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As Lutherans, we have a history that dates back to Wittenberg and long before; as preachers, teachers and evangelists, we are called to bear witness in the present.

DECLINE IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM: A STUDY

by James Arne Nestigen

THANK YOU VERY MUCH for the delightful invitation and the welcome that has gone along with it. It is a joy to actually be in Wittenberg.

Before beginning, I would like to make a couple of comments about my method. There are wide spread perceptions of a decline in American Lutheranism. But perception isn't necessarily reality. The question is how to measure or document the losses.

When I was working on my doctoral dissertation some years ago, I became convinced that the health of the Church could be measured by its use of the Book of Romans. Paul's letter has driven several major reforms, such as the Lutheran. In times of decline, his letter disappears into the background. So between 1225 and 1275, the high medieval reform, there were five or six major commentaries on Romans, including that of Thomas Aquinas. Between 1275 and 1450, there was one and that was derivative, a collection of the comments of the fathers.

Evaluating the vitality of American Lutheranism, instead of using Romans, I am going to look at the way the churches have treated Luther. The Confessions have a prior authority; Luther's authority is less formal, giving a wider range of possibility. He has enough standing to demand a reading by Lutherans, but subscription to Luther's theology is not formally required. Consequently, there is a little more range of interpretation.

Secondly, like Hermann Sasse, I believe that the Church's good health requires a balance between the past and the present. As Lutherans, we have a history that dates back to Wittenberg and long before; as preachers, teachers and evangelists, we are called to bear witness in the present. This sets up a dialectic in which fidelity to our heritage expresses itself in the willingness to engage present cultural challenges.

The melting pot

From the beginning of trans-Atlantic migration, as Europeans began settling in North America, the Christian Church has faced a particular challenge. In Europe, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant or even radical or left wing, the Church had been able to rely on the coercive power of the State. As Sidney Earl Mead¹ pointed out in

The ELCA's problem has been its left wing; Missouri's challenge has come from its right, which pounces on suggestions of variance as proof positive of corruption, to be dealt with coercively, with tar and feathers.

a classic essay some years ago, conditions in America undermined the use of coercion, forcing the Church to rely on persuasion. The frontier was always close enough to hand so that dissenters faced with coercion simply moved, evading attempts to silence them. The disestablishment clause of the American Constitution, which prohibits the use of legal coercion to maintain the Church, simply ratified the reality geography had imposed.

Adapting to this new circumstance, the Church was forced to market itself, developing appeals that would encourage voluntary association, the condition of membership. Already in the early eighteenth century, preachers such as Jonathan Edwards — a strict Calvinist — were promoting awakenings, vivid styles of preaching and other strategies that sought to move hearers to an emotional pitch in which they would make commitments to the congregations. George Whitfield, one of the great Methodist preachers of this new style, stopped in Philadelphia and visited with Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who had been sent from Halle to minister to Lutheran immigrants to the new land. The Great Awakening, as it came to be called, swept across the eastern third of the country, originally in the eighteenth, then again in the early nineteenth century. Not being able to rely on the

¹ Sidney Earl Mead, *The Lively Experiment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

State to perpetuate itself, the Church used the awakenings to fill its pews. In the process, it developed a peculiarly American structure, the denomination, to organize and affect its mission, relying on revivalism to stir people to commitment.

The Calvinists were the first to give evidence of the impact of this shift. The early Calvinists arrived with vivid memories of the Synod of Dort in 1618-19, which had been convened in the Netherlands to deal with Arminianism, a movement that emphasized the role of the human will in conversion. The new American situation, promoting free association as a basis for membership, shifted the emphasis back in the direction that Dort had just repudiated. Free assent, a decision for Jesus, became the hallmark of awakened faith. Calvinists broke into conflict, the Old Lights seeking to maintain historic characteristics of their faith; the New Lights, favoring the methods of the awakenings, sought to give more credit to the will.

Lutheran immigrants faced the same challenge that the Calvinists had encountered before them, the forces of the American melting pot. It is a loose sociological structure developed over the years to temper ethnic, political and theological differences among the new arrivals, mitigating potential conflicts by softening the edges, moving traditions toward a more acceptable middle. Doctrines such as predestination and the bondage of the will, for example, have sharp theological elbows, generating conflicts with a religiosity shaped by free association. The real presence of Christ in the Sacrament was also found provocative. The corrosive forces of the melting pot cooked down the differences. So Lutherans who had adapted to American public life, such as Samuel Simon Schmucker of Gettysburg Seminary, proposed what he termed an “American Lutheranism,” shorn of the offensive doctrines, more amenable to the Methodism that had come to dominate nineteenth century American religious life. Schmucker’s proposal, in fact, recognized what was already happening in the congregations. Lutheran identity was being displaced by American identity.

Another problem the immigrants faced was linguistic. Arriving in the new land, they generally settled among those who shared their language. In these linguistic communities, as small as neighborhoods in the larger cities, but among Lutherans more commonly rural villages and towns, the settlers attempted to replicate what they had known at home. Often they were poor and underprivileged, migrating in hopes of economic and social improvements. But as the immigration grew, whole vil-

lages left Germany and the Scandinavian countries seeking new opportunities. Sometimes, like the Saxon migration to Missouri, they brought their pastors with them; commonly the immigrants came first and then began seeking Lutheran pastors who could serve them.

As they settled, the immigrants recoiled against the denatured or neutered American Lutheranism proposed by Schmucker and earlier settlers. There were some old Lutheran holdouts who had held the confessions dear. But as the nineteenth century moved into its second third, the immigrants arrived from Lutheran churches in the old countries that had recently become more aware of their confessional heritage. The Prussian Union, remembered in the United States as “the evil Prussian Union,” had contributed to a confessional revival, particularly in Germany but with influence in Norway and other Scandinavian nations. The immigration that produced The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod came out of these sources. They arrived hoping to find a place where they could be Lutherans in America, maintaining their heritage intact.

From the beginning of large-scale immigration, the Lutheran Confessions had a critically important function for new American Lutherans. There were confessionally committed Lutherans left in America from earlier immigrations. For example, the Tennessee Synod was born fighting the acculturation of the North Carolina Synod. David Henkel, one of its founders, worked with his brothers to publish the first American edition of the Book of Concord. But the recently arrived immigrants turned the tide against acculturation, at least for the time being. In addition to the Small Catechism, they commonly arrived with three books in hand, the Bible, the Concordia and a hymnal, all in their mother tongue. Sometimes, commonly enough, they also brought copies of Luther’s Galatians Commentary. They were determined to keep the faith they had brought with them.

Because they spoke the language of the nations they had left behind, the newly settled Americans drew their scholarly resources from Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Using such sources, the immigrant churches produced a rich deposit of confessional studies. C. F. W. Walther led the way, particularly with his lectures on Law and Gospel. Charles Porterfield Krauth in Pennsylvania took up the matter of confessional authority. Others, such as Matthias Loy in Ohio, wrote extended studies on individual confessions. Later generations continued the work. George J. Fritschel’s study of the Formula of Concord, produced in Dubuque, Iowa, still sets a benchmark

as does J. Michael Reu's study of the catechisms.

For the immigrant churches, the language transition began where it usually does among arriving language groups, between the original generation, eager to preserve contact with what had been left behind, and their children, equally eager to speak the languages of schools and playgrounds. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had a resource to deploy in this conflict: the parochial schools. Even into the 1960s, long after English had become the language of the Church, Missouri's educational system was strongly Germanic.

But the Scandinavians weren't always so careful. As their children became more and more at home in English, they gradually pushed a transition to English for the family, the school and the church. Still, it took a long time. In 1949, King Haakon of Norway traveled from the eastern to the western border of North Dakota, stopping at virtually every crossing to greet Norwegian Americans who had supported Norway during World War II. Those who traveled with him reported hearing virtually every dialect of Norwegian from the people who came to greet the king. But within a year, in 1950, Norwegian as a public language had virtually disappeared in public circles. Fresh memories of the war made Yankees of every stripe hostile to Germanic sounding languages.

Luther comes to North America

North American Luther research began with the language transition, as originally European Lutherans translated to help their children and grandchildren face the pressures of the theological melting pot. There were remaining instances of purely Germanic scholarship. When it was published in St. Louis, Johann Georg Walch's edition of Luther's works made them widely available in America in the original languages for the first time.

The first priority for American Luther scholarship was translating Luther into English. Originally, it was not an organized process, but hit or miss, with individuals or small groups of individuals publishing various volumes. Matthias Loy published a translation of one of Luther's postils in 1869. J.N. Lenker, associated with a group called "Luther in All Lands," translated others of the postils, publishing them as "Luther's Sermons on the Gospels" and "Luther's Sermons on the Epistles." He dedicated

these publications to the "Luther readers," remembering individuals and small groups in Scandinavia who learned to know Luther through his published sermons, clearly hoping people would follow their precedent on the American side of the Atlantic.

A more systematic approach to Luther translation was undertaken in Pennsylvania by pastors and professors whose families remembered Charles Porterfield Krauth and the earlier American Lutheran controversy with Schmucker. His legacy was concentrated at what is now the Lutheran School of Theology in Philadelphia. Charles M. Jacobs gathered a small group of translators who provided six volumes worth of Luther's occasional writings, now remembered as the Philadelphia Edition. Many of these translations were carried over, with some revision, into the American Edition of *Luther's Works*, now the main source of Luther's works in English.

The American Edition, originally 55 volumes now being supplemented with further translations, was developed cooperatively by publishers that had previously been active in bringing Lutheran books to English speakers. One was Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis — it published the first 30 volumes, devoted to Luther's exegetical work, including the Genesis, Psalms and Galatians

commentaries. Fortress Press, originally Muhlenberg and the heir to the Philadelphia Edition, published volumes 31–55, Luther's occasional and polemical writings, including the *Bondage of the Will*. Helmut Lehman, originally from the Canadian prairies in Saskatchewan, finished a doctorate at Erlangen in 1939. He was one of the general editors along with Jaroslav Pelikan, a student of Wilhelm Pauck's who after early prominence in the field, left Luther scholarship and eventually left the Lutheran Church for Eastern Orthodoxy.

In addition to his work with the American Edition, Helmut Lehmann led the way in commissioning translations of German and Scandinavian Luther scholarship, publishing a significant number of important texts in Philadelphia, at what was then Muhlenberg Press. Paul Athaus' *Theology of Martin Luther* and Lennart Pinomaa's *Faith Victorious* became particularly important. They were joined by works of Gerhard Ebeling, Regin Prenter and Gustaf Wingren. Following in the same tradition, Augsburg Fortress Press — succeeding out of Muhlenberg

Can the LCMS exercise the theological leadership that Lutherans in America and across the globe so desperately need?

and then Fortress Press — in 1999 published Bernhard Lohse's masterful introduction to Luther studies, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historic and Systematic Development*. Though some of the earlier publications were published jointly with SCM and other English publishers, using translators from England, there were enough of the Scandinavian language speakers left into the 1960s and 1970s to find American translators. So J.M. Jensen, a Danish immigrant who served in both Canada and the United States, translated Prenter; a Finnish American, Walter J. Kokkenen, translated Pinomaa.

When common usage of languages spoken in Europe by Lutherans begin to die off in America, in the aftermath of World War II, American Lutheran seminaries continued to produce people capable of reading Luther's Latin and German. Commonly, these scholars did their graduate studies in Germany or Scandinavia and kept up close relationships with their teachers and other scholars with whom they had studied. The faculty at Erlangen welcomed a number of American candidates. Paul Althaus, Werner Elert and Herman Sasse, who eventually immigrated to Australia, all maintained strong influence in the United States. Sasse was closely interested in Lutheranism in America and kept up an extensive correspondence with, among others, Herman Preus at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. But he left his legacy primarily in the LCMS, with faculty members and now the president of the church.

Edgar M. Carlson, the long time president of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, led the way in bringing Swedish Luther research to American students. The son of Swedish immigrants to Wisconsin, he grew up speaking his mother tongue. Though he did his academic degree in Chicago, he used his family's language to become closely familiar with the work of the theologians at Lund, in Sweden, where Anders Nygren, Gustaf Aulen and Ragnar Bring had established one of the centers of Luther research. Carlson's book, *Luther Reinterpreted*, opened up the scholarly connections that gave Gustaf Wingren and his Danish co-worker Regin Prenter strong influence with an emerging generation of American Lutheran theologians.

The International Luther Congresses, meeting every five or six years in Europe as well as occasionally, the United States, has fostered direct working relationships between European and American Luther scholars. One of the congresses met at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; later, one assembled at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. In the

1960s, the congresses welcomed American Roman Catholic scholars, such as Jared Wicks and Harry McSorley, a close associate of Heinz Otto Pesch, who led the way in Germany.

Several German Luther scholars immigrated to the United States, leaving a rich legacy of doctoral students to carry on the research. Wilhelm Pauck was perhaps the most influential. Born in Westphalia, trained by Karl Holl and Ernst Troeltsch at Berlin, Pauck began his teaching career in Chicago, but served on several other faculties, most notably Union Seminary in New York. There he became doctor father to a number of important American Luther scholars, such as Pelikan, Lewis Spitz, Hans Hillerbrand and William G. Lazareth, who worked in Luther's ethics. George Wolfgang Forell, originally from Breslau, spent his academic life at the University of Iowa. He made a deep impression at a Luther Congress in Erfurt, before the fall of the wall that separated Germany, setting out the freedom of the Gospel. Heiko Oberman left the Netherlands to teach at Harvard University in the 1960s. When he left Harvard for Tübingen, several of his doctoral students became prominent in American Luther studies, including Scott Hendrix of Princeton and Kenneth Hagen, who taught at Marquette in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Oberman returned to the United States toward the end of his vocation, teaching in Tucson, Arizona, where his wife enjoyed better health. Gerhard Forde, who did his doctoral work at Harvard, has sometimes been associated with Oberman but didn't actually study with him. He was more closely related to scholarship from Lund, Gustaf Wingren and Lauri Haikola originally, and in his later years, Leif Grane at Copenhagen.

In recent years, the most influential German Luther scholar in America has been Oswald Bayer, now retired from the Tübingen faculty. Forde's students, such as Steven Paulson of the Luther faculty in St. Paul and Mark Mattes of Grandview College in Des Moines, Iowa, have been particularly drawn to him.

There were several fine Luther scholars identified with the LCMS, particularly Lewis Spitz, who came from one of the outstanding families of Synod. He taught at Stanford, where he served as doctor father to a number of other American Lutheran scholars, including James Kittelson, who finished his career teaching at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, and Robert Rosin at Concordia, St. Louis. In more recent years, Robert Kolb has through extensive publications been a leader in American Luther scholarship. Kolb has also been very interested in Melancthon

research, working with Timothy Wengert, a student of Forde's who taught at the Lutheran School of Theology in Philadelphia. Kolb and Wengert together led the team of translators who produced a recent, authoritative translation of the Book of Concord. The faculty at Concordia, Fort Wayne, has also included some fine Luther scholars, including Naomichi Masaki and John Pless.

Arthur Carl Piepkorn of the Concordia faculty in St. Louis was also identified with Luther studies. But he made a sharp distinction between the theology of the Lutheran Confessions, which he taught as authoritative, and the theology of Luther, which he treated more distantly. He was also strongly committed to liturgical reform. Consequently, his legacy has appeared more in ecumenical work, particularly in relation to Catholicism. Ecumenical scholars, such as George Lindbeck of Yale, Robert W. Jenson, now retired and living in Princeton, New Jersey, and Carl Braaten, also retired and living in Arizona, have taken an approach to Luther something like Piepkorn's, de-emphasizing his theological contributions to stress ecumenical reconciliation. Jenson and Braaten have been particularly interested in the work of Tuomo Mannerma, who carried on Pinomaa's legacy at the University of Helsinki. Mannerma died this spring.

In recent years, American Luther scholarship has fallen on difficult times. The generation that mediated the findings of Luther scholars in Germany and Scandinavia, who led the way with their own research, has by and large died or gone into retirement. There are still some strong scholars scattered among various seminary and college faculties. Their work can be found in such publications as the *Lutheran Quarterly* and the *Luther Digest*, an Annual Abridgement of Luther Studies. But the prestigious American universities whose graduate schools were so important to developing the next generations of Lutheran seminary faculties have by and large pushed theological education into the sidelights, dropping or marginalizing Luther studies along the way. Denominational seminaries, according to authoritative surveys, have in recent years suffered dramatic enrollment losses; with rare exception the schools are virtually all in financial crisis.

While LCMS faculties have continued to produce graduate students, the seminaries of the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) are no longer productive. There the forces of acculturation are particularly evident. Confessional course work has been significantly reduced, pushed to the margins or eliminated; where Luther scholarship survives, it is in heavy contention. As

a recent survey of American Luther studies demonstrates, the primary remaining interest is not so much Luther and his theology but what might be called "clientele studies,"² Luther's possible implications for the particular group with whom the scholar identifies, such as feminists or gay liberationists. Some scholarly disciplines may be still evident in these studies, some insight might be gained, but the value of such studies for the Church or the community outside of the selected target group is an open question. Using Luther

studies as a indicator, the decline of much of American Lutheranism is indisputable.

Assessing the decline

Working through the history of American Lutheranism, two different approaches to the relationship of the Church and culture can be distinguished. They may be more differences of degree than of substance; American Lutherans, like their European forebears, share a generally positive view of the culture, valuing images of critical participation in public life. Still, American Lutherans have differed on the particulars. One tradition has maintained a more critical distance from the culture, seeking to preserve its theological heritage over and against forces that might dilute it; the other has sought more convergence between its heritage and the culture, welcoming a more open-ended conversation.

The outlines of the division between these two approaches already emerged in the Predestination Controversy, dating back to the late nineteenth century. The Prussian Union, enforcing Calvinism in self-consciously Lutheran communities in Germany, had produced more skepticism about public culture among the Saxon immigrants that, with some few others, made up The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Their deeper loyalties to the

Can [the LCMS] be faithful to both its own theological heritage and the cultures in which it serves without falling into a separatism that would isolate it? Can it actually be close without becoming closed?

² Christine Helmer, "The American Luther," *Dialog* 47:2 (Summer, 2008).

Formula of Concord — with its doctrine of predestination in Article XI — clashed with American assertions of free will, reinforcing cultural suspicions. Carefully preserving their own distinctiveness, the Missourians joined with the Wisconsin Synod and a smaller group of Norwegians loyal to Formula of Concord X to form the Synodical Conference. These churches did not merge, among themselves or with others, but set in place mechanisms to prevent dilution of their witness.

C. F. W. Walther's careful exposition of the doctrine of predestination set off a storm of controversy among the Norwegian immigrant churches in the late nineteenth century. Philippist advisors to the Danish king in the sixteenth century had sabotaged his subscription to the Formula; consequently, it had less practical value among the Norwegians and Danes who immigrated. Other German speaking churches more adapted to American visions of personal freedom joined in the opposition to Walther and the predestinarians. Significantly, one of the Norwegian synods called itself "the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood."

Among the churches that opposed the conference on predestination, a century of mergers began. At first, they took place along ethnic lines — in 1917, for instance, the three Norwegian church bodies merged to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, agreeing to disagree on predestination. Mergers across ethnic lines followed among several others. The United Lutheran Church, for example, brought together Germans and Swedes. Finally, in 1989, invoking images familiar from European folk church Lutheranism, the one great merger long hoped for took place in the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The merging churches spoke the folk church language of inclusiveness in its American political form and immediately set in a place a system of quotas which sought to give all and sundry opportunities for full participation in its governance.

The coercive forces of the American melting pot have proven their power on both sides of the divide over approaches to public culture. To begin with, the numbers are down across the boards. In the past decade, Missouri is said to have lost a half million members, down to 2.2 million, percentage-wise a loss almost as large as that in the ELCA. With greater numbers at its origin, roughly some five and a half million, the ELCA has had the greater numerical losses. Attrition and departures induced by church conflicts have combined to reduce the membership to about three and a half million. By one reliable

report, church officials in the headquarters at Chicago recently discussed the possibility of ELCA membership bottoming out at about a million.

Further, evidence of theological acculturation has also accumulated on both sides of the historic division. The LCMS went through a period in the late 1950s and 1960s when in one apt description, it was not sufficiently Missouri. The faculty at Concordia in St. Louis spoke the language of the Church in public, but in the classroom taught practices perceived as undermining it. When Missouri drifted, the Synodical Conference broke apart, the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS going their separate ways. The remainders of the St. Louis faculty that turned up on the doorstep of the ELCA turned out as problematic there as they had been in the LCMS. As much as the self-styled "exiles" despised J.A.O. Preus, in the end they proved his point.

The prominence of the church growth movement in Missouri points in the same direction. When institutional growth claims pre-eminence over the Church's heritage, free will theologies multiply and the Church declines, even if it succeeds enough to be able to rejoice in its crowds. The melting pot does not respect synod boundaries.

Valuing openness and the rhetoric of tolerance, the ELCA has had a substantially greater problem theologically. The trouble appeared before the church began. A well-placed feminist on the Committee for a New Lutheran Church, which negotiated the merger, argued that the doctrine of the Trinity is inherently sexist and brought it up for a vote. Reportedly, for all of the ecumenical significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, it barely survived.

One of the commonly argued grounds for the merger was that the combined numbers would give Lutherans more influence in public life and culture. The size of the church lost some of its magic when church officials, setting up offices in that city, discovered that it was about the same size as the Roman Catholic diocese of Chicago. But there were still any number of advocates eager to capture the perceived influence for their ends. Ecumenists took the first swing at it, urging Roman Catholic consensus against prized characteristics of the Lutheran heritage. But there were more troublesome issues to come. Social advocates, who commonly devalued the church's theological heritage in favor of claims to peace and justice, joined forces to push the gay agenda. Church officials lent a hand, changing the rules, until finally in 2009 a national church assembly ratified the ordination of practicing

homosexuals. Bishops quickly assured congregations that they were not compelled to comply in their parishes. But the die was cast.

The ecumenical consequences of the 2009 vote have unfolded slowly, with only occasional drama. Clearly, however, the ELCA and with it the Lutheran World Federation, have broken out of a prevailing standard on sexual practice that has held since the days of the New Testament, isolating themselves from the formal policies of both Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity, together the overwhelming majority of the world's Christians. The decision has also led to a break with national churches in Africa, Asia and other parts of the world that continue to hold with the authority of the biblical Word. Not surprisingly, American church officials have invoked a variety of cultural images familiar from the melting pot to support its decisions — the myth of progress, advances in human knowledge, the cultural relativism of the Scriptures themselves, and so forth. To no one's great surprise, these appeals have been joined with naked power plays involving western funds. Imperialism can take several identities.

Thus the first quarter century of the ELCA's history presses a question. In all the talk of openness and tolerance that it has generated, welcoming everyone, can this church — so called by its own officials — tolerate the tradition that historically brought it into being? Can it accept itself? Is there any room within it? — in its offices, on its faculties, in its parishes — for those who identify themselves biblically with Luther and the confessions? In fact, there are significant numbers of pastors and congregations remaining within the ELCA tucked away in pockets where they can maintain traditional loyalties. But the continuing decline of Lutheran seminary faculties, the election of successive presiding bishops with little or no formal theological education in either the Confessions or Luther, combined with the similarly declining quality of synod bishops, all come together to render doubtful the survival of such pockets for long. Consequently, some four hundred congregations have left the ELCA to form the North American Lutheran Church; more than double that number have affiliated with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ. Enthusiastically in and also of the world, the ELCA appears to be salt that has lost its sting.

While both the ELCA and the LCMS have had their troubles with the coercive forces of the American melting pot, Missouri has in a couple of instances demonstrated its capacity to regenerate its tradition. Each of them has been

controversial, bringing complaints with the accolades.

When Jacob A. O. Preus, who took some considerable pride in his Norwegian heritage, took over as president of the Missouri Synod in the late 1960s, he brought the forces of the melting pot down upon himself and his alliance. Vituperated by his opponents within the Synod and the public press alike, he was described as a “fundamentalist” bent on enforcing an antique form of Lutheran orthodoxy far out of touch with contemporary life. In fact, “Jack” — as he was commonly called — was like his brother, Robert, deeply anchored in the theology that marked Missouri in its origins. Well after his critics lost interest, he was still busy rebuilding the Concordia, St. Louis faculty and the Church. Though the controversy remains, he has been vindicated historically. His opponents, who left the Synod posturing as harbingers of a new order, proved as divisive in their new home. Missouri recovered its balance.

Matthew Harrison, who has led a second recovery as the current president of the LCMS, has attracted the same kind of criticism. Opponents within the Synod and outside of it have portrayed his administration pejoratively as power driven and exclusive. But like Preus, Harrison has been shaped theologically by the forces that have moved Missouri throughout its history. Herman Sasse, whose three volumes of letters to American church leaders, edited by Harrison, were distributed to participants, was an extraordinarily perceptive observer of the American church at the same time that he was a closely disciplined theologian. While serving on the faculty at Erlangen, he recognized the threat of Nazism as early as 1934, far before others. From his later position in Adelaide, he served the proclamation of the Gospel in Australia by his teaching and in the United States with his letters. Harrison's use of Sasse lays the groundwork for a creative engagement between the Church's theological heritage and the cultures in which it serves.

To be sure, there are elements within the LCMS that show evidence of enclosure. The ELCA's problem has been its left wing; Missouri's challenge has come from its right, which pounces on suggestions of variance as proof positive of corruption, to be dealt with coercively, with tar and feathers. It is as though the Eighth Commandment has been suspended for theological discussion. The outsider becomes an enemy to be overcome rather than a neighbor to be engaged.

Thus there are questions that remain. Given the course of the ELCA, can the LCMS exercise the theological lead-

ership that Lutherans in America and across the globe so desperately need? Can it be faithful to both its own theological heritage and the cultures in which it serves without falling into a separatism that would isolate it? Can it actually be close without becoming closed? Can it maintain sound doctrine without falling into a doctrinalism in which the doctrine displaces Christ Jesus as the agent of justification?

These are challenging questions. This conference, like its predecessor a few years ago in Atlanta, provides evidence that they can all be answered positively. Carrying on from here is the mission to which all of us, from the corners of the earth, are called.

The Rev. James Arne Nestigen is professor emeritus of Church History at Luther Seminary.