

Theological Observer

Banquet Remarks for the Retirement of Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr. as President of Concordia Theological Seminary, May 16, 2024

When I was asked to speak for this occasion, I did something historians like President Rast do all the time: I went to the archives! I found my remarks at the installation banquet celebrating the beginning of the presidency of Dr. Rast on September 11, 2011. Those remarks began with the analogy that as Moses passed the leadership of Israel to younger Joshua, we had witnessed President Wenthe passing his staff to the much younger President Rast. Now turn the clock in your mind back thirteen years and listen as I quote:

The reason the installation we just witnessed in Kramer Chapel is significant is that it is part of divine history. At the time, few in this world beyond Jericho and some other conquered cities took notice of Joshua and the people of Israel. The reason Moses, Joshua, the people of Israel, Wenthe, Rast, and this seminary in Fort Wayne are significant is because we are part of divine history. Several psalms of the Psalter adeptly express the history of Israel as divine history: it is God acting in and through sinful people, sometimes in spite of them! Who at the time thought that Jesus' three-year training of his first twelve pastors, primarily in the hinterland of Galilee, was important for the world's future? Luke, among others, however, viewed the actions of the apostles as divine history that was transforming the world: "The Word of the Lord grew and multiplied." Why was Luther so important? He was part of divine history, an instrument used by God to testify mightily to God's grace in Christ Jesus. Anyone who has read Erich Heintzen's *Prairie School of the Prophets* realizes that the history of this seminary is very often, as our new president would bluntly put it, rather depressing! Yet, with all its struggles to survive and journeys between three states, we recognize and rejoice that this seminary is part of divine history as Jesus has called, formed, and sent forth countless servants faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, year after year, decade after decade, for 165 years. . . . It is a history unfolding with each service in Kramer Chapel in which Jesus is present with his gifts of life and forgiveness, every class that lifts up his death and resurrection as the source of salvation, every faithful student who is sent from here to testify to Jesus in this world. It is a history that will not end with seminary enrollment struggles or income shortfalls, but with our Lord's glorious return and our resurrection.¹

¹ Charles A. Gieschen, "An Old Seminary, a New President, and the Unfolding of Divine History," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 3–4 (July/October 2011): 369.

Tomorrow marks the close of our 178th academic year. Thirteen more years of *divine history* have unfolded at this seminary and our young Joshua—President Rast—is just a bit older, has journeyed many miles around the world, and has dealt with many challenges that arose here during those years. The video you just saw showed many of the wonderful things God has done in and through this seminary under his leadership.² He has served selflessly and sacrificially for Christ, his church, and this seminary. We owe him, his dear wife Amy, and his family our profound appreciation.

For the past thirteen years, before or after each of the annual vicarage, internship, and placement services, Larry and I would typically see one another in the administration building as we put on or took off our vestments. We would habitually say to one another that the sending out of soon-to-be pastors and deaconesses is “why we do what we do.” And I would thank him for doing what he did to make sure that sending continued to happen. Historians like our president like hard data, so I will share numbers. Between 2011 and tomorrow, 892 individuals have graduated from all the various CTSFW degree programs. If we add to that those completing the Alternate Route and Specific Ministry Program certificate programs, it pushes the number over 950. Then think of the ministry of these individuals lasting decades each and impacting hundreds of people at a thousand different locations with the love of God in Jesus Christ. And think of the thousands upon thousands who will one day be in heaven because of that ministry. That is the divine history that God has written, Larry, working through you as our president for these thirteen years. On behalf of the faculty, staff, and our students from across the world, I say to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” and we all look forward to having you back in the classroom full-time teaching church history!³

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² See *Faithfully Forming Servants*, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, video, 12:31, May 16, 2024, https://video.ctsfw.edu/media/Faithfully%20Forming%20Servants/1_8q4nell6.

³ Dr. Rast is on sabbatical during the 2024–2025 academic year and will return to teaching as Professor of Historical Theology in September 2025.

Remarks at the Faculty and Staff Banquet Prior to the Installation of Dr. Jon S. Bruss as President of Concordia Theological Seminary, September 7, 2024

Dear friends in Christ gathered for this historic and joyous occasion and especially you, Dr. Bruss, our esteemed colleague,

On behalf of the entire faculty I assure you, as our soon-to-be-installed president, of our support and prayers for your shepherding of this seminary. We know you will bring to this new calling wisdom drawn from the text of the Holy Scriptures, confessional integrity as a faithful Lutheran pastor fresh from parish ministry, academic rigor that flows from your many learning and teaching experiences, as well as much energy and compassion. We are confident you will build on the legacy of our past presidents, who shepherded this seminary during the past 178 years. I note especially three of these whose leadership has defined Concordia Theological Seminary since it moved from Springfield to Fort Wayne: Dr. Robert Preus, Dr. Dean Wenthe, and Dr. Lawrence Rast. We fervently pray that the Lord will use you, like he used them, so that this seminary continues to be a bastion of confessional Lutheran theology that is a beacon in this world by forming servants in Jesus Christ who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all.

This presidential transition is really about how the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ, will continue to meet the need for called servants through Concordia Theological Seminary. It is about this seminary *continuing* its steadfast commitment to testifying—in our chapel, classrooms, and everywhere we serve in the world—of the Christ revealed throughout the Holy Scriptures, whose atoning death and victorious resurrection offers salvation and life to all sinners. It is about this seminary *continuing* to be a twenty-first-century Wittenberg where this Christ-centered and grace-filled theology of the inspired and inerrant word of God and the Lutheran Confessions is vibrantly and faithfully preached, taught, learned, and lived by faculty and students from across the world. It is about this seminary *continuing* its mission on behalf of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to send forth workers into the harvest fields who courageously offer Jesus Christ with all of his love and forgiveness wrapped in the waters of Holy Baptism, words of gospel, and the bread and wine that are his true body and blood.

As you take on this weighty responsibility, Jon, may you be encouraged that you are not in this alone. Our Lord Jesus remains the ultimate head of this seminary, our fine faculty continues to be its heart, and our dedicated staff continues to be the hands and feet that get things done. As we begin a new academic year under President Bruss, these words from a hymn by Martin Franzmann are an apt prayer to keep in our minds and hearts, and even on our lips.

O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy Church that it might be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be those whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, and unto Thee.¹

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¹ Martin H. Franzmann, “O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth,” in *Lutheran Service Book*, ed. The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 834, st. 4.