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The Role of the Seminaries in the LCMS, 1847–2001

John C. Wohlrabe Jr.

The primary function of our seminaries has been twofold: first, the education and formation of pastors, missionaries, and other church workers for the LCMS and her partner churches; and second, providing theological leadership or influence through continuing education, publications, *Gutachten* (opinions), and educational presentations. Breaking it down further, we can touch on the perceived purpose, influence, and then outcome of the seminaries, at least in a general way. I am dividing the history into periods: 1847–1887, the Walther-Craemer years, establishing the synod's doctrinal heritage; 1887–1932, the Pieper years, conserving the synod's doctrinal heritage; 1932–1974, the disruptive years, reshaping the synod's doctrinal heritage; and 1974–2001, resettling years, attempting to restore the synod's doctrinal heritage.

I. 1847–1887: The Walther-Craemer Years, Establishing the Synod's Doctrinal Heritage

Although Concordia Seminary was chronologically the first school established, Concordia Theological Seminary was the first educational institution of the newly formed Missouri Synod. Approximately six months before the Saxons arrived, in the summer of 1838, Friedrich Wyneken came to America from Germany, making his way to Fort Wayne, where he became pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church. In 1841, Wyneken returned to Germany in order to make an appeal for more Lutheran pastors to come to the new world. This resulted in an association with Pastor Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau, Bavaria, who began preparing and sending men to serve as pastors in America. One of these was Wilhelm Sihler, who then became pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, in 1845. In September 1846, eleven young men, sent by Loehe, arrived in Fort Wayne, and on the last week of October 1846, what became Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, officially initiated instructing these students under the tutelage of Sihler. During the first seven years of its existence, students would receive initial instruction under Wilhelm Loehe in Germany, and then complete their studies in Fort Wayne. By April 1847, Sihler and St. Paul Lutheran Church were instrumental in the formation of what became The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and the newly formed church body requested that the school in Fort Wayne be formally handed over. The

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document of transfer, issued by Loehe and dated September 7, 1847, stipulated the following conditions:

1. That it serve the Lutheran Church for all times and train pastors and shepherds for her only;
2. That the German language be and remain the sole and only medium of instruction.
3. That the seminary remain what it is, namely, an institution for the purpose of training, as rapidly but as thoroughly as possible, preachers and pastors for the innumerable orphaned German Lutherans and for the newly immigrating congregations of our race and confession. It should not be a theological institution in the usual German sense of the word, but a “*Pflanzschule*” of preachers and pastors, whose study would be a serious preparation for the holy office itself.¹

This seminary was identified as the “practical” seminary, designed to equip students for the practical work of preaching and pastoral care in a congregation as quickly as possible. The course of instruction omitted wholly or in part the study of the original biblical languages.² Until 1852, studies included only two years of theology. A pro-seminary was added that year in which remedial preparatory courses were offered.³ In 1855, a teachers’ seminary was begun in Milwaukee by Friedrich Lochner, an early Loehe *Sendling* (sent one). This institution was transferred to Fort Wayne in 1857, then moved to Addison, Illinois, in 1864, and later to River Forest, Illinois.⁴ But for a few years the institution in Fort Wayne contained a pro-seminary, practical seminary, and teachers’ seminary.

From early on, some advocated the merging of the Fort Wayne and St. Louis schools, which was then precipitated by the Civil War. With Indiana not granting draft deferments for divinity students, and Union troops occupying the border state of Missouri, it was decided to move the St. Louis pre-seminary or *Gymnasium* to Fort Wayne, and move the “practical” seminary, together with its pro-seminary, to St. Louis where it shared a building with the theoretical seminary until it was moved

¹ Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod 1847–1947* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 116.

² Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Blessing: 1846–1946* (Springfield, Ill.: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1946), 11–12.

³ Baepler, *A Century of Blessing*, 16.

⁴ Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 216–217.

to Springfield, Illinois, in 1875.⁵ The war was not the only reason for the move to St. Louis. It was felt that this would strengthen the theological education for both institutions with a broader faculty, and it was hoped that the older students of the “practical” seminary would have a positive impact on the younger students in the theoretical school. Also, the combined faculty would exert a greater influence in theological circles throughout the synod and beyond.⁶

By the time of the move to Springfield, the “practical” seminary was also conducting the formation of pastors for other Lutheran church bodies, including those from the Norwegian, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois Synods, along with the English Lutheran Conference of Missouri. Upon the move to Springfield, a press release stated:

The only object of this school is to prepare and fit young men in the quinquennial course of instruction for the service of the Evangelical Lutheran church. All lessons are given only in German and Norwegian languages—a number of the students being Norwegian.⁷

The Saxon immigrants arrived in Missouri in the early months of 1839. By December 9, 1839, Pastor C. F. W. Walther and candidates Ottomar Fuerbringer, Theodor Brohm, and Johann Buenger erected a log cabin school in the newly established village of Dresden in Perry County, Missouri, with seven boys and four girls enrolled. The school was to be modeled after the German *Gymnasium*, similar to a high school and junior college with seminary education offered as well. However, a few of these early students were actually of elementary school grades. Four of the original seven boys would go on to become Lutheran pastors. When Walther, Fuerbringer, and Buenger took calls elsewhere, Brohm continued the teaching and then moved the school to the parsonage of Gotthold Loeber, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Altenburg, Missouri. When Candidate Brohm received

⁵ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 194–195. W. G. Polack, *The Building of a Great Church: A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 61. This was announced in *Der Lutheraner*. A. Craemer, “*Nachricht und Erinnerung*,” *Der Lutheraner*, XVIII (September 3, 1861), 14. Carl S. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 44 note 2. It was later reported to the 1863 synodical convention. *Elfter Synodal Bericht der allgemeinen Deutsches Evang. Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1863* (St. Louis: Synodalbruckerei von Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1864), 68–71.

⁶ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 41–42.

⁷ “The objects of instruction are: In the Pro-Seminary: The German, English and Latin languages, history, theology (dogmatics), geography (modern), and arithmetic. In the Practical Seminary: Dogmatic, symbolic positive and comparative, practical exegesis of the Bible; ecclesiastical history; homiletics; catechetics; pastoral theology; reading of the Latin text of the Apology of the Augustana Confession; the Formula of Concordia; English grammar, reading of Shakespeare and theological casuistry.” Erich H. Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets: The Anatomy of a Seminary 1846–1976* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 85–86.

a call to a congregation in New York, Pastor Loeber continued teaching until his death in 1849.⁸ In 1845, Pastor Loeber wrote in *Der Lutheraner* that the Log Cabin College in Perry County, Missouri, was an “institution for the training of future teachers and ministers.”⁹ After his brother Otto’s death, C. F. W. Walther accepted a call to serve as pastor of what became Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis. Both Trinity, Altenburg, and Trinity, St. Louis, supported the fledgling log cabin school. The maintenance of both the Indiana and Missouri schools was one factor in calling the synod into existence in April 1847.¹⁰

The founding convention desired that the seminary and *Gymnasium* in Altenburg be transferred to the synod. Walther, as the first synodical president, encouraged his congregation to do so. And so, Trinity, St. Louis, voted unanimously to give the school into the synod’s hands as long as the school could be moved to St. Louis. Pastor Loeber and the congregation in Altenburg were reluctant to move the school to St. Louis. The transfer of the school and move to St. Louis occurred after Pastor Loeber’s death in 1849, and under the following conditions:

1. That always it serve the Lutheran Church and train pastors and teachers only for it.
2. That as the only medium of instruction in the college the German language be adopted and continued without interruption. We grant, nevertheless, that the customary use of the Latin language in some lectures at the *Gymnasium* and universities in Germany may be adopted also in the Seminary.
3. That the institution remain what it is at present, namely a *Gymnasium* with a theological seminary.¹¹

Upon the move to St. Louis in 1849, a building for the school was dedicated June 11, 1850, with another building added in 1852. At that dedication, Walther stated:

⁸ James M. Thomas, “A Bethlehem Built by Poverty,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 88 (Spring 2015): 23–46; Russell P. Baldner, “Institution, Structure, and Place: Revisiting the Historiographic Circumstances of the Saxon Lutheran *Lehranstalt*—Log Cabin College (Part One),” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 88 (Spring 2015): 47–64; Russell P. Baldner, “Institution, Structure, and Place: Revisiting the Historiographic Circumstances of the Saxon Lutheran *Lehranstalt*—Log Cabin College (Part Two),” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 88 (Summer 2015): 7–44.

⁹ Warren R. Schmidt, “The Long Reach of the Log Cabin College: A Study of the Inaugural 1839–1840 Class of the Log Cabin College in Dresden, Missouri,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 88 (Summer 2015): 45.

¹⁰ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 14.

¹¹ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 15–19.

Out of this institution one day should come servants of the church and of the state, the teachers of the schools, and the craftsmen of industry, the publishers, merchants, heads of the home, in short, the heads and leaders in all stations of life.¹²

The school was incorporated in the state of Missouri as Concordia College in 1853.¹³ By 1854, a clear delineation between the *Gymnasium* and the seminary was made, with a director of the *Gymnasium* named; yet Walther served as president of both institutions. While most of the students in the *Gymnasium* were preparing to be either pastors or teachers, there were a few general students.¹⁴ So, although the Indiana school was initiated primarily for the training of pastors, the Missouri school with its German *Gymnasium* was broader in scope, at least until the *Gymnasium* was moved to Fort Wayne.

The St. Louis institution was referred to as the “theoretical” seminary, which required the students to have a basic grasp of both Hebrew and Greek, as well as German and Latin. At this time, it involved nine years of training beyond the elementary level. When the “practical” seminary and pro-seminary of Fort Wayne were moved to St. Louis in 1861, the distinction between the two forms of training continued, and during those years Walther was president of the two seminaries. While the “practical” seminary stressed functional theology, the “theoretical” seminary emphasized scholarly theology. Walther hoped that when the “practical seminary” moved to Springfield, this would be temporary and that eventually only the classical, scholarly theological education would be the norm for all pastors in the synod.¹⁵

Beginning in 1857, the Missouri Synod began making agreements with other Lutheran synods to train their pastors at its seminaries. Lauritz Larsen was the first Norwegian Synod professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and served there until the beginning of the Civil War.¹⁶ Later Friedrich A. Schmidt would fill the Norwegian chair. Between 1874 and 1875, approximately one third of the students were members of either the Norwegian or the Wisconsin Synods.¹⁷

Although the Fort Wayne institution was started under the tutelage of Wilhelm Sihler, it was August Craemer who had the greater long-term impact.¹⁸ “Onkel”

¹² August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C. F. W. Walther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 90.

¹³ Suelflow, *Servant of the Word*, 91.

¹⁴ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 30.

¹⁵ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 43.

¹⁶ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 32.

¹⁷ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 84.

¹⁸ Erich Heintzen writes: “The coming of Craemer ushered in an era that spanned 41 years in the history of the practical seminary. During this time the influence of this one man chiefly

Craemer, as he was affectionately called, trained hundreds of pastors from 1850—when he took the call to serve the seminary and left the congregation he founded in Frankenmuth, Michigan—until his death in May 1891.¹⁹ By the time of the move to St. Louis, Craemer had educated about eighty pastors. He not only followed the institution to the Gateway City, but then on to the land of Lincoln. He was known for his strict discipline, austerity, and diligent work ethic. But his students loved him, and he prepared them well for calls to far-flung, isolated, often harsh conditions in parishes across the American and Canadian frontier.²⁰ Between 1861 and 1875, 268 men completed their studies under Craemer in the “practical” branch at St. Louis, while 155 graduated from the theoretical section under Walther. For the next thirty years, the ministers who graduated from the practical seminary had a majority voice in the affairs of the synod. Yet, the confessional theology of the two schools was the same. Carl Meyer writes: “Walther and Craemer shared basic Lutheran convictions in 1861 as well as 1875. Purity of doctrine, Lutheran orthodoxy, and fidelity to Scriptural teachings received constant and recurring emphasis.”²¹ That was the confessional heritage established by Walther and Craemer.²² These men believed that the character of the theological institutions would determine the future of the Lutheran Church in America.²³ While the emphasis of the theological seminary was on scholarly theological education, and the practical seminary stressed sermonizing and catechesis, both schools held up systematic theology as of primary importance.

The year following the move of the practical seminary to Springfield, Illinois (1876), Walther expressed himself to Pastor Carl M. Zorn regarding his personal views:

Just between us, the greater share of the so-called “practical” preachers in our synod are always our weak side (since more and more become such). Not only did they lack almost all *Geistesbildung* (mental formation) before they entered, but they also were weak *an Gaben und Charakter* (gifts and character). They

determined the character of the institution, molded a large segment of the synod’s clergy, and consequently affected the shape of the synod itself.” Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 41.

¹⁹ Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events: Reminiscences of Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 22.

²⁰ Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events*, 24–30.

²¹ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 50.

²² Meyer would also add, “There is no evidence that [the practical seminary graduates] formed a bloc in any sense of the word. However, they did determine the stance of Missouri, emphasizing orthodoxy rather than scholarship and orthodoxy, as Walther wished.” Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 63.

²³ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 64.

threaten to become our Achilles heel. In their narrow-mindedness they often see heresy where nothing of the kind exists.²⁴

This is a rather ironic statement in view of the issues caused by several of the fully theologically trained men from Germany and the St. Louis institution. This would include Georg Schieferdecker, educated in Leipzig, who as both pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Altenburg and Western District President, put forth chiliastic views and then left the Missouri Synod to join the Iowa Synod.²⁵ It includes the Rev. Herman Baumstark, a graduate of Leipzig University, who then trained at Concordia Seminary. Baumstark afterward was called to teach at the St. Louis school, but then joined the Roman Catholic Church. Eduard Preuss—who had a PhD from the University of Koenigsberg, Prussia, and taught in Berlin—was called to teach at the St. Louis institution and then defected to the Roman Catholic Church as well.²⁶ Finally, this list includes a student of C. F. W. Walther, Friedrich A. Schmidt, who sat at his feet through confirmation instruction at Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, then studied under Walther through the St. Louis *Gymnasium* and seminary, then served as the Norwegian professor at Concordia Seminary from 1872 to 1876 alongside Walther, and finally hoped to be called back to the St. Louis seminary when an understudy was selected to serve under Walther in 1878. That same F. A. Schmidt precipitated the Predestinarian Controversy, splintering the Synodical Conference. He later was instrumental in forming a group called the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood.²⁷ One does not see such issues arising out of the “practical” seminary.

Particularly during the years that both institutions resided in St. Louis and then following the move of the practical seminary to Springfield, faculties from both institutions were involved extensively in writing for *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*, in providing *Gutachten* or theological opinions,²⁸ and in publishing theological works, though those coming out of the practical seminary were directed more toward preaching and liturgics.²⁹ During this period, the practical seminary

²⁴ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 43 n. 1.

²⁵ Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, rev. ed., 1975), 699.

²⁶ Suelflow, *Servant of the Word*, 105.

²⁷ John C. Wohlrabe Jr., “The Election-by-Grace Doctrinal Controversy and the Doctrine of Justification,” *Propter Christum: Christ at the Center* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Luther Academy, 2013), 385–410.

²⁸ Wohlrabe, “The Election-by-Grace Doctrinal Controversy,” 253. Fuerbringer, *Persons and Events*, 23.

²⁹ In 1875, Friedrich Lochner was called to Trinity Lutheran Church in Springfield, Illinois. He then taught liturgics and eventually wrote a book to guide the pastors of the Missouri Synod. Sadly, it was not translated into English when the synod underwent the language transition during the early part of the twentieth century. But it now has been translated by Matthew Carver and

produced the greater number of pastors for the synod, almost twice as many as the theoretical seminary.³⁰ Regardless of the institution from which they hailed, these pastors were known for their preaching, their purity of doctrine, and their pious character.³¹

II. 1887–1932: The Pieper Years, Conserving the Synod's Doctrinal Heritage

With the death of Walther on May 7, 1887, and the death of Craemer on May 3, 1891, both the theological and practical seminaries passed into the Pieper period. Franz Pieper was elected as Walther's understudy at the 1878 synodical convention, which in some ways precipitated the Predestinarian Controversy because Friedrich Schmidt wanted that position and soon started attacking Walther on the doctrine of election. Franz became president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, upon Walther's death. His older brother, Reinhold Pieper, became president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, upon Craemer's death. Franz Pieper's presidency would continue until his death in 1931. Reinhold Pieper would serve as president at Springfield until 1914.³² Conserving the doctrinal heritage established during the previous period was the emphasis at both institutions. Whereas the practical seminary far outpaced the theoretical seminary in the formation of pastors during its earlier period, the St. Louis institution would take the lead during this next time interval.

Several factors facilitated the St. Louis school overtaking its sister in Springfield. First, the synod went from having just one feeder school or *Gymnasium* in Fort Wayne to similar schools established across the continent.³³ Most of these included

published by Concordia Publishing House as *The Chief Divine Service*. Friedrich Lochner, *The Chief Divine Service of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church*, trans. Matthew Carver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020).

³⁰ By 1872, the practical seminary had graduated 298 men as missionaries and pastors to the 130 of the theoretical seminary. Baeppler, *A Century of Grace*, 127. During the years that both seminaries were together, 1861 to 1875, 268 men completed the practical curriculum, while 155 graduated from the theoretical. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 63. The school year in which Walther died, 1886–1887, the enrollment at the St. Louis institution was 93, while the Springfield school had 176 students. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 84.

³¹ C. C. Schmidt, "The Pastors of the Missouri Synod," *Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century*, ed. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 491, 493.

³² He was followed by R. D. Biedermann (1915–1921) who was then followed by H. A. Klein (1922–1935) as presidents of the practical seminary.

³³ This actually began in 1881, before Walther's death, with Concordia Colleges in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Bronxville, New York, followed by St. Paul's College in Concordia, Missouri, in 1884; Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1893; and St. John's College in Winfield, Kansas, in 1893. Concordia College in Conover, North Carolina, came to the German Synod from the

Lutheran high schools and junior colleges where Latin and biblical languages were taught in preparation for entrance to the St. Louis seminary. They made up what became known as “the system.” Other factors that assisted the St. Louis institution in surpassing the Springfield school were the attempts by some in the synod to eliminate the Springfield school, and when that failed, to restrict the number of those completing this course of study.³⁴

During the 1893–1894 school year, enrollment at Springfield was just under 300, while in St. Louis, there were 170 students. In 1896, the synod determined to limit the enrollment of the practical seminary to 170.³⁵ Attempts were also made to end the Springfield *Vorklasse* or pro-seminary. Prior to 1920, not even an eighth-grade education was required for admittance. So, the pro-seminary was very important, not only for those coming from the German Missouri Synod, but Norwegians, Finns, Slovaks, and students from the English Missouri Synod.³⁶

By 1915, the Springfield enrollment dropped to 201 including the pro-seminary program, while the St. Louis seminary climbed to 328.³⁷ Around this time, the curriculum of the Springfield school was expanded to include educational subjects, enabling graduates to pass state examinations to serve as teachers.³⁸ The enrollment limit placed on the Springfield school was finally lifted in 1926. However, by that time, the St. Louis graduates significantly outnumbered their sister seminary.³⁹

Under the leadership of Franz Pieper, conservation of the confessional doctrinal heritage passed on by Walther and Craemer was prominent.⁴⁰ At both schools, systematic theology was again given a greater emphasis over exegetical studies.⁴¹ The doctrinal stance of the Missouri Synod passed on by the seminary

English Missouri Synod in 1911, followed by Concordia College in Portland, Oregon, in 1905; and Concordia College in Edmonton, Canada, in 1921.

³⁴ This had been the desire of Walther. It was furthered by Heinrich Schwan, who had studied in Germany under the theoretical model, as well as Franz Pieper, who was president of the synod after Schwan from 1899 to 1911, and then Friedrich Pfotenhauer, who was president of the synod from 1911 to 1935. Both Pieper and Pfotenhauer studied under Walther at the theoretical seminary.

³⁵ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 173.

³⁶ Erich Heintzen noted: “The incident of the *Vorklasse* is of more than passing interest. It reveals something significant about the self-image of the institution. In contrast to its sister seminary in St. Louis, which viewed itself as a “learned” seminary aspiring to the pinnacle of German scholarship, the Springfield institution saw itself as a “pastoral” and “missionary” seminary. Its purpose was, in part, to provide training for men who for one reason or another were not suited to the synod’s lockstep, classically oriented high school-junior college-seminary system.” Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 113.

³⁷ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 114.

³⁸ Baepler, *A Century of Blessing*, 30. Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 222.

³⁹ Baepler, *A Century of Grace*, 285.

⁴⁰ Carl S. Meyer put it this way: “Conserving and retaining the teachings of the early leaders of the Synod belonged to the tasks of the new generation.” Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 91.

⁴¹ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 98.

faculties was regarded by synodical leadership as a reason for the continued growth of the synod.⁴²

The seminaries were a regular feature of reports and resolutions at the conventions of the synod, particularly addressing their growth and the need for facility expansion. During the Pieper years, two extensive building projects were undertaken for the St. Louis institution, including the 1883 structure on Jefferson Ave. and the 1926 campus on DeMun Ave. The question of closing Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield again came up in 1926. Instead, the convention voted to provide the institution with a new heating plant, a new dormitory, and an administration building.⁴³

The influence that their professors had in the classrooms became stronger after the students entered the ministry. Faculty members, particularly from the St. Louis institution, were regularly invited to deliver essays at the various conventions and conferences throughout the synod.⁴⁴ Additionally, faculty members served on synodical committees, represented the synod on the Intersynodical Committees that attempted to achieve Lutheran unity from 1917 to 1929, and then worked on the Brief Statement, which was largely formulated by Franz Pieper. The faculties of both seminaries continued to publish articles in the synod's theological journals.⁴⁵ Significant publications during this period included the *Concordia Triglotta* with Gerhard Friedrich Bente's historical introduction, Franz Pieper's three volume *Christliche Dogmatik*, John H. C. Fritz's *The Practical Missionary* (1919), and his *Pastoral Theology* (1932). Yet, it was the initiation of a radio station—KFUO from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, which was dedicated December 14, 1924, that would have a far-reaching impact outside Lutheran circles. In conjunction with the Lutheran Laymen's League, the Lutheran Hour was started, with a seminary professor, Walter A. Maier, serving as speaker.⁴⁶

Of particular interest is the role the seminaries played in the language and cultural transformation that took place in the years before and after World War I. While the Springfield "practical" seminary had pointed to the need for pastors capable of preaching in both German and English from early on,⁴⁷ the St. Louis "theoretical" faculty seemed more interested in maintaining the German culture,

⁴² Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 95.

⁴³ Baepler, *A Century of Blessing*, 31.

⁴⁴ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 104.

⁴⁵ This included *Lehre und Wehre*, *The Theological Quarterly*, which became *The Theological Monthly*, *Der Lutheraner* and *The Lutheran Witness*, *Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie*, and *Magazin für Evangelische Lutherische Homiletik*.

⁴⁶ Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 658; Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 243. .

⁴⁷ Baepler, *A Century of Blessing*, 11–12.

and not only with respect to language. This included some of the St. Louis faculty serving as active members of the American Neutrality League and speaking before the United States Congress to encourage American neutrality before the United States' declaration of war on April 6, 1917.⁴⁸ As anti-German attitudes grew across the country, President Pfotenhauer turned to the Springfield seminary in naming a Council of Defense to study the anti-German issue confronting the synod and provide advice to the congregations of the synod on how best to respond.⁴⁹

Despite the growing number of seminary students during the latter years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century, both seminaries could not fill all the calls to congregations.⁵⁰ But by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the Great Depression would result in a marked decline in calls for candidates. Erich Heintzen noted: "The Springfield seminary feared that when calls were assigned, the 'practical' men would be eliminated. But the principle actually followed was that the best men should be placed, whether they came from Springfield or St. Louis."⁵¹ The dire dearth of candidate calls continued well into the 1930s. In 1932, the studies of 160 young men were halted for a year.⁵²

III. 1932–1974: The Disruptive Years, Reshaping the Synod's Doctrinal Heritage

During the next forty-two years, the role of both seminaries would change dramatically. This period would begin with the Springfield seminary fighting for its existence, while the St. Louis school began transforming into an agent for reshaping the synod's doctrinal heritage.

With the Great Depression bearing down on the nation and the synod facing a surplus of ministerial candidates graduating from its two seminaries, the 1935 synodical convention confronted overtures to dissolve the "practical" seminary.⁵³

⁴⁸ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 137, 235–238.

⁴⁹ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 120.

⁵⁰ In 1909, there were 180 requests for candidates but only 96 graduates. Of those, 61 were from St. Louis. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 96. Because of emergency needs, some students were asked to interrupt their studies to fill in at vacant congregations. It was also during the early years of the twentieth century that voluntary vicarages began. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 97. With the rise of Missouri Synod feeder schools, enrollment at the Springfield seminary declined, particularly during World War I. Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 114. In 1923, the St. Louis seminary began issuing the bachelor of divinity degree to its graduates. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 266.

⁵¹ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 145.

⁵² It was then concluded that a mandatory vicarage be implemented after the second year at the seminary. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 155.

⁵³ The resolution to close the Springfield school first passed by one vote, 266 to 265. Two days later, a motion to reconsider carried. This time, 283 voted to retain the school while 256 voted to close.

After two votes over the span of three days, and by a margin of only twenty-seven votes, the synod resolved to retain the “practical” seminary.⁵⁴ Following that close call, a revised and expanded curriculum was introduced in Springfield during the 1936–1937 school year, which included a mandatory course in New Testament Greek. Entrance requirements were also raised, requiring at least two years of high school for admittance to the pro-seminary program, now called an “academy.”⁵⁵ Beginning in 1941, the newly established Board for Higher Education again attempted to close the Springfield school. It was held that the “practical” seminary, due to increased academic requirements for entrance and completion, was not that different from the St. Louis institution. It was also observed by the BHE that the Springfield school produced pastors who were particularly known for their conservative Lutheranism.⁵⁶ Despite the recommendation of the BHE, the 1944 synodical convention voted to retain the Springfield school. A year later, this was the only synodical seminary equipped to receive a unique group of students: the returning GIs following World War II.⁵⁷

After the death of Franz Pieper, Ludwig Fuerbringer became president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, serving in that position until 1943, when Louis Sieck was installed. While Ludwig Fuerbringer maintained the conservative status of the seminary during his tenure, Sieck began extensive changes.⁵⁸ The intent was to improve theological scholarship toward the development of a more excellent ministry.⁵⁹ But it did not stop there. While the St. Louis seminary graduate program began in the 1923–1924 school year with a Master of Sacred Theology (STM) program, this was expanded in 1944 to include a Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree.⁶⁰ The 1950 seminary report to the synodical convention stressed that the school must train not only pastors and missionaries, but also scholars: “Our Seminary ought to aim to exert a greater influence in the theological world of today.”⁶¹ In 1952, Louis Sieck was followed by Alfred Fuerbringer, son of Ludwig

⁵⁴ The response was that Springfield continued to carry out its original purpose: “to train men who, because of their educational background or age, could not fit well into the preparatory school-St. Louis system.” Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 177.

⁵⁵ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 150–151.

⁵⁶ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 180.

⁵⁷ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 183. Heintzen notes: “The simple principle of supply and demand after World War II turned the seminary into a ‘blessed necessity’ for the synod.” Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 184.

⁵⁸ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 185.

⁵⁹ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 233.

⁶⁰ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 269–272.

⁶¹ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 271.

Fuerbringer, as president of the St. Louis institution. Alfred continued the progressive changes at the St. Louis school.⁶²

To support this striving for academic excellence, the synod decided to establish a Senior College on a new campus site in Fort Wayne and to sell the existing Fort Wayne junior college.⁶³ This institution would confer bachelor's degrees, which would now be required for enrollment at the St. Louis seminary. Meanwhile, students from non-synodical schools, including Valparaiso University, were to attend Springfield.⁶⁴

The first overt sign that members of the St. Louis faculty sought to influence and even reshape the synod's doctrinal heritage occurred when five of them joined thirty-nine others in signing "A Statement" in 1945. The group that signed "A Statement" were brought together at a Chicago hotel by the Editorial Board for the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (ALPB).⁶⁵ "A Statement" included twelve theses and was divided into a "We affirm" section and a "We therefore deplore" section. Primary among those things deplored were legalism, a loveless attitude, that Romans 16:17 was applied to all Christians who differ from the Missouri Synod in doctrine, and other matters regarding church fellowship. Daniel Preus summarized the consequences:

Completely apart from the issues involved, the fact that a statement of faith and conviction which had been made and mailed to all LCMS clergy and was contrary to official church doctrine and practice was simply withdrawn from discussion without retraction was a very bright green light to those who wished to see Missouri embrace a more open fellowship practice. But the implications do not end there. When people were permitted to publish a position statement contrary to our doctrine, and were not disciplined or required to retract, it became apparent that people would be able to publish or set forth other statements contrary to our doctrine. To many who believed Missouri too rigid, the 44 became a heroic example of a new permissiveness which would slowly invade the synod and lead eventually to the deplorable positions held by the St.

⁶² Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 271.

⁶³ Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, 388.

⁶⁴ David P. Scaer, *Surviving the Storms: Memoirs of David P. Scaer* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Luther Academy, 2018), 89.

⁶⁵ The five included Theodore Graebner, Richard Caemmerer, Paul Bretscher, W. Gustave Polack, and William Arndt. Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 247. Richard R. Caemmerer, "Recollections of 'A Statement,'" *CHIQ* 43 (November 1970): 156. Thomas Coates, "'A Statement'—Some Reminiscences," *CHIQ* 43 (November 1970): 159. *Speaking the Truth in Love: Essays Related to A Statement, Chicago Nineteen Forty-Five* (Chicago: The Willow Press, n.d.), passim. Jack Tron Robinson, "The Spirit of Triumphalism in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: The Role of the 'A Statement' of 1945 in the Missouri Synod" (unpublished PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1972), 132–150.

Louis Seminary faculty majority in the early 1970s. . . . The fact remains that these men were able to flaunt the doctrinal practice of the church body to which they belonged with no significant consequences.⁶⁶

Other changes began to occur at the St. Louis school following “A Statement.” Several of the faculty members were involved in the Bad Boll Conferences beginning in 1948. Despite synodical President John Behnken being warned by Hermann Sasse that this could be theologically detrimental and would hurt relations with the German Free Church,⁶⁷ the Missouri Synod went forward with the conferences. The synod leadership who attended, including several St. Louis faculty members, were directly confronted with modern German scholarship, particularly in the area of contemporary neo-orthodox Luther studies and historical criticism from men like Werner Elert, Helmut Thielicke, Peter Brunner, Heinrich Bornkamm, Edmund Schlink, and Adolf Koeberle. Scott Murray notes three results of the Bad Boll Conferences:

First, the Missouri Synod commissioners returned to the United States with an altered view of the place of Scripture in theological prolegomena. This has affected the course of Missouri Synod history to the present. Second, the commissioners encountered an ambivalence about the significance of the Formula of Concord for which they were unprepared. Third, the commissioners returned to their teaching posts eager to recommend these great Lutheran scholars to their students for graduate studies.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Daniel Preus, “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: Holiday from History,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20020209135211/http://www.confessionallutherans.org:80/papers/dantalk.htm>, pp. 11, 13.

⁶⁷ Hermann Sasse, “Letter to J.W. Behnken from Hermann Sasse Regarding the Bad Boll Conferences—May 14, 1948,” trans. Albert Collver and Charles Schaum, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 25–40.

⁶⁸ Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 67. Concerning the influence of Werner Elert, David Scaer has noted: “Werner Elert, who out of all the Bad Boll conferees on the German side would make the biggest impression on the Missourians, was part of the Erlangen tradition. He had been a pastor and professor in the Breslau Synod, a church body that has grown closer and closer to the Missouri Synod. He also appeared as a chief attacker of Karl Barth on the matter of Law and Gospel. Elert’s essay ‘Law and Gospel’ was a direct reply to Barth’s ‘Gospel and Law.’ All this endeared Elert to the Missourians. But the elevation of ‘Law-Gospel’ as the controlling theological theme was the weakness of Elert’s position. The Missourians did not determine that Elert had provided no basis for his theology apart from a functional use of Scriptures and Luther. Elert like Barth had a Scripture divorced from history. Elert was in fact a ‘Lutheran-Barthian.’ His ‘Law-Gospel’ principle hung suspended in theological thin air, almost in the same fashion as the Erlangen theology a century before.” David Scaer, “Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod,” *Springfielder* 36 (December 1972): 162–163.

Even before the Bad Boll Conferences began, Richard Caemmerer and Jaroslav Pelikan, both on the St. Louis faculty, questioned the third use of the law in Lutheran theology.⁶⁹ This led to the position which John Warwick Montgomery later identified as Gospel Reductionism, reducing the word of God to only the gospel and questioning the normative authority of Scripture together with other churchly authority.⁷⁰ While the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference affirmed the traditional position on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture in 1959, Martin Scharlemann, director of the School for Graduate Studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, put forth a series of “exploratory” essays on the nature of inspiration and revelation. Throughout the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference, Scharlemann was severely criticized for what many perceived as a rejection of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Scharlemann apologized before the 1962 synodical convention. But the doors had been opened for the further incursion of historical criticism.⁷¹

Another emphasis growing on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was the push for Lutheran union.⁷² Several members of the faculty, including President Alfred Fuerbringer, served on the synod’s Committee for Doctrinal Unity.⁷³ Alfred Fuerbringer believed that a vital role of the institution was “informing a living church!”⁷⁴ Carl S. Meyer summarized it this way:

Some men have seen their roles simply as transmitters of viewpoints handed down from one generation to the next. Others have been disturbed about the church’s lack of involvement in the intellectual, social, and cultural milieu. Still others have conceived the role of a theological faculty as a leadership role, one which brings new insights into the Scriptures, new formulations of teachings, new programs for the church, new techniques for the proclamation of the church, and new approaches—perhaps even new avenues—for the services the church renders.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Richard Caemmerer, “The Melanchthonian Blight,” *CTM* 18 (May 1947): 321–338. See Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God*, 46–50.

⁷⁰ Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God*, 53.

⁷¹ Beginning with the November 1959 issue, the Scharlemann controversy dominated the pages of *The Confessional Lutheran* until well after the 1962 convention. LCMS, *Reports and Memorials to the Forty-Fifth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Meeting at Cleveland, Ohio, June 20–30, 1962* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 164–165. Also see John Behnken, *This I Recall* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 106–107, 199.

⁷² Carl Meyer asserted, “A genuine interest in Lutheran unity pervaded the campus.” Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 229.

⁷³ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 246, 250.

⁷⁴ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, viii.

⁷⁵ Meyer, *Log Cabin to Luther Tower*, 259.

The Springfield school did not share this latter view of a seminary's leadership role. It continued to strive toward the formation of faithful pastors for the synod.⁷⁶ During the 1950s, the Springfield seminary grew to be one of the largest Lutheran seminaries in the country, the largest seminary without a graduate school. More faculty were brought on during this time. However, instead of seeking more progressive scholars, President Baepler sought well-trained conservative theologians, including J. A. O. Preus in 1958. In 1962, Jacob Preus became president of the Springfield school. That year, it was determined that a bachelor's degree was required, although the seminary continued to enroll a certain percentage of qualified men who had no degrees.⁷⁷ Around this time, the Springfield seminary also achieved formal accreditation.⁷⁸ Then, in 1967, it was determined that graduates of the synod's Fort Wayne Senior College could choose to attend either the seminary in St. Louis or the seminary in Springfield, and the synod's Board for Higher Education stated: "In the United States, professional theological study is postbaccalaureate. Both seminaries do and should work at that level."⁷⁹ Additionally, the St. Louis seminary began accepting students who had not attended the synodical "system" schools.⁸⁰ At the 1969 Denver synodical convention, J. A. O. Preus was elected president of the synod. The next two synodical conventions, 1971 Milwaukee and 1973 New Orleans, had extensive business and numerous resolutions dealing with the St. Louis institution, while no resolutions referred specifically to the Springfield seminary.⁸¹

Just prior to the election of a new synodical president in 1969, Alfred Fuerbringer retired so that John Tietjen was elected president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.⁸² His doctoral dissertation from Union Seminary in New York was later published as *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?* where he maintained the following:

⁷⁶ After the seminary was notified by the Veterans Administration in 1945 that it was approved for education under the GI Bill of Rights, the enrollment at the Springfield school went from 137 to 229, with 95 being veterans, including 26 married students. Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 189.

⁷⁷ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 198.

⁷⁸ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 100.

⁷⁹ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 201–202.

⁸⁰ August R. Suelflow, ed., *Heritage in Motion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1998), 400–414.

⁸¹ Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 208.

⁸² He had served as the Executive Secretary of the Department of Public Relations for the Lutheran Council USA, a pan-Lutheran group striving for greater cooperation among American Lutherans.

What should be the basis for uniting the Lutherans of America? I suggest that it should be consensus in recognizing the Holy Scriptures as the norm and standard of teaching and in regarding the Lutheran Confessions as the correct explanation of Scriptures—that much and nothing more.⁸³

This minimalist view without discerning what such “recognition” might mean was basically the position of the Lutheran Church in America and not the long-held position of the Missouri Synod, which maintained that Lutheran union must be based on true unity: agreement in doctrine and practice. Concerning the changes that had been occurring at the St. Louis school, Tietjen writes in his memoirs:

Under Fuerbringer’s leadership CS had been undergoing a quiet revolution. Biblical studies were receiving major attention, replacing dogmatic theology. . . . Several members of the faculty were helping CS and the church body come to terms with contemporary issues of biblical criticism.⁸⁴

A few faculty members expressed concerns about what was being taught at the seminary, including Robert Preus (brother of President Jacob Preus), Martin Scharlemann, and Ralph Bohlmann. On April 20, 1970, President Jacob Preus wrote the seminary Board of Control that he intended to appoint a Fact-Finding Committee to evaluate the teaching at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.⁸⁵ We do not have time to get into all the details of what led to the walkout and formation of the seminary-in-exile known as Seminex. The report of the Fact-Finding Committee found that false doctrine was taught by the faculty majority. The 1973 synodical convention adopted a resolution acknowledging deviations in doctrine by the faculty majority and charged the seminary Board of Control to deal with it. The seminary board then temporarily suspended John Tietjen on January 20, 1974. The next day, the majority of the Concordia Seminary students voted to declare a moratorium on all classes. These students and a majority of the faculty then began an outreach to the congregations and church workers of the synod. The board met February 17–18, 1974, and resolved that any faculty refusing to resume their teaching responsibilities on February 19 would be considered in breach of their contracts and thereby terminated. On the morning of February 19, 1974, the majority of faculty members and students made their exodus from Concordia Seminary and marched into self-imposed exile. They formed the seminary that became known as Christ Seminary-Seminex.⁸⁶ Approximately forty to sixty students

⁸³ John H. Tietjen, *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966, reprinted by Clayton Publishing House, 1975), 151.

⁸⁴ John H. Tietjen, *Memoirs in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 6.

⁸⁵ Board of Control, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, *Exodus from Concordia: A Report on the 1974 Walkout* (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Publicity Office, 1977), 22–25.

⁸⁶ *Exodus from Concordia*, 53–117.

on campus and five faculty did not participate in the “walkout” and continued as Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The five professors who remained were Ralph Bohlmann, Richard Klann, Robert Preus, Martin Scharlemann, and Lorenz Wunderlich, although Bohlmann remained on a leave of absence serving the synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations.⁸⁷ Martin Scharlemann was named Acting President, but he and his family were threatened and harassed, which led to nervous exhaustion. Robert Preus assumed these duties until Ralph Bohlmann was named Acting President May 20, 1974. He was formally called and installed as the St. Louis seminary’s seventh president in May 1975.⁸⁸

By 1969, the Springfield seminary was providing 40 percent of the candidates entering the pastoral ministry of the Missouri Synod.⁸⁹ After Jacob Preus became synodical president, Richard Schultz was chosen president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, in 1970. Some assert that he sympathized with the St. Louis faculty majority.⁹⁰ Schultz resigned in January 1974, taking a call to serve a parish, whereupon Robert Preus, brother of synodical president Jacob, was called to serve as president of the Springfield seminary May 24, 1974.⁹¹

IV. 1974–2001: Resettling Years, Attempting to Restore the Synod’s Doctrinal Heritage

In May 1974, two men had the helm of the synod’s two seminaries, attempting to restore the synod’s doctrinal heritage after a tremendous disruption at the St. Louis institution and amidst further disruption taking place throughout the synod: Ralph Bohlmann and Robert Preus. Each man would have a different vision for the seminary under his charge, which would impact the role of each seminary even to the present.

After the walkout in February 1974, the St. Louis seminary continued providing classes and began to rebuild. The five professors who did not walk out and the 80 or so⁹² students who remained were supported by faculty from the Springfield seminary who drove the 100 miles regularly to supplement the depleted theological

⁸⁷ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 154.

⁸⁸ *Exodus from Concordia*, 133, 147.

⁸⁹ About 90 percent of those who entered the Springfield institution had college degrees, and 70 percent of the student body were married.

⁹⁰ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 207, 209. Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 143–144, 153.

⁹¹ Heintzen, *Prairie School of the Prophets*, 209.

⁹² In unpublished notes possessed by Concordia Historical Institute, Richard Warneck stated that there were about 50 students who remained at Concordia Seminary during the walkout, and they were joined by about 30 returning vicars in the fall of 1974.

faculty.⁹³ The 1974–1975 school year saw new faculty called from throughout the synod to restore the St. Louis school.

The 1975 Anaheim synodical convention made further changes that would impact both seminaries. Because many of the synod's former *Gymnasium* institutions had transitioned to four-year colleges, it was determined to close the Fort Wayne Senior College and move the Springfield institution back to Fort Wayne by June 1, 1977. Some believed this move was due to the apparent support of many on the Senior College faculty for the group that had walked out.⁹⁴ But the primary reason was that the "system" of training preministerial students and funneling them toward the St. Louis institution had come to an end. The walkout demonstrated the need for two seminaries; and so the old Springfield campus was swapped for the beautiful Eero Saarinen–designed campus in Fort Wayne.

Robert Preus set about enhancing the academic quality of the Springfield/Fort Wayne institution, adding to the conservative faculty established earlier under his brother.⁹⁵ Not only was understanding of biblical Greek required, but Hebrew was added to biblical studies. A strong confessional systematic program was given prominence. The upholding of traditional Lutheran liturgy and reverent worship practices were emphasized. A graduate program began, initially offering an STM degree. Robert Preus wanted to expand this to a program providing the ThD degree, but there was an agreement that St. Louis would continue offering the academic ThD while Fort Wayne could develop the professional Doctor of Ministry degree.⁹⁶ St. Louis soon also offered a DMin program. In addition to academic theology, Robert Preus had a strong interest in missions, and so the Fort Wayne school developed what was initially called the Doctor of Missiology (DMiss), which was eventually changed to a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Missiology.⁹⁷ Still, Robert Preus's main emphasis was on Lutheran confessional studies and the formation of confessional Lutheran pastors, missionaries, and theologians.⁹⁸

I am convinced that following the walkout at the St. Louis seminary, Ralph Bohlmann wanted to restore the synod's doctrinal heritage. After all, he was the primary author of "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles," used by the Fact-Finding Committee to evaluate the doctrine of the St. Louis faculty prior to

⁹³ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 154.

⁹⁴ Suellflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 400–414.

⁹⁵ Consider Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God*, 132–145, 192–200.

⁹⁶ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 203.

⁹⁷ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 204–205.

⁹⁸ His dream of a ThD program in Confessional Studies eventually came to fruition in 2018 with a PhD in Theological Studies offered at the Fort Wayne campus. Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 206.

the walkout.⁹⁹ However, he had a somewhat different view on what the doctrinal heritage of the synod was. In 1981, Bohlmann was elected as the president of the synod, and he served in that capacity until 1992. As synodical president, he continued to influence the shape of seminary formation in the synod.¹⁰⁰

That Bohlmann's perspective on reshaping the synod's doctrinal heritage through seminary formation differed from that of Robert Preus can clearly be seen in a presentation he gave to the ALPB at the fiftieth anniversary of "A Statement" of the Forty-Four in 1995, which was then published in the February 1996 *Lutheran Forum*. First, he lamented that the Forty-Four and their Chicago Statement did not correct the "sins of Missouri."¹⁰¹ He saw four areas where the synod needed changing: gospel versus law domination, members not seeking to deal with brothers and sisters through retribution or exclusion; scriptural interpretation, specifically whether Missouri's positions on women's ordination¹⁰² or closed Communion were really based on *sola scriptura*; understanding of church, particularly with regard to the application of Romans 16:17 to other Christians, the closed Communion position of the synod, the nature and understanding of unionism, and the apparent rejection of some regarding "church growth" practices; and finally, love, in which he deplored the party spirit of some within the synod.¹⁰³

In an effort to innovate and culturally contextualize theology and pastoral formation, Bohlmann sought to implement the practices of the church growth movement among the graduates of Concordia Seminary and elsewhere in the synod. He brought to the St. Louis faculty Elmer Matthias, who studied at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, under Donald McGavran, C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn, and others, introducing sociological and business practices including "marketing the church," "contemporary worship," "seeker services," and more. He also had Pastor

⁹⁹ LCMS, "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles," <https://www.lcms.org/about/beliefs/doctrine/statement-of-scriptural-and-confessional-principles>.

¹⁰⁰ I completed my active-duty enlistment in the Navy in August 1976 and was directed to attend Concordia College, Ann Arbor, Michigan, to finish the bachelor degree and fulfill the preministerial requirements since the Senior College was closing. I finished my studies at Ann Arbor February 1978, and I started spring quarter March 1978 at the reconstituted Concordia Seminary with Bohlmann serving as the seminary president. I completed the Master of Divinity and started the Master of Sacred Theology program under his seminary presidency. I completed the Doctor of Theology program at the St. Louis seminary under the presidency of Karl Barth.

¹⁰¹ These so-called "sins" included perceived narrow fellowship practices, continued faulty biblical interpretation, and supposed legalism in synodical dealings.

¹⁰² To that end, Ralph Bohlmann appointed a special Commission on Women in 1984 to review past and present aspects of women's service in the church. Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 50, 52–56.

¹⁰³ Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Missouri Lutheranism, 1945 and 1995," *Lutheran Forum* 30, no. 1 (February 1996): 12–17.

Leroy Biesenthal, a synodical executive, teaching evangelism at the St. Louis school based on a revamping of James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion*.¹⁰⁴

Under the leadership of Robert Preus, the majority of the Fort Wayne seminary faculty did not support these church growth practices and took a more conservative position with respect to closed Communion, unionism, women in the church, and traditional Lutheran liturgical practices. However, in building up the Doctor of Missiology program, new faculty were brought in, some of whom had studied at Fuller Seminary and who supported church growth and other aspects of Ralph Bohlmann's doctrinal emphasis. These included Eugene Bunkowske, Robert Newton, and Waldo Werning.¹⁰⁵ In 1984, President Bohlmann called for an investigation of the Fort Wayne seminary, which began in 1985.¹⁰⁶ Then, in 1988, efforts were undertaken to remove Robert Preus as president. On May 20, 1989, he was asked to step down. By September 1989, he was forced into retirement.¹⁰⁷ Concerning this sad situation, Preus later wrote:

No, there is only one logical and charitable explanation for the radical and unprecedented action of forcing me out of my call as president of the Seminary. Although many of the majority Board members do not realize it and would not admit it, the reason I was put out of my office and the reason the leaders of the BOR persisted in their actions so intransigently is doctrinal. Again and again the Seminary faculty with me as its president opposed and even foiled the plans President Bohlmann had for the Synod in the area of doctrine. We opposed his new erroneous doctrine of church fellowship and his impossible theory of levels of fellowship or relationships. Our Exegetical Theology Department's position on the place of women in the church displeased him. We thoroughly disagreed with his views on the "ministry of laymen and women in the church," pushed forth at the Wichita Convention of the Synod. We were too aggressively critical of the "Church Growth Movement." Our doctrinal assessment of the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America interfered with his plans for the Missouri Synod posture toward the ELCA. In all the aforementioned doctrinal issues Bohlmann was overtly critical of the Seminary, and many district presidents and other leaders in the church agreed with him. By 1988 the majority of the Board decided it would be to the advantage of the seminary if I retire and am removed from the scene. I had

¹⁰⁴ This is based on personal experience as an MDiv student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, during this time and as one who took these courses under Elmer Matthias and Leroy Biesenthal. If I remember correctly, the only "C" I received in a seminary course was in "Church Growth" because I disagreed with the principles put forward. Also consider Suelflow, *Heritage in Motion*, 322, 326–327.

¹⁰⁵ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 218.

¹⁰⁶ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 188, 232.

¹⁰⁷ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 262–263.

always tried not to aggravate Bohlmann as I tried to lead the Seminary to remain faithful to our confessional Lutheran heritage, but in retrospect I see I could not please him.¹⁰⁸

The next several years were very difficult for Robert Preus, the Fort Wayne seminary faculty, the students, and the synod. Preus used the synod's appeal process to be eventually reinstated, although he was no longer permitted to teach under the new seminary administration.¹⁰⁹ Norbert Mueller served as interim president for nearly three years, and during that time it is reported that he and others determined that those students who showed outward support for Robert Preus and who were classified as "Those Confessional Guys" would not receive calls. In 1992, thirty-two students not only did not receive calls, but were not allowed to process with those students receiving calls during the spring call service. Although later that summer those thirty-two received calls, a message had been sent.¹¹⁰ On April 18, 1993, David Schmiel was named as the seminary president, and it is maintained that he saw his election as a mandate to close the Fort Wayne seminary and sell the campus.¹¹¹ This did not happen, of course. Ralph Bohlmann was not reelected as synodical president in 1992, a response to his actions in removing Robert Preus from Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. Following his defeat, Bohlmann sent what many saw as a bitter letter to all Missouri Synod pastors, condemning the very church politics in which he himself had engaged. In that letter, he also tried to explain that the reason he sought to remove Robert Preus was doctrinal. Referring to a "highly organized network" which had opposed his presidency, Bohlmann said:

A few comments about its theological focus might be helpful. . . . In fact, many in the political network hold positions to the right of the Synod's in such key areas as women in the church, inter-Christian relationships, the pastoral office, and the manner of exercising Christian discipline. They have labeled their own position as "confessional" or "conservative."¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Robert Preus, "A Report by Robert Preus Delivered at a Conference in St. Louis" (October 15, 1993), 8. This can also be substantiated by Mr. Robert Doggett, who served on the Missouri Synod Commission on Appeals, which, in 1992, exonerated Robert Preus of the charges pressed against him by Ralph Bohlmann, August Mennicke, Robert King, Robert Sauer, Eugene Bunkowske, and Walter Maier (the Praesidium of the LCMS). The reason for this was characterized as "a wholesale reorganization of the seminary administration that would lead it away from its conservative direction that Preus had attempted to put in place." Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 272.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Preus died November 4, 1995. Many believe that the events surrounding his removal from office aged him dramatically and led to his untimely death. Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 164–165.

¹¹⁰ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 313–323.

¹¹¹ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 329, 347.

¹¹² Ralph Bohlmann, "Letter to Pastors" (August 1992), 3.

Alvin Barry served as synodical president from 1992 until his untimely death in April 2001. Concerns about what was transpiring at the Fort Wayne seminary were raised at the 1995 synodical convention, and President Barry was asked to appoint a committee to look into the situation. Shortly thereafter, David Schmiel announced his retirement.¹¹³ In 1996, Dean Wenthe was elected and called as president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and served in that position for fifteen years. He was followed by Lawrence Rast in 2011. From 1996 on, the Fort Wayne Seminary continued in the confessional, conservative course set under Robert Preus.

In my opinion, this course is well illustrated by “A Pastoral Response to the Events of September 11, 2001,” adopted by the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, on December 14, 2001. In the classic form of a *Gutachten*, the faculty analyzed the prayer service at Yankee Stadium that involved the participation of LCMS Atlantic District President David Benke, and which had been authorized by newly elected Synodical President Gerald Kieschnick. The faculty found that this service evidenced both unionism and syncretism in opposition to Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Constitution of the LCMS.¹¹⁴

After the 1974 walkout, the St. Louis seminary followed a somewhat different path in both pastoral formation and theological leadership, which was more along the lines of the pattern established by Ralph Bohlmann. Concordia Seminary has aspired “to be the world leader in Lutheran ministerial formation, scholarship and theological resources” (CSL Vision Statement).¹¹⁵ But, this leadership has involved striving to contextualize theology and adapt pastoral formation and theological education to emerging and ever-shifting cultural trends. While the Fort Wayne school now seems to be the more theologically focused seminary, the St. Louis school has shifted to emphasizing practical theology through contemporary practices. While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore this observation, one example will suffice here as evidence of this trend. In order to train and equip pastors

¹¹³ Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 344–345.

¹¹⁴ Formerly, at <http://www.ctsfw.edu/pastoralresponse.htm>. As an aside, after Robert Preus was removed from office, and while he was fighting this through synodical adjudication and other legal means, he helped establish two confessional organizations that further confessional Lutheran theology here and around the globe. Through the Luther Academy, support for the training of Lutheran pastors and establishment of Lutheran congregations occurs throughout the world. Additionally, the Luther Academy has published numerous confessional works, including a dogmatic series and the publication of the journal *Logia*, all initiated by Robert Preus (Scaer, *Surviving the Storms*, 197). Also established under his guidance was the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, which translates confessional Lutheran works into numerous languages. These works are then used in Lutheran missions to train Lutheran pastors and catechize Lutheran congregations around the globe. Robert L. Rahn, *Jesus Never Fails* (Macomb, Mich.: Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2012), passim.

¹¹⁵ “Strategic Plan,” <https://www.csl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/StrategicPlan2018PDF.pdf>.

in church growth practices and other means for developing and leading large congregations, even so-called “mega” churches, the Pastoral Leadership Institute (PLI) was established in 1996.¹¹⁶ PLI applied for Recognized Service Organization (RSO) status, but this was denied by the synod’s Board for Higher Education January 18, 2001. The synod’s Commission on Constitutional Matters also determined that PLI was not eligible to receive funds from the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). Yet, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, was willing to give eighteen credit hours toward a DMin degree to those pastors attending PLI.¹¹⁷

Much more could be said and should be said. For example, despite the differing paths that each of our seminaries have taken since 1974, thanks be to God that we have had confessional, conservative, faithful pastors formed at both institutions. Unfortunately, there have also been a few pastors from both institutions who have deviated from the confessional vows which they made at their ordinations. As Concordia Theological Seminary now celebrates her 175th anniversary, and as my alma mater recently called and installed a new president, Thomas Egger, it is my prayer that both seminaries remain committed to doctrinally sound theological education and leadership directed toward the formation and support of confessional Lutheran pastors, missionaries, deaconesses, scholars, and leaders. Hopefully, we learn from our history that the synod is well served by having two seminaries, that there is no room for the deceptive doublespeak found in neo-orthodoxy, that contextualizing theology to meet social changes has inherent dangers, and that there is no room for “rivalry or conceit” (Phil 2:3)¹¹⁸ at either institution. I pray that by the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit, we seek the formation of humble, orthodox ministers of the gospel, sharing the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5–8)

¹¹⁶ It was formally incorporated in the State of Missouri in 1998 by Pastors Greg Smith, Stephen Hower, and Vernon Gundermann.

¹¹⁷ On February 18, 1998, when Norb Oesch announced his call as Executive Director of PLI to the congregation he was serving (St. John’s Lutheran Church, Orange, California), he stated the following about PLI: “I want to say a word about the Pastoral Leadership Institute. It is to create an in-service training program for 300 of the top pastors, the most promising pastors in our Synod, trying to get them equipped with leadership skills, to be able to lead large and very large or mega church congregations, like ours is . . . to try to engage in the task that is set before me, it takes something that is only in a creative mind, on paper, and bring it to reality. And maybe the picture that will help you to see that more clearly is like creating a seminary without walls.” Georgann McKee, “Presentation to the Lutheran Concerns Association on the Pastoral Leadership Institute,” <http://www.concordtx.org/cpapers/mckee.htm>. Other PLI officers include John Kuddes, Ron Burcham, Michelle J. Chaffee, Carol Reineck, and Karen Soeken. Advisory members include John Johnson (former president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) and William Meyer (Executive Director of the BHE). See also Florence Misseldine and Georgeann McKee, “Update on PLI Investigation,” *Consensus* 1 (October 2002): 3.

¹¹⁸ All Scripture quotations are the author’s translation.

and a willingness to go into all the world with the gospel (Matt 28:19–20; Rom 1:16). May our seminaries together strive to be of “the same mind, having the same love” (Phil 2:2), working toward the same confessional Lutheran formational goals.