

## Theological Observer

### Books, Always Books: Reflections on the 150th Anniversary of Concordia Publishing House

“When you come, bring . . . the books (τὰ βιβλία) and above all the parchments (τὰς μεμβράνας).” (2 Tim 4:13).

The Church treasures her books, and she always has. Above all, *the* Book of books, the Holy Bible, has been given rightful reverence and pride of place, resulting in lavishly illuminated and carefully copied editions, handmade for centuries before moveable type in scriptoria, where generations of nameless monks labored with vellum, quill, and ink to preserve copies of the sacred text, along with writings of the fathers, lectionaries, orders of worship, liturgy of the hours, and other prayers. But then along came Gutenberg, and by 1450 he was able to demonstrate the successful use of printing with moveable type, literally one sheet of paper after another. He nearly figured out how to make this profitable as well. But it was left to another German, who followed him in the early decades of the sixteenth century, to show the nascent publishing industry what was possible. Martin Luther, with his pamphlets, Bible translations, treatises, disputations, catechisms, and hymnals, kept a half-dozen printers in his own hometown alone working around the clock to produce copies of his materials throughout his lifetime. Luther was truly the first “mass media” celebrity, and he took a keen interest in every aspect of the printing and publishing arts.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Saxons and Their Books: The Early Years

In the fall of 1839, five ships carrying more than seven hundred members of an *immigration society* set sail from Germany to the United States with hundreds of copies of books tucked away in their luggage: Bibles, Luther’s sermons, various hymnals, prayer books, a wide variety of classic works of theology in German, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and a myriad of other works. The Saxon immigrants were mostly clergy, students, and professionals of every description from the German middle class, which was perhaps the most highly educated society on earth at the time. They were all voracious readers. Always, there were books.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Pettegree’s wonderful book *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015) gives the following description on the cover: “How an Unheralded Monk Turned His Small Town into a Center of Publishing, Made Himself the Most Famous Man in Europe—and Started the Protestant Reformation.” It is a delight to read and lays out in great detail Luther’s personal involvement in the design, layout, illustration, and even choice of typeface for his early works, which launched the Reformation across Europe.

After settling in Perry County and surviving their first year mostly on rice and bacon, dealing with disease, starvation, and privation of every description, they established as of highest priority a seminary and began immediately seeking sources for more books for their congregations and homes.

A look at the early newspaper started by Dr. C. F. W. Walther and his colleagues (*Der Lutheraner*) is shocking for modern readers: it presents mostly unbroken columns of nothing but small print, and it proved enormously popular, read by Lutherans of a kindred spirit across the Midwest, leading ultimately to their joining together to form what today we know as “The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod” (LCMS). At the constituting convention in Chicago in April 1847, the new Synod called for the provision of faithful Lutheran books and printed resources as one of the fundamental reasons for forming a Synod, to facilitate “the promotion of special church projects,” which no one congregation could accomplish on its own, but which, banded together, they could and most definitely did.<sup>2</sup> And what is more, books featured largely in the conditions required to be a member of this new “Evangelical Lutheran Synod.” One of the “conditions under which a congregation may join Synod and remain a member” was as follows:

The exclusive use of doctrinally pure church books and schoolbooks. (Agenda, hymnals, readers, etc.) If it is impossible in some congregations to replace immediately the unorthodox hymnals and the like with orthodox ones, then the pastor of such a congregation can become a member of Synod only if he promises to use the unorthodox hymnal only under open protest and to strive in all seriousness for the introduction of an orthodox hymnal.<sup>3</sup>

Here in America, particularly on the frontier where the Missouri Synod Lutherans took up residence, the process for obtaining books—and specifically confessional Lutheran books—was extremely difficult, and so they realized they would have to provide for themselves. They worked with local printers in St. Louis to produce “the basics” for congregational life: Bibles, catechisms, hymnals, and resources for Lutheran schools. One of Walther’s first projects was to provide the young Synod with its own hymnal so that LCMS congregations would stop using a hodgepodge of hymn collections, many heavily influenced by Pietism. Walther’s congregation resolved to sponsor the publication of a genuinely Lutheran hymnal for the young Synod.

Local printers were used for the Synod’s printing needs through the 1840s and into the 1860s, but the Synod finally decided it was time to buy its own printing

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<sup>2</sup> “Our First Synodical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (April 1943): 1–18, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/lcmsconstitution.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> “Our First Synodical Constitution,” 3.

equipment and establish its own very own *Verlag* (“publishing house”) dedicated to the publication of orthodox Lutheran materials, soon to be called the *Concordia-Verlag*, indicating in its name the confessional commitment of the enterprise.

Walther preached at the overflowing dedication service on February 28, 1870, and dedicated the new publishing company “to God as long as it stands; dedicated to Him, the all-holy triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. From this institution may nothing go forth except that which serves the glory of this great God and the temporal welfare and eternal salvation of men.” The Synod had already taken on some massive printing projects even before its publishing house was constructed. It moved quickly to prepare an edition (in German) of the works of Martin Luther and other important documents for historical context. Twenty-two large volumes were included in this set and were offered in three levels of binding: a plain cloth binding, a cloth/leather combination, and a genuine leather edition with gilding on the page edges and cover. Numerous other core Lutheran resources were being pumped out of the young publishing house at an astounding rate, testifying to the commitment and diligence of the hardworking Germans who worked ten-hour days Monday through Saturday. The original first printings of these books are all in the on-site archive to this day at Concordia Publishing House (CPH) and are as imposing and impressive today as when they were first released. The Bibles and other resources used binding and printing technologies so refined and so costly that they are now not used by mainstream printing companies.

### **German in America: The Language Challenge**

It is an oft-repeated myth in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that our founders put the German language ahead of “mission.” At a pastor’s conference in Missouri some years ago, a speaker, with a scornful laugh, referred to how the German missionaries in Michigan required the Native American tribes first to learn German before they were taught the Gospel. Thankfully, he was immediately corrected by one of the pastors attending the conference. In fact, the missionaries working among the tribes of Michigan took great pains to learn and prepare a written alphabet for the native language, translated Scripture and the catechism into the native tongues, and conducted worship and instruction—and upon the missionaries’ parting, they were sent off with great weeping and embraces from the Indians, who stood on the riverbanks singing loudly the Paul Gerhardt chorales that had been taught them in their native language. I tell this story simply to caution against spreading myths about the commitment to German among our founders. Of course, German was the language used in our early congregations consisting

of German immigrants, with hundreds of thousands more Germans pouring into America throughout the nineteenth century.

The problems presented with offering resources in English are very clearly seen in Concordia Publishing House's earliest catalogs. Amidst all the German resources which were distinctly Lutheran, the Synod's publishing company was in the 1870s already selling English resources, including—ironically and ominously—the collected sermons of Charles Spurgeon! In other words, some English resources were produced by non-Lutherans, and while of course one can but speculate, it is probably not too far from the truth to think that the old phrase “in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king” applies to how English resources were chosen. Because so few qualified Lutheran pastors, theologians, and professors were masters of the English language, what was available had to suffice. For example, as long as people were able to read Luther's Bible translation, they never knew of an edition of the Scriptures without the Apocrypha, but as the King James Bible became the translation of choice in the Synod and editions were sold and used by LCMS congregations, the Apocrypha simply fell out of the Synod's awareness. Then in 2012, when Concordia Publishing House produced a new study edition of the Apocrypha, from some corners of the Synod there was heard a warning that “Romanism” was creeping back into the Lutheran Church!

And so it presented quite a challenge to remain faithful to the Lutheran Confessions when those Confessions could no longer be read and studied by those for whom German was no longer a native language. The Synod and its publishing company struggled in the first few decades of the twentieth century to accommodate the rapidly growing need for English language resources, along with supporting and sustaining the Synod's many congregations, church workers, and laity still working in the German language. The typical pressures of an immigrant community to conform to its surrounding culture and society certainly came into play during the latter part of the nineteenth and first several decades of the twentieth century. The anti-German sentiment that was whipped to a fever pitch as a result of World War I was quite devastating to many German-speaking congregations, who were suddenly faced with intense community hostility when German words and phrases were seen inscribed on their church building and in their stained glass. This caused a rapid movement away from German throughout the Synod and at the Synod's publishing house—a hasty embrace of English resources despite the un-Lutheran doctrine and worldview that many of these writings set forth.

### **Becoming an American Lutheran Church**

A survey of CPH catalogs from the early decades of the 1900s still contain many German resources, but as each year went along, the number of English titles

increased and German titles decreased. By 1919, the Missouri Synod and her publishing house were fully engaged in providing English language resources. The rise of Sunday school in the Synod's congregations was a huge impetus for providing resources in English for congregations and schools and their families. Finally, the Synod realized that unless it adopted English wholesale it would simply lose generations of members who had been born in the United States and were living and working in the English language but had to step into another language and culture on Sunday mornings. The immigrant church was becoming an American church, for better or worse. Obviously, the expected resistance to this move to English came and was hashed out in heated debates at conventions and conferences, but eventually English took hold, and German speakers and German-only congregations waned in the Synod.

The CPH catalog of 1919–1920 is an interesting case study. It has two sections. The first 204 pages are devoted to resources in German, while the rest of the 512 pages consist of resources in English. This is quite a change from twenty years earlier, when the catalog nearly exclusively offered resources in German and English Bibles and other materials were scattered throughout the pages. The opening pages, title page, and postal rate and zone explanations are all in English.

Ironically, in the “English Publications” section, as alphabetical listing would have it, among the very first titles listed is *Ahn's Method of Learning the German Language* in two volumes, followed by *American Civil Church Law* with the explanation, “This book is confined to the civil law applicable to churches as distinguished from any merely ecclesiastical rules of conduct.” This had become a pressing issue for congregations that used German during the run up to and throughout the First World War, which had concluded the year before in 1918.

The catalog lists various editions of the Bible in English, many acquired from the American Bible Society, all in the King James Version. Editions entitled *Concordia Teachers Bible* and *Concordia School Bible* are of interest, since they would appear to be the Synod's first type of “study Bible” in English. The notes are described as being “reedited and revised thoroughly,” with “full use” being made of the late “Prebendary Scrivener's invaluable work on the References, which was first published in the Cambridge Paragraph Bible.” Here we should note that in this method of making “full use” of non-Lutheran notes, “revised” was a trend that would continue with many different English language study Bibles but finally ended with the publication of *The Lutheran Study Bible* in 2009. It was not until 2009 that Concordia Publishing House provided a genuine stem-to-stern confessional Lutheran Study Bible in English.

The Americanization of the Synod was in full swing one year after World War I, and it did not bode well for the Synod's theological future. Simply put, there were insufficient numbers of Lutheran scholars capable of working fluently in English to make up for the rapidly growing movement in the Synod away from German. Thus, in the first half of the catalog there are vast quantities of solidly Lutheran works from a variety of classic Lutheran scholars and teachers, but in the English half of the catalog the only full commentary on the Bible available is an English translation of the German Calvinist *Lange's Comprehensive Commentary on the Whole Bible* with a disclaimer from CPH stating, "The theology is not orthodox throughout this work, but graduates of our theological schools should have no difficulty in discovering when the commentary assumes a trend of thought that departs from the analogy of faith." And so it was that the only Bible commentary in English being sold by the Synod's *Concordia* Publishing House was a work by German Calvinists! As one pages through the English portion of CPH's catalogs from after WWI, it is painfully obvious that various works in English by a wide array of conservative Calvinists and other Protestants were included in the offered resources, outnumbering works by Lutheran writers in English.

By 1933, only two hundred pages of the 1,100 pages in the CPH catalog were devoted to German titles; the rest is entirely in English. By 1933, however, CPH was able to offer its customers a complete popular Bible commentary in English, brief and to the point, written by Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann. The *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, soon simply referred to as "Kretzmann's Commentary," would remain popular for decades to become. The entire set cost nineteen dollars, representing an enormous investment in the Depression.<sup>4</sup> But in the next several pages, theological works by Calvinist Christians appear in surprising numbers—Lange, Meyer, Hodge—authoring Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, various Bible editions, and so forth. Over twenty-five pages are filled with English Bibles, all King James, all published by Reformed/Calvinist companies or by CPH itself under license from other publishers, with no Lutheran-specific study editions. The study Bibles offered in the catalog were based on notes prepared by Calvinist theologians.

But on a brighter note, the Synod's project to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation was to print a publication of the Lutheran Confessions in a three-language (triglot) text. It contained the original German and Latin of the 1580 and 1584 editions of *The Book of Concord*, with an English translation. Production was delayed and slowed by the onset of the Depression, which saw paper supplies dwindle, but by 1933 the catalog offered an offprint of the English text from the *Concordia Triglotta*. Whereas one could

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<sup>4</sup> With the advent of print-on-demand technology, Kretzmann is back in print again today.

imagine that in more prosperous times more deluxe bindings would have been offered, in 1933 only a clothbound hardback was available, and its price was ten dollars, postpaid, the equivalent of well over \$150 today.<sup>5</sup>

Even during the Depression, CPH's business was flourishing, and it had become as much a church supply and Christian gift store as it was a publisher. Nearly 300 pages are filled with "Christian novelties" and prints, cards, pieces of artwork, supplies of every description for a church office, a school classroom, and, of course, the Sunday School program—thousands of items from pencil sharpeners to school accounting books, from folding tables and chairs to certificates of every description, with hundreds of postcards with Christian art.

One notices a good number of books, again mostly from non-Lutheran Protestant/Calvinist authors, which addressed the new trends in Biblical scholarship. These were popular in Europe for one hundred years or more but were now raising red flags among conservative Protestant Christians in America. For instance, *Is Higher Criticism Scholarly?* by Robert Dick was a small, sixty-two-page booklet. Dick was a Presbyterian American scholar who was reported to have learned forty-five languages and made it his life's work to prove the reliability of the Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts. LCMS theologians, on the other hand, provided responses to Free Masonry and Roman Catholicism and defended the Synod's doctrinal positions. Pages of titles concerning how to respond to materialism, Scientism, and so forth are offered, but nearly all by non-Lutheran Calvinist authors. Of particular exception, though, one observes titles by LCMS pastor and seminary professor Theodore Graebner such as *Essays on Evolution and Evolution: An Investigation and a Criticism* and *God and the Cosmos*. Graebner's literary output during his long career is nothing short of astonishing, and his works and titles are found throughout CPH catalogs. Clearly, by the late 1920s, Synod's professors were very much intent on grappling with modern trends and challenges to a confessional Lutheran church body in the United States.

Turning to the *General Catalog* from 1948, only in the very back of the catalog, in a relatively thin section, does one find "Publications in the German Language," including German Bibles, hymnals, catechisms, and other works—only one hundred pages, while the English section comprises nearly seven hundred pages. The era of the "German" Evangelical Synod was virtually over, and Americanization was an accomplished fact. The post-war era was a boom time for the nation and for the Missouri Synod—and consequently also for its publishing company. The 1948 catalog notes with pride that the publishing house was running the most

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<sup>5</sup> The *Concordia Triglotta* is back in print today via print-on-demand and digital technologies.

modern typesetting and printing presses of every description nearly constantly, the workforce had more than eight hundred persons, and the publishing house on the corner of Jefferson and Miami in St. Louis was expanding office space to accommodate the ever-increasing business. Concordia Publishing House was well known across the United States and was one of the largest and most prosperous church-owned Protestant publishing houses in the world. Advances in interstate highways and rail helped speed CPH resources to distribution points on both coasts and throughout the nation.

The 1948 catalog's first item featured is *The Concordia Bible with Notes*, explaining that in its fifteen hundred pages the Scriptures are expounded in a "modern, popular style. This Bible embodies the results of thorough Biblical scholarship. All notes have been carefully edited and revised by competent theologians of our day." Again, this was not a new work but relied on non-Lutheran, conservative Protestant scholarship of the Bible. As in the catalogs from previous decades, there is a preponderance of apologetic works aimed at the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy, but aside from some comparative symbolics, or smaller books along the line of "our church and others," there are no significant works of polemic over against Calvinism or the general American Protestant culture. Under doctrinal works, the featured product is J. T. Mueller's abridgement of Francis Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, which was not yet available in English. The *Concordia Triglotta* is not offered in this catalog, only the English translation from the *Triglotta*. It is the only edition of *The Book of Concord* offered, tucked away on the last page of the "symbolics, confessions, history of dogma" section, with few to no resources devoted to the Lutheran Confessions.

Only in the German title section do we find the sturdier Lutheran orthodox materials that feature prominent, classic Lutheran works by Luther and other church fathers, including of course Pieper's dogmatics (only in German). The gap in the literature that we noticed already in the post-World War I era was accelerating rapidly and quite noticeable by 1948.

Into the 1950s, Concordia Publishing House, along with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, experienced tremendous growth and financial prosperity. One of the consequences of this time of "feast" in the LCMS's history was the establishment of a working group under the auspices of the Missouri Synod to encourage the funding and production of scholarly works via the Synod's publishing arm. Projects initiated during this era included the American Edition of Luther's Works, done in conjunction with the other large Lutheran publishing concerns in the United States, along with the translation of Johann Gerhard's *Loci Theologici* and the translation of Martin Chemnitz' *Examination of the Council of Trent*.



### The Seminex Crisis and the Publishing House

The greatest challenge to the Missouri Synod's self-understanding and identity as a Lutheran church in the twentieth century was the "Seminex crisis."<sup>6</sup> The Synod faced the question: Would it compromise its historic, orthodox, confessionally Lutheran doctrine and practice in order to participate in the much-longed for unification of the Lutheran Church in America, or would it remain true to its heritage? Rumors of theological war were circulating throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, but open conflict would break out in public view—and the point of contention was the nature and authority of the Holy Scriptures.

Those committed to the Seminex agenda would regard the result as the Synod's decision to spurn the findings of modern scholarship and to turn its back on the promise of a large, united Lutheran Church. Only time would tell where such dreams for a large, united Lutheran Church would eventually lead. Within the LCMS, the controversy gave rise to a desire to revitalize a very clearly confessional Lutheran identity and to recognize where the Synod's many decades of absorbing an American Protestant ethos and culture had come to harm the Synod every bit as much, one might argue, as embracing the liberal theology represented in modern European Lutheranism and then in American Lutheranism. This was reflected in CPH's publishing projects and commitments through the end of the century and into the twenty-first.

The theological earthquake that finally struck the LCMS in 1974, after many years of rumblings throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, is reflected in the 1971 issue of CPH's catalog. Whereas in previous catalogs non-Lutheran materials (of which there were many) were mostly from conservative Presbyterians and other conservative Protestants, in the 1971 catalog one notices a veritable torrent of works by liberal Protestant scholars. In a section at the very front of the catalog, "Mission Books for General Reading," there are titles such as *Where Tomorrow Struggles to be Born: The Americas in Transition*, described as an account of how the people of Latin America are grasping for the future against "static social, political, and religious institutions." Books by authors deeply involved in the social gospel and ecumenical movements are included. *Our Claim on the Future* is offered by the liberal Presbyterian professor, J. Lara-Braud, in which he discusses issues in Latin American churches from a Marxist-Christian point of view. Turning to the theology section of the catalog, we see translations of contemporary German Luther scholars

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<sup>6</sup> On the conflict, specifically as it concerned Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and led to the "Seminary in Exile" (Seminex), see Paul A. Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

such as Edmund Schlink, Werner Elert, Helmut Thieleke and Heinrich Bornkamm, with analyses of Vatican II. Reinterpretations of the Reformation were offered by various liberal Lutheran scholars, such as one by J. P. Dolan with the titled listed as *History of the Reformation*, offering a “conciliatory assessment of opposite views.”

A double-page spread of the catalog is devoted to psychology, psychiatry, and philosophy, offering a host of resources based on the latest psychiatric theories of treating a range of human conditions and problems such as drug addiction and marriage problems. One has the title *Why Christians Crack Up*, a discussion of “nervous and mental disorders, particularly as these affect the Christian.” In the same portion is *The Bible’s Authority Today*, offering an “up-to-date, thorough discussion of the Bible’s meaning and relevance for today’s Christian church . . . it includes current discussions of leading contemporary theologians,” by R. H. Bryant, a liberal Episcopalian scholar.

Simply put, the vast majority of titles in the 1971 catalog addressed current events, trends, and modern theology from a liberal mainline Protestant point of view and were written by theologians from liberal theological institutions. This represented the direction the Synod was headed at the time, full-steam ahead! But there were bright spots. For example, with a large word “New!” next to them, we notice J. A. O. Preus’ translation of Martin Chemnitz’ *The Two Natures in Christ*, and immediately below it Robert D. Preus’ *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*. Such books signaled already a small beginning of new interest in classic, confessional Lutheranism, an interest that would bear much fruit throughout the next forty years and to the present day, as students inspired and informed by these works would start their service to the Synod and at CPH.

The 1971 catalog announces in a double-page spread “Coming in 1971 Mission:Life—A New Coordinated Curriculum of Religious Education,” which is designed to offer in four programs materials for day school, weekday school, Sunday school, and VBS; a companion “Design for Mission Life” is described as being available for use starting in September 1971. The course description rather clumsily explains that “Courses are designed to help the child learn to know God as Creator of all things, Love and Savior of all people through Jesus Christ, and as the Holy Spirit by whom the church invites them to live in love and joy with all other human beings. Students will be led to explore God’s revelation of Himself in nature, in the Holy Scriptures, and through His people, and to be directed to seek the resources of Word and Sacrament God provides for forgiveness and strength in the fellowship of His people.”<sup>7</sup> Noticeably absent in the description of the curriculum is any mention of Luther’s Small Catechism. Even a cursory overview of *Mission:Life*

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<sup>7</sup> 1971 *Catalog* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971): 333.

reveals that it is very much a product of the spirit of that age in the LCMS, with a spirit, tone, and even vocabulary reflecting the ecumenical agenda and lack of doctrinal fidelity that was present at that time. In one of the teachers' guides, the teacher is told not to regard him- or herself as an "expert" or "having answers" but as someone who learning the material as an equal with the children in the classroom, with the focus on encouraging children to share their feelings about, encounters with, and experiences of God's love. *Mission:Life* was quickly replaced in the wake of the Synod's rejection of the liberal majority at Concordia Seminary and the departure of many of those siding with them. It was not until 1992 that publishing responsibilities for Missouri Synod curricula was transferred entirely to Concordia Publishing House. Prior to that, the Synod's Board of Parish Education wrote and edited the materials, with CPH serving as printer and distributor.

The post-Seminex era saw the publication of a new hymnal, *Lutheran Worship*, which was prepared with some haste after the collapse of the collaboration on the *Lutheran Book of Worship* project, which was nearly ready to go into production when the LCMS withdrew from it on theological grounds. *Lutheran Worship* was not as well-received in the Missouri Synod as had been *The Lutheran Hymnal* of 1941. It was replaced eventually by the current hymnal and attendant resources, *Lutheran Service Book*, which has been widely received and has been adopted by upwards of 85 percent of the Synod's congregations.<sup>8</sup>

The most significant project launched and still continuing at Concordia Publishing House in the post-Seminex era is the *Concordia Commentary* project. Launched in 1992, it is the largest confessional Lutheran Bible commentary project ever undertaken by any Lutheran publisher for the sake first of the man in the pulpit, proclaiming God's Word to his congregation, then in service to the entire Lutheran Church and wider Christian Church. The volumes have been well received and are known to the greater world of biblical scholarship as providing excellence in exegetical studies and interpretation without compromising a distinctly Lutheran confession, marked by a keen focus on the Gospel as the scope of the Scriptures, offering a clear distinction of Law and Gospel, and formed by the theological position of that church which subscribes unconditionally to the Lutheran Confessions contained in *The Book of Concord*. By the end of 2019, God willing, the project will have reached the halfway mark with thirty-seven volumes in print and thirty-seven more to come.

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<sup>8</sup> At the time, a high-ranking synodical administrator declared that the era of a printed hymnal was over and predicted failure for the *Lutheran Service Book* project. The prediction has proven to be entirely wrong.

**Into the Twenty-First Century**

Never before has the Gospel been able to be so quickly and widely communicated at the speed of light (literally), but also never before has error been able to be disseminated so rapidly. This is the greatest challenge facing confessional Lutheran publishing today—and the greatest opportunity. Facing several challenges, Concordia Publishing House has been working through them.

One of the more interesting periods of time in Concordia Publishing House's history has been the first twenty years of the twenty-first century. Several significant projects mark this period of time, a number a "firsts" for Concordia Publishing House. Additionally, significant changes in how CPH functions as a self-sustaining business have been key to the ongoing success of the publishing house.

The business operations and financial condition of Concordia Publishing House were in need of significant attention by the end of the 1990s. The situation improved enormously when CPH embraced a quality improvement process, culminating in a "first" in all of publishing, sacred or secular: Concordia Publishing House was awarded the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award in 2011 by the President of the United States of America, a capstone to many years of examining all aspects of operations and improving them to realize the greatest efficiency possible. The company was returned to a strong financial position, allowing it to sustain itself in spite of the economic ups and down of the early twenty-first century and the unique challenges presented to a denominational publishing house in an age of church membership decline across all denominations.

The new century also saw a resurgence of a keen focus of providing resources first and foremost for the pastors, teachers, church workers, and laity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. With this keen focus came a hearty embrace of a renewed and robust Lutheran identity, resulting in an ongoing proliferation of uniquely Lutheran resources for laity and church professionals alike. At the beginning of this process of deliberate self-improvement, CPH carefully studied Christian publishing as a whole, asking, "Where is Christ in Christian publishing?" The simple reality, most easily and perhaps most tragically demonstrated by a survey of hundreds of books for children, was that Christ and the Gospel simply went missing in action and instead was replaced with much generic "God-talk" in the greater portion of all children's resources. This trend has only continued and accelerated. Against this trend, CPH took on large projects to strengthen a genuine Lutheran identity and confession both in doctrine and in practice. Concordia Publishing House stands today as the largest continuously operating and confessionally orthodox Lutheran publishing company in the world. The challenges and opportunities are quite wonderful and a blessing from our good and gracious God.

While German prevailed in the old century, CPH was able to offer customers genuinely Lutheran study Bibles, but it was not until 2001 that CPH began laying the foundation for the production of a new English study Bible using exclusively Lutheran scholars and writers—another first. A period of intense customer research went into this Bible. Laypeople were recruited to participate in a process in which they were assigned to read a portion of Scripture and write down any thought or question that came to mind as they read. Hundreds and hundreds of pages of this material was generated, and, based on that, the content of the study notes took shape, with extensive use of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions, Early Church Fathers, orthodox Lutheran fathers, and a wide variety of Lutheran sources. Reflecting the past, clear Law/Gospel notes were included throughout, with prayers added frequently at the end of note sections. Supplemental essays and resources throughout provided extensive discussions of a wide range of topics. Titled *The Lutheran Study Bible* (TLSB), the Bible has gone on to enjoy enormous success within the Missouri Synod and even outside of LCMS circles. TLSB was the first of a number of new Bible editions all prepared with the same methodology and commitment to providing genuinely Lutheran content throughout, not relying on notes first written by non-Lutheran authors.

Reflecting The LCMS' historic priority on providing the church with core resources, including *The Book of Concord*, CPH decided to provide a copy of the Lutheran Confessions aimed specifically at lay readers or anyone with minimal knowledge of the contents of *The Book of Concord*. Thus, in 2007, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* was published, and there are now nearly two hundred thousand copies in circulation in a variety of print and digital formats. When it was published, CPH heard from numbers of older Lutheran laymen who remembered a time when their grandfathers talked about attending study groups on the Lutheran Confessions, in the days when German was the language of the Synod.

Other significant projects undertaken in the last ten years or so include a continuation of the American Edition of Luther's Works, with fourteen of a projected total of twenty-eight volumes in print as of early 2019. The series offers a wider selection of Luther's writings, allowing the English speaking reader more of later Luther than the first series offered. Whereas the first series of the American Edition was a cooperative effort amongst various Lutheran publishing houses, it was deemed inadvisable to work with the ELCA's publishing company in producing more volumes of Luther's Works, due to Augsburg-Fortress's editorial practice of gender neutrality and its theological commitments.

The massive *Loci Theologici* of Johann Gerhard, a translation project commissioned by the LCMS Commission on Literature in the 1960s and largely

translated by Richard Dinda in the 1970s, languished for years, available only in the rough form of the initial translation and only available in microfiche format at the two Missouri Synod seminaries. The fact that it was never printed has as much to do with the Synod's lack of interest in Lutheran Orthodoxy during the Synod's troubled times as with the fact that the translation was in rough condition, needing careful revision, improvement, and editing. Dr. Benjamin Mayes and his team have produced twelve volumes, with more to come.

The translated works of Martin Chemnitz were produced in the 1980s and 1990s at different times and in different formats, some only having been bound in paperback. These have been gathered into a matching set, and additional volumes have been added, including a defense (*Apology*) of *The Book of Concord* and Chemnitz' Braunschweig Church Order. Also, the works of C. F. W. Walther, which had appeared previously in various inconsistent quality and binding formats, have been gathered into a matching set with new translations of his most significant works: *Law and Gospel* and *Church and the Office of the Ministry*. While he was shunned by the liberal majority at Concordia Seminary in the 1960s and 1970s, the German theologian Hermann Sasse, who had cultivated friendships with a number of Missouri Synod professors and with President John Behnken, President J. A. O. Preus, and his brother Robert, has been published extensively in recent years by Concordia Publishing House, which has offered his works in English and gathered English works previously produced into several new editions.

The new century saw the rise of new technologies in publishing, including the rapid ability to print on-demand, going hand-in-hand with Google digitally scanning entire libraries (copyrights notwithstanding at first). It is now possible for a printed book never to go "out of print." But what does "in print" mean? Does it mean literally "in print"? Digital files can indeed be rapidly printed using what amounts to high-tech photocopier machines, which can print, collate, and bind a book from start to finish. But even more significantly, "in print" now refers to any way the content of a given resource is provided. E-books have levelled off in popularity, and now it is the audiobook that is on the rise, soon, no doubt, to be replaced by yet another way to distribute content.

And this is what publishing has always been about. Not until the right content was available did the Gutenberg Press see its most prolific use, with Luther himself leading the way, yet it was soon followed by many hundreds of other authors with presses everywhere churning out ink on paper as quickly as technology would permit. And it has never stopped. Now "ink" is "digital ink," and dedicated e-book readers are regarded nearly as passé. The ever-present smartphone is used universally. In developing countries where basic necessities are hard to come by, a person may well have greater access to content on his smartphone than he does

to clean drinking water. The Internet has become the universal equalizer for publishing content of every description.

With the rise of the computer and desktop publishing, already decades ago everyone could become not only an author but a publisher. Now, with the ability to host and store unlimited amounts of data in the digital cloud, anything anyone publishes can last forever (or until the power goes off or equipment fails). What, then, is to become of publishing? The delivery of quality content has reached a point where it is “device/format agnostic.” Consumers of published content want it when, where, and how they want it—and they want it everywhere. A person can carry libraries of books in his pocket on his smartphone and access them anywhere at any time.

The role of a church publisher, then, is all the more needed for identifying quality content and curating it for the Church and her servants and people. Curating means careful selection, quality editing, careful doctrinal review, and doctrinal editing, then the complicated process of managing intellectual property rights for the church, storing the content, printing it in traditional ways (still very much needed and wanted), and making it available in various digital formats.

Opportunities abound to spread the Gospel via published resources, a task that Concordia Publishing House was founded to pursue and which it has pursued for 150 years. Why? Because “‘the word of the Lord remains forever.’ And this word is the good news that was preached to you”<sup>9</sup> (1 Pet 1:25). And where there is the Gospel, there will always be books. Always books.

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### **New Developments in the Trend toward Lutheran Classical Education in the LCMS**

There was a time when virtually every LCMS pastor could point to the schools of the Synod and, with chest-thumping pride, speak of them as the crown jewels of the church. The parochial school was understood as a near indispensable part of a congregation’s work in fulfilling Matthew 28:19–20. In 1955, Synod’s Secretary of Schools, August Stellhorn, wrote that the Lutheran parochial school was “the workshop of the Holy Spirit by means of the Word, the powerful means for the

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<sup>9</sup> From The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

enlightenment, establishment, and sanctification of His children.”<sup>10</sup> It was a sentiment with which almost every pastor in Synod could wholeheartedly agree.

Such pride is difficult to find these days. It is not unusual to hear pastors complain of the school as a burden on the congregational budget, teachers who do not want pastors in the classroom, and methods and materials that are less than satisfactory when placed under the lens of theology. Far from seeing the parochial school as an indispensable part of the congregation’s educational work, pastors today will often speak with measured relief that their parish does not have a school.

Certainly there are many reasons for this. A declining birthrate means fewer parish children enrolled in schools, societal changes have resulted in parents who are less committed to a Christian education for their children, and the rising cost of education has made parochial schools much more expensive. However, while these are certainly contributing factors, they fail to adequately explain the pastor’s detachment. A major factor that needs to be addressed is the nature of the educational philosophy, which came to dominate Lutheran education in the twentieth century.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, government-run education was just beginning to take hold in America. In order to justify itself—and the public funds it required—it developed the argument that education was a science that could be studied and researched just like any other science. This was a radical idea. Prior to this, education had always been the domain of the church. It was a firmly established principle that education and theology were inseparably bound together. Education formed a student’s mind and thinking in order to allow him or her to grasp the theology of the church. The new American educators argued the opposite. Education was an objective science of learning, completely detached from theology. The myth was thus propagated that what a student learned had nothing to do with what was confessed. Teachers could do their thing while the pastor did his.

This meant that Lutherans thought they could freely adopt the methods and philosophies of secular educationalists. Teachers could be trained the same way that they were trained for government-run schools, and state licensure became a more important stamp of approval than that given by the church via its system of synodical training. All that mattered was that the content was theologically correct. But therein lies the rub. If the methods, philosophies, and pedagogies were essentially the same as those used in the government-run schools—which were much better funded and had the most up-to-date resources—and if teachers were trained according to the same standards as those teaching in government-run

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<sup>10</sup> August Stellhorn, “School System in Motion,” *The Lutheran Witness* (September 1956): 75.



schools, then why should a congregation continue to support a parochial school? Why should parents send their children to such a school? And why should pastors take an active interest in the type of educational philosophies employed in the school? They were, after all, “scientifically based,” and he was a theologian. If it was just a matter of content, then surely that could be taught to the children through Sunday school, confirmation class, and the like, without the expense of running a Lutheran day school.

It was a myth, nevertheless. In reality, the educationalists of the twentieth century were not driven by the pursuit of objective scientific truth but by their own confessions, which were militantly against the Christian faith. For example, John Dewey, often considered the father of modern American education, despised the church, which he viewed as an “intolerant superiority on the part of the few and an intolerable burden on the part of the many.”<sup>11</sup> Similar biases can be found in all the influencers of twentieth-century education, including Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, Erik Erikson, and the like. They all desired to extirpate the historic position that orthodox Christian theology should govern and regulate educational philosophy and methodology.

Over the past twenty years, there has been a growing number of pastors, teachers, and laity who have reassessed the paradigms of twentieth-century Lutheran education and have found them wanting. The result is that they have searched for a new approach—one that intentionally lets theology exert her historic voice in the field of education. That search has taken them to the pedagogical model that has served the church well for almost two millennia: the classical liberal arts. “Liberal” here does not mean liberal in the American political sense but “befitting a free man [or woman], honorable, generous.”<sup>12</sup> The liberal arts are an educational model originating in classical antiquity that is designed to produce thoughtful, well-rounded members of society, no matter what their station in life may be. Its hallmark is its very deliberate order of learning. The lower arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric prepare students with the basic skills needed to pursue the higher arts of math, astronomy, geometry, and music.

In the sixteenth century, Lutherans took this classical approach to education and incorporated it with the theological truths of the Reformation. The result was that the church produced thoughtful, intelligent, and well-rounded Christians who lived out their faith in Christ with love for their neighbor. The Lutheran liberal arts

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<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, *The Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), 331.

<sup>12</sup> Charlton Thomas Lewis and Charles Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary, Founded on Andrews' Ed. of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), s.v. “liberalis” II.

equipped students not only with knowledge but also with the tools to think critically and logically, question and debate new ideas, and defend and confess their faith in Christ boldly. Over the past two decades, this model of classical Lutheran education has been revived and adapted to the realities of the twenty-first-century classroom.

The growth of this interest in classical Lutheran liberal arts education has been nothing short of remarkable. Grassroots organizations such as the Consortium of Classical Lutheran Education (CCLE) have developed in order to support and promote those who wish to build education upon this model. CCLE-accredited schools are now recognized by the National Lutheran Schools Association. Classical Lutheran education has come to be seen as an educationally responsible and theologically cohesive approach to teaching the children of the church.

As the number of schools seeking to be “classical” has grown, so has the need for teachers who are trained to teach in those schools. In response to that need, the LCMS, meeting in convention in 2016, adopted Resolution 7-05A: *To Endorse Roster Status for Graduates of Classical Liberal Studies and Other Teacher Education Programs*. This resolution endorsed classical training programs at several Concordia University System (CUS) institutions and called for the development of teacher education standards for graduates of these programs. The resolution also seeks the development of a track for roster status for these graduates. In response to this resolution, the CUS Board of Directors appointed a committee to develop a set of standards for these classical teacher training programs. The result was a list of six core competencies that every student graduating from a CUS Classical Education program is required to meet in order to be certified as a rostered classical education teacher. To date, classical education programs have been established at Concordia University Chicago, Concordia University Wisconsin, and Concordia University Irvine.

Recognizing the need to provide scholarship around this movement, Concordia University Chicago has established the Center for the Advancement of Lutheran Liberal Arts (CALLA). An essential component of CALLA’s mission is to foster the academic development of classical education in the context of the Lutheran confession. To further that mission, CALLA draws together scholars and educators from colleges and universities who appreciate the value of a classical education in the twenty-first century.

CALLA also reaches out to classical Christian educators who share a commitment to the historic confessions of the Christian church. While valuing the work accomplished within other confessional circles, CALLA seeks to act as a unique institution that strengthens the classical Christian educational community by exerting a distinctive Lutheran voice.

There are different ways to measure a school's success: enrollment numbers, financial stability, and grade scores, to name a few. These are certainly desirable qualities. After all, who doesn't want a school that is well funded? But these qualities cannot be the hallmark of a successful Lutheran school. We Lutherans must look where the Evangelical church has always looked: to its theology. This is what classical Lutheran education seeks to do. I believe that we are only at the beginning of this recovery. As the colleges and schools of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod unpack our own rich educational heritage, we will find inspiration for developing a renewed educational voice that will benefit the entire church.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For more information, go to [cuchicago.edu/CALLA](http://cuchicago.edu/CALLA).