

## Are We Experiencing the Lutheran Reformation Eve or Twilight?

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### 09:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. – Lecture 1

My thesis for this presentation is really rather simple. Here it is: It is a miracle that confessional Lutheranism exists in any form today. Humanly speaking, it should not. But by God’s grace it does. Thus, we see in the continuing existence of confessional Lutheran church bodies—with all of their challenges, limitations, and warts—evidence of God’s continued fulfillment of the promise spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against my church.”<sup>1</sup>

Now that we’ve taken care of that, let me spend the next several hours explaining what I mean.

The theme for the Twenty-first Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in 1998 was “The Lutheran Confessions in an Ecumenical Age: Approaching the Third Millennium.” As the Missouri Synod approached the year 2000, continued its long struggle with questions of identity and function within the larger North American Lutheran and Christian context. At the Symposium a rather strong note of uncertainty repeatedly manifested itself. For example, in the paper given by Professor Kurt Marquart, titled, “The Church in the Twenty-First Century: Will There Be a Lutheran One?” Dr. Marquart considered Missouri’s ambiguous institutional future. That was nearly twenty years ago now. But among Professor Marquart’s conclusions was the following very contemporary assessment of the church’s future:

Of course, “right doctrine and church” will survive—it is built on the Rock and cannot fail. The question is, will we? With us or without us, through us or despite us, God will see His “right doctrine and church” through. Shall we, by God’s grace, have a part in this survival? Will our long-suffering Synod and seminaries? The answers to these questions lie hidden in the inscrutable counsels of God. But as the mystery of the election of grace is meant not to paralyze us into inert passivity, but rather to nerve and steel us for the bedlam of the fray (Rom. 8:30, 31), so **too the mystery of the church.**<sup>2</sup>

Needless to say, however, the question has remained; indeed, in many ways it has grown more intense. Nevertheless, speaking from the vantage of the year 2016, confessional Lutheranism continues to exist, just as Dr. Marquart predicted it would—even if that existence is one largely defined by challenge and struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., “Reformation in New Lands and Tongues,” *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 2 (September 2015): 16-22.

<sup>2</sup> “The Church in the Twenty-First Century: Will There Be a Lutheran One?” In *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000), 181-182. Emphasis in original. An excellent forerunner to Marquart’s study appeared in George O. Lillegard, “Doctrine and Life,” in *Report of the Twenty-eighth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church* (July 3-7, 1945), 16-29.

At the same time, it was—and *is*—a very good question to raise, humanly speaking. Recall the context of Dr. Marquart’s remarks. 1998 was, after all, the tenth anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and ELCA celebrated that anniversary by bringing to conclusion through formal expressions of church fellowship, its long conversations with churches of the Reformed Tradition, the Episcopal Church, and, as part of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Roman Catholic Church. Documents like *A Formula of Agreement, Called to Christ’s Mission*, and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* mapped out a radically new future for the Lutheran tradition. We’ll return to these later, but I mention them now for the sake of introduction and setting the context.

While some in the ELCA celebrated this turn of events, others had a more cautious and even negative view of at least some of the developments.<sup>3</sup> In addition to Dr. Marquart’s paper, another well-known Lutheran (at least at the time), Pastor Leonard Klein, was given a challenging title for his presentation, which related directly to the conversations introduced in the preceding paragraph. The assignment was to speak on “Lutheran-Reformed-Episcopal Alliances: The Evening Twilight of the Lutheran Church?”<sup>4</sup> And notably, the title ended with a question mark. When the paper was published, the first part of the title was removed and the question mark at the end had disappeared. It was now simply titled, “The Twilight of Lutheranism.”<sup>5</sup> Despite its absence, however, the lurking specter of the question mark remained as Klein offered an interesting twist on the word “twilight.” “Twilight is nice,” he said.

I remember an old New Yorker cartoon of two aging monks looking at the sunset as one says to the other, “after all these years it still seems like cocktail hour to me.” [Twilight] is a pleasant time of day. Many are not morning people. Everybody gets drowsy after lunch, but there are few who do not love the sunset. The Jews were not wrong to begin the day then. At the completion of the day’s work there comes rest, relaxation, and recreation toward a new day. The church anticipates her feasts at sundown and sings with tired confidence “Joyous light of glory.”

Klein quickly tipped his hand on how Lutheranism could—indeed, should—be in its twilight in this meaning of the word.

If we were talking about twilight in this sense, this could be a very upbeat lecture. If the twilight of Lutheranism marked the completion of the vocation of the Wittenberg reformers and if the basic proposal prevailed that in the church all things should be done with care not to obscure grace nor to imply that the benefits of Christ come to us through

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<sup>3</sup> Edgar R. Trexler, *High Expectations: Understanding the ELCA’s Early Years, 1988-2002* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2003). One may see Trexler’s triumphalistic answer to Kurt Marquart’s *Anatomy of an Explosion* in Edgar R. Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions That Shaped the ELCA* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991). Trexler’s works must be read carefully, given their largely apologetic purpose.

<sup>4</sup> Pastor Klein later moved from the Lutheran to the Roman Catholic Church. See Kristin E. Holmes, “Married Lutheran Minister Becomes a Catholic Priest: His Criticisms of His Former Denomination Led Him to Convert,” [http://articles.philly.com/2006-04-15/news/25395018\\_1\\_pastoral-provision-catholic-priests-catholic-church](http://articles.philly.com/2006-04-15/news/25395018_1_pastoral-provision-catholic-priests-catholic-church), accessed March 13, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Klein, “The Twilight of Lutheranism,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 63 (July 1999): 221-34.

our works rather than through faith, that would be occasion for a true Sabbath rest. It would be the end of a hard day and the beginning of a new one. If the twilight of Lutheranism meant an end to the schism of the sixteenth century, at least of that part for which we bear responsibility, Lutheranism would have fulfilled its vocation and earned a good rest in a restored communion with the rest of the Catholic West and its patriarch.

As one who located himself among the “Evangelical Catholics,” it is simply natural for Klein to view such a twilight favorably. However, Klein went on to note that, in fact, circumstances in the ELCA would not allow for such an interpretation. Indeed, ELCA had, in Klein’s mind, taken an unhelpful and potentially destructive path from which it might not return.

But there is another connotation to the term twilight. This is the connotation implied in the title. With or without a question mark it is far more discouraging. This would be the twilight of a bad day’s work, the dissipation and waste of a cause, of labor, of genius. And the ecumenical directions of the ELCA force me to think in terms of that kind of twilight,...

This latter sense of twilight drove Klein to reflect on the challenges of the Lutheran tradition in the United States, particularly in light of the ELCA’s (then) recent declaration of fellowship with the Presbyterian Church USA, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. ELCA’s adoption of *A Formula of Agreement* had revealed four distinct streams in the larger Lutheran family according to Klein’s typology. First there was the “Protestant,” which he primarily links with the ELCA but also finds in the LCMS. It is the idea that the Lutheran Church is simply one Protestant church among many “denominations,” and not much more. Second, there is the more consistent Missouri approach, which he labels “Waltherian.” This perspective, which I suspect he would also find in the WELS and ELS, sees the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true visible church on earth and, therefore, unionism, not unity, is all that can be achieved short of full agreement in doctrine and practice. Third, is “Neo” Lutheranism. This, generally the choice of scholars and professional theologians, is fading into a general Protestant modernism, although holding on to rather more substance and protesting vigorously its differences from classic theological Liberalism. In the end, all of these options are lacking in Klein’s estimation, for they all see the Lutheran tradition as a distinct institutional reality. Finally, and instead, Klein posits a fourth type, what he calls “Evangelical Catholic.” This movement sees Lutheranism as “a reforming movement in the Church Catholic and a church only because it failed in its first go at reforming the Western Church.”<sup>6</sup>

For all of limitations in respect to Klein’s typology of Lutheranism, I must admit that I find his reflections on twilight helpful for our own purposes. For I have been asked to explore the theme: “Are We Experiencing the Lutheran Reformation Eve or Twilight?” Nearly twenty years down the path from Marquart and Klein, the question is still with us. And I believe it is absolutely critical to retain the question mark, if only to challenge ourselves. For, like any good historian, my first answer to this question would be another question; something along the lines of, “Well, it depends on what you mean. What do you mean?”

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<sup>6</sup> Klein, “Twilight,” 221-24. All typologies are limited of course, and most have as their purpose to make a point for the author’s position. As such, I’m tempted to offer my own, but at this point I’ll restrain myself.

How we answer the question depends on a lot of things. It depends on how well we know the Scripture and the Confessions; it depends on how well we articulate the teachings of Scripture and the Confessions in our particular context; it depends on how well we put the teachings of Scripture and the Confessions into practice; it depends on how well we know our own story so that we can learn from past successes and failures in order to confess and practice. And it depends, above all, on our gracious Lord. He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church—and He has kept, is keeping, and will continue to keep that promise.

And so I'm thankful for the topic and would like to explore it at this Emmaus Conference under the the biblical heading of Luke 24 — the account of the Emmaus disciples and their appeal to the Lord.

“But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.’ So he went in to stay with them.” (Luke 24:29 ESV). Please hear that again, this time from the NIV: “But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.”

I intend to explore my assigned theme under two parts. First, the evidence for the reality that we are in the twilight of the Reformation, that the end is coming upon us. Then second, that we are in the Reformation's eve, and that, after 500 years, we have a long road ahead of us, which will only end with our Lord's return. But it will likely be a rough road. The first part will be much longer than the second. The reason for that is simply that our reality is life lived in the church militant, and that means it is easier to catalog challenges than successes. And so, allow me to extend the analogy of the assignment just a bit. If it is twilight, the day has passed and the night is coming. If it is the eve, the preceding day has been preparation for the next. And—perhaps I'm being too much of the historian here—both are true, depending on the theological, historical, philosophical geographical, and cultural context in which one finds oneself.

So, first, evidence that we are in the twilight of the Reformation.

### **I. Stay with us, Lord, for “The Day is Almost Over” – Evidence for the Reformation's Twilight**

It is a miracle that confessional Lutheranism exists in any form today. Humanly speaking, it should not. And, again humanly speaking, it may not—at least in its present form—in the near future. It may be that “the day is almost over.” Isaiah 59 captures the human reality well: “We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight,…” (Is. 59:10 ESV)

To the human eye it is sometimes easy—perhaps too easy—to conclude that we have passed a point of no return or the shift of an epoch in the church's life.

...Did it not seem as if, in the later age of the rule of the Roman Anti-Christ, that the light of the truth might have completely vanished from the church? What a fearful night of

faith that comes from reason was finally brought over the church at the end of the last century! How seldom has the church ever lived in times when the light of the full, pure truth burned in her lamps, when thoroughly pure doctrine echoed from all her pulpits, and the writings of all of her teachers contained nothing but the Word of truth! – But what’s the reason for this? Truly not because there had not always been Christians who sought the full truth and thirsted after it! Oh no, in every age, even in the dark cells of the cloisters, there were countless precious souls who are as anxious as the disciples on the Emmaus road to learn the complete, pure truth, but whose eyes were closed as theirs, whose eye remained closed to it unto death.<sup>7</sup>

So wrote Walter in the early 1870s. It sounds like he is speaking in 2016.

One need only look to the demographic evidence regarding Christianity in general and Lutheranism in particular in the United States. All of the major Lutheran churches in North America are 1) aging; and 2) decreasing numerically. In addition to this reality, research is showing the “millennial” generation to be the least religious generation in America perhaps since the country’s founding.<sup>8</sup> According its “general summary” of 2013, the Lutheran World Federation had 142 member churches, 10 recognized churches and congregations and two recognized councils for a total membership of 72,268,329.<sup>9</sup> Those are definitely impressive numbers. However, when one begins to drill down into the data, a different picture emerges. First of all, of course, there is the continuing reality that, while many of the churches of Europe boast large numbers, actual participation in the weekly life of the church remains extremely limited. Thus, for example, while the LWF recognizes 35,853,001 members in its European partners—far and away the largest component of its membership—actual participation on any given Sunday would be generously stated at something around five percent of that total. However, the countries with the lowest church attendance are also the among the highest when it comes to two points: 1) baptisms and confirmations; and 2) per capita donations. As the Church of Norway’s website puts it:

A large majority of Norwegians (around 75 percent in 2013) belong to the Church of Norway and many people’s religious lives find expression in church rituals and holidays.

**Church attendance** An average of 62 percent (2013) of infants are baptised [*sic*] in the Church of Norway and around 63 percent (2013) of the young people are confirmed. The majority of weddings take place in church, and the great majority of funerals (90 % in 2013) are church funerals.

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<sup>7</sup> C. F. W. Walther, “Twenty-fifth Convening of Our Synod with the Word of Truth as the Good Foundation for Today’s Jubilee Festival,” in *Treasury of C. F. W. Walther*, vol. 7, ed. and trans. Joel Baseley (Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008), 115.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper-White, Macrina. “Millennials Are the Least Religious Generation Yet, And Here’s the Surprising Reason Why.” *Huffington Post*, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/27/millennials-less-religious\\_n\\_7452998.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/27/millennials-less-religious_n_7452998.html).

This story is based upon Pew Research. <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>, accessed March 23, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWI-Statistics-2013-summary-EN.pdf>, accessed March 19, 2016.

But merely going through the liturgical motions of religious rituals does not a true Christian make. No, I'm not downplaying the work of the Spirit through water and word, but if the life given in Baptism is not nurtured and fed, then it will not survive.

Take the case of Estonia as an example. Nominally a "Lutheran" country, it now is arguably the least religious country on earth. In 2011 the LWF numbered some 180,000 members in Estonia out of a total population of 1,294,455, about fourteen percent of the population. Yet, again, participation is significantly lower than that, earning the country the title of "Least Religious Country" in the world. But is this correct? It may very well be. For Christianity, now seen as the religion of the Danish and German colonizers, has given way to a strange paganism. "Well over 50% of Estonians say they do believe in a spirit or life force, however ill-defined," writes Tom Esslemont. At times Estonia just gets downright weird. For example, one "spiritual option" is called "Maavalla Koda" and numbers about 350 members.

For them earth spirituality remains intensely personal—it is all about how you relate to the living things around you: "The tree doesn't have ears. I think the question out loud in front of the tree. And then I feel somehow the answer be sent back." "So," [the interviewer asks], "you are actually having a conversation with the trees?" "Of course," says Andres. I tell him that I would love to have a conversation with a tree, but how, I ask, can I talk to a natural object? Ott explains that "the tree is a subject not an object" before telling me how the oak is judgmental while the rowan can be discerning at times.<sup>10</sup>

How very, very strange. It reminds me of the old saying, if you don't believe something you'll fall for anything.

That said, where the numbers of the LWF get interesting is in the Global South, where LWF member churches in Africa are growing quickly. Lutherans in Africa now number more than 20 million. All of which leads the LWF to conclude that the "LWF communion is growing."<sup>11</sup>

But is it? With participation in, for example, the Danish church, hovering at something like 2.5 percent, and other Scandinavian LWF churches averaging little better at some 3 percent, is it legitimate to conclude that LWF is growing?

A clearer picture emerges for our purposes if one considers the experience of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In 2013 ELCA had a stated membership of 3.9 million. This is significantly down from the 5.3 million Lutherans who joined together from the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) to form the ELCA in 1987. Simple math shows a 1.4-million-member decline—over 20 percent of its peak membership. Along with loss of individual members, about 1,500 congregations have left the church body, again, an over 20 percent

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Esslemont, "Spirituality in Estonia - The World's 'Least Religious' Country," BBC News, Estonia (26 August 2011), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14635021>, accessed March 21, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> "LWF Communion Is Growing," *Lutheran World Information* no. 02, 2014, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWI-201402-EN-low.pdf>, accessed March 19, 2016.

decline. LCMS Pastor Kevin Vogts speculates that should the ELCA membership losses continue at this rate, and the LCMS continue its continued modest membership decline, the LCMS could pass (strange as that may sound, given that both church bodies are declining) the ELCA in total membership by sometime in the 2020s.<sup>12</sup> While I have my doubts that this will actually occur, the trends are unmistakable.<sup>13</sup>

So how do the other Lutheran church bodies of the United States compare? The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) presently has a baptized membership of 2,097,258 members (2014).<sup>14</sup> The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) reports a baptized membership of 376,177.<sup>15</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Synod has about 20,000 members. In addition to these confessional church bodies, other groups, largely drawing their membership from among the disaffected of the ELCA, have emerged. The North American Lutheran Church (NALC) now claims 140,000 members in about 400 congregations, while Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), now lists a total of 859 congregations, of which 739 are in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

One reality for most of these church bodies, however, are shifting demographics among its members. In the LCMS, while one hears wildly diverging estimates, the average age appears to be somewhere around 59 or 60. It has been climbing steadily for some years and continues to be a cause of concern. Further, the membership of Missouri is largely white. Presently approximately 95 percent of the baptized members of the LCMS are white. ELCA is reportedly 97 percent white. In both instances—age and race—LCMS and ELCA are in a demographic of risk. Family size has decreased over the last half century to the point where, as noted by President Matthew Harrison, family size in the LCMS now mirrors that of the dominant culture. Smaller families mean fewer infant baptisms, which ultimately result in fewer confirmations. Given the attrition rate of post-confirmation in the LCMS, the picture is one of likely continue decline. I don't think I'm saying anything that is surprising to anyone here in this regard.

Where we see the impact of this downstream is in the institutions of higher education in the churches. While the number of students in the Concordia University System of the LCMS continues to climb almost yearly, the number of Lutheran students—and especially LCMS students—continues to decline. Further, the number of church work students continues to decrease, as well. Several years ago the number of pre-seminary students in the CUS system was dropping yearly at a rate of ten percent. That has stabilized of late, but the fact is, as the seminaries recruit, the number of students prepared by the CUS schools' pre-seminary programs is significantly smaller than it was even fifteen years ago.

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin Vogts, "Guest Article — ELCA Has Biggest Split in American Church History," <http://steadfastlutherans.org/2013/07/guest-article-elca-has-biggest-split-in-american-church-history/>, accessed March 15, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> I fully expect the ELCA to merge with some of its ecumenical partners, especially The Episcopal Church, as both struggle to maintain their existence in the face of plunging membership and donations.

<sup>14</sup> <https://blogs.lcms.org/2015/statistics-for-2014>, accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> <https://connect.wels.net/AOM/MCG/CongStatsReport/Documents/WELS%20Statistical%20Report%202014.pdf>, accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> <http://thenalc.org/history/>, accessed March 16, 2016; <http://www.lcmc.net>, accessed March 16, 2016.

What this might result in institutionally for the LCMS can be seen now in the challenges that the seminaries of the ELCA are facing. Several years ago Lutheran Southern Seminary became an arm of Lenoir-Rhyne University. Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary was forced to do the same as it affiliated with California Lutheran University.<sup>17</sup> At Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota—perceived by many as the strongest and perhaps the most “untouchable” of the ELCA seminaries—repeated deficits resulted in draconian measures: layoffs, buyouts, and the termination of programs.<sup>18</sup> The jury remains out on Luther’s future. Yet, perhaps most notably, the oldest Lutheran seminary in the United States, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (founded in 1826), just this year announced that it would be merging with its old rival, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (founded in 1864).<sup>19</sup> All in all, these are tough times for seminaries.<sup>20</sup>

But not only have demographic and institutional challenges manifested themselves in the Lutheran tradition, theological confusion abounds as well. It is no surprise to anyone that Americans—including Evangelical Christians and even Confessional Lutherans—are increasingly relativistic in their thinking. While a stunning 90-plus percent of Americans confess belief in “God,” the definition of that “God” is increasingly uncertain. While a large number of Christians affirm that they have a relationship—or at least believe in—a “personal” God, significant minorities within that 90 percent indicate that their god is an “impersonal force.” Amazingly, included among those who affirm god as an impersonal force are significant numbers of self-identified agnostics and even a fair number of atheists. Needless to say, simply stating “In God We Trust”—or not saying it—doesn’t say much of anything at all.<sup>21</sup>

Of more immediate concern is the continued increase of relativism, even among Christians. Recently I revisited an older study by George Barna, the noted analyst of cultural trends and the Christian Church. Barna, scanning the horizon of American society, did not offer an encouraging assessment of the current state of American Christianity, particularly for pastors striving to convince people of the absolute truth and moral rightness of Jesus Christ and His teachings. According to Barna, “three out of four Americans believe that moral truth is relative (the figure runs even higher among teenagers).” Even among Evangelical teenagers the number is distressingly high. Gene Edward Veith notes that somewhere around two-thirds of Evangelical teens believe that truth is relative. These days, people “are much more likely to allow their feelings to guide their moral decision-making than the Bible or external moral codes.” The

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<sup>17</sup> <http://ltss.lr.edu>, accessed March 16, 2016. <http://www.plts.edu>, accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Libby A. Nelson, “The Struggling Seminaries: Sudden, deep cuts at the largest Lutheran seminary illustrate the challenges facing theological schools across denominations,” March 29, 2013, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/03/29/luther-seminary-makes-deep-cuts-faculty-and-staff-amid-tough-times-theological>, accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> “Pennsylvania Lutheran Seminaries Declare Intent to Form ‘New School of Theology,’” <http://www.ltsg.edu/about-us/news/2016/newschool>, accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> G. Jeffrey MacDonald, “Oldest US graduate Seminary to Close Campus,” Religion News Service, November 13, 2015, <http://www.religionnews.com/2015/11/13/oldest-u-s-graduate-seminary-to-close-campus-denominations-secularization-andover-theological/>, accessed March 19 2016, for the story of the sale of Andover-Newton Theological Seminary’s campus.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices,” June 1, 2008, <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/01/u-s-religious-landscape-survey-religious-beliefs-and-practices/>, accessed March 21, 2016.

consequence of this is that many Christians believe that such things as abortion, homosexual sex, cohabitation without marriage and pornography are morally acceptable. In the absence of absolutes, says Barna, the watchword of the day remains, increasingly, “If it feels good, do it.”<sup>22</sup>

This has led some to predict the imminent demise of Evangelical Christianity. We are on the verge of a major collapse of evangelical Christianity. This breakdown will follow the deterioration of the mainline Protestant world and it will fundamentally alter the religious and cultural environment in the West.

Within two generations, evangelicalism will be a house deserted of half its occupants. (Between 25 and 35 percent of Americans today are Evangelicals.) In the “Protestant” 20th century, Evangelicals flourished. But they will soon be living in a very secular and religiously antagonistic 21st century.

This collapse will herald the arrival of an anti-Christian chapter of the post-Christian West. Intolerance of Christianity will rise to levels many of us have not believed possible in our lifetimes, and public policy will become hostile toward evangelical Christianity, seeing it as the opponent of the common good.

Millions of Evangelicals will quit. Thousands of ministries will end. Christian media will be reduced, if not eliminated. Many Christian schools will go into rapid decline. I’m convinced the grace and mission of God will reach to the ends of the earth. But the end of evangelicalism as we know it is close.<sup>23</sup>

Now, granted, Spencer’s dire predictions have yet to be fulfilled—he may have missed the mark with his predictions. However, we continue to see significant decline among both Mainline and Evangelical church bodies. And this manifests itself even at the local level. Recently Missouri Synod President Harrison noted that the rate of decline in the Iowa East and Iowa West Districts of the LCMS is effectively the same. Theologically and practically, Iowa East tends to the more conservative and more “Evangelical,” while Iowa West is perceived as more progressive and “Mainline” (admittedly, the categories don’t quite fit). The point is that both districts are experiencing the same level of decline despite their unique profiles.

So what does all this mean for us as Lutherans? The first thing, of course, is that we are forced to grapple with what it means to be a Lutheran. What is the heart of Lutheran identity? What is basic to being Lutheran? Here I want to examine more intentionally and carefully several historical examples of theological confusion that might lead us to conclude that we are in the twilight of the Lutheran experience in North America.

First of all, the present-day institutional confusion of the Lutheran tradition is driven by confessional and theological diversity. We have already dropped a number of the American

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<sup>22</sup> See Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., “Confessing in the Public Square,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 (October 2002): 316-17, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/rastconfessingpublicsquare.pdf>, accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Spencer, “The coming Evangelical Collapse: An anti-Christian chapter in Western history is about to begin. But out of the ruins, a new vitality and integrity will rise,” *Christian Science Monitor* Online, March 10, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>, accessed March 15, 2016.

Lutheran acronyms: LCMS, ELCA, WELS, ELS, NALC, LCMC. A glance at the 2016 *Lutheran Annual* (p. 778) reveals nineteen different Lutheran church bodies in the United States.<sup>24</sup> There is certainly no shortage of “options” in regard to Lutheran churches in 2016. And we could multiply them easily if we extended our historical boundaries: ULCA, LCA, ALC, ELC, NELS, and so on.<sup>25</sup>

What’s at issue? Why all of these Lutherans? Simply put, it stems, at least in part, from the manner in which one views Luther and his work. In fact, one may see Luther and the Reformation in at least two basic ways—and the choice one makes will determine one’s “Lutheranism.” The first option was expressed by the confessional (sometimes called the *gnesio* or “true”) of the late 1500s—people like Jacob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz. These Lutherans focused on doctrine and believed that the Reformation was a conservative movement. They believed that Luther had preserved the Bible’s clear teaching on justification by grace. Therefore, they focused on what Luther retained from the medieval Catholic Church. Another group viewed Luther and Lutheranism very differently. They saw Luther as a radical reformer whose main teaching was freedom from the institutional church and emphasized what he discarded from Rome. Eventually this stream of thought channeled into a movement called Pietism. Pietism believed that Luther had made a good beginning, but hadn’t gone far enough in his reforms. Therefore, it was the task of the church to reform itself continually, even if that meant changing some of its beliefs to fit the time and place in which it existed. As the founder of Lutheran Pietism would summarize it, “Luther was a great man and a theological giant. However, even a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant can see farther than the giant.” Pietism, though not as theologically profound as Luther, felt compelled to improve or at least complete his teaching.

Obviously there would be some conflict between these two opposing viewpoints—was Luther a conservative or radical reformer? This conflict is at the heart of what divides American Lutherans. Which was the true Luther? The one who claimed that the Bible clearly states its doctrines and that these are true for all time; or the one who advocated the principle of the freedom of the individual? The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has, from its founding, clearly held to the first of these options. A significant portion of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has its roots in the second. Within both traditions, however, there are those individuals and congregations more comfortable with the other body’s perspective! Hence the tangle of the present day.

Among the well-known leaders among the more liberal expressions of Lutheranism in the United States, perhaps the most notorious is Samuel Simon Schmucker. But other eighteenth- and nineteenth century leaders also strove to “update” the Lutheran Confession. Frederick Henry Quitman, Ernest Louis Hazelius, and Benjamin Kurtz, among many others, all sought to drive the Lutheran confession in new and, in my opinion, unhelpful directions.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Lutheran Annual 2016* (Saint Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 778. In comparison, the 2001 *Lutheran Annual* (p. 433) listed twelve discreet church bodies.

<sup>25</sup> The finest aid in making sense of the myriad of Lutheran church bodies in the United States from a simple, factual posture, is Robert C. Wiederaenders, *Historical Guide to Lutheran Church Bodies of North America* (Saint Louis: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

As that stream of the Lutheran tradition moved into the twentieth century, a number of significant leaders emerged in the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA)/the Lutheran Church in America (LCA)/ELCA tradition and led their various churches in modernizing the Lutheran confession and preparing them for eventual merger. Charles M. Jacobs, son of the estimable Henry Eyster Jacobs, served as professor and later president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. He was largely responsible for introducing the Erlangen theology's commitment to limiting the the infallibility of the Scriptures to the gospel. He was a vigorous opponent of the doctrine of the verbal inspiration and, especially, the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. In this he anticipated the conflict in the Missouri Synod over Scripture by some thirty years.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the most important leader of them all was Franklin Clark Fry, long-time president of the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) (1944-1962) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) (1962-1968).<sup>28</sup>

Other examples, however, may be found. A lesser known, but no less influential leader among the ULCA/LCA traditions was Otto Frederick Nolde (30 June 1899-17 June 1972). Nolde was a pastor in the ULCA and later the LCA, as well as Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).<sup>29</sup> He was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and, after graduating from Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1920, he studied at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (LTSP) from which he graduated in 1923. He earned a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in 1928, writing on the topic "The Department of Christian Education in the Theological Seminary: A Study of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania." In 1923 Nolde was ordained by the Pennsylvania Ministerium, a constituent Synod of the ULCA. That same year he served as a "fellow" at LTS, and in 1925 was elevated to faculty status at the same institution, a title he retained to his retirement in 1968. From 1943-62 he served as dean of the seminary's graduate school. From 1925-43 he served on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. He received honorary degrees from Muhlenberg (D.D. and LL.D.), Wittenberg University (L.H.D.) and Temple University (Litt.D.).

Nolde's sphere of influence extended far beyond the bounds of the ULCA and its seminary at Philadelphia, helping to engage Lutheranism in the broader ecumenical discussions characteristic of early twentieth-century American Christianity. He served as an associate consultant to the United States delegation to the meeting at San Francisco that led to the founding of the United Nations. Nolde's task was to address the religious freedom clause in the Declaration of Human Rights and provided the language for that declaration, which states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should

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<sup>27</sup> James Kenneth Echols, "Charles Michael Jacobs, the Scriptures, and the Word of God: One Man's Struggle against Biblical Fundamentalism among American Lutherans," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1989.

<sup>28</sup> "Religion: The New Lutheran," *Time* (April 7, 1958); Robert H. Fischer, *Franklin Clark Fry: A Palette for a Portrait* (Springfield, Ohio: Lutheran Quarterly, Wittenberg University, 1972); *Mr. Protestant: An Informal Biography of Franklin Clark Fry* (New York: United Lutheran Church in America, 1960); E. Theodore Bachmann, Mercia Brenne Bachmann and Paul Rorem, *The United Lutheran Church in America, 1918-1962* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997)

<sup>29</sup> Biographical information on Nolde may be found in Minutes of the Proceedings of the 1973 Convention of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, pp.15-16 and Betty Thompson, "Tribute to a Diplomat," *Christian Century* 86 (May 28, 1969), 736. Important works of his include: Otto F. Nolde, *Toward World-Wide Christianity* (1946); Otto F. Nolde, *Freedom's Charter* (1949).

act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”<sup>30</sup> Nolde made the field of human rights his own. He is best known for his work with the WCC’s Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), a position he filled beginning in 1946.

It was Nolde’s task to act as a spokesperson for the WCC on matters of world affairs. While serving in this capacity he redefined Lutheran doctrine and practice for the present. Significant in this regard was his application of the principles of biblical interpretation outlined by the German scholar Rudolf Bultmann to the realm of theological and academic affairs. In 1964 he outlined a series of six theses that applied Bultmann’s principle of demythologizing to the ecumenical realm, arguing particularly that China should be brought out of isolation and into the world family, that disarmament should be a priority for church and world, that the United States and the Soviet Union should cooperate in space exploration generally and in moon exploration particularly, and, especially, that basic human rights, e.g., equitable race relations and religious liberty, ought to be matters of international involvement rather than mere matters of national concern.<sup>31</sup> Nolde served as the CCIA’s director until 1969.

However, Nolde was not content simply to formulate policy; he was always concerned that the policies and work of the CCIA impact human life in a very concrete way. Breaking significantly from traditional Lutheran theology, which held that the “Two Kingdoms” were separate in their spheres of influence, Nolde argued that it was precisely the task of the churches and not governments to assure that human rights were protected. “Let every nongovernmental organization in its worldwide contacts manifest its pledge to promote respect for, and observance of, human rights without discrimination. Honoring that pledge in its own life and action may mean more than the recommendations accepted by this conference and will certainly undergird them.”<sup>32</sup> For him there was no firm division between the two kingdoms. Rather, the two were closely intertwined and it was the church’s ministry to impact life in the world. In his own valedictory to the U.S. Conference for the WCC, the breadth of Nolde’s concern in this regard comes clearly through. He struck what had now become common themes, asserting that the United States should expand the Anti-ballistic test-ban treaty to include all testing, keep the oceans and seabed from becoming a battleground for nationalistic expansion, include the Soviet Union into a partnership for peaceful space exploration, offer China a greater voice in world affairs, and look at the situation in Vietnam from the perspective of the whole, rather than just the South.

Nolde’s goal was to move the churches, and especially the Lutheran Church, which he believed had theologically and practically isolated itself, into a positive role in influencing governmental policies regarding human rights. “Whatever one’s religion or belief, let a good conscience and an enlightened understanding impel each one of us to dedicated and continuing effort.”<sup>33</sup> In this he was a pioneering spirit. When the LCA joined together with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) in 1988, the newly formed

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<sup>30</sup> Otto Frederick Nolde, *Free and Equal: Human Rights in Ecumenical Perspective* (1968), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Otto F. Nolde, “Thinking the Unthinkable,” *Christian Century* 81 (May 13, 1964): 628.

<sup>32</sup> Otto Frederick Nolde, *The Churches and the Nations* (1970), 169.

<sup>33</sup> Nolde, *The Churches*, 169.

ELCA embraced many of the principles first articulated by Nolde. His visionary efforts had finally found concrete expression in his own tradition.<sup>34</sup>

One place we see Nolde's (and others') ecumenical spirit manifest itself is in the alliances of the ELCA. Thus it is appropriate for us now to re-engage the topic launched in the introduction to this paper, namely the ELCA's ecumenical alliances and how they have come to define the life of that church body.

The Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee had forwarded *A Formula of Agreement* to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly (CWA) in 1997 which recommended the following: "That the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ declare on the basis of *A Common Calling* and their adoption of this *A Formula of Agreement* that they are in full communion with one another. Thus, each church is entering into or affirming full communion with three other churches."<sup>35</sup> The Churchwide Assembly then "RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopt *A Formula of Agreement* on the basis of *A Common Calling* and declare that it is in full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ."<sup>36</sup> *A Formula of Agreement* recognized that significant doctrinal issues still existed between the various church bodies, but that dialog had achieved "fundamental doctrinal consensus" between the represented bodies. The vote was 839 for and 198 against, a full 80 percent in favor.<sup>37</sup> It took a few more years to work out the question of episcopacy with The Episcopal Church. After the *Concordat of Agreement* failed in 1997, a revision of the work, titled *Called to Common Mission: A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement*, was considered at the 1999 CWA and passed. It noted:

Our churches have discovered afresh our unity in the Gospel and our commitment to the mission to which God calls the church of Jesus Christ in every generation. Unity and mission are organically linked in the Body of Christ, the church. All baptized people are called to lives of faithful witness and service in the name of Jesus. Indeed, the baptized are nourished and sustained by Christ as encountered in Word and Sacrament. Our search for a fuller expression of visible unity is for the sake of living and sharing the Gospel. Unity and mission are at the heart of the church's life, reflecting thereby an obedient response to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, 1999 witnessed the approval of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. The ELCA

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<sup>34</sup> Christa R. Klein and Christian D. Von Dehsen, *Politics and Policy: The Genesis and Theology of Social Statements in the Lutheran Church in America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997 *Churchwide Assembly Minutes*, 38.  
<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1997.pdf>, accessed March 13, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> ELCA 1997 *Churchwide Assembly Minutes*, 40, 432.  
<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1997.pdf>, accessed March 13, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> ELCA 1997 *Churchwide Assembly Minutes*, 433.  
<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1997.pdf>, accessed March 13, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, 1999 *Churchwide Assembly Minutes*, p. 48.  
<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1999.pdf>, accessed March 13, 2016.

played an important leadership role in the eventual adoption of this document. One of the key statements in JDDJ follows:

The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.<sup>39</sup>

In all of the cases the ELCA/LWF compromised on the earlier, clear confessions made by Lutherans. Outmoded in the minds of some, insisting on certain formulae as necessary ways of rightly expressing the biblical witness was simply no longer necessary.

While it is not surprising that voices critical of these moves from outside the ELCA were largely dismissed, it was more disappointing that the ELCA failed to heed the warnings of faithful pastors in its own fellowship; those who expressed reserve about the church's future direction. The late Michael McDaniel, bishop of the ELCA's North Carolina Synod, noted the challenges facing the ELCA: "The year 1997 was especially tumultuous. It was in that year that the Philadelphia Convention of the ELCA sold our birthright for a mess of pottage by entering into unbelievably shocking relationships with Calvinistic and Zwinglian organizations," said Bishop McDaniel. He continued:

You are surely aware that the ELCA has been taken over by the very people our parents warned us not to play with when we were little. It is only now that the majority of our members are beginning, slowly and reluctantly, to realize that the persons writing our literature and directing our programs are hijackers, and that this church, once so dear, so wonderful, so shining with grace and glory, is way off course. As more and more people awaken to this fact, there are increasing distresses and demands that the leaders faithfully lead.<sup>40</sup>

The reopening of fundamental moral questions, especially in areas of sexuality, constitutes a direct attack on Christian morality and invalidates the efforts of Christian people faithfully to keep the Commandments of God.... The

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<sup>39</sup> *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church*, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html), accessed March 13, 2016. For the formal response of the Department of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW) to JDDJ, see *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (April 1998): 83-106. See also Gottfried Martins, "Agreement and Disagreement on Justification by Faith Alone," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (July 2001): 195-223; and Reinhard Slenczka, "Agreement and Disagreement about Justification: Ten Years after the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 73 (2009): 291-316.

<sup>40</sup> Michael C. D. McDaniel, "ELCA Journeys: Personal Reflections on the Last Forty Years," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (April 2001): 105.

capitalization of church leadership to the relativism of the late twentieth century has scandalized the church.

To put human sexual gratification above the Commandments of God and the clear teaching of Scripture is simply unthinkable; yet, without an ELCA leader to say a clear “no,” there is a continuing push for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessings of homosexual liaisons as if they were marriages. Furthermore, as long the ELCA health insurance program covers abortions, a percentage of each Sunday’s offering presented before the altar of the Lord is going to finance murder.<sup>41</sup>

Strong words, but in McDaniel’s mind, necessary words. Yet anyone who remembers Bishop McDaniel will recall the gentle yet convicted manner in which he uttered them.<sup>42</sup>

At the 2002 CTSFW Symposium, ELCA Pastor Louis Smith, who has also since died, similarly reflected on the question of the Reformed/Lutheran intercommunion. He said:

The issue of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar concerns nothing less than the Incarnation and the movement of the Gospel. When, at Marburg, in response to Luther’s insistence on the Word of Institution, Oecolampadius called Luther to turn away from the humanity of Christ and lift his eyes to the divinity, Luther’s rejoinder was that the only God he knew was the Incarnate God. And he wanted to know no other, since only the Incarnate God could save.... Lutherans owe it to the whole Church to confess publicly and not to try figure out an acceptable language that will allow the offense of Christ’s crucified for us Flesh and Blood to be overcome by a linguistic trick rather than by faith alone.<sup>43</sup>

Under the larger topic of whether the ELCA can faithfully represent the Lutheran Confession in its present form, Smith answered that *it could*, but seriously questioned whether *it will*. Specifically commenting on whether the ELCA can represent the Lutheran Confession of the Biblical faith of the Church catholic, Smith admitted “the outlook is bleak.” It is not due to a lack of resources, he argues, but a lack of will. “It is not at all clear that the synodical or Churchwide leadership wants to do the job.” What is at the root of this lack of will? Smith answered: “We have determined the commonalities and identified the disjunctions. The wrestling match on those points needs to be undertaken. I think that there is a reluctance to enter that match because after the epoch of ‘consensus ecumenism,’ we are afraid that to disagree is to quarrel. But as G.K.

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<sup>41</sup> McDaniel, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Bishop McDaniel also pointedly called upon we Missourians to remember our blessings and not to take them for granted when he said (McDaniel, 108): “Brothers and sisters of Missouri, thank you for your faithfulness to the word. In the January 2001 issue of the *Lutheran Witness*, President Barry wrote, ‘one of the fantastic blessings God has given to our church body is faithfulness to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.’ May that always be true of the LCMS, and may it come true in all this lost and weary world.”

<sup>43</sup> Louis A. Smith, “Can the ELCA Represent Lutheranism? Flirting with Rome, Geneva, Canterbury, and Herrnhut,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66 (April 2002): 113.

Chesterton once said, “we quarrel because we have forgotten how to argue.” But we could learn again; to test differences against commonly agreed upon standards and call one another to scratch on that basis.”<sup>44</sup>

With the passing of voices like McDaniel’s and Smith’s, the ELCA lost faithful and articulate critics. Other voices of concern in the ELCA have been marginalized—some rather aggressively. Take, for example, the forced retirement of James Nestingen of Luther Seminary, Saint Paul in 2006.<sup>45</sup> With the silencing of each of these voices, the conversation within the ELCA becomes increasingly one sided.

The theological results have been devastating. Several years ago an email made the rounds titled “Is Protestant Collapse Inevitable?” It tells of Dr. Paul Hinlicky’s commentary on a survey by the Barna Group. In what is perhaps the understatement of the new millennium, it states that “very considerable diversity within the Christian community regarding core beliefs.” And goes on to say “Barna Research found only 21 percent of Lutherans in America, 20 percent of the Episcopalians, 18 per cent of the Methodists, and 22 percent of the Presbyterians attest to the basic Protestant doctrine that a man does not earn his way to heaven by good works. Yet this doctrine, that man is made right with God (“justified”) alone by grace through faith in Christ’s saving work (with “good works” being simply the fruits of faith) is the foundation of the Reformation, Hinlicky noted, and is accepted by only nine percent of Roman Catholics in the USA.” Hinlicky’s conclusion? “If this figure holds up it signals a complete breakdown of catechetical instruction.” That much is most certainly true.

Further, it was noted that “only 33 percent of the Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists, and only 28 percent of the Episcopalians, agreed with the statement that Christ was without sin. He said that these numbers indicate “an epochal change in popular theology. This would suggest a loss of faith in the Divinity of Christ.” Another professor at Roanoke added, “Christ would then be no more than the Dalai Lama, an admirable kind of a guy.”

“We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight...” (Is. 59:10 ESV). It seems that the day is almost over and we are in the Reformation’s twilight.

## **10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. – Lecture 2**

I ended the previous section soberly, reflecting that the experience of the ELCA suggests that Lutheranism is in the Reformation twilight. But is that really the case? It is easy to criticize the ELCA. The departures from historic Lutheranism—from historic, biblical Christianity—are obvious and easy to catalog and address, and in many ways force one to conclude that the Reformation is in its twilight. But lest we critique others without addressing our own challenges, allow me to spend a brief time in our own expressions of the Lutheran tradition. My main focus

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<sup>44</sup> Smith, “Can the ELCA Represent Lutheranism?” 119.

<sup>45</sup> “Nesting Retires from Luther Seminary,” *The Lutheran* (April 2006), [http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article\\_id=5827](http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=5827), accessed March 22, 2016.

will be my own tradition, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. However, with your indulgence I will spend a moment on both The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and The Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

First, the ELS. It would be most inappropriate for a guest to critique his hosts too strongly when they have been so welcoming. Nevertheless, historically speaking, the relatively recent controversies within the ELS on the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar and questions regarding the office of the ministry have garnered interest and comment among American's Lutherans. I don't intend to pursue them here; I merely note them as evidence of how even a tightknit fellowship like the ELS can experience theological unrest. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that at the founding of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, the faithful Norwegians who held to the biblical and confession were an actual majority initially in the NALC. But the insidious character of bad theology wore down the solid rock of the biblical confession with remarkable rapidity. To put it differently, the Opjør seemed to be merely a small compromise—live and let live. And yet it's presence ultimately led to the collapse of the confessional tradition in the NALC, its successor the ELC, and finally, the ALC, which became part of ELCA in 1988.

What about the WELS? It, too, has has faced its own issues, from the institutional challenges of finance, to questions about the most appropriate Bible translation. At the same time, the historical reality of the earlier outcomes of WELS controversies continue to shape, even if only in minor ways, the landscape of American Lutheranism. Take, for example, the controversies that led to the formation of the Protes'tant Conference and, later, the Church of the Lutheran Confession.<sup>46</sup> In both cases, though in the different ways, the WELS answered the theological challenges that confronted it.

Now put the three together—the ELS, the WELS, and the LCMS in 2015, and what might we find? I'm speaking, of course, of the recent informal conversations between the ELS, WELS, and LCMS. I have been a part of these conversations, and, speaking only for myself, what I have found them to be encouraging beyond my expectations. Most recently we participants were able to publish "A Report on the Meetings of ELS, LCMS, and WELS Leaders 2012–2015." Under the heading "Plans and Hopes for the Future," the participants reported:

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

Perhaps God may guide us to a reestablishment of fellowship at some point in the future, a goal for which we pray and work. But even if we are not able to practice church fellowship, we have found benefit in talking together about church work, in patiently trying to understand the issues better, and in providing a measure of encouragement in

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<sup>46</sup> Edward C. Fredrich, "The Protes'tant Controversy," Minnesota District Pastoral Conference, Rochester, MN, May 1, 1984, <http://www.wlssays.net/handle/123456789/1555>, accessed March 23, 2016; David Lau, *Out of Necessity: A History of the Church of the Lutheran Confession* (Church of the Lutheran Confession, 2009).

our lives of repentance and fidelity to Scripture. Gradually we may also look for ways to include others from our synods in these inter-synodical discussions.

Around us in America we see a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christianity. It is good to be in conversation with the few who are still committed to confessional Lutheranism. This is something that the LCMS especially has been trying to do around the world, bringing Lutherans together and encouraging them to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>47</sup>

I personally look forward to the continuing conversations.

But I do struggle with the reasons for having to have these conversations in the first place. What I mean is that I continue to grieve that the fellowship of the Synodical Conference was broken more than a half century ago. And I am troubled by Missouri's role in that breaking. I find John Behnken's strident rejection of the claim made by Missouri's Synodical Conference partners that the LCMS was changing its theology and practice difficult to understand. I assume most of you are familiar with the interchange, but if you are not, at the height of the tensions between the synods of the Synodical Conference in the 1950s, Missouri's President John W. Behnken called it his "honest conviction" that the LCMS had not changed its doctrinal position.<sup>48</sup> It certainly had, as Behnken later came fully to realize. But his failure to recognize this earlier had serious ramifications for not only the Synodical Conference, but for American Lutheranism, also.

But, if you are familiar with my historical argumentation on Behnken, you will know that I see this as a consistent perspective of his. For example, elsewhere I have located the key moment in Missouri's shift in the 1938 Synod Convention, three years into Behnken's long presidency (1935-1962).<sup>49</sup>

Immediately upon Behnken's election in 1935, he was instructed by the Synod in convention to engage the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in dialogue. The old ALC had its roots in the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods, and, in fact, the Joint Synod of Ohio had for a time been member of the Synodical Conference (1872-1881), prior to the outbreak of the Predestination Controversy in the late 1870s. Buffalo and Iowa both had long, cantankerous histories with Missouri. At the risk of over generalizing, the issue with Ohio was whether predestination was a cause of faith—Missouri said yes, Ohio, no—and also what this meant for the conversion of individual sinners.<sup>50</sup> With Iowa and Buffalo the issue was that of church and ministry. But for all the differences—and they were significant—there were no synods in America closer in spirit to

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<sup>47</sup> A Report on the Meetings of ELS, LCMS, and WELS Leaders 2012–2015," <http://els.org/download/ELS-LCMS-WELSAApproved-122015.pdf>, accessed March 21, 2016; <http://blogs.lcms.org/2015/lcms-wels-els-report>, accessed March 21, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> John W. Behnken to "Taffy" (W.F. Klindwirth), August 19, 1955, in Concordia Historical Institute, Behnken papers, Suppl. 1, Box 15, Folder 9; cited by Thomas A. Kuster, "The Fellowship Dispute in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: A Rhetorical Study of Ecumenical Change" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1969), 268.

<sup>49</sup> I'm not alone in this. Since I first made this argument, I have found that Richard Koenig has also argued for the importance of the 1938 convention (as have others).

<sup>50</sup> Franz Pieper, *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913).

Missouri outside of the Synodical Conference than these three. And so, when the ALC was formed in 1930, it is not surprising that ecumenical discussions with Missouri quickly followed.<sup>51</sup>

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

In 1938, this committee brought its report to the Synod. Its report chronicled a series of six meetings with representatives of the ALC (including Michael Reu) and noting that these meetings considered primarily the Minneapolis Theses and the *Brief Statement*, both of which affirmed, in no uncertain terms, the “inerrancy” of Scripture. The report went on to state that the ALC participants had framed a new document for consideration, included in the minutes of the Synod, titled “Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church.” While admitting that the “Declaration” would require careful examination, particularly in light of *A Brief Statement*, the Missouri representatives, strangely, quickly moved on to note the circumstances that might lead to a declaration of fellowship: 1) “action taken by both bodies with reference to the *Brief Statement* and the Declaration”; 2) establishment of doctrinal agreement between the *Brief Statement* and the *Declaration* on the part of church bodies with which the American Lutheran Church is in fellowship; 3) submission of the Declaration to the bodies comprising the Synodical Conference; 4) smaller gatherings of ALC and LCMS pastors to consider the doctrinal basis for union and issues of practice. It concluded this section of its report by respectfully suggesting “that Synod pass a resolution approving these points and that it also . . . state its position on the *Declaration* of the American Lutheran Church representatives.”<sup>52</sup>

Committee Sixteen made the official reply to the report of the Committee on Lutheran Union. It divided its report into four sections, and then submitted several resolutions. First, it addressed those areas of significant doctrinal agreement. It emphasized two points: predestination and inerrancy. The committee was especially encouraged with the progress made toward agreement on predestination, stating: “It is with great joy that we note that in the chief difficulty which separated our Synod from the constituent bodies of the American Lutheran Church, the doctrine of predestination, unanimity has been reached and that false teachings held by some Lutheran teachers have been repudiated.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> There had, in fact, been many opportunities for discussion prior to the formation of the ALC. In the 1920s, the Minneapolis Theses (1925—American Lutheran Conference) and the Chicago Theses (1928—Iowa and Buffalo) both were written in the hopes of at least forming a common basis for discussion. The *Brief Statement* was Missouri's answers to these other documents.

<sup>52</sup> *Proceedings of the Thirty-seventh Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States Assembled at St. Louis as the 22<sup>nd</sup> Delegate Synod, June 15-24 1938* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938): 221-227.

<sup>53</sup> *Proceedings*, 228.

The Committee's second point, however, was less encouraging. New doctrinal issues had emerged, including differences over the Antichrist, the conversion of the Jews, the physical resurrection of the martyrs, and the 1,000 years of Revelation 20. Here the committee noted that the ALC representatives requested "tolerance for certain teachings and interpretations which have been rejected in our (Missouri's) circles."<sup>54</sup> In each case the committee noted that these were non-fundamental doctrines, and cited evidence from synodical publications (specifically *Lehre und Wehre*) indicating that these divergent opinions should not be divisive of church fellowship.

Third, Committee 16 expressed concern over the ALC language of "a visible side of the church," though it recognized that this could be understood properly. Fourth, the committee announced that on all other fundamental doctrines it "found itself in accord with the teachings of the *Declaration*. . ."<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Committee 16 submitted a series of resolutions for consideration and approval. Because these are so critical, I will quote them at some length.

2. That Synod declare that the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod, together *with* the *Declaration* of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report of Committee No. 16 now being read and with Synod's actions thereupon, be regarded as the doctrinal basis for *future church-fellowship* between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.

3. That in regard to the points of non-fundamental doctrines mentioned in the *Declaration* of the American Lutheran Church representatives (Anti-christ, the conversion of the Jews, the physical resurrection of the martyrs, the fulfillment of the thousand years) we endeavor to establish *full* agreement and that our Committee on Lutheran Union be instructed to devise ways and means of reaching this end.

5. That, since for true unity we need not only this doctrinal agreement but also agreement in practise [*sic*], we state with our synodical fathers that according to the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessional writings Christian practise must harmonize with Christian doctrine and that, where there is a divergence from Biblical, confessional practise, strenuous efforts must be made to correct such deviation. We refer particularly to the attitude toward the anti-christian lodge, anti-Scriptural pulpit- and altar-fellowship, and all other forms of unionism.

7. That, if by the grace of God fellowship can be established, this fact is to be announced officially by the President of Synod.

The Synod adopted the Committee 16's report.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Proceedings*, 229.

<sup>55</sup> *Proceedings*, 230-231.

<sup>56</sup> *Proceedings*, 231-233.

The actions of the 1938 Synod convention drew strong positive and negative responses. Divergent visions of Missouri's future crystalized in the wake of the convention—there were seemingly few who were indifferent to what had transpired. There were those who applauded the fresh, new wind of freedom blowing in Missouri. Missouri had changed and that change was welcomed. There were also those who warned of the ramifications of this radical shift. Most notable was the publication of the *Crucible* and then later the *Confessional Lutheran*, both of which decried the changes that were multiplying in the Synod. The battle lines were beginning to emerge.

Other voices within the Synodical Conference registered their distress. Already in 1936 the ELS had adopted the “Unity, Union, and Unionism” theses.<sup>57</sup> ELS, having had the bitter experience of seeing a majority Norwegian American Lutherans from the Hauge Synod (established 1876), the Norwegian Synod (established 1853), and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (established 1890) in the Norwegian Lutheran Church in American (NLCA), repeatedly expressed its concern to its sister synod of Missouri about the dangers of doctrinal compromise.<sup>58</sup> As we have seen, that merger was effected on the the basis of the theologically flawed compromise document known as the Opjør, or Madison Agreement. Now it all seemed to be happening again with Missouri with *A Brief Statement* being interpreted in light of the ALC's *Declaration*.

Why make this move? Why reject the counsel of your long-time friends? One element that fed this was Missouri's desire to take advantage of the opportunity to “move” the ALC to the more conservative end of the spectrum. Because they shared a commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture, it seemed natural to Behnken and plenty of other Missourians, to work with the ALC. Surely the LCMS could have a beneficial influence of the ALC. Another aspect of these were the simple numbers. When the ULCA was formed in 1918, it leap-frogged the LCMS and became the largest Lutheran synod in America, numerically speaking. When the ALC was formed in 1930, it was the third largest synod, after Missouri. However, the formation of the American Lutheran Conference, of which the ALC was a member, also changed the numbers dynamic. By working with the Augustana Synod and the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, the ALC was able to put together a conference that rivaled the Synodical Conference in size. That is to say, there were three main players on the American Lutheran field: the National Lutheran Conference (strongly sponsored by the ULCA), the Synodical Conference, and the American Lutheran Conference, all of which were roughly the same size.<sup>59</sup> Now the questions would be as follows: could the ULCA draw the ALC into its more liberal sphere? Could the Synodical Conference, via the LCMS's new arrangement, draw the American Lutheran Conference—or at least the ALC—into its sphere? Could the American Lutheran Conference draw the Synodical

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<sup>57</sup> Electronic version may be found at <http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>, accessed March 19, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> “Unity, Union, and Unionism,” features a very helpful historical summary of the events leading to the formation of Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, particularly the compromise by which the Opjør was approved. See also “A Necessary Statement,” *Lutheran Sentinel* (March 13, 1944).

<sup>59</sup> Frederick K. Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert: The Story of the National Lutheran Council, 1918-1966* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968).

Conference—or at least the LCMS—and the ULCA into its sphere. The future of American Lutheranism was at stake!<sup>60</sup>

And so began the Missouri wars, battles at every convention following 1938. The 1941 convention of Synod began a tradition of what many within (and without) the Missouri Synod have noted as its tradition of divided conventions in which the sitting delegation will affirm contradictory things.<sup>61</sup> In addressing the issue the Synod finally agreed that in meeting with the ALC “the immediate objective be not organic union but doctrinal unity” and that this unity be expressed in “one doctrinal statement.” This is the inception of the “Common Confession,” a work whose history we’ll not explore. Suffice it to say that the intensity of alarm and distrust was growing in the Synod. As the centennial of the Synod approached, it appeared that there were at least two synods and that the question of the hour would be “whither if at all”?

In May 1944 the *American Lutheran* published a segment of an article titled “The Problem of Lutheran Unity.” In it the author deplored the lack of unity among American Lutherans. While he recognized the existence of theological and practical differences between the LCMS and the ALC specifically, he did not believe these differences were church divisive. “Are these insurmountable objects in the path of Lutheran unity?” he asked. And then answered himself.

To that there will be varying answers. To us they do not seem insurmountable. When we consider what wonders the Holy Spirit has performed in the past, in effecting a growing confessionalism and loyalty to the Scriptures among practically all American Lutheran groups, we do not think that we are overoptimistic in expressing our belief that “we are over the hump,” and that a patient and prayerful continuation of the efforts toward Lutheran unity that have been going on for the last quarter century will finally bring us to the goal.

Our goal must not be to establish new groups, but to bring about a unity in the entire Lutheran Church in America. With all the existing groups officially accepting the Lutheran Confessions, accepting the inspired Scriptures as the source and norm of doctrine and life, the ought not be far off when the Lutheran church bells in America can ring in a new and glorious day for Lutheranism in our country.<sup>62</sup>

Others from within this group, however, began to fear that forward momentum was being lost. And so, over the course of 1944 and then into 1945, a working group of of pastors, presidents,

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<sup>60</sup> For an extended treatment of the drive toward Lutheran unity, see Edward C. Fendt, *The Struggle for Lutheran Unity and Consolidation in the U.S.A. From the Late 1930's to the Early 1970's* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), and E. Clifford Nelson, *Lutheranism in North America, 1914-1970* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972).

<sup>61</sup> An example would be the election of J. A. O. Preus president in 1969 and then approving fellowship with the ALC, despite the fact that Dr. Preus had publicly opposed this declaration of fellowship. Another would be the 1992 ouster of Ralph Bohlmann from the presidency of the LCMS, and then approving the significant changes Dr. Bohlmann had advocated in the Synod’s adjudication process.

<sup>62</sup> “The Problem of Lutheran Unity: The Trend Toward Confessionalism in the Lutheran Church of America,” *American Lutheran* 27 (May 1944): 122.

and other leaders began to meet. Ultimately their efforts eventuated in the publication of “A Statement,” dated September 7, 1945, a document that continues to form Missouri’s experience.

“A Statement” emerged from its historical circumstances like any other humanly authored document. Though its story has been told in part, a full and careful consideration of the document’s theology, its genesis, and its effects is still needed. That said, I will offer thoughts on it.

Following a meeting at Springfield in the winter of 1945, several significant leaders in the LCMS, including E. J. Friedrich, O. P. Kretzmann, and O. A. Geiseman of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois, began to work toward the implementation of the 1938 fellowship resolutions. Styling themselves “men interested in the problem of Lutheran unity” they began to address two thorny points: 1) what the nature of their work together should be; and 2) who should participate in it.

The first, namely the problem to be dealt with, was handled in a straightforward way. Friedrich, with the help of Kretzmann and Geiseman, developed a program that addressed the following issues: 1) Our Personal Responsibility for the Welfare of the Kingdom (E. J. Friedrich); 2) Organization and the Church (O. P. Kretzmann); 3) The Law of Love - Applied to the Practical Life of the Church (emphasis on the New Testament and historical Lutheranism.) (William Arndt); 4) Doctrine and Life (Richard Caemmerer); 5) Application of Principles to Present Conditions in the Church (O. A. Geiseman). Friedrich was also given the responsibility to organize a face to face meeting of supporters.<sup>63</sup>

The second problem grew out of this last responsibility. Who should attend? Friedrich was in contact with Prof. William Arndt of the Saint Louis seminary. Arndt admitted that he had been giving “some thought to our project.” To that end, he identified several professors “that are definitely in favor of joining hands with the A.L.C.” He included himself, Paul Bretscher, Theodore Graebner, Alfred Rehwinkel, Walter Maier, W. G. Polack, and Richard Caemmerer among these. Those “approaching” this position included Hoyer, Mayer, Sommer, Schick, Sieck, and Jesse.” Engelder, Fuerbringer, and Laetsch were described as “strongly opposed.” And Mueller, Fritz, Guebert, and Roehrs were likely inclined toward this latter group.<sup>64</sup> Clearly the St. Louis faculty was not of one mind on this matter.

O. P. Kretzmann, president of Valparaiso University, was uncertain about at least one of Arndt’s assessments—Theodore Graebner. Graebner was the outspoken editor of the *Lutheran Witness* who earlier in his career had opposed “unionism” in any and every form. Of late, however, he had tempered his position. Should he be invited or not? Kretzmann tossed the ball to Friedrich. “If I remember correctly,” he wrote, “we came to no definite conclusion on Graebner. I am still sitting squarely on the fence. Suppose you toss a coin and decide.”<sup>65</sup> O. A. Geiseman of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, on the other hand, was clear in his own mind on this matter: “I still hope that instead of tossing a coin you will toss T. G[raebner] out. His theology will give a

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<sup>63</sup> O. P. Kretzmann to E. J. Friedrich, July 30, 1945. All of the letters cited in this subsection may be found at Concordia Historical Institute, E. J. Friedrich Papers, 200FRI, Box 1, File 1, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>64</sup> William Arndt to E. J. Friedrich, July 12, 1945.

<sup>65</sup> O. P. Kretzmann to E. J. Friedrich, July 30, 1945.

completely wrong slant to what we are after.”<sup>66</sup> In the end, Graebner was invited and signed “A Statement,” even though Friedrich initially worried over the decision, stating, “At the risk of of arousing Geise’s ire, I have decided in favor of Graebner.”<sup>67</sup>

And so the invitation went out. Its tenor suggested that, unless something were done and done soon, the opportunity to achieve Lutheran unity in the United States would be lost.

In recent years, especially since the Saginaw Convention, a strange and pernicious spirit, utterly at variance with the fundamental concepts of the Gospel and the genius of the Lutheran Church, has lifted its ugly head in more than one area of our beloved Synod. This spirit has its origin in a wrong approach to the Holy Scriptures and in a tragic misconception of the very essence of the Gospel and the nature, functions and mission of the Church. It is characterized by barren, negative attitudes, unevangelical techniques in dealing with the problems of the individual and the Church, unsympathetic legalistic practices, a self-complacent and separatistic narrowness, and an utter disregard for the fundamental law of Christian love. One need not be a prophet to forecast what the results will be if this unevangelical and intolerant spirit is left unrestrained and to its own devices. Spiritual life will be blighted. The organism of the Church will be paralyzed [*sic*]. Ecclesiastical persecution will occur with increasing frequency. The onward march of the Gospel will be obstructed and one open door after another will be closed to us.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, Friedrich promised that “This will be nothing revolutionary or iconoclastic. On the contrary, our meeting is to be sane and soundly Lutheran, evangelical, positive and constructive. It is our desire to keep it on a high spiritual level.”<sup>69</sup>

With such strong feelings, it is not surprising that when the participants in the meeting approved “A Statement,” it had thrown down a very clearly articulated gauntlet, particularly in regard to the 1938 fellowship resolutions.

11. We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition and in harmony with the Synodical resolution adopted in 1938 regarding Church Fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.<sup>70</sup>

Response to “A Statement” was swift. Few people answered indifferently. The ALC’s *Lutheran Outlook* (December 1945) rightly noted that the publication of “A Statement” had brought

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<sup>66</sup> O. A. Geiseman to E. J. Friedrich to August 3, 1945.

<sup>67</sup> E. J. Friedrich to O. P. Kretzmann, August 4, 1945.

<sup>68</sup> E. J. Friedrich to “Brother,” August 9, 1945.

<sup>69</sup> And yet within the meeting itself, Dr. Friedrich was reported to have said: “We are no longer Synod in reality. Most congregations and delegates did not know what was going on at Saginaw, e.g., regarding Lutheran Union. Theoretically we constitute Synod but in reality there is a super machine which operates on the outside through officials and Boards, so that the rank and file cannot find out what is going on.” “Minutes of the Informal Conference of Missouri Synod Pastors, Assembled on Sept. 6 and 7, 1945. Room 12, Hotel Stevens, Chicago,” p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> “A Statement,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 43 (November 1970): 149-152. It is this author’s opinion that there is no coincidence that this celebration of “A Statement” appeared just as the gauntlet was being laid down, which eventuated in the Walkout.

Missouri to a critical point. “The Missouri Synod by [the 44’s] manifesto has been brought to one of the crossroads of destiny.” It was absolutely right.

President Behnken tried to delay its publication. He failed. Once it was in the public sphere, Behnken hoped to address through the Synod’s College of Presidents. Yet at least one member of the Council, G. Christian Barth, then 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the Synod and soon to be President of Concordia Theological Seminary, then located in Springfield, Illinois, spoke of his chagrin as to whether there would be a meaningful engagement of the document and the issues that it raised.

It fills me with concern to read in Doctor Behnken’s letter that the 41ers have a meeting with the College of Presidents for a discussion of “A Statement”. Four of the district presidents are signers of “A Statement” and one general vice-president, though he withdrew his signature, is in complete harmony with “A Statement”. I have reasons to believe that other district presidents are leaning toward “A Statement”, while others are pussy-footing, and still others are afraid to fight (like Ferdinand the Bull). Only a very few district presidents have the conviction and the courage to give battle. It is evident to me what the outcome will be.”<sup>71</sup>

E. T. Lams, whom Barth had addressed in the previous, attempted to reassure his discouraged compatriot. “Everything seems very gloomy, but darkness precedes the dawn.”<sup>72</sup>

What many did not know at this point was that a protest had already been written and entered by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. Later, when the faculty’s protest was made public, other entities joined themselves to it.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps a new day would dawn.

In the meantime, however, differences of opinion on “A Statement” strained relationships among the pastors of the Synod. The effects also trickled down to the students at the seminaries. When the Springfield students declined to participate in the formation of the Association of Lutheran Seminarians, and the St. Louis students did, Vernon N. Schroeder of the Lutheran Hour chastised the Springfielders. Their reasons for not joining “are wrong,” he wrote. Further, “Dr. Mattes’ [of the ALC?] statement, ‘If one Lutheran Church does not have fellowship with another Lutheran Church, it is schismatic!’ is exactly what I also believe. However, the key word, the crucial word in all of this mess is ‘fellowship’.” Then Schroeder dropped the phraseological bomb that has so bedeviled Missouri. “*There are degrees of fellowship*,” he says, and therefore “We should have a certain degree of fellowship with other Lutherans.”<sup>74</sup>

Because seminarians were involved, Schroeder brought the matter to the attention of Dr. G. Christian Barth at Springfield. He wrote in part:

I think if we would get busy to pray and work for revival in our synod we should not have so much time to argue about questions of casuistry as pertaining to fellowship, but

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<sup>71</sup> Letter of G. Chr. Barth to E. T. Lams, January 23, 1946.

<sup>72</sup> Postcard of E. T. Lams to G. Chr. Barth, January 24, 1946.

<sup>73</sup> The Concordia Circuit Pastoral Conference – January 30, 1946; The College of Visitors of the Northern Illinois District – January 28, 1946; Milwaukee Pastoral Conference – October 18, 1946.

<sup>74</sup> Letter of Vernon Schroeder to Mr. Everett Rupprecht, June 4, 1948. Emphasis added.

we would find ourselves drawn into a closer fellowship with like minded Lutherans of other synods. It is natural that those who love the Lord should cooperate and have some fellowship with one another. To those who hold the the extreme conservative position in the Missouri Synod I must say somewhat as Lutherans of other synods have said: “You have a different spirit from us.”

“Your letter disappointed me greatly,” Barth responded, defending his students and colleagues. “I do not know any ‘extreme conservatives’ in the Missouri Synod though I regret that some have employed a rather harsh approach in their efforts to preserve to our church the the treasures which we enjoyed during the last century.” But, more to the point, he continued, “I am afraid that the men whom God employed to make the Missouri Synod what it was during the last century would be considered ‘extreme; conservatives by some men in our Synod today.” And, he concluded, “God blest the work of our Missouri Synod during the past century not in spite of our conservatism but because of it.”<sup>75</sup>

As the 1940s gave way to the 50s, the Synod remained polarized and many aligned themselves with one of the two seminaries. Springfield was increasingly the locus for the “conservatives” of the synod.<sup>76</sup> St. Louis, on the other hand, was beginning to move in a different direction.

Whether it was twilight or eve was driven by one’s commitments. In the wake of the 1950 Synod convention, the *American Lutheran* could not contain its enthusiasm; its triumphalism knew no bounds. “We accept the entire convention as a special mark of divine favor,” wrote the editors, “and another proof, if we needed one, that God has a special place for the Missouri Synod in His plans...”<sup>77</sup> Later in the same issue, O. A. Geiseman, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois, and newly elected member of the Synods Board of Directors, left no doubt as to where he stood in 1950.

The Milwaukee convention will always be remembered as one in which the assembled delegates determined, under God, to avoid the perils of legalism and traditionalism, to place human theological thoughts and points of view into their proper place of subordination, and to give the full right of way in a truly Lutheran and soundly Biblical and evangelical spirit to the supreme authority of the Word. This determination marked, I am persuaded, a turning point in the history of our church, and will serve to bring us back again in the third chapter of our church’s history to the safe moorings where it was established by our founding fathers.

The question now was, from Geiseman’s chair, how Missouri would move into the future? His words would prove to be prophetic.

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<sup>75</sup> G Christian Barth to Vernon H. Schroeder, August 6, 1948, CTSFW Archives, Barth, G. Chr. (President’s Papers): Statement of the 44 (1948). Barth’s closes strongly: “Permit me to call your attention to the fact that the name ‘Lutheran’ in itself means nothing. I know ‘Lutheran’ ministers who deny not only the verbal inspiration of the the Bible but also the Atonement through the blood of Christ. I was intimately acquainted with a ULC minister who was a thirty-second degree Mason.”

<sup>76</sup> James C. Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod: A Conflict That Changed American Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> “The Voice of Jesus Christ,” *American Lutheran* 33 (August 1950): 1.

It is safe to say that this happy turn of events would not have been achieved, humanly speaking, except for the sound scholarly and courageous leadership which was given in the discussion of all pertinent matters by members of the theological faculty of our seminary at St. Louis. It is doubtful whether our St. Louis faculty has at any time since the days in which our Synod was founded had a staff of men who from the viewpoint of sound Biblical scholarship and fervent devotion to evangelical Christianity have been better equipped for the task not only of training Christian workers, but also safeguarding the Biblical truth and the Lutheran evangelical character of our church, than are the present faculty members.... If I may venture a word of prophecy I would say that, as God grants grace, we may confidently look forward to a bright and glorious day in the life of our church under such theological leadership in the years which lay ahead.<sup>78</sup>

Within a few years the faculty at the St. Louis seminary would be leading the synod into a bold new future where questions about the nature and character of the Scripture and even the Gospel itself would lead to some even to issue the call “Close the ‘Sem.’”<sup>79</sup> On February 19, 1974, a majority of students and faculty “walked out” of the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis campus. I the summer of 1974, a constitutional crisis faced the Missouri Synod over the question of ordaining “Seminex” graduates, which threatened to tear the synod apart. Indeed, it almost seemed as though Jeremiah 13:16 was being fulfilled in the life of the Missouri Synod.

Give glory to the LORD your God  
before he brings darkness,  
before your feet stumble  
on the twilight mountains,  
and while you look for light  
he turns it into gloom  
and makes it deep darkness. (Jeremiah 13:16 ESV)

And yet, the seminary did not close. Remarkably, within a few years of the Walkout, Concordia Seminary had recovered the greater part of its vigor. What had seemed to be twilight turned out to be the eve of a new age for Missouri.

### **11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. – Lecture 3**

As we closed the last section, I stated that what had seemed to be twilight turned out to be the eve of a new era for the LCMS. Now, that doesn’t mean things were easy for the synod in that period. What I think it may show is that this has been a consistent pattern in the LCMS. Allow me to explain.

Already in the 1850s, Western District President Georg Schieferdecker departed from the confessions and began advocating a form of millennialism. After first leaving the LCMS for Löhe’s Iowa Synod, and then being removed from his congregation, in 1875 Schieferecker

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<sup>78</sup> O. A. Geiseman, “While It Is Day,” *American Lutheran* 33 (August 1950): 6.

<sup>79</sup> “Close the ‘Sem,’” *Affirm* 3 (JuneB 1973): 1, 4; “The Abyss in Missouri,” *Affirm* 2 (March 1973): 1.

renounced his error and returned to the LCMS. He died in 1891.<sup>80</sup> Schieferdecker's story had a happy ending. Not as joyful were some of the results of the Predestination controversy, where a number of Missourians rejected the Confessions and severed their association with the Synod. It must also be noted, however, that a number of individuals and congregations affiliated with the Ohio Synod severed their connection with that body and joined synods of the Synodical Conference. As such, then, those who left the LCMS showed a certain integrity in that they willfully left the Synod when they found that they could not, in good conscience continue to affirm its confession. They found synods that better reflected their own positions.<sup>81</sup>

More challenging for the LCMS, however, was a controversy that festered over more than a decade in the early 1900s. It centered around the question of the nature of justifying faith and, given the heightened state of concern over the nature of faith in the LCMS during this period—recall still the ongoing effects of the predestination controversy, which also extended into the question of conversion. It is not surprising to find that the doctrinal and exegetical productions of pastors and professors were carefully watched and considered.<sup>82</sup>

The controversy erupted when a number of pastors, chiefly Ludwig Brauer and C. O. Danitschek of Kansas, challenged the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. They claimed at least a portion of the faculty had fallen into doctrinal error. The source of the controversy was an article by Georg Stöckhardt that appeared in *Lehre und Wehre* in 1910, titled “Yet Another Word on the Nature of Faith.”<sup>83</sup> Brauer and Danitschek, among others, believed that Stöckhardt and other members of the faculty held that the “ardent desire of the heart for the grace of God belonged to the essence of faith,” while they held that it was a “fruit of faith.”<sup>84</sup> At issue was the question of whether faith was *pure passive*, the purely passive means by which the merits of Christ were received, or whether there was an active component in justifying faith. Brauer and Danitschek asserted that some on the faculty “believed the desire for grace, the sobbing and the crying of the heart for forgiveness, were the very nature of justifying faith.” As such, the faculty “erred in defining faith as ‘giving,’ as an act of the individual towards God.” In contrast, Brauer and Danitschek argued that “faith was *not* to be identified with the surrendering of the individual to God. A person [who] surrendered to God was able to do so because he already was one of God’s children.” For them, “faith was a ‘receiving’ and not a ‘giving.’”<sup>85</sup> Historian John Koch summarizes the heart of the controversy as follows: Brauer and Danitschek believed that “God alone was to be considered the active agent in justifying faith,” while the St. Louis faculty held

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<sup>80</sup> August R. Suelflow, “Georg Albert Schieferdecker and His Relation to Chiliasm in the Iowa Synod,” B.D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946.

<sup>81</sup> John M. Brenner, “The Election Controversy among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century: An Examination of the Underlying Problems,” Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2012; Hans Robert Haug, “The Predestination Controversy in the Lutheran Church in North America,” Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1967; Peter Johannes Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> John B. Koch, “The Controversy within the Missouri Synod during the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century on the Nature of Justifying Faith,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 44 (February 1971): 18-31.

<sup>83</sup> Georg Stöckhardt, “Noch ein Wort über das Wesen des Glaubens,” *Lehre und Wehre* 56 (December 1910): 529-41.

<sup>84</sup> Koch, “Controversy,” 21.

<sup>85</sup> Koch, “Controversy,” 18, 19.

“faith incorporated the idea of striving and seeking after God.”<sup>86</sup> Both used various Bible passages to support their position.

Meetings between the pastors and the faculty did not remove the concern, and Georg Stöckhardt, Ludwig Fürbringer, Friedrich Bente, W. H. T. Dau, and E. A. W. Krauss vigorously defended their position.<sup>87</sup> Too make a long story short, the controversy quickly became a matter of the synodical oversight process and, ultimately, both Brauer and Danitscheck left the LCMS for the Ohio Synod. The faculty consistently argued that, given the biblical texts to which both sides turned, the matter was one of differing exegesis, rather than difference in doctrine and thus caution was in order “against putting exegetical differences on the same level as doctrinal differences.”<sup>88</sup>

So what did Stöckhardt teach in respect to justifying faith? One historian, Erwin Lueker, has argued that theologians on the St. Louis faculty emphasized different aspects of faith and even argued over the “components” or “parts” of true faith, if you will. The result, according to Erwin Lueker is that while Franz “Pieper preferred to refer to faith as passive,” his colleagues, specifically Georg Stöckhardt “made faith a powerful, mighty thing that lays hold of righteousness and life.”<sup>89</sup>

The characteristic of the righteous person is faith, that faith which grasps the promise of the Gospel and clings to it; this is the faith which makes him righteous since it appropriates to itself the righteousness which is promised and offered in the Gospel; and through such faith the righteous person will ultimately attain life, life in the full sense of the word, the eternal, perfect salvation, *soteria*. The righteousness grasped by faith qualifies a person for salvation.<sup>90</sup>

In contrast, Pieper, having developed as a professor and leader of seminary and synod in the very midst of the controversy over predestination, emphasized strongly the monergistic work of God in bestowing the gift of faith apart from any reference to human preparation or action.<sup>91</sup> Here are some select quotations from Pieper that underscore his position.

Finally, we declare that by every kind of synergism, i.e., that by every doctrine which ascribes to man a cooperation unto conversion or unto the acquisition of faith, the article of justification is corrupted.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Koch, “Controversy,” 18, 19.

<sup>87</sup> Notably absent from the list of defenders is President Franz Pieper. Perhaps Pieper disagreed with the exegetical conclusions of his colleagues. Or perhaps he was simply too busy as general president of the LCMS, a position from which he retired in 1911, though he did remain as seminary president.

<sup>88</sup> Theodore Graebner, to H. Koester, August 28, 1914, cited in Koch, “Controversy,” 24.

<sup>89</sup> Erwin L. Lueker, *Second Generation Theologians: Pieper, Stoeckhardt, Graebner* (St. Louis: Privately Published, 1972), 50, 84.

<sup>90</sup> Stöckhardt, *Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1907), 48. Translation by W. Hassold. Cited in Lueker, 84-85.

<sup>91</sup> Franz Pieper, *Conversion and Election: A Plea for a United Lutheranism in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1913).

<sup>92</sup> *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*, 10. Cited in Lueker, 49.

Nineteen hundred years ago Christ effected the reconciliation of all men with God. God does not wait for men to reconcile him with themselves by means of any efforts of their own. He is already reconciled. The reconciliation is an accomplished fact, just like the creation of the world.<sup>93</sup>

If anything is clear from Scripture, it is this fact, that the redemption of Christ balanced our account with God. It is a complete settlement, complete *extensive*, for Christ acted for all men; complete *intensive*, for the wrath of God is totally removed,...

As Christ's death lies in the past, so also our reconciliation is an accomplished fact. 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling" (namely, when Christ lived and died on earth) "the world unto himself." The *καταλλάσσειν* (*katallassein*) of Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:19 does not refer—let this fact be noted—to any change that occurs in men, but describes an occurrence in the heart of God. It was God who laid aside his anger on account of the ransom brought by Christ. It was God who at that time already had in his heart forgiven the sins of the whole world.<sup>95</sup>

Justifying faith must be viewed merely as the *instrument*, or the receptive organ (*medium leptikon*), for apprehending the forgiveness of sins offered in the Gospel.<sup>96</sup>

Needless to say, while some have criticized Pieper for over-emphasizing *sola gratia* at the expense of *sola fide*, given his context within the larger flow of American Evangelicalism, Pieper has done us a service by leaving such a strong testimony to the gracious work of God. At the same time, strangely enough, he it seems he did not push the issue within his own faculty, a perception that needs further investigation. Nonetheless, the result was that within the Missouri Synod two rather distinct positions on the nature of justifying faith co-existed uneasily. One had emerged from within the context of the confessional revival of the nineteenth century and strongly emphasized Christology, salvation by grace, objective justification, and the application of justification by the work of the Spirit through the sacraments. And the other, which emphasized salvation by faith and which would provide a strong point of connection in the latter part of the twentieth century with American Evangelicalism.<sup>97</sup>

Which is all to say that the idea that previous to the appearance of "A Statement" Missouri was theologically monolithic is unsupportable. The "A Statement" controversy was one in a series with which the LCMS struggled. Later controversies are better known: the teaching of evolution at Valparaiso University; the struggle to address adequately Martin Scharlemann's innovations in respect to the doctrine of Scripture; Gilbert Thiele's novel teaching on the nature of the soul; Arthur Carl Piepkorn's modification of the doctrine of election; controversy regarding objective

<sup>93</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:347. Cited in Lueker, 49.

<sup>94</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:347. Cited in Lueker, 49.

<sup>95</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:348. Cited in Lueker, 49-50.

<sup>96</sup> *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:517. Cited in Lueker, 50.

<sup>97</sup> Rick Nicholas Curia, "The Significant History of the Doctrine of Objective or Universal Justification among the Churches of the Former Synodical Conference of North America," California Pastoral Conference of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, January 24-25, 1983.

justification; the appropriateness of church growth theology and practice; and, of course, the controversy over Scripture and the Gospel in the 1960s and 1970s. And the list could go on.

However, by now you get the point. Confessional Lutheranism has always struggled and, in many ways, it is a basic truth that the church as we know it is always one generation away from disappearing—perhaps even less! Humanly speaking, as the evidence piles up, it seems that the Lutheran tradition has little future in America: its demographic is wrong—it is too white and old; its theology is at odds even with prevailing notions of Christianity, even among those who are more biblically inclined; its historic practice doesn't make sense to Americans; it is in decline. Simply put, all of the evidence argues that we are in the twilight of the Lutheran Reformation, at least here in America.

## II. Stay with us, Lord, for “for it is toward evening” – Evidence for the Reformation’s Eve

So is there any meaningful evidence to be found that we are in the Reformation’s eve? Earlier I quoted Walther. Let’s hear him again:

...Did it not seem as if, in the later age of the rule of the Roman Anti-Christ, that the light of the truth might have completely vanished from the church? What a fearful night of faith that comes from reason was finally brought over the church at the end of the last century! How seldom has the church ever lived in times when the light of the full, pure truth burned in her lamps, when thoroughly pure doctrine echoed from all her pulpits, and the writings of all of her teachers contained nothing but the Word of truth! – But what’s the reason for this? Truly not because there had not always been Christians who sought the full truth and thirsted after it! Oh no, in every age, even in the dark cells of the cloisters, there were countless precious souls who are as anxious as the disciples on the Emmaus road to learn the complete, pure truth, but whose eyes were closed as theirs, whose eye remained closed to it unto death.

Now let’s hear his conclusion as to the solution for this:

Therefore, so often as the Word of truth arises over a person or a whole fellowship, as the miraculous star once appeared to the wise men of the East, and the same remains for whole decades in their hearts and mouths, that is never a fruit of their intelligence, nor of their searching, nor their faithfulness, nor, much less, of their deserving it, but it is nothing but a visitation of the undeserved, free grace of God.<sup>98</sup>

What I do find intriguing about this quote is the manner in which Walther consistently locates the demise of the church *only* with the frailty of sinful human beings, and likewise the rebirth of the church *only* in the grace of God. Good Lutheranism! Whatever the challenge to the church—

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<sup>98</sup> C. F. W. Walther, “Twenty-fifth Convening of Our Synod with the Word of Truth as the Good Foundation for Today’s Jubilee Festival,” in *Treasury of C. F. W. Walther*, vol. 7, ed. and trans. Joel Baseley (Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008), 115.

the papacy, rationalism, unionism—the source is sinful humankind departing from the clear biblical witness. Nevertheless, though the church may have lost its privileged position in North American culture, orthodox Lutheranism continues to be a force for spiritual good as faithful pastors study the Scriptures, preach the Word by properly distinguishing between law and gospel, and administering the sacraments according to Christ’s establishment. As a result, the Holy Spirit continues to be at work calling gathering, sanctifying, nurturing, and sustaining the faithful through the means of grace. That is to say, it may look at times like orthodoxy has disappeared; yet, as Walther recognized, God continues to protect and extend His church through the faithful ministrations of His called servants of the Word.

God has promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church. Church history confirms that God keeps His promises. We can’t always imagine what God will do to sustain His church, but we know He will. We all know all well the story of how Lutheranism nearly came apart in the period immediately following Luther’s death in 1546. The political and theological challenges that impressed themselves on the Lutheran tradition with regularity over a series of years nearly spelled the human end of the Lutheran church. However, God had other intentions. In the midst of the recurring challenges and against all odds, God raised up wise and committed leaders who helped institutional Lutheranism maintain itself. The same was true in the 1630s when, in the midst of the Thirty Years War, it appeared that German Lutheranism would be conquered and disappear. But God maintained His church.

We can’t always imagine what God will do to sustain His church, but we know he will. In 1840, I believe that, conservatively speaking, 80 percent of America’s Lutherans were theologically more aligned with the generic, revivalistic Evangelical Protestantism of the Early National Period than they were with confessional Lutheranism. And yet, within the span of merely a decade, the American Lutheran (and Christian) landscape was transformed as a flood of immigrants made their way to North America. Many of these immigrants found their identity in their ethnic churches, which, perhaps due in part to the radical theological and practical differences that the American Lutherans offered, pushed them in a far more confessional direction.

The preceding provides us with a macro view of how Lutheranism tries to extinguish itself. Let’s drill down just a bit and see this principle in action. The Rev. Ezra Keller was an emerging leader in the “American Lutheran” movement of S. S. Schmucker and Benjamin Kurtz, and later went on to be the first president of Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio.<sup>99</sup> Before moving west, however, Keller was a vigorous revivalistic pastor in the Maryland field. He used Charles Finney’s new measures and helped popularize the theological tenets of American Lutheranism.<sup>100</sup> Keller was of the mind that the beliefs and practices of Old Lutheranism were

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<sup>99</sup> “American Lutheranism” argued that unless Lutheranism adapted its message and practice to existing American norms, it would quickly become meaningless to the majority of Americans. See Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheranism: A Study of the Issue between American Lutheranism and Old Lutheranism*, foreword by Luther Weigle (New York and London: The Century Co., 1927). Morris includes various materials treating S. S. Schmucker in *Fifty Years*, 121-37. We examine him more closely below.

<sup>100</sup> In addition to his rejection of the real presence and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, Keller held to other basic tenets of American Lutheranism. For example, he absolutely rejected any claim on the part of Rome to being a true Christian church and articulated a radical position regarding the nature of the Reformation and the

simply incomprehensible to Americans. For example, in his report of a meeting with a German immigrant pastor by the name of Rev. J. Wangner, Keller struggled to understand confessional Lutheranism.

He is an accomplished gentleman, and an ardent Christian, but a fanatical dogmatist. . . . He is quite antiquated in his views of Christian doctrine and church polity. He considers subscription to the unaltered Augsburg Confession, without note or comment, as indispensable to constitute a man a Lutheran. The Lutheran Church, based on the Augsburg Confession he considers the Apostolical Catholic Church. He believes in baptismal regeneration, and the real presence of the *body* and the *blood* of Christ in the Lord's Supper. He recommends private confession and absolution; makes the sign of the cross in the administration of the ordinance of baptism, and conforms to the various forms of the symbolists.<sup>101</sup>

Pastor Wangner was an “Old Lutheran.” He held to the form of Lutheranism that emphasized the fixed character of doctrine and practice. Old Lutherans pledged themselves to the Lutheran confessions *quia* (“because”) they believed they were a faithful exposition of Scripture and their truths were timeless. Their subscription to the Lutheran confessions was considered binding. Further, Old Lutherans tended to be more liturgical in their practice and consciously sought to maintain the traditional worship practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>102</sup> American Lutherans viewed the immigrants with suspicion and argued that their “unAmerican” perspective, if pressed, would only lead to disaster by completely marginalizing Lutheranism. “I am every day becoming more convinced of the necessity of raising up an American ministry to spiritualize the millions of Germans who are seeking a home in our happy land,” Keller stated. “Those who are educated in Germany are not qualified for the work, and cannot be persuaded to lay aside their foreign prejudices, and modes of thought and action.”<sup>103</sup>

One who agreed fully with Keller on the necessity of updating Lutheran theology and practice was the Rev. Benjamin Kurtz, a key leader in the American Lutheran movement and editor of the *Lutheran Observer*.<sup>104</sup> Like Keller, Kurtz was convinced that the greatest threat to the Lutheran

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catholicity of the church that Seiss later rejected (Keller, *Biography*, 306-307): “It seems plain to me that the Papal Hierarchy—which is called Babylon, the Mother Harlots, the Man of Sin, and Anti-Christ—cannot be part of the Church which is called the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, etc. Hence her priests have no authority to administer the ordinances. The Papal Hierarchy was organized and established in the conventions of the Council of Trent; the *leaven* was previously in the Western Church, now it became the lump. God then called his people out of Babylon by the voice of the Reformers, and the *Romish Church* lost her character as the *Church* of God—ceased to be part of the body of Christ.”

<sup>101</sup> Keller, *Biography*, 260.

<sup>102</sup> The political affiliations of the Old Lutherans and the American Lutherans also differed. Old Lutherans tended to be democrats and American Lutherans tended to be Republicans. See Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 153-63, 214-16. The two groups also differed on their view of alcohol consumption and the temperance movement. See Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-70* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 131-37.

<sup>103</sup> Keller, *Biography*, 261.

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Kurtz was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on February 28, 1795. After studying for the ministry, he was licensed as a minister by the Pennsylvania Ministerium in May 1815. He served as an assistant to his uncle, Daniel Kurtz, in Baltimore and subsequently as a missionary to the English Lutheran congregation in Baltimore.

church in America was “Old Lutheranism,” which, he firmly believed, was deficient in character. “American Lutheranism,” on the other hand, was the logical development and maturation of the revolutionary principles initiated by Luther. Kurtz believed that the distinctively “American Lutheranism” that he and Samuel Schmucker were advancing was demonstrably an improvement over older forms. He quickly grew frustrated with those who appealed to older expressions of Lutheranism. As important as sixteenth-century institutions and individuals may have been for the church of their time, they had little or nothing to say to the church of the present. Thus he rejected appeals on the part of both German- and English-speaking Lutherans for a return to the “fathers” of the Lutheran church—or the church of any period.

The Fathers—who are the “Fathers”? They are the *children*; they lived in the *infancy* of the Church, in the early dawn of the Gospel day. John the Baptist was the greatest among the prophets, and yet he that was least in the Kingdom of God, in the Christian Church was greater than he. He probably knew less, and that little less distinctly than a Sunday-school child, ten years of age, in the present day. Even the apostle Peter, after all the personal instructions of Christ, could not expand his views sufficiently to learn that the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles, and that the Church of Christ was to compass the whole world. A special miracle was wrought to remove his prejudices and convince him of his folly. Every well-instructed Sunday-school child understands this thing without a miracle, better than Peter did. Who, then, are the “Fathers”? They have become the Children; they *were* the Fathers when compared with those who lived in the infancy of the Jewish dispensation; but, compared with the present and advanced age, they are the Children, and the learned and pious of the nineteenth century are the Fathers. We are *three hundred years older* than Luther and his noble coadjutors, and *eighteen hundred years older* than the primitives; theirs was the age of infancy and adolescence, and ours that of full-grown manhood. *They were the children; we are the fathers; the tables are turned.*<sup>105</sup>

One of the ways that Kurtz and the American Lutherans “improved” Lutheranism was by changing its liturgical practice and its hymnody. Beginning in the mid-1830s, Kurtz ran a weekly column in the *Observer* that kept his readers abreast of the latest revival happenings in Lutheranism and the denominations around it.<sup>106</sup> He hoped thereby to help his denomination to

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He later served congregations in Hagerstown, Maryland, and Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. A staunch supporter of the General Synod, he was appointed emissary to solicit help for the General Synod’s Theological Seminary at Gettysburg from the churches of Germany and traveled widely in that country from 1826 to 1828. In 1833, in the most important move of his life, he assumed the editorial chores of the *Lutheran Observer*. It was as editor of this periodical he made his primary impact upon the Lutheran church in the United States. He died in 1867. Kurtz’s necrology appears in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, Assembled in Fort Wayne, Ind., May, 1866* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Rodgers, 1866), 37-38. See also E. W. Hutter, *Eulogy on the Life and Character of Rev. Benjamin Kurtz, D.D., LL.D., Delivered before the Professors and Students of the Missionary Institute, and a Large Concourse of Citizens at Selingsgrove, PA., Monday Evening, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1866* (Philadelphia: H. G. Leisenring, 1866).

<sup>105</sup> Benjamin Kurtz, “The Fathers,” *Lutheran Observer*, November 29, 1849.

<sup>106</sup> John G. Fuchs, “New Measures: An Analysis of an Argument among Lutherans in the United States During the Fourth and Fifth decades of the Nineteenth Century” (S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1994). The *Lutheran Observer*, from its inception in 1831, wielded an enormous influence on the Lutheran church in the middle third of the nineteenth century.

become a truly American church—one that reflected the general character of American evangelicalism.<sup>107</sup>

And yet, in the face of this, God did a remarkable thing. Where Lutheranism sought to destroy itself, within the span of just a few years God had rebuilt it. Indeed, by the time of this death Benjamin Kurtz would see the tide turn against him So much so, that after his death in 1865, the following obituary appeared:

On the 29th of December last, Rev. Benjamin Kurtz, formerly, and for many years, editor of the *Lutheran Observer*, died in Baltimore, in the 71st year of his age. No man, perhaps, on this continent, has exerted an influence more fatal to the cause of true Lutheranism in this country, and his name will be one of the most prominent in the number of those who have spent all their energies pulling down the massive walls of our Church. He was a most persevering champion of that hideous monster “American Lutheranism,” and the implacable enemy of everything that our fathers [*sic*] held most dear as the distinctive glory of our beloved Church. May God in His mercy spare us from seeing his like again.<sup>108</sup>

So don’t give up hope. God will maintain His church.

In October 1972, an unsigned article in the unofficial LCMS newsletter, *Affirm*, stated: “This century would compel us toward ambiguity. In a strange and perverse way, it invites ambivalences within all of us. It would persuade us to hesitate, to vacillate, to defer making clear-cut choices, to evade taking simple and well-defined positions as adequate ways of confronting the real world.”<sup>109</sup> Many of us recall those days well, when the authority of the Bible was at stake, inerrancy was questioned, infallibility in some places boldly denied. At the bottom of it all, there was concern that the clear teaching of Scripture was compromised beyond repair. And yet, examples abound of courageous confession of the Synod’s biblical and confessional position. In the face of the diffusion of truth offered by the likes of ELIM and ultimately Seminex, Missouri laymen and pastors made the good and faithful confession of God’s unchanging truth.

At the same time, we see such men making faithful confessions, a notable concern about the future of Missouri is also present. Karl Barth wrote: “Which way Missouri? It’s an old question. And it has been asked in countless ways. Will Missouri remain a strong, confessional church body, rooted in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions? Will she become an “umbrella church” which welcomes all, from extreme right to extreme left, in her hospitable bosom? Will she splinter, divide, fragment, or fold?”<sup>110</sup> Barth held out hope and proposed a threefold program: 1) we must face the theological controversy that centers around our approach to the

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<sup>107</sup> For an example of Kurtz’s preaching in practice, see Benjamin Kurtz, *Christ Blesses the Little Children: A Sermon Preached Before the Sunday School in Funks-Town, on the 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1828* (Hagerstown, Md.: William D. Bell, 1828).

<sup>108</sup> F. A. Schmidt, “Death of Dr. Kurtz,” *The Lutheran Watchman* (February 1, 1866): 24.

<sup>109</sup> “The Report,” *Affirm* 2 (October 1972): 1.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Barth, “Which Way Missouri?” *Affirm* 2 (April 1972): 3.

Scriptures; 2) we must settle that controversy, by affirming once again where stand and by the exercise of discipline, loving but firm; and 3) we must ALL walk in love.<sup>111</sup>

Dr. Barth's statements, along with the ones offered earlier, ring with wisdom and contemporary application. What emerges from our consideration of these many controversies are at least two things. First, the remarkable grace of God in raising up faithful confessors throughout the ages. God's promise is sure—"The gates of hell will not prevail against the church." Second, however, it shows that the confusion over Lutheran identity generally and Missouri's identity specifically has been around for a long time. In a way that is a good news/bad news proposition. We're not facing anything new—however, we haven't followed Dr. Barth's advice as well as we should or *could* have.

However, when Karl Barth wrote in 1972, he did sound strikingly like his own father, who had been the president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield in the second half of the 1940s—during the period that saw the publication "A Statement" of the 44. The elder Barth's words paint a distressing picture of how Missouri's unity had deteriorated a mere decade and a half after Franz Pieper's death. By 1947, at what was supposed to be its centennial celebration, the Synod seemed on the brink of chaos and possible dissolution. While a formal adherence to the Synod's doctrinal position was commonplace, a wide diversity of practice was emerging. As G. Christian Barth saw it:

Things are going from bad to worse. One of our students declined to accept a vicarage assignment in the East, because he knows what is going on there and told me that he could not with a clear conscience work under pastors who are no longer conservative Lutherans. *The Lutheran Witness* consistently ignores those things which make union with other Lutheran bodies impossible, but almost every issue contains items which must make our laymen believe that there is nothing in the way of union. I am very happy that I am as old as I am, but I do feel terrible when I think of my children and grandchildren.<sup>112 113</sup>

One can only think of Isaiah 21:4 when one hears such sentiments.

My heart staggers; horror has appalled me;  
the twilight I longed for  
has been turned for me into trembling. (Isaiah 21:4 ESV)

Fear and trembling, indeed. It is a miracle that confessional Lutheranism exists in any form today. Humanly speaking, it should not.

We'll not take the time today to recount the story of the battle for the Bible and the Gospel. I trust that history is known well enough to most of you. However, a few words are in order. The challenges that the Missouri Synod faced when it allowed the Synodical Conference to collapse

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<sup>111</sup> Barth, "Which Way?" 3, 11.

<sup>112</sup>G. Chr. Barth to Harold Romoser, June 4, 1948, archives of Concordia Theological Seminary, Barth Papers, The Statement of the 44, 1948.

<sup>113</sup> G. Christian Barth to H. W. Romoser, March 30, 1948, CTS Archives, The Statement of the 44, 1948.

and made its way into the Lutheran Council USA (LCUSA) continue to shape the LCMS's experience even today. In the wake of the 1965 Detroit Convention of the LCMS, announcements of the death of old Missouri were loud and vibrant. It did seem that it was old Missouri's twilight.

And yet, it has proven otherwise, even as we continue to recognize the challenges that we face. Within the span of a few years, a vibrant confessional movement had found its feet and began to move Missouri forward even as it sought to recapture its former confessional position. In this respect Missouri recaptured its place in the confessional revival of which it had played such an important part decades earlier. Some realized this, even as they

There have been times in the recent months and years of our church when the light on the horizon was thought to be the last, fading beams of Synod as it slowly sank into oblivion. But the report of President Preus regarding the facts of the St. Louis Seminary investigation should serve to point us to a sunrise, not a sunset.

A new day is dawning....<sup>114</sup>

What that "new day" will look like is uncertain. We are all aware of the speed with which the church is presently changing. As we've seen above, Europe has collapsed. And yet, there are pockets—sometimes very small pockets—of faithful, confessional Lutherans who are doing their best in almost impossible circumstances, to maintain a faithful, biblical confession. At times that confession has been confused, partly because the historic churches have departed so far from the faith that those who have been brought up in them have little or no idea what the church's confession was and should be. They are learning—and want to learn more.

This also holds true for the fast-growing churches of the Global South, especially in Africa. With roots in the pious mission societies of the the European churches, these church bodies often have a deep sense of mission, which manifests itself in powerful ways. At the same time, many of the churches of Sub-Saharan Africa, whether in West, East, or South, are striving to align their doctrine and practice with that of the historic church.<sup>115</sup> They have a deep commitment to the Scriptures, but in some instances still do not have the Lutheran Confessions in their own language.

And here we ourselves must remember that it was only a little more than a century and a half ago that God in His mercy spared the American Lutheran church and gave us the Book of Concord in English. In 1851 the Henkel Press delivered its full translation of the Concordia to the American church with the following words:

...we cherish the anticipation of a brighter day in the Lutheran church. In a land of freedom, of science and art, where the generous spirit of political wisdom encourages the

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<sup>114</sup> R. W. Shields, "The Morning Light is Breaking," *Affirm* (October 1972): 4.

<sup>115</sup> For a very helpful analysis of the changing relationship between the LWF and some of its African member churches, see Albert B. Collver, "Colonialism in the Global South: The Imperialism of Western Sexual Ethics." *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 3, no. 1 (2016): 34–39.

exercise of reason, and guards the decisions of conscience; where industry, energy, and enterprise, though daily attaining fresh prospects of future improvement, are continually unburying the sacred treasures of the past, we believe that the doctrines of our church will ultimately be reclaimed, and that men of our western clime will enter into the investigation of these doctrines with all the avidity natural to a love for the truth.<sup>116</sup>

These are wonderful words and ones that I fully affirm. However, I do so from the posture of one still in the church militant. That is my—our—reality. In my own case it is not nearly a quarter century since I began my public ministry. I can say that things in some ways are worse—and in some ways are better. Years ago James West Davison typologized as “the afflictive model of progress.”<sup>117</sup> To put it a little differently, over the brief course of my years as a student and pastor in the church, a common theme has emerged. It is the realization that America has changed in fundamental ways in the last several decades. Older assumptions and patterns of activity have given way to new ways of thinking and acting that bear little resemblance to what was the assumed norm of our parents and grandparents. A relativism has captured the American mind that says “anything goes!” And now the church is grappling mightily with these issues.

Let me put it personally. I grew up in DeKalb, Illinois, about 60 miles west of Chicago. I graduated from High School in 1980, and made the decision to enter the ministry the following year. I chose to attend Concordia Teachers College in River Forest, Illinois, even though both of my parents were professors at Northern Illinois University. I firmly believed that studying in the one of the schools of our church would better prepare to serve that church. When I left DeKalb for River Forest, my congregation was just about to make the shift from TLH to LW. (Of course, at RF we only used LW.) The liturgy of my youth, which I had sung corporately, with congregation and family, and individually, and that had not changed, was now being modified. Yet I adjusted with ease. I had learned the 1943 catechism, strange language and all, with ease, if not with 13-year-old joy. My pastor, E. George Krause, had impressed upon me two key things—the theology of the cross and the distinction of law and gospel.

But significant changes occurred during the period of my pastoral formation. Over the nine years between my entrance to River Forest and my leaving Ft. Wayne (I stayed an extra year to do an S.T.M.) the entire situation seemed to have changed. Upon arriving in Nashville, Tennessee, to work on my doctorate, and being called to a wonderful, dedicated Lutheran congregation, I realized the religious context had changed significantly. Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madison, Tennessee, was the ideal church to serve—distinctively Lutheran in the best evangelical sense. Yet I came to understand that a sea change had occurred more broadly speaking. As I met with my brother pastors and heard their concerns and challenges, the realization forced itself upon me that the culture and the church had developed in some very interesting ways. Around me were churches that used no liturgy and whose practice seemed to reflect the prevailing culture more than that of the Lutheranism I had learned. There was, at least

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<sup>116</sup> *The Christian Book of Concord, or Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Newmarket, VA: Solomon D. Henkel and Brs., 185), iii.

<sup>117</sup> James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

at times, a downplaying of Lutheran distinctiveness, and a seeming loss of the centrality of catechesis.

In what could have been a very depressing situation, I had the tremendous blessing of studying in the History of Christianity in America program at Vanderbilt University. There I was thrust into the cauldron of trying to sift the historical data and make application of the lessons of the past to the present. There I learned that Lutherans were certainly not the only ones facing the sorts of questions, challenges, and adventures that I was experiencing as a pastor. My best friends at Vandy were a Southern Baptist and a Methodist. I brought the argument to the table argued that evangelical Christianity generally had acquiesced to the spirit of America and therefore had lost the right to call itself by that name. The Baptist insisted that apart from catechesis centered in the Apostles' Creed, the church was doomed to lose its traditional and historical character and would disappear into the existing cultural morass. The Methodist was more "High Church" than any Lutheran chancel prancer I've ever met, and had the dubious distinction of having set the pews on fire at one of the churches in his tri-point parish when his home-made thurible came apart on Christmas Eve. Now there's an education—one that will dispel some caricatures in a hurry. For our efforts we were dubbed, along with a few other folks in the Divinity School, "the Nicene Crowd"—because we actually affirmed biblical, historic, creedal Christianity. We accepted the title with pride.

We had, of course, profound differences theologically speaking. But one thing we shared was a concern for the gospel—and for the church in the world that carries that gospel. And what quickly emerged from our uneasy theological truce was that we shared a basic conviction—that by losing a sense of its history, the church was in danger of losing its mission. In other words, in so accommodating the culture, the church was in danger of losing its identity.

Those lessons have stayed with me. If we capitulate, what will we be left with? The individualization of the church, theology, and religion generally. As Robert N. Bellah pointed out in 1967 in his seminal work "Civil Religion," there is an assumed religion in America, which is "universal" and "transcendent," which allows one to speak about "God," but does not allow one to speak specifically about Christ. Civil religion covers the public sphere—where we share generally that there is a God and that religion is primarily about activity. But that the particular confession of what that God is like is a private matter.

So are we in the twilight or eve of the Reformation? This paper has shown that there is plenty of evidence to lead us to conclude that it is twilight. But it has also shown that, despite ourselves, God remains faithful to His church and, wherever the Word is preached and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, the Holy Spirit continues to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian church on earth. But if, as I am arguing, we are still in the Reformation's eve, then we need to wake up our compatriots to work in the new day. We quoted Kurt Marquart earlier in this presentation. I'd like to do so again at this point, and expand the offering.

When Hermann Sasse tried to wake his slumbering fellow-Lutherans with the question about the very survival of the Lutheran church, he had in mind something else [than the presence of a Lutheran church in the future]. What is the meaning of this question? For

one thing it cannot mean a glib recipe for success, like the popular sacrilege of “goal-setting,” with the goal of Lutheran survival assured by keeping abreast of the most up-to-date trends with a Pandora’s box full of clever methods and techniques. What will “survive” in this way may well call itself “Lutheran,” but it will have nothing to do with the Lutheran *confession*, which on the contrary will be happily-clappily trampled underfoot to the soft seduction or the raucous savagery of “Christian music.” Or course, “right doctrine and church” will survive—it is built on the Rock and cannot fail. The question is, will we? With us or without us, through us or despite us, God will see His “right doctrine and church” through. Shall we, by God’s grace, have a part in this survival? Will our long-suffering Synod and seminaries? The answers to these questions lie hidden in the inscrutable counsels of God. But as the mystery of the election of grace is meant not to paralyze us into inert passivity, but rather to nerve and steel us for the bedlam of the fray (Rom. 8:30, 31), so **too the mystery of the church.**<sup>118</sup>

What Dr. Marquart argued for in 1998 is precisely what LCMS President Friedrich Wyneken advocated when he addressed the Synod in 1855. His words remain applicable to us today.

Therefore, we hold fast to our Confession, as to our very life’s life. In each part of that Confession, we have acknowledged, perceived, and experienced a bulwark that God has constructed on all sides to protect our troubled consciences from the attacks of the devil. We can give up nothing without the most terrible betrayal of ourselves, of the poor sinner of the world, and without injustice toward the One who has purchased them and us with His blood. In daily repentance before the mirror of the divine holiness of His Law, we peer ever more deeply into the abyss of the evil of our hearts. We burn with the need for certainty of salvation in the confession of Christ. We long to grasp Him ever more fully in true, living faith. And by His blood, He purifies our hearts and we find rest for our souls. Our positions, our gifts, our understanding may be ever so diverse. Yet, at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will all with one another—as poor sinners—hold fast to the simply truth of the catechism. That truth is our only consolation. It may be ever more richly unfolded and expanded for our understanding and conscience. But it finally always remains the same.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> From: Dr. Kurt Marquart, “The Church in the Twenty-First Century: Will There Be a Lutheran One?” *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, 2000, pages 181-182.

<sup>119</sup> Friedrich Wyneken, “How Can the Synod Remain United? Sermon for the Opening Session of the Western District of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, April 25, 1855, in Chicago, Illinois,” in *At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod’s Great Era of Unity and Growth*, Matthew C. Harrison (Lutheran Legacy, 2010), 386-7. Wyneken’s rhetoric is really quite marvelous (386-7): “Then why, beloved brothers, do we stand by one another? Why can’t we leave one another? It is because we cannot let go of the one truth that we, in fellowship with all the saints, have acknowledged, believe and confess as it is in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. These Confessions bear witness to the truth clearly, plainly, and powerfully on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, against all the desires of Satan, to the whole world. And why do we hold so firmly to our Confession such that we happily endure the hatred of the world and also the rest of Christianity, which is difficult to bear? Why, with God’s help and grace, would we suffer persecution and death before we would give up even a small part of that Confession? We do so because we have come to make the truth set forth in that Confession our own, not in times of good leisure and rest, like we might appropriate other natural or historical truths. The Holy Spirit has revealed this truth to us in the midst of the burdens of troubled consciences as our only salvation. Through the Word, the Spirit has borne witness to the truth in broken and troubled hearts. Our consciences are bound to the Word and therefore to the Confessions of the Church. As poor, forlorn, and

What both Marquart and Wyneken would agree on is that we need a recovery of the centrality of the Gospel, of justification by grace through faith because of Christ. “Justification for Christ’s sake, sola gratia et sola fide, is for Lutherans as for St. Paul, the article by which the church stands or falls. it is the centerpiece, which holds all the other articles of the Gospel together.”

For years I have been finishing presentations with the following quotation from C. F. W. Walther. It should encourage us to faithful service even in the face of the challenges that we continually face. I am convinced that as we conclude every that the Lord tarries in His return is an evening for a new day in which to hold forth His Gospel in all of its clarity and sweetness. Thought the forces of darkness and the evil one surround us, and while at times it seems that all may be lost, we have a sure, unwavering, certain promise from the mouth of the Savior Himself that our labor is not in vain that that because He, the light of the world has suffered died and risen again for us, that “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5 ESV). And so, in light of Christ’s unchanging Gospel, let us hear the words of one of His faithful servants. Walther writes:

Let us above all and in all matters be concerned about this, that the pure doctrine of our dear Evangelical Lutheran Church may become known more and more completely among us, that it may be in vogue in all of our congregations, and that it may be preserved from all adulteration and held fast as the most precious treasure. Let us not surrender one iota of the demands of the Word. Let us bring about its complete rule in our congregations and set aside nothing of it... Here let us be inflexible, here let us be adamant. If we do this, we need not worry about the success of our labor. Even though it should seem to be in vain, it cannot then be in vain, for the Word does not return void but prospers in the thing whereto the Lord sent it. By the Word alone, without any other power, the church was founded; by the Word alone all the great deeds recorded in church history were accomplished; by the Word alone the church will most assuredly stand also in these last days of sore distress, to the end of days. Even the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” (C. F. W. Walther, *Synodal Rede*, 1848)

It is a miracle that confessional Lutheranism exists in any form today. Humanly speaking, it should not. Thus, we see in the continuing existence of confessional Lutheran church bodies—with all of their challenges, limitations, and warts—evidence of God’s continued fulfillment of the promise spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against my church. And so, along with the Emmaus disciples, our plea will continue to be: “Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening.” And the Lord’s response will be the same, too: “So he went in to stay with them.”

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condemned men, we have learned to believe in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. The peace of conscience, the peace of our souls, the hope of eternal blessedness, our very being and life hand on this truth. To surrender it would be to surrender our salvation and ourselves for time and eternity. Therefore, neither can we let go of the most insignificant portion of the Confession because the entire series of the individual teachings of the faith are for us one chain. This chain not only binds our understanding in the truth, it binds our consciences and lives. The loss of an individual part of the same would break this chain, and we would be torn loose from Christ, tumbling again into the abyss of anxiety, doubt, and eternal death.”