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Volume Twenty-Eight, Number One

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Many—today perhaps most—of our students were not even born in 1974. What they know of the Seminex controversy is secondhand at best. But they are keenly interested in what transpired. And I strive to put it in the context of the larger narrative of American Lutheranism, neither overstating nor understating its importance.

### 7 **Confessional Subscription:** **What Does This Mean?**

**Scott R. Murray**

The first verb in the introduction to the *Book of Concord* is “we subscribe.” Remarkably, the last word in the text of the *Book of Concord* (except the signatures themselves) is “we subscribe.” What does it mean to subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions?

### 10 **Memories of Seminex**

**David P. Scaer, Dean O. Wenthe,  
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At the time of the 1974 Walkout, two of our authors were serving at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, one was a student at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, and one was a teenager living in faculty housing on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

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### **Corrections: Winter 2023 *For the Life of the World***

- Page 15: Dr. Todd Peperkorn presented at a campus ministry event at College Hill Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, not Cedar Rapids.
  - Page 22: CTSFW student Aaron Wade, not Andrew Berg, appears in the fieldwork assignment day photo with the Rev. Andrew Yeager.
- Thank you, readers, for letting us know.



## For the Life of the World

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# Memories of Seminex



Image courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.



Image courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

## SPRINGFIELD



*Dr. David Scaer, the David P. Scaer Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology and editor of CTQ, was a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield at the time of the Walkout. A graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (MDiv, 1959; ThD, 1963), Scaer experienced firsthand the “neoorthodoxy” that had started to creep into the seminary classroom. He was called to serve at CTS in Springfield in 1966 and took the reins as editor of The Springfielder (now CTQ) in 1968. For more of his memories, see Surviving the Storms (Luther Academy, 2018).*

### The Issues

The Concordia Seminary faculty and student walkout on February 19, 1974, in support of its suspended president, John H. Tietjen, was set in motion by the July 1969 election of J. A. O. Preus as president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). On the day of the Walkout, the LCMS as the standard of orthodox Lutheranism stood on the edge of disintegration. Whatever the future held for the synod, things would not be the same again.

There has been no shortage of articles and books analyzing what was behind the Walkout, and still more will be written. At the heart of the conflict was that some professors were teaching that gospel, defined as the proclamation of forgiveness, was the criterion of what in the Bible to believe. This came to be known as gospel reductionism. Law and gospel, not an inspired Bible, was the criterion of belief. This neoorthodox theology had been proposed in Europe after World War I and had made its way into the LCMS.

Neoorthodoxy, which literally means “new orthodoxy,” took the words of older orthodoxy and gave them different meanings and left unaddressed whether the things the Bible reported really happened. In the seminary, course readings from neoorthodoxy were assigned alongside Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* with little or no explanation that each viewed the Bible differently. With equal billing for each position, confusion set in, and this came to a head February 19, 1974.

### The Walkout

The quad at the center of the campus had the appearance of the dedication of a cemetery, with students placing white crosses in the ground, one for each person going into self-imposed exile. Professors gave orations.

Some participants could claim lineage traceable to the beginnings of the LCMS. Since its founding in 1847, LCMS orthodox theology came to be identified with the St. Louis seminary as an institution whose presidents were C. F. W. Walther and Francis Pieper, each of whom had prepared dogmatics that were recognized by the LCMS as standards for what it believed. The board’s challenging of the St. Louis faculty’s orthodoxy by suspending President Tietjen was seen by some as disrespect of its past and of what it meant to be Lutheran.

### Fallout

For some of the seminary’s alumni serving LCMS congregations, personal attachment to the faculty was reason enough to support the Walkout, even though in the end most did not follow them into the ELCA. Some professors continued their teaching in the break-off institution known first as

# SPRINGFIELD • FORT WAYNE • ST. LOUIS



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“Concordia Seminary in Exile” and then as “Christ Seminary—Seminex.” Beginning in 1983 Seminex began to operate within the seminaries and congregations of the future ELCA (founded in 1988).

Students in whose name the Walkout was staged paid a higher price. Anticipating pastorates in LCMS congregations at the time of their seminary enrollment, each now had to decide in which synod to stake his future. Some went to LCMS congregations that they would lead into the ELCA. (To the credit of LCMS president J. A. O. Preus, the vast majority of congregations remained.) Other students chose secular vocations. Sadly, some left the faith.

What happened on February 19, 1974, was set in motion by eighteenth-century rationalism, from which C. F. W. Walther and other LCMS founding fathers fled in the 1840s. By addressing doctrinal aberrations in February 1974, the LCMS was going back to its roots in asserting that the supernatural events the Bible reports really happened.



*Dr. Dean Wenhe, Professor of Exegetical Theology and President Emeritus of CTSFW, entered Concordia Seminary as a student in 1967. In 1969, when Wenhe was in the middle of his MDiv program, J. A. O. Preus was elected synod president; he began an investigation of the seminary shortly thereafter. Wenhe graduated from Concordia Seminary in 1971 then headed north to Springfield. Following is a brief excerpt from an article that will appear in the Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly later this year.*

My first call, upon graduation, was to serve as an instructor in Hebrew at Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois. To my surprise, a number of the younger faculty and a few administrators were supportive of the St. Louis faculty majority. Some faculty votes on sensitive issues such as the proper role of the “historical-critical” method would result in only a two-vote majority for Synod’s historic position on Scripture.

When the emotion-laden Walkout took place in 1974, actions and events quickly displayed the depth of viewpoints on both sides. The faculty majority had negotiated for a space to occupy at St. Louis University—a Roman Catholic and Jesuit school. Moves and logistical arrangements fell into place in the following months, with many LCMS churches sending support. Very soon the number of students on the seminary campus was reduced to around fifty. Dr. Harold Buls, Dr. Walter A. Maier II, Dr. David Scaer, and I traveled by train on a weekly basis to teach the remaining students. I still recall how sobering it was to be on a campus so reduced in its number of students in comparison to the over 700 when I graduated in 1971. At the same time, it was a pleasure to watch how swiftly a new faculty was assembled and how rapidly numbers of students came to study. In fact, Dr. Robert Preus, by then the president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, minimized recruitment efforts for several years to assist the St. Louis seminary.



## FORT WAYNE



*Dr. Walter Maier III, Professor of Exegetical Theology at CTSFW, was a student at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne at the time of the Walkout in St. Louis. Concordia Theological Seminary relocated from Springfield to the Senior College campus in Fort Wayne in 1976.*

*Maier earned his MDiv from CTSFW in 1978 and has been on the CTSFW faculty since 1989.*

In February 1974, I was in my last year at Concordia Senior College (now the location of Concordia Theological Seminary). It was a tense time, and as student body vice-president I was well aware of the various factions on campus. Most of the professors were supporters of Seminex. Recruiters came to the Senior College from the three seminaries. My own class was divided into four groups: those going to Seminex, those going to “801” (a reference to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, which at that time had the address 801 DeMun Ave.), those going to “Springfield” (the Illinois city where Concordia Theological Seminary was then located), and those in a fourth group. In this last group were those not going to any of the seminaries. They had decided not to become pastors, because they had grown disillusioned due to how they perceived the “politics” and the turmoil in the LCMS.

The history of the events leading to the formation of Seminex must be remembered so that the LCMS will maintain constant vigilance against subtle intrusions of false doctrine and practice.

## ST. LOUIS



*Christian Preus, son of Dr. Robert Preus and chairman of the LCMS Board of Directors, was a teenager living on the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis campus at the time of the 1974 Walkout. His father was one of the “faithful five” faculty members who remained on campus. Later that year, the family relocated to Springfield when Dr. Preus accepted a call to serve as president of Concordia Theological Seminary. Following are excerpts from an interview with Christian Preus about his memories of those years.*

### **Life on Campus, Pre-Walkout**

The first fourteen years of my life were on the St. Louis Seminary campus. It was a wonderful place to live. I had a lot of friends who were faculty members’ children. I remember playing capture the flag and baseball and softball and kickball and other things on the seminary campus with other seminary faculty children. I also hung around the gym a lot. I loved basketball and other things at the gym. I went to the seminary basketball games and sometimes played with seminary students.

I could probably walk down the street now and tell you where everyone lived. [Martin] Scharlemann was #1. In #2, which was right next door to us, were the Mehls. Duane Mehl was a professor at the time, at least in the latter years. His son, David, was one of my best friends. We were #4. The Tietjens were #6. We lived right next door to them.

### **After the Walkout**

I talked with my older brother, Peter, recently, about the Walkout. He drove to school every day with two Tietjen



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Image courtesy of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

children. He went to high school with them, and his comment was, “There were days when going to school was very quiet, especially after certain events, but there was never antagonism.” Obviously, they were aware of everything going on, but it stayed cordial and pleasant, even though it was maybe a little stressed and quiet on some days.

I remember how I was treated by the Mehls. After it all happened, just a few days before all the Seminex professors were moving out, they invited me for dinner, had me into their home. That’s how I was treated by some.

Not all were that way. It was one of those classic “two sides” and “we versus them” situations, but you have to be fair and recognize that a lot of the people involved, even though they may have left with Seminex, weren’t necessarily unpleasant, certainly not to me as a kid. Others were. Others were extremely antagonistic.

We’re a big family. At this time my father was very busy. I was fourteen. There were six or eight kids at home, depending on who was away at college. My mom took care of everything that went on in the home. She was extremely wise, and she had a manner in which she handled things.

There was no Caller ID back then. The phone rang, and you had no idea who was calling. Someone had to answer the phone. My mom reached a point where she said, “I’m not taking these calls anymore. If Robert is not there, then one of the kids will have to answer the phone.”

I was one of those who would answer the phone. I guess I was young enough not to be bothered by things. My parents were wise enough to pick up the phone and leave it off the hook all night long, because if you didn’t . . . Dr. Scharlemann got calls all night long, and he would answer. That wears on someone.

One of my sisters and I answered the phone probably 90% of the time. We took the prank phone calls and some of the other kind of vicious attacks that were made. There was a lot of that. There really was a lot. But it certainly wasn’t everybody.

It was kind of a lonely feeling on campus. A lot of my friends, at least all those in the neighborhood, were gone. If I’m recalling correctly, we were the only ones left on campus with kids. Before that, growing up on the campus, we mostly hung out with the other professors’ kids. And now they’re all gone.

I remember Dr. Scaer and Dr. Wenthe. I remember Dr. Scaer coming into our home regularly after the Walkout up until the time when my father was called to be the president in Springfield, and I remember Dr. Wenthe as well.

### **Impact of Seminex: Guarding our Confession**

When you step back and try to look at Seminex objectively, for the seminary and our church body and also for Christendom in this country, it’s in stark contrast to what almost every other denomination has done. Theologically, when you look at where we are compared to where other church bodies are theologically, the significance of Seminex and the success of the seminary and the synod in maintaining the St. Louis Seminary and preventing it from going in the wrong direction theologically is really amazing.

Walter Disson, who recently died, was on the Board of Control at the St. Louis Seminary at the time. There were people like him and my father and others who simply would not accept allowing the seminary to go down theologically, and everything else with the seminary to go down with it. They were willing to be the strong minority that defended the school. 