



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

Volume 88 Number 4
October 2024

Seminex: Looking In from the Outside
Mark Braun

Gospel Reductionism: Then and Now
David P. Scaer

**Caesar Jesus? The Kingship of Jesus and
Political Authorities in Luke and Acts**
Kendall A. Davis

Concordia Theological Quarterly

Concordia Theological Quarterly, a continuation of *The Springfielder*, is a theological journal of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, published for its ministerium by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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Subscription Information

CTQ is published in four issues per year: January, April, July, and October. The annual subscription rate is \$35.00 within the United States, \$40.00 (U.S.) in Canada, and \$50.00 (U.S.) elsewhere. All changes of address, subscription payments, subscription cancellations, and other correspondence should be e-mailed to CTQ@ctsfw.edu or sent to Concordia Theological Quarterly, 6600 North Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46825. CTQ is printed and shipped by Kingery Printing Company, Effingham, IL.

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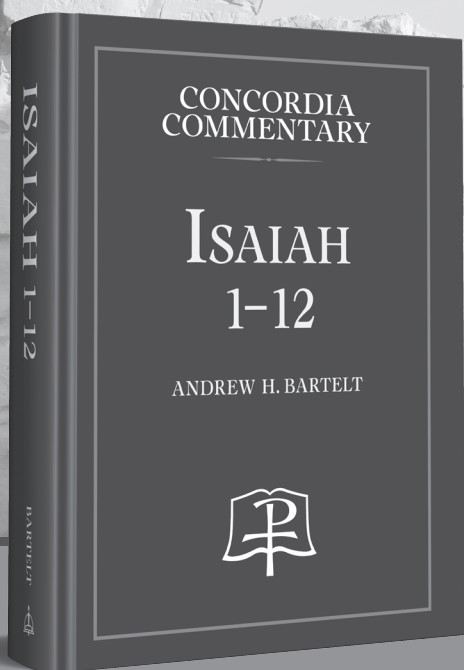
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Seminex: Looking In from the Outside

Mark Braun

The term “Bone-cruncher” may no longer mean anything to students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, but the experiences connected to that term were deeply imprinted on those who attended the seminary generations ago. Bone-cruncher was an event typically held on the first Saturday night in March each year to welcome members of the Northwestern College (NWC) senior class who were planning to become first-year seminarians in the fall.¹ The entertainment for each year’s Bone-cruncher included the singing (good and bad) of quartets, a mock exegesis of a purportedly significant text, and a basketball game between college and seminary teams. However, as the evening progressed, the seniors soon realized that they themselves would become the central focus of the entertainment. At the Bone-cruncher evening meal, the place setting for each Northwestern senior was a piece of bone—selected from skeletal remains generously donated by a local butcher—with one’s name attached. The bigger the bone with your name on it, the more vigorously you could expect to be initiated into the student body at its next welcoming event, to be held after school started in September: *Gemuettlicher Abend*, or “GA.”

I did not consider my college years to be notable for any sort of rowdy behavior that would have called for stern disciplinary measures, but I had dropped out of college for a year, which meant that most of the first-year seminarians had been my classmates at Northwestern Preparatory School and during our freshman year in college. Now they were a year ahead of me and looking forward to a reunion at Bone-cruncher. My place setting was a thick block of bovine shoulder blade. Dinner service had barely begun when one of my former classmates demanded that I stand up and explain to “the body” why I had not worn a necktie that evening. (I was the only person there without a tie.) I replied with a somewhat sarcastic, disrespectful answer. My response provoked a guttural male roar—similar to the sound I imagine rose from the Roman hippodrome as Christians were paraded for execution. I could not tell if “the body” thought my comment was daring or disgusting. But above the growl I heard one voice distinctly: “Send him to St. Louis!”

¹ Northwestern College was an educational institution of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod located in Watertown, Wisconsin. It merged with Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, in 1995.

The date of that Bone-cruncher evening was Saturday, March 2, 1974—eleven days after the walkout at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Time magazine reported that “outwardly, the tailored lawns and brown Gothic buildings” at Concordia gave “every evidence of serenity,” and that its very name was Latin for “serenity.” Yet “the largest Lutheran seminary in the world (690 students) was closed down by a student and faculty boycott.”² What was happening at Concordia looked all too much like the many anti-war protests that had been occurring on university campuses for almost a decade, but this action of faculty and students was provoked not by a far-off civil war or the loss of young American lives overseas but by disagreements over biblical interpretation, the limits of ecclesiastical authority, and the place of the institutional church in the modern world.

This event was momentous for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), but its shock waves rippled far beyond it, to other Lutheran church bodies that not many years earlier had been in doctrinal fellowship with the LCMS and had looked up to Missouri as their dependable “big sister.”³ As 2024 marks the half-century anniversary of that event, it is appropriate for the LCMS to examine its causes and effects. But I hope it will also be helpful for those of us in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) who were watching from the outside to recall those days, and for you to hear what we saw, heard, and thought.

The Past as Prologue

Missouri Synod historians have explained that the walkout did not occur suddenly or spontaneously but was the result of actions decades in the making.⁴ Wisconsin Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) observers also recounted the changes they saw occurring.⁵

² “Discord at Concordia,” *Time*, February 4, 1974, 54.

³ In this article, the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod are sometimes referred to simply as “Missouri” and “Wisconsin.”

⁴ Kurt Marquart *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), 1, wrote that the events that occurred in the 1970s in the Missouri Synod “cannot be understood without knowing something of what has gone before.” He detailed how “looser views of biblical authority, inspiration, and inerrancy were held already prior to World War I by individual theologians in the Iowa Synod, the General Council, and especially in the General Synod” and were spreading into the LCMS (101–139). Matthew Harrison observed that “the agitation and protest that broke out within the LCMS during the 1970s had been building for more than fifty years,” as far back as anti-German sentiment against a German-Lutheran church body during World War I and the desire to present Lutheranism in a more positive light (introduction to *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*, ed. Ken Schurb [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023], 2).

⁵ See Gaylin R. Schmelting, “A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 58, nos. 2 & 3 (June and September 2018): 182. The LCMS had been “the bastion of orthodoxy throughout the world. Yet in the 1930s the mighty defense began to crumble. In 1935,

David Schmiel has written that the casual observer in the 1850s “would hardly have imagined two more disparate groups of Lutherans than the Wisconsin and Missouri synods.”⁶ Wisconsin’s premier dogmatician, Adolf Hoenecke, once remarked to John P. Koehler, future professor and historian, that there was “something sectarian” about the Missouri Synod.⁷ More than seven decades after the synods’ foundings, August Pieper analyzed the differences in strengths and personalities of Missouri and its smaller sister bodies.⁸ Some Missouri historians have cited “triumphalism” and a muscular *esprit de corps* in Missouri’s self-confidence,⁹ and at least one Wisconsin writer detected in his synod an attitude of “small synod-itis.”¹⁰

Of course, even sisters who love each other will occasionally disagree. These intermittent conflicts were far outweighed by memories in Wisconsin and the ELS of high regard for Missouri, its leaders, its doctrinal sturdiness, and its missionary aggressiveness.¹¹

the Missouri Synod accepted separate invitations from the [ALC] and the [ULCA] to negotiate for the purpose of establishing pulpit and altar fellowship. . . . The ALC drew up a document called the *Declaration*, which was ambiguous on many important doctrines.” Missouri’s adoption of the *Declaration* in 1938 alongside its own *Brief Statement* “began its slow but steady decline” (182). See also Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Missouri and Wisconsin* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 320–323. Wisconsin Synod pastors saw changes in the Missouri Synod in its progressively more “liberal interpretations of Scripture,” its “smugness that took the attitude, ‘We are the Missouri Synod, so whatever we do must be OK,’” even “a growing high church tendency,” which, one respondent asserted, “almost inevitably breeds doctrinal indifference” (322).

⁶ David Schmiel, “The History of the Relationship of the Wisconsin Synod to the Missouri Synod Until 1975” (master’s thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1958), 1.

⁷ John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, ed. Leigh D. Jordahl, 2nd ed. ([*Mosinee, WI*]: *Protestant Conference*, 1981), 251–252. Leigh Jordahl, in his introduction to Koehler’s *History*, explained, “Neither Hoenecke in making the remark nor Koehler reflecting upon it intended to fault the doctrinal position of the Missourians, but both rather had reference to a certain mind set” (xxiv).

⁸ Pieper noted Missouri’s strong feeling of internal brotherhood, against both theological opponents and even friendly Lutheran synods (August Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” trans. R. E. Wehrwein, revised, in J. P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, *The Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn, vol. 3 [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997], 245. Previously published as Aug[ust] Pieper, “Jubiläumsnachgedanken,” pts. 1–4, *Theologische Quartalschrift* 20, no. 1 [January 1923]: 1–18; no. 2 [April 1923]: 88–112; no. 3 [July 1923]: 161–177; no. 4 [October 1923]: 254–270.). The Wisconsin Synod, on the other hand, coming from differing confessional leanings, was not as cohesive (Pieper, “Anniversary Reflections,” 272).

⁹ See Mark E. Braun, “Only in the Eye of the Beholder?,” *LOGIA* 26, no. 1 (Epiphany 2017): 35–40.

¹⁰ C[arleton] Toppe, “Small Synoditis,” *The Northwestern Lutheran* (hereafter cited as *TNL*) 47, no. 23 (November 6, 1960), 355.

¹¹ Herman Amberg Preus, in J. Herbert Larson, “The Centennial of Walther’s Death with Special Reference to Our Synod’s Indebtedness to Him,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2011): 287–288; and J[ohn] J[enny], “Golden Jubilee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America,” *TNL* 9, no. 13 (June 25, 1922), 198.

But beginning in the mid-1930s, ELS and Wisconsin pastors and professors began to detect a different spirit in Missouri, and for a time they were unsure what they were hearing. Joh. P. Meyer wrote in 1941, “Is the Missouri Synod, the staunch champion of confessionalism in the past, really veering in its course? We hope and pray that this may not be the case.”¹² Doubts arose concerning nuances in the teaching of church and ministry, participation in the United States’ military-chaplaincy program, and issues regarding the Boy and Girl Scouts programs. Most disconcerting was that Missouri had formerly voiced its opposition to Scouts and the chaplaincy program as vigorously as Wisconsin had, and Missouri had even thanked Wisconsin for joining them in these unpopular stands.¹³ Missouri president John W. Behnken wrote in a 1955 letter that “the Missouri Synod has not changed its doctrinal position,”¹⁴ and an *American Lutheran* editorialist insisted, “Those faulting the Missouri Synod will be hard put to prove that the Synod as an organization or any of its members has departed from the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.”¹⁵

By the late 1950s, however, changes were becoming clearer. By 1962, Martin Marty stated flatly, “Missouri is changing and knows it.” Wisconsin criticisms hurt, Marty charged, because “they were reminders of a cozy world of a century and less ago when Missouri held some of the same positions.”¹⁶ Also in 1962, LCMS first vice-president Roland Wiederanders admitted, “We have not dealt honestly and openly with our pastors and people. We have refused to state our changing theological position in open, honest, forthright, simple, and clear words. Over and over again we said that nothing was changing but all the while we were aware of the changes taking place.”¹⁷

The split of the ELS from Missouri in 1955, and of Wisconsin in 1961, constituted one of the great tragedies of their synodical lives, made all the more painful by

¹² [Joh. P.] M[eyer], “Is the Missouri Synod Veering?,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 38, no. 3 (July 1941): 229–230.

¹³ [Theodore] G[raebner], “Misrepresentations Regarding Chaplain Service,” *The Lutheran Witness* 37, no. 7 (April 2, 1918), 107–108; see J[ohn] B[renner], “Why Do We Not Co-operate?,” *TNL* 5, no. 4 (February 24, 1918), 31–32.

¹⁴ John W. Behnken to “Taffy” (W. F. Klindworth), 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.

¹⁵ “A Dead End for the Synodical Conference,” *The American Lutheran* 46 (October 1963): 5.

¹⁶ Martin E. Marty, “Head First but Not Headlong: Missouri’s New Direction, 1962,” *The Lutheran Standard* 2 (August 14, 1962): 5.

¹⁷ Quoted in James E. Adams, *Preus of Missouri and the Great Lutheran Civil War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 124.

expressions from Missouri's "moderate" element that they preferred no longer being shackled to their little sisters anyway.¹⁸

1961–1969: "A Deterioration Rather Than an Improvement"

In its 1961 action, when the Wisconsin Synod resolved to "suspend fellowship" with the Missouri Synod, it added in an explanatory footnote that "the word 'suspend' as used in the resolution has all the finality of termination during the duration of suspension, but contains the hope that conditions might someday warrant the reestablishment of fellowship."¹⁹ Wisconsin leaders hoped to see evidence of such conditions, but within the first fifteen months after the resolution two indicators suggested that circumstances would not be moving in that direction.

The first indication came following Missouri's 1962 convention in Cleveland. *The American Lutheran*, an independent publication within the synod, announced that "a new era has dawned for the Lutherans of America." Under the leadership of outgoing President Behnken, the synod "took a firm stand against the efforts of a small but extremely vocal minority to turn back the clock of history and commit the Synod to a policy of theological obscurantism and ecclesiastical isolationism." The election of a new synod president and manifestations of a progressive and evangelical "spirit promised exciting years ahead for the Missouri Synod."²⁰

Reporting in *The Lutheran Standard*, the magazine of The American Lutheran Church (ALC), Marty declared that the Missouri Synod "decisively repudiated its 'radical right wing,' which threatened not so much to prevail as to paralyze the convention." Marty predicted that "Missouri may not have seen the last of its dissidents, but [this] convention gave a better picture of their relative strength." He credited Missouri with casting reconciling glances at the Wisconsin Synod. "While new harmony is not likely to develop until Wisconsin changes officially," he wrote, "Missouri does not want to be reckless in burning bridges to the past."²¹

Wisconsin responded that the 1962 Cleveland convention confirmed that the LCMS had "yielded to a considerable extent to the contention" that it was "neither possible nor necessary to agree in all doctrines" and that such agreement was replaced by what was now considered "a wholesome and allowable latitude of theological opinion." Missouri's vision of achieving "greater confessional solidarity, to

¹⁸ An unnamed author likened the Missouri Synod's regret over the dissolution of fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod to the sadness one feels when a long-ill relative has finally died. "It was no secret that, among other things, the Wisconsin Synod had been a drag on Missouri's moves toward ecumenical participation." "Autopsy," *Dialog* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1962): 70.

¹⁹ *Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, August 8 to 17, 1961*, 198.

²⁰ "The Beginning of a New Era," *The American Lutheran* 45 (August 1962): 3.

²¹ Marty, "Head First but Not Headlong," 4.

say nothing of doctrinal agreement by the practice of a greater degree of cooperation,” was “the exact reverse” of what its former synodical policy had been.²²

The second indicator that Wisconsin’s suspension of fellowship could not easily be rescinded came at the Synodical Conference convention in Chicago in November 1962. Tensions between the four member synods had been present at least as far back as 1946.²³ Meetings at Fort Wayne in 1950 and the Twin Cities in 1952 “reached new lows in strife and bitterness, divided reports, and bloc voting. Positions had hardened, in most cases along synodical lines.”²⁴ By 1956 “the WELS and ELS delegates had their own opening communion service in the ELS church while the LCMS and Slovak delegates worshiped at the scene of the convention.”²⁵ In 1962, the Missouri and Slovak Synods held their opening service at St. James Lutheran Church, while the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS gathered at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. On the convention floor, the majority report, representing the position of the LCMS and the Slovaks, announced that “the doctrinal basis, the qualifications for membership, and the purposes” expressed at the founding of the conference were still present among the synods of the Synodical Conference. The minority report of Wisconsin and the ELS maintained that “when one or more of the synods finds that another member body persists in leaving the Scriptural ground on which the unity of spirit is based, a call for dissolution is the only avenue left open to testify against such a departure.” The vote, reflecting the heavy numerical advantage of the Missouri Synod, was 177–53 against dissolving the Synodical Conference. Julian Anderson, reporting on the conference for the ELS magazine, *The Lutheran Sentinel*, concluded, “It may be fairly stated that [this] convention succeeded in preserving an external organization called the ‘Lutheran Synodical Conference,’ but its true spiritual glory is departed inasmuch as it no longer stands committed to its first-stated purpose—to give outward expression to the unity of spirit existing among the constituent synods.”²⁶

During the remainder of the 1960s, Wisconsin and its companion synods responded to inter-synodical differences regarding the meaning and practice of church fellowship. Wisconsin president Oscar Naumann wrote in 1963 that the WELS typically agreed to participate in inter-synodical discussions only if (1)

²² [Heinrich J.] V[ogel], “Toward Cooperation among American Lutherans,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *WLQ*) 59, no. 3 (July 1962): 216; see also Armin W. Schuetze, “Missouri’s New Direction,” *WLQ* 59, no. 4 (October 1962): 287–289.

²³ E. Benjamin Schlueter, opening address, in *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1946*, 8.

²⁴ Edward Fredrich, “The Great Debate with Missouri,” *WLQ* 74, no. 2 (April 1977): 166.

²⁵ Mark E. Braun, “‘Those Were Trying Years!’ Recollections of the ‘Split,’” *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 18, no. 1 (April 2000): 44.

²⁶ Julian G. Anderson, “Special Report: 47th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference,” *The Lutheran Sentinel* 45 (November 22, 1962): 340–344.

differences in doctrine and practice were frankly acknowledged, (2) the primary business of such discussions was the removal of existing barriers by honestly facing the points of difference, and (3) until actual unity has been achieved, every practice of church fellowship, including all forms of joint worship and church work, would be conscientiously avoided.²⁷

Wisconsin responded to the 1965 LCMS publication *The Theology of Fellowship* that it attempted “to set up lax principles of church fellowship by reinterpreting those passages of Scripture which bid us to avoid the persistent errorist.” In addition, “conspicuous by its absence” was any definition of the terms “church fellowship” or “unionism.”²⁸ Pulpit and altar fellowship were cited as “outstanding manifestations of church fellowship,” but the document contained no mention of expressions of fellowship beyond that.²⁹ Wisconsin believed that the statement “consciously” ruled out from the scope of church fellowship “things that have always among us in Synodical Conference circles been considered an essential part of the exercise of church fellowship.”³⁰ Instead, *The Theology of Fellowship* stated, “Our Synod should clearly recognize that, in the case of necessary work on the local, national, or international level, where the faith and confession of the church are not compromised, and where it appears essential that the churches of various denominations should cooperate or at least not work at cross purposes, our churches ought to cooperate willingly to the extent that the Word of God and conscience will allow.”³¹

Wisconsin replied that *The Theology of Fellowship* revealed “a deterioration rather than an improvement in the teaching on Church Fellowship in the Missouri Synod, at least in its Commission on Theology and Church Relations.”³²

Missouri’s 1967 convention in New York adopted *The Theology of Fellowship* and in doing so “documented the change in fellowship principles in the LCMS after disturbing evidences of the change had long appeared in the official life of the body.”³³ There was “no fellowship with the ALC—yet,” and some convention participants objected that the “Joint Statement and Declaration” previously approved by Missouri and the ALC failed to address “the real issues which have separated the

²⁷ Oscar J. Naumann, “Wisconsin Synod Answer Re: New Cooperative Agency,” *WLQ* 60, no. 1 (January 1963): 58–61.

²⁸ Gerald Hoenecke, “Supplement to the Report and Recommendation of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod re Theology of Fellowship,” *WLQ* 63, no. 1 (January 1966): 58.

²⁹ Hoenecke, “Supplement to the Report,” 58–59.

³⁰ Hoenecke, “Supplement to the Report,” 59.

³¹ “Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Theology of Fellowship* ([St. Louis]: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, [1965]), 43.

³² Hoenecke, “Supplement to the Report,” 61.

³³ Irwin J. Habeck, “Missouri Synod Convention,” *WLQ* 64, no. 4 (October 1967): 307. See also Braun, *Tale of Two Synods*, 132–138.

ALC and the LC-MS in the past.” Nevertheless, the 1967 convention resolved that there was sufficient scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between the two bodies and urged that the synod “proceed to take the necessary steps toward full realization of altar and pulpit fellowship.”³⁴

Wisconsin rejoiced in the “evident determination” of the 1967 convention to resist yielding to liberalism concerning the Genesis accounts of the creation and the fall of mankind.³⁵ It “reaffirm[ed] its faith in the united testimony of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions” that “God by the almighty power of His Word created all things in 6 days by a series of creative acts”; that “Adam and Eve were real, historical human beings, the first two people in the world”; and that the fall of our first parents is a historical fact “which corrupted God’s handiwork in Adam” and thus brought sin into the world, so that “since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin.”³⁶ The convention approved a resolution restating doctrinal positions “that the Holy Scripture is the inerrant Word of God”; that “Christ has made atonement for the sins of the whole world”; that “Christ rose from the dead glorified in His flesh”; and “that only those who believe in Christ receive eternal life.”³⁷ Wisconsin’s Irwin Habeck cautioned, however, that “we have heard other reaffirmations of a sound doctrinal position and rejections of error from past conventions but have seen little evidence of decisive discipline against those who promulgated the views. . . . The resolutions concerning discipline are not much different from those of previous conventions.”³⁸

Thus, Missouri’s 1967 convention “marked time.” It did not provide “much that might give rise to the hope that the sister who has become estranged from us might return to our side. But we shall continue to do what we can to support with our prayers, and with the words and actions of our own Synod, those who are dedicated to bringing the [LCMS] back to where she once stood, one with us in doctrine and practice.”³⁹

Meanwhile, representatives of the ELS and WELS assembled as the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum beginning in October 1968. The objective of this forum was “to manifest in a more tangible way the unity of faith and confession, which

³⁴ Habeck, “Missouri Synod Convention,” 308–310.

³⁵ Habeck, “Missouri Synod Convention,” 307.

³⁶ “To Reaffirm Our Position on Creation, Fall, and Related Subjects,” in *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1967]), 95.

³⁷ “To Reaffirm Our Position on Certain Doctrines,” in *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention*, 95.

³⁸ Habeck, “Missouri Synod Convention,” 308.

³⁹ Habeck, “Missouri Synod Convention,” 311.

already exists between the two bodies, and to strengthen each other in our endeavor to remain faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.”⁴⁰

1969–1974: “The Deep Theological Cleavage Became Evident”

Missouri’s 1967 declaration that “the Scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between [the LCMS] and the [ALC] exists” and resolution that the [Missouri] Synod proceed to take the necessary steps toward full realization of altar and pulpit fellowship” with the ALC⁴¹ set the stage for a dramatic showdown at Missouri’s 1969 convention in Denver, and it set in motion the next phase leading to the walkout.

Two months before the Denver convention, Concordia Seminary professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn wrote an editorial favoring fellowship with the ALC, remarkable not only for the position he espoused but also for the absolute certainty with which he expressed it: “The question would not be *if* the vote would favor authorizing” fellowship but “only the size of the margin in favor of it.” He expected that “70 percent of our people probably approve the authorization of such fellowship” and “conceivably the vote in favor would run much higher.” A recent poll conducted among Concordia Seminary students had indicated that 90 percent of faculty members and graduate students and more than 80 percent of ministerial students also approved the merger. Piepkorn apparently believed this poll represented “a good cross-section” of the LCMS. The LCMS Council of Presidents had also voted 25 to 13 in favor of the fellowship with the ALC.⁴²

Beyond the numbers, Piepkorn maintained that the movement toward Missouri-ALC fellowship was “practically irreversible” because of the “countless civic, welfare, evangelistic, missionary, and pastoral activities” already linking the two synods, on local, regional, and national levels. “In a great variety of ways the congregations of the [LCMS] and the [ALC] are practicing *de facto* fellowship already.” There were exceptions, of course, but Piepkorn maintained that such exceptions “merely prove the almost universal rule.”⁴³

Piepkorn charged that any convention delegates who would vote against the fellowship proposal would fail adequately to represent the mind of the LCMS and could “with the best intentions” vote “contrary to the will” of the synod—as if to

⁴⁰ Gerald Hoenecke, “Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum,” *WLQ* 66, no. 1 (January 1969): 59–60.

⁴¹ Cited by Heinrich J. Vogel, “Steps Taken by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Toward Declaration of Fellowship with The American Lutheran Church,” *WLQ* 66, no. 1 (January 1969): 67.

⁴² Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “Will the Decision on Fellowship at Denver Make a Difference?,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40, no. 5 (May 1969): 260–261.

⁴³ Piepkorn, “Will the Decision on Fellowship,” 261.

assert that only moderates discerned the true mood of the synod; any delegates who saw the fellowship issue differently were all but foreign to the synod. “Even if the assembly at Denver were to vote no on authorizing fellowship,” Piepkorn wrote, it was “quite inconceivable that not a single one of these people would pause for a moment in doing what they have been doing,” because they had already made their decision “before the forum of their conscience” and thus “see no conflict between their loyalty to what they see as the demand of the Holy Spirit and the demand of their commitment” to LCMS principles.⁴⁴

Carl Lawrenz, president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, served as the WELS observer in Denver. He noted that

already at the open hearings of the Floor Committee on Church Relations, . . . the deep theological cleavage became evident. Those opposing a declaration of fellowship . . . stressed the unsound position of many of its leaders in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, the ALC’s lax lodge practice, and its ecumenical relations with heterodox churches and church federations. . . . These speakers therefore found an establishment of fellowship with the ALC unwarranted. On the other side, those speaking for ALC fellowship did not spend too much time questioning and refuting the facts about the ALC. . . . They rather viewed these facts from a different theological approach. . . . Instead of demanding full unity in Scriptural doctrine and practice for fellowship, those speaking in favor of fellowship with the ALC emphasized a vaguely defined consensus in the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. . . . Instead of stressing the absolute inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, also in factual statements, they contented themselves with a functional trustworthiness of the Scriptures in the matters of Christian faith and life.⁴⁵

Lawrenz concluded that in the presidential election, the division between candidates centered on their “theological positions.” Four of the five top candidates “were considered to be conservatives,” and Dr. J. A. O. Preus was elected president on the second ballot. It appeared that “a large segment of voting delegates had given Dr. Preus the mandate of leading his synod back to its former positions in doctrine and practice” and “to turn the synod away from the new theological approaches which had led to a recommendation of establishing fellowship with the ALC.”⁴⁶

Dr. Preus urged each delegate to “vote his conscience,” and he himself favored “a delay in declaring fellowship.” A minority report signed by ten of the forty-six-man floor committee, advocating further study of the issue “was merely read for

⁴⁴ Piepkorn, “Will the Decision on Fellowship,” 261–263.

⁴⁵ Carl Lawrenz, “The Denver Convention of the LCMS[,] July 11–18, 1969,” *WLQ* 66, no. 4 (October 1969): 277–279.

⁴⁶ Lawrenz, “The Denver Convention of the LCMS,” 279–280.

purposes of information.” The vote was 522 for the declaration of fellowship and 438 against. Dr. Preus closed with this statement: “As your president I will abide by the decision of the convention and will endeavor to procure consensus and fellowship with all Lutherans in America with all vigor and sincerity.” Lawrenz interpreted the division of votes as not a divided judgment on the position of the ALC in doctrine and practice “but rather a cleavage in theological position on the part of the voters.” The resolution establishing fellowship with the ALC “was handled as a matter of judgment, rather than one of conscience.”⁴⁷

Another Wisconsin observer, Professor Armin Schuetze, wrote that “one can only conclude that for Dr. Preus and for the majority of the LC-MS recognition of the full inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures is no longer a prerequisite for church fellowship.” Missouri, Schuetze wrote, had “openly and formally conceded that its teaching and practice of a century was wrong.”⁴⁸ The *Brief Statement* of 1932, which included the words “We repudiate *unionism*, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God’s command,”⁴⁹ had yielded to the ALC position that it was not necessary to agree on all points of doctrine.⁵⁰ To the ALC, Schuetze could only say, “but we say it sadly, Thou hast conquered.”⁵¹

Earlier that year, Concordia Seminary president Alfred Fuerbringer had announced that he was stepping down from his position. Under his leadership, Concordia had already been undergoing “a quiet revolution” in which “biblical studies were receiving major attention, replacing dogmatic theology.” Several faculty members “were helping Concordia Seminary and the church body come to terms with contemporary issues of biblical criticism.”⁵² In May 1969, Dr. John Tietjen was informed that he had been elected to become Concordia’s next president.⁵³

Early in 1970, a group of pastors, professors, teachers, church officials, and laymen issued the statement “A Call to Openness and Trust.” This group called for

⁴⁷ Lawrenz, “The Denver Convention of the LCMS,” 280.

⁴⁸ Armin W. Schuetze, “Formal Announcement of Fellowship,” *WLQ* 66, no. 4 (October 1969): 285.

⁴⁹ *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1932]), 13.

⁵⁰ As early as 1938, the American Lutheran Church had stated, “We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines.” See “Resolutions of the American Lutheran Church with Reference to Lutheran Union,” cited in *Concordia Theological Monthly* 10, no. 1 (January 1939): 59.

⁵¹ Armin W. Schuetze, “Formal Announcement of Fellowship,” *WLQ* 66, no. 4 (October 1969): 284–285; see also Carleton Toppe, “No Warning Against Typhus?,” *TNL* 57, no. 15 (July 19, 1970), 235.

⁵² John H. Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 6.

⁵³ Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, 6.

“greater freedom in the Lutheran Church.” Reviewing the statement, Schuetze wrote,

What kind of freedom do they seek? . . . This statement . . . is in fact a declaration of independence from authority in the Christian’s faith and life. From whose authority do they seek freedom? Is it merely from the authority of a denominational organization? Or of church leaders preoccupied with their own institutional power? . . . They are asking for freedom to call Jesus a liar when He refers to a portion of the Old Testament as written by Moses. They are asking for freedom to declare the Bible factually false. . . . They are asking for freedom from the authority of Scripture, freedom from confessional commitment. That is not the freedom God gives us under the Gospel. . . . The freedom He gives us is from the tyranny of Satan and sin, so that the Christian freely and joyfully places himself under God’s Word, under Scripture, and freely confesses the full truth therein revealed, as we do in the Lutheran Confessions.⁵⁴

Thus, according to Schuetze, the appearance of “A Call to Openness and Trust” provided further evidence of the “deep doctrinal cleavage” within the synod. President Preus in his letter to LCMS clergy warned, “Make no mistake about this, brothers. What is at stake is not only inerrancy but the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself, the authority of Holy Scripture, the ‘quia’ subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, and perhaps the very continued existence of Lutheranism as a confessional and confessing movement in the Christian world.”⁵⁵ Schuetze issued a challenge: “Will President Preus follow through? Or will he be satisfied merely to have complained that synodical channels and procedures were ignored? . . . Will he be content to have invited these ‘troublers of Israel’ to leave [their] fellowship, something they themselves have already said they [did] not intend to do? The patient is very, very sick. Dr. Preus has diagnosed the illness. A few antibiotics won’t do. Radical surgery is called for. Is Dr. Preus ready to head a team of surgeons for the operation?”⁵⁶

In fall 1969, Pastor Herman Otten of New Haven, Missouri, had met with President Preus, pleading with him to conduct heresy trials against Concordia faculty members.⁵⁷ A year later, Preus announced the appointment of a Fact-Finding Committee to investigate the seminary.⁵⁸ The impending investigation was ridiculed by

⁵⁴ Armin W. Schuetze, “More Evidence of the ‘Cleavage,’” *WLQ* 67, no. 2 (April 1970): 134–135.

⁵⁵ Schuetze, “More Evidence of the ‘Cleavage,’” 135–136. Schuetze was quoting portions of Preus’ letter entitled “Brother to Brother,” dated February 11, 1970. Portions of this letter are reprinted in *Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout* (St. Louis: Concordia College, 1977), 19–20.

⁵⁶ Schuetze, “More Evidence of the ‘Cleavage,’” 135–136.

⁵⁷ Adams, *Preus of Missouri*, 168.

⁵⁸ Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, xiii.

Newsweek magazine as a “sitting in judgment on some of the church’s most respected scholars,” and “heading the inquiry was a man whose theological reputation rests largely on his efforts to prove that God created the world in six days of 24 hours each.”⁵⁹ Such reporting, wrote Wisconsin’s Carleton Toppe, was “particularly mortifying to the liberal segment of the Missouri Synod” but was “only somewhat less galling to the average conservative Missourian because his synod has long wooed public favor. Missourians have been watching the public relations barometer with anxiety for 30 years.”⁶⁰

As Missouri’s 1971 convention in Milwaukee approached, more than two hundred overtures to the convention called for some form of suspension of fellowship with the ALC.⁶¹ Committee 2 submitted a resolution, “To Uphold Synodical Doctrinal Resolutions,” which would have made synodically adopted resolutions doctrinally binding throughout the LCMS. However, convention delegates rejected this resolution, prompting Wisconsin’s Carl Lawrenz to comment, “Scripture, of course, at all times gives Dr. Preus full authorization to take a firm stand in his Synod . . . to implement the kind of doctrinal discipline which becomes necessary to put this position into practice. We note, however, with sadness that the delegates of the Synod assembled in convention failed to supply him with a resolution which indicated that they would wholeheartedly stand behind him as he carried out his Scriptural mandate. The fact that the adoption of such a resolution was effectively and very deliberately defeated carries a very disturbing message.”⁶²

The results of the 1971 convention also rocked the Milwaukee area, bringing the issues closer to future Wisconsin Synod pastors attending Northwestern College in nearby Watertown or the seminary in Mequon, north of Milwaukee. Two LCMS churches, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Okauchee and St. John’s Lutheran Church in Watertown, were among seven LCMS congregations that became charter members of the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism, a new, conservative Lutheran synod that protested Missouri’s recent decisions.⁶³

Under the date of March 3, 1972, President Preus announced preliminary progress on the task assigned to him by the Milwaukee convention to report “the progress made by the board of control of Concordia Seminary” relative to the Fact-Finding Committee. Initially, the seminary’s board declined to take any action on

⁵⁹ “Discord at Concordia,” *Newsweek*, January 4, 1971), 41.

⁶⁰ Carleton Toppe, “Misericordia,” *TNL* 58, no. 4 (February 14, 1971), 51.

⁶¹ *Workbook of the Forty-Ninth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 150–183.

⁶² Carl Lawrenz, “The Subversive Theory of Open Questions,” *WLQ* 68, no. 4 (October 1971): 265–267.

⁶³ Carl Lawrenz, “F.A.L. A New Confessional Lutheran Church Body,” *WLQ* 69, no. 1 (January 1972): 38–40.

these guidelines. A majority of Concordia's faculty members defied Dr. Preus and rejected the *Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*. They argued that "the positions rejected in the *Statement* are in most cases not the position of any member of this faculty," and in a few cases they were "caricatures of positions of one or more of our colleagues. But in almost every case the distortion is so severe that it does not represent the actual position of any of us."⁶⁴

Wisconsin's Harold Wicke commented,

[This] is not a confrontation between two men, . . . [but] the clash of two systems of thought, two ways of life, two methods of reading the Word of God. At stake finally is every single doctrine of the Christian faith. . . .

The fact that more than half of the document is taken up with [the doctrine of Scripture] reveals that it is here where the real trouble lies, in the attitude toward the Scripture—its inspiration, its authority, its infallibility, its unity, its interpretation. Where there is no unanimity in the understanding of the Scripture, there can be no doctrinal unity.⁶⁵

Early in 1973, the Concordia faculty issued two booklets, both of which bore the title *Faithful to Our Calling[,] Faithful to Our Lord*.⁶⁶ The first volume contained a joint confession of faith from the faculty; the second featured statements of individual faculty members. Wisconsin professor Siegbert Becker charged that the second booklet made it

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

⁶⁴ Reported by H[einrich J.] Vogel, "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles," *WLQ* 69, no. 3 (July 1972): 200–210. He refers to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* (St. Louis: [The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod], 1972).

⁶⁵ Harold E. Wicke, "Briefs by the Editor," *TNL* 59, no. 9 (April 23, 1972), 134.

⁶⁶ Faculty of Concordia Seminary, *Faithful to Our Calling[,] Faithful to Our Lord: An Affirmation in Two Parts*, 2 vols. ([St. Louis: Concordia Seminary], n.d.).

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

With David we can only say, “How are the mighty fallen!” As a former member of the LCMS, this writer feels constrained to add, “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan.”⁶⁷

In July 1973 at New Orleans, 329 resolutions were brought to the floor of the fiftieth convention of the Missouri Synod, and more than 950 memorials were addressed to it. President Preus was easily reelected on the first ballot, and his election was followed by 150 results favorable to conservatives, including vice presidents, the secretary, the treasurer, boards of directors, nominating committees, commissions, boards, and boards of control. According to Heinrich Vogel, the convention approved three significant resolutions: (1) that the synod’s constitution “permits, and at times requires, the formulation and adoption of doctrinal statements as definitive of the Synod’s position relative to controversial issues”; (2) that the *Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles addressed itself* to “the doctrinal issues troubling the church”; and (3) that the Concordia faculty majority was guilty of “false doctrine running counter to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the synodical stance.” This false teaching “cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended.”⁶⁸

The conservative element in the LCMS clearly had won “the battle of New Orleans,” having asserted itself “in unmistakable terms as standing for the authority of Scripture” and having shown “a willingness to apply this theological stance to the problems afflicting” the synod. Wisconsin’s Heinrich Vogel cautioned, however, that “much will depend on the thoroughness with which these principles set down in the resolutions adopted at New Orleans are applied in the discipline which the responsible boards and commissions in the Synod must now carry out.” Both sides acknowledged that the synod is a “house divided,” but “neither is willing to concede leadership to the other.” If some are not satisfied that the synodical leadership cannot gain control of the body, “they will have to separate themselves from it and join their forces with others of the same persuasion.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Siegbert W. Becker, “Faithful to Our Calling—Faithful to our Lord,” *WLQ* 70, no. 2 (April 1973): 131–132.

⁶⁸ H[einrich J.] Vogel, “The 50th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” *WLQ* 70, no. 4 (October 1973): 287–289.

⁶⁹ Vogel, “50th Regular Convention,” 290.

Richard John Neuhaus, an LCMS pastor in Brooklyn and a forthright opponent of Dr. Preus, charged that in recent decades the synod's leadership "kept telling the people there were no changes in the Missouri Synod, when any village idiot anywhere in the church knew there were changes." People felt "lied to and cheated."⁷⁰ Wisconsin's Edward Fredrich responded, "Wisconsin Synod members whose intersynodical memories go back to the time when the Synodical Conference was disintegrating will be reminded by the Neuhaus commentary . . . of [the] frustrating effort to point out and pin down changes in theological positions of former brethren. Always and again the claim was made that no changes had taken place. Neuhaus has his history straight on that point. . . . Our hope [is] that in basic issues the Missouri Synod, as it began at New Orleans, will continue to change and once again become what it was before it changed."⁷¹

Wisconsin's Carleton Toppe added that conservatives must be "prepared to make painful sacrifices. The distastefulness of strong discipline must replace the former more palatable permissiveness." Those who choose to return to historic Lutheranism "will need to accept the stigma of isolationism, and to forfeit public approval. And they dare not flinch from the anguish of severing ties with members of their synodical household—to split their congregations and their synod if need be." To restore Missouri to its confessional integrity will require "clear-sightedness, painful sacrifices, much toil and prayer, and complete reliance on the boundless help of God. That will be almost a theological miracle."⁷²

Less than two months after the 1973 convention, more than eight hundred Missouri Synod Lutherans met in Des Plaines, Illinois, to "protest errant actions of the majority" and to form an organized "confessional movement," as reported by Carleton Toppe. The conference set in motion the legal incorporation of a national organization, which would adopt the name Evangelical Lutherans in Mission (ELIM). The group's stated purpose was "not to leave the Missouri Synod" but "to stay and work within" it. They insisted they were "not schismatics and will not be responsible for schism" but would "continue our movement of confession and protest within our Synod."⁷³ President Preus called their action "a rebellion not only against our Synod and its recent convention but, more importantly, against God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word," and he urged them to reconsider their actions.⁷⁴ But an

⁷⁰ James E. Adams, "Missouri Synod Lutherans: Conservative Takeover," *The Christian Century* 90 (August 1, 1973), 772.

⁷¹ Edward Fredrich, "Neuhaus and New Orleans," *TNL* 60, no. 18 (September 9, 1973), 290.

⁷² Carleton Toppe, "Reversing Time and Tide," *TNL* 60, no. 17 (August 26, 1973), 263.

⁷³ H[einrich J.] Vogel, "Evangelical Lutherans in Mission," *WLQ* 71, no. 1 (January 1974): 62–63.

⁷⁴ J. A. O. Preus, "Meeting of Insurgents Deplored," *The Lutheran Witness* 92 (September 16, 1973), 383.

opposing voice in a new publication, *Missouri in Perspective*, countered, “The President appears most distressed over [his] inability to control and bind the consciences of our membership on the basis of majority vote in Synodical conventions.”⁷⁵

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

- the suspension of Dr. Tietjen and the appointment of Dr. Martin Scharlemann as acting president of the seminary;
- the declaration by 40 faculty members and a majority of the student body refusing to teach or attend classes;
- the board’s dismissal of 45 professors and staff members from their positions;
- a meeting of more than 350 students who declared that they found it “impossible in good conscience to continue their education under the present Seminary Board of Control”; and
- the procession of students and faculty members walking off the Concordia campus, referring to their status as “exiles,” indicating that they planned to form a Seminary in Exile at facilities offered by Eden Theological Seminary and the St. Louis School of Divinity.⁷⁶

Dismayed but Hopeful

A complete analysis of Wisconsin’s reaction to Missouri’s tragedy was provided by seminary professor Joel Gerlach in Wisconsin’s *Northwestern Lutheran*:

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

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

Clearly there is a doctrinal issue involved. The controversy ought to have been resolved on the basis of that issue. Officials of the Synod complicated matters unnecessarily by including procedural matters and by attempting to solve the problem with diplomacy. We hope that the “moderates” in the Synod will

⁷⁵ “Response to ‘Insurgent Charge,’” *Missouri in Perspective* 1 (October 22, 1973), 4.

⁷⁶ H[einrich J.] Vogel, “Troubled Missouri,” *WLQ* 71, no. 2 (April 1974): 142–144.

not succeed in beclouding the issue by shifting attention to procedural technicalities.

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

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

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

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

It behooves us all to pray earnestly and often for those in Missouri who share our view of Scripture. God bless their efforts to establish and maintain the authority of the Word throughout their Synod!⁷⁷

John Tietjen characterized the LCMS convention in 1962 as "a turning point in the life of the Missouri Synod, signaling a way to move from rigidity in theology and isolation in church life toward more openness in both theology and mission."⁷⁸ But

⁷⁷ Joel C. Gerlach, "Phoenix in St. Louis," *TNL* 61, no. 7 (April 7, 1974), 106–107.

⁷⁸ Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, 6.

the conservative publication *Affirm* reported that “for more than a decade events at the Sem had been building to the Tietjen suspension.” Even before Tietjen became Concordia Seminary’s president, “Missouri had started to grow aware of the fact that its faculty harbored theological deviants who wanted to lead the church away from its traditional theology, based on the Word, to a liberal theology in conflict with the Lutheran heritage.”⁷⁹

David Scaer observed “something messianic in how Tietjen saw himself.” Scaer asked, “How else is one to interpret the following remark” from Tietjen’s *Memoirs*? “I am convinced that God, who raised Jesus from the dead, worked through institutional death and transfiguration to produce the ELCA.”⁸⁰ Robert Preus, reviewing Tietjen’s *Memoirs* in 1992, wrote, “Tietjen and his colleagues did not ever sufficiently understand the thinking of ordinary Missouri pastors and people. . . . They were God-fearing, pious people who wanted to remain Lutheran and who believed the Bible. They were not interested in ecumenical relations with other church bodies, and they were confused and frightened by the so-called historical critical method, whose apologists could never explain it and rarely knew what it was. They were parochial in the good Lutheran sense of the word. And they should never have been taken for granted.”⁸¹

The evidence suggests that at significant junctures, moderates overestimated the level of support from within their synod. An editorial in *The Lutheran Witness* in 1962 stated, “Emphatically and in many ways the Cleveland convention repudiated the legalistic tactics of a tiny segment which had troubled Synod relentlessly for decades and the devious devices of splinter groups which had spawned irritation and festering discontent.”⁸² Marty wrote in *The Lutheran Standard* that the synod had “decisively repudiated its ‘radical wing’ which threatened not so much to prevail as to paralyze the convention.”⁸³ While the 1962 convention was indeed a victory for moderates, they may not have recognized or did not want to acknowledge the growing resurgence of synodical conservatives in free conferences and independent publications. Piepkorn’s 1969 article in *Concordia Theological Monthly* strongly suggests that he mistook campus and faculty support for fellowship with the ALC as representative of the mindset of the synod as a whole. While Piepkorn predicted a victory of 80 percent or greater in the vote for fellowship with the ALC, the vote

⁷⁹ “The Tietjen Suspension,” *Affirm* 3 (January 1974), 1.

⁸⁰ David P. Scaer, *Surviving the Storms: Memoirs of David P. Scaer* (Fort Wayne, IN: Luther Academy, 2018), 134, citing Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile*, 341.

⁸¹ Robert Preus, review of *Memoirs in Exile: Confessional Hope and Institutional Conflict*, by John H. Tietjen, *LOGIA* 1 (Reformation 1992): 70–71.

⁸² “Editorial: Turning Point,” *The Lutheran Witness* 81 (August 21, 1962), 406, emphasis added.

⁸³ Marty, “Head First But Not Headlong,” 4.

succeeded by less than 55 percent.⁸⁴ This miscalculation and some of his comments—in the view of this author—reveal not only overconfidence but also hubris.

Shortly after the walkout, Marty predicted that “before many seasons the two Preuses will announce their sudden discovery that good stewardship calls for but one seminary. Only thus can the Preuses have some sort of faculty, student body, and the possibility of continuing accreditation.”⁸⁵ Wisconsin’s Joel Gerlach interpreted Marty’s comment as “the words of a person who knows he’s been licked.”⁸⁶ Richard Koenig, editor of *Forum Letter*, conceded victory to the conservatives, concluding, “Logically what all of this points to, as many have observed, is for the moderates to leave the Synod in favor of a structure of their own creation.”⁸⁷

There is no indication of a split theological opinion in the Wisconsin Synod concerning the issues that tormented and divided Missouri—although some would quickly qualify that statement by reminding that reports in Wisconsin’s theological journal and its members’ magazine were “managed news.” A few pastors and congregations left Wisconsin for Missouri, and perhaps a few more went from Missouri to Wisconsin. But during the 1960s and early 1970s, as many in Wisconsin watched with sadness, there was also a growing recognition that this was no longer their battle. That battle had been fought in 1961, and they were not fighting it again in 1974.

Professor August Graebner, father of Theodore Graebner, once likened the Christian in the world to a passenger riding in a train car who finds himself unwillingly thrust into a sudden race with a runaway car traveling on a parallel track. Though unavoidably involved and even deeply distressed, the passenger is not responsible for the fate of the runaway car or the catastrophe that may ensue. Graebner’s point was that in the same way, Christians are present in the world but not accountable for the injustices that occur there.⁸⁸ The Wisconsin Synod watched events in St. Louis with interest and sympathy, but those events no longer involved us. Every year a few more people with cherished memories of a once-heartfelt fellowship with Missouri went to heaven, and every year a new class of seminary graduates entered Wisconsin’s ministerium with fewer ties to Missouri and few, if any, friendships there.

⁸⁴ See above, n. 42.

⁸⁵ Martin E. Marty, “Missouri’s Exiles: Heartbreak, Ashes—and Victory,” *The Christian Century* 91 (June 12–19, 1974), 630–631.

⁸⁶ Joel C. Gerlach, “Missouri Personalialia,” *TNL* 61, no. 14 (July 14, 1974), 215, 222.

⁸⁷ Richard E. Koenig, “Missouri Report and a Message to (Uneasy) Missouri Moderates,” *Forum Letter* 3 (May 1974), 5.

⁸⁸ A[ugust] L. Graebner, “In der Welt, nicht von der Welt,” *Der Lutheraner* 50 (August 14, 1894), 135, cited by Alan Graebner, *Uncertain Saints: The Laity in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1900–1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1975), 111.

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

Carl Lawrenz wrote, “We can only pray that the doctrinally concerned members and leaders of the LCMS may seek and find their answers not in human strategy and ingenuity but in the edifying Word, including its injunctions relative to error and persistent errorists. May they at the same time find strength in the precious Gospel message which is at stake, strength for clear and resolute confessional action.”⁸⁹ Siegbert Becker addressed the impending “doctrinal examination of the faculty of a large Lutheran seminary, which was also once a great Lutheran seminary,” and noted that “as members of a church body which was once a part of the Synodical Conference, we recognize this as a matter that strikes close to our hearts.” Becker added, “Far from viewing this news, therefore, with Pharisaic pride, which thanks God that we are not as other men, we can only thank God that by His grace we have kept the treasure he has given us in grace.”⁹⁰

Carleton Toppe wrote, “To those who loved Concordia for what she once was—*Misericordia!*”⁹¹ And in a longer reflection, Toppe wrote,

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

We who recall what Missouri was and who cherish the faith that many in her churches still cling to, shouldn’t we pray for her in her troubled hour? Pray that she may stand in awe of every syllable and letter that God has inscribed in His Book. Pray that she may place fidelity to eternal truth above concord among her churches, above prestige in her halls of learning, above filial love for the church of her fathers. Pray that she may remember the crown God gave her, and pray that God may keep her for that crown.⁹²

“What Will It Take for Us to Get Back to What We Once Were?”

In addition to official responses to the walkout, surveys were conducted during October 2023 with forty-three men who were students at Wisconsin’s Northwestern College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and who graduated from seminary

⁸⁹ Lawrenz, “The Denver Convention of the LCMS,” 283.

⁹⁰ Siegbert W. Becker, “Academic Freedom at a Confessional Seminary,” *WLQ* 67, no. 4 (October 1970): 227.

⁹¹ Toppe, “*Misericordia*,” 51.

⁹² Carleton Toppe, “A Prayer for the Missouri Synod,” *TNL* 58, no. 14 (July 4, 1971), 215.

between 1971 and 1981. Thirty men replied to the survey; their responses confirmed many of the viewpoints expressed in synodical publications, but some responses also contained personal memories and divergent appraisals.⁹³

The troubles in the Missouri Synod did not loom large for many students when they were in college. “To my shame,” one admitted, “I was oblivious to all that was going on in the world outside NWC.” Another had a roommate in his freshman year who belonged to the LCMS, but he did not “ever recall his talking about anything brewing at St. Louis.” The walkout “had little impact on me personally. I followed it somewhat closely but harbored little optimism for any real change in LCMS doctrine or practice.” Some recalled humorous comparisons to the name *Seminex*: an article in the *Black and Red*, the college magazine, suggested that if such an event occurred there, the breakaway group would be called “*Narthex*.” Another offered the alternate: “*Sominex*.”

Others remembered the walkout as “a giant, dramatic event” that they “paid attention to and talked about a lot.” The St. Louis crisis “dominated the religious news,” which respondents read “with interest and a bit of horror at what had happened in our former sister synod.” The “irreverence and anti-establishment attitude” displayed by some at Concordia who went on strike and then walked was disturbing. Another’s memories were more of a “big picture nature”: “Being the kind of person I am concerning anti-war/government rebellion, the idea of students walking out, for the reasons they did, did not sit well with me. It seemed to be another example of radical, left-wing thinking that I could not understand or appreciate. I came from a ‘flag-waving America, love-it-or-leave-it’ upbringing. . . . I remember having little sympathy for the LCMS: ‘That’s what you get for being so un-Lutheran to begin with.’”

At seminary, the walkout became more “front and center” than it had been in college. One respondent did not recall specific comments made by any of his professors but a general mood of “sorrow and caution.” The attitude another sensed “was that the profs expected something like the walkout to happen based on what had led to the split.” A third said that the walkout occurred during his vicar year, and he did not remember that subject “making a dent in our pastors’ conference agenda or during my time with my bishop [i.e., vicarage supervisor].”

Others have more distinct memories of classroom discussions, and one name was mentioned repeatedly: Siegbert Becker, a former Missouri Synod pastor and professor at Concordia Teachers College in River Forest who left to come to the WELS in 1963. One respondent recalled how he and his classmates “devoured class time” with Dr. Becker, who “had lived through the developing struggle” in Missouri

⁹³ The following unpublished survey responses are in the author’s private possession.

and “was able to provide first-hand glimpses into the heart of the issues.” Frequently and “with great insight,” Becker spoke from his experiences “within the ministerium of the LCMS about the liberalism that had crept into that synod.” He seemed “always to remain in control of his emotions” when he discussed these experiences, yet one former student believed he could sense “the disturbed emotions that were percolating within him.”

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

Another specific instance Becker related involved a telephone call he made to Missouri’s president—either Behnken or Oliver Harms. He told the president that he had to remove either Martin Marty or himself from Missouri’s clergy roster. He told the president, “There was no way the LCMS could retain in its ministerium two theologians, one biblically liberal, the other biblically conservative.” The synod “could not embrace both positions and be theologically and scripturally liberal and conservative at the same time. It had to be one or the other.”

As students, those who were surveyed “learned from Becker that the core issue was the reliability and inspiration of the Scriptures.” Once commitment to the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures was challenged and then abandoned, “there were no restraints on the spread of false theologies and practices.” Becker also maintained that Missouri’s troubles were attributable to its position on the doctrine of church and ministry.

A second source of information was Herman Otten’s weekly publication *Christian News*, which was delivered in bulk mailing to the seminary dormitory every week. “Many of us read his newspaper from cover to cover,” said one, and it played “a big part in the awareness of and interest in events surrounding the walkout.” One said Otten’s “cut-and-paste articles about the walkout provided whatever I knew about it.” Yet some pointed also to a darker side of *Christian News*, which became more pronounced as time went on. “It became difficult to differentiate truth from fiction. Most of us eventually caught on and read his newspaper with a growing

sense of discretion and care. A few classmates never caught on and later allowed his attacks to color their feelings toward the LCMS.” Another called Otten “a weak brother” whose most obvious weakness was “his propensity for gossip and slander.” As an example, the respondent cited an instance in which he read in *Christian News* a clearly inaccurate statement about a brother in the ministry. “I called the editor and spoke with him personally about it. He replied: ‘I can’t verify the truth and accuracy of everything I print. I don’t have time. You readers need to submit corrections and I will print them.’”

One seminary classmate, a former LCMS member, was “quite excited and optimistic” when the walkout occurred. His attitude was like that of Ziba falsely accusing his master, Mephibosheth, of thinking at the time of Absalom’s rebellion, “Today the house of Israel will return the kingdom to my grandfather and me” (2 Sam 16:3, my translation). The classmate must have been thinking, “Today the LCMS will return to its former stance of orthodoxy.” Two other Northwestern College graduates had chosen to attend Concordia Seminary rather than Wisconsin’s seminary, but they maintained regular correspondence with a third NWC graduate who remained in the WELS. “By the time of the walkout, the communication between these three was happening by phone every night.” The still-WELS student learned a lot of outside information and knew about the anticipated walkout before it happened.

Regarding family conversations, one professor’s son said, “My father did not go out of his way to give me a crash course in church history so that I could keep up with events.” Another remembered how the 1961 split had caused divisions even in the family of Wisconsin’s president, Oscar Naumann. His mother and most of his siblings had remained WELS members, but a brother-in-law was a prominent LCMS layman who became president of the Lutheran Laymen’s League. His congregation joined the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) in 1976 and subsequently went to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Naumann’s children remembered their father saying that those pastors who had misled their uncle and aunt would have to answer to our Lord for that. President Preus attended President Naumann’s funeral in 1979 and expressed his condolences to the family, but when he asked if he might be allowed to speak a few words after the service, Naumann’s family decided that it would be inappropriate for him to do so. The family told him that they cherished the fellowship that the WELS and the LCMS had enjoyed for so many years, and they gave evidence of that by singing Walther’s great resurrection hymn, “He’s Risen, He’s Risen, Christ Jesus, the Lord,” at the funeral service. Another respondent remembered an LCMS cousin and how he and his cousin treated each other with respect and occasionally had brief conversations about the state of things in Missouri. He believed his cousin later became a leader among conservatives in the Concordia student body.

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

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

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

Certainly there were also expressions of relief: “Are we glad we got out of fellowship when we did!” said one. Another admitted, “My thoughts about the St. Louis walkers was basically, ‘What a bunch of flamin’ liberals.’” He thought about a classmate who went all through prep school and college with him. “I never knew he was from a Missouri parish because no one ever made anything of it. He was just one of our own. It was only at Seminary that his latent left-wing Missouri tendencies came to life and were germinated.” When “the liberals had their day in St. Louis, my thoughts went back to him. ‘What have you gotten yourself into?’” Another had it instilled in him that “the LCMS wore the black hats and we wore the white hats. They were the enemy, and if the enemy had discord in its ranks, was that all bad?”

The clearest perception one respondent got from listening to WELS pastors talk in those days was “shock and awe.” Missouri’s acceptance of the *Common Confession*,⁹⁴ its flirtation with the ALC and its declaration of fellowship with it, and the walkout itself “traumatized the entire WELS for two generations. It fed the sense that we WELS-ers were God’s last and best hope for true Lutheranism.” Another

⁹⁴ The *Common Confession* was a second effort by the Missouri Synod and the ALC to draft a single doctrinal statement acceptable to all member synods of the Lutheran Synodical Conference and the ALC. While the Missouri Synod’s 1950 convention stated that the *Common Confession* showed that “agreement has been achieved in the doctrines” treated by the synods’ doctrinal committees (*Proceedings of the . . . Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [1950], 585, 587), Wisconsin rejected the *Common Confession*’s statement on Scripture as “inadequate” (Edmund Reim, “As We See It: Once More, the Common Confession,” *TNL* 38, no. 7 [April 8, 1951], 104–105) because it contained no mention of verbal inspiration or inerrancy but allowed truth and error to stand side by side (Edmund Reim, “As We See It: Looking at the Foundation,” *TNL* 38, no. 9 [May 6, 1951], 135–136). See also Braun, *Tale of Two Synods*, 294–301.

remembered conversations among the many pastors who were members of his family. “The talk was about ‘Missouri’ issues. I don’t remember talking about Christ and how to get the good news out.” Missouri was the “whipping boy.” Too often, “I repeated that behavior myself.”

One respondent was told by Wisconsin pastors who established initial WELS congregations in the Detroit area that “the LCMS pastors there had no use for them,” and he had encountered similar “haughtiness from one of the liberals during the early years of my ministry.” One of his family members was a relative of LCMS pastor Robert Brueckner from West Nyack, New York, who regularly wrote letters to *Christian News* to antagonize Otten by recounting the worship services he had conducted with non-Lutheran and even non-Christian clergymen. He believed Brueckner was “among the top 0.1% of Missouri’s liberals.” A former Missouri member who crossed over to Wisconsin wrote,

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

Another asked, “If there is a theological debate of any kind, including analyzing the creeping kudzu of higher criticism of the Bible, wouldn’t Christian people sit together, pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our study of the Word, and then proceed to pray and discuss Scripture, letting Scripture interpret Scripture?” He wondered how Christians could take “a page out of secular society” and try to change things through a “protest” or a “walkout.” If “efforts to gain support not only with outsiders (as if that should even matter) but with Christian souls is through political actions,” the battle was already lost.

While the walkout occurred in St. Louis, one recalled that he and classmates in Milwaukee were invited to an open forum at an area LCMS congregation. “We heard from leaders, professors, and pastors who supported Seminex.” One local district leader—respected in local Missouri circles—attempted to summarize and harmonize the obvious divisions by describing these disagreements as “diversity in unity and unity in diversity.” This pleased all the LCMS people present, and he received a

rousing ovation. But the WELS students all agreed, “If this was the prevailing sentiment across the LCMS, they certainly had a different understanding of fellowship” than the WELS did.

Another knew five students who were a year ahead of him in a WELS synodical school and who chose to attend Concordia Seminary; it distressed him that “four out of the five joined the Seminex walkout. They knew better.” He guessed that “they were influenced by the personalities of the professors who walked out. They were probably also caught up in the excitement of the moment.” This respondent was amazed that “those who remained at Concordia were able to weather the turmoil of a divided faculty and student body, both before and after the walkout.” Seminex students “returned to the dormitories at Concordia every night after the walkout and continued to eat in the cafeteria.” Several respondents commented that they were told that “Seminex students had more or less looted the Concordia library.” Another respondent traveled to Greece in the mid-1990s with a group of pastors, one of whom had been at Concordia during the walkout and later became an ELCA pastor. “He bragged about carrying books away from the library and [complained about] the narrow-mindedness of the LCMS.”

The effects of Seminex extended beyond seminary graduation. “I had been assigned two mission congregations in a community formerly reserved for the Missouri Synod,” said one. “There was a long-time LCMS congregation in town that had drifted toward a more liberal position, so much that the LCMS had established a daughter congregation nearby.” Soon the daughter congregation also received a new pastor who was “very progressive.” This new pastor shocked his congregation by giving Communion to his two-year-old child on the first Sunday he conducted worship there. “I was often dealing with ‘refugees’ from the local Missouri Synod congregations, as well as answering many inquiries about how the WELS was different from the Missouri. Many Lutherans in town were asking, ‘What is going on here?’”

Another “encountered numerous occasions when ministries that had traditionally been conducted jointly by the WELS and the LCMS were still being disentangled”—social services, nursing homes, radio and media ministries, etc. After Seminex, “it became hard to know which LCMS we were sharing ministries with. Old line Missouri pastors were refusing to work with Seminex followers, and we were caught in the middle.” He was invited by a college in the city to participate in a roundtable discussion with a local ELCA pastor and a local LCMS pastor to explain to students the differences between the church bodies. The ELCA pastor served a progressive congregation known for celebrating the Lord’s Supper with bread, wine, and cheese. “It became obvious that I was the lone ‘conservative’ while traditional LCMS

doctrinal positions were being attacked.” Afterward, conservative LCMS students expressed to him that what they were hearing was not what they had been taught.

Another recalled an incident that occurred in the area where he was serving. Two St. Louis students, one a senior, the other a second-year student, appeared in town, and they invited people to come to a more casual conversation that evening. The senior student began to defend the historical-critical method, and

I asked him if he believed the body of Jesus had risen from the dead. He gave the standard responses about the spirit of Jesus and the courage of the apostles. I said, “So, what if you get assigned to some small church in North Dakota and a little old lady is dying in a nursing home? Are you going to tell her that Jesus rose from the dead?” He answered, “If she believes Jesus rose from the dead, I’ll tell her he rose from the dead.” I said, “So if you believe God exists, then he exists, but if you believe that he doesn’t exist, then he doesn’t?” He answered, “That’s right.”

Meanwhile, the second-year student was taking all this in, and he said, “Is that where this all leads?” The senior snapped at him, “Of course. What do you think?” And the second-year student started crying. The respondent wrote, “I will never forget that night as long as I live. I often wonder what happened to him.”

“I felt sad,” another respondent said. The walkout “made the national news. I still remember the cover story in *Time* magazine, ‘Civil War in Missouri.’ Now the divisions and turmoil in the Missouri Synod” were out in the open.⁹⁵ “There was a growing understanding among Missourians that the WELS did indeed have something vital to offer them. Some however asked, ‘How long will it be before the same problems come upon you?’” Said another, “I still recall an instance speaking with a friend (at NWC then, later a WLS grad), a level-headed, respected guy. I referred to the downhill slide in the LCMS as a caution for us in the WELS. His reply was, ‘Oh, nothing like that will ever happen to the WELS.’ It was not spoken with an attitude of pride, but an amazing combination of naivete and complacency.”

As young pastors, some respondents took note of changes in their neighboring pastors. One pastor wrote, “The conservative LCMS pastors in my area refused to go to conference and commune with other LCMS pastors who were supportive of the walkout” and Seminex theology. A second remembered, “My brother, also a WELS pastor, was contacted in the early 1980s by a neighboring LCMS pastor. He told my brother that Missouri President Ralph Bohlman[n] had encouraged pastors to study the doctrine of fellowship,” but “there weren’t any nearby Missourians he

⁹⁵ Although many remember news of the walkout being featured on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, and even on the *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite, this researcher has found no evidence thus far to confirm those memories.

was eager to study with, so he contacted the nearest WELS guy instead.” That Wisconsin pastor’s son also struck up a friendship with one of the Missouri pastor’s sons, who has now become a WELS pastor. “This young Missouri pastor said he would not commune when he attended his LCMS pastoral conferences because he knew he wasn’t one in faith with a number of the pastors in his conference.”

One response differed from the rest:

Our attention to the exile stunted my growth in ministry and led me deeper into a Pharisaical focus on others and an unhealthy denominational pride. . . . Overall, the walkout . . . affected my spiritual growth and maturity and led to attitudes which took me decades to rise above by the grace of God. One of the Concordia professors who was a well-known leader of the walkout was also a noted homiletics professor. Through my own very esteemed Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary homiletics professor, the walkout professor has perhaps had a more positive influence in my pastoral life than almost any other person. He taught “propositional preaching,” I believe he called it: determine malady, means, and goal; personally and prayerfully digest the text; state your theme in about six words; deliver strong, biblical, Christ-centered sermons. Priceless!

Another concluded, “Seminex confirmed my joy in wanting to be a WELS pastor. I saw firsthand, within my own family, the doctrinal erosion that occurs when inerrancy is abandoned. President Harrison has characterized it as ‘the great tragedy that befell our beloved Synod.’ I heartily agree with that—and not only for the LCMS.”

The effort to restore Concordia was greeted with emphatic approval.

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

Another wrote, “I along with many in the WELS were delighted to hear that our former sister synod was able to remove from its seminary many professors who refused to confess and teach that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God.” According to this respondent, President Harrison said that “the problem he and others face is dealing with the many pastors those false teachers trained for a

generation who remained in the synod, and the doctrine and practice they taught and established in the churches they served throughout their ministries.” The respondent noted that, with the apostle Paul, I rejoice wherever the Gospel is preached, and that certainly applies to that church body with which we were one for nearly a century. Our guys seem to respect Matt Harrison, and he seems to respect us. Such friendships would not have happened in those walkout days or in the years shortly after them.”

One WELS pastor who became a DMin student at Concordia Seminary during the 1990s said he “generally found that the faculty was firmly set on a course to train pastors who were committed to the historical grammatical method of interpreting the Scriptures and opposed to the historical critical method, and I met some wonderful, evangelical, deeply committed professors and fellow pastors.” Twice he was asked to serve as a casual observer at LCMS conventions. “It was apparent that there were still divisions in the ranks about doctrine and practice.” He “keenly” remembers that “the conservative element in one group did not consider the errors that took hold in the LCMS made it a heterodox church body” but instead regarded the events connected to the walkout to have been “a casual intrusion of error that had to be resisted and removed” from their orthodox church, even though it was taking decades to do it.

This same respondent reflected on the good the conflict brought to the Wisconsin Synod, in spite of the “many problems and much damage” it caused. “It was a strong test for confessional Lutherans in the WELS and the ELS as well as the LCMS. We really had to examine what we believed and what we would and must do to follow the truth of God’s Word.” The split helped the Wisconsin Synod “grow up” more in developing its own ministry resources and conducting its own mission efforts in the United States and around the world. The WELS managed “to retain much of its homegrown talent that may have otherwise been drawn into service at LCMS schools and agencies.” He also acknowledged “the contributions of Dr. Becker” to his faith life and ministry.

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

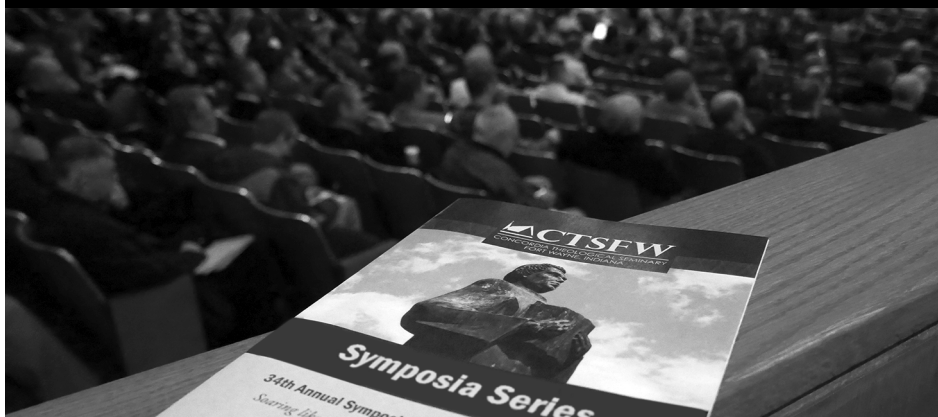
Conclusion

More than half a century has passed since the walkout at Concordia Seminary and the formation of Seminex. With every passing year, a smaller percentage of

pastors in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will have memories of the events and the issues that caused them. Yet the walkout had and continues to have a significant effect on members of the former Lutheran Synodical Conference and beyond.



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Gospel Reductionism: Then and Now

David P. Scaer

Gospel reductionism is a result of a method of eighteenth-century rationalism that interpreted the miraculous events in the biblical documents as ordinary ones, allowing a core message to stay in place that God justifies sinners by the preaching of forgiveness. Events reported as miraculous in the Bible were seen as no more than embellishments of what were otherwise ordinary events. Portraits of Jesus in the Gospels were thought to have been constructed by his followers to enhance early church belief that he was divine. For gospel reductionism, only what belongs to salvation is necessary for belief and so a distinction is made between the Scriptures as historical documents and the gospel as the proclamation of salvation.¹ The phrase “gospel reductionism” is of recent origin, but the principle came into play in eighteenth-century rationalism. With Jesus unburdened of his divinity, nineteenth-century scholars directed their efforts to discovering who Jesus really might have been. These endeavors were called the quest for the historical Jesus.² At the beginning of the twentieth century, Albert Schweitzer collected these diverse and often contradictory results of who Jesus was into *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* and concluded that no more can be known of him than that he was mistaken in expecting that in his death throes “the son of man” would come streaming out of heaven to rescue him.³ With the supernatural elements of the Bible placed off limits to scholarly research and historical research providing uncertain and often contradictory results, the ingredients for the destruction of Christianity were in place. Adolf von Harnack provided a stopgap Christianity that reduced the message of Jesus to the fatherhood of God, our love for him and the neighbor, belief in divine providence, and the infinite value of the soul.⁴

¹ See especially Richard J. Serina Jr., “Gospel Reductionism,” *Lutheran Witness*, March 2023: 25. In comparison to the doctrine of justification, all other doctrines are considered secondary. See also Ken Schurb, “Gospel and Scripture,” in *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*, ed. Ken Schurb (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023), 15–37.

² For a concise overview of the quest for the historical Jesus, see Martin Noland, “The Nature of Scripture,” in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 42–45.

³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

⁴ Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 300; see also the foreword and introduction by Rudolf Bultmann, xiv.

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In America, belief in miracles persisted among the rank and file in the mainline denominations. This faith cracked publicly when James Pike was removed by his fellow Episcopal bishops for saying the same things for which the Concordia Seminary faculty majority would later be censured by J. A. O. Preus' fact-finding committee. No faculty member explicitly denied the virgin birth, but some found it was not a cause for removal from the ministry. After Pike's death, his colleagues recanted by concluding there was no such thing as heresy. If there is no heresy, there is no truth. Denial of the miraculous anticipated the widely influential proposal of Rudolf Bultmann that the miracles are Greek myths to present Jesus as divine that must be demythologized to make the Gospels compatible to the modern man, a position that has largely fallen out of favor with scholars. This was a revival of the old rationalism.

LCMS founding fathers had been taught by German theologians who had advanced rationalist understandings of the Scriptures, but in coming to America they were no longer participants in the theological discussion as it flourished and expanded from the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. This was the theological world that led up to the Concordia Seminary faculty walkout February 19, 1974. It would be only a matter of time before views spawned mostly by German-speaking theologians would enter the LCMS bloodstream. Radical proposals such as the denials of the virgin birth and the resurrection were bound to catch the eye of the LCMS rank and file, as they did, and congregations, conferences, and districts would have to come to terms with the new theology.

In the modernist-fundamentalist debate, other churches had come face to face with what, in the LCMS, would later be called gospel reductionism: a view that challenged the historical authenticity of what the Bible reported as miraculous. Taking the lead in opposition to this method of biblical interpretation in America at the time of the gospel reductionism in the LCMS were churches that came under the wider umbrella of Evangelical. They established seminaries in which denials of the miraculous in the Bible were successfully addressed. Their professors were widely published scholars with membership in academic associations. Opponents of gospel reductionism in the LCMS made use of Evangelical resources in addressing the denial of supernatural in the Bible.

Gospel reductionism as a theological concept was unique to Lutheran theology and was an extension of the law-gospel paradigm, that in the law's second use God condemns the sinner and in the gospel he offers grace. While there is wide agreement among Lutherans that the law in its first use functions to suppress injustice in civil society and to preserve order, in its second use the law works to produce a conviction of sins in preparation for the hearing of the gospel. In gospel reductionism the law has no function for believers in their lives as believers, a view condemned in

article 6 of the Formula of Concord.⁵ Denial of the third use of the law has consequences for those in churches like the LCMS that accept the entire Book of Concord. It is less crucial for clergy and congregations who do not accept the Formula. However, quite apart from the Formula, the law's continuing to function for faith is set forth in the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and especially each of Luther's explanations of the Ten Commandments in the Small and Large Catechisms. Denying that the law functions in the life of believers was a prominent issue in the St. Louis seminary faculty walkout.⁶

The place of the law in the Christian life is not incidental in faith, but belongs to the essence of the faith, since Christ is working his will in his followers. The diminution of the law results from placing law and gospel against one another as opposing words of God so that one is seen as antagonistic to the other. By doing this the gospel emerges as the superior word of God and eventually the only word. Gospel reductionism as the elimination of the law from the life of faith is advanced by Lutheran theologians largely by citing Reformation-era writings. On one hand, gospel reductionism can be understood as the removal of the supernatural from the biblical narratives. Within a Lutheran context it refers to subordination of the law to the gospel as the superior and eventually only word of God.⁷

Neoorthodoxy

Filling the gap historical agnosticism left by the quests for the historical Jesus after World War II was neoorthodoxy, which deflected liberal concerns about biblical history by proposing that all that was needed was the preaching of forgiveness or the promises of God. Revelation, in the neoorthodox view, happens not in past events but in preaching, and preachers today are no less inspired than the biblical writers who had the advantage of being closer to the events they recorded. Theology deals with proclamation, so the focus is shifted from past events to oral communication, under which Edward Schroeder also claimed that Luther subsumed the sacraments. The Bible's value rests in "its witness to the primary element of

⁵ Scott R. Murray, "The Third Use of the Law," in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 83–97.

⁶ Quite apart from developments in the LCMS at that time, the view reappeared in Gerhard Forde's "theology of the cross" and then was developed by James Nestingen and Steven Paulson. In their view, God is neither law nor is bound by it. Just as Christians do not live by the law (third use of the law), neither does God. This extreme antinomianism was the logical conclusion to the denial of the law's third use.

⁷ Careful attention might have been given to the title of the collection of essays *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law & Gospel*, ed. Albert B. Collver, James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017). Law and gospel do function differently but constitute one word of God and not two.

Christianity, the gracious gift.”⁸ Biblical authority is subordinated to justification, which is effected by oral communication. In neoorthodoxy the Bible becomes the word of God in its proclamation when the hearer encounters it in the “I-thou” moment. In that moment of inspiration the hearer recognizes the proclamation as the word of God. Proclamation replaces the Bible’s history and its supernatural origins as set forth in the traditional doctrine of inspiration as the focus of faith and foundation for theology.⁹

Recognized as the leading proponent of neoorthodoxy, Karl Barth after World War I began producing the multivolume *Church Dogmatics*, in which he engaged the biblical texts on their own terms positively. Citing the older Reformation-era and post-Reformation-era Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxies, his program came to be called neoorthodoxy. Unlike the then-failing liberalism, he actually did theology and avoided the rationalist historical criticism that had reinterpreted supernatural events as ordinary ones. The leading British neoorthodox theologian, John Baillie, argued that the same Scriptures can be both inspired and not.¹⁰ To identify what in the Bible was divinely revealed, Baillie invoked Luther’s principle of *Was Christum treibet* (“what concerns Christ”). This principle placed the gospel outside of the Scriptures and judged the latter according to the former. This was incorporated into what would be called gospel reductionism, that what mattered was preaching the gospel.¹¹ Later the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations would say that if we apply gospel reductionism in this sense, “we misuse the gospel and inevitably compromise the whole counsel of God taught in the Scripture[s].”¹² If God’s existence is confined to oral communication, it has to be asked whether he has any existence apart from the act of preaching. An outlier among the neoorthodox theologians was Emil Brunner, who held God existed apart from the preached word.

Though less influential now, Bultmann was then on all sides of the equation. Preaching of the law and the gospel was understood existentially, in that hearers could come to an authentic awareness of themselves. As he was offering an

⁸ Edward Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?,” in *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, ed. Robert Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 84.

⁹ Schurb, “Gospel and Scripture,” 18.

¹⁰ John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1956), 114–120; and Matthew Harrison, “Historical Introduction,” in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 6. I first encountered neoorthodoxy in a class by Henry Reimann (1955–1956) and soon thereafter in confrontation with Martin Scharlemann (1956–1957). See my *Surviving the Storms: Memoirs of David P. Scaer* (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 2018), 22, 33, 34–38.

¹¹ Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation*, 119. “We must remind ourselves again that revelation only takes place within the relationship between the Holy Spirit of God and the individual human soul. Nothing is the vehicle or revelation for me unless I hear God speaking to me through it.”

¹² Serina, “Gospel Reductionism,” 28. See also Murray, “The Third Use of the Law,” 109–112.

existential definition of justification, he republished Adolf von Harnack's *What is Christianity?*, which revived the arguments of rationalism, questioning whether we could with any certainty know anything at all about the historical Jesus. This was the last gasp of a dying liberalism. Going to the other end of the spectrum, Bultmann, like Barth, took the biblical texts at face value and produced his useful *Theology of the New Testament* and *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, avoiding the historically critical question of whether anything the biblical documents reported really happened. In response to neoorthodoxy, Robert Preus set forth "the realist principle in that the theological and historical words of the Bible correspond to objective truth."¹³ This concept rarely, if ever, garners any attention but it does characterize the traditional LCMS approach to the Scriptures: that the things, ordinary or supernatural, really happened. It should be asked if the realist principle should be addressed to the now-popular literary criticism that examines the biblical texts without asking whether they correspond to anything that really happened.

The LCMS Encounters Neoorthodoxy

It was the world of neoorthodoxy into which the LCMS stepped in its meetings with the German Lutheran clergy and professors at Bad Boll, Germany, from 1948 to 1954, and it was a world for which most were largely unprepared. Here gospel reductionism based on the law-gospel paradigm gained a toehold in the LCMS. After his death in 1931, no theologian came to take the place of Francis Pieper, whose *Christian Dogmatics* spoke to nineteenth-century theology and said nothing of the quest for the historical Jesus, which was once the rage in Germany and which was replaced by neoorthodoxy after World War I. Pieper's three-volume *Dogmatics* was completely available in English only in 1953, when the issues it addressed were no longer relevant.¹⁴ By then, neoorthodoxy had found a home at the LCMS-related Valparaiso University and the St. Louis seminary. John Theodore Mueller's one-volume abridgment of Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* was more of a textbook than a dogmatics and still is more likely to be referenced by outsiders than the original *Dogmatics*.¹⁵ Essays in *The Abiding Word* commemorating the LCMS centennial in 1946 might be best described as a self-content orthodoxy that did not engage with current theologies.¹⁶ At the grassroots level, some LCMS congregations began to

¹³ David P. Scaer, "Justification in the Theology of Robert D. Preus," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (January 2022): 46–47.

¹⁴ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1953).

¹⁵ John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934).

¹⁶ Theodore Ferdinand Karl Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word: An Anthology of Doctrinal Essays*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946–1960).

resemble their Protestant neighbors. Crucifixes were found to be too Catholic and were replaced by brass crosses without the corpus. American flags were placed on the sides of the chancel. Methodist hymns were sung and *Lutheran Hour* rallies borrowed the techniques of Billy Sunday and set the table for the popular Baptist preacher Billy Graham, who gained admirers among both LCMS clergy and people. The Sunday school and vacation Bible school materials produced by thriving Evangelical publishers were finding their way into LCMS congregations. Those publishers' homiletical and theological books would soon be lining the shelves of LCMS pastors. The LCMS was shedding the shackles of its German culture and thereby had become an American church.

With World War II fast becoming history, the door was open for the LCMS to have theological discussions with Lutherans in Europe, among whom the theological university professors were the most prominent. The discussions would take place in the resort town of Bad Boll near Stuttgart. The Bad Boll meetings rose out of concerns of army chaplain Karl A. Arndt, stationed with American military forces in Bavaria, for the welfare of a war-devastated German population. From the beginning, at every level this was not a meeting of even near equals. German and American Lutheran congregations were constituted differently. In Germany, church membership was coterminous with boundaries that were in place before the provinces (territories) were assimilated into a nation. Some Protestant lands were Lutheran, others Reformed, and still others "Union," in whose churches Lutherans and the Reformed under government mandate used a common liturgy. All these churches can best be described as territorial in embracing most of the population within their boundaries as members, and it was typical for one pastor to be responsible for thousands of parishioners, perhaps up to one hundred thousand. University theological faculties, like those of other disciplines, were self-perpetuating under the minister of culture. Contrast this with the LCMS in America, whose congregations for membership require instruction before Baptism or Confirmation, choose their own pastors, and nominate seminary presidents and (at one time) college and seminary professors. German participants at Bad Boll took exception to how Lutheran churches in America were run. More important was that for the Lutherans in Germany, the sixteenth-century confessions had a cultural role derived from their history and were not in every instance an expression of what they believed, especially about the Bible.

Before the conferences began, the American military government suspected that the LCMS was seeking to convert the Germans to their particular way of doing theology, a well founded suspicion that the German participants shared and would

use to their advantage in their discussions with the LCMS.¹⁷ With the LCMS at the end of the war beginning to experience a period of phenomenal growth, it had reason to believe that this success in growth at home could be translated into theological success in winning over the German conferees to its theology. Few, if any, LCMS participants realized that each group was living in different worlds. In response to the LCMS proposal that verbal inspiration (i.e., that the Bible is the word of God) be the basis for discussion, the Germans countered that if the LCMS proposal were adopted, the conference would be dead on arrival. The LCMS acquiesced to the German counterproposal that the articles of the Augsburg Confession would provide the outline, with each side lecturing and responding article by article. So the die was cast. With this arrangement, which was as much historical as theological, justification, understood as the law and the gospel, could be put in place as the basis of doing theology and could create the impression of agreement that really was not so. In spite of the courtesies extended by each side to the other, both were suspicious that real agreement would not be achieved.

Justification might be the most prominent interpretative principle of the Augsburg Confession, but it is not the only one, as Horace Hummel pointed out.¹⁸ Even Werner Elert, who is rightly credited with making the law-gospel paradigm the controlling principle in theology, and who went on to become a favorite in the LCMS, saw article 1 of the Augsburg Confession as a regrettable remnant of medieval theology that did not fit the law-gospel paradigm.¹⁹ Hidden in this paradigm were the seeds from which gospel reductionism would spring.

¹⁷ Karl J. R. Arndt, "Missouri and World Lutheranism at Bad Boll in 1949," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 50.

¹⁸ Horace D. Hummel, "Are Law and Gospel a Valid Hermeneutical Principle?," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46, nos. 2-3 (April-July 1982): 189-190. "Perhaps the best one can say for such hermeneutics is that, while beginning with something very nearly uniquely Lutheran, by turning the unique into the totality, it often loses even the unique. I submit that such one-sided accent on one doctrine, or one hermeneutical axiom, even when it is so central a one as 'law and Gospel' is of the very essence of heresy (a vocable which understandably then is usually expunged from the vocabulary of the heresiarchs). Hence, one is not surprised to discover that such 'law-Gospel reductionism' is not the hermeneutical method of the Lutheran confessions either."

¹⁹ David Yeago notes that Elert came up against a blank wall with the first article of the Augsburg Confession, which demanded faith in the triune God quite apart from the law-and-gospel paradigm. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology: Reflections on the Costs of a Construal," *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 43. Elert expressed frustration that "the decree of the Nicene Synod concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three Persons is true and must be believed without doubting." His verdict was that "here the ship of the Reformation, which has just recently departed from land, seems to be sailing back into the harbor of the medieval church, which produced laws of faith and demanded obedience to them. Faith itself, the most precious treasure, seems to be betrayed!" Cf. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism: The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 202. See also Schurb, "Gospel and Scripture," 18-19.

From the reports issuing from Bad Boll, explicit dissent was kept at a minimum. Oberkirchenrat (High Consistory Member) Wolfgang Schmidt, who appeared as the spokesman for the German delegation, noted that “the American brothers put much more emphasis on the stable, remaining elements in the message of the church, which do not have to be put into new forms for every new generation or even for every new theologian.”²⁰ In other words, for the LCMS the Bible was *norma normans* (“the source and standard for doing theology”), and so theology remained quite the same apart from the contemporary situation. For the Germans, theology is done *wissenschaftlich*, in that nontheological elements like philosophy and scientific and historical perspectives are brought into discussion, a method with which the LCMS was not familiar. Here something must be said about what the German word *wissenschaftlich*. It can be translated as either “scholarly” or “scientific,” with the latter sense of the word giving the impression of objectivity. A claim to be *wissenschaftlich*, scientifically objective, does not make it so. Even the still oft cited and influential Luther scholar Hermann Sasse preferred the explanation offered by evolution for the origins of the world to that of Genesis 1–11.²¹ He himself fit the paradigm of a German theologian by incorporating disciplines external to the Scriptures in doing theology. Sasse preferred theories of evolution over Genesis for the origin of the world and constructed a Lutheran theology out of Luther’s writings and the Confessions. Such was the case even more so with Werner Elert, who was a lead theologian at Bad Boll.²² With this approach most LCMS representatives were as unfamiliar as they were unprepared. Introduction of neoorthodoxy into the discussion can be found in a comment by Wolfgang Schmidt that the Germans engage in what he called “a theology of meeting.”²³ An otherwise strange-sounding phrase in English, it would become known as the now more familiar “encounter” theology of neoorthodoxy. “Meeting” translates the German word *Begegnung*, which would soon make its way into the theological vocabulary as “encounter,” as in neoorthodoxy’s “I-thou” theology as proposed by Barth, Emil Brunner, Bultmann, and Paul Tillich. Robert Preus described encounter theology as crisis theology in that preaching was the critical moment of the “I-thou” encounter in which the Scriptures become the word of God for the hearer.

²⁰ Arndt, “Missouri and World Lutheranism at Bad Boll,” 80–81.

²¹ Benjamin T. G. Mayes, “Creation Accommodated to Evolution: Hermann Sasse on Genesis 1–3,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (April 2023): 123–150.

²² Elert is reported to have spent 90% of some of his university semesters on non-theological pursuits, such as philosophy, psychology, history, and military science.” Robert C. Schultz, “Werner Elert, Professor of Theology,” in Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, xiv.

²³ Arndt, “Missouri and World Lutheranism at Bad Boll,” 80–81.

Neoorthodoxy on the Oral and Written Word

Those who accept the neoorthodox definition speak of the superiority of the oral or spoken word to the written word in creating faith, and from this go on to attribute greater authority to the oral word. Basic to this argument is that the effect of preaching in creating faith demonstrates its authority. The response to this is that in regard to content, there is no essential difference between the oral and written word. It is agreed the oral proclamation is more likely to affect the hearer in creating faith and has much wider audiences in societies that are largely illiterate, and even with congregations who are literate. That said, faith can be engendered by the written word, which has the advantage over the oral proclamation in that the Scriptures can be passed down more securely intact from generation to generation. Indeed, the original written Scriptures were spoken by prophets and apostles to scribes, and so in this sense, the oral word has priority in regard to originality; however, what was once spoken is available in the written word. The authority of the oral word as we have it in written form has its authority from its inspiration and not from its effect. If effect determines authority, the Scriptures would have no authority over the vast majority of hearers who have not believed them.

The Post-War LCMS in Contact with German Theology

Wolfgang Schmidt reported that LCMS delegates were not familiar with the German approach; however, there is good reason to think that some came to Bad Boll with the hope of expanding their theological horizons beyond what they knew from Pieper. The new law-gospel paradigm for doing theology would not be restrained by what Preus called “the realist principle in that the theological and historical words of the Bible [had to] correspond to objective truth.”²⁴ With an accommodation to neoorthodoxy at Bad Boll, unwitting for some and deliberate for others, an opening was made for the denial of the supernatural, which was at the heart of the St. Louis seminary walkout.

In assessing Bad Boll, LCMS Chaplain Arndt, who was the point man in making the arrangements, painted a rosy picture: “Nevertheless, despite the divergent backgrounds of the conferees, a remarkable unanimity on fundamental questions was discovered.”²⁵ *The Christian Century* spread abroad what for some was the good news that the LCMS and the Germans were in close agreement in how they did theology.²⁶ In spite of having said the LCMS representatives did not understand how

²⁴ Scaer, “Justification in the Theology of Robert D. Preus,” 46–47.

²⁵ Arndt, “Missouri and World Lutheranism at Bad Boll,” 50, 62.

²⁶ Karl J. Arndt, “Bad Boll Conferences: Missouri Synod Lutherans and German Theologians Exchange Views,” *The Christian Century* 65, no. 38 (September 22, 1948): 980. Telling in Arndt’s

the Germans did theology, Schmidt went on to say that the LCMS and the Germans were agreed on the law-gospel hermeneutic and that the Bible did not provide the basis for doctrinal authority. “There was complete agreement in the basic conception of the Gospel: that one must justify the message of the church by the doctrine of justification and not by a hierarchical or formal authority, such as starting from the Scriptural canon. The Good News, however, consists of nothing but the love of God, which gives everything freely and descends to man. Out of this realization follows inevitably the double nature of the Word of God in Law and Gospel.”²⁷

Here we are left hanging in the balance of whether the LCMS representative had failed to make an effective case for the historic LCMS position on verbal inspiration or whether Schmidt failed to grasp it. Or did he declare peace when there was none? St. Louis Seminary Professor Paul M. Bretscher sounded the alarm. He noted that the Germans are so committed to the human side of the Scriptures at the expense of coming to terms with its divine side as the word of God, they had reasons to recognize its imperfections. For them the gospel takes precedence over the Scriptures as authoritative, a principle articulated by rationalism. “Whatever in Scripture does not deal directly with the way of salvation, has little or no relevance for the Christian faith.”²⁸ This was as good as any a definition for what would later be called gospel reductionism.

article is this sentence: “An evaluation of the conferences in *Evangelische Welt*, published in Bethel-Bielefeld, states that no essential differences were noted.”

²⁷ According to Wolfgang A. Schmidt, “Theological Discussion with the Missouri Synod in Bad Boll,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (February 1949): 81:

Along with these technical difficulties went the inner difference of theological method. It is true that Professor Elert found understanding for his excellent dissertations in which he tried to find reasons for the German tendency to “brood” about theology. Also the references to a theology of “meeting,” given especially by Schlink and Merz, were eagerly received. But on the whole the difference remained that the American brothers put much more emphasis on the stable, remaining elements in the message of the church, which do not have to be put into new forms for every new generation or even for every new theologian. They do not put into their theological language the degree of “actuality” which we regarded as necessary. On the other hand, it seemed to many of the Germans that it was worth noting that the Americans, although they had less of a “theology of meeting,” had much more of a “practice of meeting.” We thought that this was an important thing to note about our ecclesiastical and theological work at the conference.

²⁸ Paul M. Bretscher, “Review of ‘Bad Boll’ Conferences,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 25, no. 11 (November 1954): 834–848, 843. He also noted the following on page 843:

Nevertheless, one must record that most European Lutherans so stress the “human” side of Scripture that its “divine” character is practically set aside. From their point of view, Scripture suffers from the imperfections of every historical document. Whatever in Scripture does not deal directly with the way of salvation, has little or no relevance for the Christian faith. Since Scripture is a thoroughly human document, it compels us to assume that there are in it conflicting reports, lapses of memory, contradictions, and interpretations of the origin and nature of the cosmos which are false and must be discredited. Much of what appears to be a record

At the July 1960 Luther Congress in Munster, Germany, Norman Nagel alerted me that the German theologians had never recovered from rationalism. Bad Boll had proven that, and it was noticeably so in the positions of Elert and Sasse. Elert did not follow the classic rationalistic line in interpreting supernatural events in the Bible as ordinary ones, but he allowed secular disciplines to shape classical Lutheran theology. By conceding to the proposal of the German delegation that the Augsburg Confession be made the basis of theological discussion and not insisting on their own proposal that the Bible be recognized as the basis for doing theology, the LCMS conceded the game before it began. Here was unrecognized the influence of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, who made the Christian consciousness as it expressed itself in the Christian community the basis for doing theology. He retained the rationalist hermeneutic that had little use for the Old Testament. What might be surprising for some is that Schleiermacher replaced the New Testament with Reformation-era documents as authoritative for doing theology.²⁹ Thus with gospel reductionism one is more likely to hear arguments advanced on the basis of Luther's 1518 Heidelberg Disputation rather than on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount.³⁰ What was authoritative was the religious consciousness of the community, which for the Germans was best expressed by Luther's earlier writings and less so by his later ones, much less a confession like the Formula of Concord, especially with its definition of the law's third use.³¹

It seems that the majority of the LCMS participants at Bad Boll were unaware that a different way of doing theology was proposed by the German delegation. Matters are clarified in Robert C. Schultz's doctoral dissertation *Gesetz und Evangelium*, a topic proposed by and begun under Elert, the lead theologian for the German delegation, and after his death defended under Paul Althaus Jr. at the University of

of historical fact is myth, legend, the imagination of a fertile mind, allegory, the opinion of an author who was himself subject to all the crosscurrents of the social forces of his day. Therefore Genesis 1 to 3, or even Genesis 1 to 11, and books like Jonah and Job, though they teach important spiritual truths, are unhistorical. They must be divested of their mythological and allegorical dress and their messages stated in terms intelligible to the mind and language of our generation.

²⁹ Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "Marcion on the Elbe: A Defense of the Old Testament as Christian Scripture," *First Things* 288 (December 2018): 23. See also Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler, ed. Catherine Kelsey and Terrence N. Tice, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 1:166.

³⁰ The same can be said for Gerhard Forde's "theology of the cross." For example, Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 108–109: "The temptation is always to fall back on the law, either in its original sense or perhaps in some new sense like 'third use.' But the theologian of the cross knows that there is no way back."

³¹ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, 9.

Erlangen and then published in 1958.³² It was probably completed several years before and time for the research would correspond with the last of the Bad Boll conferences in 1954. So it is not unlikely that plans or contacts for Schultz to study at the University of Erlangen under Elert and Althaus were made at Bad Boll. In his introduction, Schultz expresses his appreciation for the two men. What is telling is that he proceeds to propose that the doctrine of justification, i.e., the law and gospel, rather than the Scriptures should be the foundation for all of theology.³³ Schultz acknowledges that he has taken over the law-gospel principle that LCMS founding president Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther set forth as a principle for parishioners troubled about their salvation and has put it in the position of how all theology is to be done. There is no subterfuge here, since Schultz is up front in saying that Walther had not done theology in this way, not even in how he preached.³⁴ In contrast to Walther, Schultz is as bold as to say that he sees applying law and gospel to exegetical and systematic theology as the most important task in America, and he sets himself as the pioneer in offering a law-gospel theology on this side of the ocean. Whatever his intentions might have been, he drilled a hole in the dike through which the floodwaters of gospel reductionism would pour on February 19, 1974. Until Bad Boll, the law-gospel method of doing theology was largely unknown, if known at all, among Lutherans in America and not just in the LCMS.

Lead-Up to 1974

Here pieces of the puzzle come together of how the law and the gospel as a theological principle took hold in the LCMS at Bad Boll and then pinnacled in the 1974 faculty majority walkout at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The elder Paul M. Bretscher, a St. Louis professor, recognized that if the German theologians could not go beyond recognizing the Scriptures as human documents, without their divine origin the Scriptures could be filled with errors, a view from which even the confessionally influential Hermann Sasse could not detach himself.³⁵ Standing in the way of a general optimism that agreement could be reached were negotiations for establishing the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), in which Lutheran, Reformed, and Union churches would be embraced. This might have been enough to frighten the LCMS from pursuing closer relations with the Germans.

³² Robert C. Schultz, *Gesetz und Evangelium* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958).

³³ Schultz, *Gesetz und Evangelium*, 9.

³⁴ Schultz, *Gesetz und Evangelium*, 11–16, 148–168. Much of this he summarized in his “The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32, no. 10 (October 1961): 591–597.

³⁵ See Eugene F. Klug, “Holy Scripture: The Inerrancy Question and Hermann Sasse,” *Concordia Journal* (July 1985): 124–127.

Ken Schurb, in his editor's note added to Scott R. Murray's essay "The Third Use of the Law," writes that Wilhelm Oesch as "early as the 1920s observed that Werner Elert opposed not only the Formula of Concord's position on the third use but also its entire teaching on God's Law."³⁶ The denial of the third use of the law was only the tip of an iceberg in which the law had no function in the Christian life in pursuing good works. Thus, the elimination of the third use of the law, which is so essential to Elert's law-gospel paradigm, was already in place before Bad Boll began and would resurface in the faculty majority walkout. Elert's elimination of the law anticipated gospel reductionism, in which the gospel is regarded as the only revelation of God. This view was expressed later by Steven Paulson's view that God is not law.³⁷

Here we have to pick and choose in the LCMS Bad Boll delegation who would promote the new theology. Lawrence "Lorry" Meyer was the right-hand man to LCMS President John Behnken and was the go-to man in handling arrangements for the conference, including expenses for which the Germans, recovering from the ravages of war, were lavish in their gratitude. German participants were on a first-name basis with Lorry. Behnken was kept informed of developments and expressed his pleasure with how well the meetings were going.³⁸ He was admired by the Germans for his pastoral decor and kindness. Along with the elder Bretscher, St. Louis Professors Frederick Mayer and Theodore Graebner were also there. Mayer handled the arrangement for the conference and took care of expenses. Graebner had been up front in his dislike of Pieper's theology of proof texting, that method of biblical interpretation that references certain Bible passages to the exclusion of others. Richard R. Caemmerer, who joined the St. Louis faculty in 1940, was proposed as a delegate.³⁹ He would give the oration at the majority faculty walkout.⁴⁰

³⁶ Murray, "The Third Use of the Law," 119, n. 33.

³⁷ Steven D. Paulson, "Freedom from the Law and the Experimental 'Third Use,'" *Lutheran Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2023): 268–289.

³⁸ "Fortunately, or unfortunately, he [Behnken] was almost utterly under the control of Lorry Meyer, the first politician in synodical history who built a power-structure and completely changed the Missouri Synod. During the tenure of two weak presidents [Behnken and Oliver Harms], Lorry was the power in Synod." Berthold von Schenk, *Lively Stone: The Autobiography of Berthold von Schenk*, ed. C. George Fry and Joel R. Kurz (Delhi, NY: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2008), 39. Von Schenk had been chosen to head the LCMS relief efforts to German Lutherans, but before his assuming the position, synod officials rescinded his appointment. He was able to continue relief efforts through another church organization under the auspices of the United States government and was highly regarded. Whatever differences he had with Behnken and Meyer, he expedited visa and travel arrangements for them (109–110).

³⁹ Murray, "The Third Use of the Law," 109.

⁴⁰ Noland, "The Nature of Scripture," 47. Before the last of the Bad Boll meetings, Caemmerer had written "A Concordance Study of the Concept the 'Word of God,'" *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22, no. 3 (March 1951): 170–185. According to Martin Noland, this article argued that the "Word of God is not equal to Scripture, though it acknowledged both the 'inspiration' of Scripture

Also present at Bad Boll was Alfred Fuerbringer (1903–1997), President of Concordia Teachers College in Nebraska and son of former St. Louis Seminary President Ludwig Fuerbringer. Not a notable theologian, he was likely viewed as the probable successor to Louis Sieck as seminary president in 1953. Under his tenure as president of Concordia Seminary (1953–1969), professors were added to the faculty who would promote the new theology that led to an LCMS convention calling for an investigation of the seminary. In spring 1969, the resignation of Fuerbringer as seminary president made possible the election of John Tietjen as his successor. In light of later events, Fuerbringer’s participation in Bad Boll was hardly coincidental. His plans for taking the faculty in a new direction were inadvertently disrupted. In 1958 Robert D. Preus was called to Concordia Seminary to take the place of Assistant Professor of Philosophy Paul Riedel, who after only a three-month tenure died unexpectedly during the 1957 Christmas recess. Preus had received his doctoral degree under the leading British neoorthodox theologian John Baillie and it can be surmised that Fuerbringer thought Preus would be an advocate of the new theology. He was not.

Outside the LCMS, the idea that agreement on the gospel rather than on the Scriptures sufficed as the basis of doctrine was gaining momentum among Lutherans in America.⁴¹ Though the term “gospel reductionism” had not entered the common theological vocabulary, the principle that the gospel rather than the Scriptures was the basis for fellowship was gaining support. By 1974, the year of the walkout, the law-gospel principle as the basis for theology was already in place for the ALC and the LCA, which later, with the AELC, a church formed in 1976, formed the ELCA. This was the beginning of an ever-expanding fellowship of churches. The ELCA went on to establish fellowship with the Reformed, Methodist, and Episcopal churches. Today, fellowship among mainline Protestant churches is so taken for granted that what previously were theological discussions working toward doctrinal unity among churches have been replaced by conferences on social issues. The National Lutheran Council, to which the LCMS and predecessor synods to the ELCA belonged, no longer exists and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA is a shell of what it once was.

and the ‘dynamic quality’ of Christian theology. This position was akin to Karl Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God” (47). Ascribing inspiration to both the Scriptures and preaching may have led to the confusion in not grasping what was entailed in the new theology. Another lesson here is that word studies, on either the Scriptures or the Confessions, can, without further elaboration, lead to erroneous conclusions.

⁴¹ Cameron A. MacKenzie, “Church Fellowship,” in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 156–157.

Shift in LCMS Theology

Application of the law-gospel paradigm to preaching and theology initiated a course change in the LCMS theology. In an essay included in a commemorative volume for Caemmerer fittingly called *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, Edward Schroeder took a grand leap in proposing that the act of justification of the believer that took place in the oral or spoken communication of the gospel (preaching) was the basis of theology and that this principle was determinative in doing theology.⁴² Both Robert Bertram and Schroeder would serve at Valparaiso University and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This view had appeared in Bad Boll and was largely unrecognized by the LCMS participants.⁴³

With this shift away from the Scriptures as the foundational principle for theology, “Preaching becomes the chief office of the church.”⁴⁴ What counts is a vibrant preaching of the gospel to engender faith while the Scriptures are relegated to a subordinate position as being no more than “the oldest and most ancient witness to the one Word of God.”⁴⁵ The principle *Was Christum treibet* determines what in the Bible qualifies as the word of God. Schroeder goes on to say that “The desire to get back through historical, tangible words and events to a spirit behind them was a voice of no-confidence in God’s own revelatory ability.” Those who attempt to test the gospel on the Scriptures are judged as arrogant and guilty of hubris in the theology of glory.⁴⁶ “Even the sacraments . . . are subsumed in Luther’s theology under the one means of grace,” which is preaching.⁴⁷ John Calvin had already proposed the idea that the sacraments are little more than forms or subcategories of preaching the gospel. (This is similar to a commonly held view among the people that the celebration of Holy Communion can be kept to a minimum on the grounds that its benefits are available in preaching.)

Along with Schroeder, another proponent of the new theology was Valparaiso University colleague Paul G. Bretscher, son of the St. Louis professor who was explicit with his concerns about the German theologians at Bad Boll. For the younger Bretscher, the Bible was defective and law and gospel determined what is worthy of

⁴² Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?,” 83.

⁴³ It would later reappear in the “theology of the cross” that was proposed by Gerhard Forde and advanced by James Nestingen and Steven Paulson.

⁴⁴ Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?,” 84–85.

⁴⁵ Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?,” 86. Though the LCMS debate was explicitly of the law and the gospel specifically in these terms, Schroeder astutely noted, “In fact it is more explicitly Pauline to speak in terms of Law and Promise than of Law and Gospel, for Paul never explicitly juxtapositions the latter two terms” (92).

⁴⁶ Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?,” 89. For a more detailed account of gospel reductionism before the walkout, see David P. Scaer, “The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod,” *The Springfielder* 36, no. 3 (December 1972): 156–167, esp. 165.

⁴⁷ Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?,” 85.

belief. Since Schultz, Schroeder, Bertram, and the younger Bretscher were at one time or another associated with Valparaiso University, what is now known as gospel reductionism was for a time called the Valparaiso theology.⁴⁸

Schultz, who in his published doctoral dissertation for Elert and Althaus provided theological rationale for gospel reductionism as the principle for doing theology, later joined the Episcopal Church. After Bertram taught at Seminex, he then joined the faculty of the ELCA Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Schroeder remained in St. Louis, not far from the seminary campus, to articulate the theology of the faculty majority arguing that the gospel allowed for the ordination of women and the blessing of same-sex marriages, beliefs now held by the ELCA. Bretscher served as Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Valparaiso and went on to write *Christianity's Unknown Gospel*, in which he argued for adoptionism, the belief that Christ gradually became the Son of God.⁴⁹ He was suspended from the ministry by the LCMS Indiana District president for denying the incarnation, the resurrection, and the Trinity, a tragedy from which his friends and family saw no way out for him.⁵⁰ At the time of the 1974 walkout, synods that would later comprise the ELCA and many LCMS Seminex supporters were already arguing for what is now common belief in much of world Lutheranism, that ordination of women was not contrary to the gospel. Since then, this has been expanded to include the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex marriages. Transsexualism is condoned.⁵¹ This was all the logical conclusion of gospel reductionism.

The Trauma of the 1960s and 1970s

In preparation for a commemorative issue of *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, the journal's editor and LCMS Vice President John C. Wohlrabe Jr. wrote letters to those who participated in one or more of the events associated with the seminary walkout. Another collection of memoirs, edited by Theodore E. Mayes, sets forth the personal remembrances of twenty students of Concordia Seminary at the time of the walkout, some of who sympathized with those who started Seminex, and some who remained with the LCMS.⁵² The collection of essays is amazing in that these firsthand experiences are drawn not from secondary written and oral

⁴⁸ Schroeder wrote the article "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Missouri Synod," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43, no. 4 (April 1972): 232–247.

⁴⁹ Paul G. Bretscher, *Christianity's Unknown Gospel* (Valparaiso, IN: Dove Group, 2001). Also Paul G. Bretscher, *After the Purifying* (River Forest, IL: Lutheran Education Association, 1975).

⁵⁰ As a personal note, he was an exceptionally fine preacher.

⁵¹ John T. Pless, "After the Walkout: Publications by the Faculty of Seminex," in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 253–256.

⁵² Theodore E. Mayes, ed., *Memories of the Walkout from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri: February 1974* (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 2021).

sources and then rearranged to fit scholarly prerequisites. In these essays readers can more easily step back into events that happened fifty years ago, e.g., how seminary students discussed among themselves in their dormitory rooms whether they should join the faculty in what they saw as a well-orchestrated walkout.

In reading through their accounts, I relived my own agony as a St. Louis seminary student (1955–1960) on whether to tell church and seminary administrators what was being taught in the classes. Standard responses to students raising concerns were that they should follow protocol and not offend against the eighth commandment. If what the students reported was actually being taught in the classes, the administration would do its best to suppress these concerns and to win the students over to gospel reductionism, which was the de facto seminary theology, as LCMS President Preus' committee of investigation proved.

In an article by now retired LCMS Pastor Terry Weinhold, "A Student during the Walkout from Concordia Seminary," Weinhold describes his meeting as a first-year student with Seminary President Tietjen. He describes how the events for him evolved. In the term before his meeting with Tietjen, he told Alfred von Rohr Sauer that he was being taught that there was no such thing as rectilinear prophecy. To this Sauer responded that it was impossible. Seminary student Weinhold took the next step and arranged a meeting with Tietjen, who as president surely already knew what was going on. As Weinhold tells the story, Tietjen was simply incapable of engaging his concerns and five times Tietjen said he wished that New Testament Professor Edgar Krentz would have been there to explain things.⁵³ As a personal note, I have suspected that faculty members engaged in the walkout were not of one mind in knowing in depth what the issues were. For Tietjen the walkout was as much a political crusade as it was a theological one. His doctoral dissertation had the goal of one unified American Lutheranism, in which by his becoming President, Concordia Seminary would have a part. In the matter of how serious the theological understanding of the faculty was, I call attention to the response of erstwhile LCMS Pastor Richard John Neuhaus to my essay "The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod."⁵⁴ The later Catholic priest and founding editor of the politically and theologically conservative-leaning journal *First Things* said I was taking matters more seriously than its proponents. As I read through the article in the commemorative issue of *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, the walkout and the events leading up to it had the character of a prolonged football rally. When the die was cast, walking back from what had been done was impossible for nearly all who were involved.

⁵³ Terry Weinhold, "A Student during the Walkout from Concordia Seminary," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 14.

⁵⁴ As above, n. 46.

The Law-Gospel Paradigm

Just as the law-gospel paradigm found its way into the LCMS through Valparaiso University and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, it appeared with a different pedigree at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, under the tutelage of Gerhard Forde and became known as the “theology of the cross.” At Luther Seminary, two brothers, J. A. O. Preus and Robert D. Preus, who were later presidents of our seminary (Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne), had prepared for the ministry. The older of the two, Jacob, became the LCMS president who resolved the gospel reductionism controversy. After the walkout, the younger, Robert, as the acting academic dean, took the helm at the St. Louis seminary and more than anyone else was responsible for keeping its accreditation. He was a key figure in the relocation of Concordia Theological Seminary from Springfield, Illinois, where it had been for nearly one hundred years, to its Fort Wayne campus, and for initiating the annual symposium on the Lutheran Confessions.

Forde was the patriarch of what would also be called gospel reductionism, first in a triumvirate that came to include Nestingen and Paulson. Forde saw the atonement not as satisfying God’s wrath over sin, which he denied, but as an event experienced by each believer. “Atonement [is] understood as dying and rising in Christ in faith.”⁵⁵ The moment of faith replaces the historical moment, *crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato* (“crucified under Pontius Pilate”), as where salvation took place. Predestination, in this way of thinking, did not take place before creation, but happens in preaching. At Forde’s death Paulson preached the sermon that, along with Nestingen’s obituary, was published (ironically) in *LOGIA*, a journal founded by Robert D. Preus, the theologian who led the way in addressing the St. Louis seminary’s gospel reductionism and who had taken Forde to task for holding that the Bible’s authority rests not in its inspired character but in its proximity to the events it reported.⁵⁶ Forde also held that our preaching is of the same inspired character as that of the prophets and apostles.⁵⁷ This was straight out of the neoorthodox play-book that appeared in the LCMS as the Valparaiso theology and that became known

⁵⁵ Gerhard O. Forde, “The Seventh Locus: The Work of Christ,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2:97. For a complete presentation of Forde’s denial of the atonement see pp. 5–89, e.g., 47: “Atonement occurs when God succeeds in getting through to us who live under wrath and law. God is satisfied, placated, when his move toward us issues in faith.”

⁵⁶ Steven D. Paulson, “Funeral Sermon for Gerhard O. Forde,” *LOGIA* 15, no. 4 (Reformation 2006): 11–14; James A. Nestingen, “A Tribute to Gerhard Forde and Lou Smith,” *LOGIA* 15, no. 4 (Reformation 2006): 7–8.

⁵⁷ Scaer, “Justification in the Theology of Robert D. Preus,” 50.

as gospel reductionism, which led to the St. Louis faculty walkout.⁵⁸ Views proposed by Forde resembled those put forth by Elert, who took exception to the third use of the law and according to Oesch had long opposed the law itself.⁵⁹ Forde held that the moral law is not eternal, a view that has no place for the third use of the law and for the atonement as a transaction in which the Son offers himself to God as a sacrifice.⁶⁰ Likewise, Paulson's denial of the third use and his position that the law comes to an end relies on an idiosyncratic and false interpretation of Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law,"⁶¹ that is, Christ terminates the law.⁶² But Robert Jewett rightly says that this passage "should not be understood in this context as cessation and termination," but "as 'fulfillment' or 'goal,' which means that the teleological perspective remains primary in this verse."⁶³ It "has a directional sense that explains how Christ is the goal of the law."⁶⁴ It does not refer to the law's cessation as proposed by Forde and persistently advanced by Paulson in spite of biblical evidence to the contrary.

A theology of gospel reductionism that disallows verifying the authenticity of the biblical message disqualifies any apologetics that looks to compare what the Bible says about persons and events accessible by historical research. Schroeder held that one cannot go behind the orally communicated word to verify it.⁶⁵ The view that the oral word is in itself sufficient shares an unintended similarity with Marshall McLuhan's proposal some years back that the medium is the message.⁶⁶ In the theology of the cross, the hearers focus on the proclamation of forgiveness, in which salvation is accomplished and then acquired, and not on the historical moment of Christ's death, in which by atonement as the eternal reciprocal action the Son offers himself as an atonement for sin to the Father, who forgives sin for the sake of the Son.

⁵⁸ James A. Nestingen and Gerhard O. Forde, *Free to Be: A Handbook to Luther's Small Catechism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

⁵⁹ Murray, "The Third Use of the Law," 119, n. 33.

⁶⁰ Jack D. Kilcrease, *The Doctrine of the Atonement from Luther to Forde* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 121–122, 140.

⁶¹ Steven D. Paulson, "Christ, the Hated God," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1, 6. Paulson also claims this interpretation as Luther's position. "For Luther the break-through of the gospel is that where Christ is preached as crucified for our sins and sake, the law comes to an end. That is the central point of Paul's letter to the Romans (10:4): 'Christ is the end of the law'" (Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* [London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011], 4).

⁶² Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the RSV.

⁶³ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 619.

⁶⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 619–620.

⁶⁵ Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 171–172.

⁶⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1.

Schroeder, who until his death remained the most conspicuous apologist for gospel reductionism, warns that we dare not look behind the curtain of the revelatory word to see if it corresponds with what it tells us. Should we attempt this, we are guilty of not taking God at his word. Those who look for external assurances are said to succumb to the theology of glory. Here it is difficult to distinguish Schroeder from Forde and his disciples, though one may not have influenced the others. Paul's warning that the Jews demand signs (1 Cor 1:22) does not diminish the fact that throughout the Scriptures, in both the Old and New Testaments, signs accompany the revelatory word in support (e.g., in Luke's nativity account).⁶⁷ In several instances in Luke's nativity account, signs are provided to accompany the word of revelation. Shepherds go to Bethlehem to verify the angel's message that the Savior can be found in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:12, 2:16). Such is the case also with the resurrection accounts. Women who come to anoint the body of Jesus accept the invitation of the tomb angel to look at the place where the body of Jesus lay to support the message that he has risen (Matt 28:6). Behind the word as the preached gospel there is something without which the written or especially oral word is a vacuous sound, which in itself is not the object of faith.⁶⁸

A prominently recognizable theme in the law-gospel paradigm is the denial of the third use of the law. At first this seems unimportant, since in the state of sin in which all have existed since the fall of Adam, the law's second use with its

⁶⁷ Brittany E. Wilson, "Seeing Divine Speech: Sensory Intersections in Luke's Birth Narrative and Beyond," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42, no. 3 (March 2020): 251–273.

⁶⁸ In Steven Paulson's opinion, for Bayer objectivity is found in the proclaimed word and not in a tangible person or thing. Paulson says that "when Bayer speaks of the 'incarnate word,' he is referring to 'the external word of promise,' and the not the creed's 'incarnatus est de spiritu sancto' by which the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, takes on flesh in the Virgin Mary." Steven D. Paulson, "Forward," in Joshua C. Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer*, by Joshua C. Miller (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), xi. But cf. Oswald Bayer, "Preaching the Word," in *Justification Is for Preaching: Essays by Oswald Bayer, Gerhard O. Forde, and Others* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 196–216. In this essay, Bayer states that one must affirm the historical facts of salvation, and that proclamation reminds us of these facts and distributes the salvation that was won for us under Pontius Pilate. It stands in contradiction to other writings of his:

The gospel is always "distributed" anew, but it was only "won" once, under Pontius Pilate. "And you are blessed [=saved] for ever!" Therefore, it cannot be separated from the historical fact of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and its temporal and spatial specificity, nor can it be separated from the original texts that testify to its meaning. These texts contain its authoritative formulations that cannot be extrapolated without losing its definitive, eschatological character as a once-and-for-all event. God's presence in the Spirit does not surpass what happened under Pontius Pilate, but "reminds" us of it (see John 14:26), recalls it, brings it into the present, distributes it, and promises it. The distinction and correlation between the salvation won once under Pontius Pilate and its ever new distribution and application gives preachers a hint of how they can avoid two extreme positions." (204–205)

accusations prepares the sinner to hear and believe the gospel. Also left in place is the law's first use to give society structure and to corral destructive forces that threaten it. Problematic is that the denial of the third use compromises any subscription to the Book of Concord, which, however, is not an issue for those churches in Europe and the ELCA that do not accept the Formula on the same basis as they accept the Augsburg Confession. For European Lutheran territorial churches this is a moot point, since for them the Lutheran Confessions are as much of a cultural artifact belonging to their national history as they are a statement of what they believe. As discussed above, LCMS participants at Bad Boll were unaware of the difference they had with the German delegations. Deniers of the third use typically cite the Apology's *lex semper accusat* (Ap IV 128, 166) without providing the fuller context: "That is, the law condemns all men, but by undergoing the punishment of sin and becoming a sacrifice for us, the sinless Christ took away the right of the law to accuse and condemn those who believe in him, because he himself is the propitiation, for whose sake, they are accounted righteous" (Ap IV 179).⁶⁹ At the base of the third use of the law is the eternal law, which is an expression of God's righteousness, which is himself. Thus denying the third use opens the door to denying the law and that it expresses God's essence. Detached from God, what the law works in us is nothing more than the experience of anxiety.⁷⁰ What God does not require of believers in living according to the law, he would not have to require of himself. By taking the law out of the equation of salvation, God is relieved of having to offer himself as an atonement for sinners. The void left by Forde's denial of the view of the atonement as a sacrifice is filled by a false doctrine of justification. What was once said to be accomplished by the sacrificial death of Christ is said by Forde, Nestingen, and Paulson to be accomplished by the proclamation of the gospel. Thus deniers of the third use of the law consistently and logically hold that since God is not bound by an eternal law, no atonement is required. Through Forde's two disciples, Forde's views have lately found a hearing in the LCMS, but it was Elert's arguments for denying the third use of the law, which surfaced at Bad Boll, that shaped the theology leading to the majority faculty walkout on February 19, 1974.

Care should be used in speaking of any one doctrine as more important than another. In the Trinity each person has his function in a particular order but one is not more important than another. Even if in the context of the atonement the Son makes the sacrifice, nevertheless the Father requires and offers the sacrifice. As stated above, the second use of the law is the most important use in coming to terms with the atonement; however, in coming to terms with the current disorder in

⁶⁹ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 131.

⁷⁰ Kilcrease, *The Doctrine of the Atonement from Luther to Forde*, 111.

society, the first use of the law in curbing evil and protecting life and property is the most important. For following Christ and living the life and dying the death he died, the third use of the law is the most important. Having said this, Christians are accused by the law only insofar as they are sinners, but as sanctified saints they are not subject to the accusatory function of the law. Shift the context and law functions differently. God remains the same. Since law has its origins in God himself and expresses his righteousness, which is who he is, law as he expressed it in creation might well deserve the honor of being the most important use. How could it be otherwise? How the law functioned in Eden before the fall is prescient of how the law functions in its third use and will function perfectly in paradise, in which believers will no longer sin. Each will live no longer for himself but for the other. Law in what we call its third use or function will last forever. For a glimpse of how the law will look in paradise, one need look no further than Luther's explanations of the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism. He sets the tone in his explanation of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." Here the warning against idolatry becomes an invitation to fear, love, and trust in God above everyone or everything else. This perspective continues with the remaining commandments, each of which begins with "we should fear and love God." In each of the explanations, Luther sets down the third use of the law in that God works his will in what believers do. First Luther sets forth each of the commandments with their impossible demands and punishments threatening the offender. Then he looks at them from the perspective of God's original intentions for them and how believers are to do them now. It is as if he is turning a piece of clothing that has been turned inside out back to its original shape so that we now see the commandments (law) in the way God does and the way God originally intended for us. What by sin had become negative command was transformed into positive possibility, which will be perfected in use in the next life. The prohibition against murder in the fifth commandment stands in sharp contrast to the God who created life and now works through believers to enhance the lives of others. Hence the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus already had this insight when he defined the greatest commandment as loving God first and the second equally important as loving the neighbor, and he did so by quoting Moses (Matt 22:36–39; Lev 19:18). Here might be the place to rescue the reputation of Moses from the hands of those who in advancing the gospel as the only revelation of God have denigrated the law by presenting Moses as only an instrument of God's wrath. In whatever way Luther is referenced to further this caricature, it should be balanced by the Bible: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). He was the one who stood in the breach between God and Israel and restored Israel to the covenant as God's people (Exod 32:10; Ps 106:23). More than anyone else in the Old Testament, Moses was the

Christlike figure. Luther closes his explanations to the Commandments not as accusations, but with the assurance that “Therefore we should also love and trust in Him and willingly do according to His Commandments.”⁷¹ Forgiveness is dependent on propitiatory atonement: “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). This Christ did by entering the heavenly sanctuary to appear before God. This is the step that gospel reductionism has yet to recognize. In seeing the law only as accusation, it is easy to conclude that there are two words of God,⁷² law and gospel, and left without explanation this introduces the possibility of a contradiction within God. Thus Paulson resolves that God uses the law but is in himself not intrinsically law. But if law exists apart from God then law, if it exists at all, has autonomous existence, which Paulson denies. If believers are relieved from the law simply by a word of Absolution, the need for atonement is abrogated and we are relieved from praying “forgive us our debts” (Matt 6:12) because there are no debts. If the law does not proceed from God’s attribute of righteousness or justice, then he can easily abolish or ignore it. If God can ignore it (not requiring atonement) then it follows that so can we. Murray sees the practical application of it all when he makes the acute observation that in spite of the plea of the board of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, students who had been taught that there was no third use of the law would be easily persuaded by their professors to join them in walking off the campus February 19, 1974.⁷³

The Third Use of the Law is Forever

Discussion about the law is nothing else than a discussion of God’s righteousness. Should there be discomfort in saying that the law belongs to God’s essence, then substituting the word “righteous” might be satisfactory. Just as God is love in himself, he also is righteous in himself. This is a moral righteousness that in the context of sin is expressed in the law as accusation. By Adam listening and obeying the serpent and doing what God had forbidden, he committed a onetime, unrepeatable offense in which all his descendants took part. It was an offense against God himself in despising the love in which Adam had been created. Adam sinned against the first commandment, in which all the commandments are embraced. In doing what God did not want him to do in loving him, Adam gave the honor due his creator to Satan. So he turned the law as the structure on which he was on speaking terms with God into prohibition with the threat of penalty. The life he received from

⁷¹ *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 8.

⁷² Jonathan A. Linebaugh, ed., *God’s Two Words: Law and Gospel in the Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

⁷³ Murray, “The Third Use of the Law,” 120.

God, which anticipated an even more glorious life, now was punctuated by death and the disintegration of his body into the dust from which he had been formed. With Christ coming as the second Adam, the law is returned to its original form and is enhanced to a higher level so that in the next life, we will forever know the law as God's love for us and our love for him and for all the redeemed. Jesus already said all this: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37-39).

Caesar Jesus? The Kingship of Jesus and Political Authorities in Luke and Acts

Kendall A. Davis

I. Introduction¹

It was not uncommon for Paul to stir up trouble as he traveled during his missionary journeys. Paul’s preaching is routinely met with a mob, often composed of Jews, who bring charges against him to the local authorities (e.g., Acts 14:1–7, 17:1–9, 18:1–17, 21:17–36). While Acts makes it clear that the charges brought against Paul and others are often baseless (26:31–32) and rooted in personal animus (17:5), the charges nonetheless still reveal much about how non-Christians in the book of Acts perceive the gospel of Jesus and its effects on their society.

The episode described at the beginning of Acts 17 in Thessalonica illustrates this point well. Paul teaches in a synagogue and is accused by some of the Jews who say, “These men are turning the world upside down² . . . and they are all violating the decrees of Caesar by saying that there is another king, Jesus” (vv. 6–7).³ So, is the mob right? Has Paul been violating the decrees of Caesar by proclaiming Jesus as an alternative to Caesar?⁴ Or has the mob simply misunderstood Paul’s message? Commentators are divided on the question. Most read the crowd’s claim as a blatant and perhaps deliberate misunderstanding⁵ while others read the claim as essentially

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented in September 2023 at the Theological Symposium at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. I would like to offer thanks to the following people who read drafts of this article and gave helpful critical feedback: Katherine Dubke, Noah Dunsmore, Christian Einertson, Hayden Lukas, and Kyle Weeks.

² Or perhaps “leading the empire into rebellion.” That *ἀναστατώω* can be used to refer to rebellions is made clear by Acts 21:38. For an extensive argument that *οἰκουμένη* should be understood as “empire” in Luke and Acts, see Barbara Rossing, “Turning the Empire (*οἰκουμένη*) Upside Down: A Response,” in *Reading Acts in the Discourses of Masculinity and Politics*, ed. Eric D. Barreto, Matthew L. Skinner, and Steve Walton (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 148–155.

³ All quotations from the Old and New Testaments are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁴ There is some debate over whether *βασιλεύς* (“king/emperor”) refers to Caesar here. However, it seems clear contextually that imperial claims are in mind here. See the discussion in C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 97–98.

⁵ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 1994), 2:808; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand

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more true than false.⁶ Kavin Rowe summarizes the conundrum well: “The opponents’ accusations are at one and the same time both true and false. They are false in that they attempt to place Jesus in competitive relation to Caesar. Such a positioning can only lead to a politics of revolt. The accusations are true, however, in that the Christian mission entails a call to another way of life, one that is—on virtually every page of the Acts of the Apostles—turning the world upside down.”⁷ The claim made by the mob in Thessalonica thus highlights an important facet of how the gospel of Jesus confronted Greco-Roman society in general and imperial authorities in particular: The apostles proclaimed Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. No earthly authority, including Caesar, was an exception.

This article thus explores how Luke’s portrait of Jesus as God’s anointed king confronts earthly claims of authority. After all, it is a misunderstanding of Luke’s message to see Jesus as a rival imperial claimant like so many other Roman generals and politicians. Yet it is also a misunderstanding of Luke to think that the claims of Jesus do not significantly undermine and reframe the claims of Caesar and other authorities. How then should we understand these issues? This article argues that the Lutheran doctrine of the two realms helps make sense of the conflict between Jesus and political authorities in Luke and Acts since it shows us how both Jesus and Rome make claims to authority in both the spiritual and temporal realms. Luke and Acts offer one of the most extensive explorations of how the message of Jesus confronts human authorities in the New Testament. Thus, a thorough investigation of this material will offer the church today refreshed insight as Christians seek to live as faithful citizens in both of God’s two realms. After a discussion of major scholarly approaches toward imperial authority in Luke and Acts, this article proceeds in three parts. First, I criticize the modern notion of separation between the religious/spiritual and the political as a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the two realms and an insufficient tool for making sense of the conflict in Luke and Acts between Jesus and Rome. Second, I argue that Jesus’ primary enemy is not Rome but Satan. While many have argued that Jesus comes to oppose political, economic, and social systems of power, especially as represented by Roman imperialism, this makes primary what is really a secondary conflict in Luke and Acts. Third and finally, I discuss how Luke and Acts show that Jesus is the ultimate Lord of both the temporal and spiritual realms. I conclude with a discussion of the difference this all makes for the church today.

Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:2554; and Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 157.

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 189; and Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 99–102.

⁷ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 101.

II. Why Would Jesus Be a Threat to Caesar?

Of course, it is not necessarily obvious that Jesus is a threat to imperial authority in Luke and Acts. For most of the history of modern biblical scholarship, Luke's stance toward the Roman Empire was understood to be conciliatory. Luke's writings were frequently read as presenting an apologia to broader Roman society on behalf of the church, trying to show why Jesus and the movement he started were no threat at all to the imperial order.⁸ This view was the traditional scholarly view on Luke's attitude toward Rome for much of the twentieth century.

However, in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, a growing number of interpreters have instead argued that Luke and Acts take a much more hostile attitude toward the empire.⁹ The work of these and other interpreters is part of a broader trend in New Testament studies, sometimes going by the name of "anti-imperial readings." Such scholars seek to emphasize the way that New Testament writings engage in both overt and covert opposition and resistance to dominant imperial authorities. Surveys of this work abound,¹⁰ but two of the more prolific and influential names in this area include Warren Carter and Richard Horsley.¹¹ The aim of such interpreters is to highlight the more subtle ways that New Testament writers counteract imperial claims to power. For example, Luke's infancy narrative has provided endless fodder for interpreters who see in Luke's mention of Caesar Augustus in 2:1 the beginning of an extensive comparison between Jesus and Caesar. It is argued that Luke portrays Jesus as a new and better Caesar right from the beginning of the narrative. Carter's comments regarding the angelic announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2:11 are typical. He writes, "The announcement presents Jesus' birth, not the emperor's, as good news. Jesus, not the emperor, is Savior and Lord. Jesus, not the emperor, is the rightly anointed agent . . . and king in the line of David, entrusted with representing God's purposes. And those purposes do not reserve blessing for the privileged, powerful, wealthy few, but extend it to all

⁸ For example, Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber, 1960), 138. For a summary of a few variations on this reading, see Steve Walton, "The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire," in Barreto, Skinner, and Walton, *Reading Acts in the Discourses of Masculinity and Politics*, 76–82.

⁹ For example, Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978); Loveday Alexander, "Luke's Political Vision," *Interpretation* 66, no. 9 (2012): 283–293; and Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

¹⁰ See especially the extensive survey in Judy Diehl, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament," *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 1 (2011): 9–52.

¹¹ Each of these scholars has numerous works on this subject, but two representative works include the following: Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); and Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

people.”¹² As with all scholarly trends, not all of these readings are successful. However, the best evidence that Luke portrays Jesus as a counter-Caesar is the use of particular titles for Jesus that were also in common usage for the emperors: κύριος (“Lord”), βασιλεύς (“king/emperor”), and σωτήρ (“savior”).¹³ As Steve Walton writes, “the use of these three groups of words for Jesus so prominently suggests that Luke presents the early Christians as subversively using Caesar’s titles for Jesus.”¹⁴ Thus, it is not hard to imagine why some people in the ancient world, upon hearing the Christian message, might think that Jesus is being proclaimed as an alternative to Caesar.¹⁵ Michael Bird, for example, argues that Christian writers often portray Jesus in ways that are similar to “ancient ruler cults” from throughout the ancient Mediterranean world as a way of mocking the divine claims of such rulers.¹⁶

Of course, the more extreme versions of these anti-imperial perspectives are not without their problems. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that Jesus does not lead any kind of formal opposition to imperial authority.¹⁷ If Jesus were such a threat to Roman authority, then it is strange that Jesus and his apostles are continually declared innocent by the same Roman authorities who mistreat them (Luke 23:22; Acts 18:15, 19:37, 26:31–32). Christopher Bryan’s conclusion is therefore apt: “Luke’s Jesus is not a rebel seeking to replace one polis with another, nor is he a Gandhi, counseling nonviolent noncooperation with imperial authorities.”¹⁸ Thus, whatever we make of the gospel’s opposition to imperial authority, it is nothing of the crudely revolutionary sort.

¹² Carter, *The Roman Empire*, 99.

¹³ For examples of κύριος used to refer to emperors, see Acts 25:26; and Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.418–419. See also the inscriptions listed in Stanley E. Porter and Bryan E. Dyer, *Origins of New Testament Christology: An Introduction to the Traditions and Titles Applied to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 5–6. For examples of βασιλεύς used to refer to emperors, see 1 Pet 2:17; Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.351; and Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1927), 362–363. For examples of σωτήρ used to refer to emperors, see Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.459; Philo, *Flaccus* 74; and David Magie, *De Romanorum iuris publici sacrique vocabulis sollemnibus in graecum sermonen conversis* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1905), 67–68.

¹⁴ Walton, “The State They Were In,” 99.

¹⁵ See, for example, Joseph D. Fantin, *The Lord of the Entire World: Lord Jesus, a Challenge to Lord Caesar* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011); and Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus among the Gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2022), 295–379.

¹⁷ Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 100–105.

¹⁸ Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 99.

More and more scholars thus recognize that it is less than helpful to simply ask whether Luke is for or against Rome.¹⁹ The narratives of Luke and Acts present a complex and multifaceted picture of Roman authority in relation to God's authority. As already noted, Roman officials often declare Jesus and his apostles innocent, yet they still treat them cruelly and capriciously. Luke hardly offers a shining portrayal of Roman justice. And yet Luke also portrays a number of Roman officials positively, even showing some coming to faith without suggesting that they quit their jobs and turned their backs on the empire in order to follow Jesus (Luke 7:2–10; Acts 10).²⁰ A more nuanced theological reading of the conflict between Jesus and political authorities is necessary. I propose that the doctrine of the two realms, when rightly understood, offers a helpful framework for a more nuanced reading of these issues in Luke and Acts.

III. Spiritual and Temporal Kingship?

One common way to resolve the conflict between the authority of Jesus and human political authorities is in fact a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the two realms. Such a misunderstanding asserts that Jesus and Caesar operate in two different, largely nonoverlapping realms, that is, Jesus is a spiritual king over a spiritual kingdom while Caesar and other earthly authorities are kings of temporal kingdoms. Caesar has his kingdom while Jesus has his. No conflict necessary. Of course, most who offer this answer will still acknowledge that Jesus retains some kind of ultimate authority. However, this is typically left fairly vague, something like the American platitude “one nation under God.”²¹

Of course, modern Americans are not the only ones tempted to make such a division. Eusebius relates an account from Hegeippus wherein the grandchildren of Jude, the brother of Jesus, were called in for questioning before the emperor Domitian because he was trying to exterminate the descendants of David:

¹⁹ Drew W. Billings, *Acts of the Apostles and the Rhetoric of Roman Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), 3–11; Diehl, “Anti-Imperial Rhetoric,” 34–41; Michael Kochenash, “Taking the Bad with the Good: Reconciling Images of Rome in Luke-Acts,” *Religious Studies Review* 41, no. 2 (2015): 43–51; Timothy W. Reardon, *The Politics of Salvation: Lukan Soteriology, Atonement, and the Victory of Christ* (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 1–3; Matthew L. Skinner, “Who Speaks for (or against) Rome? Acts in Relation to Empire,” in Barreto, Skinner, and Walton, *Reading Acts in the Discourses of Masculinity and Politics*, 107–125; and Walton, “The State They Were In.”

²⁰ See Alexander Kyrychenko, *The Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel: The Role of the Centurion in Luke-Acts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

²¹ I call this slogan a platitude because it is not clear how it makes a difference for American governance. For example, there is no constitutional provision that laws must be in accord with Scripture nor is it even clear which God the slogan refers to.

When asked also, respecting Christ and his kingdom, what was its nature, and when and where it was to appear, they replied, “that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when coming in glory he would judge the quick and dead, and give to every one according to his works.” Upon which, Domitian despising them, made no reply; but treating them with contempt, as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by a decree ordered the persecution to cease. (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.19–20)²²

The grandchildren of Jude are not wrong, but they do undersell the temporal and earthly aspects of Jesus’ kingdom, though this is perhaps understandable given their circumstances. Domitian, accordingly, dismisses them, clearly viewing their alternative kingdom as no threat to him and a waste of his time. Michael Bird has written that these events “show that Luther’s two-kingdoms theology had ample and early precedent.”²³ Bird’s comments are no isolated phenomenon. The doctrine of the two realms has often been misunderstood as the idea that the spiritual and the temporal, or the religious and the political, are entirely separate domains, something like the American notion of the separation between church and state.²⁴

Of course, as neat of a solution as it may be to argue that Jesus’ kingdom and the emperor’s kingdom have nothing to do with one another, there is little in Luke and Acts to warrant it. To be sure, Jesus is no revolutionary in the traditional sense, as made clear by his arrest in Gethsemane when he stops his disciples from defending him with violence (Luke 22:47–53). Furthermore, many of the basic functions of government such as the raising of taxes and the bearing of the sword are affirmed in the Gospel of Luke, as seen, for example, in John the Baptist’s instructions to soldiers and tax collectors (3:12–14) and in Jesus affirming, somewhat cryptically, that taxes should be paid to Caesar (20:19–26). However, none of this means that Jesus *ever* cedes the temporal realm to Caesar or any other authority. In fact, one of the very first things said about Jesus in Luke’s Gospel is the following from the angel Gabriel: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his reign will have no end” (1:32–33). Certainly David’s kingdom was a temporal kingdom. Luke thus gives us no reason to expect that the kingdom of this ultimate son of David will not also be a temporal kingdom. There is no idea that Jesus’ kingdom is merely a heavenly, spiritual

²² Translation from C. F. Cruse, *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998).

²³ Bird, *Jesus among the Gods*, 356.

²⁴ For more on these issues, see the essays in Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, eds., *One Lord, Two Hands? Essays on the Theology of the Two Kingdoms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021).

kingdom. This is confirmed later in the Gospel when Jesus affirms that he will return to reign as king *on earth* (19:11–27).

Not only does Jesus' reign extend to the temporal realm, but also the claims of Caesar extend to the spiritual realm. In fact, the emperors made numerous, quite extravagant spiritual claims about their own authority.²⁵ The empire claimed to rule not on the basis of popular favor, as in modern democracies, but on the basis of divine favor and power. The gods themselves allegedly sanctioned Roman rule and their continued assistance was necessary for the continued success of the empire.²⁶ This is one reason why sacrifices were such an important part of civic and military life.²⁷ Furthermore, the first century saw the rise of the worship of the emperor as a kind of divine figure.²⁸ This was particularly prominent in the Greek-speaking, eastern part of the empire. Judy Diehl puts her finger on the problem for early Christians: "If Caesar was considered a god, what did that mean for the earliest Christians who gave allegiance to 'another' God?"²⁹ In other words, even if Luke did portray Jesus as only making a claim to spiritual authority, this would still counter imperial claims to authority. There is no clean separation between the spiritual and the political that modern people take for granted. Such an idea is an Enlightenment construct entirely foreign to both the New Testament and the broader Greco-Roman world. As Timothy Reardon writes: "This division of spheres derives, at least partially, from presupposed compartmentalization characteristic of modern, Western space. Though such divisions as religion and politics, or even religion and the public sphere, seem natural, these delineations of space are discursive products of power consolidation. The modern imagination in many respects is rent by this categorical fault line, so that the divide between the political and religious defines the present and is assumed of the past. It is a discursive act from which NT interpretation and the study of Lukan soteriology are not immune."³⁰ Thus, however we answer the question posed by this article, the idea that Caesar and Jesus have separate, nonoverlapping domains does not stand up to either the biblical or historical witness. This should not surprise Lutherans in the slightest. After all, the doctrine of the two realms does not teach the American idea of separation between church and state as often supposed,³¹ but rather, in the words of Joel Biermann, "The realms—both the spiritual and the temporal—belong to God and are directed by him for specific and

²⁵ Again, see Bird, *Jesus among the Gods*, 295–379.

²⁶ Carter, *The Roman Empire*, 7–8.

²⁷ This is the conflict at the heart of Tertullian's *De corona militis*.

²⁸ See Gwyneth McIntyre, *Imperial Cult* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

²⁹ Diehl, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric," 10.

³⁰ Reardon, *Politics of Salvation*, 2.

³¹ See the examples in Joel Biermann, *Wholly Citizens: God's Two Realms and Christian Engagement with the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 39–46.

distinct, but equally God-pleasing work.³² To say that Jesus is king and Lord is to say that *both* the spiritual and temporal realms belong to him and this must, therefore, contradict the particular universal claims to authority made by Caesar.

Thus, in order to give a more fitting answer to how Jesus' status as king stands in contrast to Roman claims in light of the doctrine of the two realms, we must further flesh out what Luke has to say about two topics: first, how Luke teaches us to understand Jesus' enemies and, second, how Luke would have us see Jesus' own authority and ministry.

IV. The Real Enemies

Who are Jesus' primary enemies? Many scholars observe the ways that the kingship of Jesus and the coming of the kingdom of God stand in tension with Roman claims and insist that the central conflict in Luke and Acts is between Jesus and Caesar. For example, Seyoon Kim argues that the mention of Caesar Augustus in both Luke 2:1 and the close of Acts in Rome creates an *inclusio* in Luke's two-volume work: "Luke deliberately contrasts Jesus the Messianic king/lord to Caesar Augustus, and implicitly claims that Jesus is the true *kyrios* and *sōtēr*, the true bearer of the kingship of God, and that he will bring the true *pax* on earth, replacing the false *pax* brought about by the military conquests of Caesar, a false *kyrios* and *sōtēr*."³³ There are, however, several problems with this reading. First of all, while it is certainly significant that Paul ends his journey in Rome, this is not because of some overarching conflict with Caesar. The last chapter of Acts mentions Caesar but only because Paul tells the Jews in Rome that he has come there because he has appealed his legal case to Caesar. Paul comes not to defeat Caesar but to appeal to him, to get Caesar to declare Paul innocent and perhaps for Paul to proclaim to Caesar the gospel along the way. Moreover, the emphasis of this final part of the narrative is on how Paul continues his pattern of ministry now in Rome even while under imperial arrest.³⁴ Having begun in the capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem, Paul has now brought the gospel to the capital of the Gentiles, Rome. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' words at the beginning of Acts that the apostles would be his witnesses in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (1:8). Now the gospel has, in a sense, come to the ends of the earth.

³² Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 5.

³³ Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 80–81.

³⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson concurs that the point of the end of Acts is not Paul's confrontation with Caesar (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992], 476). For more on the narrative complexities of the ending of Acts, see Troy M. Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts within Its Literary Environment* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

Second, the reference to Caesar Augustus in Luke 2:1 does not set up some kind of grand showdown between Jesus and Caesar.³⁵ While Jesus is indeed referred to with terms like *κύριος* and *σωτήρ* that were often used of Caesar, Luke does little to highlight this fact. Luke 2:1 is not even the first mention of a king in Luke's Gospel. Luke begins his Gospel by referring to "the days of Herod" (1:5). At the beginning of chapter 3, Luke again refers to a number of rulers to pinpoint the events in time. The purpose here is not to set up a conflict between Jesus and these earthly rulers but rather to locate these events in time, as any historian would do, and to evoke the language of the beginnings of so many of the prophetic writings (e.g., Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3; Hos 1:1).³⁶ The claims that Luke and Acts make about Jesus certainly conflict with Roman claims (e.g., Luke 1:33, 2:11; Acts 10:36, 17:30–31), but this particular conflict is just not as front and center as has often been claimed.

Another problem for readings that see the central conflict of Luke and Acts to be the conflict between Jesus and Caesar is that while Jesus himself almost never gets into direct conflict with representatives of Roman rule,³⁷ he is constantly getting into conflict with local Jewish authorities (e.g., Luke 4:22–30, 6:1–5, 11:37–52). When Jesus is put on trial, it is the Jewish council that condemns him (Luke 22:71) while Pilate declares him innocent (Luke 23:4). Likewise, Paul and the other apostles more typically find themselves getting into trouble with Jewish authorities rather than Roman ones (e.g., Acts 4:1–22, 12:1–5, 14:19). One episode that demonstrates this pattern well is when Jesus is asked about how Pilate killed a group of Jewish Galileans by mingling their blood with the sacrifices (Luke 13:1–5). Jesus could have offered woes against the evil, corrupt political authorities who were committing such violence against God's people. Instead, Jesus takes the event as an opportunity to insist that these people did not die because they were particularly bad sinners. Rather, this and the incident at the tower of Siloam offer a call to repentance. At least in this instance, Jesus believes his most important opponent is not Pilate but human pride.

The upshot of all this is that Rome is not the main focus of opposition in Luke and Acts. Of course, many interpreters who say otherwise recognize that Jesus and his apostles do not spend all their time denouncing the Roman Empire. However, they typically assert that on account of the threat of imperial persecution, authors like Luke were not able to voice their opposition to imperial rule as openly as they

³⁵ So also Michael Wolter, *The Gospel according to Luke*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig (Waco: Baylor Univ. Press, 2016), 1:126.

³⁶ It has been frequently noted how much Luke evokes the language of the LXX, especially in the first several chapters of his Gospel; see Chang-Wook Jung, *The Original Language of the Lukan Infancy Narrative* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

³⁷ In fact, Jesus seems to get along fairly well with the representatives of Roman power he encounters in the Gospel, for example the centurion whom he enthusiastically commends (Luke 7:9) and Pilate, who is constantly declaring him innocent (Luke 23:4, 23:15, 23:22).

might like and accordingly relied on subtlety and “hidden transcripts” to make their point.³⁸ Consider, for example, Gertrud Tönsing’s reading of the parable of the minas in Luke 19:11–27. Tönsing argues that the real, hidden message of this parable is that the third servant, who is condemned by the king, is actually the hero since this servant is the one who refuses to comply with the unjust demands of the king and thereby begins a movement of resistance against unjust power.³⁹ The fact that in the Lukan context the parable undeniably pictures Jesus as the king merely serves as a plausible, public meaning of the parable to remove any suspicion from the true, hidden meaning of the parable, which must obviously be a message of resistance. The problem, of course, with readings like this is that any detail that would contradict an anti-imperial reading can be dismissed as merely part of the public message, which only distracts from the true meaning of the text. If that were not enough, there is little reason to think of Rome as a kind of Orwellian surveillance state, meaning that New Testament authors had little reason to hide their opposition to the empire if they wanted to express it.⁴⁰

Instead, the most basic opposition at the heart of the Lukan narrative is not between Jesus and Rome but between Jesus and Satan. This is the conclusion of Matthew Monnig in his study of Satan in Luke and Acts, where he calls Satan “the primary antagonist to Jesus.”⁴¹ After all, the idea that the people of God have enemies is present in Luke’s story from the beginning. In Zechariah’s song after the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah mentions how God will save Israel from her enemies, from the hand of those who hate her (Luke 1:71–72), but Zechariah is rather vague about who exactly these enemies are.⁴² It is therefore instructive that the first clearly defined conflict to occur in Luke’s Gospel is the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness by Satan (4:1–13). As Jesus begins his ministry, Luke makes it clear whom Jesus has

³⁸ The sociological concept of “hidden transcripts” refers to the way that oppressed people can covertly communicate their opposition to their oppression without engaging in open revolt, as described in James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990).

³⁹ J. Gertrud Tönsing, “Scolding the ‘Wicked, Lazy’ Servant; Is the Master God? A Redaction-Critical Study of Matthew 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27,” *Neotestamentica* 53, no. 1 (2019): 139–140.

⁴⁰ Laura Robinson, “Hidden Transcripts? The Supposedly Self-Censoring Paul and Rome as Surveillance State in Modern Pauline Scholarship,” *New Testament Studies* 67, no. 1 (2021): 55–72.

⁴¹ Matthew S. Monnig, “Satan in Lukan Narrative and Theology: Human Agency in the Conflict between the Authority of Satan and the Power of God” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2019), 276.

⁴² Of course, Robert C. Tannehill has argued on the basis of Luke 19:43 that the enemies who Zechariah references should indeed be understood to be the Romans (*The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke–Acts* [Eugene: Cascade, 2005], 49–50). Tannehill makes a persuasive case that Rome should be considered *one* of Israel’s enemies. However, it is not clear to me why they deserve pride of place among Israel’s enemies (note the plural in Luke 1:71), especially when elsewhere Jesus calls Satan and the Jerusalem elite who reject his kingship enemies (Luke 10:19, 19:27).

really come to oppose. Jesus' fight is with the evil spiritual powers that reign over the present world and subject it to the powers of sin and death. Thus, in the very next episode, when Jesus preaches to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus frames his anointed ministry as a ministry to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (4:18). And the reader sees over the course of the next several chapters that Jesus fulfills this ministry by healing the sick, the injured, and the dead. He cleanses lepers and casts out demons. He gives sight to both the physically blind and the spiritually blind. When a group of John the Baptist's disciples come to ask if Jesus really is the one whom they have been waiting for, he points to these very sorts of acts to show them that he is in fact God's promised anointed one (7:22). As Jesus takes up the throne of his father David and the mantle of the prophetic ministry of Elijah in his own messianic ministry, Jesus does battle not with Rome or the Sanhedrin but with Satan. He fights Satan by undoing Satan's work, by freeing God's people from death, sickness, uncleanness, and demonic powers. While it might not be immediately obvious that Jesus' healing ministry constitutes a battle against Satan, this becomes clearer when we observe the association between healings and exorcisms in Luke's Gospel. In describing Jesus' healings and exorcisms, the narrator frequently lists both actions together, often depicting the healings and exorcisms as occurring together (e.g., Luke 4:40–41, 6:18, 7:21, 8:2, 9:1–2). At several points the narrator or other characters talk about Jesus "healing" people of evil spirits (Luke 7:21, 8:2 [θεραπεύω], 9:42; Acts 10:38 [ἰάομαι]). Furthermore, sometimes demonic possession causes what modern people may otherwise identify as medical problems (Luke 9:37–43), and the healing of medical problems is described using the language of exorcism (Luke 4:39). Consider the account of the healing/exorcism of the bent woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17). The woman is described as having a spirit of illness (πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας, 13:11). Jesus says that Satan has bound her in this illness for eighteen years (13:16). While Luke's Gospel still makes a distinction between healings and exorcisms, they often seem to be two sides of the same coin, and the kingdom of God is proclaimed equally against both as a battle against the devil (Luke 9:1–2). As Monnig concludes, "In Luke's view, all healing of illness, whether there is a direct involvement of an evil spirit or not, is an illustration of God's power being wielded against the oppression of the devil."⁴³

Later on in the Gospel, Jesus explicitly frames his work as a fight against the devil. In Luke 11:14–23 Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil. Jesus rejects this accusation as absurd and contradictory. Instead, he affirms that in his ministry he is doing battle with the devil to plunder his house and manifest the reign of God (11:20–22). Satan, for his part, fights back. At the end of the

⁴³ Monnig, "Satan in Lukan Narrative," 124–125; see also 124–132.

temptation of Jesus, the narrator notes, “The devil left him until the proper time” (Luke 4:13). This ominous foreshadowing finds its fulfillment when Satan enters Judas before Judas makes a plan to hand Jesus over to the Jewish authorities (Luke 22:2). But Jesus is not alone in fighting Satan. Just like Jesus, the apostles in Acts regularly do battle with demonic forces (e.g., 5:16, 16:16–24, 19:11–20) and heal people of various diseases (e.g., 3:1–10, 9:32–35, 9:36–41). Thus, the way Luke tells the story, the primary opponent of Jesus and his kingdom is the devil. Unsurprisingly, this is also Paul’s view of things in Ephesians: “For us it is not a fight against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the global rulers of this darkness, against the wicked spirits in the heavenly realm” (6:12).

Yet this does not mean that the gospel of Jesus has no conflict with political authorities. A failure to understand political authorities from the perspective of the two realms leads to one-sided readings. For example, the idea that Luke presents the church as entirely compatible with and subservient to Rome focuses too exclusively on the relative lack of conflict in the temporal realm. On the other hand, the idea that Luke presents the church and Rome in diametric opposition focuses too exclusively on the conflict in the spiritual realm. As discussed above, to proclaim Jesus as Lord, King, and Savior does indeed contradict claims made by Caesar to be lord, king, and savior. For Jesus to claim ultimate divine authority is to set himself above Caesar, who claims to be a god among men. What is more, Jesus establishes a new polis in the church. While the church does not try to overthrow Caesar, the church does establish an alternative system of relations. This affects not merely spiritual matters but also the distribution of resources (Acts 4:32–37, 6:1–6) and standards of behavior (Acts 15), that is, matters of the temporal realm. Most importantly, this is a polis that recognizes only God, not human beings, as the ultimate authority (Acts 5:29). Thus, the proclamation of the kingdom of God radically relativizes political authority, but it does not overthrow it.

That being said, human authorities can also become Jesus’ opponents when they ally themselves with the devil’s kingdom rather than God’s kingdom. As Monnig writes: “While it is true that Luke, especially in Acts, is subtly but clearly putting the gospel in tension with political authorities, the immediate narrative context is the theological one implicated by Jesus’s conflict with Satan. Luke does not associate Satan with political powers in any systematic way, but rather with opposition to God and his work in Jesus in any way, in which both political and religious powers are associated.”⁴⁴ Rome’s complicity with Satan is thus most clearly established when Roman authorities participate in the persecution of Jesus and his apostles, such as when Pilate acquiesces to the demands of the Jerusalem elite to have Jesus executed

⁴⁴ Monnig, “Satan in Lukan Narrative,” 93, n. 118.

(Luke 23:1–25)⁴⁵ or when Felix holds Paul in custody so that he might receive a bribe and later to curry favor with the Jews (Acts 24:26–27).

Nevertheless, it is not the case that every authority everywhere is necessarily a servant of Satan. Luke and Acts note two instances of Roman centurions coming to faith (Luke 7:1–10; Acts 10), and the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion declares Jesus innocent (Luke 23:47). Toward the end of Acts, Paul appeals to King Agrippa to believe the prophets' testimony about Jesus and become a Christian (26:27–29). This would make little sense if all political authorities were hopeless servants of Satan. After all, even Luke would affirm the claim made elsewhere in Scripture that the authority of earthly rulers comes ultimately from God, as affirmed by Romans 13 and John 19:11 (see also AC XVI). In the second temptation of Jesus, Satan offers to give him authority over all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5–7). Yet Satan acknowledges that this authority has been handed to him by someone else (Luke 4:6), and though Luke's Gospel does not specify who Satan received his authority from, the only reasonable answer is God (cf. Rev 20:3, 20:7). All authority, even Satan's, ultimately comes from God. Thus, even when earthly rulers surrender themselves to the devil's ways, their political authority still ultimately comes from God. We express a similar idea in our systematic theology when we talk about distinguishing between an office and the person who holds an office.⁴⁶ Political authority itself is a God-given gift to be exercised well. Yet Luke would also emphasize that those who occupy offices of temporal authority must watch out lest they end up serving Satan rather than God.⁴⁷ Thus, earthly authorities are always subordinate to God and sometimes obedient to the devil. While Jesus' real fight is with the devil and his minions, human authorities can also become the devil's minions when they submit to his ways. Jesus' conflict thus extends to earthly rulers as well in a secondary way but only when they ally themselves with Jesus' ultimate foe.⁴⁸ Of course, a further distinction is made between human and nonhuman enemies in that while no call to repentance goes out to the devil and his forces, Jesus' disciples are called to offer a

⁴⁵ This would also show how Israel's leaders are also subservient to Satan, a theme that recurs elsewhere in Acts (e.g., Acts 4:1–37, 6:1–8:40, 17:1–9; 21:1–24:27) yet has received far less scholarly attention.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Hans Joachim Iwand, "Estate and Sacrament," in *Hans Joachim Iwand on Church and Society*, ed. Benjamin Haupt, Michael Basse, Gerard den Hertog, and Christian Neddens, trans. Christian Einertson (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 147–169.

⁴⁷ Compare Paul's discussion of the way that his hearers can be slaves of sin or slaves of God depending on how they conduct themselves (Rom 6:12–23). See also Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 20–21.

⁴⁸ One observes a similar idea in Matt 25:41 when, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Son of Man says to the goats on his left, "Get away from me you cursed ones into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels." The fire exists because of evil spiritual forces. However, human beings are sent to this fire because they are on the side of the devil and not the Son of Man.

call to repentance and the proclamation of the kingdom of God to human authorities (Luke 12:11–12), as many of the apostles in fact do throughout Acts (4:8–12, 7:1–60, 24:24–26, 26:27–29). Likewise, while Jesus engages in violence against evil spirits (Luke 4:34, 8:26–33), violence against human beings is generally postponed until the parousia (Luke 19:27; cf. Luke 9:51–56, 22:49–51; see also Acts 17:30–31),⁴⁹ thus offering human authorities a chance to repent.

V. Jesus, Lord of All

If this is the perspective Luke would have his readers take of earthly authorities, then his image of Jesus as the ultimate authority does even more to shatter the modern separation between spiritual and temporal authority. This is because Jesus is clearly the Lord of both of God's realms. To begin, we observe that Luke often portrays Jesus as one possessing authority. As mentioned already, the angel Gabriel says that Jesus will be given the throne of his father David forever (Luke 1:32–33). Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the city of David (2:11). Jesus is later acclaimed as son of David by the blind man on the road to Jericho (18:35–43). As he enters Jerusalem he is acclaimed as king by the crowds (19:38) and will later be crucified as the “king of the Jews” (23:38). Yet this is not the only discussion of authority. Jesus astonishes the crowds at Capernaum because his word and teaching possess authority (4:32), and he exercises authority over the demons (4:36). Jesus also gives this authority to cast out demons and to cure diseases to his disciples (9:1). Elsewhere, Jesus, when faced with a dispute about keeping the Sabbath, affirms that he is Lord of the Sabbath (6:5). When asked by some of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem where he gets his authority, Jesus refuses to answer, but the implication of his response is that Jesus' authority comes directly from God (20:1–8), something that the reader already knows from the beginning of the narrative and that is confirmed during Jesus' trial (22:69).

Perhaps one of the strongest affirmations of Jesus' authority and the most helpful for our purposes is found in Acts 10 in Peter's speech to the centurion Cornelius. Peter says that Jesus is “Lord of all” (10:36). This is significant for several reasons. First, when Luke calls Jesus “Lord,” as he so often does, this is an affirmation of Jesus' identity as *the* Lord of Israel's Scriptures who is Lord not just over Israel but also over the whole world and over all of his creation.⁵⁰ Second, it subtly highlights the contrast between Jesus and Caesar. While Caesar is called “Lord” (see Acts 25:26)

⁴⁹ With at least two notable exceptions in Acts: Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11) and King Herod (12:20–23).

⁵⁰ See C. Kavin Rowe, who argues at length that Luke creatively uses the title *κύριος* to narratively merge the identity of Jesus with the identity of the God of Israel (*Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009]).

and even “Lord of all the world,”⁵¹ these claims are exposed as blasphemy, as “usurpation by a human being of the identity that belongs to the God of Israel alone.”⁵² Thus, in contrasting Jesus with Caesar, it is not so much that Jesus is presented as a rival emperor to Caesar, as the Jews in Thessalonica may have thought. Rather, it is that *Caesar* has appointed himself as a rival lord to the Lord of heaven and earth. As Rowe writes, “Jesus does not challenge Caesar’s status as Lord, as if Jesus were somehow originally subordinate to Caesar in the order of being. . . . It is Caesar who is the rival; and what he rivals is the Lordship of God in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁵³ Thus, Jesus is indeed a threat to Roman imperial rule insofar as Jesus threatens to tear out the entire blasphemous system by the roots, to corrode the idolatrous ideology from the inside. Christians are happy to honor and pray for the emperor (1 Pet 2:17), but they do so having fundamentally rejected the emperor’s own basis for his claim to authority. Christians honor the emperor not as the divine son of the gods and lord of all, but as a mere man who occupies an office that exists at God’s good pleasure, a man who can be replaced whenever God sees fit, as in fact happens to Herod (Acts 12:20–23). This is an attitude that the church today must seek to cultivate since we live in a context where politicians of various stripes present themselves as the only hope and savior of their constituents.

But Peter’s affirmation that Jesus is Lord of all (Acts 10:36) does not merely remind us of Jesus’ divine authority over mere men like Caesar, but it also reminds us that as Jesus proclaims and enacts the reign of God in his messianic ministry, he inevitably does so as Lord of all of God’s creation, which means as Lord of both of God’s two realms. It is certainly easy to frame Jesus’ ministry primarily in terms of his work in the spiritual realm. This is the most common strategy in our preaching, after all: Jesus has come to repair the relationship between God and man, to forgive sins, and so on. This is all certainly true and forms a vital part of both Jesus’ work and the work of his apostles. However, Jesus’ work also takes place in the temporal realm as well. This is, of course, not to say that Jesus gets himself elected to office and starts enacting reforms. After all, the temporal realm is not synonymous with human government. Rather the temporal realm “is simply God’s provision for the smooth functioning of the creation.”⁵⁴ Thus, whenever Jesus heals the sick (Luke 4:38–40), cleanses lepers (Luke 5:12–16), makes the paralyzed walk (Luke 5:17–26), raises the dead (Luke 7:11–17), feeds the hungry (Luke 9:10–17), teaches the rich to share with the poor (Luke 18:22), or heals the blind (Luke 18:35–43), he is, in a prophetic way, restoring creation to its proper functioning. Any politician who figured

⁵¹ See Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 106.

⁵² Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 111.

⁵³ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 112.

⁵⁴ Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 4.

out how to do even half these things would find himself hailed as one of the greatest statesmen ever.

Jesus thus conducts his ministry in both the spiritual and the temporal realms. He heals the sick and forgives sins. He raises the dead and casts out demons. He cleanses lepers and preaches the good news of the kingdom. The healing of the paralytic who is lowered through the roof offers an excellent picture of how Jesus' ministry operates in both realms (Luke 5:17–26). The paralytic's friends bring him to Jesus so that Jesus might heal him. However, the first thing that Jesus does is forgive his sins. When Jesus' authority to forgive sins is questioned, he demonstrates his authority over the spiritual realm by demonstrating his authority to make this paralyzed man walk again. The logic here is that if he has the authority to make the paralyzed walk, then surely, he also has the authority to forgive sins. Here ministry in both realms comes together. Jesus is concerned with the whole human person, and thus he ministers to the whole human person because he has authority over the whole human person. Thus, Jesus' fight with Satan is a grand cosmic battle that takes place on multiple fronts. This will even include, when necessary, conflict with human authorities by bearing witness to the truth in front of them (Luke 12:11–12).

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, Luke presents Jesus as a deeply political figure. He is the heir of the throne of David. He is God's anointed prophet and king, and these claims to authority are what get him killed toward the end of the Gospel. Jesus' apostles continue to get into trouble with earthly authorities when the message of Jesus is rightly perceived to be a threat to their authority. While Jesus does not come to overthrow these authorities like a common revolutionary, the kingdom of Jesus is indeed a threat to these earthly authorities, both Gentile and Jewish, insofar as they serve not God but Satan in their God-ordained offices of leadership. Jesus is not a new Caesar. But in a way he is everything Caesar claims to be and more. Jesus' rule exposes Caesar's claims to be the blasphemous and empty posturing that they really were all along. Thus, as Christians seek to follow their King and Lord of all in a world filled with all kinds of earthly authorities, Luke's writings might remind us to keep a few things in mind.

First, we must not forget that the conflict between Jesus and other authorities is first and foremost a spiritual battle. This is true in two senses. In one obvious sense, Jesus comes to defeat Satan. Everything Jesus does is in opposition to this ancient foe, and he wins the victory over this enemy for his faithful people. Thus, those who have sworn allegiance to Jesus engage in a deeply political act. They turn away from the present ruler of this world and toward the one whose rule is dawning just over

the horizon. This is one reason why it is fitting that in the Lutheran baptismal rite, candidates publicly reject the devil and all his works.⁵⁵ Those who would like to be citizens of the kingdom of God must renounce the citizenship into which they were born, the kingdom of Satan. In another sense, Jesus is engaged in a spiritual battle because other authorities, even earthly authorities, make spiritual claims and are engaged in spiritual work. The lines of division between the temporal and spiritual realms are indeed quite permeable.⁵⁶ This is not to say that earthly authorities are always engaged in evil spiritual work—far from it. They may make unobjectionable spiritual claims and may even be engaged in good and salutary spiritual work, as was Frederick the Wise in Luther's day. The point is simply to recognize that the spiritual work of temporal authorities is necessarily an element of their work that cannot be ignored by Christians.

Second, Luke would remind us to distinguish between an office and the one who holds it or, better yet, between authority, which ultimately comes from God, and the ways that the people who exercise that authority choose to serve Satan in their offices. In his narrative, Luke tells the stories of several centurions who offer faithful responses to the message of Jesus. Many Roman and even Jewish authorities declare Jesus and his apostles to be innocent of any crimes. Jesus is no anarchist. Instead, as Bryan asserts, "The biblical tradition subverts human order . . . by consistently confronting its representatives with the truth about its origin and its purpose. . . . Powers . . . are allowed to exist, and may even be approved, but they are always on notice."⁵⁷ One implication of this is that while many in the United States and elsewhere have become disillusioned with particular officeholders, Christians should avoid letting this disillusionment boil over into a general distrust and disrespect for earthly authority itself. It is just and reasonable to distrust particular officeholders, but this should not be misdirected to a distrust of the idea of earthly authority or the office itself. Furthermore, since all authority ultimately comes from God, earthly authorities are measured not against the standards that they set for themselves but against the standards that God sets for his creation. This is why Christians, of all people, must avoid becoming captive to the more simplistic forms of partisan politics. After all, all political parties find ways to ally themselves with demonic forces. Christians should be ready to be a voice of critique to all earthly authorities, not merely the authorities from another political party.

Finally, the church, while primarily concerned with the spiritual realm, also rightfully engages in the temporal realm. Jesus is Lord of both realms, and his

⁵⁵ The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, ed., *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 270.

⁵⁶ Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 16.

⁵⁷ Bryan, *Render to Caesar*, 125.

ministry engages in both realms. This is a pattern followed by the apostles themselves, who not only call sinners to repent and believe in Jesus, but also heal the sick and ensure that widows are provided for (Acts 6). This does not merely mean that the church should manage its finances well or be engaged in what is often called “social ministry,” that is, food pantries, soup kitchens, and the like, though these are certainly all commendable tasks. The point is that when Christians are formed as part of the church, they are formed into a new polis, a new way of life. This is Rowe’s central point in his excellent book *World Upside Down*, where he claims the following:

For Luke, the kingdom is obviously not a “human kingdom” in the straightforward simplistic sense, and in this way the Christian mission does not threaten Rome as did, for example, the Parthian kingdom. Yet, against every Gnosticizing impulse . . . , the kingdom of which Jesus is King is not simply “spiritual” but also material and social which is to say that it takes up space in public. The very fact of the disturbance in Thessalonica—that *this* is what happens—attests to the publicly disruptive consequences of the conversions ([Acts] 17:4). There is no such thing, at least in Acts, as being a Christian in private.⁵⁸

This means that the church must think carefully about how she “takes up space in public.” Congregations must think about how their life together is structured such that it leads to faithful lives and human flourishing in the present age.⁵⁹ For example, are husbands and wives taught how to love one another and raise their children in the faith? Are the lonely given the chance to find community? Are the poor provided with what they need? Are the rich given the opportunity to use their riches to make themselves rich in good works?⁶⁰ Furthermore, as Christians live their lives in the world, they inevitably offer the world witness about their Lord and the heavenly citizenship that is their baptismal birthright. This does not stop as they approach the issues that particularly vex our society, culture, and government. Our lives in God’s two realms are not a bifurcated, schizophrenic reality but a single reality united under the messianic lordship of Jesus. While congregations typically do well to avoid telling their members how exactly most issues that face our civic institutions should

⁵⁸ Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 101.

⁵⁹ One such proposal can be found in Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017). Regardless of what one makes of Dreher’s proposal, in my estimation, Dreher asks many of the right questions.

⁶⁰ Questions like these are often addressed in the tables of duties found toward the end of several New Testament Epistles (e.g., Col 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim 5:1–6:2; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7). While we might be tempted to read these passages as providing instruction merely to individuals, we should keep in mind that these were instructions given to the whole church and therefore implicate not just the individuals to whom they are specifically addressed, but also the entire body of Christ.

be decided,⁶¹ they can teach Christians that the faith speaks to both realms and that Christians do not stop being Christians when they enter the public square because their Lord does not stop being the Lord of all at the ballot box, the school board meeting, or any other function of government. Jesus is the Lord of both realms because he is the Lord of all creation.

⁶¹ Though there are certainly exceptions to this. Pastors and their congregations also shirk their duties if they fail to speak to issues of public concern when Scripture offers clear guidance; see Biermann, *Wholly Citizens*, 118–122.



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Theological Observer

Holding Fast to a Lamp Shining in a Dark Place

An online article by John McWhorter trumpets that the classics department at Princeton University decided some time ago that it is possible to receive an undergraduate degree in classics without having actually to *learn* either language—neither Latin nor Greek.¹ Dan-el Padilla Peralta, a Black colleague of that department, has declared that the gatekeeping protocols of classics have been explicitly aimed at disavowing the legitimate status of scholars of color. Classics, in other words, is a bastion of White supremacy—and the Princeton decision, ironically, was supposedly intended to get more Black and Brown students into the field. McWhorter points out that the Princeton decision has deprived students—yes, African American students in particular—of the “pleasant challenge of mastering Latin or Greek.”

The McWhorter article was written a few years ago. I decided to go to the Princeton classics website² and see for myself what has transpired in the meantime. What I discovered did not quite square with the media hype. My impression is that Princeton, like most schools with classics departments nowadays, is trying to deal adroitly with the ongoing problems of declining enrollment and educational pragmatism. Yes, if I am reading the program of study correctly, it is possible to take a course in ancient literature, “whether read in the original or in translation.” But five of the eight courses that constitute the classical studies major must be taught by classics faculty (three electives may be taught by non-classics faculty). One course must deal substantially with classical reception, also fulfilled by study of another language relevant to the student’s interests (Akkadian, modern Greek, etc., at any course level). I remember thinking, while looking at the online degree requirements, that to get into classics at Princeton a potential applicant likely would have had to be reading Latin for at least a number of years—maybe since elementary school. Hence, it struck me that the undergraduate program did indeed enable future classicists to “chart their own path through the Department’s offerings”—maybe (putting the best construction on things) to get into an even more impressive graduate program at another prestigious university. I saw no hint of Princeton responding in any way to the racial issues identified in 2021 in the McWhorter article. It seems impossible to me (judging by just the website) to determine whether changes made back then

¹ John McWhorter, “The Problem With Dropping Standards in the Name of Racial Equity,” *The Atlantic*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/06/princeton-classics-major-latin-greek/619110/>.

² Available at <https://classics.princeton.edu/programs/undergraduate/tracks/classical-studies-track/>.

were designed to attract more Black or Brown students to classics and, if so, they have been successful in this attempt.

However, I will agree with McWhorter that to deprive students of any race of “the pleasant challenge of mastering Latin or Greek” seems particularly reprehensible in light of what classics offers still today. Typically what one must go through, according to McWhorter, is a “phase of drudgery—learning the rules, memorizing vocabulary,” etc., before passing into a phase of mastery and comprehension, “like dealing with scales on the piano before playing sonatas.” By not really learning Latin and/or Greek, students are discouraged from even beginning the process. Thus far McWhorter.

Along these lines, I am greatly cheered to see students “getting Greek” in the Advanced Greek course I teach, usually in the winter quarter of each academic year. These students, to be sure, often are the best Hellenists at the seminary—having taken Beginning Greek, Gospels I (Matthew selections), Gospels II (Luke/Mark selections), Gospels III (John selections), and Pauline Epistles (Galatians and Romans selections), to say nothing about the five one-hour New Testament Greek Readings courses obligatory for the Master of Divinity degree. Nevertheless, in Advanced Greek, I often see massively improved competency in the language as students pass from the deciphering stage to much more confident reading ability. As I am fond of quipping to all the Greek students I am privileged to teach at the seminary, “One cannot fly until one can run; one cannot run until one can walk; one cannot walk until one can crawl; and one cannot crawl until one has been born smilingly into the world.” And being born smilingly into the world is the whole point and purpose of *beginning* Greek. This is where the process *begins*, and hopefully will continue and increase throughout one’s entire lifetime and ministry as a pastor in Christ’s church.

As for the race issue, McWhorter points out that Pan-African civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois taught Latin and Greek “for a spell” and would have been astonished to learn that classics somehow smacks of White privilege. I am a great fan of Frank M. Snowden Jr., an African American classicist educated at Harvard, whose book *Blacks in Antiquity*³ garnered for him the Charles J. Goodwin Award of Merit of the American Philological Association in 1973.⁴ Snowden’s book includes a picture of a bronze statuette of a “Negroid” boyish orator from Alexandria during the Hellenistic age.⁵ As most classicists know, any ancient orator—“boyish” or otherwise—would have been expected to declaim lengthy passages of Homer from

³ Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1970).

⁴For a list of previous award winners, see “List of Previous Goodwin Award Winners,” Society for Classical Studies, accessed July 12, 2024, <https://classicalstudies.org/awards-and-fellowships/list-previous-goodwin-award-winners/>.

⁵ Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity*, 189, fig. 64.

memory, if not passages of Thucydides, Demosthenes, or Pindar (which is some of the most difficult Greek known). Nor would it have made the slightest difference if the boyish orator were “Negroid” or not: My point is that *any* educated person (of whatever race) would have been expected to declaim Greek in this manner—which means that classics from time immemorial has *united* the diverse races of humanity, not excluded them or set them at each other’s throats.

Hence, in applying these matters to ourselves, we would be well advised to encourage all students coming our way (such as those studying for the Office of the Holy Ministry) to learn as much Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and German as possible. It should be unthinkable to exclude someone from learning Greek, for example, on racial grounds—or, for that matter, on the basis of one’s God-given sex (that is, female diaconal students might be encouraged to study the languages as well). In places on earth where the gospel is expanding, such as in Africa, Greek should be taught rigorously and with aplomb—not just the Catechism and systematic theology, as important as these theological disciplines are. Where the gospel is under attack, such as in America and the West, Greek and the classics should be even more aggressively cultivated—such as in our Lutheran schools, and among homeschoolers. Luther supposed that the languages were essential for the study and exposition of the word of God, and also for the training of the young to become good citizens. The reformer’s words, though widely known, are too little heeded nowadays:

And let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph 6:17] is contained; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and, as the gospel itself points out [Matt 14:20], they are the baskets in which are kept these loaves and fishes and fragments. If through our neglect we let the languages go (which God forbid!), we shall not only lose the gospel, but the time will come when we shall be unable either to speak or write a correct Latin or German. As proof and warning of this, let us take the deplorable and dreadful example of the universities and monasteries, in which men have not only unlearned the gospel, but have in addition so corrupted the Latin and German languages that the miserable folk have been fairly turned into beasts, unable to speak or write a correct German or Latin, and have well-nigh lost their natural reason to boot.⁶

⁶Martin Luther, *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* (1524), in *The Christian in Society II, Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986), vols. 56–82, ed.

Yes, let *us* take a lesson from our “deplorable” universities in America nowadays—where, for the most part, careerism has displaced learning for its own sake and the liberal arts have taken a terrible beating from virulent wokeism. It is to the point where, as in Luther’s day, students are increasingly unable to speak or write coherent English (to say nothing about Latin!)—but, then, why should they, with powerful AI algorithms on the rise? Do the hoary classics have anything to contribute to the current malaise? I think so. If modern universities cannot (or will not) teach the Greek and Latin languages in their pristine glory, then let the church do so, say I. If academic conferences purportedly dedicated to the Classics or the Bible waste time on diversity (however defined) and such esoterica as South Sea Islander exegesis, deviant sexualities, disability studies, the environment, and the like,⁷ then let us poor benighted Lutherans host our own conferences wherein the essential disciplines of the traditional liberal arts canon are not overlooked.⁸ Anyone who can write a cogent philological abstract should be welcome to the table, say I, be they Black, Brown, White, or any of the other skin tones God created long ago—provided only that each contributor respect our commitments, which are biblical and Lutheran.

It is a priceless privilege—and not a chore—to study Greek and Latin at all nowadays, and for pastors actually to get paid for studying and teaching the word of God to their congregations. Let us not take this privilege lightly. We are living in dark times, to be sure, but other Christians long before us cultivated the languages and preserved the gospel through even darker times. Now it is our turn: “And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19 RSV).

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Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 45:360.

⁷ Such topics were standard fare at the recent Society of Biblical Literature conference I attended in San Antonio November 18–21, 2023.

⁸ Themes of the past six Lutheranism and the Classics conferences have been church fathers, history, poetry, philosophy, beauty, and humor. (Our first meeting in 2010 was basically a kickoff for the Lutheranism and the Classics movement.) Our eighth meeting, scheduled for October 3–4, 2025, will be cohosted with the Consortium for Classical Lutheran Education and focus on education.

Book Reviews

***Evangelisch-Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch.* By Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2021. 1,820 pages. Hardcover. €28.00.**

The new hymnal and service book of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, SELK), abbreviated *ELKG*², follows their excellent hymnal of the same name from 1987 (abbreviated *ELKG*¹).¹ The new hymnal is available from the German Bible Society for a very reasonable price (<https://shop.die-bibel.de/Buecher-Kreatives/SELK-Gesangbuecher/>). The new book is significantly larger (1,820 pages vs. 1,296 for the 1987 hymnal). It has a sturdy sewn binding, featuring a blue cover with a new logo. The logo is an abstract cross made up of irregular geometric shapes. Besides the cross form, the geometric shapes do not have any particular meaning. They could be interpreted variously, perhaps as “the unity of Christ and his congregation,” or “the gifts of the Spirit in the body of Christ,” or “the variety of elements needed for forming worship and personal faith.”² In my opinion, ambiguity, variety, and diversity characterize not just the logo of the new hymnal but also its contents.

The Chief Divine Service: *ELKG*² presents more musical options than *ELKG*¹ had. The old hymnal had many variants within only one order of Holy Communion. *ELKG*² has two “forms” of the service of the Holy Supper. Order 1 is the traditional service of Holy Communion as is known to readers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) from *Lutheran Service Book (LSB) Divine Service, Setting Three*.³ Order 2 of the Divine Service with the Holy Supper is the *novus ordo*, known to Missouri Synod Lutherans from *LSB Divine Service, Settings One and Two*. Notably, “Order 2” is the same as the order of service in the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch (EG)* for the mainline territorial churches of Bavaria and Thüringia.⁴

One of the most problematic aspects of the new hymnal is in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. SELK congregations now may use the 1971 “altered version” of these creeds—the version altered by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) mainline territorial churches. The LWF churches changed the words “niedergefahren zur Hölle”

¹ Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Kirchengesangbuch* (Hannover: Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, 1987) (hereafter cited as *ELKG*¹).

² It is explained at <https://selk-gesangbuch.de/hintergrund/graphisches-konzept/>.

³ The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, ed., *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

⁴ Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern, *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Ausgabe für die Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchen in Bayern und Thüringen*, 2nd ed. (München: Evangelischer Preserverband für Bayern, 1995), pp. 1145–1159, no. 679.

(“descended to hell”) to “hinabgestiegen in das Reich des Todes” (“went down to the realm of death”).⁵ A footnote gives a gloss: “Gemeint ist ein Ort (endgültiger) Gottesferne” (“What is meant is a place of [final, definitive] distance from God”). The same ambiguous note glosses also the unaltered creed. The gloss itself is a problem. Hell certainly should not be described as a place where the infinite, omnipresent God is absent or distant. What makes hell bad is not God’s absence but his vindictive presence (Matt 10:28; cf. Ps 139:8). The alternative creeds raise questions. Why would the SELK want to allow its congregations to avoid confessing FC XI and Christ’s descent into the real hell? Are so-called ecumenical versions of texts shared with the mainline LWF churches a good enough reason to make the church’s confession of the descent into hell ambiguous? Why would this be set forth for the SELK to use, when for a previous generation of the SELK the “alternative” creeds were not approved for use, and when previously their errors had been demonstrated?⁶

Lectionary: The lectionary in the new hymnal is mostly the same as in the old hymnal. The only lectionary offered is a one-year lectionary, in which the Gospel readings are usually the same as in *LSB*’s one-year series. The new book sometimes changes the historic Epistles. For example, on Trinity 14, the historic Epistle is Galatians 5:16–24 (sturdy paraenesis). The old hymnal had this as the first option, with Romans 8:12–17 as the second option. The new book gives Romans 8:14–17 as the only option, leaving out verses 12–13 (which the old hymnal included), which effectually removes the apostolic threat of death to those who live according to the flesh.⁷ Another notable change in the church year is at Trinity 10 (Proper 56), where the new book moves Luke 19:41–48 (Jesus’ prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem) and makes it the alternative (Proper 57) to the new Trinity 10 Gospel reading: Mark 12:28–34, naming the Sunday “Israelsonntag: Kirche und Israel” (“Israel Sunday: Church and Israel”).⁸ In my opinion, even the title “Church and Israel” of Proper 56 is problematic, since after the gathering of the Christian church, the church *is* the new Israel (Rom 9:6; Gal 6:15–16). Of course, the theme of the relation between Christians and Jews is very difficult, especially in Germany. It also seems problematic to me that congregations could now avoid the historic propers of Trinity 10, with Christ’s weeping over Jerusalem. This was probably not the intent of the

⁵ See below, n. 6; *ELKG*², pp. 32–35.

⁶ Gotthilf Döhler, “Altes oder ‘neues’ Apostolikum? Sieghafte Höllenfahrt Christi oder schrecklicher Abstieg in das Reich des Todes?,” *Lutherischer Rundblick* 21, no. 4 (1973): 210–232; Gotthilf Doehler, “The Descent into Hell,” trans. Walter C. Daib, *The Springfelder* 39, no. 1 (1975): 2–19.

⁷ Compare *ELKG*¹, pp. 180–181, Proper 059; and *ELKG*², p. 292, Proper 61.

⁸ Compare *ELKG*¹, pp. 170–171, Proper 055; and *ELKG*², pp. 271–277, Propers 56–57.

hymnal commission, but the danger is present that congregations could avoid these difficult, but important, biblical texts of the historic propers (Proper 57).⁹

A new day of repentance with full propers is provided for January 27: “Tag des Gedenkens an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus” (“Day of Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism”) (pp. 367–368, no. 79).

Hymns: There are 700 hymns (compared to 561 in the old hymnal), including 19 by Luther (compared to 35), 4 by Melancthon (compared to 6), 39 by Paul Gerhardt (compared to 40), 14 by Nikolaus Herman (compared to 12), 12 by Johann Heermann (compared to 16), 6 by Johann Walter (same as in the old hymnal), 10 by Michael Weisse (same as in the old hymnal), and 13 by Jochen Klepper (d. 1942) (compared to 11). Hymns from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries are abundant. Hymns from before the Reformation and from the nineteenth century are far less frequent. The liturgical music section provides an impressive fullness of ancient and modern musical settings of parts of the liturgy (nos. 100–194).

Psalms: The singing of the psalms is currently being cultivated in both American Lutheranism¹⁰ and the SELK. Besides Gregorian settings of psalms, the new *ELKG*² presents several different kinds of psalms: antiphonal, responsorial, Anglican, and other styles. Currently, LCMS congregations do not make much use of responsorial psalms, but the examples in the new *ELKG*² show how beautiful and beneficial they can be. The choir or cantor sings the verses, and the congregation sings a short refrain after each verse. Thereby, the people will have learned a short Bible passage or prayer by heart, and not too much musical skill is required of them. A good example in *ELKG*² is Psalm 31 (no. 810), with the response “Meine Zeit in deinen Händen” (“My time in your hands”).

Liturgy of the Hours: Matins and Vespers in *ELKG*² add prayers and responses not found in previous SELK hymnals (nos. 900, 905, 909, 910, 920, 925, 929, and 930). The new Matins has no option to use the Te Deum. The choice of texts seems to make the offices more generic and less doctrinal. Instead of the old Vespers responsory praising God’s word from Psalm 119:105 (*ELKG*¹, p. 275), there is a more general praise of God’s work from Psalm 92:5 (*ELKG*², p. 1464, no. 924). In the old *ELKG*¹ (p. 279), the responsive prayer versicles (a long-standing feature of the Liturgy of the Hours in German Lutheranism) were quotations from Scripture that confess sin and pray for the church and for missions. The new responsive prayer

⁹ Of course, LSB’s three-years series also omits Luke 19:41–48, and thus allows congregations to avoid this difficult but important Gospel reading.

¹⁰ E.g., Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship Psalter* (Waukesha, WI: Northwestern, 2021); Benjamin T. G. Mayes, *The Brotherhood Prayer Book*, 2nd ed. (Kansas City, KS: Emmanuel Press, 2007).

versicles are nonbiblical quotations and are very general, focusing not on sin and salvation but on worldly trouble and relief, peace, and justice (pp. 1468–1469, nos. 929–930). The collects for the days of the week (another long-standing German Lutheran feature) have been changed slightly. The Monday collect removes the mention of “sin” (compare p. 1470 new vs. p. 280 old). The new book also removes the collect that confesses sin at the end of Vespers (old p. 282 vs. new p. 1471).

Compline is now gender neutral. The old version began, “Brüder, betet um Gottes Segen!” (“Brethren, pray for God’s blessing!”) (*ELKG*¹, p. 283). This is now omitted (p. 1472, no. 933). Likewise “Brüder” (“Brethren”) in the reading from 1 Peter 5:8 is omitted (old p. 283; new p. 1472, no. 933). The old hymnal provided only for a man to be leading the service. “Wir bekennen Gott, dem Allmächtigen, und dir, Bruder. . . .” (“We confess to God Almighty, and to you, brother. . . .”) (*ELKG*¹, p. 284). The new book allows a woman to lead the service: “und dir Bruder (Schwester)” (“and to you, brother [sister]”) (p. 1473, no. 934). Compline is also doctrinally weaker in other respects. The second option for confession in the new book’s Compline leaves out the mention of sin and confesses only insufficient love, omitting also the triple confession of guilt; and the following prayer asks not to be brought to eternal life but only “zum Leben” (“to life”) (p. 1473, no. 935). This is the exact same service as found in the hymnal of the mainline LWF territorial churches, *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, with only a few stylistic differences.¹¹

*ELKG*² also has “alternative daily prayer services,” similar in concept to Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in *LSB*. The prayers emphasize praise, peace, troubles, and relief. Taizé music and forms of prayer have been incorporated into *ELKG*². “Prayer According to Taizé” consists of songs, responsorial psalms, Bible reading, and ektenia-style responsorial prayers. The themes include praise, peace, troubles, and relief. This order of service is mostly the same as in the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*.¹²

The role of women: The new hymnal is designed to be used by female worship leaders. As previously mentioned, the Compline confession gives the option of being led by a woman. Also, the explanations for how to use the hymnal include this instruction: “The terms used in the hymns and forms of worship and devotion for the

¹¹ Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern, *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Bayern und Thüringen*, 1256; *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Ausgabe für die Evangelisch Landeskirche in Württemberg* (Stuttgart: Gesangbuchverlag Stuttgart, 1996), no. 782.2; *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Ausgabe für die Evangelisch Landeskirche Anhalts, die Evangelische Kirche in Berlin-Brandenburg, die Evangelische Kirche der schlesischen Oberlausitz, die Pommersche Evangelische Kirche, die Evangelische Kirche der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen* (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), no. 786.2.

¹² Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern, *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Bayern und Thüringen*, no. 725; *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Württemberg*, no. 787; *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Anhalt, Berlin-Brandenburg*, no. 789.

individual roles (blue font color) are valid for persons of both sexes, insofar as church law permits this.”¹³ Thus, for the new book, whether or not women lead worship is a matter of adiaphora, not doctrine. The egalitarian view of men and women is also found in the wedding vows, which are identical for both husband and wife (p. 1535), rather than following the differentiated complementarity of Ephesians 5, as *LSB* does.¹⁴

Other questionable parts: The new book signals many hymns and texts as “ecumenical” by using the marker *ö*, which stands for “ökumenisch,” and is defined as an “ecumenical version in the German speaking territory; agreement in text and melody (as of 2021)” (p. 15). With the repeated use of the *ö*, “ecumenicity” is constantly reinforced as desirable. One problem with this is that melodies or texts unique to confessional Lutherans seem thereby to be given an inferior status. This ecumenical signaling is yet another feature that was taken over from the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch*. It is found throughout the *EG* for Bavaria, for example.

A significant problem with striving to adapt SELK liturgies and hymns to “ecumenical” texts is that the modern liturgies, adopted from ecumenical sources, studiously avoid the topics of sin, forgiveness, evil, angels, and devils, even though the SELK hymnal commission examined these hymns and determined that they did not contain unscriptural or unconfessional content. Perhaps it could be said that the ecumenical hymns are deficient, even if not false. Likewise, the psalm selections of the new hymnal avoid the imprecatory verses. This raises the question: if one intentionally avoids certain themes and verses of Scripture, does this not dilute the theology and in fact distort Scripture’s meaning by hiding its essential features from the people? If the purpose of liturgy is to teach the people faith and fear of God on the basis of the Scriptures (see Ap XXIV [XII] 3), but parts of Scripture are intentionally avoided, how will the people be taught what they need to know?¹⁵

Summary: The new *ELKG*² has many good parts, but it also includes some seriously concerning theology. Its good parts include rich worship music and liturgical settings, psalmody, and a vast selection of hymns old and new. Its theologically concerning parts can be summarized as (1) ecumenical priority, from which comes the alternative versions of the creeds and theologically weak orders of service borrowed

¹³ “Die in den Liedern und Gottesdienst- und Andachtsformen verwendeten Begriffe für die jeweiligen Dienste (blaue Schriftfarbe) gelten für Personen beiderlei Geschlechts, sofern kirchliches Recht dies ermöglicht.” *ELKG*², p. 14.

¹⁴ *LSB* 276. A SELK pastor has assured me that the full order of marriage from the SELK’s *Agende* includes the full citation of Ephesians 5:21–33, even if this is not reflected in the wording of the vows.

¹⁵ *LSB* is not free of fault on this point. Psalm 95 in Matins and Morning Prayer omits the last half, which is central to the message of the book of Hebrews. Psalm 141 in Evening Prayer omits the imprecations, making a hard, difficult psalm nice and pleasant.

from the mainline LWF territorial churches; and (2) egalitarian feminism. How long can a church use liturgies that reinforce egalitarian feminism before it has definitively rejected what Scripture says about the order of creation and the complementarity of men and women? Already the voices clamoring for women pastors are not disciplined in the SELK.¹⁶ Now such voices can appeal to their new hymnal too. It will be difficult for conservative SELK pastors to teach against what the hymnal says explicitly, such as if they want to teach that women should not lead public worship or that the creeds used by the mainline LWF territorial churches are theologically problematic and should never be used.

Beautiful and edifying stand beside problematic in this new hymnal. It is a beautiful book, but it would be better to keep the old one in print.

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***On Any Given Sunday: The Story of Christ in the Divine Service.* By Michael Berg. Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2022. 144 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95; paperback, \$22.95.**

I have a theory that when Lutherans here in the United States all used the official worship books of their respective church bodies—say, in the 1940s through the mid 60s—very few gave much conscious thought as to why they worshiped the way they did. There were the occasional publications that attempted to supply the answers, such as Luther Reed’s magisterial *The Lutheran Liturgy*,¹ Paul Lang’s *Ceremony and Celebration*,² Arthur Carl Piepkorn’s *The Conduct of the Service*,³ and even various attempts at catechizing the laity through pamphlets such as *Our Way of Worship*⁴ and Berthold von Schenk’s *The Little Service Book*.⁵ But for the most part, everyone

¹⁶ E.g., SELK news on November 18, 2022, advertised a new issue of the pro-women’s ordination YouTube series *inFOyer*. “inFOyer mit neuer Ausgabe,” *selk_news*, November 18, 2022, <https://www.selk.de/index.php/newsletter/9037-infoyer-mit-neuer-ausgabe-18-11-2022/>.

¹ Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Liturgy of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947; rev. ed., 1960).

² Paul H. D. Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965).

³ A[rthur] C[arl] P[iepkorn], *The Conduct of the Service*, rev. ed. ([St. Louis]: C[oncordia] S[eminary] P[rint] S[hop], 1965).

⁴ R[ichard] Jungkuntz and R[alph] Gehrke, *Our Way of Worship* ([St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House], n.d.).

⁵ Berthold von Schenk, *The Little Service Book* (New York: Lutheran School of Our Saviour, n.d.).

used the church's worship books, some fully, many not. And that was that. Who needed to examine closely or think deeply about the services that the church had bequeathed to succeeding generations, let alone the reasons why this way of worship had been cherished by Lutherans ever since the Reformation? Until, that is, the social upheaval of the 60s, a renewal in liturgical studies that informed new worship books published in the 70s and 80s, and the rise of the evangelical megachurch and something altogether different. Since then, a better understanding of and appreciation for the church's historic patterns of worship have been all the rage, evidenced not only by numerous official publications but also a raft of homegrown efforts by pastors and musicians who have put pen to paper to provide a fitting apologetic. While tempted to offer a few examples, I will pass, since book reviews come with word limits.

A recent entry into this burgeoning field of study, however, is a small volume, *On Any Given Sunday*, written by Michael Berg, a pastor and professor in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). His modest yet profound goal is nicely encapsulated in his subtitle: *The Story of Christ in the Divine Service*. A single sentence in his conclusion nicely summarizes his point: "From the Nativity of Christ to his ascension into the heavenly realms we hear the story of Christ each Sunday" (111). In the second half of the book, Berg walks the reader through the Divine Service, making his case by demonstrating how the various parts of the service take the gathered assembly through the life of Christ. But he does not stop there. In addition to the life of Christ, the author traces other themes, such as how each iteration of the Divine Service walks the worshiper through the church year as well as through the life of the Christian. Berg's approach, while multifaceted, is eminently approachable and a delight to read.

A few highlights include an insightful discussion of ritual and the very nature of man as one who worships (72–77); a helpful treatment of the Kyrie that demonstrates how it is more than simply a repetition of the plea for mercy in the confession of sins (70); a brief but helpful encouragement toward individual confession and absolution (89); comments regarding vestments in the context of the Salutation (93); a very fine description of the purpose of the sermon, especially within its liturgical context (97); a very picturesque description of the crucifixion (106); and a helpful discussion concerning the importance of eating in the Scriptures (107).

I have mentioned thus far only the second half of the book. What precedes Berg's methodical review of the service is what one might call a modern-day parable. The main characters, John and Jennifer, are a young married couple beset by various marital and professional challenges. After laying their burdens at our feet, the author takes us with them to an Ascension Day service where they silently reflect on all that they hear and see during the service. All of the texts of the service are included for

the reader's own edification. By the end of the service, as you might guess, this couple departs the church in the confidence that God has not abandoned them but, on the contrary, continues to serve them with his grace and mercy.

Explaining the church's historic rites through story has a definite appeal. Rather than a mere cognitive presentation of information, the reader is invited to contemplate how the Divine Service tells the story of Christ. If there is any criticism of this approach, it is that it is somewhat unrealistic to think that two individuals could reflect so deeply on every part of the service. (At various moments while reading I could not help but wish that I had had such well-catechized members in my congregation!) More realistic would have been a slightly different approach in which we would have been given access into the musings of other members in attendance at that Ascension service. That, however, would have necessitated a much longer book in order to provide background information on the additional characters. Please understand, though, that this is a minor criticism. The author's use of story to convey the power of the church's rites is a new and welcome contribution to the ongoing conversation.

As might be expected, there are various points with which one might quibble. Most baffling to this reviewer is the lack of any list of abbreviations. Standard references in the footnotes to the Lutheran Confessions will be unhelpful to the non-Lutheran reader. The same goes for several references to *Lutheran Service Book* and *Luther's Works*, American Edition, for which only the acronyms are provided.

Such criticisms aside, *On Any Given Sunday* is a wonderful contribution to the ongoing catechesis regarding the deep truths that are confessed every Sunday as the faithful gather to receive life from their Lord through word and sacrament. This is the type of book that belongs in every church library. Though a very different genre, Thomas Winger's *Lutheranism 101: Worship* falls into the same category.⁶ Both are resources that intend to equip the laity with a deeper appreciation of the liturgical heritage of the church that was taken for granted far too long.

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⁶ Thomas M. Winger, *Lutheranism 101: Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

***The New Testament Commentary Guide: A Brief Handbook for Students and Pastors.* By Nijay K. Gupta. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 120 pages. Paperback. \$18.99.**

New Testament professor and commentary writer Nijay K. Gupta has prepared this guide for beginning students and pastors baffled by the flood of commentaries that appear every year. Why not simply find a commentary on some New Testament book, purchase it, and begin reading? Because, due to the “inexhaustible supply of resources” (dust jacket), the hapless student, and pastor, may quickly be overwhelmed—and realize (too late!) that the commentary chosen does not match one’s level of expertise or even the subject matter. The guide is packed with much specialized information that helps beginners (and more advanced students) find commentaries that will be of benefit to them in reading, research, and sermon production.

In the first ten pages of the first chapter (“Introduction”) Gupta poses questions, and provides advice, for the following. Why read new commentaries? (Answer: Because there are always new things about ancient texts to discover and learn.) Pastors write good commentaries, right? (Answer: Not necessarily, because they are too busy) Should I buy a whole commentary set or single-author series? (Answer: It depends on the quality of the author.) What about study Bibles? (Answer: They can detract from the text itself if one relies too heavily upon the notes). The chapter concludes with an overview of twenty major commentary series, everything from the Anchor Yale Bible Commentary Series to the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (10–36), with many in between. Unfortunately, the featured commentary series do *not* include the Concordia Commentary Series (CCS)! Each entry provides the series editor(s), series description, level (technical, semi-technical, non-technical), theological orientation (e.g., traditional/conservative, Evangelical, liberal), methods used (e.g., historical-critical or literary), and pricing, and notes. Before concluding the chapter Gupta provides brief mention of other resources (most are online) and Logos Bible Software (36–38).

The heart of the book is chapter 2 (“Commentary Recommendations”), wherein Gupta provides his personal recommendation and notes on commentaries for each book of the New Testament. Along the way, he breaks the featured commentaries down into four categories: (1) Technical (requires training in Greek, geared toward scholars, not pastors), (2) Semi-technical (academic discussions of texts but geared toward students and pastors), (3) Non-technical (geared toward laypersons who have had no seminary education), and (4) Hidden Gems (commentaries that Gupta has discovered over the years outside of the major commentary series). Turning to his treatment of Philippians (76–80), I am gratified to see that I am currently reading—in my own Philippians research—nine of the sixteen

commentaries Gupta recommends. Some of the favorite commentaries I use are too old for consideration (e.g., Lightfoot, Vincent, Lenski), but why did he not list Hansen, which is one of my favorite resources?¹ Gupta admits that his selections have had to be necessarily selective: “I have read many New Testament commentaries over the years—many dozens. I have a good sense of what is available. But like anyone else, I have my personal preferences” (40). (To have access to many more commentaries than Gupta can provide, go to www.bestcommentaries.com. This website *does* consider the CCS volumes, I notice.) Near the end of the chapter occurs a subsection titled “Commentaries by Women and People of Color” (105–110), addressing a need for “more diverse voices” in biblical interpretation.

Finally, there appear three appendices: (1) “A Quick List of Recommended Commentaries” (111–113), (2) “German and French Commentary Series” (114–116), and (3) “Nijay K. Gupta’s Commentaries and Reference Works” (117–119). The volume concludes with endnotes (121–124).

Gupta’s guide offers a valuable service to students and pastors who want to invest in commentaries that will serve them for many years. Unfortunately, the guide is dominated by Gupta’s own preferences, which, as he himself admits, can be very subjective—and so fail to consider really good commentaries. Also, this work will quickly become obsolete as more commentaries appear. Nevertheless, this would be a great resource to have as one, for example, leaves seminary to begin full-time parish ministry elsewhere. And more experienced pastors (and professors!) can learn a thing or two as well. So, get the book, I say, and use it.

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¹ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

Books Received

- Black, Jonathan. *40 Questions about Pentecostalism*. 40 Questions Series. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024. 336 pages. Paperback. \$23.99.
- Curtis, Heath R. *Telling People What to Think: A Concise Homiletics for Lutheran Parish Pastors*. N.p.: Reredos & Ambo, 2024. 250 pages. Paperback. \$15.80.
- Epps, B. Jason, and Paul Pettit. *One Body, One Spirit: Disability and Community in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2024. 224 pages. Paperback. \$19.99.
- Gushiken, Kevin M. *A Theology of Play: Learning to Enjoy Life As God Intended*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024. 176 pages. Paperback. \$24.99.
- Horton, Michael. *The Divine Self*. Vol. 1, *Shaman and Sage: The Roots of "Spiritual but Not Religious" in Antiquity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 528 pages. Hardcover. \$64.99.
- Young, Frances M. *Doctrine and Scripture in Early Christianity*. Vol. 2, *Scripture in Doctrinal Dispute*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 384 pages. Hardcover. \$49.99.



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- Davis, Kendall A. “Caesar Jesus? The Kingship of Jesus
and Political Authorities in Luke and Acts” 4:347–365
- Gieschen, Charles A. “Which Happened from the Foundation of the
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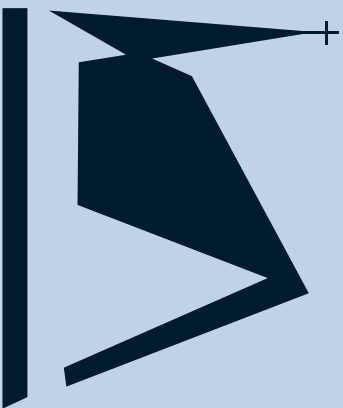
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