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Theological Observer

The History and Goal of the Concordia Commentary Series

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1).¹ The divine Word is the means by which God spoke the creation into existence. Adam’s transgression against the Word plunged the world into sin and death, but God in his grace nevertheless calls fallen men and women to faith and bespeaks them righteous on account of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14). The eternal Word of Christ, committed to writing by the prophets and apostles as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, is the foundation and lifeblood of the church, the sole source and norm of the Christian faith and life. The gospel alone enlarges the kingdom of God by bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation to the world of sinners, among whom we are the foremost (cf. 1 Tim 1:15–16). We are saved by grace alone and through faith alone (Eph 2:8–9), “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). I believe the Concordia Commentary series is one of the corporate “good works” God prepared for the current generation of confessional Lutherans to “walk in,” confident that the Lord who has begun this “good work” “will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6).

The idea for the current Concordia Commentary series was first verbalized in 1989 as editors Rev. Dr. Christopher W. Mitchell and Rev. Bruce A. Cameron mused over the dusty holdings in the Concordia Publishing House library.² They soon broached the topic with Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Carter, vice president of CPH at that time, and later, CPH president (1995–2001). Carter immediately recognized both how audaciously ambitious the project would be and how “eager, determined, and passionate,” in his estimation, the young editors were to pursue it. He identified the series as a “legacy” that we could leave for the benefit of future generations. In spring 1990, Carter conferred with Mr. John W. (“Jack”) Gerber, CPH president (1986–1995), who directed the finance department to draw up a projection of the costs.³ After a couple years of planning, the series was formally launched on July 7,

¹ All Scripture translations are by the author.

² The author has collected many original documents from the early years of the series. The present article draws on them and on presentations (written, delivered orally) to various groups at venues that included the two seminaries and International Center of the LCMS. A shorter article, complementary to this one, was published with the title “A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture” in *The Lutheran Witness* (September 2019), 20–22.

³ Research projected that the series would cost about \$2 million. Gerber determined that this could not be funded internally, but would require an outside donation.

1992. CPH pledged to produce a commentary series that is faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, employs the best of modern scholarship, and is eminently useful for pastors in their ministries. Thus the commentaries are to be Lutheran, scholarly, and evangelical in service to the church's ministry and mission. CPH's original press release (July 7, 1992) states this goal, along with the optimistic initial estimate of its scope and timeframe:

On July 7, 1992 Concordia Publishing House embarked on a 15-year project⁴ to produce and publish a 30-volume⁵ scholarly commentary on the entire Bible. The Concordia Commentary will be a careful exegetical and theological commentary on the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of Scripture. . . . The purpose of the commentary is to fill a vital niche currently occupied by few other works. Drawing on diverse areas of biblical scholarship, including philology, archaeology, history, linguistics, and theology, the Concordia Commentary will focus primarily on Scripture's *kerygma*—the evangelical proclamation emanating from God's Word that calls people to faith in Christ Jesus and empowers them for Christian service and ministry. This commentary will examine individual texts from the perspective of the whole canon, treating both testaments as a unity centering on the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah. The history of God's people, from Israel to the apostolic church and including the contemporary church, is relevant as the historical manifestation of God's working through his Word. Theological themes in the text, such as grace, mercy, covenant, temple, sacrifice, priesthood, Messiah/Christ, apostle, baptism, Lord's Supper, mission, and parousia, will be highlighted and matrixed into the whole of biblical theology. . . .

While generally conservative in matters of isagogics and reverent in tone, the commentary will relate the message of Scripture in a fresh, joyful, and invigorating manner, emphasizing the unity of all believers in Christ, their mission to the entire world, and their responsibilities in both church and society. The perspective will be international and transdenominational.

Why undertake a commentary series? This question was posed from the start within CPH and whenever the proposal was set before others in the church's ministerium. A response, at first oral, and then written, was developed in 1990–1993, beginning with a theological rationale and then addressing logistical considerations.

⁴ During the planning in 1990–1992, the CPH editors estimated that the series would take twenty years to complete, but the CPH president persuaded the team to aim for fifteen years in the public communications in 1992.

⁵ Earlier drafts of the press release stated that the series would be twenty-six volumes or twenty-six to thirty volumes, but the final version stated the number as thirty.

Jesus Christ comes to us through his word, bringing us life and salvation. We describe that doctrinally by saying that the Lutheran Church is the church of *sola Scriptura*. Therefore the proper interpretation of the Scriptures is of the highest priority. The Formula of Concord states, “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (FC Ep Rule and Norm 1).⁶ That formulation remains just as true today as it did in 1580. If we are to be the Christian Church, the body of Christ and his disciples, we must abide in his word; through the word alone shall we know the truth that frees us from our sins, from death, and from the devil (John 8:21–59). The church’s mission is carried out through the faithful proclamation of the word. Bible commentaries that are true to the Scriptures fortify the teaching of the church’s doctors, the preaching of her pastors, and the Bible study of all the faithful, even as the books themselves, often in ways unforeseen, carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.⁷

The Lutheran Church, and Concordia Publishing House in particular, has a long record of publishing sturdy doctrinal works. However, in previous decades of the twentieth century substantive exegetical publications were not copious. The best Lutheran commentary sets were the Old Testament series by Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch (originally published in German in the 1850s–1870s) and the New Testament series by Richard C. H. Lenski (from the 1920s–1930s).⁸ In contrast, the twentieth century witnessed the proliferation of competing series from diverse perspectives, many of them Reformed, some nominally Lutheran, a few Roman Catholic. Academic series often were predominately secular and suffered from critical methodologies that were, to a lesser or greater degree, inimical to the Christian message of the Scriptures themselves.

The thirtieth convention of the LCMS, held in Fort Wayne in 1941, recommended that CPH undertake the publication of a Lutheran Bible commentary series.⁹ Toward this end, three volumes ensued in the 1950s with the series title

⁶ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 464. See also FC Ep Rule and Norm 2; FC SD Rule and Norm 3.

⁷ At gatherings such as the Society of Biblical Literature, the author is often amazed by the international professors, pastors, and leaders from other church bodies, and from underground associations of Christians from all over the world, who seek out these books to take home.

⁸ There were other significant Lutheran volumes, such as the commentaries by Herbert C. Leupold, but those covered only a fraction of the biblical canon.

⁹ A quotation is provided in William F. Arndt, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), vii.

“Bible Commentary”: Dr. Theodore Laetsch penned *Jeremiah* (1952) and *The Minor Prophets* (1956),¹⁰ and William F. Arndt wrote *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (1956). These were hefty expositions that engaged the original languages with theological depth appropriate for serious exegetes such as pastors. In 1956, William F. Arndt asked:

Does the issuing of a new commentary on the Scriptures need a defense? Books of interpretation, be they ever so excellent, can never be considered final. “The Word of the Lord endures forever,” but the books written about it constantly have to be revised, rewritten, brought up to date, and improved. . . . In addition, it is reasonable to assume that if in a church body a new commentary on the Scriptures appears, this event will be a means of stimulating Bible study in the denomination. Is there anything more desirable in a church than the study of the Holy Writings, the fountain of divine truth, the source of the Gospel of salvation, the rock on which our faith rests, the basis of wisdom for resolving our individual and social problems?¹¹

That “Bible Commentary” series was put on hold later in the 1950s when CPH decided to publish the Luther’s Works series and did not have the resources to maintain both series simultaneously. In the 1960s, CPH resumed the effort to publish a series, now titled “Concordia Commentary.” Five volumes were published in 1968–1970, and none thereafter.¹² This series became a casualty of the doctrinal controversies that culminated in the walkout in 1974, whereupon some authors (and editors) exited the LCMS.¹³ Unlike the previous academic volumes designed for learned clergy, the commentaries in this second effort were intended to reach two different audiences, pastors and laity alike, but in the estimation of many they did not adequately reach either. Lay readers found them cerebral while clergy considered them superficial because of their brevity and neglect of the original languages.

¹⁰ Dr. J. A. O. Preus II once remarked that Laetsch was not deemed by his contemporaries to have been the preeminent LCMS exegete of the era, but because he wrote two commentaries he became one of the most influential, whereas others, who may have been more talented but did not write, did not have as lasting an impact. Preus impressed upon me that the same would hold true for our generation: those who write commentaries will guide the church for generations whereas those who do not will not.

¹¹ Arndt, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, vii–viii.

¹² Volumes published by CPH bearing the series title “Concordia Commentary” were *1–2 Samuel* by Ralph D. Gehrke (1968); *Jeremiah and Lamentations* by Norman C. Habel (1968); *Acts* by Robert H. Smith (1970); *Romans* by Martin H. Franzmann (1968); and a combined volume covering 1–2 Timothy and Titus by H. Armin Moellering and Philemon by Victor A. Bartling (1970).

¹³ See Lawrence R. Rast Jr., “Forty Years after Seminex: Reflections on Social and Theological Factors Leading to the Walkout,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 80.3 (2016): 195–215.

The need for a new academic Lutheran exposition remained unmet. In 1990–1991, CPH research¹⁴ found that about 65 percent of LCMS pastors owned and used the New Testament series by Lenski (1920s–1930s) and about 40 percent the Old Testament series by Keil and Delitzsch (1850s–1870s). No other series was owned by more than 10 percent of our pastors. They told us that they simply did not trust the theology in any other series. Yet those venerable series were not without their weaknesses. Their layout is essentially a massive, run-on text, and their philology is dated.¹⁵ When one author (or two) with limited areas of expertise attempts to cover the entirety of a Testament, the writer may be prone to repeat himself, wax eloquent on topics within his specialty, and skip issues outside his purview. The Concordia Commentary series seeks to surpass those predecessors by selecting the best scholar for each biblical book, providing collegial guidance through the editorial team and the synodical process of doctrinal review, and publishing the material in a tripartite organization, comprised of the author’s translation, textual notes on the original languages, and theological exposition.

On October 30–31, 1990, the LCMS Advisory Committee on Church Literature, meeting at CPH, devoted considerable discussion to the presentation by Bruce Cameron to revive and redo the Concordia Commentary series. The four-page presentation stated that this would require the “commitment of the church at large and CPH to a 20-year project,” at a cost of 1.5 to 2 million dollars, with “a strong, hard-working editor” and ten to fifteen authors, and it outlined three schemes to cover the biblical canon in twenty-six, thirty-one, or thirty-five volumes. A summary of the meeting was included in a letter written by Carter on November 27, 1990, addressed to LCMS President Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, John W. Gerber, Richard Kapfer, Alan Harre, Daniel Preus, and Dean Wenthe, noting the “generally favorable reaction” to the plan, which “could give new impetus for theological research and discussion” and provide a “proactive approach to advancing Confessional Lutheran theology in today’s world.” Bohlmann responded with a letter on December 13, 1990: “I wish to commend you and CPH and the Committee” for this “imaginative and far-reaching project,” which “certainly would have great benefit not only to our LCMS pastors, but to theological literature throughout the world.”

The idea gained momentum that winter. Notes prepared by Cameron for the advisory committee meeting on February 4–5, 1991, record the support of Dr. J. A.

¹⁴ A survey was sent to LCMS pastors by Bruce Cameron, and the results were analyzed in a twenty-two-page document by Donald L. Brown (of CPH) dated November 4, 1991.

¹⁵ For example, Keil and Delitzsch often rely on Arabic etymologies. Now we have the benefit of more Northwest Semitic writings, such as the Ugaritic texts, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Likewise, the discovery of Greek papyri and advances in the field of linguistics have greatly improved our understanding of the language of the New Testament.

O. Preus II, who frequented the hallways of CPH in conjunction with the publication of his translations of Melancthon and Chemnitz.¹⁶ The present author recalls him saying, “If this is done well, it will keep the church firmly grounded in the Scriptures for generations.” When told the estimate of the costs, he replied nonchalantly, “If that’s what you need, I can get it for you.”¹⁷ A series of meetings along with letters and phone calls ensued in 1991, during which time agreement was reached to invite Dr. Jonathan F. Grothe, president of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary (St. Catharines, Ontario), to serve as general editor and Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, professor (and later president) of Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne), to be associate editor.

Dr. Carter stressed that if we were to embark on this project, we had to be sure we could finish it, which required forecasting the costs (contrary to the man in Luke 14:28–30)—and not just monetary costs. Did we have enough superb exegetes in confessional Lutheran church bodies to author the volumes so that we could finish the series within a generation? Did we now (unlike the 1970s) have sufficient theological unity and agreement in exegetical method? Could we count on support from LCMS institutions (e.g., the synodical praesidium, seminaries, and CPH) for the duration of the project? Could adequate funding be secured? Confidence grew that affirmative answers could be given to these four crucial questions. The proposal was finally approved by the CPH Executive Board on February 20, 1992, and by the CPH Board of Directors on March 19, 1992.

This stage of the planning culminated in a meeting at CPH on April 15, 1992, that included J. A. O. Preus and Rev. Lawrence Burgdorf.¹⁸ On June 30, 1992, Preus

¹⁶ Dr. Preus translated the *Loci Theologici* of Martin Chemnitz, published in two volumes by CPH in 1989. His translation of Melancthon’s *Loci Communes 1543* was published by CPH in 1992, and his book on Chemnitz, *The Second Martin*, in 1994. Preus remarked that he expected that most of the things he had done during his presidency would be forgotten, but he would be remembered as the man who translated these enduring works of doctrinal theology into English. (Later the Chemnitz translations were republished as part of the series *Chemnitz’s Works*, currently ten volumes, and a second edition of his work on Melancthon is titled *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*.)

¹⁷ Separately, in 1990 Debb Andrus, a colleague in the editorial department of CPH to the present day, had encouraged this author to initiate conversations with Lawrence Burgdorf, based on the years in which her husband, Rev. David Andrus, served as associate pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Overland, Missouri, where Burgdorf was the senior pastor. During conversations with Burgdorf in 1990–1991, the present author did not know that he was precisely the same person Preus had in mind. The author kept Burgdorf up to date with the progress of the proposal as it moved through the CPH administration to the CPH board of directors with feedback from many outside CPH. At the luncheon on July 7, 1992, Burgdorf recalled what he termed, with a wink, the “evangelical persistence” of the CPH editor in these conversations.

¹⁸ This was in what was known as “the old board room” in CPH. We were well prepared and had rehearsed our presentation, but after offering to pour Burgdorf a cup of coffee, we discovered that none of us had remembered to fill the coffee pitcher. Preus, on his part, leveraged his

and Burgdorf flew to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to meet with Marvin M. Schwan, who approved of the project upon their recommendation. A luncheon was held at the Missouri Athletic Club in downtown St. Louis on July 7, 1992, attended by CPH executives, leaders from the LCMS International Center and LCMS Foundation, and the editorial team (Grothe, Wenthe, Cameron, and Mitchell). Burgdorf presented the pledge from the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation to provide funds spread over the years 1992–1999.¹⁹ This was one of the last large pledges personally approved by Mr. Marvin M. Schwan, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack less than a year later.²⁰ About a year after that, Jacob A. O. Preus II was called to eternal rest.²¹ Thus it would seem that God had “prepared beforehand” that these two saints, baptized believers in Christ, should “walk in” their vital roles during their appointed time to enable the commencement of the “good works” necessary for the Concordia Commentary series (Eph 2:10).

The “walk” along the way to the inauguration of the series had not been without its challenges. New (or renewed) ideas, no matter their merit, typically encounter a certain amount of institutional inertia or resistance.²²

As part of the effort to gain the support of the church, CPH had sent the youthful editors Cameron and Mitchell to propose the commentary series to each of the LCMS seminaries and plead for their support, and particularly to recruit seminary faculty to be authors. The entire faculty of Concordia Seminary was invited to a meeting on April 29, 1991, in Pritzlaff Hall; five attended.²³ In separate

relationship by reminiscing about his years as a professor at Bethany College in Mankato, Minnesota, during which time Burgdorf and also Marvin M. Schwan had been his students. Later, on another occasion, Preus remarked that Schwan had been an unremarkable student whose talents became obvious only later when he, as a shrewd businessman, made astute decisions that resulted in the rapid growth and enormous success of Schwan’s Sales Enterprises, Incorporated.

¹⁹ The two-page pledge, dated July 7, 1992, describes it as a “fifteen year project,” which it had become at the urging of Gerber, who was impatient with the original estimate of twenty years. (A year later, Gerber suggested that we consider shortening the duration to twelve years.) The pledge includes two provisions for possible scenarios that could potentially have cut off funding at some time during the years 1992–1999. “One of course is death,” that is, “a simultaneous death of two principals.” The other possibility was “financial reversals” at the company. The foundation fulfilled its pledge in full. Moreover, the foundation has graciously exceeded its pledge by continuing to provide support to the present day.

²⁰ He died on May 9, 1993, at age 64.

²¹ He died on August 13, 1994, at age 74.

²² In 1990, a CPH marketing manager told me, “Pastors do not buy or read books.” On November 12, 1991, the CPH Director of Congregational Resources distributed a two-page memo to the CPH president and vice presidents advising that work cease on the commentary project: “the research data was inconclusive” for this “private project of Carter/Cameron/Mitchell” and “a large loss will result to our church body.”

²³ Dr. Horace Hummel expressed vigorous support for the project. Other attendees were Drs. Andrew Bartelt, Paul Raabe, Louis Brighton, and James Voelz.

discussions, some were skeptical whether any such ambitious project emanating from CPH could meet with success.²⁴ The presentation to Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne) on April 29, 1991, was well attended; the interest was keen but far from unanimous.²⁵ Drs. Arthur Just Jr. and William Weinrich each wrote a robust follow-up letter of support, for which CPH was grateful.²⁶

Preliminary talks had also taken place in other settings with prospective authors. CPH compiled a “short list” of authors who were thought to be willing and able to finish their books in a few years, and a “long list” of others expected to take longer. The first meeting of the commentary editorial board (Grothe, Wenthe, Cameron, Mitchell, and Carter, *ex officio*) was on July 8, 1992 (the day after the public launch), by which time the “short list” had expanded and included estimated dates of completion. An advisory committee was also recruited to help guide the editorial board by providing input from clergy throughout the church.²⁷ The editors and advisors met with the first round of authors at CPH on February 17–18, 1993, to discuss the theological vision and ecclesiastical purpose of this Lutheran series as well as the practical and logistical aspects of how these books would be written, edited, and submitted to the LCMS doctrinal review process for publication. The second round of authors, five in all, two from outside the LCMS, met with the editorial board at CPH on October 14–15, 1993.

From the start of the initial planning, the hope was that the series would include authors from other confessional Lutheran church bodies around the world, and we were making some progress in that direction. The list of potential authors swelled to include a number from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and

²⁴ Cf. John 1:46. A memo dated November 25, 1991, conveying the sentiments of a seminary president, states, “There is no expression of an overwhelming need for a series which justifies the expenditure of time and money CPH is considering.” Moreover, “This project should not take money from the establishment of faculty chairs” nor “drain energy from the Synod’s Stewardship Board efforts in behalf of the seminary.”

²⁵ One professor asked why a Lutheran Bible commentary would differ from a commentary written by an exegete of any other denomination. Another senior professor slept soundly through our presentation.

²⁶ In addition, Dr. Norbert Mueller, interim president of Concordia Theological Seminary, wrote two letters to Carter, dated February 22, 1991, and November 7, 1991, that were hopeful yet concerned that hermeneutical differences between faculty might curtail the effort. The relationship between verbal prophecy and typology was a hot topic at that time.

²⁷ The advisory committee first met (together with the editorial board) on September 15, 1992, comprising Richard Kapfer (district president of the Iowa District—West) as the convener; parish pastors Gerhard H. Bode Sr., Ulmer Marshall, Michael Newman, and Paul Shoemaker; retired district president Arnold Kuntz; John F. Johnson, president of Concordia Seminary; Daniel Mattson of LCMS World Missions; and Prof. Glenn Reichwald of Bethany Seminary (ELS), Mankato, Minnesota, whom this author recalls as one of the most energetically outspoken advocates of the project.

the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and from farther abroad.²⁸ LCMS President Alvin L. Barry corresponded with President Carl H. Mischke of WELS and President George M. Orvick of ELS in the effort to recruit authors from their church bodies.²⁹ The editorial board flew to Milwaukee on June 1, 1993, to meet at Northwestern Publishing House with professors from WELS and ELS, particularly faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The conversation was constructive. Some authors from WELS and ELS have signed on.³⁰

Dr. Arthur A. Just bravely volunteered to work diligently so as to become the first to finish a commentary manuscript, aiming to complete his exposition of Luke by 1996. The contractual agreement anticipated one volume of five hundred pages, but by 1995 it became apparent that Just had written enough material on the first half of Luke to fill one volume. The editorial board had to make a key decision that (unbeknownst at the time) would affect many later commentaries: either request that the manuscript be halved in length (which would take additional time and labor, and deprive the church of priceless treasure) or respect the depth of the author's scholarship and publish it in full for the benefit of the church (which would also enable the first volume to be published promptly). The latter option was chosen, and set the pattern for the volumes on the other Gospels and many other biblical books.³¹ The decision also solidified the niche that would characterize the whole series. It would be a scholarly series that devotes considerable attention to the texts in their original languages as the foundation for profound and extensive theological reflection. Subsequent decades have shown that this is the kind of series that provides maximum benefit to the church and her pastors.³²

To announce the imminent publication of Just's *Luke 1:1–9:50* (1996, 447 pages), CPH put together a sixteen-page "Sampler," mailed to pastors in early 1996, that highlighted the distinctive features of the series; provided photos and

²⁸ By March 11, 1993, the list of potential authors had grown to three pages long and included fourteen from WELS and ELS. Also included were some from the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Lutheran Church—Canada, and one from Korea.

²⁹ The letters from Barry to them are dated October 27, 1992.

³⁰ At the present time (2020), WELS authors (and their forthcoming commentaries) include Dr. Mark Braun (Judges), Prof. Thomas Nass (Joel), and Dr. Kenneth Cherney (Exodus). Prof. Adolph Harstad (ELS) finished his commentary on Joshua (2004) and is completing a forthcoming commentary on Deuteronomy.

³¹ The commentary on Matthew by Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs comprises three volumes. The exposition of Mark by Dr. James W. Voelz occupies two. Dr. William Weinrich has finished one volume covering John 1:1–7:1, and anticipates two further volumes.

³² Thus, the current Concordia Commentary series is akin to, but more extensive than, the "Bible Commentary" series published by CPH in the 1950s and is to be differentiated from the brief volumes in the "Concordia Commentary" series of 1968–1970.

biographies of the first round of authors, the editorial board, and the advisory committee; and contained some pages from that commentary.

The editors crafted a lengthier expression of the theological presuppositions, goal, and methodology of the series, published as the “Editors’ Preface” in *Luke 1:1–9:50* (pp. xi–xvi) and in every subsequent volume (occasionally modified). It answered its rhetorical question with four convictions:

What may a reader expect from the Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture?

The purpose of this series, simply put, is to assist pastors, missionaries, and teachers of the Scriptures to convey God’s Word with greater clarity, understanding, and faithfulness to the divine intent of the text. . . .

First in importance is the conviction that the content of the scriptural testimony is Jesus Christ. The Lord himself enunciated this when he said, “The Scriptures . . . testify to me” (Jn 5:39), words that have been incorporated into the logo of this series. The message of the Scriptures is the Good News of God’s work to reconcile the world to himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Under the guidance of the same Spirit who inspired the writing of the Scriptures, these commentaries seek to find in every passage of every canonical book “that which promotes Christ” (as Luther’s hermeneutic is often described). They are Christ-centered, *Christological*.

As they unfold the scriptural testimony to Jesus Christ, these commentaries expound Law and Gospel. This approach arises from a second conviction—that Law and Gospel are the overarching doctrines of the Bible itself and that to understand them in their proper distinction and relationship to each other is a key for understanding the self-revelation of God and his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. . . .

A third, related conviction is that the Scriptures are God’s vehicle for communicating the Gospel. The editors and authors accept without reservation that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are, in their entirety, the inspired and inerrant Word of God. The triune God is the ultimate author of the Bible; every word is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who did also, at the same time, make use of the knowledge, particular interests, and styles of the human writers. . . .

A fourth conviction is that, even as the God of the Gospel came into this world in Jesus Christ (the Word Incarnate), the scriptural Gospel has been given to and through the people of God, for the benefit of all humanity. . . . The living context of Scripture is ever the church, where the Lord’s ministry of preaching, baptizing, forgiving sins, teaching, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper

continues. Aware of the way in which the incarnation of the Son of God has as a consequence the close union of Scripture and church, of Word and Sacraments, this commentary series features expositions that are *incarnational* and *sacramental*.³³

The two volumes on Luke each required a full year of editorial labor (before their publication in 1996 and 1997) because of the steep learning curve for everyone involved. None of the authors had ever written, nor had any of the editors ever edited, a Bible commentary. Internal processes had to be developed within CPH to accommodate the size and complexity of these books, which dwarfed many of the other publications of this era. A like amount of time was required for editing the commentary on Revelation by Dr. Louis Brighton, published in 1999, but only nine months for the fourth volume, on 1 Corinthians, by Dr. Gregory Lockwood, published in 2000.

Dr. Jonathan F. Grothe was the general editor from 1992 until 1999. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe served as the associate editor from 1992 through 1999, when he became the general editor, and remained so into 2016, and he displayed *fides heroica* throughout his tenure. Julene Gernant Dumit (M.A.R.) has been the CPH copy editor and production editor for the series since its inception. Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, one of the first authors recruited, served on the editorial board as the New Testament editor from 1999 into 2012, when he stepped aside from editorial duties due to his workload, which included the writing of three superb volumes on the Gospel of Matthew (2006, 2010, 2018). Dr. Curtis P. Giese, author of the commentary on 2 Peter and Jude (2012) and the forthcoming volume on James, joined the editorial board in 2011 and has served as the New Testament editor since 2012.³⁴

After a hiatus,³⁵ the publication of books resumed, apace, in 2003 with the appearance of *Colossians* by Paul Deterding and then *The Song of Songs* by Christopher Mitchell. The pace of two volumes per year, finally achieved

³³ Quoted from pages xi–xii of the first printing (1996) of *Luke 1:1–9:50*, by Arthur A. Just Jr. In subsequent years, the “Editors’ Preface” has itself been edited and slightly expanded. Whenever a volume is reprinted the “Editors’ Preface” is updated to be the current version.

³⁴ The present author, who has served at CPH since 1989, first had the title of “Contributing Editor” (1996–1999) and then became “Old Testament and CPH Editor” (2000–present), but has always had the same role of editing every book for publication.

³⁵ No volumes were published in 2001 and 2002. To safeguard the reputation of the series and publicize its continuance, the Editorial Board as of 2000 (Wenthe, Mitchell, Gibbs) sent out a four-page newsletter titled “Concordia Commentary News” (Summer 2000), which reiterated the purpose of the series and gave biographies of the editors and twenty-seven authors. As a follow-up, in January 2002 a two-page letter was sent listing the four volumes in print, five forthcoming volumes, and a full list of the thirty-one then-current authors and their biblical books.

in 2003,³⁶ was a goal stated in the original press release in 1992, and has, by the grace of God, continued to the present day, when thirty-seven volumes are in print (totaling 26,462 pages). We intend, with the help of God, to continue to publish two more per year until the completion of the seventy-four volumes envisioned for the series. As of 2020, we have a total of more than forty authors, including professors in the LCMS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Lutheran Church—Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, and the Lutheran Church of Australia.³⁷

To help show that this is not an insular enterprise to benefit Lutherans alone, but part of the church's worldwide mission, we began soliciting endorsements for the back covers of the dust jackets and the web pages starting in 2014. We ask authors to identify esteemed academic colleagues around the world, including some outside of Lutheranism and from renowned universities, to write brief commendations, from their perspectives, that demonstrate the broad appeal of the series. These first appeared on *Galatians* by A. Andrew Das and *Isaiah 56–66* by R. Reed Lessing, both from 2014.

We give thanks to God for the era of theological unity, the prosperity of resources, and the joyful participation of everyone involved that have enabled this series to thrive over the decades. To be sure, each of the editors and authors is *simul iustus et peccator*, and all we have done is far from perfect. We could have been more efficient in the past if we had known then what we (think we) know now. Nevertheless, we believe a plethora of “good works” have been accomplished solely by the grace of God as we have “walked in” the opportunities that God “prepared beforehand” (Eph 2:10). The ultimate value of the effort will become evident only at the great assize on the Last Day (1 Cor 3:10–15). It is fitting to conclude with the same Scripture passage (Rom 16:25–27) quoted at the end of the “Editors’ Preface” in every volume:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, by the revelation of the mystery kept secret for ages past but now revealed also through the prophetic Scriptures, made known to all the nations by order of the eternal God unto the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen!

Christopher W. Mitchell

Concordia Commentary Editor, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO

³⁶ A third volume, *Leviticus*, also has the copyright date of 2003, but it was released in January 2004.

³⁷ For a full list of published authors and their volumes currently in print, and for updates about authors of forthcoming volumes along with additional information about the series, see cph.org/commentary.

Walter Arthur Maier II
(June 14, 1925–October 24, 2019) in memoriam

With a ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod spanning over sixty years, Walter A. Maier II had an impact on its congregations, in its synodical life, and at our seminary that is unmatched in time and service. He remained active as a



professor at Concordia Theological Seminary until a few years before his death on October 24, 2019. When he was called to teach New Testament studies at the seminary (then in Springfield, Illinois) in the fall of 1965, his name appeared in the seminary and synodical publication as “Walter A. Maier Jr.,” a reminder that he was walking in the footsteps of his father, who was the founder and longtime speaker of *The Lutheran Hour*. When one of his sons, another Walter A. Maier, joined the faculty in 1989, he then was more often known as Walter A. Maier II. This is hardly an incidental matter, since historians researching the synod’s publications will likely find more references to “Jr.” appended to his name. It is a reminder for future generations that he perpetuated the scholarly evangelical and missional legacy of his father, who even after he died in January 1950 was the face of the Missouri Synod as no one else was.

Being brought up on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where his father was professor of Old Testament, Maier received his theological instruction there. In the same year of his seminary graduation, 1949, he received a Master of Arts in Greek Classics from Washington University, also in St. Louis. This would equip him for teaching New Testament, particularly Romans, which was his deepest love. Upon graduation, he was called to a congregation in rural upstate New York. From there, he went to Levittown, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia, a community that was established to accommodate the burgeoning suburban population. He was well suited to serve a congregation that was growing by leaps and bounds. His third call was to Hope Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, and while there he also served as an instructor of religion at Concordia College in that city.

Through his contacts with the Lutheran Laymen's League, J. A. O. Preus II, who had become seminary president in September 1962, learned of Maier's preaching gift and teaching skills, and proposed his name to the board of regents for a position on the faculty in New Testament, a position into which he was installed in September 1965. The proximity of Springfield to St. Louis allowed Maier to earn first the Master of Sacred Theology degree and then the Doctor of Theology degree in 1970, both at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He was the ideal professor in that he had both lengthy pastoral experience in a variety of situations and scholarly qualifications. Maier had a facile mind and delivered his lectures rapidly. In order to preserve what he had said, students collected notes from his lectures, which were passed down from class to class. There were three different versions of the lecture notes, some of which are still on the shelves of pastors. Rather than taking notes, students would follow along in his printed lectures, sometimes making comparisons among the versions. During his faculty tenure, he served as chairman of the department of biblical studies, academic dean, and assistant to the president. For many years, he served as a member of the synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations and as a synodical vice-president.



The death of Walter's father on January 11, 1950, just four months following Walter's ordination, left a lasting impression on both him and his younger brother Paul, who then was a student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and became a noted writer and scholar. This was a legacy that both sons, Walter and Paul, were determined to continue. And continue it they did, as now Walter's son Walter A. Maier III serves as a professor at our seminary, and his other son, David Maier, serves as president of the Michigan District of the LCMS. Walter A. Maier II is survived by his wife, Leah. They were married on August 27, 1951, making their marriage one of nearly seventy years. They are remembered by both his colleagues and students as the most elegant of hosts. Funeral services were conducted at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, a founding congregation of the synod.

Institutions are held together by the longevity of the service of their most notable members. Walter A. Maier II is a permanent part of the structure that is called Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

David P. Scaer

“Claiming Christian Freedom to Discuss Abortion *Together*”

Under this title, the Summer 2019 issue of *Lutheran Forum*³⁸ offered an article detailing how women using the principle of Christian freedom might respond in those states where the legislatures have passed or will likely pass such severe restrictions on abortion that abortions will not be done at all. For some time, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has drifted toward mainline Protestantism in adopting the ordination of women clergy, which in comparison to abortion, now seems a minor issue, but of course it is not. Women’s ordination opened the door to the ordination of practicing gay pastors and the blessing of same-sex marriages. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and predecessor synods of the ELCA used to work toward common goals. In that bygone age, the *Lutheran Forum* could take on the role of a mediator in letting all sides of an argument be heard. With this essay, it has abdicated this role.

Amy Carr and Christine Helmer, joint authors of “Claiming Christian Freedom to Discuss Abortion *Together*,” push the needle further to the left, if indeed this is possible. For some time, the ELCA has funded insurance coverage for abortions for its church workers including female pastors, a practice that its presiding bishop sees as a positive good. But this is not a good, especially for the child.

Carr and Helmer cover the waterfront in providing sociological, biological, and theological arguments, easily recognizable as Lutheran, that pregnant women clergy should keep the option of abortion open. A usual argument is that women have freedom over their own bodies, though for the record their bodies remain intact and the child’s body is mutilated to death. Uniquely, Carr and Helmer set a woman’s decision to kill the unborn child or to let it live within the context of “Christian freedom.” Luther, Gerhard, Spener, and Bonhoeffer are said to have used “the resources of tradition and their intellectual acumen to engage others in meaningful discussion of topics.”³⁹ So argument for or against abortion is no longer settled by “You shall not murder,” but by historical ways of reasoning that these theologians never intended to be used in this way.

Carr and Helmer delve into what a woman’s “right to choose” means. This can only be resolved by understanding a “relationship” that includes “a ‘village’ of family, friends, healthcare, day care, and educational opportunities, churches, infrastructure that guarantees clean air and water, and cultural and sports centers.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Amy Carr and Christine Helmer, “Claiming Christian Freedom to Discuss Abortion *Together*,” *Lutheran Forum* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 48–51.

³⁹ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 48.

⁴⁰ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 51.

So whether a child lives or not is determined by what can be expected in his or her future, including an adequate soccer playing field and a healthy environment. Lacking these, the door is open to abortion. The authors then tackle the question of what is meant by “the unborn child.” Viability determines when someone is a human being and when they are not, and a child who has failed to get beyond the first twenty-three weeks after conception is better referred to as a zygote or fetus and is open game for the abortionist’s scalpel. “Without legal access to safe abortion, more women suffer.”⁴¹ Without pro-life advocates, the unborn will suffer. But there’s more. “Even when adoption is an option there are compelling physical, practical, and existential reasons for women to choose to avoid the ordeals of continuing a pregnancy.”⁴² Now comes “the question [of] whether in faith we should support laws premised on an abstract ideal of purity with regard to the sanctity of the life of the unborn.”⁴³ Since life is never perfect, abortion is just the way things are. Since we live in a real world, we can legally support what we otherwise do not like. Deciding to abort or not “involves listening for the nudging of the Spirit, who speaks in a particular context—not as didactic rule-maker, but as One who actively conforms us to the mind of Christ.”⁴⁴

Wow! There goes the law and here enters a new creation where the unborn can be killed. Carr and Helmer call for “intellectual seriousness” and “meaningful discussions,” which means that they enter the arena of public opinion with their minds already made up that they are not against abortion.⁴⁵ Amy Carr teaches at Western Illinois University. Well known among Luther scholars, Christine Helmer is a professor in Germanic studies at Northwestern University with an adjunct position in teaching religion. Her most recent book, *How Luther Became the Reformer* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), traces the story of how early twentieth-century German theologians constructed the myth of the “here I stand Luther.” After reading it, some might restrain their gusto in singing “A Mighty Fortress.” I will not. It might be the time for her fellow Luther scholars to question her placing abortion under Luther’s concept of Christian freedom, or perhaps ask what his concept of Christian freedom means. For Helmer, what is existentially contemporary context trumps an outmoded concept of the law as the will of God. Her concept of “it takes a village” to determine what to do takes us back to a former presidential candidate.

David P. Scaer

⁴¹ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 49.

⁴² Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 49.

⁴³ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 50.

⁴⁴ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 50.

⁴⁵ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 48.

The Law Is Good

The following sermon was preached on September 17, 2019, in Kramer Chapel at the beginning of a catechetical series on the Ten Commandments. The sermon is included here in connection with recent discussions on the abiding place of the law in the lives of Christians, both to accuse them of their remaining sinfulness and to instruct them in holy living, and on the atonement as requiring Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law.

Sometimes, I'd rather plug my ears and shut my mouth. Because people do not want to hear it, we would rather not say it. But the truth sets free. The law is good, and it is eternal. "Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1-2).⁴⁶ Here the psalmist speaks of the *Torah*, the truth in all its fullness. The law and the gospel are really not so far apart. What is the gospel but the law fulfilled on our behalf?

To the one caught in sin, the law looks menacing, as it must. But the opposite of love is not wrath, but indifference. A God without wrath is not more loving, he is apathetic, deaf to the cries of injustice.

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3). This commandment indicts the pagan, but it also indicts us when we devote ourselves to money, popularity, reputation, and the pleasures of the body, whether active on a Saturday night or asleep on Sunday morning.

Where will we find the good place? Is it gathered around our golden calf? Is it to live under the illusions of the rich fool? Or would we rather dwell in the house of the Lord, singing hymns to the one who loves us?

Are we prone to curse? Perhaps, but such speech, given free reign, pollutes the air. And if we forget the Sabbath, we harm only ourselves. Going to church can seem a drag. But afterward, like the gym, you feel better. Which is to say, we were created to live in God's presence.

What is the law? It accuses the pagan, so also those of us who know better. But the law is also what I want. It is a better place. Go to Walmart, and see a kid mouthing off to his mom. Look out at a world where fathers are absent, leaving children in houses that are not true homes. From this vantage point, the Fourth Commandment looks better every day.

Thou shall not murder. Perhaps in rage, anger, vengeance, or pure selfishness, murder may seem the answer. But such a world is ugly, even horrifying. If you are

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

not from Fort Wayne, you should know that we now live in the epicenter of our nation's fight for life. Dr. Klopfer, who put to death some 40,000 children here in Fort Wayne and South Bend, himself died this past year. In his home were found the remains of some 2,246 bodies. We have now our Mengele, our Auschwitz. That is not the world I want to live in. And when we see such things, we cannot simply say "gospel, gospel, gospel." We have to meditate upon the price that Christ paid, stand at the foot of the cross, and gaze at the wrath that he rightly suffered on our behalf.

Thou shall not commit adultery? No doubt, the fruit is tempting, but it hides a poison pill. Look what the sexual revolution has done to our people, to our children, confused and abandoned. And, of course, the sixth commandment bleeds into the fifth; no amount of penicillin can make it better.

Thou shall not steal? We all want more. And who will notice if we skim off the top? But then many restaurants, many businesses are forced to close because employees take a little here, a little there. Sadly, many church workers are caught with their hands in the offering plate. But where do we want to live? In neighborhoods where every house is like a bank vault, and every door must be bolted and chained? Is it nostalgia to long for former days, where cars and houses had no need for locks?

Thou shall not bear false witness. Sure, gossiping is fun. It can feel good to speak ill of others, to think ourselves superior. But then we know the pain of having others whisper about us. And really, such talk leaves a residue, both on the one who speaks and on the one spoken against.

Thou shall not covet. Is there anything harder to take than the success of a friend? Misery loves company, and your joy turns me a shade of green. But why? What a wretch of a man I am to feel this way! Would it not be better to live in a world where we are happy for the success of others?

Yes, I want a better world. A world as Luther positively describes in the Ten Commandments hymn. A world fulfilled in the Beatitudes of Christ's life. A world anointed with the Spirit's fruits of charity, love, kindness, and patience. That means that I must let that law indict me, recognizing that I am part of the problem. But it shall not always be so. To live according to these commandments is to live a life of love eternal. It is the life of Christ lived for me, in perfect obedience to the law, but not simply as a past event, but as a life he gives to us even now.

In this life, the law does not cease to indict us. But in Christ, we see it from a different vantage point. The true Isaac, Abraham's Son, has been sacrificed for us. We have been redeemed out of the Egypt of our sin and death. And in this death, he does not put an end to the law, but establishes it.

Walk among the pagans, and feel the heaviness of the air. Or come to the chapel, filled with the incense of prayer. The world celebrates death; come instead to chapel teeming with new life in the faces of seminarians and their wives and many children. See kindness and generosity at the food and clothing banks. Experience encouragement and joy and the mutual consolation of the brethren. Sin remains. In each one of us. We know that. The devil still prowls among us like a lion (cf. 1 Pet 5:8). But we also know that Christ makes all the difference, and we would be ingrates not to notice.

When we grumble, wishing we were back in Egypt, we slap ourselves and say, “What were we thinking?” The golden calf is just a hunk of metal, nothing compared to our living God. Like new converts, we rejoice that we have been freed, that the old ways are soon to pass away, to be buried, and never again rise. We see that the law does not bind us, as with chains of the tyrant, but that we are willingly held close to the Lord and tied to one another in bonds of charity and love, the law’s fulfillment.

Peter J. Scaer