

Concordia Springfield as the “Conservative” Alternative to St. Louis

Cameron A. MacKenzie

For most of its history, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, was “another way” into the ministerium of the Missouri Synod. Although Fort Wayne became the synod’s first seminary in 1847,¹ the Perry County congregations also turned their school over to the synod a couple of years later. So the synod then had two schools, the second one relocated from Altenburg, Missouri, to St. Louis.² But they were very different schools. The one in Fort Wayne resulted from the thinking of Wilhelm Loehe (1808–1872), Wilhelm Sihler (1801–1885), and others to recruit and prepare men for ministry on the American frontier, whereas the Saxon men wanted to create an orthodox version of what they had left behind. The former would train men from various walks of life in what they needed to proclaim the Word of God faithfully but without a classical liberal arts education or an in-depth exposure to languages, church history, and dogmatics of the sort that the latter school would require of its students. Over the next several decades as the Missouri Synod grew, it put considerable resources into schools that prepared men for St. Louis. By the time of the synod’s hundredth anniversary in 1947, there were ten of these “prep” schools (basically high schools and junior colleges) stretching across the continent and one seminary, St. Louis.³ That was the synodical system for training its clergy.

Oh yes, there was still that other seminary—our seminary. It survived (although not in Fort Wayne) as an alternative to the “system” for men who somehow did not fit the ideal, often because they were too old to go back to high school—late bloomers, so to speak, who still could make good pastors if just given enough training. And as long as the synod was growing as it was by leaps and bounds over

¹ The most complete history of CTSFW is Erich H. Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets: The Anatomy of a Seminary, 1846–1976* (St. Louis: CPH, 1989), but, as the subtitle indicates, it does not include the seminary’s second sojourn in Fort Wayne, 1976–. According to Heintzen, at its first convention in 1847, the LCMS requested “the founders” of the seminary to transfer their institution to the new church body, and in September of that year, Wilhelm Loehe wrote to C. F. W. Walther that he and his colleague, Johann F. Wucherer, would do so (37).

² For the history of the St. Louis seminary from its founding to 1964, see Carl S. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower* (St. Louis: CPH, 1965).

³ See the 1947 *Reports and Memorials*, 31–61.

Cameron A. MacKenzie is The Forrest E. and Frances H. Ellis Professor of German Reformation Studies at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. He can be contacted at Cameron.MacKenzie@ctsfw.edu.

the first several decades, fueled by massive German immigration and committed to organizing the newcomers into Lutheran congregations, it could readily use a second way of preparing men for ministry.

So the Fort Wayne seminary survived after moving first to St. Louis (1861) and then to Springfield, Illinois (1874–1875), where it stayed for the next one hundred years. But it was not a part of the system; it was an alternative to the system, and by the time of the synodical centennial, Springfield was offering a comprehensive program of ministerial training for high school graduates: four years in residence (ostensibly the equivalent of a BA degree), a year of vicarage, and then a “graduate” year, once again in residence.⁴ The ideal was still the prep school/St. Louis route, but as long as there was the need for pastors, the Missouri Synod would continue to train men outside of the system at Springfield.

But from time to time, some in the synod made the case that it no longer needed the alternative, at least, not one with its own campus in Springfield.⁵ In the depths of the Depression, this was practically self-evident. St. Louis was not placing many of its graduates—and neither was Springfield.⁶ But that changed with World War II. After its conclusion, Springfield was perfectly positioned for training former military men who had experienced firsthand the horrors of war and the consolations of the gospel that they now wanted to preach.⁷ Once more, an alternative to the system made good sense, but it was a practical choice, not an ideological one. Or was it?

The postwar years were boom years for America and for the Missouri Synod. Both seminaries experienced great growth and significant change. And some of that change was theological.

The terms *conservative* and *liberal* make very good sense when talking about post-Napoleonic France. But I am not sure about Missouri Synod Lutheranism in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the terms were used to describe the differing viewpoints that began to surface in the LCMS. In fact, I used

⁴ Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Blessing, 1846–1946* (Springfield, Ill.: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1946), 35–36, and its academic catalogue for 1945–1946, *Concordia Theological Seminary Founded 1846* (Springfield, Ill.: n.p., 1945–1946), 10.

⁵ See Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 168–185.

⁶ *Christian Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The. VII. Expansion, 1932–. 1.” accessed October 29, 2020, <http://cyclopedia.lcms.org>. Heintzen indicates that fourteen men from the class of 1937 did not receive placements (twenty-two vicarages had been assigned to that class the year before), nor did fifteen men from the class of 1938 (fifteen vicarages had been assigned to that class the year before). See *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 150, 221.

⁷ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 159, 161–162, 222. The number of students grew enormously each year from just 152 in 1944–1945 to 229, 265, 296, 337, and 387 over the next five school years.

them and will continue doing so here to describe the polarization that set in and finally led to the great Missouri Synod Civil War of the 1960s and 1970s.

There were many issues that revealed this polarization, but two of them were clearly momentous in importance for our church body. First, there was the question of how the Missouri Synod should relate to other Lutherans—the “fellowship question” that dominated the early phases of controversy between synodical wings in the 1930s and 1940s. Then, emerging clearly in the 1950s and quickly becoming for many *the* issue: the question of biblical inerrancy. With respect to both of these, the forces of movement, the “liberal” side, included prominent St. Louis professors. In fact, especially with respect to the Bible, Concordia St. Louis was the institutional center for the liberals.⁸

That was not the case with respect to the fellowship question, but nonetheless when the liberals moved overtly and dramatically in 1945 to challenge the synod’s approach to dealing with American Lutherans by issuing the so-called “Statement of the Forty-Four,” they numbered five St. Louis seminary professors among the original signers, including one of their most prominent: Theodore Graebner,⁹ editor of *The Lutheran Witness*.

Given the prominence of the St. Louis men among the “forty-four,” almost by default, Springfield had to be the synod’s “conservative” seminary, but was there anything more to it than that? Yes, but perhaps not without at least one complication. The recently retired president of Springfield, H. B. Hemmeter, was also one of the forty-four men who had issued the Statement.¹⁰ He was the only one

⁸ Still the best theological analysis in historical perspective of the polarization is that of Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Press, 1977).

⁹ *Christian Cyclopedia*, s.v. “Graebner, Theodore Conrad,” accessed October 29, 2020, <http://cyclopedia.lcms.org>. The other St. Louis men among the forty-four were William Arndt, Paul Bretscher, Richard Caemmerer, and William Polack. See a photocopy of the Statement along with its signers in Jack T. Robinson, “The Spirit of Triumphalism in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: The Role of the ‘A Statement’ of 1945 in the Missouri Synod” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1972), 240–241. Robinson’s work is very informative, but his sympathies (and sources) are very much tilted toward the forty-four. Similarly, the November 1970 (vol. 43) issue of the *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* is devoted to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Statement and includes reminiscences by seven signers, a letter by another, and just one four-page conservative critique of the Statement from 1947. More than a decade later, the *Quarterly* published an article by A. T. Kretzmann, a critic of the Statement and one of those appointed by President Behnken, to deal with the signers, “A Statement of the 44, 1945–79,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 55 (1982): 69–81. On the occasion of the Statement’s fiftieth anniversary, Ralph Bohlmann, erstwhile president of the LCMS, argued for the ongoing applicability of the Statement to the LCMS fifty years later, “Missouri Lutheranism 1945 and 1995,” *Lutheran Forum* 30, no. 1 (February 1996): 12–17.

¹⁰ According to Heintzen, Hemmeter’s farewell banquet was “one week after V-E Day” (May 8, 1945). (See *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 157.) The forty-four issued their Statement on September 20, 1945.

from the “other” seminary who had done so, but he had done so. So why would anyone suggest that somehow Springfield was more conservative than St. Louis? Well, with Hemmeter gone, the Springfield faculty did something rather unusual for the times. It decided to respond formally to the Statement by means of a letter to E. J. Friedrich (1889–1982), chairman of the Statement’s continuation committee, that condemned the Statement in no uncertain terms.¹¹

The faculty characterized the Statement as “a loveless, unmotivated, and widely disseminated attack . . . on brethren in synod” and criticized it sharply for “getting rid of Scripture proof that is a sedes [for the doctrine of fellowship],¹² countenancing selective fellowship, agreeing to fellowship before ‘there is agreement among them (the A.L.C. and us) in doctrine and all its articles,’ and opening the door to genuine unionism.” Finally, the Springfield men described themselves as appalled that synodical leaders, including “worst of all, five members of a theological faculty in our synod,” could sign onto a document that seems to be “veiled propaganda for a *liberal* and loose Lutheranism” [emphasis mine].

On the day following the date of the letter, the acting president of the Springfield Seminary, Richard C. Neitzel (1875–1951),¹³ sent a copy of it to G. Christian Barth (1883–1965), a synodical vice president who had apparently¹⁴ admonished Neitzel and another professor previously on the need to speak out about such matters. As a result, wrote Neitzel, he was offering the faculty letter as “some evidence of our *conservatism*” [emphasis mine]. And interestingly, he offered as an excuse for earlier failures, “We knew that we could not get anywhere as long as our former president sat in his armchair and ruled with an iron hand.” But with Hemmeter gone, Springfield’s faculty was now acting on its “conservatism.”

Two additional points need to be made in connection with the Statement of the Forty-Four. One is that the recipient of Neitzel’s letter, Vice President Barth, became

¹¹ F. Wenger (faculty secretary) to E. J. Friedrich, October 26, 1945. See Robinson, “The Spirit of Triumphalism,” 266–270.

¹² That is a reference to the Statement’s conviction, “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.” See “A Statement” of the forty-four, Thesis 6.

¹³ Neitzel had been a member of the synodical committee appointed to review the so-called Intersynodical Theses that representatives of the Wisconsin, Iowa, Ohio, Buffalo, and Missouri Synods had negotiated in the 1920s as a way to settle the doctrinal issues that had divided the synods and prevented church fellowship. The review committee criticized the theses sharply and in 1929 Missouri rejected them. See Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847–1947* (St. Louis: CPH, 1947), 319.

¹⁴ “Remembering the admonition you gave Prof. Coyner and me in St. Louis, it is my conviction that I owe you some evidence of our conservatism.” R. C. Neitzel to G. Chr. Barth, October 27, 1945.

Hemmeter’s successor just a few months later.¹⁵ Obviously, this was a move in a conservative direction. A second point of evidence for the seminary’s conservatism was a publication by Springfield’s leading systematician, Walter Albrecht (1885–1961),¹⁶ that directly challenged a comparable work by Graebner on the question of prayer fellowship, a central concern of the forty-four.¹⁷ Basically, Graebner argued that synodical conservatives were misusing Bible passages that warned against infidels, idolators, or heretics who were undermining the foundations of faith. These passages, maintained Graebner, were not talking about praying with Christians who erred in non-fundamental doctrines.¹⁸ Albrecht responded that Graebner’s position justified not only prayer but all forms of fellowship with persistent errorists of all types. In other words, for Albrecht, Graebner’s position plainly opened the door to unionism. Not insignificantly, while Graebner’s pamphlet was published by Concordia Publishing House, Albrecht’s was published by Northwestern, the publishing house of the Wisconsin Synod.¹⁹

In the mid-1940s, Concordia Theological Seminary was certainly conservative by the standards of that day. Indeed, in a pamphlet prepared for the 1944 synodical convention to make the case for maintaining the seminary, President Hemmeter himself had insisted that a principal result of the Springfield system was that “our graduates have been *known for their conservative Lutheranism*” [emphasis original].²⁰ However, it remained only an alternative to the system and was not a conservative alternative to *St. Louis*. In fact, students from the prep schools were not allowed to enroll at Springfield without special permission from their school, usually based on their potential for ministry but without the requisite foreign language skills

¹⁵ He was called in November and installed on December 16, 1945. *The Lutheran Witness* 64 (1945): 390. This was after calls had been declined earlier that year by Harold Romoser and Alvin Wagner.

¹⁶ Perhaps Albrecht’s greatest contribution to synodical theology was his preparation of the index volume for the English version of Pieper’s *Dogmatics*. Earlier for his Springfield students, he had prepared his own translation. It did not become the printed version, but it was used in its preparation. “Preface” in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 4 (St. Louis: CPH, 1950–1957).

¹⁷ Theodore Graebner, *Prayer Fellowship* (St. Louis: CPH, 1945) and Walter W. F. Albrecht, *Dr. Theo. Graebner’s “Prayer Fellowship”: In the Light of Scripture and the Faith of Our Fathers* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1946).

¹⁸ The forty-four had included this statement on prayer, “We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together . . . if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God,” Robinson, “The Spirit of Triumphalism,” 240.

¹⁹ For an excellent treatment of the fellowship issue during these years, see Mark Braun, “Changes within the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America That Led to the Exit of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary St. Louis, 2000), 111–179.

²⁰ Henry Hemmeter, *The Springfield Concordia Case* (Saginaw, Mich.: Synodical Convention, 1944), 12.

that St. Louis required.²¹ They also had to be high school graduates and, as of 1946, at least twenty years old.²²

However, American education was changing greatly in the postwar years, and so was that of the synod. For one thing, by the end of the 1950s, Springfield was actively seeking accreditation.²³ That meant eliminating its pre-seminary program and making a bachelor's degree the standard for admission into a ministerial training program that culminated in a BD.²⁴ It took a while, but that is where the school was heading by the beginning of the 1960s.

Because of such changes, one could more easily imagine Springfield as an alternative to St. Louis, but was it still "conservative"? Of course, it still was not St. Louis, where some of the more vocal advocates of change were holding forth, including Martin Scharlemann (1910–1982), the first prominent proponent of higher criticism in the Missouri Synod²⁵; but the Springfield faculty was no longer what it had been fifteen years earlier. For one thing, there were more of them. To accommodate growing enrollment, the faculty had increased from eleven in 1949 to more than double that—twenty-six—by 1956. And still more were on the way—thirty-four in 1964–1965.²⁶

They were also different in kind, especially under George Beto (1916–1991), who served as president from 1959 to 1962. New professors were supposed to have their doctorates or be working on them—and if the latter, the seminary would assist by granting sabbaticals or study leaves. According to Lorman Petersen (1915–2009), one-time academic dean, "More faculty members joined the staff in the three years of Beto's presidency than the total faculty in the hundred years previously."²⁷ But in terms of the LCMS battles that were coming, our question would be this: Were these new faculty members liberal or conservative? The answer is some of both. Raymond Surburg (1909–2001) and Eugene Klug (1917–2003) would certainly belong to one side, and Curtis Huber and Richard Jungkuntz (1918–2003) to the other. Of course,

²¹ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 180–181. In response to a question from the acting president of Concordia Milwaukee, Springfield President Walter A. Baepler wrote, "We cannot accept any student from our preparatory schools unless said student has an unqualified recommendation of the Faculty." Walter A. Baepler to Henry Gienapp (February 27, 1953).

²² Baepler, *A Century of Blessing*, 36.

²³ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 204–205.

²⁴ According to Heintzen, the 1962 seminary catalogue first announced the policy of training men for the ministry who already had a bachelor's degree, and in 1964, more than 80 percent of the entering class had that degree (*Prairie School of the Prophets*, 198–199).

²⁵ Ed Schroeder, "The Wars of Missouri That Led to Seminex. A Retrospective. Part II," *Crossings: Where the Gospel Meets Our Daily Lives*, September 13, 2007, accessed November 9, 2020, <https://crossings.org/the-wars-of-missouri-that-led-to-seminex-a-retrospective-part-ii/>.

²⁶ Lorman M. Petersen, "Epilog: The Golden Years (1945–1975)" in Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 195, 197–198.

²⁷ Petersen, "Epilog," 197.

the battles were mostly ahead of them, so one could not say definitively regarding those who were joining the faculty on which side they would eventually land.

But what about Beto himself? It is difficult to know for certain, of course, but on a few occasions in the pages of *The Springfielder*,²⁸ Beto addressed issues that marked the synodical polarization. In the fall of 1961, for example, he dismissed the idea of applying Romans 16:17 to other Lutherans, a position that had characterized the forty-four signers of the Statement and had raised the ire of the Springfield faculty at that time. Beto wrote, “Missouri . . . in the past used this passage somewhat indiscriminately in her relations with other Lutherans and with other Christians,” and then added, “In the past we could never develop any enthusiasm for the use of Romans 16:17–18 in describing the people of another Lutheran body pledged in their loyalty to the same Scriptures and same Confessions which we accept.”²⁹

In the summer issue of 1961, Beto also ascribed the origins of the synod’s burgeoning conservative movement to “difficulties arising from our Synod’s passing from a cultural and social isolation into America’s mainstream.”³⁰ Perhaps, but did that really explain the concerns that those conservatives were raising over inerrancy, evolution, and the like?

So it is unclear how “conservative” Springfield would have been in the 1960s under the leadership of Beto. However, Beto’s tenure was short lived, for early in 1962 he left the seminary to become director of the Texas Department of Corrections (as well as its chief of chaplains!),³¹ and he was succeeded by J. A. O. Preus II (1920–1994), under whom the seminary finally became a real alternative to the St. Louis seminary. The new president also became a champion of the conservative cause in the LCMS.

Upon Beto’s leaving, the seminary Board of Control indicated its confidence in Preus by appointing him interim president. So perhaps he was their choice from the beginning. But something else seems to have been at work as well, for when *The Lutheran Witness* reported on nominations for Springfield’s presidency, Preus was the choice of forty-seven congregations. William Poehler was the next most popular choice with only ten nominations.³² Just three years earlier, when the synod had last

²⁸ Under Beto in 1959, *The Springfielder* was repurposed from a student journal into a theological journal. See “An Introduction,” *The Springfielder* 23, no. 5 (December 1959): 1–2.

²⁹ *The Springfielder* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1961): 2.

³⁰ *The Springfielder* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1961): 2.

³¹ Paul M. Lucko, “Beto, George John (1916–1991),” Texas State Historical Association, *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/beto-george-john>.

³² *The Lutheran Witness* 81 (1962): 326.

filled the same office, the man with the most nominations was Walter Stuenkel with nineteen.³³ So Preus was really in a league of his own. But why?

A possible answer is that people were actively supporting his nomination. I know of at least one person who was—a Springfield seminary student at the time, Mark F. Bartling (1939–2013). More than once, he told me about his promotion of Preus when Beto left the seminary. Mark was much impressed by Preus as a teacher and a theologian and thought he would make a great seminary president. So when the position became open, he sent a letter recommending Preus to those on his father's mailing list for *The Confessional Lutheran*, probably the first unofficial conservative publication in the LCMS, edited by Paul Burgdorf. Mark's father, Fred, was the longtime secretary of the Confessional Lutheran Publicity Bureau. Mark always believed that his letter had something to do with those forty-seven nominations.

Of course, it is hard to say after so many years and even harder to know the degree to which the presidential electors were influenced by the number of nominations. But the facts remain that Preus received not only the nominations but also the call and so became the seminary's eleventh president (1962–1969). Of course, this is not the place to investigate the connections between Preus and other synodical conservatives, but even when he was still acting president, he signaled his identification with the conservative cause in a brief remark about the synod's *Brief Statement*, which by that time had become a shibboleth for conservatives.

For one thing, the *Brief Statement* summarized doctrinal positions that the LCMS had taken on a range of issues that differentiated Missouri from other American Lutherans. Approved by the synod in 1932, it had quickly become a rallying point for those opposed to fellowship with the old American Lutheran Church³⁴ unless, of course, it accepted the *Brief Statement*. However, because the statement also addressed doctrines of inerrancy and creation, conservatives continued to value it for its affirmation of their position on these doctrines as well. In fact, in an effort to rein in those who were seeking to accommodate higher criticism and evolution in the synod, conservatives at the 1959 convention managed to persuade the synod to adopt Resolution 9, which required "Synod's pastors, teachers, and professors . . . to teach and act in harmony" with "every doctrinal statement of a confessional nature adopted by Synod as a true exposition of the Holy Scriptures." If members of the synod did not agree with such statements, they were

³³ *The Lutheran Witness* 78 (1959): 22.

³⁴ Basically a merger of the Iowa and Ohio Synods in 1930, this version of the American Lutheran Church was similar to the Missouri Synod in its rejection of "liberalism" and so always seemed a possible candidate for church fellowship. See Fred W. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church: A Case Study in Lutheran Unity* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1958).

“not to teach contrary to them, but rather to present their concern to their brethren in the ministry.” In the “whereas’s,” the resolution listed the *Brief Statement* as such a “statement on doctrine and practice formally adopted by Synod.”³⁵

While pleasing to conservatives, this resolution was painful to liberals who wanted freedom to teach differently from synodical doctrinal statements while still maintaining that they were good Lutherans because they had subscribed to the Confessions (an approach called by Kurt Marquart “using the confessions as a rabbit’s foot”³⁶). So in preparation for the 1962 convention, the St. Louis faculty—at least as represented in the pages of the *Concordia Theological Monthly*—not only devoted several articles and many pages to the *Brief Statement* but also editorialized in favor of further study of the document³⁷ (always a good move when you think you might lack the votes to do what you really hope for). Conservatives wanted the synod to approve a resolution that explicitly made the *Brief Statement* binding, while the liberals wanted to rescind the 1959 resolution altogether.³⁸ So what about Preus?

He used the pages of *The Springfielder*, in the spring issue, before the 1962 convention, to say it was a good idea for church bodies to bind its members to doctrinal statements like the *Brief Statement*. The 1961 autumn issue had included a criticism of the *Statement*’s position on inerrancy by Robert Bertram,³⁹ but in the first issue published during his “acting” presidency, Preus wrote that Resolution 9 of the 1959 convention “is a good, proper, and perfectly correct procedure.” Then he added, “A church body has a right to insist upon a doctrinal position, and it has

³⁵ 1959 *Proceedings*, Resolution 9, Committee 3, p. 191. See also Carl S. Meyer, “The Role of A *Brief Statement* since 1932,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 33, no. 4 (April 1962): 208.

³⁶ Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 66–76.

³⁷ “To appoint a representative committee, possibly the proposed Commission on Theology, whose responsibility it will be to review thoroughly A Brief Statement from the exegetical, symbolical, dogmatic, historical, and practical points of view, with special attention also to its adequacy and relevancy for our day, and to submit its report at a future convention of Synod.” “A Brief Statement: Guidelines and Helps,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 33, no. 4 (April 1962): 223.

³⁸ For overtures concerning the *Brief Statement*, see 1962 *Reports and Memorials*, 148–151, 164–165. As a matter of fact, before the 1962 convention, the Committee on Constitutional Matters had ruled that the 1959 resolution was unconstitutional because it elevated synodical doctrinal statements to confessional status. The convention itself adopted that position, Res. 3-17, “Resolution 9 and Synodically Doctrinal Statements,” 1962 *Proceedings*, 105–106. That position turned out to be an obstacle to reestablishing synodical orthodoxy until dealt with at the 1973 New Orleans convention by Res. 2-12, “To Understand Article II of the Synod’s Constitution as Requiring the Formulation and Adoption of Synodical Doctrinal Statements,” 1973 *Proceedings*, 30–31, 111–115. See also John W. Behnken, *This I Recall* (St. Louis: CPH, 1964), 197–198.

³⁹ Robert Bertram, “The Confessions for Today’s Student of Theology: A Session with Schneeweiss on Scripture,” *The Springfielder* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1961): 31–35. While not explicitly rejecting it, Bertram contends that the *Brief Statement*’s position on inerrancy neglects (or even perverts) the christocentric character of the Bible.

the right to exercise discipline upon those who fail to uphold this position. This is so axiomatic . . . that it needs no further elaboration.”

And how about the *Brief Statement*? While acknowledging that he did not want to add it to the Confessions, Preus nevertheless affirmed its value: “It has served us well. It has kept us sound in doctrine . . . it still serves a valuable purpose in our church, . . . it gives much help in a day when we are still talking about creation, evolution, inspiration, inerrancy, justification, church fellowship, and the rest.” Then he challenged the opponents, “Let those who want to repudiate this document on theological grounds show us what kind of theology they wish to substitute for that of our historic position. Those who worry about its constitutionality should remember that it teaches only what we have always believed.”⁴⁰

Just a few lines, but to people who were paying attention to synodical polarization, it was a pretty good indicator of where Preus stood.⁴¹ And if the president stood somewhere, it was likely that the seminary was standing in the same place. Springfield was still “not St. Louis,” the center of synodical liberalism; and now Springfield also had a conservative at the helm. Perhaps as seminary president Preus did not always satisfy conservative activists;⁴² nonetheless, in just a few years, he was leading conservatives to a major victory in the synodical conflict. So under Preus, Springfield was ready to become a “conservative” alternative to St. Louis and, in fact, it finally did so in 1967.

By that time, the prep school system was beginning to crumble. Since fewer people were eager to send their children away for high school anymore, especially

⁴⁰ J. A. O. Preus, “Toward the Cleveland Convention,” *The Springfielder* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1962): 2–3.

⁴¹ During his seminary presidency, a number of men who became prominent synodical conservatives joined the faculty, including Harry Huth (1917–1979), Walter Maier II (1925–2019), and David Scaer (1936–). But that would not be true of everyone whom Preus brought in. See Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 219–220, for the entire list of new faculty from 1962 to 1969.

⁴² This is not the place to examine Preus’s connection with conservative activists in the synod, but Preus’s first biographer, James E. Adams, *Preus of Missouri and the Great Lutheran Civil War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 116–119, describes what he calls the “ambiguity” of Preus’s conservatism as seminary president. James C. Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 45–46, contends that Preus demonstrated his conservative *bona fides* by seeing to it that neither Huber nor Jungkuntz had their contracts renewed. Burkee also states that before becoming president, Preus had represented the synodical position on inerrancy in a meeting convened by President Behnken. Interestingly, the first issue of the conservative newspaper *Lutheran News* (December 15, 1962), 2, reported that The State of the Church Conference had decided at its meeting of November 9 and 10 to contact Springfield about training “conservative” men for the ministry. However, late in 1965, *The Confessional Lutheran* 2, nos. 11–12 (November and December 1965): 133–134, included an article by recent graduate Mark Bartling that was critical of Springfield for putting up with Curtis Huber as long as it did and that, as a result, “some students at Springfield accepted Huber’s approach to theology and began doubting historic Christian doctrines.”

when there was a local Lutheran high school at hand, the prep schools were beginning to close their high school departments and were eager to become four-year colleges instead.⁴³ That in turn would make it more difficult to maintain the Senior College⁴⁴ in Fort Wayne as the requisite way into St. Louis. Meanwhile, Springfield greatly reduced its own pre-seminary program but was attracting significant numbers of students from non-system colleges.⁴⁵ In its waning hours,⁴⁶ the 1967 synodical convention, already something of a turning point in the development of conservative synodical politics,⁴⁷ adopted Resolution 6-52, “To

⁴³ In its report to the 1962 convention, the Board for Higher Education (BHE) had listed as Planning Proposition Five, “Residential coeducation on the high school level, except at Edmonton and Selma, is to be eliminated on all synodical campuses. Where community Lutheran high schools are a live option, even nonresidential coeducation is to be eliminated.” 1962 *Reports and Memorials*, 54. That same *Workbook*, 85–86, includes resolutions regarding expanding teacher training to four years at St. Paul and Bronxville. In the 1965 *Workbook*, 263–270, there were resolutions for expanding to four-year courses of study at Ann Arbor, Bronxville, St. Paul, and Winfield, Kansas. In 1967, the BHE report indicates that only River Forest and Fort Wayne no longer had synodical high schools (of course, Ann Arbor and St. Louis never had had one) (1967 *Workbook*, 140). Nevertheless, the BHE recommended the closure of the high school in Austin and requested synodical authority to close the high schools at Bronxville, Oakland, Seward, St. Paul, and Winfield if “their continued existence can no longer be defended” (150). The convention adopted both recommendations (1967 *Proceedings*, 127, 128). Again, in line with BHE recommendations, the convention refused to authorize the expansion of either Ann Arbor or Bronxville to four-year colleges (1967 *Workbook*, 151, and *Proceedings*, 141–142).

⁴⁴ Founded in 1957, the Senior College was an addition to “the system.” Graduates of the prep schools would earn their bachelor’s degree in two years of residence at the Senior College before going to St. Louis for graduate theological education. The synod closed it in 1977. See Edgar Walz, *Diamond Bricks Live on in the Scandinavian Village* (Freeman, S.Dak.: Pine Hill Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ In 1959, Springfield requested the synod to make a bachelor’s degree a requirement for admission in line with the accreditation standards of the American Association of Theological Seminaries (1959 *Reports and Memorials*, 20). The convention authorized the seminary’s faculty to determine its own admissions policies with the concurrence of its Board of Control and BHE (1959 *Proceedings*, 126). In its 1960 catalogue issue of *The Springfielder* 24, no. 13, the seminary explained, “It is now the policy of the seminary to train men for the ministry who have attained the level of the bachelor’s degree.” It also indicated its decision to terminate the pre-seminary program: “For a limited number of years the seminary will continue to receive into pre-seminary some men” [emphasis mine]. Academic Dean Lorman Petersen (“Historical Review of the Springfield Seminary Faculty, 1940–1973,” unpublished paper, April 25, 1973, File 863, in the library of Concordia Theological Seminary, 6) reported that “1961–62 was the last year of the college department.” In spite of or because of such changes, enrollment reached new heights. From school year 1959–1960 through 1966–1967, the average Springfield enrollment was 417 students, whereas during the Baepler presidency (1953–1958), the average was 323. See Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 222.

⁴⁶ In fact, after 12:00 noon, when the convention by common consent agreed to continue “until the completion of the convention business” (convention minutes for “Session 16, July 14, 1967, Morning, in 1967 *Today’s Business*, 437).

⁴⁷ According to Burkee, the 1967 convention was the first to occur after the organization of the United Planning Conference, which successfully put in place a structure for electing convention delegates who, in turn, would elect conservatives to the synod’s boards and committees (*Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod*, 85–87). In his convention analysis, conservative activist Herman

Allow Fort Wayne [i.e., Senior College] Graduates to Enter Springfield.” The seminary itself had not proposed this action, nor had the Board for Higher Education.⁴⁸ In fact, the convention floor committee had presented a resolution that rejected those overtures that had called for opening up Springfield to system graduates, but the convention selected one of these same overtures as a substitute for the floor committee’s proposal and then had passed it.⁴⁹

Once again, it is difficult to say now whether conservative activists had planned this move or whether it was more or less accidental. In his final recommendations to the convention delegates, conservative activist Herman Otten in *Lutheran News*⁵⁰ made thirty-five recommendations but did not address this particular issue at all. But in his convention wrap-up, he “rejoiced” at the convention’s decision, while remarking also that “liberals want most Fort Wayne graduates to go to St. Louis.”⁵¹ It is also worth noting, however, that the Central Illinois District—Springfield’s home district—had itself memorialized the synod “to declare that Senior College graduates may attend either seminary.” Obviously, the convention’s decision had some significant backing other than a random congregation or two.⁵² Conservatives in the Missouri Synod still had a long way to go before they could claim victory in the synodical wars, but as far as the Springfield seminary was concerned, the New York convention marked a real milestone in its history.

Lorman Petersen, who became academic dean also in 1967, wrote that even before the New York convention, Springfield had already become a “functional” part of the synodical system for training its clergy because it had upgraded its admission standards and was well on its way to accreditation. Moreover, it was also producing more than a third of the pastors needed by the synod each year. However, the Board for Higher Education was still expecting it to recruit its students from outside the

Otten (1933–2019) commented on the elections, “Seldom in recent years has such a high percentage of true Missourians been elected to responsible positions. This is one of the few times we can recall when so many of those nominated from the floor were actually elected.” Herman Otten, “The New York Convention: Where Do We Go from Here?” *Lutheran News* 5, no. 15 (July 24, 1967): 9.

⁴⁸ 1967 *Workbook*, 151: The BHE recommended (1) that St. Louis and Springfield continue functioning as they were; and (2) that Springfield continue to upgrade its offerings and intensify its recruitment efforts at public and private colleges and universities.

⁴⁹ 1967 *Proceedings*, 142; and *Today’s Business*, 439. From the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, New York, New York, July 7–14, 1967.

⁵⁰ Begun in 1962 by Herman Otten, *Lutheran News* (later *Christian News*) quickly became a principal vehicle for synodical conservatives to promote their views, plans, and candidates. Largely on account of his newspaper, Burkee (*Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod*, 7) describes Otten as “the single most influential conservative in the synod before 1969.”

⁵¹ Herman Otten, “How We Would Vote,” Editorial, *Lutheran News* 5, no. 14 (July 3, 1967): 4; Otten, “The New York Convention,” 8.

⁵² 1967 *Workbook*, 210–211.

prep school/senior college system.⁵³ So that is what the convention floor committee had recommended to the convention. But some now-anonymous delegate moved the substitute resolution, and it passed! In Petersen’s words, Springfield had now become an “integral” part of the system. But that also meant that Springfield had become a real alternative to St. Louis—after 120 years!

History, of course, never stands still, and that was certainly true of Concordia Theological Seminary in the years following 1967. Not only did Jack Preus leave Springfield in 1969, so did the seminary in 1976! In its new home, it has certainly remained an alternative to St. Louis—or is St. Louis an alternative to Fort Wayne? Today, both schools are equally part of the synodical system, but what about tomorrow? Perhaps by God’s grace, twenty-five years from now, Concordia Theological Seminary will be celebrating the answer to that question.

⁵³ “. . . qualified students at public and private colleges and universities,” 1967 *Workbook*, 151.