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Observing Two Anniversaries

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born on October 25, 1811, in Langenchursdorf, Saxony, Germany. It is appropriate that this issue honor C.F.W. Walther on this 200th anniversary of his birth because of his significant influence as the first and third president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (1847–1850 and 1864–1878) and also president and professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (1850–1887). Most of the articles below, which were first presented at the 2011 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in Fort Wayne, reflect his influence in many areas of biblical teaching, confessional subscription, and the life of the church in mission. These historical and theological studies are offered here so that Walther may be understood in his context and continue to be a blessed voice in our synod as we face the future.

This issue also recognizes one other anniversary. The venerated King James Version of the Bible, first printed in 1611, is now 400 years old. The article below on the King James Version was originally given as a paper at the 2011 Symposium on Exegetical Theology in honor of this anniversary. The importance of this translation for the English-speaking world is widely acknowledged. Although many may think that its day has passed, this article demonstrates the ongoing influence of the King James Version through other translations.

The Editors

Theological Observer

Dean Wenthe: An Appreciation

[The following remarks were offered at the banquet recognizing the retirement of Dr. Dean O. Wenthe from the presidency of Concordia Theological Seminary on May 26, 2011. They are reprinted from For the Life of the World (July 2011): 12-13. The Editors]

One thing that has always characterized Dr. Dean Wenthe is his engaging, encouraging personality. From the time I was a student at this seminary, agonizing over sermon preparation, to discussing "future possibilities" with him following his election to the presidency of CTS in the spring of 1996, to serving with him in seminary administration, he has consistently held forth a gracious, Christ-centered vision for this institution and encouraged his colleagues in the same.

President Wenthe's accomplishments in office are too lengthy to list at this point. However, it is worth noting that having assumed the presidency in challenging circumstances, he has provided the seminary with outstanding leadership. First, he was guiding the seminary as it received, for the first time in its history, ten-year accreditation from both the Association of Theological Schools and the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, the highest level of accreditation achievable. Secondly, his commitment to mission has led to this institution being known the world over through its international work, particularly his support of the "Russian Program." Thirdly, his compassion has found concrete expression in the establishment of the deaconess program in 2003. Finally, no retrospective of his service would be complete if it failed to mention that it was under Dr. Wenthe's leadership that, after more than 30 years, the seminary has successfully begun expansion of its library facilities, creating a structure that can only be described as world class.

Recently, while doing some research in the CTS archives, I found a document delivered by Dr. Wenthe in 1979. During this time he was pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Atlantic, Iowa. He had been invited to return to campus to speak to the fourth-year class, to whom he said:

Our primary calling as theologians is to interpret reality for ourselves and for our people. In our day, we behold the tragic paradox of secular man seeking something more solid than the phony, penultimate, pleasure trips, of either the gross or more refined variety, that are constantly held before us as the only route worth traveling . . . and, in their seeking, find no one to speak to them of that which is solid and real. The saints whom you serve will at times overwhelm you with their support and love. The sinners whom you serve will at times send you scampering to the throne of grace for more patience and wisdom than your flesh can muster. And yet,

on this latter point, I can forthrightly say that for all their frailties you will find your flock a joy to serve. I was simply not prepared for that closeness which is forged between Pastor and people as they seek to live a real life in the midst of a phony world. Frankly, it's great! And if these tasks do not plant the seeds of joy and happiness in our service, then we have ourselves drifted from that which is real.

For nearly 40 years of service to this seminary, 15 of which were spent as president, we can only say "thank you" to Dr. Dean Wenthe for his collegiality and the way in which he has embodied this CTS mission to form servants in Jesus Christ who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

An Old Seminary, a New President, and the Unfolding of Divine History

[The following is the collegial recognition speech given by the Academic Dean on behalf of the faculty at the banquet that followed the installation of Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. as the 16th President of Concordia Theological Seminary on September 11, 2011. The Editors]

Although you know this already, President Rast, let me assure you and the whole church that the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary is profoundly thankful to our Lord for your election and installation, and each member of this faculty stands united with you as we serve under your leadership in the vital work of forming servants in Jesus Christ for his harvest field. As a highly respected colleague for the past 15 years who has been involved in seminary administration in some manner almost as long, you already enjoy the faculty's complete confidence and support. Let me also assure you of even our sympathy and sincere prayers as you formally take up your challenging duties!

I think it was one of my colleagues who quipped that with the election of Larry Rast as seminary president and the transition of Dean Wenthe out of that office, we had witnessed Moses handing over his staff to younger Joshua. This historical analogy is worth pressing a bit further. The person who would lead Israel out of the slavery of Egypt was no by no means clear to Israel, much less to Moses, as can be seen from the narrative in Exodus. Who would fill the presidential void here in the post-Robert Preus era was certainly not clear to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, much less to Dean Wenthe, until the Lord gave him the staff in the midst of a challenging time in this seminary's history. The past 15 years have been richly blessed, but—as we all know—they have not been a quick triumphant march to the promised land, always flowing with the milk of the church's support and the honey of abundant students. It took our Moses 14 years to drain the lake so that bulldozers could cross on dry ground to construct a library that was needed already when this seminary

returned here from Springfield in 1976. Unlike 15 years ago, however, there was little doubt among your colleagues that the Lord had raised up one who would follow faithful Moses, the younger Joshua. We only waited for the electors to confirm the Lord's will.

The reason the installation we just witnessed in Kramer Chapel is significant is that it is part of divine history. At the time, few in this world beyond Jericho and some other conquered cities took notice of Joshua and the people of Israel. The reason Moses, Joshua, the people of Israel, Wenthe, Rast, and this seminary in Fort Wayne are significant is because we are part of divine history. Several psalms of the Psalter adeptly express the history of Israel as divine history: it is God acting in and through sinful people, sometimes in spite of them! Who at the time thought that Jesus' three-year training of his first twelve pastors, primarily in the hinterland of Galilee, was important for the world's future? Luke, among others, however, viewed the actions of the apostles as divine history that was transforming the world: "The Word of the Lord grew and multiplied." Why was Luther so important? He was part of divine history, an instrument used by God to testify mightily to God's grace in Christ Jesus. Anyone who has read Erich Heintzen's *Prairie School of the Prophets* realizes that the history of this seminary is very often, as our new president would bluntly put it, rather depressing! Yet, with all its struggles to survive and journeys between three states, we recognize and rejoice that this seminary is part of divine history as Jesus has called, formed, and sent forth countless servants faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, year after year, decade after decade, for 165 years.

President Rast, your colleagues are confident you will help us learn from the past as you lead this seminary with confessional integrity and boldness into the future. May you be encouraged by the realization that we are participants in the divine history of salvation that our Lord is continuing to unfold in our midst. It is a history unfolding with each service in Kramer Chapel in which Jesus is present with his gifts of life and forgiveness, every class that lifts up his death and resurrection as the source of salvation, every faithful student who is sent from here to testify to Jesus in this world. It is a history that will not end with seminary enrollment struggles or income shortfalls, but with our Lord's glorious return and our resurrection. When a future generation reflects on the divine history unfolding right here and now with you, President Rast, may it be written: "As for him and his seminary-fold, they served the Lord."

Charles A. Gieschen

The Sacred Character of Human Life

[This is the response of Dr. Dean O. Wenthe upon receiving the Telemachus Award from the Allen County Right to Life for Pro-Life Activities at their annual banquet in Fort Wayne on October 10, 2011. The Editors]

My gratitude for this award is joined to gratitude for all of you who support life. I rejoice in the clear and courageous witness of Bishop Emeritus D'Arcy, Bishop Rhoades, the Roman Catholic Church, and Evangelical Christians in many denominations and other traditions who confess the sacred character of life. I am also grateful for my own portion of the Christian family, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, her president, Matthew C. Harrison, and my colleagues and students at Concordia Theological Seminary for their solidarity on this crucial matter. And, on a personal level, I am thankful for my ever supportive wife, Linda, who as a nurse and mother has stood for life.

What we are about is far more than a question of ethics, the righteous propriety of a particular act, though, such a question merits our full energies in and of itself where life is at stake. Rather, we are engaged in a foundational and fundamental debate on what it is to be a human being. On this level of reflection, some human beings without the benefit of scriptural revelation have come to the right answer. Ancient Assyrians, Hippocrates, as well as diverse peoples and cultures around the globe and through time have rightly perceived that to end life in the womb is murder. Natural law speaks truth while the deceptive vocabulary of a secular culture seeks to disguise the fact that a baby is alive with heart and organs by use of terms such as “fetus” or simply “pregnancy.” Natural law still works.

With the light of revelation, however, what it is to be human becomes even clearer—beautifully clear! When Moses penned Genesis, the Egyptian, Palestinian, and Mesopotamian cultures were rich with epic accounts of the cosmos. In their grand epics, the narrative of creation placed the real action with the gods whom they identified with the sun, the moon, stars, the sea, various creatures, and even statuary. History was an unfolding story of the gods' preferences and choices. Human beings were simply not major players. They were marginal and insignificant. In such a context, Genesis 1 and 2 are revolutionary. They offer a radically different view of what it is to be human. Here human beings are not marginal and incidental. Here Adam and Eve are the very apex of God's creative labors. They alone are made in God's image for intimate communion with him. Here the sun, the moon, and all of creation are gifts from a gracious God to support the life of humanity. Here God personally and intimately forms human beings as a potter molds clay and breathes into human beings the breath of life.

This answer to what constitutes human life is full of wonder and imparts value to every single individual. This answer is so clearly and lovingly

expressed by Jesus when he asserts: "There is joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner who repents" Luke 15:10. That is how much value each and every human being has by virtue of who we are as the handiwork of a gracious, giving God. Indeed, God gives us His Son as a man. Gabriel addresses Mary: "You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus" [Luke 1:31 NIV]. The original is much more specific for it literally reads "you will become pregnant in your womb." I very much appreciate the artist Fra Angelico's rendering of the Annunciation, for he shows Mary reverencing the angel; yet, the Angel Gabriel is also reverencing Mary, for God—Jesus—is now present in her womb. How beautiful! This moment defines all others as God becomes flesh for us and displays in Jesus what it is to be fully human. As the poet John Donne captured:

Tw'as much that man was made
Like God before
But that God would be made
Like man much more.

My encouragement is that we courageously and tirelessly articulate and confess the beauty of this Christian vision, for it is foundational truth about human life. Powerful and winsomely deceptive voices in our day seek to re-mythologize the cosmos and to reduce human beings to mere accidents in an evolutionary black hole. With Moses, with Jesus, we bring a word that redeems human beings from such a cold, dark existence and end. May God bless us and our words so that every human being may be refreshed by the beautiful truth about who they are in the essence of their being. And by God's grace, may all hear the good news of Jesus who lifts our lives to God when he says: "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Dean O. Wenthe