commissions on a common document to be drafted toward a presumed full restoration of fellowship. The informal meetings with the LCMS are helpful but not intended to suggest a restoration of fellowship between the former Synodical Conference bodies is imminent.” *ELS Synod Report 2015*, Pres. Rep., 31.

⁷⁵ During one of these informal sessions an LCMS official made the point that Missouri is not even in fellowship with itself which would preclude any serious discussions of being united with the ELS and the WELS any time soon.

⁷⁶ For the entire theses of “Unity, Union, and Unionism” see Appendix C, for the entire document see: <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>

bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1–3 NKJV).

It should also be noted that the ELS has found areas of external cooperation with the LCMS that have proven to be beneficial. For example: our three current seminary professors have or will have all earned their advanced degrees from the St. Louis seminary. Other ELS pastors and professors have done the same also at the Fort Wayne seminary. Still others of our pastors have availed themselves of pastoral renewal through the Missouri based DOXOLOGY program. ELS pastors and laymen have attended symposia and free conferences hosted by Missouri institutions. (Naturally, some of our clergy have also done further study at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and conferences of the WELS.)

What happened in St. Louis fifty years ago did affect the ELS, not only in regard to the three and a half decades that led up to the fateful day of Seminex II, but also its fallout which has reached Mankato and the congregations of the ELS. But again, keep in mind that the ELS was not just a hapless victim in all of this. There never has been, nor will there ever be a perfect synod that is without its own self-generated struggles and casual errors. However, we do intend to remain vigilant as best we can firmly in the grasp of the gracious hand of the Savior we have been called to serve. The devil still prowls around seeking whom he may devour through his lies and deceptions, which all attempt to rob us of the comfort and certainty of salvation in Christ Jesus alone. God preserve us all until the day of our Lord Jesus' return.

We rejoice that a spirit of wholesome reconciliation is active once again as evidenced by Hilda's grandson, Matthew; Edna's grandson, Mark; and that even Lena's adopted grandson is also allowed to join this cordial table talk. We sadly acknowledge that others in that extended family, like Helga's granddaughter, Liz, and her descendants are still creating new divisions and putting obstacles in the way that prevent a broader family-wide reconciliation—so it is in this broken world. It is hoped that the history of this traumatic estrangement which came to a head 50 years ago may better be understood with the fervent desire that complete reconciliation by God's gracious working may take place in generations yet to come. We know and trust that with God all things are possible, to that end we continue to pray and work.

While we former sister synods cannot in joint worship sing this song together yet, we know that many of Hilda, Edna, and Lena's

descendants with sincerity and truth sing many of these same words as they await the Lord's return to deliver them from this vale of tears.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide;
Nor let Thy Word, that heav'nly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

O keep us in Thy Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay!
Oh, may Thy mercy never cease!
Give concord, patience, courage, peace.

O God, how sin's dread works abound!
Throughout the earth no rest is found,
And falsehood's spirit wide has spread,
And error boldly rears its head.

And ever is there something new
Devised to change Thy doctrines true;
Lord Jesus! as Thou still dost reign,
Those vain presumptuous minds restrain;

And as the cause and glory, Lord,
Are Thine, not ours, do Thou afford
Us help and strength and constancy,
And keep us ever true to Thee.

Thy Word shall fortify us hence,
It is Thy Church's sure defense;
O let us in its power confide,
That we may seek no other guide.

Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary 511, vv. 1-2; 4-8⁷⁷

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⁷⁷ *The Lutheran Hymnary* 1913 #427; *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 1941 (SC) #292; *Lutheran Service Book* (LCMS), #585; *Christian Worship*, 2021 (WELS) #641; but not found in Helga's *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 2006 (ELCA); nor in its previous hymnbooks: *Lutheran Book of Worship* 1978; *Service Book and Hymnal*, 1958; *Concordia Hymnal*, 1932.

Appendix A

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First name</i>	<i>Home Cong</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Seminary</i>	<i>Grad/Ord</i>
Aaberg	Ted	Parkland, Wa	Bethany	StL, BLS	1949
Anderson	Einar	Fairview, Mpls, Mn	CSP & UM	StL	1930
Anderson	Paul	Beaver Creek, Mn	BLC	StL	1945
Branstad	Raymond	Center, Ia	BLC	StL	1943
Dale	Morris O.	Scarville, Ia	CSP	StL	1928
Galstad	Martin	Tracy, Mn	BLC	StL	1932
Guldberg	Gottfred	Holton, Mi	BLC	Springfield	1945
Gullerud	C. M.	Norseland, Mn	CSP	StL,	1932
Gullerud	Arvid	Norseland, Mn	DMLC	Thiensville	1947
Gullixson	G. A. R.	St Paul, Chicago, Il	CSP & StJn	StL	1931
Gullixson	W.C.	St.Paul, Chicago, Il	BLC	StL	1940
Harstad	Adolph	Parkland, Wa		StL	1926
Johnson	Iver	Parkland, Wa	BLC	StL & BLS	1948
Lee	Sophus	Northwood, Ia	CSP	StL,	1927
Madson	Juul	Princeton, Mn	BLC	Thiensville	1945
Merseth	Alf	Bagley, Mn	BLC	StL	1946
Mommsen	Lloyd	Cottonwood, Mn	BLC	StL	1937
Oesleby	Nils	New York, NY	Bronxville?	StL	1940
Oesleby	Christian	New York, NY	Bronxville	StL	1939

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First name</i>	<i>Home Cong</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Seminary</i>	<i>Grad/Ord</i>
Petersen	Joseph N.	Scarville, Ia	BLC	Thiensville	1945
Quill	Grant	Albert Lea, Mn		Springfield	1947
Runholt	Joseph R.	Cottonwood, Mn		StL	1927
Sande	Stephen	Scarville, Ia	Luther	Luther & StL	1920
Strand	Ahlert	Norseland, Mn	CSP	StL	1927
Teigen	Bjarne	Princeton, Mn	CSP	StL	1935
Teigen	Torald	Princeton, Mn	BLC	StL	1939
Theiste	Hans	Norway	California	StL	1930
Tjernagel	Neeklak	Saude, Ia	CSP	Thiensville	1932
Tweit	Milton	Starbuck, Mn	CSP	StL	1937
Unseth	Eivind	Waterville, Ia	BLC	StL	1937
Vangen	Luther	Clearbrook, Mn	BLC	StL	1944
Wosje	Carl	Volga, SD		Springfield	1963
Ylvisaker	Erling	Zumbrota, Mn		StL	1927
Ylvisaker	Paul	Zumbrota, Mn		StL	1928

Appendix B

ELS Flavor Document 2022

We in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are often asked why we continue as a separate American Lutheran Church body since in comparison with others we are so small. The answer has often been given that we have a distinct ELS Flavor that is cherished among us and is desired to be preserved. Prior to the last convention of the old Norwegian Synod which established a union with two heterodox church bodies in 1917, a Synodical Conference committee met with some of the leaders who would be part of our reorganized Norwegian Synod. Dr. Franz Pieper, former president of the LCMS, who served on this committee is quoted to have said to some of our founding fathers: "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." Then it was observed by an eyewitness: "One important question was whether to continue our own Synod or to join the Missouri Synod as a district. The committee advised us to rebuild the Norwegian synod on the old foundation." (Lutheran Sentinel, "Lest We Forget" by John A. Moldstad, Vol. 26, April 1943, p. 115.)

In 1961 when the ELS numbered about 75 congregations, a memorial was considered in the midst of the doctrinal disagreement in the Synodical Conference that the ELS merge with the WELS. The decision was to defer such action. President Aaberg, communicated with President Oscar Naumann, who responded:

Our Synod also once declined to be absorbed and, I believe, rightly so. There are distinct advantages to remaining an organizationally separate body. If we [ELS & WELS] were to merge, we would be one body, standing rather alone confessionally. As it is, we are two sister synods, one in doctrine and confession, mutually encouraging and strengthening one another in our common God-ordained calling. (Letter on file in the ELS Archives, from President Oscar Naumann [WELS]).

The Flavor of the ELS: "Lift Up Your Hearts—Your Sins Are Forgiven."

1. The ELS has a Gospel predominance.

This is evidenced in the synod's commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions which point to Christ and His atoning work for sinners. A proper distinction between Law and Gospel is sought in all activities and receives special attention in our preaching and teaching. Items of casuistry* are not legalistically resolved but evangelically. At times, this may appear as if pastors are not committed to the truth; it is actually evidence of patience,

and understanding that the people involved are sinners who need the Gospel. Pastoral care is not neat and tidy; it involves working in the dirt of sin, with other sinners. The Gospel must shine forth in such situations. Seeking and finding the lost while trusting completely in the power of the Gospel is a priority in the work of the ELS domestically and abroad. (**to discern the most valid approach when two seemingly competing biblical truths are being considered*)

2. The ELS has a non- hierarchical form of organization.

This flavor tends more toward a grass-roots approach due to the desire to ensure that pastors and congregations are involved in the decision-making process for their synod, and not relying on bureaucratic processes to provide the way. The synod has a long history of desiring knowledgeable and pious laymen and recognizing the autonomy of local congregations. The ELS ministerium desires to demonstrate both a high view of the office of pastor and an unpretentious manner in the care of souls as pastors and members of congregations historically have interacted with each other with gentleness and hospitality.

3. The ELS is a liturgical Lutheran church body with a traditional approach to the Divine Service.

This flavor is exhibited in a traditional, historical approach to worship which includes, but is not limited to, Norwegian influences on liturgy and hymnody. These influences are preserved with the publication of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (1996) which combined the traditions of the *Lutheran Hymnary* (1913) and *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941). Although there is a variety in worship through which congregations maintain their local customs, a healthy caution toward assumed improvements via innovation in liturgy and hymns has marked the regular worship of the synod.

4. The ELS prioritizes a Christ-centered liberal arts education.

This is demonstrated through the support of Lutheran elementary and high school education and also Bethany Lutheran College which readies individuals with the *“One Thing Needful”* to serve their Savior and His Church in various vocations. We also view our schools as vehicles by which we are enabled to reach students beyond the ELS with the Gospel (cf. #1).

5. The ELS is compassionate toward those who find themselves in difficult confessional situations.

Since her formation in 1918, the synod has welcomed pastors, congregations, and individuals from various backgrounds who have been left without a confessional Lutheran home. This also is demonstrated by the provision in the synod’s constitution allowing for individual membership in the synod. This compassion has made the ELS a “melting pot” of various backgrounds gathered around pure doctrine and practice. The ELS also acknowledges contributions

and insights that come from outside our synod (e.g., Reformation Lectures; devotional and educational materials).

We view the church's history, our synod's history, and our current circumstances through the lens of the theology of the cross, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18 NKJV).

By His grace, the Lord has kept the ELS steadfast in His Word and it was noted at our 75th Anniversary:

As a further reflection on the ELS flavor this was also observed:

A church body that finds as its highest priority the correct understanding and proclamation of the saving Gospel will never be a failure in the Lord's eyes whatever the outward circumstances of that church may be. The Savior's call has ever been to faithfulness, above all, faithfulness to His word of truth. (*Built On The Rock*, by Herbert Larson and Juul Madson, Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992, p. 72.)

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. ... 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." (*Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, "ELS: An Introspective" by Craig Ferkenstad, Vol. 59, No. 1 (March 2019), p. 150.)

Appendix C

Unity, Union, and Unionism

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

Thesis I

The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any, such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” Eph. 4:3, and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.

Thesis II

We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

Thesis III

Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.

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 on existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact. 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.

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.

*Norwegian Lutheran Church of America—Adopted 1938⁷⁸
Remains a Doctrinal Statement of the ELS today in 2024*

⁷⁸ In the 1967 edition it ends with this expression: "*Vestigia terrent.*"—"the footprints frighten." This is quoting Horace who was referencing an Aesop Fable "The Fox and the Sick Lion," about a lion hiding in a cave, who lured animals in order to eat them. When the lion asks the fox why she doesn't enter the cave, she replies "*sed me vestigia terrent, omnia te adversum spectantia, nulla retrorsum.*" "But the footprints frighten me; all of them seem to lead toward you but none lead back."

Rejection is No Proof of Failure

Matthew Moldstad
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LSQ Vol. 65, No. 1 (March 2025)

Greeting: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Text: *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. 20 He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth. And they kept saying, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" 23 He told them, "Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum." 24 And he said, "Amen I tell you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 But truly I tell you: There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut for three years and six months, while a great famine came over all the land. 26 Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in Sidon. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. 29 They got up and drove him out of the town. They*

led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way. (Luke 4:16–30)

Prayer: Lord these are your words and therefore they are the truth we ask that you would increase our faith through them. Amen.

DEAR FELLOW REDEEMED,

No one likes rejection, it can make us feel terrible unwanted, unloved, a failure. Maybe its a student rejected by his classmates. Maybe its a young man who asks a certain young woman to dance and she said “no.” Maybe its someone who applied for job of their dreams, but didn’t get picked. In all of these rejection certainly can feel like failure.

And what about when it comes to sharing the Gospel or speaking the truth of God’s Word. There are times we have tried and it wasn’t well received. There are times when people maybe have even gotten furious with us. In such moments we can feel like failures. But as we see in our lesson today, rejection is no proof of failure, just because people rejected the Word of God we shared doesn’t mean the it failed or that we are failures.

I. Rejected for doing the right thing.

Granted sometimes we are rejected not because we were sharing the Gospel or the truth of God’s Word, but because we shared it in an uncaring and unkind, maybe even arrogant and mean. If that’s the case, that’s on us. In those circumstances we rightly deserve to be rejected. But what about those times when we tried our hardest to act in the most caring manner and maybe even share the gospel but still were rejected?

If you think about it, Jesus did everything right in our lesson for today. While in the synagogue in Nazareth, he is called upon to read and given a scroll of Isaiah. He chooses his section wisely, it is a part of Scripture that speaks about him, the Messiah, and what does it say? “**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.**” It’s all gospel. Good news of salvation preached to the poor in spirit. Freedom for those captive to sin and death. Sight for the spiritually blind. Those oppressed by the world, the devil and their own sinful flesh, set free. The

Lord's favor declared on those who were once his enemies. Then he tells them that these words are fulfilled in their hearing, pointing to himself as the one anointed to do these things.

Jesus proclaims good news, gospel, nothing critical or condemning. And their reaction? We hear that they spoke well of him and were impressed by his "words of grace". So what was the problem? Why did they reject him?

The people begin to doubt. They wonder: "Could this really be true? After all this is Joseph's son, we've known him since he was a boy. He can't be anymore than a carpenter's son." To them Jesus was a ordinary man who grew up among them, with perhaps some skill at preaching. Some think he should prove himself by doing miracles as he had done in Capernaum.

So why didn't he? He knew that the people's demand for miracles wasn't coming from faith. They didn't believe in him as Savior, as the Messiah, as the anointed one. They just wanted to now see him do tricks.

Jesus goes on to make mention of Elijah's visit to the widow of Zarapheth where he caused her jars to fill with oil and flour, and Elisha's healing of Naaman's leprosy and he points out that these were not Israelites, but Gentiles. The prophets' own people had at various times rejected them and had little regard for what they said. But these, the widow and Naaman, were foreigners. And it's interesting to note they believed that the men they spoke to were prophets of God, and they trusted them even before one miracle was performed. The widow using her last bit of oil and flour for the Elijah and Naaman went down to the Jordan to wash. They followed the prophets' word, trusting the miracle would occur just as they had declared.

But what happens to Jesus? His own friends and neighbors from Nazareth reject him, they don't believe he is who he claimed to be. The get angry, not simply because he didn't do miracles, but because he pointed out their unbelief. The crowd is filled with anger and rises up against Jesus to throw him off a cliff.

Have you ever heard Christians say its important to be careful when speaking the truth. After all St. Paul encourages believers in Ephesians 4:15 "**[Speak] the truth in love.**" Some are of the mindset that the reason more people don't believe is that the church is not careful with its words, if it just took more care in explaining what the Scriptures say about sexuality and marriage, or abortion, or the role of men and women in the church or church fellowship, people wouldn't reject us, but accept the truth.

Is it possible that we speak the truth in a heartless way? Of course. Is it possible that we could take greater care with our words? Yes. But sometimes we are rejected, despite how eloquent, careful, and sensitive we were. But why? Doesn't God's Word work? Though God has declared that his word is powerful for salvation and he wants us to share it, he has also told us many will reject it and reject even Christ himself. Think about Jesus, He's not like us, at times we can be hot heads and bumbling idiots, but he always said the right thing he never sinned, he never was out of line yet he and his message was rejected by some.

II. Success in Failure

But it's that failure? Isn't the whole purpose of proclaiming the word of God so that people believe in Jesus as their Savior? As saint Paul wrote, "**Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)**" If the message is proclaimed and people don't believe that certainly seems like failure.

But the prophet writes in Isaiah 55, "**Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.**

God promises there that his word will not return to him empty, but will accomplish his purpose for which he sent it. The chief purpose is conversion and to lead people to come to the knowledge of the truth of their sin and believe in their Savior. But another thing it can do is expose the hardness of people's heart in the face of God's grace, testifying to God's goodness.

Have you ever rejected the word of God? To be honest there are times when we have. Maybe a parent, teacher, pastor or friend confronted your sin using God's Word. We didn't like the harshness of God's law that points out our sin and our self-righteousness or says things that run contrary to the views of society. Maybe it has even angered us. Why? It's because we find ourselves at variance with the word and it shows us that we are not living according to God's standard.

Maybe we like the parts of God's Word that condemn adultery or homosexuality or stealing or murder or blasphemy, because those things don't really touch on our sin. But what about the parts that talk about lust and drunkenness, anger and gossip, greed and self-control,

or require us to love our enemies and forgive those who sin against us. Those things hit home, those things can make us uncomfortable. Our sinful flesh gets angry, because the truth of our sin is exposed in us.

We see such things happening to the crowd that day. Jesus' exposes their motivations and he exposes their unbelief, and there is a visceral reaction. But the word is not without effect. It's doing what its supposed to do convict of sin, but sadly, instead of confessing their sin, in unbelief they rise up to kill Jesus and shut-up the one who speaks the truth and comes to be their Savior.

But that is not always the reaction, many hear the word of God and believe. Think of Peter on Pentecost Sunday, he bluntly told the people that **“Jesus the Nazarene was a man recommended to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you... 23 This man...you killed by having lawless men nail him to a cross. 24 He is the one God raised up by freeing him from the agony of death...“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”** Upon preaching this, we hear that the people were cut to the heart and they began asking what should we do? Peter answered them, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** and they did and 3,000 were added to the church that day.

So why don't we share God's Word more? I think part of it is we wonder if it would do any good. And that is a weakness of faith. Lacking trust in God that his promise is true that his Word will not return empty, but will succeed in the purpose for which he sent it.

Another part of it though is fear of rejection. We want to be loved or liked by our peers, and classmates and coworkers, and friends and family. **Matthew 10:32 “Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.”** We are so worried at times about rejection of the world in proclaiming the truth about God's Word, but what about Christ's rejection of those who refuse. That's terrifying and condemning.

But know this God that Jesus did come as the anointed of God, to preach good news to you, who are poor in spirit and desperately needing God's salvation. He was sent to declare freedom for you who are captive to sin. He was sent to give you spiritual sight to see your sin and your Savior Jesus Christ. He came for you oppressed by the world, and the devil's lies, and even your own sinful nature to set you free. To declare

to you that you are not God's enemy, but to assure you that God's favor is upon you in Christ. He has not rejected you, but accepted you as his own, not because you were so worthy or good, but by his grace, he saved you and made you his own and he wants you to join him in proclaiming the good news of salvation that you know to the world around you.

And when it comes to proclaiming God's Word and the effect it has on people, we leave that up to God. We are never a failure when we proclaim his word of truth.

Conclusion

Yes, rejection hurts, and can be difficult to deal with. But rejection, especially for proclaiming God's Word is no proof of failure. Even Jesus himself was rejected for proclaiming the truth and caring out his plan of salvation.

Instead remember that God has accepted you into his family and you can know you are his through faith in your Savior Jesus Christ. He has won for you forgiveness and life in his name, and he desires you to share his word in the world that he might carry out his good purpose through it. Amen. 

Sermon on Acts 4:13–20

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Text: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”* (Acts 4:13–20 NKJV)

IN THE NAME OF JESUS! AMEN! WE HAVE A HYMN that begins: “In Jesus’ Name” (ELH 4). The traditional Norwegian table prayer begins: “I Jesu navn—In Jesus’ name.” We often close our prayers, “in Jesus’ name.” The name Jesus is on our lips as Christians, because we belong to Him. He is our Lord and Savior. He is true God. He shows that through the miracle of becoming Man, through His wonderful healings and miracles, through His sinless life, by suffering and dying for our sins.

The name of our school—Bethany—comes from the story of Jesus visiting Mary and Martha. Our motto of One Thing Needful

refers to the gospel of Jesus. How would we respond, then, if someone demanded: “Don’t use the name Jesus anymore; don’t call yourselves Bethany anymore; don’t call yourselves Christians?”

In our text, Peter and John were threatened by the temple authorities “not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.” In a sense we see this happening in churches today where Jesus is no longer considered the only way to heaven. They have abandoned the saving truth. In the verse just before our text, Peter proclaimed, “There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Early Christians were also persecuted for their Christian faith. A generation ago, we could not have imagined such a threat in our society, but today is different. Christianity is ridiculed and mocked. It is seen as outdated and irrelevant to the “values” of the world today. But God’s values are enduring and eternal. And God’s promises are enduring and eternal. “Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Jesus is our connection to eternal life. Can we give Him up? Can we deny His name? We are His people, purchased, with His own divine blood, the “blood of God’s Son that cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

How did Peter and John respond to this “command” not to teach in Jesus’ name? They said: “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. ... We have to speak of Jesus. He is our only Savior.” Their faith urged them to speak when they were called upon, when they had opportunities to proclaim the Savior to those who needed to hear.

Peter was an impetuous person who rushed into things. John was more relaxed; perhaps he even seemed timid. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, His own disciple Peter denied Jesus three times. — Jesus forgave Peter, and now Peter speaks boldly.

Surely there are times when we too become embarrassed or timid to speak about Jesus. Maybe we even deny knowing Him or being connected to Him. But the Holy Spirit will give us courage to confess the name of Jesus, to give an answer when we are asked—to tell why we have hope in the midst of our earthly troubles, how we can have certainty of heaven in the midst of human doubt and worry.

Not all of us are bold to speak about our faith in every situation. Jesus forgave Peter who denied Him. He forgives us too when we fail to speak the truth in love.

Maybe we find excuses, thinking we don’t know enough, that we aren’t holy enough. But we know Jesus, and the Holy Spirit gives us the words to say. We know the truths of Holy Scripture. We know what

Jesus has done for our salvation, and that's what we need to say—in Jesus' name—to those whom God places in our lives—whether they are troubled by their sin, or angry with God, or confused, or even reject God. The Holy Spirit will use His power in the Word of God, through our simple actions and our simple words. God converts the soul; we do not.

The text says Peter and John were “uneducated and untrained men.” They simply spoke about Jesus. Jesus gave them the authority to heal the sick and perform miracles. These “signs and wonders” got people's attention, but it directed them to hear Peter and John's preaching by the power of the Holy Spirit. They spoke in the name of Jesus. They spoke of Jesus, crucified for all people, as the sacrifice for sin, risen from the dead, and forgiving all our sins.

Jesus' name is what we treasure because of who He is and what He has done. In Jesus' name, the Holy Spirit gives us strength to go on each day, to face challenges, and to have hope and forgiveness to share with our fellow sinners.

Some people proclaim Jesus by being preachers and missionaries in a public way. Others quietly go about their proclamation of the gospel by teaching their children, by regular church attendance, through prayers, through helping their neighbor in Christian love. We are all different parts of the body of Christ and each serve our own purpose in God's kingdom.

But to all of us God gives strength to confess and proclaim the name Jesus in our various circumstances and in our various personalities. “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” We have heard what Jesus has done. In Jesus' name we speak the truth in love—we proclaim Jesus' forgiveness—to ourselves, to our family and friends, in whatever appropriate opportunities God has given to us. God does the actual preaching and converting. It is His holy Word and His saving truth.

People may threaten us, may urge and command us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But we must speak of Jesus, who has forgiven us and saved us. We want this forgiveness and salvation for all people—just as God “wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” God grant to all of us, this forgiveness, this comfort, this certainty of salvation—in Jesus' name. Amen. 

BLC Chapel: Romans 8:31–39

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Text: 31 *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31–39 NKJV)*

DEAR FELLOW REDEEMED IN CHRIST,

“I don’t want to go through things that make me stronger but don’t kill me anymore.” I found that meme last year, and it makes sense to me. I don’t want trials, I don’t want sorrows, I don’t want struggles. I don’t want it anymore.

St. Paul points us to one of the psalms of lament, Psalm 44, “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps 44:22). We find ourselves in places of danger, in life situations that trouble us as we watch loved ones suffer, as friends and

family go through the fires of this life, as we experience disappointment, despair, dejection.

One author commented on Christian lament, defining it this way: it is **“experiences that seem to contradict what we believe... It is, after all, easy to discern the hand of God and to believe in His goodness when things go well. But it is hard, very hard indeed, to recognize His goodness and to trust in His provision for us when the bottom falls out of our lives.** It's hard to see His goodness when we are surrounded by darkness. That's when we need the eyes of faith most of all, eyes that see Him at work with us, bringing good out of evil and life through death” (Kleinig).

St. Paul was very much aware of the struggle of the Christian in a time of trial and persecution. He experienced in his own body the pain of suffering for the sake of Christ. Several centuries later, some of the worst persecutions of the Roman Empire would be directed against Christian pastors and people. One torture included taking out the right eye and cutting the ligaments of the left leg so as to permanently mark those who had the temerity to confess Christ. Some of those men were included among the 318 bishops gathered at Nicea in AD 325, where they physically limped, half blind, yet determined to confess the Christ, of one substance of the Father, and born of the Virgin Mary. Their bold examples of confession make our safe spaces for our confessions seem rather tame. I suggest that on Sundays, when you confess the Creed, do so with your head up, speaking in a bold voice the words that express your hope, your faith. I BELIEVE. And, as an aside, this is why I am little impressed by those pastors who make up their own creeds for use on Sunday morning. Give me a creed with blood behind it.

Paul does not leave us stranded in the realm of the contradiction of experience and promise, of suffering and God's forgiveness, grace, and mercy, of looking for goodness when the bottom falls out of our lives. Not at all. He states in words that deserve our learning by heart: “If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Paul puts this not in a conditional form, but as a rhetorical device. If God *is* for us? Well, He *is*, that's the point. “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” You don't have to wonder what God thinks of you. He didn't spare His only-begotten Son. And His Son did not hesitate to go up to Jerusalem, to go the way of the cross, the way He knew was the way of suffering. He did it for you.

Paul closes this chapter with the confidence of faith grounded on this Son of God, Jesus Christ. That is why he can confess: “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I began by saying I don’t want trials, sorrows, sufferings. That is true. I don’t. I don’t seek them. I don’t run to them, nor do I force my loved ones into them. But I know they will come. I know this because I know my own sinful flesh, I know the plans of this world, and I know the goals of Satan. None of these have my best interests in mind. But each of them, in their own way, help me. How? Because they force me to quit thinking I can handle these things. They force me to lean more and more on the promise of Jesus, the mercy and love that He shows a poor sinner, me. This is for you, too. The confident confession of Paul is meant for you, too; grow in trusting that nothing, nothing at all, nothing of Satan, or the world, or even your own sinful flesh, can separate you from God’s love. Why not? “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” No one. You are a conqueror of all that is thrown at you through faith in Christ. You do not lose. You win. That’s the promise, a promise not from just anyone, but from Jesus, the Son of God.

The hymn we sing today is one I have mentioned to my wife and family, and also to the congregations I served in north Iowa as one they will, God willing, hear at my funeral. It is a hymn of hope, that wonderfully captures the truths revealed to us here in Romans. “Why should cross and trial grieve me? Christ is near, with His cheer. Never will He leave me.” And He will never leave you. Amen. 

Book Review

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Book Review: Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation

Hansen, Collin. *Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2023. xii + 306 pp. \$26.99.

Bookshelves provide a window into the soul and mind. Quickly scanning a pastor's bookshelves, one can quickly determine his interests, influences, and theological development since he left seminary. That's what Collin Hansen allows his readers to do in his insightful intellectual biography of Tim Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and one of the most prominent evangelical pastors of the last several decades. Hansen narrates Keller's life through books, professors, pastors, and other influences which shaped Keller's life and ministry. This biography reminds its readers that every Christian life (and especially

that of a pastor) involves continual spiritual and intellectual development.

Timothy Keller was born on September 23, 1950, in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church in America. Different pastors yielded different emphases. A pastoral transition occurred while Keller was in confirmation class. The first pastor was relatively orthodox, while the second pastor was a proponent of the Social Gospel. Keller later reminisced that "it was almost like being instructed in two different religions" (9). The LCA congregation's liberalizing tendencies caused the Keller family to switch to the Evangelical Congregational Church, a conservative Wesleyan denomination which Hansen describes as legalistic.

Keller matriculated to Bucknell University and, like many college students in the 1960s, doubted Christianity. However, through studying comparative religions in college courses, Keller was struck by

Christianity's uniqueness, particularly its historical basis. Finally, through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Keller reverted to conservative Christianity. InterVarsity's small groups and intellectual bent matured Keller's understanding of Christian doctrine.

While at Bucknell, Keller was introduced to Reformed theology. Edmund Clowney, a professor at Philadelphia's Westminster Theological Seminary, particularly influenced Keller, providing a Reformed critique of the existentialism prevalent on college campuses and demonstrating that non-Christian philosophies fail to deliver what they promise. In short, Clowney showed that becoming a Christian did not require surrendering one's brain, a lesson reinforced as Keller digested the works of C. S. Lewis, J. I. Packer's *Knowing God*, and F. F. Bruce's *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Additionally, a local InterVarsity worker, Barbara Boyd, taught Keller how to study the Bible inductively, moving from a passage's broad theme to the nuggets hidden in the text's details. Through InterVarsity, Keller also met his wife, Kathy.

As a newly-minted Reformed Christian in Pennsylvania, Keller came under the influence of R. C. Sproul's Ligonier Valley Study Center. Modeled after Francis Schaeffer's L'Abri in Switzerland, Sproul, a Presbyterian minister and former philosophy professor at Gordon College, established his study center in rural western Pennsylvania as a place where people (particularly

college students) could live and study Scripture and Reformed theology. He provided an intellectual space where questions and doubts were welcome, expected, and answered. Sproul was famous for his "gabfests," a weekly open forum in which any topic about theology, philosophy, or the Bible was fair game.

Tim and Kathy Keller were heavily influenced by Sproul, who officiated their wedding in 1975. Hansen notes that "when [Keller] moved to Hopewell after seminary and later planted Redeemer in New York, Tim sought to replicate this kind of community inside the church—hospitable and evangelistic, intellectual and earthy" (64). Keller saw Ligonier as an evangelistic response to America's shifting religious culture. As Hansen writes, Keller believed that "the church would need to adopt the parachurch mentality and go to the doubters and skeptics, find the wounded and wandering. The church must become a place where doubters would be welcome, where questions would be honored, where critics would be answered alongside mature believers" (66).

In 1972, Keller enrolled in Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in suburban Boston, Massachusetts. A broadly evangelical seminary, Gordon-Conwell refused to situate itself within a confessional box. Faculty members espoused a variety of viewpoints within mainstream evangelicalism. Elisabeth Elliot, the widow of the martyred missionary Jim Elliot, taught at the seminary and, arguing against women's ordination, convinced Keller of gender

complementarianism. Roger Nicole, a conservative Reformed theology professor, modeled how to disagree without being disagreeable. The larger “battle for the Bible” debate engulfing conservative Protestantism honed Keller’s theological skills, cementing him as an inerrantist. Additionally, Richard Lovelace introduced Keller to the eighteenth-century Presbyterian theologian Jonathan Edwards, initiating a theological love affair which would last throughout Keller’s ministry.

In 1975, Tim Keller took his first call to a Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) congregation in Hopewell, Virginia. Keller adapted to his ministry context. His church reflected its working class surroundings, and so erudite reflections on Jonathan Edwards’ theology of religious affections or the intricacies of the Reformed confessions would not fly. Instead, Keller learned the ropes of pastoral ministry by living and serving side-by-side with his people. He attended high school graduations, “sweet sixteen” parties, notified families of deaths, and even had to identify the body of a member who had been electrocuted in a home accident (115). Hansen writes that Keller served his people “by showing up” (116).

At Hopewell Presbyterian Church, Keller grew as a preacher. Removal from an academic environment forced Keller to translate his learning into sermons and Bible studies which were accessible to congregants who largely never attended college. He learned that he needed to listen to the questions and problems raised by his congregants. “Keller found

that preaching fails to connect when it’s not answering questions. Pastors either became distant or abstract in their teaching, or they work out their own problems in the pulpit” (119). Keller introduced Sproul-style “gabfests” at Hopewell, inviting church youth in his family’s house to ask anything they wanted. Potentially running for hours, the “gabfests gave Keller a chance to develop his theological and apologetic acumen” (122).

In 1984, Keller left Hopewell to replace Edmund Clowney as a homiletics professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, where he quickly became a popular professor. The Westminster faculty were divided between “doctrinalists,” who emphasized Reformed orthodoxy above all else, and the “pietists,” who believed that evangelism required engaging deeply with the surrounding culture. Charting a “third way,” Keller “appropriated insights from every group, because he believed all of them contributed to a mature, biblical church” (152).

While on the Westminster faculty, Keller developed his theology of contextualization in conversation with fellow professor Harvie Conn. Hansen writes that “Conn prioritized connecting the gospel message to different cultures’ values and idols” (153). Theological expression is inherently contextual. For instance, the Westminster Confession, written within a seventeenth-century British context, neglected issues that twentieth-century Korean Christians would consider essential, such as proper modes of respect towards ancestors (153). Ultimately, “no

culture, including the West, can introduce us to the saving gospel without explicit divine revelation of Christ" (154). Conn also helped Keller understand the importance of evangelizing urban areas, especially due to their outsized cultural influence.

Keller soon had an opportunity to apply his ideas about contextual and urban ministries in 1989, when he reluctantly accepted a call to plant a PCA mission, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, in Manhattan. At this time, New York City's crime rate spiked and its population declined. While once a hotbed of religious revival and interest, the city, especially the downtown financial center, had grown overwhelmingly secular. Manhattan churches had not recovered from the "white flight" of the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, evangelicals had not fully abandoned New York City, and some of that remnant served as Redeemer's core group.

Keller, though, sought to gather de-churched evangelicals or round up Manhattan's small Presbyterian population. Hansen writes that "Keller wanted to recreate L'Abri as a local church for a strikingly secular city. At Redeemer, Christians were encouraged to bring their non-Christian friends. He met with those friends during the week to learn their objections, and he incorporated those objections into his sermons the next week. He added counseling insights to discern the issues beneath the questions" (194). Keller's evangelism was contextual. He listened to his target audience, intently and honestly, so that he could share Christ with them.

Keller recognized that, on any given Sunday, the church would be filled with Christians and non-Christians. Therefore, "worship and discipleship wouldn't happen separately from evangelism. Redeemer wouldn't code-switch its vocabulary between Christians and non-Christians. The Christian community itself would be the evangelistic program of the church" (197). Therefore, "Redeemer challenged both legalism and relativism, confronted personal idols as well as cultural idols as dead ends to self-salvation, and evangelized non-Christians while edifying Christians at the same time" (197). Knowing Manhattan's intellectual environment, Keller quoted from *The Village Voice*, *First Things*, and *The New Yorker* to connect with his congregation. He preached without notes, seeking to create an intimate environment even as he preached to hundreds.

Keller's apologetics flowed from his ministry context. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the rise of the "new atheists," Keller published *The Reason for God*, which, using classical apologetics, argued for God's existence. However, Keller shifted to presuppositional apologetics as the questions changed from God's existence to sexual ethics and theodicy. Keller's later books, such as *Making Sense of God* and *Counterfeit Gods*, focused on how non-Christian spirituality and ethics can never provide what they promise, and they are inevitably inconsistent. Keller leveraged the weaknesses of non-Christian philosophies in order to highlight Christianity's superiority and truthfulness. During his time in New York

City, Keller recognized that classical apologetics is better suited “to shore up Christian belief than convince skeptics” and therefore favored presuppositional apologetics, which met non-believers where they were at.

Hansen’s book was published before Keller’s 2023 death, but it provides a thought-provoking portrait of one of the most preeminent evangelical preachers and thinkers of recent times. For pastors, Keller’s ministry demonstrates the importance of translating theology from the pulpit to the pew. Keller did not “dumb down” his sermons. Listening to nearly any of Keller’s sermons dispels that notion. His sermons were intellectually rigorous and grounded in the biblical text. However, they were not filled with theological jargon, and they were not museum pieces. Instead, Keller met his audience where they were at, answered the objections he knew they had, applied God’s Law and Gospel to topple idols and resurrect dead souls, and did so in a dynamic and winsome way. His sermons were deep yet accessible, because Keller mastered the old adage that preaching

involves exegeting both Scripture and the congregation.

If one theme runs through Hansen’s biography of Keller, it is “context.” Keller was very aware of his context and adapted to it. However, one constant is his openness to questions. Keller was deeply shaped by R. C. Sproul’s Ligonier “gabfests,” and he modified that concept in his ministries in Hopewell and New York City. Whether he served in the Bible Belt or a post-Christian urban area, Keller recognized that believers and non-believers had questions, doubts, and concerns about the Christian faith, and he welcomed them. Keller believed in Christianity’s exclusive truthfulness, and his spiritual and intellectual confidence prevented him from assuming a “bunker mentality.” Instead, he felt free to employ a broad array of sources to expose the emptiness of non-Christian religions and highlight the Gospel’s beauty. Preaching and apologetics can be intellectually adventurous – and fearless.

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