The Word-of-God Conflict in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the 20th Century

Donn Wilson
Luther Seminary

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/mth_theses

Part of the Christian Denominations and Sects Commons, and the History of Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/mth_theses/10

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Theology Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact tracy.iwaskow@gmail.com, mteske@luthersem.edu.
THE WORD-OF-GOD CONFLICT IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH
MISSOURI SYNODE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

by

DONN WILSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Luther Seminary
In Partial Fulfillment, of
The Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF THEOLOGY

THESIS ADVISER: DR. MARY JANE HAEMIG

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2018
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Mary Jane Haemig has been very helpful in providing input on the writing of my thesis and posing critical questions. Several years ago, she guided my independent study of “Lutheran Orthodoxy 1580-1675,” which was my first introduction to this material. The two trips to Wittenberg over the January terms (2014 and 2016) and course on “Luther as Pastor” were very good introductions to Luther on-site. Just prior to the Wittenberg trip in 2014, I studied “The Theology of Martin Luther” with Dr. Steven Paulson, which was further good background for Luther’s understanding of the Word. Dr. Mark Granquist guided my study of “The History of Lutherans in North America,” “The History of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod,” and studies in biblical historical criticism in the context of the modern church – all courses which were very relevant for this thesis. My course work at Luther Seminary has been very helpful.

Dr. Edward Schroeder, a professor at Concordia Seminary St. Louis during the time of this conflict, provided his interpretation of events, directed me to material in the Crossings internet site, and clarified some points about the formal and material principles. Dr. Patrick Keifert and Dr. Gary Simpson from Luther Seminary provided information that enlightened me about their experience as students during this conflict. Dr. Matthew Becker sent me a one-page description of Confessionalism in the 1830s in Germany and its influence on C.F.W. Walther.
Dr. Samuel Nafzger, former Executive Director of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, shared his perspective about this conflict during an interview-discussion. Dr. Robert Hausman, professor at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois, explained his experiences as a moderate there from 1968-74. Missouri Synod pastors Dr. Thomas Trapp, Rev. Deane Schuessler, and Rev. Robert Cordes shared background from their student days at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis in the 1950s and 60s.

I appreciate the contributions of all the above individuals in helping me to understand this period in church history. In addition, Joel Thoreson, Archivist for Management and Reference Services at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Archives, provided oral histories from the Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism. Finally, I received assistance from the Library staff at Luther Seminary. Peter Susag contributed writing and technical talents related to footnotes, bibliography, and general design. Peter Watters was helpful in answering questions about books, articles, and research papers.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................................. ii

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ........................................................................................................ vii

1. INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 1

2. LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY AND THE ENLIGHTENED MIND .............................................. 8

   Lutheran Orthodoxy ............................................................................................................... 9
   Important Theological Terms Derived from Lutheran Orthodoxy ....................... 12
   Verbal Plenary Inspiration ................................................................................................. 12
   Inerrancy ............................................................................................................................. 13
   Scriptural Authority ........................................................................................................... 14
   The Enlightened Mind ....................................................................................................... 15

3. C.F.W. WALTHER AND THE RETURN TO LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY .................... 20

   Two Expressions of Lutheran Theology: Orthodox and Erlangen ...................... 21
   Justification by Grace through Faith ............................................................................... 26

4. FRANZ PIEPER, CHIEF DOGMATICIAN .......................................................................... 32

   17th Century Lutheran Orthodoxy in 20th Century America ......................... 33
   Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism .................................................................................. 37

5. MODERATE MISSOURI 1932-1969, PART I ................................................................. 40

   A Statement-44 in 1945 .................................................................................................. 44
   The Bad Boll Conference, 1948 .................................................................................... 47
   Werner Elert and the Erlangen Inroad ............................................................................ 50
   The Serious Clout of the “Little Norwegian Synod” .................................................. 52

6. MODERATE MISSOURI 1932-1969, PART 2 .................................................................... 58
The “Golden Era” of the Moderate Movement in Missouri, 1958-1969 ........63

Martin Scharlemann, Missouri’s Uncommon Person ..................65

*The Inerrancy of Scripture* ........................................68

*The Bible as Record, Witness and Medium* .........................69

*Revelation and Inspiration* .......................................70

Concordia Theological Monthly .....................................72

Assessing Franz Pieper .............................................76

Valparaiso University and the Promising Tradition .................78

The Conservative Counter ..........................................81

Gospel Reductionism ..................................................81

Convention Resolutions .............................................82

A Crisis ........................................................................84

7. **TIETJEN, PREUS, AND THE NEW ORLEANS CONVENTION** ..........87

The Context for the Decisive Events of 1973-74 .......................87

John Tietjen, an Easterner .............................................91

Jack Preus ....................................................................95

A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles ...........100

The New Orleans Convention, July 6-13, 1973 .....................102

To Repudiate the Historical Critical Method .........................103

To Condemn Elements of the Teaching of the Faculty Majority ...105

The Subversion of the Authority of Scripture, the Formal Principle ..105

Gospel Reductionism: Reducing the Authority of Scripture to its Gospel Content .........................................................106

Denial of the Third Use of the Law ....................................107

8. **CONCLUSION** ..........................................................109

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................115
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AELC</td>
<td>Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALC</td>
<td>American Lutheran Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSSL</td>
<td>Concordia Seminary, St. Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTCR</td>
<td>Commission on Theology and Church Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTM</td>
<td>Concordia Theological Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELS</td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Synod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCMS</td>
<td>Lutheran Church Missouri Synod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Missouri Synod</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Tables

Table 1. Important 20th Century LCMS Theological Statements ................................. 43

Table 2. Sample: Where CSSL Professors Received Their Advanced Degrees .............. 60

Table 3. Two Decades of Moderate CSSL Seminary Presidencies, 1953-74 ............... 64

Table 4. MS Doctrinal Resolutions Related to the Bible, 1959-73 ............................ 83

Table 5. Timeline of Key Events Surrounding the New Orleans Convention .......... 88

Table 6. Changes in CSSL Student Enrollment, 1973-75 ........................................ 111

Figures

Figure 1. Time Cover December 30, 1974 .................................................................. 3

Figure 2. Early LCMS Leaders: Walther, Pieper, & Graebner ................................. 31

Figure 3. From the ELS: the Preus Brothers and Paul Zimmerman ....................... 57

Figure 4. LCMS Presidents Behnken & Harms. CSSL President Fuerbringer .......... 62

Figure 5. W. Elert, O.P. Kretzmann. J. von Hoffman ............................................. 78

Figure 6. CSSL Professors Scharlemann & Piepkorn and President Tietjen ............ 86
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The decades following World War II were times of intense conflict in America. Desegregation of schools began under President Dwight Eisenhower (1890-1969). He ordered U.S Army troops to Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 to restore order when black teenagers were refused admittance into an all-white high school. Civil rights marchers demanded integration and the civil rights movement gained full recognition under Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). The Vietnam War was waged with tens of thousands of American deaths and an ongoing antidraft movement, which was at times present on college campuses. In Ohio in 1970, National Guardsmen shot and killed four protesting Kent State college students. In Congress, doves battled hawks over whether the war should continue or the way it should be fought. The hippie movement promoted unconventional life styles and some older Americans agreed with the adage: “Never trust anyone under thirty.” The Cold War tension between the Soviet Union and the United States was the backdrop for anxious Americans who came to understand mutually-assured destruction in a nuclear age. Even school children were taught how to respond to an attack. As they reported on this turbulence, journalists and photojournalists must have

---

1 In a span of just five years, assassins took the lives of King, President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963), and Senator Robert F. Kennedy (1925-1968).
thought themselves brilliant for their career choice as America seemed to thrive on discord.

The national media would also cover an explosive and devastating church conflict in 20th century America, one that had been simmering for at least a quarter of a century. On February 19, 1974 hundreds of students could be observed walking off the campus of Concordia Seminary, St Louis, Missouri (CSSL), the primary clergy training school of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). Students pounded white crosses into the lawn as they moved. They were joined by faculty members who had been fired by the Board of Control. This event and many more were in response to the accusation that professors taught false doctrine at Concordia Seminary. A 1973 synodical convention in New Orleans, Louisiana declared that the Seminary Board of Control should address the future of the president of the Seminary, John Tietjen (1928-2004), because he had not dealt with alleged false doctrine related to the authority of the Scriptures and the third use of the Law.

It was a painful upheaval for many thousands of Lutheran Christians who were now in a state of uncertainty over where they would teach and learn without this seminary and where they would receive calls for ministry if they departed from the institutional process. They soon formed what would later be called Christ Seminary-Seminex in downtown St. Louis. Eventually over 100,000 LCMS members would leave to begin a new Lutheran denominational body, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). It was a loss as well for the LCMS as an institution as it struggled to fill professorships at the Seminary and pastoral vacancies in congregations, and at the same time deal with the repercussions of this crisis.
Time magazine gave the events prominent coverage in its last issue of 1974. A picture of three magi filled the front cover that read, “How True Is the Bible?” Recent archeological discoveries had confirmed the credibility of the Bible, the article stated, but this support wasn’t necessary for conservatives and Fundamentalists who accepted a Bible that is literally true, regardless of scientific research. The lead article, “The Bible: The Believers Gain,” stated that Missouri Synod (MS) Lutherans and other conservative

2 The title of article is an oblique reference to a sermon by Increase Mather (1639-1723), “The Believers Gain by Death.”
churches deemed the Bible literally true. The magazine explained that a notable conflict had occurred between conservatives and moderates in the 3-million-member Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, one of the nation’s largest denominations. In the article, lay members of the LCMS were quoted as saying, “If you start questioning it [the Bible], where do you stop?” and God “would not give us a book with errors.” In contrast, liberals had come to realize there is human and historic evidence that should be taken into account when reading the Scriptures. Believers, they said, should live with some doubt. The article continued with a history of early Biblical critics, the Enlightenment, and the teaching of scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and Raymond Brown (1928-1998).

How might the “walk-out” and the many contentious events surrounding it be interpreted? Former CSSL professor Frederick Danker (1920-2012), terminated after the walk-out along with many of his colleagues, identified one of Missouri’s major faults as seeking to establish itself as the most correct and orthodox church body in all of Christianity. He explained how the MS insistence on “purity of doctrine” suppressed

---

3 The terms conservative and moderate are used in this study to broadly define the positions of the two groups in this conflict. That is generally how they referred to each other in speech and writing although privately “ultra-conservative” and “liberal” were certainly used. Conservatives valued highly an approach to the Bible inherited from Missouri Synod fathers, one that regarded the Scriptures as inerrant and divinely inspired. They also demonstrated caution about fellowship agreements with other Lutheran bodies. Moderates expressed an appreciation of contemporary approaches to Biblical studies and were more open about unification efforts with other Lutheran church bodies.


5 Ibid., 37.

6 Ibid., 39ff.
academic truth-seeking in *No Room in the Brotherhood*. Danker related how MS President Jack Preus (1920-1994) and *Christian News* editor Herman Otten, Jr. (1933- ) engineered a conservative purge of the LCMS employing tactics that present-day corporations might use to mastermind a turnaround. This study is unique to Danker, who was a professor at CSSL for more than two decades.

Another approach might consider the two primary opponents with sufficient influence to accomplish a peaceful resolution, if that was possible. John Tietjen, President of the Seminary, and Jack Preus, President of the LCMS, came to their respective offices in 1969. No book or study has yet addressed their relationship as a cause of this schism. CSSL professor Richard Caemmerer (1904-1984) noted that they were personal adversaries, and this, he thought, may have contributed to the turmoil. Tietjen once said of Preus “He’s a snake in the grass,” and Preus of Tietjen. “I’ll get that guy if it’s the last thing I ever do.” Tietjen wrote his personal story in *Memoirs in Exile* and Preus’ was covered by *Preus of Missouri and the Great Lutheran Civil War*.

---


8 This study will refer to LCMS President Jacob Aall Ottesen Preus II as “Jack Preus,” the name others often used to refer to him.


James Burkee (1968-) has elucidated the brazen politics of the conflict in *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod*.12 Conservatives began to ramp up a political machine at least eight years before the famous New Orleans Convention of 1973. Burkee explained the outrageous political behavior that made even some devoted conservatives ashamed.13 Like Danker, Burkee credited conservative *Christian News* editor Hermann Otten with amazing influence in the Synod. The author explained that Missouri conservatives belonged to a wide-spread counter to liberal culture that had emerged in America in the 1950s and 60s. But theology mattered more than his book demonstrated and reviewers of his work have identified this as Burkee’s important oversight.14

Theology had much to do with this clash and that is the focus of this study. Masked at times by political and cultural slogans were deep differences between conservatives and moderates about the extent to which criticism could be applied to the Biblical text. Moderates were criticized for diminishing the Gospel by not “norming” it with Scriptural content. Conservatives accused moderates of abandoning the Third Use of the Law. Moderates stressed the freedom of the Gospel, critical Biblical interpretation,

---


13 Ibid., 181. See comments related to Waldo Werning (1921-2013).

14 “Burkee also describes the traditional theology that challenged the seminary faculty. The book is very good for telling us how Preus and others began their long slog to take back Concordia-St. Louis for orthodoxy, but the book would have been stronger had it analyzed this theology further.” Martin E Conkling, “Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod by James C. Burkee,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2012): 327.

and the theology of Werner Elert (1885-1954). The conservative side worried whether the Synod’s strong attachment to strict Confessionalism and Lutheran Orthodoxy from the 17th century could withstand this onslaught. Moderates considered adherence to the Scriptures as a standard for teaching and subscription to the Lutheran Confessions sufficient to embrace critical and non-critical approaches to the Bible.

The study begins with Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 17th century and the challenge to Orthodoxy that arose from the Enlightenment (Chapter 2). It continues with the experience and guidance of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm (C.F.W.) Walther (1811-1887), the founding theologian of Missouri whose leadership contributed to the establishment of the church body in the mid-19th century (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 describes Franz Pieper (1852-1931), the successor to Walther who composed the three volume *Christliche Dogmatik*, which defined conservative theology and shaped the Biblical understanding of Missouri pastors and leaders for decades. After Pieper’s death, the Synod experienced a period from roughly 1932 to 1969 (Part 1, Chapter 5, and Part 2, Chapter 6) characterized by moderates’ efforts to unite with other Lutherans, an acceptance of contemporary Biblical criticism, and a major change in academics at CSSL. Chapter 7 examines the theological approaches Preus and Tietjen brought to the dispute and the issues in contention at the New Orleans Convention in 1973. Chapter 8 draws conclusions from this study.

---

CHAPTER 2
LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY AND THE ENLIGHTENED MIND

Significant elements of the conflict in the Missouri Synod began with the theological environment of the 16th through 18th centuries in Europe. What became known as classical Lutheran Orthodoxy dominated Post-Reformation Germany from roughly 1580-1675. Lutheran scholars in Germany taught and researched at primarily five universities: Wittenberg, Tübingen, Strasbourg, Leipzig, and Jena.¹ From these schools dozens of German Lutheran theologians produced works in Latin that captured the doctrinal content of the Scriptures. They developed lists of requirements for the study of theology. The time-honored method of prayer, solid familiarity with Scriptures, and personal cross of affliction were just a few of the necessary components needed to engage in this theological work.² Their ponderous writing style generated “loci” or common points of doctrine which gained considerable agreement among the Orthodox theological fraternity. In these patterns of expression, the dogmaticians, men who derived dogmatic truth from the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, were following Philip Melanchthon

² Ibid., 105-6.
(1497-1560) and Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) in composing summaries of doctrine to serve as a rule for Christians to examine what was taught.\footnote{Ibid., 90ff.}

The second important stream of thought was rationalism, which began with the Enlightenment and continued in Germany and other countries along with the development of Biblical historical criticism. New and more radical thinking from the Enlightenment would gain ascendancy in the 18th and 19th centuries and would draw the attention of Lutheran theologians away from Orthodox teaching and the Lutheran Confessions. Biblical historical criticism achieved a stronghold in Germany and interest in Confessionalism and Lutheran Orthodoxy diminished. The critical analysis of Biblical texts entered the life of the Church through theologians seeking to apply rational approaches to the Bible and to re-examine the assumptions inherited from their predecessors in Orthodox Lutheranism.

**Lutheran Orthodoxy**

One of the tasks of classical Lutheran Orthodoxy was to formulate doctrines about the relationship between God and the Scriptures. Three of the most exceptional theologians of this period, all prolific writers, would later gain prominence in the theological writings and teachings of the Missouri Synod. Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) was professor at the University of Jena and author of *Loci Theologici*, the 23-volume work for which this deeply pious scholar is known best. Abraham Calov (1612-1686), remarkable for his memory and prodigious knowledge, was professor at the University of
Wittenberg beginning in 1649 and author of many works, but particularly noted for his 
*Biblia Illustrata*, a commentary on the entire Bible. Lastly, Johannes Quenstedt (1617-
1688), professor at the University of Wittenberg, wrote *Theologia Didactico-Polimica sive Systema Theologica*, the result of 30 years of university lectures and written
according to the strictest standards of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

In 1613, Johann Gerhard delivered seven “scripturally-saturated” Christmas
sermons to celebrate the birth of Christ. In the second of these, based on Luke 2:8-12, he
preached the following:

Christ’s swaddling clothes are the Holy Scriptures, which are the paper swaddling
clothes in which He has wrapped Himself. For the entire Scripture promotes
Christ; He is the kernel of the Scripture. It is true [that] these little cloths [the
pages of Scripture] have an insignificant appearance; it appears as if Christ is not
in them. Human reason can also not find Christ in them; but when the divine
Light comes to it, by which the eyes of our understanding become enlightened,
one can in them joyfully find Christ—just as the shepherds already here found
this little Child at Bethlehem in insignificant swaddling clothes, as was previously
demonstrated to them by the angel who was engulfed by the brightness of the
Lord.  

Gerhard’s sermon is a vivid example of Orthodoxy’s genuine admiration for Scripture,
which it held in the highest esteem and with the greatest respect.

Gerhard’s description of swaddling clothes might evoke a reminder of a similar
statement by Martin Luther (1483-1546). There were certainly similarities and

---


5 “... Therefore, dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all
differences in the theology of Luther and the dogmaticians, but it is not the purpose of this study to evaluate this topic. What is most important to recognize is that 17th century Orthodox theologians fashioned and filtered Walther’s grasp of Luther. C.F.W. Walther received “the faith of Luther” as delivered by Lutheran Orthodoxy. His purpose was to return to Luther, whom he saw as God’s spokesperson, but generations after Luther shaped the sources he read.6

In the 19th century, prior to the Luther renewal that produced categories like “theology of the cross” and “two kinds of righteousness,” CSSL students studied Johannes W. Baier’s (1647-1695) Compendium Theologiae Positive (1685), a systematic theology textbook that summarized the teaching of the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Dogmatic theology using Bair’s Compendium dominated the curriculum five to seven periods per week.7 It was a Latin textbook accompanied by dictation from an instructor in the Latin of the dogmaticians. Having gone through over a dozen editions, it was easier to find this dogmatics than any other in stores which sold old textbooks.8

—

pride. Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:12]. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them.” Martin Luther et al., Preface to the Old Testament, Luther’s Works., American edition, vol. 35 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 236.


7 See John Philipp Koehler et al., The Wauwatosa Theology, vol. 3 (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1997), 265-66. Here is a description of one student’s experience at CSSL in the period of the late 1800s. Besides dogmatics, there was instruction in practical theology, but exegetical theology was Walther’s weakness and students graduated without having studied a single book of the Scriptures thoroughly.

8 For more on Bair’s Compendium, see Henry W Reimann, “C. F. W. Walther’s 1879 Edition of Baier’s Compendium,” Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly 34, no. 3 (October 1961): 86-94.
Important Theological Terms Derived from Lutheran Orthodoxy

The LCMS derived several important terms from the teaching of Orthodox fathers which entered into the theological discussions in the 20th century. Lutheran Orthodoxy and the MS regarded the Scriptures as the foundation and source of theology. Orthodoxy defined other properties of the Scriptures, but these three terms are frequently employed in this study: verbal plenary inspiration, inerrancy, and Scriptural authority.

**Verbal Plenary Inspiration**

Often shortened to “verbal inspiration,” the word *plenary* emphasized that God inspired the entire content of Scripture. There is nothing in Scripture that is not inspired including common place terms, facts, and thoughts which the Biblical writers knew prior to their experience of enlightenment. This understanding of inspiration was so comprehensive that if one verse was denied the status of inspired text, it meant the denial of inspiration for all of Scripture. Johann Quenstedt wrote that “... the Holy Spirit actually supplied, inspired and dictated the very words and each and every term individually.” Calov believed the Holy Spirit placed the words into the minds and dictated to the pens of the authors.

In the teaching of Orthodoxy, as Johann Gerhard wrote, “God is the great author of Scripture.” God Himself established the paradigm for Biblical writers when He

---


10 Ibid., 43.
inscribed the words of the Law on stone tablets (Exodus 24:12). The writers of Scripture were “moved, inspired, and driven by the Holy Spirit” to write at His impulse and inspiration. They were instruments of God to transfer heavenly doctrine to written form.\(^{11}\) So close was the communication link with God, that Biblical writers could accurately be described as amanuenses of God and notaries of the Holy Spirit.\(^{12}\) Nevertheless, the dogmaticians taught, the writers of Biblical material were neither co-authors nor cooperators with God’s Spirit. They were not in a state of trance. They were neither robotic nor mechanical but made choices from their own free will.\(^{13}\)

**Inerrancy**

The inerrancy of the Bible follows from its divine inspiration. The dogmaticians considered it to be unthinkable that the apostles and prophets could err in their writings. Although sinners like all people, the Biblical writers were kept from committing errors by the Holy Spirit. The apostles could not err, said Quenstedt, because on Pentecost they received the gift of the Holy Spirit who would lead them into all truth.\(^{14}\)

There is no obligation for believers to prove that Scripture is true because it has been divinely authored, and its truth should simply be accepted as stated by the text. If there were a mistake in Scripture, it would no longer be God’s Word, but partly His and

---


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{13}\) Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 69-70.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 76-78.
partly the words of humanity. If there is an error in one place, there could be an error in another. This would create uncertainty in a book written to lead people to salvation. What then becomes of the authority and certainty of the Bible? Quenstedt declared that anyone who attributes error to the prophets and the apostles blasphemes the Holy Spirit.15

**Scriptural Authority**

Orthodox dogmaticians derived the authority of Scripture from the doctrine of verbal inspiration. The Scriptures were authoritative because their origin was in God Himself and God alone. Whatever humans may think about the authority of the Bible is irrelevant. No scientific, historical, archeological, or rational investigation could ever nullify the authority of Scripture.16 Calov argued that if the authority of Scripture depended on human opinion even in the slightest way, then human judgement superseded the divine Word. The miracles of the virgin birth and the resurrection could be rejected by uncomprehending reason.17

The teachings of Lutheran Orthodoxy would pass into the MS through the “fathers” of the Synod—Walther, Pieper, and others.18 Orthodoxy would contribute great hymns and spiritual writings in addition to its rigid dogmatics. In response to Orthodoxy,

---


17 Ibid., 90-91.

18 Lutheran Orthodoxy would produce its last great teacher in Valentin Ernst Loescher (1673-1749), a professor in Wittenberg. Loescher spoke directly against Pietism and the Enlightenment and resisted following either movement. See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background & History* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1972), 139-40.
Pietism would teach there was much more to Lutheranism and faith than intellectual assent to the dogmatic discoveries of these university professors. Living faith required experience, they said. Pietists promoted the religion of the heart which they derived from Luther. Some of the leading figures of Biblical historical criticism would come from Pietist families.

**The Enlightened Mind**

Lutheran Orthodoxy established the Scriptures as the source of all truth, the instrument through which revelation was received from God. Whatever lay outside these words had to be harmonized with the contents of the Bible. Rationalism, on the other hand, arose as an intellectual movement that intended to free human thought from this rigid mindset which the Bible and doctrine had imposed on humanity. Its aim was to elevate human reason as the final authority in all matters relating to God and the world. Revelation from Scripture could be set aside as completely unnecessary.

Rationalism drew its strength from the ideas of the Enlightenment, which attempted to bring the revelation of God in Christ into a new world view. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) taught that people lived with a self-imposed immaturity from which they could be freed to think for themselves. Reason meant freedom; the constraint of

---

19 In America, the Pietist Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787) had tense relations with the Orthodox Lutheran ministers in the 18th century. It was in this context that Muhlenberg spoke his well-known saying that Orthodox ministers “tried to adhere to the unaltered Augsburg Confession with unaltered hearts.” See E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 64.

doctrine could be abandoned. Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) explained to his readers that the Biblical message and revelation were completely unnecessary for human development. Truth could be gained by reason alone and human reason could establish the moral teaching the Bible had supplied. God had for a time accommodated His message to the thought world of the Biblical writers, he believed. Biblical prophecy and miraculous events were merely accommodations to the culture of the ancient world.\textsuperscript{21}

Many Christian scholars would no longer refer all things to God. They would carry out their research without divine guidance for, after all, inherent goodness had replaced the corrupt human nature of Biblical thought. Instead of a world where theological questions had been answered and certainty was achieved, there was now a pursuit of truth even if it meant conflict with Church dogma. Instead of the Augustinian thought that “one is not able not to sin” and Luther’s “we daily sin much,” there was a total abandonment of teaching about sin and salvation. The ideas of the Enlightenment would gradually establish biblical criticism as an alternative approach to the prayerful Lutheran Orthodox study of Scripture.\textsuperscript{22}

Johann Semler (1725-1791) holds the title of “father of historical-critical theology.” He was born into the family of a pious Lutheran pastor and was for a time a


student of Pietist learning at the University of Halle. At Halle, he studied under the Enlightenment theologian and biblical scholar, S. J. Baumgarten (1706-1757). Semler rejected Lutheran Orthodoxy’s verbal inspiration and divine dictation arguments. He accepted the Biblical message of Christ’s redemption through His death and resurrection, but also recognized the accommodation principle of the Enlightenment. Semler developed two slogans that would become part of the discussion in 20th century LCMS. First, “the Bible contains the Word of God but is not the Word of God,” an adage contrary to conservative teaching. Secondly, “Treat the Bible like any other book,” an affront to conservative thought which considers the Bible unlike any other book.

Following the principles of Semler and also from a family of Pietists in Halle, Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791) abandoned Pietism after two years of Deistic education in England and, from then on, favored rationalism. He approached the New Testament without the assumption of any doctrinal bias and acknowledged there could be contradictory material in the text. He gave no regard to the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

---


24 Ibid., 911-12.

25 For example, in a systematics course in 1977 at Christ Seminary-Seminex, this student recalls Dr. Robert Bertram (1921-2003) noting that “we give the Scriptures at least as much authority as any other ancient text.”


Spirit in determining the divine origin of a text.\textsuperscript{28} Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827) was a student of Michaelis, a professor at Göettingen, and the son of a pastor. Eichhorn agreed with Michaelis that the Bible must be freely examined like any other literature without any pre-conceived dogma, traditions, or institutional authority.\textsuperscript{29} He explained that biblical writers did not share the same cultural world view as modern people and they must be classified as pre-rational thinkers.\textsuperscript{30} Eichhorn understood inspiration of Scripture vaguely as a process of providence allowing for the preservation of many Biblical texts.\textsuperscript{31}

There were, of course, many others who embraced and promoted historical criticism in this era. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) taught that the Bible was open to historical investigation because there is no doctrine of divine inspiration.\textsuperscript{32} Ferdinand Christian Bauer (1792-1860), David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), and others would continue development of criticism in the 19th century. The intellectual and theological environment was fashioned by these men.\textsuperscript{33} What was important about the

\textsuperscript{28} Werner Georg Kümmel, \textit{The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 73. Michaelis wrote: “I must confess that I have never experienced it [the witness of the Holy Spirit] in the whole course of my life; nor are those persons who have felt it, either deserving of envy, or nearer the truth, since the Muhammedan feels it, as well as the Christian.”


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 403.


\textsuperscript{33} Historian and professor Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875) described conditions among Lutherans in Bavaria in southern Germany prior to an awakening that began in 1814. Rationalism was
Scriptures was not the message of faith in Jesus Christ but natural religion, morality, and Jesus as a moral teacher. Miracles and the supernatural were dismissed. Williston Walker et al. summarized the period thus: “This was rationalism; it was characteristic of much of the strongest theological thinking in Germany by 1800 and was to continue powerful in the nineteenth century. Side by side with it confessional orthodoxy and Pietism continued, though with decreasing intellectual appeal, and much which may be called semirationalism.”

Into this setting C.F.W. Walther, the future MS president, was born and trained to lead a moral life by teachers who were almost all rationalists. Walther’s father, a Lutheran pastor, taught him that the Bible was God’s Word and both his parents provided Christian upbringing. He left home to attend school starting at age 8 and from then until his entry into the university his education occurred in the milieu of unbelievers. He never owned a Bible or a Catechism during his pre-university life but only a manual of heathen morals.

---


CHAPTER 3
C.F.W. WALTHER AND THE RETURN TO LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY

St. John’s Lutheran Church just outside of Dresden, Germany was an enclave of Pietism and Lutheran Confessionalism for twenty-eight years (1810-1838) under the pastoral leadership of Rev. Martin Stephan (1777-1846). His life had been defined by suffering as had been the lives of his pious ancestors who had embraced the spiritual inclinations of various Church reform movements: Waldensians, Hussites, Moravians, and Lutherans. With other refugees from Austria, the Stephans moved to Stramberg, Bohemia where they learned the Czech language while retaining their native German and their weaving trade. Martin and his sister were orphaned at a young age and chased by Jesuits who had discovered they were evangelical and sought to kill them. Stephan eventually settled in Silesia, at the time a Prussian province, and, after studies at the Universities of Halle and Leipzig, received the call to St. John’s Lutheran.¹

Stephan’s personal struggles brought him recognition in Dresden and beyond as a respected pastoral counselor who demonstrated listening skills and compassion.² Christians who were distressed by the spiritual aridity and rationalism of the times were


² Ibid., 26.
directed to Stephan for counsel. It was not surprising, then, for him to receive a letter from a young theology student at the University of Leipzig who was despondent over his experience in the “holy club” on campus. The student who was living in this gloomy brand of Pietism and experiencing the terrors of hell in a legalistic struggle was C.F.W. Walther, or “Ferdinand,” the name his family called him. Several pastors advised him to contact Pastor Stephan in Dresden by letter. Walther would record this about the return letter from Stephan: “When I read his reply I felt as though I had been translated from hell to heaven. Tears of distress and sorrow were transformed into tears of heavenly joy.” Stephan pointed him to faith and away from the repentance he sought through the law.³

**Two Expressions of Lutheran Theology: Orthodox and Erlangen**

Walther’s personal experience of sin and salvation was characteristic of many in the religious awakening, or *die Erweckungsbewegung*, throughout Germany in the first half of the 19th century.⁴ Included in the revival was a refreshed understanding of Luther’s works, the Confessions, hymns, and liturgical forms. This departure from

³ On Stephan, see also August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 25. Suelflow characterized him as follows: Stephan was well-known as a confessional pastor. “Stephan had preached the Gospel in an age of faithlessness and rationalism. His sermons and devotional exercises brought countless people to his church. Sometimes entire families walked many miles to attend his worship services.” For more on Stephan, see also page 20 of Lewis William Spitz, *The Life of Dr. C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1961).

⁴ Gottfried Thomasius explained the awakening in Bavaria in southern Germany from 1800-1840 as not due to any theologian or theological school. The event was all at once in many different places and had representatives in pulpits and lecture halls. See Hans Schwarz, “Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875),” 104. The complete history can be found in Gottfried Thomasius, *Das Wiedererwachen des evangelischen Lebens in der lutherischen Kirche Bayerns. Ein Stück süddeutscher Kirchengeschichte 1800-1840* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1867.)
rationalism produced two main expressions of Lutheran theology during this time of rediscovery: Orthodox theology, also known as repristination theology, and the Erlangen School of Theology.⁵ Both theologies disdained rationalism but there were precise differences between them.

Orthodox theology returned to a pre-Enlightenment view that the Scriptures are the authoritative Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions accurately and faithfully explained them. This repristination theology paid the highest respect to the doctrinal formulations of 17th-century Lutheran Orthodoxy and understood it as a bastion to defend Christian doctrine from the influence of rationalism.⁶ One major Orthodox leader was August Vilmar (1800-1866), a professor at Marburg University. Following a personal awakening, he abandoned rationalism, fought for conservatism, and defined the aims of Orthodox theology. Theology, he taught, offers nothing new because there is nothing more to discover and nothing more to “produce,” a static view of theology which earned Orthodoxy the label “unproductive.” Its aim was to preserve the great treasure the Church has received in the Holy Scriptures. For Vilmar, these were divinely-inspired Holy Scriptures.⁷ He understood the Word as a living, divine reality that speaks to

---

⁵ See Lowell C. Green, The Erlangen School of Theology: Its History, Teaching and Practice (Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2010), 28. The Erlangen School, ERLANGER-SCHULE, was not a university institution but a theological approach that spread from the University of Erlangen to other teachers and universities in Germany.


humans and considered the reading of Scriptures to be in serious neglect; he encouraged theology students to read them regularly.  

The Erlangen School, in contrast, denied the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. This School of Theology, also known as Neo-Lutheranism, was more progressive and innovative than Orthodox theology. Erlangen theologians built on the Reformation theology of Luther, not on 17th-century Orthodox theology. They interpreted Lutheran writings in the light of discoveries in science and historical criticism since the time of Luther. Unlike the repristinators, these men were “productive.” The School provided a mediating path between the repristinating “Old Lutherans” and the more radical Tübingen School of Ferdinand Bauer and David Strauss. They were defenders of the Confessions but not in the manner of the Orthodox theologians’ strict interpretation. Erlangen professors regarded the Lutheran Confessions as scripturally-sound and worthy

---

8 A. F. C. Vilmar and Roy A. Harrisville, *The Theology of Facts Versus the Theology of Rhetoric: Confession and Defense* (Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2008), 51-57. See all of chapter 3, “Literature and Exegesis of Holy Scripture” for a more complete understanding of Vilmar and the Word. Vilmar criticized “university theology” that steers theologians away from their true calling of discipleship, 8-9. See also page 51 where Vilmar wrote: “Where there is not a heart for God’s Word the science of literature is a welcome vehicle for deviating from it and for dwelling exclusively on human words, ideas, and skills.” See the whole “Introduction,” pages 8-23, for a good survey of Vilmar by Walter Sundberg.

9 The term “Neo-Lutheran” was applied to the Erlangen School in the 19th century and marked it in contrast to repristination theology. See John T. Pless, “Repristination Theology,” 638.

10 This difference should not be misinterpreted. How important the Confessions were to Erlangen is evident by the decision to terminate the School in 1969 when the faculty determined no teachers were committed to the Lutheran Book of Concord. Note, too, that the Erlangen theologians were pious Christians with a sincere dedication to the Church and to missions. See Green, *The Erlangen School of Theology*, 33-34.
of defending. These were records of the Church as it fought against error in the
Reformation. The Confessions, they believed, should be a force for dynamism, change,
and progression but not merely an “external law or bond.”

Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810-1877) was the most important and
most brilliant of 19th century professors to come from the Erlangen School. Hofmann
believed it was not the words of the Bible but the content, the stories of the Scriptures,
that were inspired by God. The Scriptures were a history of God’s saving deeds, a
collection of records of how He had intervened in history, Heilsgeschichte as it came to
be known. Along with many others, Hofmann had experienced personal regeneration in
the awakening and he believed it was not a doctrine of inspiration but the believer’s faith
and experience that confirmed the Bible as God’s Word. Vilmar’s repristination had the
attraction of simplicity but it didn’t address developments in natural science and
historical criticism that followed the Reformation. In short, Hofmann sought new ways
to teach old truths.

Press, 1946), 203-4. Erlangen professor Gottfried Thomasius (1802-71) wrote that the Confessions were
never “a mere external law or bond for us,” 204.

12 See Green, The Erlangen School of Theology, 119: “Hofmann was by no means a critical
liberal; in fact, he rejected much of the use of higher criticism in interpreting the Sacred Scriptures.”

13 See Green, 111. It was Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), the founder of modern source-based
history and Hofmann’s teacher, who had influenced him initially in this development of salvation history.

14 Ibid., 114.

15 The Vilmar-Walther relationship would be interesting to explore but is outside the scope of this
study.

16 Green, The Erlangen School of Theology, 119-20.
C.F.W. Walther aligned with Orthodox theology, not with Hofmann and the Erlangen theologians. The Erlangen School was just barely beginning in Bavaria in the 1830s, while Walther lived in Saxony to the east, studying at Leipzig, learning to know Stephan, and working to become a licensed pastor in Saxony. Had Walther any inclination to rethink this alignment he certainly could have done so in 1851 when he engaged the Erlanger theologians in debate-discussion on a trip to Germany.\footnote{Green, \textit{The Erlangen School of Theology}, 44-45. Green indicates that the Erlangen School began sometime in the 1830s. Adolf von Harless (1806-79) and Johann Hoefling (1802-53) were both teaching at Erlangen by 1833 and Johann von Hofmann (1810-77) joined Harless and Hoefling in 1838. These three men were the founders of the School and had to fight their way through their own rationalist doubts to recover the faith of the Lutheran fathers.} This exchange, though, did not result in significant agreement. The Missouri Synod-Erlangen relationship would be a cordial one in the decades of the 19th century but there would never be full affirmation of each other’s divergent views.

In the theological struggles surrounding him in Europe, Walther had come to confidently accept the Confessions as literally binding and later, in America in the LCMS, would require “unconditional subscription” to them. In 1830, Lutheran Confessionalism was finally beginning to gain strength in Saxony, led by three Lutheran clergy: Martin Stephan, Andreas Rudelbach (1792-1862), and Johann Scheibel (1783-1843). They organized pastoral conferences, a mission society, and even influenced senior members of Saxon government. Rationalism had been firmly entrenched in Saxony and rationalist professors of theology staffed the Universities of Leipzig and Halle. Stephan remarked that Pietism was too weak doctrinally to oppose the unbelief of...
the Saxons. Rudelbach and Scheibel agreed and all three men preached conservative Confessionalism. Walther’s own experience with Pietism was adverse and his strict adherence to the Confessions was a means for him to criticize and to further distance himself from Pietism.

**Justification by Grace through Faith**

After completing his degree at the University of Leipzig, Walther was licensed for ministry in Saxony in 1836. In the following year, he experienced opposition to his Confessional views in his first congregation in Brauensdorf. For this and other reasons, he soon joined Stephan’s Emigration Society and sailed to America with Stephan, soon to be Bishop Stephan, several other pastors and pastoral candidates, and hundreds of mostly Saxon emigrants who sought a new Zion on the Mississippi in the state of Missouri. Their hopes of escaping rationalism, avoiding enforced unionization with Reformed churches, and having freedom of worship and absence of persecution were nearly all devoured in the failed leadership of Bishop Stephan several months after reaching Perry County Missouri in 1839. Stephan was defrocked for his moral failures and for misleading the Society and sent eastward across the Mississippi where he would eventually find a pastorate in another Lutheran congregation in Illinois.

---


20 Matthew L. Becker, email message to student, August 12, 2016.

C.F.W. Walther would gradually emerge as the leader of this company of Saxon believers, though always, with a feeling of personal inadequacy for the role. His preaching, letter-writing, and administrative skills were essential to the formation of the German Evangelical-Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States in 1847. He attracted attention in America through *Der Lutheraner*, an educational publication he began in 1844 to disseminate the writings of Luther, the Confessions, and theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy, and to apprise all Lutherans about the truth he had personally discovered. *Der Lutheraner* was a vehicle for the thousands of Lutherans who had no other access to German theological writings. In 1872 Walther also provided leadership as first president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, comprised of six synods: Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Joint Ohio, Norwegian, and Wisconsin.²² Despite its volatile history and doctrinal disagreements, the Synodical Conference benefited the LCMS by supplying theologians for CSSL in future decades.²³

In his late teens, Walther had forgone his dream of becoming a musician to attend the University of Leipzig at the encouragement of his father, a Lutheran pastor. At Leipzig, he joined the *collegium philobiblicum* with other beginning theology students. The Pietist August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) had founded this study group over a century earlier. The Franckean branch of German Pietism cultivated the inner religious

---

²² The Iowa Synod declined to join the Synodical Conference because its relationship with the MS was not harmonious. See Mark Alan Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2015), 189-190.

²³ Some of those from the Synodical Conference who later taught at CSSL are: Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006), who came from the Slovak Synod which joined the Synodical Conference in the 20th century; Theodore Graebner (1876-1950), Franz Pieper (1852-1931), and Martin Franzmann (1907-1976) came from the Wisconsin Synod.
life and challenged participants to have a true conversion experience. New members of the group had to undergo real penitence, an intense and agonizing struggle to arrive at conversion because it was assumed that these young theology students were not yet truly converted. Walther engaged in this effort with such serious dedication to renounce the flesh that after two years he suffered a physical collapse. He had fasted and set aside recreation to attain true faith. Exhausted, he returned home where he discovered Luther’s writings on his father’s bookshelves. He recovered after six months and returned to the University though his life would be marked by periodic major illness. It was then he received the famous letter from Stephan absolving him of sin through Christ.24

Walther’s attachment to Pietism would gradually fade. He replaced it with Luther’s teaching on justification by grace through faith, the doctrine, which he would later publish in Der Lutheraner, Luther named as decisive for whether the Church stands or falls. This was the message that Walther would champion in America. He had read Luther during his time of illness in 1831-32 and began to understand how grace comes to sinners. He began to grasp the distinction between Law and Gospel. The Rationalists and the Pietists25 both veered from this truth. To the Rationalists, Christ was a law-giver and Christians could become pious by keeping the law. The Pietists might say that...


25 In a letter Walther wrote in January 1846, he explained the errors of Pietism and personally distanced himself from their teaching. They appear to teach that faith alone justifies but they do not teach it purely. Pietists have not learned the distinction between Law and Gospel which drives one away from his own works to trust in Christ alone. They employ methods, he said, to bring about contrition and remorse and require conditions that portray Christ as harsh and hard and not as a merciful Savior. See C.F.W. Walther and Carl Stamm Meyer, Letters of C.F.W. Walther; a Selection (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 71-72.
salvation was through Christ alone but to this they added experiences to achieve real conversion. It was true that Walther was not “productive” in any theological sense as the Erlangen School was but, with some reluctance, he accepted the label of “repristination theologian” because justification by faith was the truth from the past he had learned and believed. His life-long attachment to this doctrine would produce his most famous piece in his last years, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*.\(^\text{26}\)

In the 39 lectures that formed the content of *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, Walther reached the pinnacle of his theological thought and demonstrated that he had over the course of his life rediscovered the abandoned doctrine that had been central for Martin Luther.\(^\text{27}\) In doing this, he was among the first Lutheran thinkers in his time—\(^\text{28}\) and possibly, the very first—to bring Law and Gospel teaching and preaching to the attention of the Church, a homiletical approach which Lutherans in the 17\(^{\text{th}}\) and 18\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries had forsaken.\(^\text{29}\)

Walther of course gave Luther credit in his Law-Gospel lectures, but Johann Gerhard received considerable attention, too—nearly five pages in his 5\(^{\text{th}}\) evening lecture

\(^{\text{26}}\) For a discussion of Walther’s emphasis on justification by faith, see Erwin L. Lueker, “Justification in the Theology of Walther,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32, no. 10 (October 1961): 598-99.

\(^{\text{27}}\) See Kolb, “C F W Walther, Interpreter of Luther on the American Frontier,” 482. Robert Kolb considered the summation of Walther’s ministry to be his lectures on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.


on October 17th, 1884. From his thorough study of Luther, Gerhard explained that the Law has no place in the doctrine of justification; no one can be saved by it. Justification, Gerhard continued, is from the Gospel where righteousness is revealed without the Law. Walther added that without the doctrine of justification, the Bible would descend to the ranks of any other book of morals.  

Naturally, Walther could not control all developments in the Synod as it grew in membership and as he approached the end of life. In the late 1870s, though, he would address two problems in Missouri. He had long wanted Karl Georg Stoeckhardt (1842-1913) to come to America and serve in the Missouri Synod. Stoeckhardt was a fellow Saxon, shared Walther’s theology of justification by faith, and had suffered imprisonment in Germany for his faith. Stoeckhardt accepted a call to CSSL to teach Biblical exegesis. He would bring the needed Biblical teaching to the Seminary, write exegetical studies on Psalms, Isaiah, Romans, Ephesians, and I Peter and other books, and be among the greatest fathers of the MS in its second generation.

A replacement would also be needed for C.F.W. Walther. He would be 70 years of age in 1881 and had suffered frequent poor health during his life. He wanted to

---


31 Erwin L. Lueker, Second Generation Theologians: Pieper, Stoeckhardt, Graebner (St. Louis, MO: Lueker, 1972), 71-72, 77-78. See page 66 for a short description of Stoeckhardt’s meeting with August Vilmar at the University of Marburg in 1867. He was very impressed with Vilmar as a theologian.

32 Stoeckhardt was clearly Walther’s first choice to replace him as president of CSSL. An unpublished letter by Walther indicated that he wanted the more mature and experienced Stoeckhardt for this position but Stoeckhardt was still in Germany at the time with no expectation of coming to America. Instead, Franz Pieper received the call. See Carl S. Meyer, Log Cabin to Luther Tower: Concordia
prepare a successor to lead the systematics department at the seminary and compose a
dogmatics text that he never found the time to begin. He would find someone in a young
graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis who had been born in Germany.

**Figure 2. Early LCMS Leaders: Walther, Pieper, & Graebner**

*C.F.W. Walther  Franz Pieper  Theodore Graebner*

_Seminary During One Hundred and Twenty-Five Years Toward a More Excellent Ministry 1839-1964_ (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 69.
A telegram arrived for the young pastor of a Wisconsin Synod congregation in Manitowoc, Wisconsin in 1878. It was full of encouragement for him to accept a call to CSSL to be professor of systematic theology “who during the life-time of Prof. Dr. Walther should work himself into this office.” There would be challenges but God would provide grace for him and he would receive support under the special tutorship of Dr. Walther himself. The call came from the plenary Delegate Synod and almost all the fathers and heads of Synod were happy about this invitation. The pastor politely declined the invitation, but it came a second time and now the pastor received approval from his congregation and the President of the Wisconsin Synod to accept.¹

The pastor was Francis (Franz) Pieper² (1852-1931), a native German from Pomerania who had emigrated to America at the age of 18 in 1870 with his widowed mother and three siblings.³ He graduated from Northwestern College in Watertown,

¹ Lueker, Second Generation Theologians, 26-27.

² The name Franz will be used rather than Francis in this study. Chief dogmatician was an informal title Pieper earned simply because of his outstanding gifts. See William J. Danker, “Who Wrote the Pivotal Quotation in Francis Pieper’s Christian Dogmatics,” Currents in Theology and Mission 4, no. 4 (August 1977): 235. He held formal titles of Professor of Systematics, President of the MS for a time, and President of Concordia Seminary.

³ In 1870, Pieper, his mother, and three younger brothers emigrated to America where they united with two older brothers who had migrated earlier. Franz’ brother Reinhold would become first a professor
Wisconsin in 1872 and delivered the valedictorian address in Latin. Walther knew Pieper as a student at Concordia Seminary where Pieper graduated in 1875. Now at age 26, having no advanced degree and with a wife and small child he moved to Immanuel Church in St. Louis where he would remain for his entire career while teaching at the Seminary. Pieper would shape the theology of every Missouri Synod pastor from his first year of teaching at the seminary until his death in 1931. His *Christliche Dogmatik* would continue to be used in training pastors even in the last quarter of the 20th century in its English translation, *Christian Dogmatics*.

17th Century Lutheran Orthodoxy in 20th Century America

Like his mentor Walther, Franz Pieper was not a producer of new theological ideas. He was classified the same way Walther was, as a repristination theologian. Like August Vilmar, he believed in an unchanging theology. His *Christliche Dogmatik* (1917-1924) was comprised of material he used previously in convention essays, classroom

of homiletics and later president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois. His younger brother August became a professor of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

4 Lueker, *Second Generation Theologians*, 25. His speech was titled “Quid iis quae sunt propria germanorum in hac terra sit retenendum quid dimitendum?” and translated is “Which characteristics of the German people should be retained in this country and which should be discarded?”

5 Ibid., 27.


7 Franz Pieper and E. Eckhardt, *Christliche Dogmatik*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1917). This work was completed as follows: 1917 volume 2; 1920 volume 3; 1924 volume 1.

Lectures, articles in *Lehre und Wehre*, and other periodicals. The three volumes include quotations, both in the text and footnotes, from Johann Gerhard, Johannes Quenstedt, Abraham Calov, other Orthodox theologians, and, of course, Luther and Walther. Pieper quoted all these Lutheran “fathers” extensively, sometimes using footnotes of a quarter to a third of a page.\(^\text{10}\)

Pieper achieved an extraordinary competence in handling the theology of the 17th century Lutheran Orthodox dogmaticians which he had learned in his seminary education, through his tutelage by Walther, and certainly in his personal reading as a professor. He wrote mostly in his native German although he was proficient in English as well. His classical education in Latin was an asset in his understanding of the precise writing of the 17th century dogmaticians. He taught in an era when it was expected that he could walk into his systematics classes, speak in Latin and students would comprehend. He could easily quote many New Testament passages in the original Greek and, to a lesser extent, he did the same with the Hebrew Old Testament.\(^\text{11}\) He never acquired an earned doctorate but in 1903 he received two honorary Doctor of Theology degrees, one from Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin and another from Luther...

---


10 Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950). See, for example, the lengthy footnote of Johann Gerhard in volume 1, 351-353.

11 L. Fuerbringer, *80 Eventful Years; Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer* (St: Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), 93-94. Pieper’s colleague, Dr. Stoeckhardt, required his students to translate the original Greek and Hebrew into Latin. See pages 97-98 of L. Fuerbringer’s Reminiscences.
College, Decorah, Iowa. He strove to continue Walther’s plan for a true Confessional Lutheran Church in America. He would ensure it was founded on the Lutheran Confessions and the doctrine of the fathers of Lutheran Orthodoxy and would steer the Missouri Synod away from the theology the Erlangen School promoted.

Throughout his whole life, Pieper would wage polemical warfare against many types of “modern theology.” He accomplished this through his writings and lectures and through the pulpit. He was a practical theologian who regularly preached to parishioners. Theology was more than an academic discipline; it was meant to serve people. He believed the Church Militant should be engaged in fighting false doctrine. He abhorred “modern theology,” which placed itself above Scripture, refusing to accept it as the Word of God. The Ego of modern theologians, said Pieper, arrogantly dominated their understanding of the Bible and left no room for the Holy Spirit.

The names of many Erlangen theologians are scattered throughout his three volumes of *Christian Dogmatics*, but he reserved special attention for Erlangen’s Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann, whom Pieper called the father of Ichtheologie, Ego Theology or Subjective Theology. Ego Theology was “pious faith-consciousness” which Pieper asserted had very little to do with the Scriptures and guaranteed there would be no

---


unity of faith in the Church.\textsuperscript{15} Hofmann, Pieper stated, encouraged theologians to train their theological Ego to be completely independent of what the Church has taught in the past and what the teaching of the Scriptures is.\textsuperscript{16} Pieper also unleashed his criticism against Reinhold Seeberg (1859-1935), an historian of dogma from the Erlangen School, for praising Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whom Seeberg called “the Reformer of the theology of our century.”\textsuperscript{17} Though he was not of the Erlangen School, Schleiermacher was called out by Pieper for not leading people back into the Scriptures but into “the morass of emotional rationalism.”\textsuperscript{18} The pages of \textit{Christian Dogmatics} are replete with criticisms of many other Erlangen professors: Franz von Frank (1827-1879) for being a rationalist,\textsuperscript{19} Karl Kahnis (1814-1888) for denying the inspiration of the Scriptures,\textsuperscript{20} Christoph Luthardt (1823-1902) for deriving doctrine from the Ego,\textsuperscript{21} and many others.

Pieper also mentioned Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), who was not from the Erlangen School, and strongly objected to his use of historical criticism to decide what is essential or non-essential in the Christian religion. Pieper refuted the idea that the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 1:6.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 1:60-61.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 1:113.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 1:267.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 1:201.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 1:304.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 1:103-4.
Scriptures are a human word for if this were true they would be subject to human criticism. With respect to historical criticism in general, Pieper and the MS in the late 1800s were on common ground with other Lutheran bodies in their opposition to it.22

Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism

In the early 20th century, the Fundamentalist movement was committed to divine inspiration of the Bible and strengthened the resolve among Northern Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ and other denominations to counter the trend toward liberalism and the attack on Biblical authority. Pieper and Missouri could sympathize with Fundamentalists in this conflict because of the Synod’s affirmation of Scriptural inerrancy but they did so without accepting the label “Fundamentalist” themselves.23 Fundamentalists recognized the distinction24 and referred to Missouri leaders as


24 See Paul Tillich’s comment, which includes all Protestant Orthodoxy, in Paul Tillich and Carl E. Braaten, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row,
“Orthodox” and appreciated their support for an inerrant Bible. Pieper could find commonality in Biblical inspiration and inerrancy but there were many beliefs in Fundamentalism that Pieper would never countenance. Millennialism was one. The Fundamentalist movement also showed little interest in the historical development of Christianity and held positions that were dismissive of churches that favored traditional Christianity and traditional views of the Sacraments. Of course, Pieper would not accept the Five Points of Fundamentalism as a test to determine where a person stood with respect to classical Christianity.

Pieper followed Luther, the dogmaticians, and Walther in encouraging Oratio, Meditatio, and Tentatio as means for attaining theological aptitude. He would not, however, select a single individual to carry forward the theology of the Missouri Synod as C.F.W. Walther had done. At the time of Pieper’s death, the MS had over 1.1 million members.

10. According to Tillich, it is unfortunate that Orthodoxy and fundamentalism are mingled. Orthodoxy “did not have anything like the pietistic or revivalistic background of American fundamentalism.” Orthodoxy has little relationship with fundamentalism but has a strong relationship to Scholasticism. Orthodoxy understood very well the history of the church, according to Tillich.


27 Jordahl, “Theology of Franz Pieper,” 119-20. For an understanding that Pieper held to the “dogma of change as heresy,” see page 127 of Jordahl’s article which defines Pieper as a “fundamentalist’ with a small “f” due to his mindset of intransigence.

28 The Five Points were (1) The inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) substitutionary atonement of Christ, (4) the physical resurrection of Christ, and (5) the bodily return of Christ to earth.

members served by clergy who had been trained in his dogmatics. Pieper would also define his legacy in the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*\(^\text{30}\) which during the next era of MS history would at times receive quasi-Confessional status and be a reference point in the discussions concerning church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church organized in 1930.

CHAPTER 5
MODERATE MISSOURI 1932-1969, PART I

Edward J. Friedrich (1889-1982), a professor of homiletics at CSSL from 1930-1940, recounted an incident in 1907 when, as a young man contemplating ministry in the LCMS, his father invited him to attend a meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. The topic of the meeting focused on the doctrines of conversion and predestination. The chairman, a theologian of a non-Missouri synod, offered to open the discussions with prayer. Professor Frederick Bente (1858-1930) of CSSL, stood up and objected to joint prayer because attendees were not in fellowship, were not in agreement on certain points of doctrine, and therefore should not pray together. The embarrassed chairman then apologized and suggested the attendees stand and pray silently. Dr. Bente rose again and objected because they would still be praying together. Friedrich reported that those very important discussions thus began without any joint prayer.\(^1\) Friedrich, who later identified himself as a moderate in Missouri, was saddened by this event and many like it.\(^2\)


\(^2\) Friedrich did not imply that there was a MS policy about practicing prayer with non-Missourians. Where a person lived, who the leadership was, and other circumstances were determiners of this practice.
Expressions of moderate theology did surface in the MS in its early history. Alfred O. Fuerbringer (1903-1997), President of CSSL from 1953 to 1969, recalled the open-mindedness of his own father, Ludwig Ernst Fuerbringer (1864-1947), professor at the same seminary beginning in 1893. Ludwig Fuerbringer accepted the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch but believed that Moses harmonized existing documents and pre-existing documents and that the Pentateuch included work of contemporary writers alongside Moses. Material from later generations of writers was also integrated into the Pentateuch. In another example, Edward Friedrich recalled Professor W. H. T Dau (1864-1944) of the St. Louis Seminary as a “forward-looking” man who received criticism for writing articles for non-Missouri publications. Dau wrote daily devotions for the Christian Herald and was a contributing editor for The Lutheran Survey, a publication of non-Missouri Lutheran groups on the east coast. In 1915 another professor at the seminary, Dr. Theodore Graebner (1876-1950) soundly criticized Dau for these “unionistic” behaviors.

---

3 Matthew Becker (1962-), professor at Valparaiso University, has noted that he learned about Heilsgeschichte at Concordia College in Portland, Oregon from Rev. E. W. Hinrichs (1901-1991) who learned it at CSSL from teachers who had acquired it from Karl Stoeckhardt, a student of Johann von Hofmann in Germany. See Matthew L. Becker, The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes Von Hofmann (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), xxiii.


The years 1887-1932 (the death of C. F. W. Walther through just after the death of Franz Pieper) had emerged as “The Period of Conservation”6 as explained by LCMS church historian Carl S. Meyer (1907-72). The CSSL faculty, which held the memory of Walther in honor and regarded his life as a blessing, made a conscious effort to preserve what had been received. Professors Karl Stoeckhardt and Friedrich Bente resolved to preach conservatism in the MS. There was a pervasive conviction among all instructors that conserving was their primary task. Conserving applied to Confessionalism but also to the group values of positions taken toward dancing, theater, lodge membership, labor unions, and others.7 Conservation applied as well to public doctrine: teachers and preachers felt compelled to use the very phrases, words, and expressions inherited and accepted by the Synod. “Inerrancy” and “verbal plenary inspiration” were benchmarks for Missouri Orthodoxy. There was attention to the writings of Synod fathers and identification with their faith.8

Missouri historian Meyer also identified 1932 as the beginning of a moderate era in the LCMS. Franz Pieper died in 1931. A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod was adopted in convention in 1932. English outdistanced German as the language frequently in use in the Synod. John Behnken (1884-1968), who became president of the MS in 1935, was the first president of the LCMS born on American soil. Dialogues concerning fellowship that began in the 1920s with the Iowa and Ohio synods,

7 Ibid., 90-91.
8 Ibid., 92-93.
which, along with the Texas and Buffalo synods, became the American Lutheran Church of 1930, would continue. There was a greater interest in union with other Lutherans, which culminated in the “St. Louis resolutions,” a statement approved in the 1938 convention of the MS. The St. Louis Resolutions announced that the American Lutheran Church, formed in 1930, had reached points of agreement with Missouri and asked for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to complete the work of church fellowship between the two bodies.9

The St. Louis Resolutions were a modest move toward the center by the MS but certainly not a sharp turn to the theological left. This was demonstrated in the 1930s as the LCMS and the more liberal United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) came together for discussions about fellowship. After two meetings—one in 1936 and one in 1938—the efforts toward fellowship ended with the MS affirming verbal inspiration and Biblical inerrancy and claiming the ULCA denied the Bible was God’s Word. The Missouri commissioners said, “We cannot call you brothers.” ULCA representatives were of course offended by this and the talks never again resumed.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TABLE 1. IMPORTANT 20TH CENTURY LCMS THEOLOGICAL STATEMENTS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short name and date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Statement-Pieper 1932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

9 Ibid., 246.

of controversy in fellowship discussions with the Ohio and Iowa Synods and the Norwegian Lutheran Church.\textsuperscript{11}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A Statement-44</strong></th>
<th><strong>A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles</strong>, which President of the Synod Jack Preus, mailed to members of the Synod indicating that these were guidelines to assist the CSSL Board of Control in identifying areas of doctrine that needed attention.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td><em>Speaking the Truth in Love</em>, is a statement of theses and essays published in 1945 by moderates that identifies alleged legalism and man-made traditions in the LCMS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{A Statement-44 in 1945}

As Missouri worked to carry out the St. Louis resolutions of altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC), a serious disruption happened in September 1945. Following the MS convention in Saginaw, Michigan in 1944, a group of 44 mostly MS pastors and professors gathered in Chicago, composed 12 theses and essays under the heading of *Speaking the Truth in Love*, and with signatures undersigned mailed copies to the approximately 3,500 pastors of the Synod.\textsuperscript{12} As “the 44” saw it, there was resistance and backpedaling in the work of merger with the ALC. The “44” had perceived a reluctance to move away from long-standing traditions.\textsuperscript{13} The document

\textsuperscript{11} Meyer, “Historical Background of ‘a Brief Statement,’” 538.

\textsuperscript{12} “Statistical Year-Book of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States for the Year 1945,” 144.

\textsuperscript{13} See Richard E Koenig, “What’s Behind the Showdown in the LCMS?: Church and Tradition in Collision,” *Lutheran Forum* 6, no. 4 (November 1972): 18. Koenig was a moderate who explained the event in terms of a reluctance to move away from “a Pieperian theology of authoritarianism and legalism.”
identified a “loveless attitude which is manifesting itself within the Synod.”

Over three hundred Missouri Synod leaders would eventually sign the document including future Lutheran Hour speaker, Oswald Hoffmann (1913-2005) and future CSSL professor Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006).

“Citation theology” is another name for classical Lutheran Orthodoxy. A Statement-44 (see Table 1) strongly objected to one of Christliche Dogmatik’s most important citations, Romans 16:17,18, which says in part, “I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine you have been taught; avoid them (RSV).” Under Franz Pieper’s guidance, the Synod was grounded in the understanding that this was a warning to be cautious about fellowship with, not only other Christians, but other Lutherans as well.

In Thesis Five of A Statement-44, the “44” declared: “We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17,18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America.” There was nothing in A Statement-44 that promoted Biblical historical criticism or denied the inerrancy of Scripture yet, said Edward Friedrich, one of the signers, “it really shook up the whole Synod.” Conferences and district conventions discussed it. Candidates for an office or pastorate prompted the question, “Was he a signer?” There were instances of

---


15 See, for example, Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 1950, 1:55 and 89.
men not receiving a call because they had sided with “the 44,” said Friedrich. However, by 1950 peace was restored.16

The whole event modestly prefigured what would unfold over 25 years later in the upheaval of 1974. The uproar went on for months and years. Five Concordia Seminary, St. Louis professors signed A Statement-44 and the Northern Illinois District immediately demanded that all of them resign their positions, which they did not do. The five included William Arndt (1880-1957), noteworthy translator of A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature; Richard R. Caemmerer (1904-1984), homiletics professor at CSSL and promoter of the preaching formula “goal, malady, means”; and Theodore Graebner, Professor of Philosophy and New Testament Interpretation at CSSL, author of many books and articles, and since 1914, editor of The Lutheran Witness.

Right after this controversy began to subside, Graebner privately circulated a mimeographed article in 1948, which was later published posthumously. This was the new, less conservative Graebner drawing near to the end of his life. He delivered harsh remarks about the MS approach to ecclesiastical questions. When problems arise does this body investigate what Scripture says? No, he said, Missouri looks back to see what Luther, Walther, Pieper, and the first twenty volumes of Lehre und Wehre said. Missouri operates on the assumption that all previous pronouncements have been infallible and those who deviate from these are apostate. He wrote, “There is an urgent need of

someone who has the time (I don’t) of psychoanalyzing the Missouri Synod.”\textsuperscript{17} Graebner concluded there is only one remedy for this problem, and that is Biblical scholarship.\textsuperscript{18}

**The Bad Boll Conference, 1948**

C.F.W. Walther had led a MS delegation to Germany in 1851. He reported meeting Erlangen School of Theology professors Johann von Hofmann, Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875), Heinrich Schmid (1811-1885), and Johann Hoefling (1802-1853), who all warmly welcomed him. He engaged in difficult disputes with them and, while there was some small movement toward closer agreement, Walther could not conclude they were entirely unified.\textsuperscript{19} Pieper reported that this close relationship with German Lutherans gradually subsided and no longer existed in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, he thought, because the German theologians considered the Missouri repristination theology irrelevant in the light of modern theological research.\textsuperscript{20}

After World War II, Missouri Synod Lutheran theologians and their colleagues in Germany arranged a conference in Bad Boll, Germany in the summer of 1948. The Augsburg Confession was the basis of the sessions, which were structured in a series of three seminars of 9 days each, attended by approximately one hundred theologians in

\textsuperscript{17} Theodore Graebner, “The Burden of Infallibility: A Study in the History of Dogma,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (July 1965): 88-89.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 94.


each seminar. Theologians Helmut Thielicke (1908-86), Günther Bornkamm (1905-90), and Werner Elert (1885-1954) delivered essays for the German side. Concordia Seminary St. Louis theologians Paul Bretscher (1893-1974), Theodore Graebner, and Frederick E. Mayer (1892-1954) shared essays on the Synod’s history in America and their unique doctrinal beliefs. To this, the Germans—liberal, conservative, and Free Church—raised several questions.

German theologians challenged the LCMS verbal inspiration doctrine. Does Missouri accept the Scriptures as God’s Word because “it is written” demands inspiration theory as the starting point of dogmatics or does the Synod accept the Bible as God’s Word in the manner of Luther’s principle of “Was Christum treibet?” Won’t verbal inspiration lead to an intellectual, legalistic apprehension of the Scriptures? To this MS theologians responded that verbal inspiration evokes the mystery of inspiration not the manner of its delivery. Nor, they said, is it the foundation of systematic theology. They seek clarity in the Bible to determine what God wants to say. And what of the human side of Scriptures, asked the Germans? Isn’t there a danger that verbal inspiration will lead to Docetism and forgo the human aspects and the findings of science and history? To this MS theologians stated only that the incarnation of Christ reveals the inerrancy of the Bible; in His humiliation, His knowledge was limited but He was without error.

Frederick Emmanuel (“F.E.”) Mayer, professor of systematics at CSSL, returned from Bad Boll 1948 significantly affected by the theological exchange. Mayer shared his


22 Ibid., 26-27.
struggles with his students in the classroom in the late 1940’s and early 1950s. He experienced real Anfectungen as he struggled with what he had received from his “fathers”—Pieper, other faculty of the second generation, and his own colleagues—and what he had heard from German theologians in Bad Boll. Mayer was confronting two traditions in Missouri, wrote Edward H. Schroeder (1933 - ), one of Mayer’s students. Pieper gave weight to the formal principle which addresses the Bible as the inspired Word of God, the basis for pure doctrine, sola Scriptura, Scripture alone. The other tradition, drawing attention from Missouri moderates, was the distinction between Law and Gospel, the material principle, employed by Lutheran reformers to bring issues back to the Gospel. In the 1950s Mayer began to write extensively about the formal and material principles in the Concordia Theological Monthly. Schroeder credited Mayer with accomplishing what Pieper could not do for Missouri: explain how to grant double primacy to both the Scriptures and justification by faith, the formal and material principles.

---


24 There was another tradition in the MS that ignored the formal and material principles entirely because of their origins in philosophy. This tradition said that philosophy has no place in Biblical study. This comment was communicated by Edward Schroeder in an email to this student.

25 Ibid., 246-47.


Werner Elert and the Erlangen Inroad

Franz Pieper had thoroughly addressed what he understood as the errors of the Erlangen School of Theology. Hofmann, Frank, Kahnis, Luthardt and others were all singled out for departures from Orthodox Lutheran teaching. Pieper completed his three-volume dogmatics in 1924, a year after Werner Elert (1885-1954) had begun to teach history and systematics at Erlangen University, a position he would keep until his death in 1954. Pieper made no reference to Werner Elert in his Christliche Dogmatik because the first of his writings, which would make Elert purportedly the most important confessional Lutheran theologian of his era, was not published until the year of Pieper’s death in 1931.

A member of the Lutheran Free Church, Elert taught during the heyday, the second Blütezeit, of the Erlangen School of Theology, along with Paul Althaus, Jr. (1888-1966) and Otto Procksch (1874-1947). It was his thousand-page Morphologie Des Luthertums, published in 1931, that would gain attention in Missouri during its moderate period. CSSL Professor Theodore E.W. Engelder (1865-1949) delivered a surprisingly strong positive review of Morphologie in the Concordia Theological Monthly just months after it was published in Europe. Engelder was a member of the CSSL faculty during Pieper’s presidency, a defender of verbal inspiration, author of a


book in defense of verbal inspiration, and chief translator of Pieper’s dogmatics into English. Nevertheless, he praised Elert’s *Morphologie* for its presentation of Law and Gospel and the doctrine of justification by faith. Elert, however, was a critic of the teaching of divine inspiration of the Bible as explained by 17th century Lutheran Orthodoxy. Engelder naturally supported verbal inspiration and criticized this departure from Lutheran Orthodoxy in his book review.

It wasn’t until the late 1940s and early 1950’s that Elert’s *Morphologie* would be promoted in the classrooms of CSSL by professors Paul M. Bretscher, Jaroslav Pelikan, and F.E. Mayer. This inspired CSSL students Richard P. Baepler (1929-), Robert C. Schultz (1928-), and Edward H. Schroeder (1930-) to head to Germany to study under Elert himself in the early 1950s. Robert Schultz earned his doctorate under Elert and Paul Althaus (1888-1966) with a dissertation on Law and Gospel in 19th century Lutheran theology. All three students brought Elert’s theology back to the LCMS beginning in the late 1950s.

---

30 Th. Engelder, *Scripture Cannot Be Broken; Six Objections to Verbal Inspiration Examined in the Light of Scripture* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1944).


32 Baepler, Schultz, and Schroeder all studied Elert’s theology in Germany but only Schultz earned his doctorate from Erlangen. All three students would later teach at Valparaiso University, an LCMS-related school in Indiana. Another CSSL student Walter R Bouman (1929-2005) also studied in Germany and brought Elert’s theology back to Concordia Teachers College in River Forest, Illinois.

33 Ibid., 234.
During this moderate era in Missouri, volume 1 of *Morphologie Des Luthertums* would be translated into English in 1962 as *The Structure of Lutheranism* \(^{34}\) and be published by Concordia Publishing House, the official publication organ of the MS. By the late 60s and early 70s, Elert’s historical and systematic work would influence not only CSSL but also Valparaiso University and Concordia Teachers College, \(^{35}\) River Forest, Illinois. Elert’s work would, in the view of moderates, propel the neglected center of Walther’s theology, the distinction between Law and Gospel, back to its place of significance. Erlangen had gained a foothold in Missouri and conservatives were not pleased. They criticized Elert’s denial of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, his presumed denial of the third use of the law, and, as they understood it, his acceptance of Antinomianism, the view that Christians no longer need to heed God’s Law. Some would come to see Elert’s work as contributing to the eventual split in Missouri. \(^{36}\)

**The Serious Clout of the “Little Norwegian Synod”**

In the 1940s and 50s, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, became seriously disturbed by the perceived liberalism that had developed in the Missouri Synod, as evidenced in Missouri’s discussions with the “unionistic” American Lutheran Church


\(^{35}\) Its name was later changed to Concordia University.

\(^{36}\) For a positive appraisal of Elert, see Matthew L. Becker, “Werner Elert (1885-1954),” 94-95.
(ALC). The ELS, frequently called the “Little Norwegian Synod,” had declined to join the merger with the large Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (NLCA) in 1917. It was proud of the theological roots of its Norwegian ancestors: Herman Amberg Preus (1825-1894) and Jacob Aal Ottesen (1825-1904) who taught a verbally inspired Word and faithfulness to the Lutheran Confessions. A handful of pastors and congregations formed the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church rather than join the large NLCA merger of 1917. Instead, the small synod was pleased to belong to the Synodical Conference with the much larger Missouri and other synods. By the 1950s it had a total baptized membership of over 12,000 and in 1958 changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The ELS watched Missouri for 20 years beginning in 1935 and tried to persuade it to renounce the St. Louis Resolutions of 1938 and return to the Pieperian tradition. The ELS waited for discipline to come to the 44 pastors and theologians who signed and promoted A Statement-44 in 1945 but it never happened. It disagreed with the Common Confession of 1950 that intended to settle doctrinal differences between Missouri and the ALC. Finally, in 1955 the ELS suspended fellowship with the LCMS based on Romans 16:17. It was Missouri, the ELS said, that had departed from the principles of the

37 Omar Bonderud, America’s Lutherans, Rev. ed. (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1958), 51-53. The Synod grew from a handful of pastors and congregations to over 12,000 baptized and 74 congregations in the mid-1950s. It stressed purity of doctrine from the pulpit.

38 The merger of 1917 combined the Norwegian Synod (1853), the Hauge Synod (1876), and the United Norwegian Synod (1890). The minority of Norwegians which later became the Evangelical Lutheran Synod refused to join this large merger of Norwegians (the NLCA) because they viewed it as doctrinal compromise. This minority saw themselves as the true continuation of the Norwegian Synod of 1853. See Granquist, Lutherans in America, 236.
Synodical Conference, not the ELS. Notable influence from this small synod was just starting as three ELS clergymen with Ph.Ds. began their career moves into the Missouri Synod. They were by no means emissaries of ELS as their migration grew out of personal preference.

Jack Preus and his younger brother Robert Preus (1924-95) agreed with the ELS decision to suspend fellowship with the LCMS. The brothers had attended Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul. Robert “found the seminary atmosphere oppressive, laden with theological compromise, evasion, and indifference.” Robert declined to complete his studies there and instead transferred to the new Bethany Seminary of the ELS in Mankato, Minnesota. He became its first pastoral graduate in 1947. Jack had recently left the Evangelical Lutheran Church after graduating from Luther Theological Seminary and serving in one of its congregations. Despite some misgivings about Missouri’s compromising stance in recent years, the Preuses were willing to move to academic positions in the MS. Robert Preus became an instructor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis in 1957 and Jack Preus accepted a teaching position at the Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois in 1958. From there Jack would springboard into the presidency of the Springfield seminary and then to the presidency of the LCMS. Jack explained that the ELS had not recognized the talent of the two brothers and therefore


41 Ibid., 355.
they were willing to move to the LCMS. Robert Preus had been passed over for a professorship, an opportunity that would only occur every 15-20 years in the tiny synod.42

One-time president of the American Lutheran Church David W. Preus (1922-), a cousin of and good friends with Jack and Robert Preus, recalled that they frequently quoted the Orthodox theologian Johannes Quenstedt. Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) was the favorite of Jack Preus, who had earned a doctorate in Latin at the University of Minnesota and would later translate Chemnitz’ *Two Natures in Christ* into English.43 Robert Preus, the younger brother, presented himself as a defender of Lutheran Orthodoxy in his teaching role at CSSL. After earning his Ph.D. at the University of Edinburgh, he published his book on *The Inspiration of Scripture* in 1955.44 In 1969 he acquired a D.Theol. from the University of Strasbourg and published another book, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*,45 which established him as a leading English-language interpreter of 17th century Lutheran theologians.

The third ELS clergyman was Dr. Paul A. Zimmerman (1918-2014), who had served at Bethany College in Mankato, Minnesota as professor and administrator.


43 David W. Preus, *Two Trajectories: J.A.O. Preus and David W. Preus* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 18-19. David Preus noted in this context that both Quenstedt and Chemnitz were adherents of very strict Lutheran doctrinal Orthodoxy.

44 See Kurt E. Marquart, “Robert D. Preus,” 356: “Preus’ book on inspiration supplied welcome ammunition for the traditionalists, then very much on the defensive. The old inspiration doctrine was routinely ridiculed as a scholastic artifice contrived by seventeenth-century dogmaticians from pagan (Aristotelian) philosophical pedantries and inflicted on the church contrary to the dynamic or Hebrew genius of the Bible and of an existentially reinterpreted Luther.”

45 Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. 
Zimmerman was an ordained LCMS pastor who earned his doctorate in chemistry and was well-acquainted with the Preus brothers.\textsuperscript{46} Starting in 1954, Zimmerman began his career advancement into several LCMS executive positions.\textsuperscript{47} He held the presidencies of Concordia College, Seward Nebraska, Concordia College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Concordia College, River Forest, Illinois. In the MS, Zimmerman would defend \textit{Brief Statement-Pieper}'s assertion that God created the world in six days. In 1959, he was both editor and writer for \textit{Darwin, Evolution, and Creation},\textsuperscript{48} a work which brought him into conflict with Valparaiso University\textsuperscript{49} biology professor Carl H. Krekeler (1920-2012). Krekeler was an ordained LCMS pastor and very critical of the anti-Darwin book. Zimmerman called him a heretic because he rejected the creation material from the 1932 \textit{Brief Statement-Pieper} and asked Krekeler, “Has the Missouri Synod been in error all these years?”\textsuperscript{50}

The St. Louis Resolutions and fellowship discussions, the protest of “the 44,” the writings of professors Theodore Graebner and F. E. Meyer, and the positive reaction to Werner Elert’s writing were all indications that something was stirring in the MS unlike

\textsuperscript{46} Aaberg, \textit{A City Set on a Hill}, 270.

\textsuperscript{47} Neither Zimmerman nor the Preus brothers were sent from the ELS to the LCMS to deliver theological correction. The theological situation in Missouri was not so objectionable that the three men could not serve there. There were in this moderate era many strong conservative elements in the LCMS.


\textsuperscript{49} Valparaiso University is an independent school within the Missouri Synod.

anything previously. This was leading up to a period of greater and more intense activity in the moderate movement, which Chapter 6 will explain.

**Figure 3. From the ELS: the Preus Brothers and Paul Zimmerman**
In the late 1920s, Theodore Graebner and his brother Martin (1879-1950) exchanged letters about the trend for CSSL professors to earn doctorates from denominations outside of the LCMS. The Graebner brothers described universities and non-Missouri seminaries as “heretical.” Theodore taught at CSSL and Martin, a pastor and professor, would eventually be president of Concordia College, St. Paul. They discussed how some men would lose their faith or drop out of the ministry altogether. Some would use their scholarship to belittle those colleagues who didn’t have an advanced degree. Others would absorb Modernism and eventually make it an issue in the MS, they thought. 1 In the 1920s, CSSL professors J. T. Mueller (1885-1967) earned his doctorate at Xenia Presbyterian Seminary and P. E. Kretzmann (1883-1965) acquired his from Chicago Lutheran Seminary. Martin Graebner pronounced that these ungodly degrees would be the beginning of the end of Missouri Orthodoxy.2

However, the faculty at CSSL prior to Pieper had included men who had attended universities in Europe. Walther, of course, studied at Leipzig and sought to include

1 Meyer, Log Cabin to Luther Tower, 110.
2 Ibid., 191-92.
scholars from Germany on the CSSL faculty. During his presidency, he succeeded in acquiring two faculty members who had studied at the University of Erlangen: Gottlieb Schaller (1819-1887) and Friedrich Craemer (1812-1891). Walther’s faculty pick and Pieper’s colleague, Karl Stoeckhardt, attended several European universities including the Erlangen School where he studied under Johann von Hofmann. Walther encouraged Missouri pastors to seek out serious study and not to be presumptuous. Orthodoxy was not easy to achieve, he noted. But the rush of German immigrants in the 1800s forced many Missouri pastors to attain practical skills to address the needs of a growing church. They simply had no time for the refinements of a university. Lueker wrote: “The anti-intellectual bias became more and more noticeable, and by the end of the first quarter of the 20th century the university-trained clergyman was suspect in many parts of the Missouri Synod.” Some theologians in Germany and America came to view the MS as Wissenschaftsverächtter, despisers of scholarship or academics.

Alfred Fuerbringer, president of CSSL from 1953-1969, agreed with this assessment. MS clergy in the first half of the 20th century lacked an open-mindedness toward Biblical interpretation, he believed. Whatever they learned during their seminary training was what they carried with them for the remainder of their ministry. They were

---

3 Walther was frustrated by the loss of two of his faculty: Eduard Preuss (1834-1904) and Hermann Baumstarck (dates unknown) from Germany who defected to the Roman Catholic Church once in America. See Meyer, 55-56.

4 With several CSSL professors having backgrounds at the University of Erlangen, it does raise a question for further study. Is this the reason Pieper corrected the Erlangen School of Theology so heavily in his writing? Did he detect unorthodox teaching from Erlangen in the faculty that he wanted to address?

5 Lueker, Second Generation Theologians, 17-18. Lueker translated Wissenschaftsverächtter as “despisers of science” but “scholarship,” “academics,” or “systematic method” would all be better.
insecure about new ideas, having a fear that if one questioned the tradition that Moses composed the entire Pentateuch there would follow doubt about all Biblical truth, even the Resurrection of Christ. This mindset of LCMS pastors, Fuerbringer reasoned, contributed to tensions in the Synod right into the decades following World War II.⁶

Some of the most notable LCMS theologians (Pieper, Graebner, Franzmann) never acquired an advanced degree as Table 2 shows. This Table also shows an incipient trend in the first half of the 20th century for study at non-Missouri institutions. The doctoral program at CSSL did not begin until 1944.⁷

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professorship Begun Before 1950</th>
<th>Where Doctorate was Earned</th>
<th>Professorship Begun After 1950</th>
<th>Where Doctorate was Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Franz Pieper 1877-1931</td>
<td>None earned</td>
<td>Frederick Danker 1956-74</td>
<td>University of Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul E. Kretzmann 1923-46</td>
<td>Chicago Lutheran Seminary</td>
<td>Everett Kalin 1966-74</td>
<td>Harvard Divinity + European Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter A. Maier 1922-50</td>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>Ralph Klein 1968-74</td>
<td>Harvard Divinity + European Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore Graeubner 1913-50</td>
<td>None earned</td>
<td>Carl Graesser 1953-57, 1964-74</td>
<td>Harvard Divinity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁶ Alfred O. Fuerbringer, Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, 46-47.

⁷ The first doctorate was awarded to Roy Suelflow (1918-1981) in 1946.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William F Arndt</td>
<td>Washington University</td>
<td>Edgar Krentz</td>
<td>Washington University + European Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-57</td>
<td></td>
<td>1953-74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul M. Bretscher</td>
<td>University of Chicago</td>
<td>Horace Hummel</td>
<td>Johns Hopkins University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-69</td>
<td></td>
<td>1956-58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Caemmerer</td>
<td>Washington University</td>
<td>Norman Habel</td>
<td>Concordia Seminary, St Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-73</td>
<td></td>
<td>1960-73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Franzmann</td>
<td>None earned</td>
<td>Robert H. Smith</td>
<td>Concordia Seminary, St Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-69</td>
<td></td>
<td>1968-74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fuerbringer became Concordia Seminary president in 1953 when his faculty was already under attack by “right wing conservatives.” The discussions with the ALC concerning fellowship had been going on for 15 years. In their official meetings, the faculty joined in prayer with other Lutherans and thus were charged with holding lax and unbiblical practices. In the 1950s, New Testament professor Dr. William Arndt, a member of the Doctrinal Unity Committee, openly advocated fellowship with the ALC because the two bodies were already in agreement, he said.  

Concerning the period of CSSL history in the 1950s, Synod President John Behnken (president 1935-62) had little to say in his memoir, *This I Recall*. There seemed to be relative quiet. In the early 1950’s, however, young Hermann Otten (1933 -), a

---

8 Ibid., 54-55.

9 In the winter of 1954, a group of CSSL students asked professors for an open discussion of verbal inspiration, one that would go well beyond what would usually be accomplished in a classroom. Students were seeking to know what the Scriptures and Confessions taught about the doctrine of verbal inspiration and how this functioned in the life of the church. The symposium included several hours of discussion open to all class levels. For more details, see Richard R Caemmerer, “Essays on the Inspiration of Scripture,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 25, no. 10 (October 1954): 738. Content of the symposium
student at CSSL, began to report his discoveries of false doctrine to CSSL professors and the LCMS administration. Kurt Marquart (1934-2006) joined Otten in this investigative work as they confronted students and faculty at CSSL. For Otten this became a life-long passion as he wrote about departures from Lutheran Orthodox teaching in Missouri, first in the Lutheran News, later to become the Christian News. Did a professor teach contrary to Lutheran Orthodoxy? Otten wanted to know. Was an LCMS pastor co-leading worship or practicing fellowship with non-Missouri Lutherans? Otten wanted to know. Marquart would later teach at Concordia Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana and write a book about the Missouri conflict from a conservative perspective.¹⁰

**Figure 4. LCMS Presidents Behnken & Harms, CSSL President Fuerbringer**

John Behnken  Oliver Harms  Alfred Fuerbringer

---

The “Golden Era” of the Moderate Movement in Missouri, 1958-1969

Events seemed to be converging for moderates to succeed in changing Missouri in the eleven years leading up to the installation of John Tietjen as CSSL president in 1969. If there ever was a “golden era” for moderates, this was it. Students who earned their M. Div. at CSSL completed their doctorates and returned to CSSL to teach. Everett Kalin (1929-), Arlis Ehlen (1931-2017), and Ralph Klein (1936-) all acquired doctorates at Harvard and brought fresh perspectives back to CSSL.\(^\text{11}\) They were educated in the tools, techniques, and ideas of Biblical historical criticism. By 1962, Robert H. Smith (1932-2006) and Norman C. Habel (1932-) became critical scholars and earned their doctorates right on the campus of CSSL.\(^\text{12}\) Seminary course descriptions changed to reflect this momentum.\(^\text{13}\) Historical criticism was out in the open. In 1962 Concordia Publishing House oversaw the translation of Elert’s volume 1 of *Morphologie Des Luthertums* into English as *The Structure of Lutheranism*, a book some conservatives strongly criticized.

In 1966 the Missouri Synod became a member of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. (LCUSA), a cooperative agency with other Lutheran bodies. The two men with the most


influence to move this progression onward—MS President Oliver Harms and CSSL President Alfred Fuerbringer, both moderates\textsuperscript{14}—were in place to accomplish change.\textsuperscript{15} For a short time, “new hermeneutic” was a slogan for pastors and students discussing the new Biblical terminology. And the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church\textsuperscript{16} would finally declare Altar and Pulpit Fellowship in 1969.

But conservatives were not ignorant of any of this. Counter movements were stirring to contest the moderate direction the Synod was taking. Convention resolutions in the 1960s emphasized a return to traditional Biblical understanding. Especially disturbing to conservatives were the changes happening at CSSL, the “flag ship” and center of MS theology.

**Table 3. Two Decades of Moderate CSSL Seminary Presidents, 1953-74**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Corresponding Synodical President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate Oliver Harms 1962-1969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} If there was any doubt about Harms being moderate, he answered this after the MS division by joining the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC). He also voted in favor of bringing John Tietjen to CSSL.

\textsuperscript{15} See Table 3. Two Decades of Moderate CSSL Seminary Presidents, 1953-1974.

\textsuperscript{16} This was the new ALC established in 1960, not the ALC formed in 1930 which Missouri had begun discussions with leading to the St. Louis Resolutions.
Martin Scharlemann, Missouri’s Uncommon Person

Martin H. Scharlemann (1910-1982), professor of New Testament at CSSL, was unquestionably deserving of entries in a variety of “Who’s Whos.” He received his Ph.D. from Washington University in classical literature in 1938 and completed his Th.D. at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1964. After serving as pastor in an LCMS congregation in the late 1930s, he entered the Army Air Force Chaplaincy at the beginning of World War II, serving on active duty from 1941-1952 in Egypt, North Africa, and Italy before returning to America. After the war, he was a regular Air Force Chaplain, and in this capacity, he created moral and ethical training courses for Air Force personnel in the Military Chaplain School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In 1966, he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserves. In the same year, he received an appointment to the Pontifical Institute in Rome to study Roman Catholic Biblical interpretation methods and was the first non-Roman scholar to be so honored. He had prepared himself to accept the presidency of either CSSL or Union Seminary in

17 “Listed in every major directory of notable Americans, as well as several international directories, Dr. Scharlemann had also received many honors including: Legion of Merit, the Air University Medal (1965), the St. Martin of Tours Medal (1967), Outstanding Educator of America (1975), the Chief of Chaplains Special Award (1976), Rotary International’s Paul Harris Fellow (1978), and Religious Heritage of America’s Outstanding Educator (1981).” See Richard Klann, “Martin H Scharlemann, 1910-1982: An Appreciation,” Concordia Journal 8, no. 6 (November 1982): 202-4.

18 Ibid., 202. In Italy, in addition to his military role as chaplain, he learned enough Italian to gather Waldensian Protestants together to hear Gospel teaching and preaching.

New York City, whenever offered and many were aware of this ambition. Scharlemann could hardly be expected to stay on the sideline of changes in the Synod.20

With the assistance of Horace Hummel (1928-), instructor in Old Testament, Scharlemann led the first formal introduction of the historical critical method to the CSSL faculty in February 1958.21 Their paper was entitled, “Notes on the Valid Use of the Historico-Critical Method.”22 The “Notes” cautiously and conservatively defined the goal of historical criticism as seeking to address the human side of Scriptures as well as the divine, inspired aspects. Yes, they argued, some of the early proponents of historical criticism were agnostics and unbelievers but that doesn’t nullify the method. The historical critical method becomes detrimental to research only when its rationalistic judgment views the Scriptures as a mere human book and denies revelation and miracles.23 Scharlemann and Hummel concluded that if the method was used “conservatively,” “we feel certain that no doctrines of the Lutheran Church will be at stake.” Just how far would exegesis be permitted to take the interpreter? Criticism, they said, would end before basic revelation—the Red Sea Exodus, the exile in Babylon, the

20 Klann, “Martin H Scharlemann, 1910-1982.”


22 At this time, the historical-critical method was sometimes written in the format, “historico-critical.”

23 Martin H. Scharlemann and Horace D. Hummel, “Notes on the Valid Use of the Historico-Critical Method” (Concordia Faculty Meeting, St. Louis, MO: unpublished, February 7, 1958), 1-2. Obtained from Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.
Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ—was denied. Hummel left his position at CSSL at the end of the year. He returned to CSSL to teach in the 1970s when conservative scholars were needed after the 1974 walkout. Scharlemann would move on to a new endeavor in his career at CSSL that would stir the Synod in a controversy concerning the Scriptures.

Scharlemann’s next project carried more bravado. Franz Pieper had turned aside the Erlangen Ichtheologie of Johann von Hofmann but beginning in 1958, Scharlemann would communicate Hofmann’s transformed views of salvation history and Biblical revelation to the Synod in several essays he had composed. The core of Hofmann’s work in Heilsgeschichte had inspired several theological studies by Otto Piper (1841-1921), Oscar Cullman (1902-1999), and G. Ernest Wright (1909-1974). Scharlemann had been writing, analyzing, and reflecting on the material he would present for the past 6 years, essentially since he began teaching at CSSL. He began to deliver these essays in

24 Ibid., 8.

25 John Tietjen commented that Hummel’s contract was not renewed because of his promotion of historical criticism. See Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, 14.


29 These essays referenced the writing of Otto Piper, Oscar Cullman, G. Ernst Wright, and Hofmann’s term Heilsgeschichte.
February of 1958. Each one is worthy of some attention since they created a controversy that would go on for several years.

*The Inerrancy of Scripture*

Scharlemann delivered this shortest of the three essays at a faculty discussion on February 25, 1958, just following his and Hummel’s introduction to historical criticism in the same month. “The book of God’s truth contains errors,” he wrote, and in this essay, he would address the human side of the Scriptures. He then objected to the first paragraph of *Brief Statement-Pieper*, which says, “Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions . . . also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters.” This statement had not been thoroughly discussed and vetted, said Scharlemann; had it been analyzed it would not have been adopted. This understanding of “inerrancy” has come to mean in the MS that the Gospels, the Pentateuch, and other Biblical writings are actual historical accounts, accurate in every detail, and the secular material described therein has no factual errors. Scharlemann then outlined three major points in his essay: (1) Insistence on inerrancy makes the Bible something less than what it proposes to be; 30 (2) A stand for inerrancy overlooks the use of literary form in the process of revelation; 31 and (3) Insistence on inerrancy oversimplifies the whole process of communication. 32

30 Martin H. Scharlemann, “The Inerrancy of Scripture” (unpublished manuscript, 1958), 1-2. Obtained from Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

31 Ibid., 4.

32 Ibid., 6.
The Bible as Record, Witness and Medium

Scharlemann delivered this second essay in April 1959, to the MS Council on Bible Study and later that month to a District Pastor's Conference in Northern Illinois. He eased into the subject matter that would come to trouble Missouri by discussing “revelation.” Revelation, he said, is not a conveyance of a body of information but it is God’s self-disclosure of His person to a human person through an action in history. When knowledge is understood as an acquisition of facts and truths—as in Scholasticism—33—the Bible becomes a source book of information and not a testimony to God’s acts in history. Truth as factual accuracy is a late development in history. In the Scriptures, he wrote, truth is almost synonymous with revelation, God’s disclosure of Himself. Scharlemann then unleashed the words that would shake the LCMS just prior to its 1959 convention in San Francisco: “The time has come to insist that the word ‘inerrancy’ is inappropriately used of the Scripture.” It has become a shibboleth to evaluate a person’s stance in relation to the Bible. A more precise and less obscuring term to use, said Scharlemann, was “reliable,” which refers to God’s utter dependability in keeping His promises.35 The Scriptures are both divine and human but using


34 Martin H. Scharlemann, “The Bible as Record, Witness, and Medium” (unpublished manuscript, 1959), 10-12. Obtained from Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

“inerrancy” obscures the human limitations with respect to history, geography, science, and language.

**Revelation and Inspiration**

Scharlemann delivered this essay to an LCMS program committee after the San Francisco convention in the summer of 1959. The convention had passed a resolution granting *Brief Statement-Pieper* an authority alongside but not equal to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions.\(^{36}\) This elevation of *Brief Statement-Pieper* was in response to concerns by conservatives about what they were hearing from CSSL. Scharlemann began his essay with: “I want it understood that I am fully committed to the doctrine of verbal inspiration.”\(^{37}\) He explained inspiration as the creative guidance of God’s Spirit that brought the Scriptures into existence. It included the work of editors, researchers, oral tradition, and secretaries such as Tertius and Baruch. But early in Christian history, another view of inspiration as a formal process apart from Biblical content gained credence and was employed by Christian defenders of the faith.\(^{38}\) This view carried with it a theory of inerrancy that cannot be supported by the Scriptures. It is a logic that says divine inspiration preserves every writer from making any error. Scharlemann cited just one example—Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 and the inconsistencies with his quoted

\(^{36}\) This decision concerning *Brief Statement-Pieper* was reversed at the 1962 Convention because the Synod recognized it was not permissible to make such a sweeping change to an Article of the MS Constitution by placing Pieper’s work alongside the Scriptures and Confessions.

\(^{37}\) Martin H. Scharlemann, “Revelation and Inspiration” (unpublished manuscript, 1959), 6. Obtained from Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO. (This document begins with page 6 rather than page 1.)

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 18-19.
Genesis material—to demonstrate that it is misleading to use the word “inerrant” when referring to the Scriptures. A false view of inspiration entered the Church through pagan philosophy. What verbal inspiration really means is that the Bible testifies to Christ.39

Synod President Behnken and other synodical leaders were disturbed by this emergence of a “new theology.” Concerning events with Scharlemann in the late 50s and early 60s, Behnken later wrote: “Nothing during my 27 years in office caused me more heartache.”40 Behnken and the Seminary Board of Control wanted to discipline Scharlemann. Not only his essays but the tone, language, and style of his presentation antagonized many people. Behnken and the Board discussed their options for Scharlemann: a suspension, or a leave of absence leading to termination, or at least restrictions on teaching in the classroom. Seminary President Fuerbringer defended Scharlemann completely because he agreed with the theological stance he had taken. If Scharlemann went, then Fuerbringer would leave, too.41

An agreement was reached allowing Scharlemann to remain in his position at Concordia Seminary. Standing before the delegates at the Synod Convention in June 1962 in Cleveland, Ohio, Scharlemann read the following statement: “I deeply regret and am heartily sorry over the part I played in contributing to the present unrest within Synod. . . . By the grace of God, I am—as I have been in the past—fully committed to the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. I hold these Scriptures to be

39 Ibid., 23.

40 John William Behnken, This I Recall (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 194-95.

41 Alfred O. Fuerbringer, Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, 65.
the Word of God in their totality and in all their parts and to be truthful, infallible, and completely without error. . . . Herewith then I withdraw the following papers in their entirety.” 42 The list included Scharlemann’s three essays. 43 Fuerbringer had protected the gutsiest man in the Synod. Scharlemann was forgiven by convention delegates by a vote of 620 to 17. 44 He would continue to serve CSSL for 20 more years as a respected faculty member and, for a short time, as president of the seminary.

Concordia Theological Monthly

The Seminary’s academic publication, Concordia Theological Monthly (CTM), became a voice for conservatives and moderates in the 1960s and 70s. The CSSL faculty published a “statement” in 1960 following a two-year study of the theology of the Word. It was intended to convey the faculty’s “profound sense of obedience to the Scriptures” and at the same time it lent support to Scharlemann, who had in one of his essays argued that “reliable” would be a better way to describe the Scriptures than “inerrant.” The faculty asserted that the Scriptures are “inerrant, infallible, and wholly reliable” and “those who believe the Scriptures, trust them, and rely on them will not be put to shame. . . .”

42 There is only conjecture to explain Scharlemann’s reversal. It obviously saved his career at CSSL. The possibility of becoming president of CSSL remained. He was a “good soldier” who knew how to follow orders in a system of structured authority. Even his brother-in-law, Edward Schroeder, has no clear explanation for Scharlemann’s behavior.

43 Danker and Schambach, No Room in the Brotherhood, 28-29.

44 Ibid., 30.

Assistant Professor of Systematics Robert Preus would not pass on this opportunity to question the faculty on the use of the term “reliable.” A year later in a CTM article, “Walther and the Scriptures,” Preus pointed to the first Missouri president’s understanding of inerrancy. Walther did not mean, wrote Preus, by inerrant that the Scriptures are merely “reliable” or that they teach us about Christ and lead us to Him without making any errors. Walther meant what the Church has always meant, that all declarative statements in the Bible are true. Preus wrote further on this theme of inerrancy in another CTM article in the 1960s.

CTM captured another discussion of inerrancy after the LCMS convention in Detroit in the summer of 1965. Delegates adopted Resolution 2-01, To Reaffirm Unwavering Loyalty to the Scriptures as the Inspired and Inerrant Word of God. Dr. Arthur Carl Piepkorn (1907-1973), Graduate Professor of Systematic Theology, recorded his thoughts on inerrancy a short time later in CTM. The Scriptures and the Lutheran Symbols, he stated, do not use the term at all. The ancient Church and the Lutheran reformers asserted the correctness and adequacy of the Scriptures for salvation and

---


48 Concordia Historical Institute, The Doctrinal Resolutions of the National Conventions of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod 1847-2004, CD (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Historical Institute, 2006), 452.
Christian living. It wasn’t until the 17th century that Quenstedt described the canon of Scripture as infallibly true, free of falsehood and even the slightest error. Piepkorn explained that “inerrancy” when applied literally results in a deification of the written revelation and does not insure orthodoxy. Those who use it as a *shibboleth* hope to guarantee pure doctrine in the Church. Piepkorn concluded: “It does not seem to this writer that we are serving the best interests of the church when either we continue formally to reaffirm the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures or even to continue to employ the term.”

Other senior faculty members used CTM to educate, persuade, and calm Missouri pastors who were disturbed by the historical critical material they were reading in the journal. Herbert T. Mayer (1922-2005), Managing Editor of CTM and Professor of Church History at CSSL, acknowledged that readers may be unhappy with the strong historical critical emphasis in the journal when faculty members and writers like Arlis J. Ehlen, Norman Habel (1932- ), and Alfred von Rohr Sauer (1908-1991) explained Old Testament topics using terms like *Heilsgeschichte*, but they need to try to quickly orient themselves to these studies. Mayer asserted that all denominations are experiencing a

---


50 Ibid., 578.

51 Ibid., 580.

52 Ibid., 588.

time of digesting the past 50 years of Biblical research and, in a reference to new faculty in the person of returning CSSL graduates, “the Lord of the church is being particularly good to our body by giving us men who will not let us ignore the newer Biblical studies.” The LCMS has had a long history, he explained, in propositional theology setting forth absolute statements of truth; this has been good, and we are grateful to God. Now the emphasis is turning to Biblical studies and theologians are searching for truth in this research. This may require a redefinition of some of our vocabulary in systematic theology, he wrote.54

Richard Caemmerer, one of the signers of A Statement-44, employed CTM to encourage Missouri pastors not to fear the “new hermeneutics.” Caemmerer’s specialty was teaching pastors how to preach. Preachers should not be unsettled by scholars such as Walther Eichrodt (1890-1978), Gerhard Ebeling (1912-2001), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014) and many others, he wrote. They were engaged in the preacher’s work of struggling with the text.55 In this golden era, CSSL faculty members had the freedom to publish articles in CTM that referred to topics like the sources J, D, E, and P.56 Naturally, conservatives nurtured by the writings of the anti-historical critical Franz Pieper were confused and alarmed.


Assessing Franz Pieper

The older generation of Missouri professors, who knew Franz Pieper personally or had been one of his students, provided a strong, positive assessment of the CSSL teacher and author of *Christliche Dogmatik*. Moderate Dr. Richard Caemmerer, professor in practical theology at CSSL, was a student of Pieper’s in the late 1920s and praised his theology. “I’m high on Pieper,” he said and called him “ultra-evangelical.” Pieper distinguished between the authority of the Bible and its power. Divine inspiration provided the authority and the words of the Bible provided the power to build faith and believe, commented Caemmerer.\(^{57}\) Similar high regard for Pieper came from moderate Edward J. Friedrich, who also knew Pieper personally. He said: “A lot of fellows, some of the fellows at Seminex kind of downgrade him, but they didn’t know him. . . . Of course, he had a lot power and he was no shrinking violet either. But I had a lot of respect for him.”\(^{58}\)

However, some post-World War II moderate professors expressed concerns about Pieper. CSSL systematics Erwin Lueker (1915-2000) and Edward Schroeder, who also taught at Valparaiso, believed Pieper had not handed on the tradition of C.F.W. Walther judiciously.\(^{59}\) The importance of the material principle, justification by faith, had

---

\(^{57}\) Richard R. Caemmerer, Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, 23.

\(^{58}\) Edward J. Friedrich, Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, 56.

\(^{59}\) In this student’s conversation with Professor Patrick Keifert of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, in November 2017, he commented that he regarded the theology of Walther and Pieper as essentially the same and he could not identify significant differences.
been slighted by Pieper. He was, said the two professors, unbalanced by his favoritism toward the Scriptures, the formal principle. Lueker thought Pieper and other MS theologians had increasingly identified with Fundamentalists in other denominations who were fighting against liberals.\textsuperscript{60} He pointed out that in volume 1 of \textit{Christian Dogmatics}, Pieper gave considerable emphasis to the doctrine of Scripture—over 200 pages (pages 233-444). But for justification by faith, Pieper could summon a mere 66 pages in volume 2 (pages 606-672).\textsuperscript{61}

Schroeder was also suspicious of Pieper’s theological direction. In his early ministry, Pieper delivered two lectures on Law and Gospel to MS district conventions, one in Iowa and another in Kansas. Before lecturing on Walther’s Law and Gospel theses at the Iowa convention, he remarked, “Whoever does not believe that the entire Holy Scriptures are God’s Word has given up the foundation of Christianity.” To Schroeder, Walther was clear about the one doctrine by which the Church stands or falls; it was the material principle of justification. Pieper was confused, said Schroeder, at least at this early juncture in his ministry. Schroeder, Robert Bertram (1921-2003), and others would accomplish a renewal of Walther’s, and of course Luther’s, Law and Gospel theology in the LCMS in this moderate period.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Lueker, \textit{Second Generation Theologians}, 11.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 38. Lueker also thought it inappropriate for Pieper to begin \textit{Brief Statement-Pieper} with an article on Scripture. He should have followed the Augsburg Confession pattern and started the Statement with an article on God, according to Lueker. See Lueker, 35.

\textsuperscript{62} Schroeder, “Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” 241. See also on page 241: At the Kansas District Convention in 1892, Pieper said, “In our time men within Christendom deny the Holy Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God. . . . If one denies that the
Valparaiso University and the Promising Tradition

Valparaiso University in northern Indiana has held a unique position within the LCMS. Since 1925 it has been operated by an organization of LCMS members as a center of learning with a Lutheran commitment. Every MS school of higher education carried the moniker “Concordia” in its title and served to train pastors and teachers for Missouri churches and congregations. Not “Valpo,” as it was commonly called.\textsuperscript{63} The curriculum at Valparaiso prepared students for careers in law, social work, business

\footnotesize{\begin{quote}
Holy Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, he has thereby sacrificed the grounds for the doctrine and faith of the Christian Church.”
\end{quote}}

\textsuperscript{63} The Lutheran University Association was a group of clergy and laity with close association to the Missouri Synod which purchased the University in 1925. Although technically independent of the Synod, it has been dependent upon Missouri for fund-raising and student recruitment. It remains even today an independent university with close relations to the LCMS.
administration, health professions, engineering, science, music, and art, as well as education and theology, all in a Lutheran context.

Dr. Otto Paul (O. P.) Kretzmann (1901-1975), a CSSL graduate and one of “the 44” signers, was president of the university from 1940-1968. He had met Werner Elert on a trip to Germany and declared that Elert’s theology was what he wanted at Valparaiso. Contrary to the perception that Valparaiso theology was liberal in the 1950s, this was not true. Religion classes offered standard Missouri theology in agreement with *Brief Statement-Pieper.* Kretzmann wanted to change this and expected the religion courses to become the most interesting courses on campus. With encouragement from Professor Jaroslav Pelikan, CSSL students Robert C. Schultz, Richard P. Baepler, and Edward H. Schroeder became exchange students in 1952-53 and studied directly under Elert in Erlangen, Germany. Schultz was the only one of the three students to earn his doctorate from Erlangen. Kretzmann appointed all three men to his faculty in the 1950s.

Kretzmann inspired a fresh look at Walther’s *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel,* which, he pointed out, had been translated into English by

---


65 Ibid., 73.


67 In *The Cresset,* a Valparaiso University journal, Kretzmann wrote that much of Lutheranism “had succumbed to a completely alien fundamentalism, a shallow moralism, and a painful parroting of old words and phrases which had never passed through the purging fires of hard study of the Word of God.”
Valparaiso’s first president as a Lutheran university, W.H.T. Dau. Dau’s grandson was Valparaiso faculty member, Robert Bertram, who had been reared in this tradition of Law and Gospel. After teaching at Valparaiso from 1948-63, Bertram transferred to CSSL in 1963. Edward Schroeder came to CSSL from Valparaiso University to teach systematics in 1971. Together they promoted the “Promising Tradition” and developed a “reader in Law-Gospel reconstructionist theology.” The “Reader” included foundational material by Elert and C.F.W. Walther but recent writings by Bertram, Schroeder, and Robert C. Schultz—three professors with strong roots at Valparaiso—were the primary content. The sources of the “Reader” were articles from The Cresset, a Valparaiso University publication, Concordia Theological Monthly, and other writings of Bertram, Schroeder, and Schultz that had been used in classrooms and were now bundled together to summarize the Promising Tradition. But there was nothing by Franz Pieper, not even a reference to him. This was a revival of Walther’s Law-Gospel teaching, which recognized but set aside his belief that “every Word of Holy Scripture is inspired by the


68 Elert explained that “the Gospel is a promise” not a heavenly philosophy. See Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, 179.

69 This reader was later published. See Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, The Promising Tradition: A Reader in Law-Gospel Reconstructionist Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1973).
For the Valparaiso theologists, verbal inspiration was a “hang-up” and an “albatross.” Elert would have agreed.

The Conservative Counter

Gospel Reductionism

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery (1931-) entered the conflict on the side of conservatives in the 1960s, after his ordination as an LCMS pastor in 1965. Montgomery’s career and talents were multifaceted. Besides his Th.D., he earned advanced degrees in philosophy, law, and library science and is credited with authoring over 235 works. He taught church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1964-1974) during the period of clashes in Missouri. He had earned a reputation as a defender of the Christian faith as he debated atheists and “God-is-dead” theologians. Montgomery coined the term “Law-Gospel Reductionism,” which was later shortened to “Gospel Reductionism,” to describe the narrow focus of Valparaiso Theology on the Law-Gospel principle to interpret the Bible. This emphasis, he claimed, diminished the importance of

70 C.F.W. Walther, Selected Sermons, Selected Writings of C.F.W. Walther, 1811-1887 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 142. In this context, Walther criticized his contemporaries who say the Scriptures are not the Word but only contain the Word.


72 Edward Schroeder, “Remembering Werner Elert—Fiftieth Anniversary of his Death,” Crossings (blog), December 10, 1998. Schroeder acknowledged in this blog article that Elert’s Evangelischer Ansatz (grounding the Bible’s authority on the Gospel itself) was not compatible with MS verbal inspiration teaching.
Missouri’s formal principle of a verbally inspired Scripture. He charged Schroeder, Bertram and others with holding this Gospel Reductionist view. Montgomery delivered his message opposing Gospel Reductionism to many conferences in the LCMS in 1966. He compiled his argument in a two-volume work about the crisis Lutherans were facing. His stature as a scholar carried great weight with Missouri conservatives and honed their view that CSSL was having problems with the third use of the law by reducing the Biblical message to the Gospel only.

Convention Resolutions

The 1973 MS convention in New Orleans, Louisiana, was decisive in condemning the theology of the CSSL faculty by means of a resolution. But prior to 1973 and as far back as 1959, every MS convention approved at least one doctrinal resolution related to the Scriptures, Biblical authority, or the historical critical method. Missouri gradually concluded that the historical critical method was at the heart of its problems and finally in 1971 it requested an evaluation of this method which would be carried out by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. In 1973, the CTCR had the authority to repudiate the historical critical method without a vote by the New Orleans convention. The CTCR referred the results to the Synodical Board of Directors for implementation.

---


TABLE 4. MS DOCTRINAL RESOLUTIONS RELATED TO THE BIBLE, 1959-73

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convention Year &amp; City</th>
<th>Resolution Numbers and Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959 San Francisco</td>
<td>3-9 Brief <em>Statement-Pieper</em> is binding on pastors, teachers, and professors just as are the doctrines of Scripture and the Confessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962 Cleveland</td>
<td>3-16 Reaffirmed belief in plenary verbal inspiration, inerrancy. Scripture is the very Word of God. The Bible does not contradict itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965 Detroit</td>
<td>2-01 Loyalty to Scriptures as inspired and inerrant Word of God. 2-14 To respect Scripture. 2-23 Acknowledge that Antiscriptural teaching has made inroads into the Synod. 2-26 Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in Christ. 2-27 The Jonah account is historical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 New York</td>
<td>2-16 To reaffirm position on Scripture as inspired and inerrant. 2-31 Adam and Eve were historical human beings; their fall is historical fact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

75 Concordia Historical Institute, *The Doctrinal Resolutions of the National Conventions of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod 1847-2004*, 414.

76 Concordia Historical Institute, 434. In 1926, Prof. William F. Arndt used a method from Lutheran Orthodoxy that merged Biblical material to demonstrate that while there seemed to be two creation stories, there really was only one. He cited many other Biblical examples. See William F. Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself? A Discussion of Alleged Contradictions in the Bible*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1976).

77 Concordia Historical Institute, *The Doctrinal Resolutions of the National Conventions of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod 1847-2004*, 452.

78 Ibid., 455.

79 Ibid., 458.

80 Ibid., 458-59.

81 Ibid., 459.

82 Ibid., 478.

83 Ibid., 485-86.
1969 Denver 2-01 Warn against use of theories about authorship of Isaiah and Pentateuch.\textsuperscript{84} 2-03 Scriptures are the verbally inspired and infallible Word of God.\textsuperscript{85} 2-16 To affirm the historicity of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{86} 2-33 Affirmed wholehearted desire to follow true Biblical teaching.\textsuperscript{87} 2-35 Abide by the historic position on the Word.\textsuperscript{88}

1971 Milwaukee 2-52 Since the use of the historical critical method appears to be at the heart of problems troubling the Church, resolve to evaluate the historical critical method of interpretation.\textsuperscript{89}

1973 New Orleans 2-38 Historical criticism denies the divine character and authority of Scripture and distorts the concept of Biblical inspiration. Thus, the CTCR and the Synod repudiated the use of the historical critical method.\textsuperscript{90} 2-46 To affirm the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures.\textsuperscript{91}

A Crisis

What was happening in the Synod was understood by a growing number of people to be a crisis. During the 1960s, conservatives were hearing and reading about changes in instruction at CSSL. Synod president Behnken told 1962 convention delegates that he was alarmed by the upward trend in ideas from European theology that were threatening the verbally inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God and these

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 496-97.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 498.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 501-3.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 506.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 507.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 527-28.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 561-62.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 562.
departures required correction, he said. In the same convention, charges surfaced that the CSSL student publication, *The Seminarian*, had regularly printed modernist material that undermined the Bible. There were concerns about CSSL teaching regarding the historicity of Adam and Eve by Old Testament professors. Prof. Alfred von Rohr Sauer indicated that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 were hymns evoking praise and mystery about creation and were not intended to provide precise, scientific answers. Likewise, Prof. Norman Habel’s (1932-) essay, *The Form and Meaning of the Fall Narrative* asserted that the fall of Adam and Eve was not history but symbolism. Action groups, such as, “Faith Forward—First Concerns” sprung up in the 1960s to address “doctrinal unrest” in the MS.

Conservatives were increasingly displeased with the response of synod president Oliver Harms to the new hermeneutic practiced at CSSL. They viewed him as weak and either unwilling or unable to reverse the moderate tendencies. As the 1969 convention in Denver approached, the MS was more and more polarized into conservative and moderate factions. The CSSL faculty came to be defined as two groups of professors. There was the Minority Five, who remained to teach at CSSL after the walkout in February 1974, and the Faculty Majority of 45 professors who would later be fired.

---


93 Waldo J. Werning, *Making the Missouri Synod Functional Again* (Fort Wayne, IN: Biblical Renewal Publications, 1992), 54-55. See also Thomas A. Baker, *Watershed at the Rivergate: 1,400 vs. 250,000* (Sturgis, MI: [publisher not identified], 1973). Student Tom Baker wrote and published a book about his student days at CSSL in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He called moderates “neoliberals” and believed there was a neoliberal strategy to take control of CSSL.
FIGURE 6. CSSL PROFESSORS SCHARLEMMANN & PIEPKORN AND PRESIDENT TIE TJEN

Martin H. Scharlemann  Arthur Carl Piepkorn  John H. Tietjen
CHAPTER 7
TIE TJE N, PREEUS, AN D THE NEW ORLEANS CONVEN TION

The Context for the Decisive Events of 1973-74

Moderates in the LCMS might have been euphoric in 1969. John Tietjen had been elected president of CSSL in May and pulpit and altar fellowship between Missouri and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) was established in July. Rather, it was the beginning of a great reversal. The election of Jack Preus to the presidency of the Synod at the 1969 Denver Convention in July was the first major turning point. (See Table 5.) Oliver Harms was not reelected, an unprecedented happenstance given that MS presidents were usually reelected or they voluntarily retired. Harms was a peacemaker and too kind to deliver the rough political solutions that conservatives advocated.¹

Years of passionate struggle, full of stress and sheer nastiness lay ahead. Many believed the death-by-heart attack of 65-year-old systematics professor Arthur Piepkorn just prior to the walkout emanated from his legal battle with Missouri. He fought strenuously for a return to his faculty position after being involuntarily retired in late 1973. After the ‘74 walkout, former seminary president Alfred Fuerbringer would be refused admission to the CSSL campus library named after his father. Seminex Professor

¹ For details on the political events, see Burkee, Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod and Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, especially 75-230.
Robert Werberig (1929-2010) would be denied admission to Holy Communion at CSSL.²

A law suit would be threatened against the new seminary for using the name “Concordia Seminary in Exile.” There were many other such events.

The New Orleans Convention in July ’73 and the walkout from the seminary in February of ’74 were closely-related, cause-and-effect events. The Convention authorized the CSSL Board to act against Tietjen for allegedly permitting false teaching at the Seminary. When Tietjen was suspended in January ’74, students organized the walkout in February. The New Orleans Convention and the walkout were positioned between the Preus presidential election in ‘69 and a second major turning point in 1976.

**TABLE 5. TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS SURROUNDING THE NEW ORLEANS CONVENTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1969</td>
<td>John Tietjen elected president of CSSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1969</td>
<td>Jack Preus elected president of the LCMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1971</td>
<td>Fact Finding Committee completes faculty interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1972</td>
<td>Preus issues <em>Blue Book</em> identifying faculty false teaching, Tietjen responds with <em>Fact Finding or Fault Finding</em>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1973</td>
<td>New Orleans Convention:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• declared <em>A Statement-Preus</em> aligned with Scripture/Confessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CTCR repudiated historical critical method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• condemned faculty majority for false teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• required Board of Control to deal with Tietjen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1974</td>
<td>Board of Control suspends Tietjen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1974</td>
<td>Students and Faculty Majority walk off CSSL campus and begin education in exile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1976</td>
<td>Preus removes four district presidents from office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

President Preus arranged a press conference in St. Louis on April 2, 1976. He communicated to the press that he was removing four LCMS district presidents of the approximately three dozen in North America and in so doing addressed what had been one of the most contentious issues after the split in 1974: what to do about students who had graduated from the “new seminary,” which was eventually called Christ Seminary—Seminex. Should they be approved for ordination in LCMS districts? Of course, the Preus administration opposed this but several district presidents ordained Seminex graduates anyway. One terminated district president was Rev. Rudolph Ressmeyer, (1924-2017), president of the Atlantic District of the LCMS and grandson of Franz Pieper, chief dogmatician. Jack Preus’ grandson, current assistant historical theology professor at CSSL, Dr. Gerhard Bode Jr., recorded that Jack Preus came home after the press announcement, sat down, and wept saying, “I have destroyed the Synod.” Moderates interpreted the firings as a clear signal that it was time to form a new church body, which would be named the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC).

The loathsome behavior appeared to be one-sided, directed from conservatives toward moderates. CSSL Student Body President Gerald Miller in 1973 informed Tietjen that, although he himself was a theological conservative, he did not approve of the political actions of the Preus administration. He would stand with Tietjen in this

---

3 This included students who had studied at CSSL for all their student years except the last few months when they moved into ‘exile’ at the “new seminary.”

4 Ressmeyer officially resigned in September 1976 despite the termination.

5 *Seminex: Memories of a Church Divided, a Documentary*, directed by Tim Frakes (Glen Ellyn, IL: TF Productions 2015), DVD.
controversy. Several months later Miller led the student walkout. In this ecclesiastical struggle, though, innocence was a rarity. Roland P. Wiederaenders (1908-1995) explained how he believed moderates shared in the blame for the synodical turmoil.

From 1959-1974 as full-time first Vice President under John Behnken, Oliver Harms, and Jack Preus, Wiederaenders had a singular perspective. He was a conservative but had a respectful relationship with moderates. He said this concerning the 1960s in the LCMS before Tietjen became seminary president:

. . . the fact that the faculty of Concordia Seminary, which was shifting into the historical critical method, which was beginning to question, for example, that our Lord walked on water, beginning to question the story of Jonah and other parts of Scripture. They were beginning to do that, and they were teaching it to their students. I knew that, because I had contact with the students. However, when Dr. Behnken and Dr. Harms would meet with them, they said no, no, we’re still in the same position. Nothing has changed. And we would go out and say to people, nothing has changed, when it had changed. They were using the historical critical method, and in my opinion, they were pecking away at undermining the authority of Scripture. . . . There were other professors who were, however, continuing to promote militantly in their classes the historical critical method. . . . They had changed, but we were told they had not changed, and that’s why I say we didn’t square with our people. We didn’t tell them that changes had taken place.

---


7 In agreement with Wiederaenders’ criticism of the CSSL faculty is this comment by Martin E. Conkling, book reviewer of Burkee’s work on the MS: “. . . [moderates] suffered as much from arrogance as brilliance, Burkee indicates. Such an attitude is lamentable among men who are supposed to approach their duties pastorally.” See Conkling, “Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod by James C. Burkee,” 327.

8 Because of the strained relations between the two men, Wiederaenders had been called upon to act as a peacemaker between Preus and Tietjen at a series of meetings in 1972 and 1973.

9 Meaning other professors besides Scharlemann.

A similar sentiment came from leaders who were struggling in the gray area of conservative-moderate identity and who had to make difficult decisions. One of these was Dr. Milton J. Nauss (1920-2013), an LCMS pastor in St. Louis. In September 1976, he announced his decision to remain within the LCMS stating that certainly “the Conservatives have been guilty of injustices and lack of integrity. Personally, I believe these charges are justified to a degree. But at the same time, I believe the Moderates are even more guilty of these same things, however, in a more sophisticated fashion.” His statement went on to explain that moderates were responsible for inaugurating the controversy by introducing a new method of Biblical interpretation.11

John Tietjen, an Easterner

In 1969, John Tietjen, a pastor, writer, and editor in the Atlantic District12 of the LCMS and Public Relations Director for the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A, was asked to be the next president of CSSL to replace the retiring Fuerbringer. “I was as surprised as anybody,” he said and accepted.13 Tietjen’s experience in the MS was primarily in New York and New Jersey. Many Missourians in the Atlantic District were not considered to be as theologically conservative as other geographic areas of the Synod. As editor of the


13 Tietjen was Harms’ choice for the position. See Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, 5. Martin Scharlemann was on the long list of candidates but did not make the top five.
American Lutheran, a journal for the loyal opposition in Missouri,\textsuperscript{14} Tietjen provided writers a means of open expression of views that would never be articulated in official Missouri publications. The American Lutheran argued vigorously for unification of Lutheran denominations and for ecumenical and social causes. “We were the liberals in the Missouri Synod,” said Tietjen, though he immediately added he didn’t mean theology liberal.\textsuperscript{15}

His parents were Lutheran immigrants from Germany and primarily concerned about finding churches where German was spoken as they moved within New York City and tended to their grocery business. Tietjen was baptized in the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA)\textsuperscript{16} and confirmed in an LCMS church. He attended the reputable Stuyvesant High School in New York City with plans to be an engineer.\textsuperscript{17} A spiritual event\textsuperscript{18} changed his career plans. After high school graduation, he attended Concordia College, Bronxville, NY, continuing through the MS system to complete the Master of Divinity degree at CSSL. He thought he would have made a good Hebrew and Old

\textsuperscript{14} John H. Tietjen, interview by Margaret E. Schulze, October 14, 1978, transcript p. 88, Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, 1976-85, Elk Grove Village, IL. Tietjen remarked that he had received abundant condemnations from Hermann Otten’s Christian News for many years.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 1-2.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 4-7.

\textsuperscript{18} Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, 7.
Testament scholar but decided, after a discussion with Jaroslav Pelikan in his student days, to attend Union Seminary in New York and earn a Th.D. in church history.\textsuperscript{19}

Tietjen’s thesis for this degree became the book \textit{Which Way to Lutheran Unity}.\textsuperscript{20} Although Concordia Publishing House finally published it in 1966, it didn’t achieve print without the intervention of one or two key people and, at one point, Tietjen almost withdrew the request to publish because of opposition. The book was, of course, a plan to unite all Lutherans in America, a design nowhere near the top of the agenda for many in Missouri. The basis for unity, wrote Tietjen, should be the Holy Scriptures as the standard of teaching and the Lutheran Confessions as their correct exposition.\textsuperscript{21}

Tietjen later directed readers of \textit{Christianity Today} to this same thought. In post-walkout 1974-75, this evangelical magazine offered Tietjen and Preus space in their publication to explain their views of the main theological issues in the LCMS. Preus wrote first and stated that the issue was the authority of the Bible and that the Synod slid from Orthodoxy when it moved out of its isolation and into relationships with other church bodies. Clergy, he said, had also acquired unorthodox ideas at non-Missouri graduate schools.\textsuperscript{22} Tietjen wrote next and claimed the authority of the Bible was a smokescreen. The real issue was what it means to be a confessional Lutheran Church

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Tietjen, 8-9.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 151.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Jacob A. O. Preus, “Integrity, Schism, Neither, Both,” \textit{Christianity Today} 19, no. 2 (October 25, 1974): 11-12.
\end{itemize}
founded on the Scriptures as norm and the Book of Concord of 1580 as its correct exposition.\textsuperscript{23}

Confessional and Biblical correctness Tietjen had found in his research to reside in the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), predecessor to the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). Consciously or unconsciously, Missouri moderates were, as he taught in his courses at Seminex, confessionally and Biblically brothers, fully related to the old ULCA. He praised the ULCA achievement in the “Baltimore Declaration” of 1938\textsuperscript{24} concerning the Word of God and the Scriptures:

\begin{quote}
. . . the Missouri Synod had been criticizing the ULCA for its liberalism, especially in connection with its understanding of the Bible and for its unwillingness to use the \textit{shibboleths} that for the Missouri Synod were essential, like inspired and infallible and inerrant. The Baltimore Declaration is a very fascinating document, in which ULCA authors clearly had worked through the problems of understanding the Bible in relationship to the Word of God, which is a task that Missouri Synod people had to undertake, too, and that’s a very, very crucial job for Lutherans because of the genesis of that issue within Luther himself. The Word of God is clearly not coterminous with the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{25} Not in Luther. Not in the Bible. And not in our Lutheran confessions. . . . The Word
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23} John H. Tietjen, “Piercing the Smokescreen: Toward an Understanding of the Issues in the Missouri Synod,” \textit{Christianity Today} 19, no. 14 (April 11, 1975): 8. Preus’ cousin, one-time ALC President David W. Preus (1922-) explained in his recent book that for the MS, Confessional agreement included not only the Augsburg Confession but also “the Gospel and all its articles.” This phrase enables the LCMS to add requirements which are not addressed in the Confessions such as the inerrancy of the Scriptures. See David W. Preus, \textit{Two Trajectories: J.A.O. Preus and David W. Preus} (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Lutheran University Press, 2015), 8-9.

\textsuperscript{24} 1938 was the year the ULCA and Missouri ended their fellowship discussions. See page 43 in chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{25} If Tietjen was here suggesting that most Missouri clergy defined only the Bible as the Word of God, this was not correct. The LCMS considered “Word of God” to include Christ, the preached Word, and the written Word of Scripture.
of God is Jesus Christ. The Word of God is also the Bible. But not simply coterminous with the Bible.26

Tietjen credited Scharlemann in the late 1950s with attempting to help the MS to understand this very notion of affirming the inspiration of the Scriptures and, at the same time, coming to terms with errors they were ignoring in the Bible.27

**Jack Preus**

Jacob “Jake” Aall Ottesen Preus I (1883-1961)28 was an attorney, who had served first as assistant to U.S. Senator Knute Nelson in Washington, D.C. and then became governor of Minnesota from 1921-25. He had co-founded Lutheran Brotherhood in 1917 and worked as an insurance executive for many years.29 Jake would bequeath not only his wealth to son Jack, making him independently wealthy30 and the richest man at that time to be president of the LCMS, but also a measure of political shrewdness that Jack could not have acquired in his seminary education.

Jake enjoyed participation in several Lutheran synods, which became evident at his funeral in 1961 where the ALC, the LCMS, and ELS were all represented or

---


27 Ibid., 26-27.

28 Note that Jacob Aall Ottesen Preus I, the father of Jack Preus, went by the nickname “Jake.”

29 Adams, *Preus of Missouri and the Great Lutheran Civil War*, 43-44.

30 Ibid., 133. In 1968, Jack Preus inherited stocks and bonds from his deceased mother valued at more than $1.5 million dollars, 2018 equivalency. His real estate holdings were abundant: a 470-acre farm in Indiana, a 160-acre piece of land in the North Dakota coal-mining area, and a half-share in 221 acres of lakefront property at Gunflint Lake in Ontario.
engaged. Reflecting a similar Lutheran eclecticism as Jake, son Jack was baptized in the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC), confirmed in a Missouri Synod church, was a pastor in the ELC, and at various times ministered in ELS churches. He attended Luther Seminary in St. Paul where he read and reread Walther’s *Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* and credited this book with making him a true Lutheran and a “Missourian.” At Luther Seminary, he also charged systematics Professor George Aus (1903-1977) with synergism, initiating an investigation that went nowhere. Aus would later liken Preus’ tactics to a “theological terrorist attack.”

When Preus became LCMS president in 1969 he assessed the CSSL faculty as having gradually adopted a “believe-as-you-wish attitude” on the doctrine of the Word. He believed they acquired this from other graduate schools where they studied and gradually they became more “ecumenical,” a pejorative in much of Missouri. However, he regarded a great many professors who were fired in early 1974 as holding a truly orthodox doctrine on the Word. He had conceptually divided the faculty into three parts: (1) the orthodox Minority Five who were not fired and included Scharlemann and future LCMS president Ralph Bohlmann (1932-2016); (2) a large middle group who believed the MS was big enough for traditional and non-traditional teaching on the Word and that neither were a denial of the Lutheran Confessions; and (3) the left wing who had clearly

31 Ibid., 47.
32 Ibid., 68-69.
33 Jacob A. O. Preus II, Oral History Collection of the Archives of Cooperative Lutheranism, 55.
34 “Minority Five” gradually became the standard description for the five professors who sided with the Synodical administration of the LCMS.
broken with LCMS doctrine on the Word. It was the “left wing” exegetical department that disturbed Preus, the people who had adopted the historical critical method and employed it in classrooms such as Edgar M. Krentz (1928- ), Everett R. Kalin, Carl Graesser, Jr. (1929-89), Alfred von Rohr Sauer (1908-1991), Holland Jones (1920-2016), Ralph W. Klein, Robert Smith, and others. He had planned originally to investigate only this group, not systematicians, historians, or anyone in practical theology. The Minority Five and the large middle group were not his concern.

Less than a year into the Jack Preus presidency, Martin Scharlemann, Graduate Professor of Exegetical Theology, sent a lengthy letter to Preus describing the serious erosion of major themes of conservative Lutheranism at CSSL and requesting a competent committee of inquiry to investigate “matters that threaten to deface the Lutheran character of the life and instruction” at the St. Louis seminary. In the years since his 1962 humiliation at Cleveland, Scharlemann had learned to balance his own theology with that of the Synod. His heart was heavy, said Scharlemann, over many things such as ambivalence to what the Gospel truly is, inattention to the distinction between the kingdom of Christ and political structures of the world, and talk that says it is “not really necessary to verbalize the Gospel.” Biblical interpretation concerned him, too.


36 The Seminary Board of Control, Exodus from Concordia, 151-52.
Scharlemann’s letter interjected information for Preus on the heresy trial of the Presbyterian Charles Briggs.\textsuperscript{37} In the later part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Briggs had studied in Germany, ambitiously returned to America having embraced historical criticism, and was prepared to enlighten his denomination. In 1893 Briggs was tried for heresy by the Presbyterian General Assembly, defrocked, and excommunicated. He transferred his more liberal theology to the Episcopal Church where he ended his career as a priest and scholar.\textsuperscript{38} The prescient Scharlemann, having escaped the gallows himself, was thinking aloud for Preus. The investigation of Briggs developed into a political “tour de force,” skillful maneuvering to deliver the charge of heresy. That would not have to happen in Missouri, explained Scharlemann; the investigation could be thoroughly doctrinal and nothing more.\textsuperscript{39}

In the spring of 1970, Preus announced to the Synod that he would be investigating the CSSL faculty, something he had already explained to the faculty in 1969 prior to receiving Scharlemann’s letter. His initial plan was to focus only on the exegetes who were using historical criticism. But in a confrontation with Tietjen in July 1970 the plan blossomed into an inquiry into the entire faculty. Tietjen had protested that Preus could not focus on a few individuals. There must be specific charges. Preus then decided

\textsuperscript{37} Preus may not have had any knowledge of the Briggs trial since his academic background was Lutheran Orthodoxy and early Church Fathers, while his doctorate was in the Latin language.

\textsuperscript{38} This is the same Briggs who co-authored the Hebrew lexicon, Francis Brown et al., \textit{A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix, Containing the Biblical Aramaic} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907).

\textsuperscript{39} The Seminary Board of Control, \textit{Exodus from Concordia}, 152-53.
that the investigation would include everyone. He organized a Fact Finding Committee that would be led by Dr. Paul Zimmerman, Preus’ long-standing friend from the ELS.

The Committee conducted personal faculty interviews in St. Louis from December 1970 through March 1971. The professors’ responses were coded to conceal identification of individual responders. The following illustrates the type of facts the Committee pursued and summarized:

It is evident from the evidence gathered by the Fact Finding Committee that the majority of the professors embraced a concept of inerrancy that limits the infallibility of the Scriptures to the purpose of bringing men and women to faith in Jesus Christ. Beyond that, the extent of the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures appears to be an open question.40

Many other topics were addressed such as the third use of the Law, miracles, historical criticism, and evolution. The results, bound in a blue-colored book and thereafter often referred to as the Blue Book, were extensive and meticulously prepared to indicate how closely a professor aligned with LCMS positions on these topics.41 The CSSL Board of Control, at this time weighted in favor of moderates, found no professors to be teaching false doctrine. But Preus interpreted the Blue Book to be saying false teaching was practiced and at the 1973 New Orleans Convention he would engineer a resolution for the Board of Control to act against Tietjen for not correcting false doctrine at CSSL.

40 Zimmerman, A Seminary in Crisis, 53.

The outcome of the Fact Finding Committee, then, was for Preus to make non-specific, blanket charges of false teaching against the CSSL faculty, charges which moderates said were not proven. Preus would then charge Tietjen with permitting false teaching at the seminary and only Tietjen and not the faculty would be charged with heresy.42

Tietjen understood Preus’ strategy and responded to the Fact Finding Committee’s work, the Blue Book, with his own booklet43 outlining his concerns. He had it mailed to all pastors in the Synod in September 1972. In his opening letter, Tietjen appealed for a return to fraternal relations regarding doctrinal matters, an approach that characterized the LCMS in the past, he said. The Faculty did not claim to be perfect and stood ready to be corrected when wrong. Fraternal dealings, he stated, were not an effort to avoid doctrinal issues, which should be confronted and resolved in face-to-face discussions.44 Tietjen was making his plea realizing that the ’73 Convention was less than a year away.

A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles

During the first years of his Synod presidency Jack Preus published several writings. In 1970, he produced a translation from Latin of Martin Chemnitz’ Two


44 Ibid., 1.
Natures in Christ.\textsuperscript{45} He followed this in 1971 with It Is Written,\textsuperscript{46} a book describing how Christ and His Apostles regarded the Scriptures as true and authoritative. He concluded that he was astonished by “so-called theologians” who have given themselves to a criticism of the Bible that destroys Scripture and deprives the Church of the Biblical message.\textsuperscript{47} With the title of this short book, Preus was subtly sending another message about his own origins: “It Is Written” is the motto of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.\textsuperscript{48}

Then, in March 1972, Preus sent a letter to all members of the LCMS with “A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles” (A Statement-Preus) attached. It appeared to be Preus’ work but was widely known to have been composed by CSSL systematics professor Ralph Bohlmann. Preus called these guidelines, which were needed because of teaching in the Synod about the Word of God and its Confessional stance that was at variance with MS instruction.\textsuperscript{49} In his letter, he mentioned Fulbright scholar and professor Arlis Ehlen (1932-2017) whose contract at CSSL had recently been renewed for one year. This disappointed Preus because of Ehlen’s denial of miraculous

\textsuperscript{45} Martin Chemnitz, The Two Natures in Christ; a Monograph Concerning the Two Natures in Christ, Their Hypostatic Union, the Communication of Their Attributes, and Related Questions, Recently Prepared and Revised on the Basis of Scripture and the Witnesses of the Ancient Church., trans. Jacob A. O. Preus (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1971).

\textsuperscript{46} J. A. O. Preus, It Is Written (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 73-74.

\textsuperscript{48} “It Is Written” is also the motto of the Lutheran Sentinel, a journal of the ELS.

\textsuperscript{49} In July 1970, the Washington Post reported in an interview of Preus by one of its reporters that Preus planned to develop procedures that would enable him to eliminate pastors and professors who taught outside MS boundaries. See Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, 66.
events connected to the Exodus story. The longest section in his document addressed the Holy Scriptures and its authority, infallibility, and method of interpretation. The guidelines rejected in considerable detail ideas that may have entered the thinking of pastors and teachers in Missouri. A sampling of the teachings A Statement-Preus refuted are:

- The Scriptures have theological and factual contradictions and errors.
- Predictive prophecy is impossible because of human limitations.
- Miracles should be explained as events of nature whenever possible.
- The meaning a canonical text has now may differ from the meaning it had when first written.
- The literary form of Genesis 3 argues against the historicity of the Fall.

Preus and his colleagues now had a written statement to evaluate any professor, pastor, or teacher in the MS.

**The New Orleans Convention, July 6-13, 1973**

Along with many non-voting attendees, over 1,000 lay and clergy voting delegates assembled at the Rivergate convention center in New Orleans in early July.

---


51 Ibid., 76-86.

52 Ibid., 80.

53 A Statement-Preus may not have been literally nor frequently used in personal settings. Via email, Dr. Robert Hausman explained to this student that at Concordia College, River Forest, President Paul A. Zimmerman questioned him about his theological beliefs without using A Statement-Preus.
Of course, moderates and conservatives worked for the election of delegates supportive of their views.\textsuperscript{54} Would the assembly make \textit{A Statement-Preus} binding on everyone in the whole Synod? Jack Preus argued that someone (Preus himself) in the LCMS ought to have the authority to determine how the Lutheran faith should be interpreted in pulpits and classrooms. Despite objections that this proposal was “unLutheran,” Resolution 3-01 was adopted 562-455, where a simple majority was required.\textsuperscript{55} The convention gave Preus the authority to interpret the faith for the MS. 

There were many other resolutions pertaining simply to the business and policy of the Synod. Two other resolutions, however, stand out as important for this study: Resolution 2-38 concerned the historical critical method and Resolution 3-09 requested a vote to condemn the teaching positions of the CSSL Faculty Majority.

To Repudiate the Historical Critical Method

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) was founded because of concerns in the 1960s that a standing group of theologians was needed to respond to and provide guidance for theological issues that were arising in the Synod. There were in the 1960s enough moderate theologians on the CTCR to respond favorably to historical criticism in official synodical pronouncements. In 1966, CTCR produced \textit{A}

\textsuperscript{54} Tietjen, \textit{Memoirs in Exile}, 142-43. Tietjen described the selection of delegates as follows: “Because voting delegates made the convention’s decisions, delegate selection was crucial. The Missouri Synod’s districts were divided up into electoral circuits with one pastor and one lay person chosen from each circuit. Each pair of delegates represented from seven to twenty congregations involving an aggregate communicant membership ranging from fifteen hundred to ten thousand.”

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 149-52.
Lutheran Stance toward Biblical Studies, which explained the need to reexamine the assumptions of “our fathers” who correctly protested crass theological liberalism in modern Biblical scholarship. There has been a change in direction, it stated, toward a more conservative, more Biblical theology which practices historical criticism more responsibly. There should not be the assumption “that our church’s present judgment needs to coincide at all points with that of the fathers.”\textsuperscript{56} The report concluded that the Synod could continue to apprise modern Biblical scholarship and use elements of historical criticism with necessary controls.\textsuperscript{57}

By the 1970s, however, the CTCR had come under the influence of more conservative members.\textsuperscript{58} When the Synod suspected that historical criticism was the cause of doctrinal irregularity in Missouri, the Commission produced a comparison of the Synod’s traditional historical-grammatical view and the historical-critical view, titled A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation. The report concluded that historical criticism reduced the Bible to mere human thought and recommended that the Synod reject and repudiate any method that diminishes the “not-of-this-world” character of the Bible. It reaffirmed the traditional historical-grammatical

\textsuperscript{56} Commission on Theology and Church Relations, A Lutheran Stance Toward Contemporary Biblical Studies (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1966), 5.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{58} Self-described conservative Dr. Richard Jungkuntz (1918-2003), a moderate from Missouri’s perspective, was removed from leadership of the Commission early in the Preus administration. Jungkuntz had come to the MS from the Wisconsin Synod and had been a teacher at Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois during the Preus administration.
approach. By the authority of the CTCR and without a convention vote, the LCMS repudiated the historical critical method and directed that it not be used for interpretation at its colleges and seminaries. This was Resolution 2-38.

To Condemn Elements of the Teaching of the Faculty Majority

Article II of the Synod’s constitution required unqualified commitment to the Scriptures and the Confessions. This resolution, Resolution 3-09, described the Faculty Majority as interpreting the Synod’s confessional position according to its own subjective preference. Professors were acting individually and not “walking together” with the LCMS. Three violations were cited.

The Subversion of the Authority of Scripture, the Formal Principle

The New Orleans Convention charged CSSL with abolishing the formal principle, sola Scriptura, inferring that the faculty denied that Scriptures are the sole norm of doctrine. The Faculty Majority had asserted that the Gospel is the governing principle in Lutheran theology, saying: “It is our conviction that any effort . . . to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith or the governing principle for our theology is to be rejected as unLutheran . . ..” The Convention resolution described

59 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, March 1973), 19.

60 See Concordia Historical Institute, The Doctrinal Resolutions of the National Conventions of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod 1847-2004, 561-62. No vote was required for this (Resolution 2-38). It was adopted by authority of the CTCR and referred to the Synodical Board of Directors for implementation.
the faculty teaching as “fusing” the formal principle into the “Gospel principle” and so rejecting the Scriptures as a norm for doctrine.  

**Gospel Reductionism: Reducing the Authority of Scripture to its Gospel Content**

John Montgomery had charged the Valparaiso theologians with Gospel reductionism in the 1960s. The CTCR dealt with this question in a 1972 report called *Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology.* The report explained that Gospel reductionism made the Gospel the norm for the Scriptures and set up the Gospel as a core from which all other teachings of the Bible are merely deduced. The Synod’s position was that the Scriptures are the norm for the Gospel. The Synod argued that the Gospel as a summary is inseparably united to its source, the Scriptures.

The CSSL Faculty Majority had earlier in 1973 directly challenged this Synod stance in *Faithful to Our Calling Faithful to our Lord,* a two-volume confession of personal and collective belief. The faculty first made clear that the issue in Missouri was

---

61 Ibid, 574-576.

62 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *Gospel and Scripture: the Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, November 1972). CSSL professors Edgar Krentz and Edward Schroeder, and Valparaiso professor Paul Bretscher were members of the Commission and voted against approving *Gospel and Scripture.*

63 Ibid, 10.

64 Ibid, 21.

65 Concordia Seminary, *Faithful to Our Calling, Faithful to Our Lord; an Affirmation in Two Parts* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Seminary, 1973).
not academic freedom but Gospel freedom that Christ established for the whole Church.66 The faculty asserted that the Gospel is the center of the Scriptures and “the Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character, not vice versa.” The faculty document implied that the Synod wanted to make inspiration or inerrancy a guarantee of the truth of the Gospel, something that the Synod denied in its CTCR document.67

**Denial of the Third Use of the Law**

The Fact Finding Committee reported in the *Blue Book* that, as they saw it, the Faculty Majority either rejected the third use of the Law as a guide for Christian living or expressed confusion and ambiguity. The Committee implied this made possible the teaching of antinomianism and situation ethics, although no specific allegations were made.68

Following up on the *Blue Book* assertions, the Convention resolution charged the Faculty Majority with claiming to adhere to the third use of the Law69 but in truth they really meant the second use of the Law. The Faculty Majority, it said, stressed “the continuing significance of the Ten Commandments as God’s law exposing human sin.” Christians should face the criticism of the Law and deal with one another in love, said the

---

66 Faculty of Concordia Seminary, *Faithful to Our Calling, Faithful to Our Lord; an Affirmation in Two Parts*, vol. 1–A Witness to Our Faith, A Joint Statement and Discussion of Issues (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1973), 3-4.

67 Ibid., 21.

68 Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Preus, *Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod*, 120.

69 Article VI of the Formula of Concord.
Faculty. The Synod’s resolution called this an expression of Neo-Lutheranism and a denial that Luther ever taught the third use of the Law.70 These areas of concern, the resolution stated, demonstrated that the Faculty Majority was out of sync with Synodical teaching and doctrine.71

After the resolution condemning the faculty passed, Preus offered Tietjen the opportunity to resign as president of CSSL and take a call to a congregation. A vote was coming before the convention on Resolution 3-12A titled, “To Deal with Dr. John Tietjen under the Provisions of Synod’s Handbook.” The Synod Handbook provided procedures for removing seminary presidents from their positions. The Board of Control, with conservatives in place, could expect to remove Tietjen administratively by this means. Tietjen refused Preus’ offer, Resolution 12A passed 513-394, and, after several months of due process, his eventual suspension followed in 1974.72

70 Concordia Historical Institute, The Doctrinal Resolutions of the National Conventions of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod 1847-2004, 579-80.

71 See Tietjen, Memoirs in Exile, 140-41. Prior to the vote on this resolution (3-09), Tietjen addressed the Convention and explained that these charges condemning the Faculty Majority were false. However, Eugene Klug (1928-2015) of the Concordia Springfield Seminary addressed the Convention and explained that everything in the resolution had been thoroughly researched and was correct.

72 Ibid., 156-57. Convention leaders concluded they did not have time for Resolution 3-12, which charged Tietjen with multiple failures including false doctrine, intimidation, insubordination and many others. Had this passed, Tietjen would have been forced to resign at the Convention or be dismissed.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

This study has sought to deliver a balanced understanding of the serious division in the LCMS in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and to recognize that both conservatives and moderates share responsibility for the ruinous outcome. The student-writer is a descendent of Franconian Lutherans from the state of Bavaria, Germany, who emigrated to America and settled in Frankenmuth, Frankentrost, and Frankenlust in the Saginaw Valley of Michigan in the mid-1800s. They were among early members of the LCMS. This effort has aspired to draw out and focus on concepts related to the Word of God in this conflict, while acknowledging that politics, confessional theology, and discussions of church fellowship were impingements as well. The statement of the “44” and the Martin Scharlemann episodes were lesser disturbances compared to the major conflict in the 1970s. But all three happenings demonstrate the pattern of disturbance-response-resolution-return to equilibrium. It was characteristic of the MS to attempt to return to a place of “walking together.”

Obvious in this conflict were the many streams of thought regarding the Scriptures and the Word of God, their divine inspiration, inerrancy, and authority and, as moderates taught, their susceptibility to historical criticism as human writings. Biblical terminology and Aristotelian philosophical terms from Lutheran Orthodoxy of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century were a part of the discussion. Biblical discourse often referenced one or more of
these statements: *Brief Statement-Pieper, A Statement-44, and A Statement-Preus*. The Preus brothers came from the ELS to the LCMS, and promoted Lutheran Orthodoxy in their teaching, writing, and publishing. The Erlangen School of Theology that Pieper opposed so strongly made headway for a time in the MS through Werner Elert and the essays of Martin Scharlemann. There was a revival of Walther’s Law-Gospel emphasis. Robert Bertram and Edward Schroeder advocated for Werner Elert and Law-Gospel theology in their “Promising Tradition.” John Montgomery charged that the Valparaiso Theology was really “Gospel Reductionism.” Theology and the Word of God were in the mix with politics and Lutheran Confessional perspectives in this conflict.

This arena of turmoil needed the entry of an apostolic genius with expertise in methods of organizational and institutional change and giftedness in Lutheran theology, Lutheran Orthodoxy, and the Confessions. There was no one like this and the political powers of the LCMS resolved the issues democratically by majority vote at the 1973 New Orleans Convention.

Conservatives achieved an astounding pyrrhic victory. Concordia Seminary retained 5 faculty and discarded, by firing, 45 other gifted members of its staff. This, after President Preus stated that his investigative focus would only be the 10 or so exegetes who were using historical criticism in the classroom. The Synod was willing to part with people like systematician Arthur Carl Piepkorn1 who earned a Ph.D. in Assyriology at age 24 and was Commandant of the US Army Chaplain School. He

---

1 Piepkorn was not fired but was forcibly retired at age 65 and died prior to the firing of the faculty.
assisted in organizing and participating in US Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues where Catholic scholars acknowledged he could out quote them in ancient Latin documents.

Within Missouri, Piepkorn was the expert, in the original Latin or German, for the Lutheran Confessions and Lutheran Orthodoxy. He usually called the Bible the “Sacred Scriptures.”

The Synod parted with many students, too, as indicated in Table 6. Most enrolled in Christ Seminary-Seminex while some accepted calls.

### Table 6. Changes in CSSL Student Enrollment, 1973-75

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Year:</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Special</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973-74 Enrollment</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75 Enrollment</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conservatives’ politics were cold and harsh. Professors were fired and ordered out of their faculty offices on short notice. The political machine had been working for years to move the right people into boards, committees, and delegate roles. They succeeded.

But moderates and the Faculty Majority shouldered blame in this conflict, too. They were not sensitive to the beliefs of the Old Lutheran heritage in Missouri. These

---


were descendants of German Lutherans opposed to the Prussian Union. They still understood what distinguished them from Neo-Lutherans of the 19th century. They were generally not ecumenically-minded believers. Since its founding in 1847, the MS had never merged with any other church body. Many were repristination, strict Confessional Lutherans whose ancestors embraced a return to Lutheran Orthodoxy in the early 19th century. Moderates failed to recognize and implement the careful guidance and discerning leadership that would have been required to move the MS even modestly into Biblical historical criticism. A Law-Gospel renewal was acceptable but not, as it turned out, without the Scriptures as the norm for the Gospel.

Moderates had challenged the Pieperian Tradition, so solid that even in the 21st century there are still Missouri clergymen who call themselves “Pieperians.” Today, approximately 98% of MS members consider the Scriptures to be the Word of God.4 Moderates did not announce or explain their intentions to add Biblical historical criticism and introduce other new theological ideas at CSSL. As Vice President Wiederaenders recalled there was always a denial of change when many knew there was significant change. Conservatives were not naïve about Tietjen’s well-documented view that Lutherans should be one unified Lutheran Church. But it had taken 31 years—from the 1938 St. Louis Resolutions to the 1969 agreement—for the LCMS just to establish fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (which was not the church body with

4 Nafzger, Samuel, interview by Donn Wilson, January 2017. The statistic of 98% was provided by Dr. Nafzger, former Executive Secretary of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations.
which it began discussions). And this altar and fellowship agreement was revoked by Missouri 12 years later.

What were the intentions of moderates and where were they leading the Synod? The moderate Edward Friedrich drew attention to the faculty’s leadership problem. He and O. P. Kretzmann, President of Valparaiso University, agreed on this:

We always felt that the St. Louis faculty was doing an awfully poor public relations job. They were kind of sitting in an ivory tower, and many of them—some of them were my friends, but I’ve got to say it—they were just not willing to accept any suggestions. And their public relations efforts—well, they made no efforts. I think that was one of their big mistakes. They kind of isolated themselves from the rest of the church. I don’t mean they did it intentionally. I don’t think it was intentional. But that’s the way it turned out.

Open communication about plans for change at CSSL might have eased tensions in the Synod. Conservatives regarded the moderates’ actions at CSSL as a stealth maneuver to control the direction of the LCMS. This incensed enough of them to react politically. The fraternal discussions about doctrine and direction which Tietjen proposed in 1972 really needed to begin years earlier.

The differences between the two sides were likely so great that a peaceful separation would have been the wisest solution earlier than 1973. Moderates and conservatives both understood themselves to be Confessional Lutherans committed to the Holy Scriptures. Moderates, though, had much more latitude to be historically critical of the Scriptures and to see the Gospel as the norm for Biblical teaching. For conservatives in Missouri, the starting point of Biblical understanding is always that the Scriptures are
the written Word of God, the source and norm of doctrine. Although these opponents attempted reconciliation at a theological convocation in April 1975 at CSSL, a negotiated outcome was never achieved.

---

5 Traditional MS Lutherans could not agree to Scriptures that “contain the Word but are not the Word.”

6 Nafzger, Samuel. Nafzger believes some aspects of historical criticism are acceptable if the approach begins with acceptance of the Scriptures as the Word of God. The exegete should not begin with a cross examination to determine if the text is the Word of God, he stated.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


———. *Scripture Cannot Be Broken; Six Objections to Verbal Inspiration Examined in the Light of Scripture.* St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1944.

Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. *Statistical Year-Book of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States for the Year 1945.* St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1945.


Meyer, Carl S. “Historical Background of ‘a Brief Statement.’” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32, no. 9 (September 1961): 526-42.


Preus, Jacob A.O. “Integrity, Schism, Neither, Both.” *Christianity Today* 19, no. 2 (October 25, 1974): 11.


Scharlemann, Martin H. “The Bible as Record, Witness, and Medium.” Unpublished, 1959. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

———. “The Inerrancy of Scripture.” Unpublished, 1958. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.

———. “Revelation and Inspiration.” Unpublished, 1959. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, MO.


