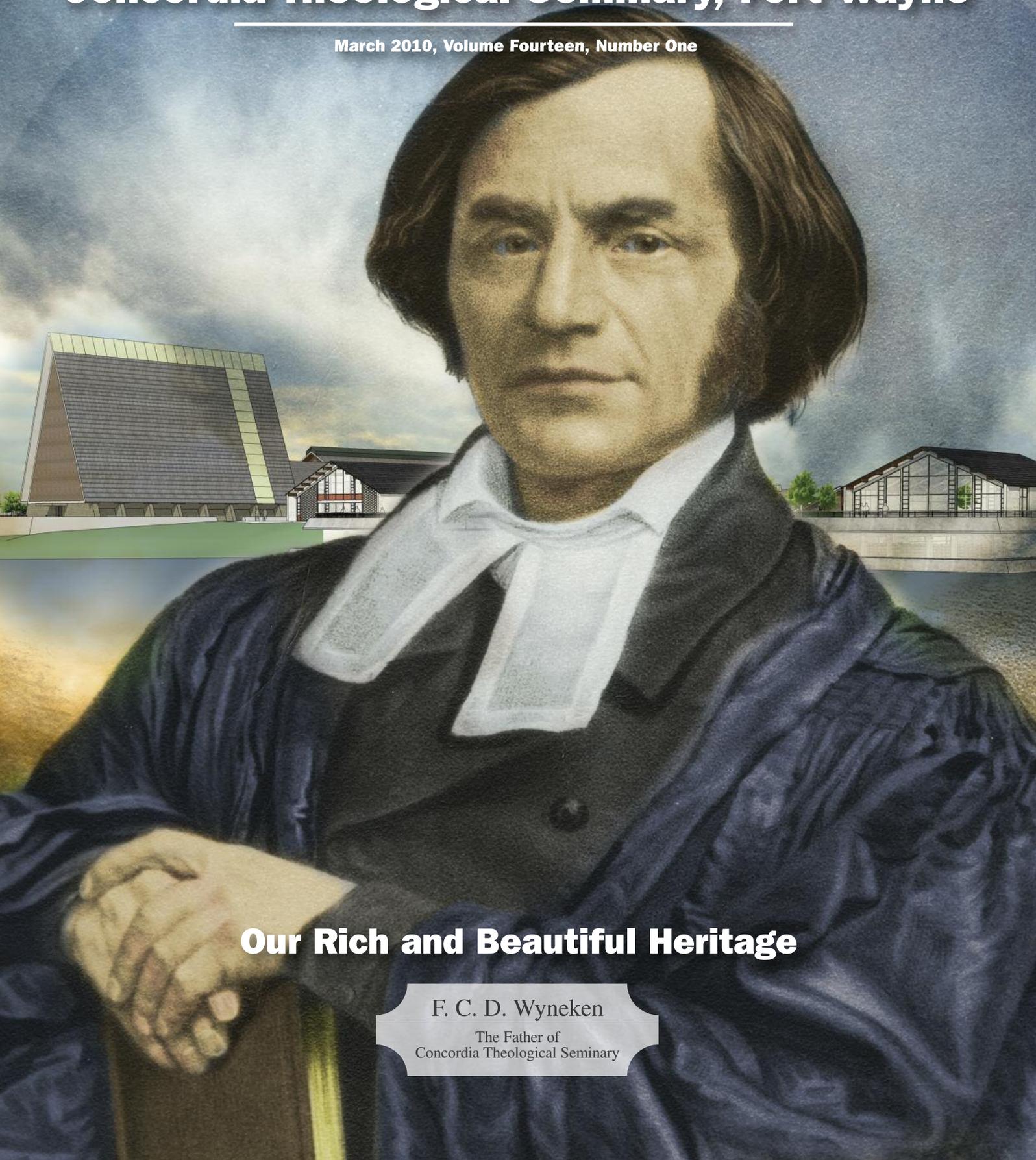


For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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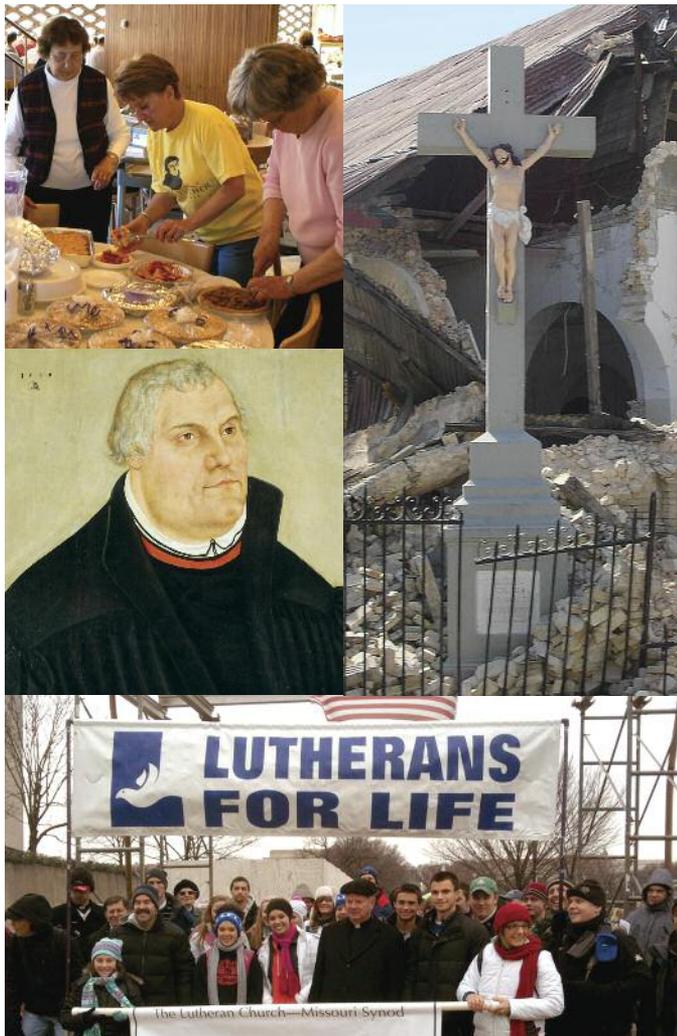
Our Rich and Beautiful Heritage

F. C. D. Wyneken

The Father of
Concordia Theological Seminary

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There’s *lots* that separates Luther’s world from ours besides time and miles! So what then is his “legacy” to *our* world? Does Luther have anything to say to people alive now? Perhaps, surprisingly, the answer is a resounding yes! For in spite of all the obvious differences, there are even more important similarities—indeed, constants—that we see in Luther’s world and our own.
- 10 Our Rich Heritage—Luther: Catechism and Tradition in the Parish Today**
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I am thankful for my forefathers who kept pointing me to Scripture and Christ with an eye to the Christian Church and taught me how to journey through death to life everlasting. I also realized that I had now become a part of the faithful witnesses and the son who would pass on the saving words of Christ. Through stories, sermons, devotions, writings and preaching, my congregation would hear and learn from Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz, C.F.W. Walther, Philipp Melancthon and others who shared similar faith struggles as we did.

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The More Things Change: Capturing Wyneken's Vision for Today

An economy in collapse due to market speculation; bank failure; record unemployment; the housing market in a downward spiral—these all too human realities can make ministry challenging, to say the least! But I'm not talking about 2010. The Panic of 1837 challenged the youthful United States in ways it had never before experienced. The transition to a market capitalist system was largely complete, and speculators were taking advantage of the circumstances by making money via unbridled speculation. However, on May 10, 1837, the system collapsed when banks in New York City stopped payment in gold and silver. The result was a five-year depression. This was the context into which Friedrich Wyneken stepped.

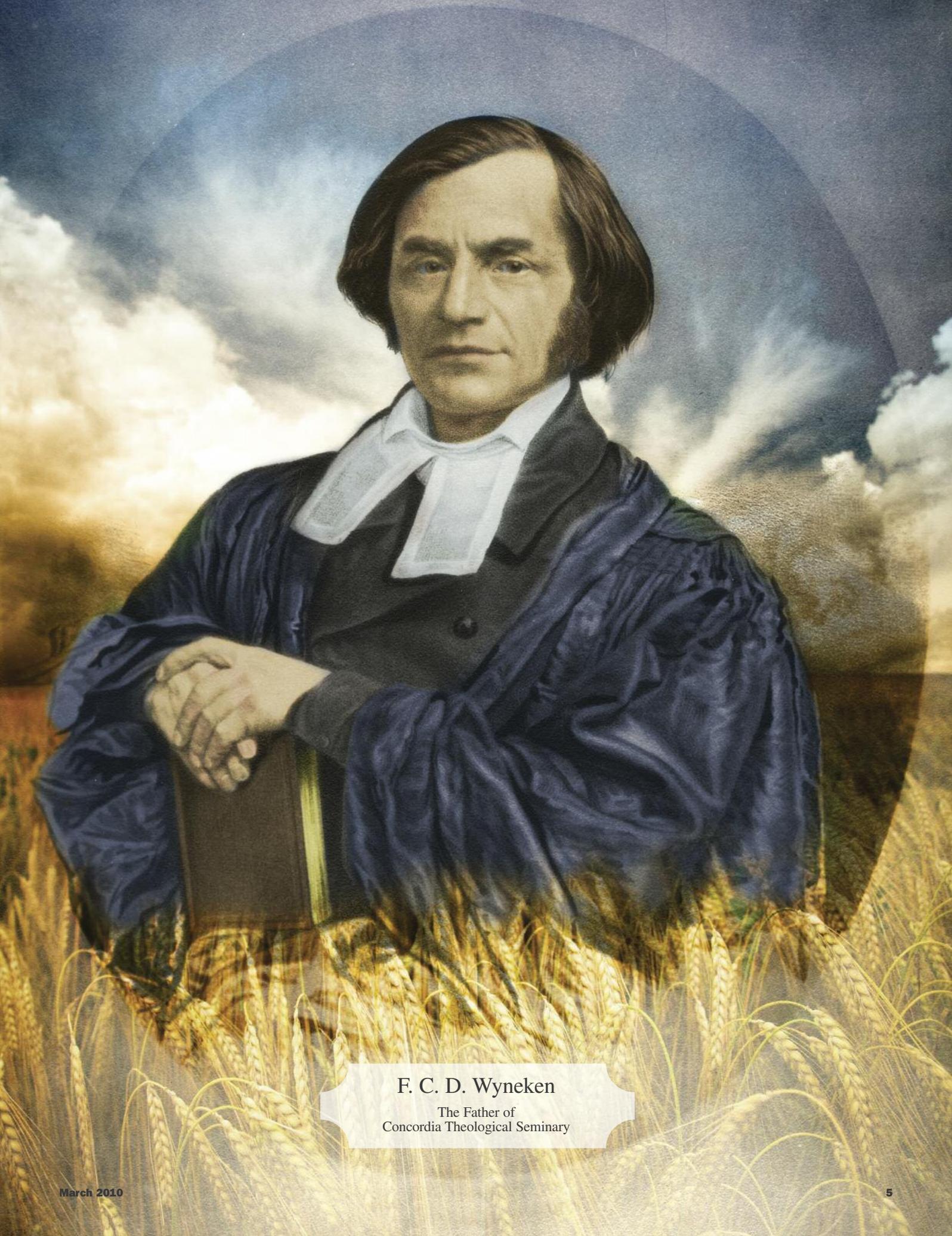


Similar themes, different circumstances. The need for the preaching of God's Word—and for the preparation of faithful preachers of the Gospel—remains as pressing today as it was in Wyneken's time.

This calendar year we recall the 200th anniversary of one of our seminary's founders, Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken (1810–1876). Born on May 13, 1810, Wyneken came to the United States at the age of 28, just at the time the U.S. was experiencing the first of its difficult periods of economic challenge. The human cost was immense and, as immigrants arrived to find there were no jobs, they were driven to the western frontier—places like Fort Wayne, Indiana. That was where, in the late summer of 1838, Wyneken began to gather these hardscrabble settlers together into Lutheran congregations.

Wyneken traveled widely throughout Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, where he found similar unfortunate circumstances. German immigrants were going without any meaningful spiritual care. If preachers were even present, many times they were from traditions that claimed that Lutheran doctrine was false and that baptism did not give the forgiveness of sins. Worst of all was when these positions were taken by those who claimed the name Lutheran! It didn't take Wyneken long to realize that the situation was dire indeed. The spiritual lives of thousands of Lutherans were in danger.

How could one man do much in the face of such challenges? In 1843 he published *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*—a call to Germany to “come over and help us.” This short piece helped introduce Germans to the plight of the immigrants in the United States.



F. C. D. Wyneken
The Father of
Concordia Theological Seminary

Now to the misery in the dense forests of the wide west through which, and on the wide prairies over which the German immigrants have poured like a mighty stream. Singly or in small groups our brethren settle in the forest with wife and child, often having no neighbors, and even if they do have some in the vicinity, they are separated from each other by the dense forest, so that they know nothing about each other. Now come, enter the [log cabins] of your brothers. See, brethren, how they, men, women and children, have to work hard to cut down the giant trees, to clear out the underbrush, to plow and to plant, for their meager finances are disappearing or are already gone. ... Clothing and shoes are also wearing out and winter is at hand! No wonder, then, that everyone is working to secure what is indispensable for the body. There is no difference between Sunday and weekday, particularly since here no bells call the people to church services and the festively dressed neighbor does not stop by to pick up his friend. It is no wonder at all if tired limbs are stretched out on the bed without a prayer being said, and that their misery drives them out again and back to work without a prayer. ... No preacher comes to shake them out of their worldly striving and thinking, and the voice of the sweet Gospel has not been heard for a long time.



Thousands of families, your fellow believers, perhaps even your brothers and sisters in the flesh, are hungry for the Gospel’s powerful food. They implore you, crying out in distress: “Oh, help us! Give us preachers who will strengthen us with the Bread of Life, who will build us up with the Word of the Lord, who will instruct our children in Jesus’ holy teachings! Oh help us, or we are lost!”

Through his pleas for help funds were raised and men were moved to offer themselves for the ministry. Wyneken first tutored students for ministry in his parsonage and later worked with Wilhelm Loehe and Wilhelm Sihler to establish Concordia Theological Seminary in October 1846 to provide missionary pastors to teach the faithful, reach the lost and care for all.

This all sounds somewhat familiar, doesn’t it? Economic hardship, record unemployment, distressed immigrant communities, lack of pastors—we hear of all of these things almost daily. At the same time, while today’s themes echo the past, there is also the reality of radical differences between yesterday and today. Transportation, technology and culture—all have changed dramatically. It took Wyneken a month to get from Pittsburgh to Fort Wayne in 1838; today one can make the same drive in much less than half a day. Letters took weeks to make their way to their intended recipient and return; today e-mail is instantaneous. Wyneken’s diaries have been translated but only partially published; today blogs and Twitter tell us more than we want to know about what people are doing!

Similar themes, different circumstances. The need for the preaching of God’s Word—and for the preparation of faithful preachers of the Gospel—remains as pressing today as it was in Wyneken’s time.

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I beg you, God willing, take up the work and quickly walk together! Stop conferring about it! Hurry! Hurry! All that matters is that there are eternal souls to redeem! 

Dr. Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., serves as Academic Dean and Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

