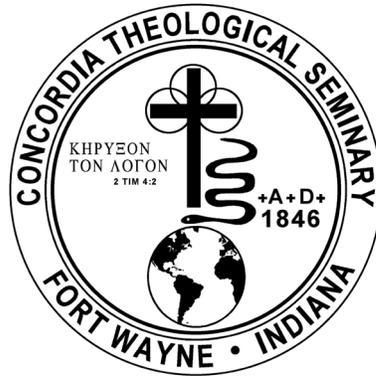


# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



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## **Concordia Theological Seminary 1985–2010: A Story of Decline and Revival**

**William C. Weinrich**

Dates are at times arbitrary. They may merely bracket a period of time in which important events occurred which are descriptive of an institution's history. In the case of our present interest, however, 1985–2010 possesses a real accuracy. In 1985, President Ralph Bohlmann sent a team to investigate the alleged “unrest” at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTS). This visitation may serve as the marker for what would become a decade of difficulties and decline at CTS. Not until the election of Dean Wenthe as seminary president would normalcy and growth return to the school, culminating in 2010 when for the first time in its history CTS received a ten-year accreditation from both of its accreditors.

As Concordia Theological Seminary entered into the decade of the '90s, the period of any effective leadership under Robert Preus was over. He had been removed from office by the Board of Regents in 1989, although by synodical resolution he would be reinstated in 1992. Yet, this was meaningless for the seminary, for the real administration was given to Michael Stelmachowicz as CEO. In spring of 1993, David Schmiel was installed as president. The years 1990–1995 would see institutional stagnation, steep declines in student enrollment, fiscal weakness, and a real threat that accreditation would be revoked. In April 1996, Dean O. Wenthe assumed the presidency, and under his guidance a truly remarkable turnaround began, culminating in 2010, when, as I noted, for the first time in its history CTS received a ten-year accreditation from both of its accreditors.

The following is a personal reflection on those years and the events which defined them. I attempt to give an accurate presentation of what was often tumultuous and contentious. The early 1990s were not easy years, but they were formative, and for me (and others) they were a cauldron in which not only institutional questions but also theological issues came to greater clarity. For much of the following, I was an active participant. Personal perspective will be evident, and space demands a certain selectivity. Moreover, I will not attempt to evade evaluations and judgments which, yet today, seem to me justified.

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### I. Some Background

In the mid-1980s, the faculty and students were hardly aware that we were entering into a very contentious period in our seminary's history. Obviously, in many ways life and learning on the campus went on, and it remains my opinion that in the main there was a very high degree of satisfaction among both faculty and students. Nonetheless, we must mention two developments that would play a huge role in the near future and in their own way would contribute to the ruffled relationship which CTS would have with certain synodical authorities. The first is the deepening hostility between President Preus and the synodical president, Ralph Bohlmann. Preus was a much-beloved president and wildly popular with the students, and he had a significant portion of the faculty who were deeply loyal to him personally. But his great strength was his total commitment to confessional Lutheranism and his palpable love for the vocation of theologian. He relished theological discussion, and this aspect of his *persona* gave to CTS a particular edge—theology was queen, and the vocation of the Lutheran pastor was to do dutiful honor to that regent. Yet, theology was a *habitus practicus*, and the pastoral office was the natural home of the theologian. CTS students gained from Preus this attitude, and when later certain cultural attitudes were thought to be eroding Lutheran habits and disciplines, our students at times found themselves at odds with various church officials who were promoting practices and liturgies they viewed as more creative.

With a certain inevitability, the hard feelings between Preus and Bohlmann, along with CTS critique of certain synodical postures,<sup>1</sup> embroiled the seminary in various disputes which were then agitating the synod as a whole. In 1985, President Bohlmann sent a team to investigate “unrest” on the campus. It was a typical attempt of central government to manage affairs in its favor by uncovering a crisis which required solution. Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that the legacy of the final years of Preus's presidency—namely, the latter years of the 1980s and the early years of the 1990s—was to leave the seminary in a relation of unhelpful antagonism with various synodical offices and a sizeable number of district presidents, as well as a ruptured trust in CTS graduates in many congregations, however unfair and undeserved that was. This troubled position of CTS within the wider context of the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as the LCMS was faced with an increasingly liberal ELCA, the question arose whether various cooperative endeavors, such as military chaplaincy and human disaster response, should be continued. To give a positive answer to this issue, the idea of “levels of fellowship” was developed. No one was more critical of this idea than Kurt Marquart, who articulated the theological problems in such an idea. There is one and only one true church fellowship, namely, that of unity in the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The idea of “levels” is incoherent and nonsensical. Of course, Marquart was correct. But his opposition was not appreciated by synodical officialdom.

synod would shed its shade upon the institutional and pedagogical aspects of the seminary throughout the next ten years. Only with the presidency of Dean Wenthe would more normal relations return.

However, the drama surrounding the last years of Robert Preus was intimately bound up with the ascendancy of a theological emphasis that came to be recognized as most characteristic of CTS. In brief, this emphasis was on the flesh of the incarnated Son as the *locus* and the *form* of theological thought and church practice. Just as in the person of Jesus his human nature was the form and instrument of his redemptive deity, so in the life of the church there are human instantiations of Christ's redemptive activity. These are primarily the pastor as the image and representative of Christ among his flock, the historic liturgy as the proper and most robust form of Christian worship, and the necessity of care for the body and the soul through ministries of mercy and spiritual care. At the beginning, the rise of the conviction that the truth of Christ could not remain merely noetic and propositional but had to be realized in the concrete patterns of ecclesial life was rather willy-nilly—at least as a common conviction within a segment of faculty. There was no organized attempt to define a theological program with the above emphases. Rather, the individual academic interests of several faculty, as it were, combined to give CTS a theological trajectory in which Truth was held to assume form and in which Truth was held to be experienced within the forms Truth assumed. Here, as illustrative of this conviction, several professors may be especially mentioned: David Scaer, who was increasingly thinking dogma through the Gospel narratives (especially Matthew). Hermeneutically, this was important, for it placed the life of Christ as the proper lens for thinking through the claims of Christian dogma. Arthur Just, who brought an informed understanding of liturgy as “primary discourse,” that is, liturgy as arising out of the redemptive work of Christ and so providing the church with its proper language. One may also recall Just's development of a course entitled “Liturgy as Pastoral Care.” Dean Wenthe, whose Old Testament studies centered on the institutional realities of ancient Israel as the concrete and particular *forms* which bound Israel to the promises of God (Torah, temple, altar, priesthood). And, if I might, William Weinrich, who brought his interest in patristic theology and in that way reinforced the “high” Christology which was the conceptual basis of all of these.

Nor, as it happened, did this theological perspective develop within a vacuum. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, the LCMS was not immune from various cultural persuasions which confronted it with theological and practical questions. Two movements may be mentioned as of most significance. The first was the movement toward the ordination of women, which did not leave the LCMS unaffected. The collapse of some conservative and evangelical churches on this issue revealed the fact that the mere appeal to certain Pauline prohibitions was not

sufficient to argue for an all-male clergy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the question of the ordination of women demanded a response that articulated the “why” a man and not a woman might be pastor and bishop. Some of us in the faculty of CTS undertook to articulate this “why.” In this question, too, the importance of the flesh of Christ—that is, the concrete and particular form of his own humanity—was taken as an essential *datum* for reflecting on the issues arising from the debate on women’s ordination. The masculine form of Christ’s humanity was not incidental to the question of whether a man, and only a man, ought be pastor or bishop. The office of pastor, therefore, could not be thought of in merely functional terms. It entailed a particular human form, that of a man, who was and could be the *icon* of Christ within the flock to which he was bound as pastor. There was, then, a certain “ontological” aspect to the question of an all-male clergy.<sup>3</sup> The person and vocation of pastor was to be thought through the person of Christ himself. He was not merely the agent of a certain set of functions “distinctive” to the pastoral office.

Opposition in the synod to this way of responding to the issue of the ordination of women was broad and fierce. Such ideas, so it was claimed, threatened the idea of the pastor as servant and would give rise to authoritarian pastoral behaviors. Or, as some also claimed, such a “christological” concept of the pastor moved toward a Catholic idea of the priest possessing an “indelible” mark of the priesthood.<sup>4</sup>

The second movement was the rapid rise and strong enthusiasm for church growth. I must simplify. But characteristic of the church growth movement was the loss of confidence that traditional forms—such as liturgy, the received creeds, traditional hymnody, and the centrality of a sacramental piety—were effective in gaining new adherents to the Christian faith and in the growing of our

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<sup>2</sup> An incident within our own context of this point is instructive. During one of the faculty’s discussions on the office of pastor and the ordination of women, Professor Eugene Klug offered the opinion that there was no reason not to ordain women other than the fact that Paul had prohibited it. Such a comment revealed to me that some of the LCMS had no real concept of the pastoral office that meaningfully responded to the arguments adduced for women’s ordination. Moreover, that a mere apostolic prohibition could sufficiently ground the boundaries of a dominically instituted office was theologically inept. Arguments, even from within evangelical circles, were debunking Paul as culturally determined. More ominously, the specificity of Christ’s humanity as that of a man was similarly being sidelined as a divine accommodation to cultural patriarchy. Evidently, the appeal to various verses in the Pauline *corpus* required a deeper grounding for those verses themselves! Refer to William C. Weinrich, “*It Is Not Given to Women to Teach*”: A *Lex in Search of a Ratio* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Weinrich, “*It Is Not Given to Women to Teach*,” 19ff.

<sup>4</sup> On two occasions, President Bohlmann, in personal conversation, advanced this evaluation of my attempt to ground the ordination of men in the fact that they thereby imaged the person of Christ. I was struck by the reluctance to confront the actual nature of the question: why men only and not women. Obviously, the question is difficult, but to declare off-limits the very point of contention seemed to me then, and now still, a failure of theological awareness.

congregations. The theological emphasis I have mentioned above opposed the methods and the new structures of the church growth movement and advocated for the theological integrity and missiological strength of the historic and traditional forms of pastoral leadership, historic liturgy, and the central importance of sacramental piety and the disciplines it entails (closed Communion). In these issues as well, the Fort Wayne faculty often found itself at odds with synodical and district officials, as well as with many pastors and congregations which struggled with declining expectations and were enticed by the promises of success through church growth methodologies.

The point of this extended preamble is to outline the fact that as we moved into the 1990s there was a mix of institutional as well as theological issues which embroiled the seminary in controversy with certain segments of the synod and the wider church. It was wholly impossible to disentangle these elements. And I should mention that divisions on these items reached into the faculty and student body of CTS itself.

## **II. 1990–1995: The Years of Norbert Mueller and David Schmiel**

I find it difficult to characterize in general terms these years at CTS. There was, to begin with, a certain institutional instability. In 1989, Robert Preus was removed from the office of president by the Board of Regents. For three years, 1989–1992, the role of acting president was given to Norbert Mueller. In 1992, Preus was reinstated by synodical resolution, but the real administrative authority was given to Michael Stelmachowicz. In April 1993, David Schmiel assumed the office of president. From 1989–1993, therefore, the seminary possessed no real administrative face. With Schmiel, administrative leadership returned. However, overall CTS continued to face institutional and fiscal weakness.

Yet, during the early 1990s there were positives that may be noted. Classes were taught without interruption, and with one major exception, which I will mention below, graduates were placed into the pastoral office. Moreover, there were curricular initiatives which intended to serve certain special needs within the synod. I will briefly mention three. (1) CTS, which since 1988 was offering an accredited Doctor of Ministry program at Christ College in Irvine, California, in 1990 received permission from its accreditors to offer the DMin also at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Catharines, Ontario, and at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta. These sites continued with varying degrees of success until 2010 when President Wenthe officially notified our accreditors that DMin work at Irvine, Edmonton, and St. Catharines was discontinued.

(2) CTS established and initiated the “Distance Education Leading to Ordination” (DELTO) program. This program responded to calls for theological education of laymen who were working and preaching in very small congregations. These laymen were otherwise employed and had no intention of residential pastoral education. Moreover, were they to leave for seminary, so it was feared, the congregations might altogether dissolve. Although this was a valiant attempt to address a real need in small contexts, from the beginning of the program the discipline to accept *only* men in such fragile contexts proved impossible. As it happened, DELTO became a certain prototype for various attempts to develop alternate routes into the pastoral ministry, which now has taken the form of the SMP program. Given contemporary concerns, it is not unimportant to note that the DELTO program was one way by which, it was hoped, black men might study for the ministry.

(3) CTS did, however, initiate a program which was specifically intended to recruit black men for the Lutheran ministry. Several times a year, courses, for which MDiv credit was given, would be offered at Concordia College, Selma, Alabama. The Board of Regents minutes in January 1994 report that three such courses were given during the academic year of 1994–1995, and that four such courses would be offered during the 1995–1996 academic year. The intent was to offer four courses on a continuing basis each year. Each course required that a professor travel to Selma for three consecutive weekends, usually teaching two hours on a Friday evening and eight hours on the following Saturday: ten hours of class each weekend for a total of thirty hours for the course. Although this program did achieve some success in bringing black men to our campus, the program was labor-intensive and involved considerable fiscal commitment for the seminary. Moreover, CTS had ongoing difficulty justifying to our accreditors that the courses offered in Selma met their accreditation standards. For example, in January 2005 the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) voted to extend approval of the Selma site for one year. Yet, it also required a report, due November 1, 2005, which was to document “how the programming at the Selma extension site meets the criteria for accreditation.” This report specifically demanded, among other things, that CTS address the following: (1) to “demonstrate that the courses offered at Selma are clearly graduate level courses, comparable in academic rigor to those offered at Fort Wayne”; (2) to “demonstrate that the classes offered at Selma have enrollment sufficient to constitute a community of inquiry among the students”; and (3) to “make explicit” how much financial subsidy CTS intended to expend on the Selma project and to explain “how this decision is consonant with the fiscal health of the institution as a whole.” The difficulties of sustaining that program were, unfortunately, evident. At

its February 2009 meeting, the ATS voted “to receive notification of the closure of the Selma, Alabama, extension site effective immediately.”

In June 1991, the ATS voted “to reaffirm accreditation for five years.” In August, the North Central Association (NCA) followed suit.<sup>5</sup> The next accreditation visitation would be March 1996. Yet, already here future issues were evident. The ATS continued the notation that “the governing board does not exercise sufficient control,” and imposed a new notation, that the “library facilities are inadequate.”

Yet, despite these initiatives and much that was good and routine at the seminary, the years 1990–1995 were not especially happy years at CTS. Faculty and student body were not free from the discussions and disagreements concerning the issues of pastoral office and worship forms, nor from the attitudes and theological commitments attendant to them. Moreover, there was a common, albeit indistinct, suspicion that Schmiel’s presidency was a bureaucratic prelude to attempts either to close Fort Wayne or to transform it to a “practical” seminary similar to what Springfield had once been, or perhaps to something other like a training school for lay leadership. More evident at times was a heavy-handed attempt to bring the student body of Fort Wayne into line with certain attitudes and opinions dominant in the synodical bureaucracy and certain districts. The employment of the National Council of Churches “Profiles of Ministry” instrument for evaluating the suitability of a student for the pastoral office was part of this attempt. Charges of inflexibility and arrogance were at times cast toward students who represented a desire to maintain the traditional liturgy or practice “closed Communion.”

I will not dwell further on this facet of our seminary’s life at the time, but mention must be made of the scandalous fact that in the spring of 1992 thirty-two of our fourth-year students did not receive calls. It remains difficult to evaluate this other than as an intentional act by certain district officials, abetted by seminary administrators, to send a signal that certain views toward the pastoral office, toward pastoral oversight of Communion practice, and toward the fate of Robert Preus were not to be tolerated (in 1992, the saga of Preus had not been concluded). Be that as it may, the fact that a full thirty-two students did not receive calls elicited understandable suspicions and anger. Fortunately, some church leaders recognized that this scandal had to be rectified. As I remember it, the Council of Presidents (COP) representative on our Board of Regents, David Buegler of Ohio, was instrumental, along with others, in bringing this sad episode to a happy conclusion. By the end of the summer, all CTS graduates eligible for a call had received one.

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<sup>5</sup> During much of the time covered by this article, CTS was accredited by the ATS and the North Central Association (NCA). This latter organization is now the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Faculty discussions were dominated by the twin issues of the nature of the pastoral office and what came to be called the “worship wars.” At times, faculty exchanges were highly partisan and unfriendly. In any case, faculty discussions on these issues were largely unfruitful, and at times approached farce. On one occasion, President Schmiel formed a committee composed of Bunkowske and Lane Burgland on one side, and myself and Arthur Just on the other. The task as given by Schmiel: To develop one sentence or two on the issue of worship on which the faculty could unite and which could be reported to the church as enjoying faculty consensus. After two or three meetings, the effort was abandoned.

At the same time, the seminary was experiencing increasing financial weakness, falling enrollment, and a general institutional stagnation. For example, for the year 1984–1985 CTS enrolled 154 first-year students. After years of up-and-down enrollment, the year 1991–1992 saw 103 students come to the seminary. By 1994–1995, that number had fallen to 63 (according to the *LCMS Statistical Yearbook*).

With all of this said, perhaps the most important event for the seminary during the early 1990s was not directly related to the seminary at all. Quite unexpectedly at the synodical convention of summer 1992, Alvin Barry, President of the East Iowa District, was elected to be President of the Synod. With Al Barry, CTS had a friend and an advocate at the top of the synodical bureaucratic structure. How important that was would be demonstrated in the next few years!

### **III. The Transition: From David Schmiel to Dean O. Wenthe**

The summer of 1995 was a turning point for CTS. During the July 7–8 meeting of the Board of Regents, David Schmiel formally announced his intention to retire from the office of president, effective January 1, 1996. It was a strange time to retire. Not only had he been president for only two years, Schmiel determined to leave the seminary in the midst of its preparation for an accreditation visit scheduled for March 1996. More strange still was the request by Schmiel that the Board for Higher Education (BHE) conduct a “Transition Audit” of the seminary. The seminary Board of Regents correspondingly approved a resolution “that the Board of Regents ask the Board for Higher Education to conduct such a transition audit during the Fall of 1995.” Supporting whereas claimed that “the Concordia University System routinely provides a transition audit to an institution of the system whenever a vacancy occurs in the position of president,” and noted that Schmiel had requested such an audit to include “management matters” both “to affirm his own stewardship of the office and to provide a clear slate for his successor.” Finally, in its July 7–8 meeting the Board of Regents began the process for choosing a successor president

and as its own nominations for the post put forth the following three men: Richard Kapfer, president of Iowa West; Donald Mattson, Board for Mission Services; and Robert Newton, Supervisor of Certification and Placement, CTS.

As I noted, it was thought by many that intentions existed to change the nature of the Fort Wayne seminary. Were that the case, it failed. At the synodical convention of summer 1995, a new Board of Regents was elected which gave a majority vote to “conservative” members. New to the board were Mark Grunst, Walter Dissen, Louis Herring, and Robert Kuhn, representing the synodical president. Raymond Mueller was elected chairman of the board.

At its October 6–7 meeting in 1995, the new Board of Regents took the following actions. It appointed William Weinrich to be acting president of the seminary, effective January 1, 1996. It reinstated Daniel Reuning as Dean of Chapel. Finally, it set February 16–17, 1996, as the date for interviewing the final candidates for the office of president and the electing of a new president.

The Transition Audit requested by Schmiel occurred during October 25–27, 1995. I wish to spend some little time on this event, not only because, despite claims to the contrary, there was no policy that demanded such a visitation, but also because the extreme negativism of the report placed considerable additional burden on the seminary’s quest for extension of its certification. The visitation team consisted of William Meyer, Executive Director of the BHE; Ralph Reinke, past president of Concordia College, Seward, Nebraska; Eugene Krentz, past president of Concordia College, River Forest; and Ed Trapp, member of the synod’s Board of Directors. A cover letter, dated December 1, 1995, indicated that the audit was sent to the seminary Board of Regents, to the Board of Directors of the BHE, to the synodical Board of Directors, and to the Council of Presidents. Hence, what was at first a request by Schmiel that an audit affirm his administrative and fiscal stewardship had become a full-scale evaluation of the seminary, its students, its faculty, and its future, and this in the most negative tones. In addition, this critique of the seminary was to receive the widest possible dissemination among the synod’s governing bodies.

What were the findings of the Transition Audit? Having praised the Administrative Council for its “effective leadership and competency” and having noted that Schmiel had stimulated his team to “high levels of performance,” the audit proceeded to discuss their achievements. Enrollment decline was a pressing problem. Apart from the vicarage classes, the Full Time Equivalence for 1990–1995 had dropped from 240 to 185. The probability of significant increase in enrollment did “not appear to be realistic in the near term.” The student body was largely married and had a mean age of 35.5 years. Such a demographic had a “negative impact” on the sense of community (since they lived off campus) and negatively

affected the use of facilities. Although tuition costs to the student had increased, the shrinking of the student population had resulted in declining tuition income. Third-source income had not equaled inflation over the last five years. Indeed, about \$500,000 of gift pledges had been withdrawn in the past six months. The seminary had operated at a loss for the past five years, the loss totaling over two million dollars. Occupancy of dorm space and utilization of the food service was significantly down. More achievements were mentioned. But this gives an idea.

What about the faculty? Was there any mention of their aptitude to teach, of their publications, of their various activities in local churches or among the clergy? No, not a word of commendation or praise. However, there was this:

An acknowledged deep division within the faculty resulting from theological personal, political, and “party line” differences appears to be irreconcilable. There was ample evidence of elitism and lack of respect for fellow faculty on the part of some members of the faculty. This reality, which permeates the fabric of the Seminary community, impedes the ability of administrators, faculty and staff to move the Seminary community forward effectively and efficiently. Students, though they express satisfaction with their academic experience at the Seminary, . . . in some cases, are intentionally drawn into [existing divisions] by faculty members through special group activities in faculty homes. [Later the same claim is made: “The manipulation of students into the ‘party system’ was reported to be taking place in the homes of some faculty.”]

Under its section entitled “Concerns,” the audit made certain reasonable suggestions: the need for greater ownership of regents and faculty in the Strategic Plan and the need for greater stability in presidential leadership, for example. Then, acknowledging the upcoming accreditation visit, the seminary was exhorted to show unity to the visitation teams, with this observation: “The Visitation Team coming to the campus will be aware of the Seminary’s past difficulties and will not be ‘taken in’ by superficial and insincere statements about the condition of the Seminary.” Then the final paragraph of the Transition Audit:

There is a need to give serious consideration to an alternate site for the operation of the Seminary in view of the staggering cost of maintaining and operating a campus ill-suited to the character of the current and future student population.

I do not wish to be overly dramatic. But the Transition Audit was a totally unnecessary and, yes, shameful attempt by a synodical commission to weaken the standing of the seminary before a crucial accreditation visitation.

#### IV. Revival

On November 4, 1995, Robert Preus unexpectedly died. The shadow of his enormous influence as an icon of Lutheran confessional thinking made the following weeks unto the symposium week of January 1996 increasingly electric. At its December 14, 1995, telephone conference call, the BOR moved to establish the Robert D. Preus Chair of Systematic Theology and also the Robert D. Preus Student Aid Fund. It was thought that in the wake of Robert's death the funding of these initiatives would be rather quick and easy. It did not happen that way. But that is another story. In addition, the board moved to request that both the ATS and the NCA delay their accreditation visitations for one year. Such a delay would allow the new administration to develop responses to real challenges facing the seminary and to rewrite accordingly the seminary's Self-Study which, as it stood, was regarded as excessively self-deprecating and negative.

During a January 1, 1996, telephone conference call, as acting president, Weinrich replaced Schmiel's administrative council with new people. Dean Wenthe became Vice-President of Academic Affairs; Daniel Gard became Vice-President of Student Personnel Services; and James Bollhagen became Director of Certification and Placement.

On January 19–20, 1996, the BOR met with the new administrative team. Significant actions were the following: the board finalized the slate of nominees for the office of CTS president (William Weinrich, Dean Wenthe, James Voelz, Dale Meyer) and formally set February 16–17 as the date for final interviews and the election proper. The board further invited William Meyer, Executive Director of the BHE, and John Meyer, Chairman of the Board, to discuss the Transition Audit. I was present for that discussion and will only say, in the language of international diplomacy, that the discussions were frank and open. The net result was that the BHE representatives averred that they had "no intent to harm the Seminary nor to urge its closing or relocating." The BOR thereupon formally requested that by the end of the month the BHE "make the same explanation in writing to those entities to which the report was addressed." Finally, the board instructed me to "make public statements that the Board of Regents favors two seminaries and desires to keep Concordia Theological Seminary functioning at a high level."

Some few comments should be made concerning the symposium of January 1996. Given recent developments, including the recent death of the honored Robert Preus, the atmosphere was electric. Not completely unexpectedly, registrations for the symposium and for the banquet skyrocketed. It quickly became clear that our dining hall would not be able to accommodate all those who wished a banquet ticket. In the circumstance, I visited the event director at the Coliseum and was shown the newly renovated Johnny Appleseed Room, beautifully appointed with new carpet

and hanging chandeliers. The symposia banquets of 1996 and 1997 were catered by the Coliseum banquet staff. For the 1996 banquet, more than 550 people were in attendance. Highlighting the banquet program was the conferral of an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree upon the Reverend Martin Taddey, a longtime mentor to our vicars and supporter of the seminary. At the time, Martin was lying in a San Mateo, California, hospital dying of cancer. The conferral occurred by special telephone hookup so that all present could hear. Before reading the citation which would confer the degree, I told Martin Taddey that he must sing for us a song he would always sing during gatherings with friends. The song was "Chattanooga Choo Choo." From his deathbed in California, Martin Taddey sang that song for the 500 guests gathered in Fort Wayne. He died days later. For those who were there, the event remains a treasured memory.

On February 16–17, the electors met for the choosing of a new seminary president. There were four electors: Alvin Barry, president of the LCMS; John Meyer, chairman of the BHE; David Buegler, president of the Ohio District and representative for the COP; and the members of the seminary's BOR, who together cast one vote. One after the other, the four finalists were interviewed: in order, Dale Meyer, James Voelz, William Weinrich, and Dean Wenthe. On Saturday, February 17, the balloting took place. On the first ballot, Dale Meyer received two votes and William Weinrich two votes. A second ballot gave the same result: two for Meyer; two for Weinrich. A third ballot was taken, with William Weinrich receiving one vote and Dean O. Wenthe three votes. Dean O. Wenthe would be the new president of Concordia Theological Seminary. What had happened between the second and third ballot, bringing Wenthe from zero votes to the electing three? On the first and second ballots, the electors voted the same way: Al Barry and the seminary's BOR for Weinrich, the representatives of the BHE and COP (John Meyer and David Buegler) for Dale Meyer. It was evident that John Meyer and David Buegler would never agree to cast their votes for Weinrich. Al Barry, wishing the new president to come from within, advanced the name of Wenthe, and with some arm-twisting brought Meyer and Buegler to agreement. Final vote: Barry, John Meyer, Buegler for Wenthe, the seminary's BOR for Weinrich.

A personal reflection: Many assumed that I would be elected president of CTS. In the event, I was relieved and overjoyed that I was not elected. I was ill-suited to be a school president, my personality was too prone to express my thoughts and opinions at inopportune times, and my interests and strengths were academic and curricular and not administrative and bureaucratic. As one student expressed to me, they elected the priest, not the prophet. How true! I would have made a terrible president. As it happened, Dean Wenthe enjoyed a long tenure as president and

became one of the most, if not the most, successful and important presidents this seminary ever had. It was with genuine gladness that I congratulated my good friend later that Saturday in the seminary commons. One of his first acts was to make me his Vice-President for Academic Affairs. I am bold to say, I had discovered my niche!

President Wenthe would have serious challenges to overcome. We may follow his success by a quick tour through our accreditation history from 1996 to 2010. On January 23, 1996, I along with Dean Wenthe and First Vice-President of the Synod, Robert Kuhn, met with the governing board of the North Central Association at the O'Hare Hilton Hotel in Chicago. It was a long and brutal meeting. Kuhn was there to reinforce the synod's determination to continue to support CTS as a seminary for the training of her clergy. From the outset, it was evident that the NCA had no intention of postponing its March visit for one year. Its evaluation would be in view of the negative, unedited Self-Study and the Transition Audit of the BHE. The big question was whether CTS would continue to be accredited by the NCA or not. In the event, CTS received a continued accreditation of two years, however, on probation (August 9, 1996). Problematic was the seminary's inability to demonstrate fiscal viability; failure to demonstrate effective organization of human, financial, and physical resources; and inability to demonstrate that "the institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness," a direct echo of the claims made by the BHE and the seminary's own Self-Study.

What of the ATS? In a bold move, Wenthe requested a personal meeting with the ATS Commission on Accrediting. That being allowed, he flew to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for the ATS meeting in May 1996. His intent was to plead for continuing accreditation and that accreditation be granted without the additional burden of probation. Here we must credit the positive influence and advocacy of Mr. Michael Gilligan, who had been the primary ATS staff member working with CTS. Together, Wenthe's presentation and Gilligan's support worked their way. CTS was given a two-year extension without probation, but with the addition of three notations: undercapitalization and deficit budgeting threaten to weaken the seminary; future financial planning is not demonstrated; the general tone of the seminary impairs its purpose to provide ministerial training. Later, in a reflection of his experiences with Missouri Synod leadership, Daniel Aleshire, chief administrator of the ATS, describes Dean Wenthe's meeting with the Commission on Accrediting:

He explained how the school was resolving its conflict, addressing wounds, and why he thought that it had the necessary pieces in place to be able to move into the future. He spoke thoughtfully and carefully, and was fully honest about

what all the seminary had been through. I remember that he asked the Commission to give the school one more chance, which it did.

### V. Renaissance

The results of subsequent accreditation visits may be quickly summarized. The compromised situation in which CTS stood is evident in the language of the ATS, even as it extended accreditation for two years: “To continue accreditation for two years and to authorize a focused visit for spring 1998, to enable the Commission to determine whether to reaffirm accreditation, place the institution on probation, or withdraw accreditation.” The accreditation visit occurred on May 4–6, 1998, and was obviously crucial for the future of CTS. Yet, the visit attested to considerable progress and stabilization of the seminary. The result: The ATS reaffirmed accreditation for five years; approved the MDiv, STM, DMin, DMiss, and MA programs; and removed six notations! The NCA likewise extended accreditation for five years and removed the seminary’s probation status.<sup>6</sup> The next visitation occurred in spring of 2003. The result was again very positive. Both ATS and NCA reaffirmed the seminary’s accreditation and extended it for five years.<sup>7</sup> The next visitation was on March 15–18, 2010, resulting for the first time in the seminary’s history with an accreditation of ten years.<sup>8</sup>

In the introduction of the ATS “Report of a Comprehensive Visit,” March 15–18, 2010, the evaluation team briefly summarizes the past woes of the seminary: “The early and mid 1990’s witnessed a period marked by significant financial concerns, several transitions in leadership in a short period of time, and serious questions about the institution’s future viability. In addition, the Seminary has had a history of beginning a number of extension programs that have not lasted long.” Then there is this assessment of the seminary in 2010:

That said, the Seminary has made significant progress since the last visit in 2003 and the turmoil of the early 1990’s. Much of that progress is due, no doubt, to a new leadership team, beginning with a new president called in 1996. Since

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<sup>6</sup> Crucial was the 1998 visitation. Here one must acknowledge the wonderful leadership of Cameron MacKenzie, who led the development of the seminary’s Self-Study. One should add that throughout this process the seminary was asked to give various interim reports on progress, all of which was done successfully.

<sup>7</sup> At this visit, approval was given to accredit the seminary’s PhD in Missiology degree.

<sup>8</sup> I was not involved in this latest and most successful visit. In January 2007, I had moved to Riga, Latvia, where I served as Rector of the Luther Academy, the theological school for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. However, I remember well, when on a bitterly cold day in Riga, I received a telephone call from President Dean Wenthe, informing me of the ten-year extension. We reviewed the recent past with a great deal of satisfaction!

2003, the Seminary has stabilized enrollment, doubled the endowment, hired a number of faculty, revised its MDiv program, added new programs, and broken ground on a long-awaited library expansion that will quadruple its current capacity. The Self-Study Report is a candid and comprehensive analysis of where the Seminary now stands and demonstrates every potential for a strong and healthy future that seems increasingly removed from its more turbulent past.<sup>9</sup>

### VI. How Did This Happen?

Obviously, this story has many components, including rising student enrollment and Wenthe's studied intention to reform the Board of Regents into a more professional advisory council.<sup>10</sup> However, five things deserve special mention.

First, it was felicitous that several members of Schmiel's council early on received and accepted calls and positions elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> While this removed those most disaffected, it also gave opportunity to acquire additional new faculty. Already at its May 17–18 meeting in 1996, the BOR determined to call Lawrence Rast and Charles Gieschen. The official vote to call was taken at the August 12, 1996, session. Timothy Quill had been approved at the May 17–18 meeting to oversee the seminary's Russian Project.<sup>12</sup> At the meeting of November 7–8, 1997, the BOR officially called Detlev Schulz and Richard Nuffer, and retained the services of David Coles. The solidification of the faculty with pastorally minded, academically outstanding faculty was underway.

A special comment on the calling of Robert Roethemeyer is needed. From the outset, Wenthe determined to upgrade the library facilities of CTS. The minutes of the May 23–24, 1997, BOR meeting report that Wenthe was authorized "to analyze the necessity and feasibility of a new library/communications building." For that, we needed not only a librarian, but someone with outstanding technical knowledge of

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<sup>9</sup> This first ten-year accreditation period ended in 2010 when CTS underwent another comprehensive visit by the ATS and HLC. The progress achieved under Dean Wenthe continued under President Lawrence Rast. In February 2021, the seminary was officially notified that it had received another ten-year accreditation!

<sup>10</sup> This was not an unimportant aspect of the seminary's recovery. From very early on, Wenthe enlisted the expertise available through the ATS to instruct the board on its duties and responsibilities. This initiative had the additional benefit of solidifying the seminary's reputation with its accrediting agencies.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Borcharding left to become assistant to William Meyer at the BHE; Robert Newton accepted a call into the parish in California; and Gary Satterfield, Business Manager, accepted that position at Concordia College, Selma, Alabama. Somewhat later, Randall Schroeder left the faculty to devote himself full time to his private family counseling service. Al Wingfield replaced Satterfield as Business Manager.

<sup>12</sup> At the BOR meeting of September 12–13, 1997, Quill was called as Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions, thus becoming a member of the faculty.

library science and structures. In November 1996, Wenthe and I met with Robert at the Howard Johnson's restaurant opposite the International Center and discussed our intentions to expand significantly our library facilities. The BOR extended a call to Robert at its January 24–25, 1997, meeting.<sup>13</sup> Looking back, the acquisition of Robert Roethemeyer was one of the most significant events of that early period. His oversight and guidance during the construction of the new library facilities were of the highest excellence. Of that, the library of CTS is itself testimony and demonstration!<sup>14</sup>

Second, when Wenthe became president in April 1996, the financial status of the seminary was weak, and the donor base was rather small. However, the seminary was blessed with a remarkable increase of giving. In this brief account, two sets of donors deserve mention. The Schwan Foundation, led by Larry Burgdorf, was very generous to CTS, subsidizing not only the Russian Project, but also contributing to capital needs of the seminary. Secondly, Walter Dissen, together with Arnold Kemmerle, established the Concordia Theological Foundation, Inc., whose sole purpose was to give financial support to CTS. That foundation continues to grow in value, and its annual distribution to the seminary is significant.

Third, it would be hard to overestimate the importance of the Russian Project for the early revitalization of CTS. The presence of around twenty students from Russia on our campus not only infused a missiological intensity to our campus, but their presence supported the seminary's on-campus student census, dormitory use, and cafeteria use.

How did this occur? I was acting president, and in early March 1996 I received a telephone call from Wallace Schulz. I had never met Wally, but this was my introduction: "Hey, Weinrich, this is Wallace Schulz. How would you like to have more students on campus?" That was the beginning of the Russian Project! Wenthe and I traveled to St. Louis to visit with Wallace, who informed us that Larry Burgdorf of the Schwan Foundation was willing to subsidize the travel and education costs of Russian students at CTS.<sup>15</sup> Prophetically, Schulz warned us that should we agree to

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<sup>13</sup> The BOR minutes of June 20, 1998, report the motion to construct a new library. At its September 11–12 meeting in 1998, the BOR allocated \$80,000 to initiate the library project.

<sup>14</sup> Concerning faculty, I should mention also the service for some few years of Roger Pittelko. For twelve years, he had been president of the English District and was a most respected member of the Council of Presidents. He had a pastorally conditioned theological mind and taught in our Department of Pastoral Ministry and served also as Supervisor of the Doctor of Ministry Program. In addition, the presence of Roger on our faculty served to improve relations between some sectors of the COP and CTS. He was a great ambassador for the seminary.

<sup>15</sup> The BOR minutes of March 11, 1996, report: "Acting President Weinrich informed the Board of Regents that he, President-Elect Wenthe and Professor Marquart had just been to St. Louis for a meeting with a grantor which would result in a grant of \$1,000,000 to the Seminary over the

go forward with the project, synodical bureaucracy would oppose and object. The future would more than verify his warning!<sup>16</sup>

At the April 17–18 BOR meeting in 1996, Wenthe was able to report that fifteen Russians were expected in the fall. For some few years, CTS trained persons from Russia, both men and women, on our campus. Some qualified for master's degrees; most received a certificate testifying to their studies. With some very few exceptions, all of our Russian students returned to their native homes and served as pastors, deacons, and deaconesses. Of course, the goal of the Russian Project was to enable the Russians to have their own seminary in Novosibirsk, Siberia. CTS was instrumental in assisting Bishop Lytkin and Alexey Streltsov in establishing their seminary. Early on, faculty of CTS as well as non-faculty were sent to Novosibirsk to give theological instruction. At the BOR meeting of September 11–12, 1998, Alan Ludwig was called as Assistant Director of the Russian Project. Ludwig would dedicate the remainder of his professional life to the Russians in Novosibirsk, becoming fluent in Russian and a beloved teacher and mentor.

The success of the Russian Project is demonstrated by the fact that the LCMS and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Siberia are in full church fellowship.

Fourth, at the beginning of this article, I noted the commitment to the flesh of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, as the central *datum* for theological thought and practice. The gospel proclaims the redemption of fallen man which will find its goal in the sanctification and beatitude of the human person, body and soul. The caritative aspect of Jesus' ministry was integral to this economy of human salvation (Matt 9:35; 10:1). Early on, our agenda included the establishment of a program of diaconal studies for women. We were aware of programs elsewhere. However, we wanted to

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next two (2) years that would enable students from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to study at this Seminary.”

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this story ought to be fully told, but I have not the space here to do it. Given the concerted and heavy-handed opposition of certain synodical officials to CTS's work with the Russians, in Russia and at CTS itself, it is quite doubtful that the Russian Project would have proceeded were not Alvin Barry president of the synod. From the beginning, and regularly, Wenthe and I met with President Barry, usually in person, and kept him fully informed of everything we were doing and planned to do. At no time did Barry object to our work or in what manner we were doing it! That requires emphasis! The BOR minutes of November 1–2, 1996, summarize President Wenthe's report to the board. Included is this item: “He [Wenthe] observed that the Russian program was progressing nicely and the Seminary is in fact providing Seminary education in Russia. The Board for Mission Services, however, has a different view on what role the Seminary is playing and should be playing.” What a wonderful example of a Wenthe understatement! In fact, Wenthe and I were, with frequency, accused of transgressing the *Handbook* of the synod and insubordination. In one particularly nasty meeting at the International Center at which representatives from the Board for Mission Services, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and the Board for Higher Education were present, Wenthe and I were accused of money laundering! Not one person present objected to that over-the-top slander or ever apologized to us for it.

give the women in such studies a high profile in church service. To that end, our program for the training of deaconesses would be (a) a full seminary-based theological program of study earning a master's-level degree; and (b) guided by a member of the faculty. The success of our program has been truly remarkable, and the high quality of our graduates a wondrous resource for the church. As of May 2020, 143 women have graduated from the deaconess program at CTS.

Fifth, the curriculum gives form to the theological/pastoral *habitus* of the aspiring pastor. With the Fall Faculty Forum of September 1998, the faculty undertook what would become a seven-year curriculum review and revision process. That first forum was dedicated to the discussion of Edward Farley's *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. Other books that were crucial in guiding our reflection were David Kelsey's *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School?* and Reinhard Hütter's *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*. These books reinforced the following ideas: (a) whatever the strengths of the four-fold disciplinary structure of theological education, its origins lie in the university and not in the church, and it may, and often does, lead to a fragmentation of theological study (Farley); (b) the proper object of theological education is God (Kelsey); and (c) to study the work of God is to study those practices in which and by which God works his way and will (Hütter). Among the aspects of the resulting "new" curriculum were (a) an emphasis on primary texts, most especially the Scriptures; (b) an emphasis on class structures which invite more intentionally the student to speak (small groups); (c) an emphasis on preaching, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper as instantiations of God's manifesting work (*Theologia* courses); and (d) an understanding of the person of the pastor as an image of the truth he preaches.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For a statement by the faculty that presents the characteristics of this curriculum which has been in place since 2005–2006, see "Christ Offers His Life through the Church's Pastors to a Confused World: An Introduction to the Seminary Curriculum," *CTQ* 85 (2021): 171–179.