



A Life Well Lived: Remembering the Legacy of Walter Disen

By Timothy S. Goeglein

When the most famous wordsmith of 18th century England Dr. Samuel Johnson died, a famous eulogist wrote that Johnson was so fundamental and foundational to the life of English letters and literature that he could only be succeeded and never replaced.

The eulogist felt the unwavering insight and singular impact Johnson left was so unparalleled, and his unbounded energy so colossal, that everything he prioritized in life had been in part shaped by the sheer weight of his worldview.

There are a handful of remarkable people in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod whose footprint would echo that of Johnson's, and Walter Disen was one of them.

My own life was more deeply enriched, and my Lutheran worldview more firmly rooted, because of my 20+ years friendship with Walter.

I feel confident that others who knew him longer than I, some who knew him lesser, and others who had only recently come in contact with him, would share the same view: His unflinching clarity of thought and immovable conviction had such moral weight that he was a force of nature, whose theological and intellectual synergy was almost galvanic to his legion of friends, comrades, allies, and associates.

I remember when and where we first met.

I was working at the White House during the administration of President George W. Bush. I had spoken in a Lutheran forum in those years, and after my remarks an older, well-dressed gentleman asked if he could speak with me 'for a moment.' I happily assented, and that conversation lasted nearly an hour and a half.

Walter wanted to discuss the Lutheran teaching of the two kingdoms -- and specifically how the church and the state were to engage or not engage -- and following our *tete-a-tete* he invited me to speak at an annual gathering in my hometown Fort Wayne, Indiana, sponsored by this publication, which brought together confessional Lutherans for speeches, fora, and sessions on the timely, topical, and relevant issues the 21st century church and synod were confronting.

I found it a lively day-long conference, and I remember asking several of my fellow-panelists and speakers how they had gotten to know Walter.

To a person, their story was similar to mine: he had systematically identified people through their writing, speaking, debating, and editing, and had subsequently built a kind of Lutheran think tank – nationwide in scope – comprised of fellow believers who took the Lutheran Confessions seriously and whose fundamental worldview was shaped by an unwavering adherence to God's time-

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The Concordia University System: Challenges and Opportunities

The presentation below was given by Rev. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, President of the Concordia University System, at the 2024 Lutheran Concerns Association Conference at Ft. Wayne Indiana on January 15, 2024.

It is a privilege to address the annual gathering of the Lutheran Concerns Association and to celebrate its rich commitment to confessional Lutheranism so ably and heroically championed by the sainted Walter Disen.

It has also been a great privilege to serve for a decade as President of the Concordia University System. Thoughtful Christians have reflected for generations on how best to position the Christian faith in the world of higher education. Lutherans, from Luther onwards, have valued education and especially higher education. It has been a particular strength of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to value her schools at every level. Recent years, for cultural, economic, and societal reasons, have been especially challenging for smaller colleges and universities, so it is fitting and important to reflect on both the challenges and the opportunities for the Concordia Universities¹ of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod which are aided in their mission by the Concordia University System (CUS).

From my perspective, the church and especially its universities are facing significant challenges. These dark forces intertwine and reinforce each other intellectually and politically. Their assumptions about knowledge and learning are devastating to individuals and to society. The results are on display all around us.

These challenges require our analysis and refutation.

1. The Challenge to Language
2. The Challenge to Creation
3. The Challenge to Ontology
4. The Challenge to Teleology
5. The Challenge to Meaning and Significance

These intellectual challenges and convictions permeate Western culture and frequently have their origin in higher education. Their combined impact has destabilized and damaged family, personal, and political life.

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Concordia University System: Challenges and Opportunities *Continued from page 1*

Yet we should not be defeatist, but hopeful. Why? Because in a vast, pitch-black auditorium, a single candle can be seen throughout. Indeed, it invites attention and reflection.

Just so, I would suggest, by God's grace, the Concordia Universities can be lights shining brightly and radiantly in the world of higher education with the beauty of Christ, of God, of the gospel, of truth, and of knowledge for this reason: "Jesus Christ is the light of the world, a light that no darkness can overcome."

As we engage these challenges, it is important to note three encouraging contextual realities. First, the five Concordia University presidents:

Erik Ankerberg, Concordia University Wisconsin—Ann Arbor
Bernard Bull, Concordia University—Nebraska
Russell Dawn, Concordia University—Chicago
Brian Friedrich, Concordia University—St. Paul
Michael Thomas, Concordia University—Irvine

These men are able, agile, and faithful. Their academic, administrative, and theological abilities are just what is required to navigate the turbulent waters of higher education in a manner that displays the church's faith, teaching, and practice in a substantive and winsome way.

They fully understand and reject the view of learning recently exhibited by the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania in their testimony before Congress.

Indeed, the testimony of those presidents provided clear evidence that these elite institutions have lost their moral compass and capacity to see and to speak the truth.

The Concordia Universities will witness to the light of Christ and of the true knowledge in such a dark landscape.

There is much truth in the saying: "People are policy."

We can thank the Lord for these men whom the Lord has given us as Concordia University presidents.

A second contextual reality that should be noted as a positive is the theological leadership of LCMS President Matthew Harrison. In a culture where many protestant church presidents have simply acculturated, President Harrison continues to stand firmly with Sacred Scripture and Lutheran Confessional teaching. Our university presidents can trust in the church's support as they meet the challenges of a radically secular environment in higher education circles.

The presidents can also count on the support of the Concordia University System Board, now chaired by the recently elected President Pastor Mark Bradon and served for a decade with distinction by Dr. Gerhard Munding. The entire Board is knowledgeable and loyal to Lutheran teaching and practice.

In an historical setting where broad landscapes of the Christian tradition are accommodating false teaching and practice to such an extent that classical Christianity can no longer be recognized, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is blessed with such faithful leaders.

Indeed, a breathtaking example of abandonment of Scriptural and Christian practices is Pope Francis' recent endorsement of a priestly blessing for practicing homosexuals.

Contrast the Pope's announcement with the 1994 edition of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist

Press, 1994) p. 566:

"Basing itself on Sacred Scriptures, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity [Gen. 19:1-29; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:10; 1 Tim 1:10], tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They are contrary to natural law. ... They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved."

This development underscores the historical situation we are in and how a loss of Scriptural authority swiftly becomes darkness and a loss of the truth. The Hebrew of Leviticus 20:13 is תּוֹעֵבִים best translated "abomination" or "detestable." The Greek is πορνεία at Mark 7:21, Romans 13:13, Galatians 5:19, and Jude 7, best translated as "immorality" or "fornication."

In such a setting, a third contextual positive is the passage of Resolution 7-04B by the 2023 Convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The resolution gives the Concordia University System (CUS) Board and staff additional tools to support the universities in their teaching and practices of the church's theology.

Especially to be noted as a part of this resolution are the so called "LIMOS," "The Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards."

This series of protocols will enhance communication between the CUS Board and staff and bring greater clarity and strength to the universities' display and practice of the church's theological confession.

The Six Identity Standards are:

Identity Standard 1: Ecclesiastical Missions and Goals.

"The institution's ecclesiastical mission and goals appropriately center on Christ, the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the shared confession and practices of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod."

Identity Standard 2: Spiritual and Academic Life. "The spiritual and academic life of the institution reflects and embraces its ecclesiastical mission and goals."

Identity Standard 3: Student Recruitment and Student Life. "Student recruitment, student affairs, campus life, and other programs reflect and embrace the institution's ecclesiastical mission and goals."

Identity Standard 4: Planning and Resourcing. "Planning, resourcing, and personnel reflect and embrace the institution's ecclesiastical mission and goals."

Identity Standard 5: Governance, Leadership, and Administration. "The governance, leadership, and administration of the institution foster and embrace the institution's place in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod."

Identity Standard 6: Assessment of Effectiveness. "The institution's assessment of its achievement of the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes is foundational to and effective in advancing its ecclesiastical goals."

These Six Identity Standards are complemented by Sets of Evaluation Tools that provide for concrete measurement of Lutheran Identity and Expression in a number of areas.

To summarize the contextual landscape, the people and policies are in place to anticipate rich ecclesiastical outcomes.

Challenges

For all of the weighty and dark challenges that we will now turn to, by God's grace, we can be confident that our universities' theo-

logical candles will burn brightly and illumine many searching souls.

Challenge #1: The Challenge to Language

First, I point to “The challenge to language.” If we lose the capacity of language to communicate clearly and objectively, we are simply defeated.

Mark Bauerlein described this challenge.

In 1970 the number of English majors earning a four-year degree in higher education reached 63,914. Research fellows and Ph.D. students would contest the truth of *Paradise Lost* and all the other canonical works. Students at all levels majored in English because they would read Shakespeare or Hemingway or other works as enriching themselves and their lives. Then the French invasion in October of 1966 occurred at John Hopkins. In this theory of reading self-reflexivity would never stop ... the search for the central truth of a literary work was over! No more truth-only problematized reading ... every text was now open to endless interpretation... rejected was the old-fashioned vocabulary of masterpieces, genius, and Great Books. Mark Bauerlein from “Truth, Reading, Decadence,” paraphrased from *First Things*, June/July, 2021, vol. 26.

This radical challenge to the ability of language to communicate an objective claim is, perhaps, the final bloom of the historical-critical method – a method that gave birth to “endless interpretation” and “problematized reading.” When the meaning of texts is severed from their objective claims, no enduring meaning is possible.

When English students abandon the project of properly interpreting Shakespeare or Milton, they often embrace any text as a momentary object of their study – even graffiti – but always provisionally.

This collapse of linguistic integrity provides the Concordia Universities with a vast opportunity to assert that our ability to use language is a priceless gift from our Creator. Far from texts being plastic and endlessly malleable, they define who we are and how we are to think. Language is primordially beautiful and at the core of what it is to be truly human.

It is the Divine media that God uses to speak to His creatures. John Milton said the most beautiful words in any language were:

“And God said”

“Let there be light”

“And there was light”

And immediately after creating male and female in His image and likeness, God addresses them:

Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them and God said, “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

God’s addresses, blessings, and exhibits bring a radically beautiful view of language, namely, that human beings are given this gift to communicate with Him, to praise Him, to pray, to confess his name, to express contrition, and to receive his absolution in Christ.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that the Lord God formed “every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” Genesis 2:19. And, the first poetry of the Bible entails naming with God’s gift of language.

Then the man said, “This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out

of man.”

Human responses to God’s Word matter. In fact, our receipt or rejection of God’s true words define our very identity for better or for worse – for salvation or for condemnation.

And here is a vast opportunity for the Concordia Universities to display and to practice the significance of language – rejecting the linguistic nihilism of our times that sets aside not only the canon of Western literature but also the canon of Sacred Scripture.

Ultimately, the narrative and authority of Sacred Scripture determine our identity. Here language describes the Blessed and Holy Trinity and reveals His will in Christ from creation to consummation. What we are witnessing in the linguistic nihilism of our day is the final blossoming of the historical critical method which challenges and delivers only, as Mark Bauerlein states, “problematized provisional reading.”

The Concordia Universities have a huge opportunity to exhibit and to practice confidence in Sacred Scripture’s narrative from creation to consummation.

The perspicuity, the efficacy, the infallibility and authority of Sacred Scripture are God’s great epistemological gifts.

The revelation of scripture beautifully and truthfully describes the loving and merciful character of God as well as his holiness and righteousness. It also describes what it is to be a human being.

Most critical and helpful is the Lutheran lens that views Scripture via *sola gratia* – “grace alone,” *sola fidei* – “faith alone” and *solus Christus* – “Christ alone.” Especially insightful is the view of early Lutheranism that Scripture is the *viva vox Jesu* – “the living voice” of Jesus through his prophets and apostles.

Sacred Scripture is more than accurate data. It is a word that gives life.

Ps. 119:105: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

John 8:31-32: “To the Jews who had believed in him, Jesus said ‘If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’”

Challenge #2: The Challenge to Creation

An almost unbelievable challenge has raised its head in direct opposition to the First Article, namely, an enfleshed nature and God’s good gift of maleness and femaleness. While no surgeries or hormonal injections can alter the reality that the overwhelming majority of human beings are defined by the impact of X and Y chromosomes, elites in our culture, with gnostic disregard for creation, are inflicting huge suffering on adolescents by suggesting to them at a vulnerable stage of life that they can change genders.

Darlene McCormick Sanchez, a neuropsychologist, points out in a recent article that the medical industry is making billions through these procedures: “Billion Dollar Transgender Industry Leaves Broken Families and Lives.” as quoted in *The Epoch Times*, No. 429, October 12-18, 2022, A5-6. – Sharp informed responses to such fallen rejections of God’s good gifts.

Two recent books provide a splendid, careful, and Scripturally faithful analysis of enfleshment. They rightly expound the bodily character of who we are as well as our spiritual life (John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: a Protestant Theology of the Body*, Lexham Press, 2021; Klaus Detlev Schultz, *Theological Anthropology and Sin*, Fort Wayne, Indiana: The Luther Academy, 2023.)

The opportunity this provides the Concordia Universities is to project a truthful understanding of human beings’ physical nature.

We can affirm and give thanks for Godly young men in all of their masculinity and Godly young women in all their femininity. They are God's good gifts that define who we are and provide the foundation for a family structure – a lifelong union between a man and a woman. What a positive! Indeed, there can be no greater confirmation of the sheer goodness of human bodily life than that God himself, in becoming incarnate, took on that life – God's love and mercy became living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, a bouncing baby boy, born of a woman.

Maleness is God's good gift. Femaleness is God's good gift. Family and children are good gifts even as singleness is a good gift if God so leads to it. Masculinity and femininity are not social constructs but God's good and gracious physical gifts. Our campuses can provide and exhibit delight and gratitude for our physical being.

As Luther so faithfully confesses: "God has made me and all creatures; he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses and still takes care of them. He richly and the daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in me." *Book of Concord, Large Catechism.*

We can share with Concordia students the Divinely guided origin of their lives:

Ps. 119:73: "Your hands have made and fashioned me."

Ps. 139:13-14: "You formed my inward parts. You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. Your work I know full well."

What good news for young people as John Kleinig writes, "Even if we rarely think about our bodies, our opinion of them and attitude towards them subconsciously govern how we live and act every moment of our lives" John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: a Protestant Theology of the Body*, Lexham Press, 2021

Challenge #3: The Challenge of Ontology

Who are we?

University students frequently experience a campus where the instruction is dominated by careerist/utilitarian outcomes, i.e, a rewarding salary and a respectful social position. While these are legitimate and rightly ordered goals, they are simply inadequate for a human being's status.

Listen to this analysis by Jonathan Locks in *The Wall Street Journal*:

"What the secularists forgot is that Homo sapiens is the meaning-seeking animal. If there is one thing the great institutions of the modern world do not do, it is to provide meaning. Science tells us how but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot guide us as to how to use that power. The market gives us choices but leaves us uninstructed as to how to make those choices. The liberal democratic state gives us freedom to live as we choose but refuses, on principle, to guide us as to how to choose. ... But they [science, technology, the free market and the liberal democratic state] do not answer the three questions that every reflective individual will ask at some time in his or her life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live?" "Swords into Ploughshares," *WSJ*, October 3/4, 2015.

The Concordia Universities have a great opportunity to answer these questions of identity. They can substantively and winsomely indicate that human identity depends upon God's identity. To refuse to consider that human identity hinges on our "*coram Deo*," our "before God" nature, is to deny that one answer that is adequate and true.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn stated that the 20th century exhibited a tragic amnesia: "Men," he said, "have forgotten God." As Mary Eberstadt puts the question: "Do we believe we are created in the image of God and for a purpose, or do we subject ourselves and all who come after us to perpetual self-invention and its miseries?" *First Things*, January, 2022, 13.

Sacred Scripture bestows, by virtue of being created in the "image and likeness of God" and endowed with a God-breathed soul, a very high anthropology. Men and women are the apex of God's creative labors – the very opposite of cosmic accidents – the anthropology that dominates so many campuses.

The Concordia Universities can display a life lived before God, "*coram Deo*."

The realization that we are to live our lives before God, our Creator, changes every breath we take and every action we undertake.

And, it is our calling to hold up the truth that God has offered new life to each and every human in His Son's life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Consider, for example, Jesus' comment in his parable of the lost coin - Luke 15:8-10: "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me for I found the coin that I lost.'"

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Reflect on the significance that gives to each and every human being! The angels of God rejoice before Him over one sinner who repents. This applies to each and every Concordia student!

We, each and every one of us, is at the center of the Triune God's cosmic narrative with Christ at the heart of his saving action for us. Rather than human beings viewed as mere transitory matter, we are the apex of God's creation, endowed with a God-breathed soul.

The decayed and politicized status of much contemporary higher education provides the Concordia Universities an opportunity to stand out.

Listen to two very different voices in this state of affairs. The first is a paragraph from Seth Williams in his reflections from Floyd, WV (pop. 396): "Not far from my back porch the last rays of sunlight fall on a mountain graveyard containing the mortal remains of a young woman who died in childbirth, of infants carried off by influenza, of a man kicked to death by his mule. Here were lives lived in the light of eternity, punctuated by tragedy, illuminated by the joy of unbiddable grace. Whatever else they were, these humans were convinced that, in some mysterious way, their existence was of incalculable significance to their Creator and that one day, they would see it all clearly." *First Things*, February, 1992.

In the Dec. 16-17, 2023 *The Wall Street Journal*, Peggy Noonan wrote an article entitled, "What Universities have Done to Themselves," in which she makes a point that elite universities have gone from being centers of excellence and merit in learning to politi-

cized settings where propaganda prevails.

We live in a culture that is captive to enlightenment rationalism and reductionism. It is necessary to name and to expose the inadequacy and unexamined dogmatism that renders human beings mere material.

One more observation describes where many are: “While those of us who remain rooted in faith have restrictions and revelations aplenty to instruct us, many, the majority these days, alas, do not. They are forced to approach every choice they make afresh, without the benefit of a coherent ethical blueprint or reliable moral compass. Family and romance, work and leisure, each and every aspect of human life is governed not by some external and superior set of aspirations and beliefs, but by the crippling fear that the choices we make might not be the right ones. “Liel Leibovitz at Large,” *First Things*, June/July, 2020, p.17.

Challenge #4: The Challenge of Teleology

The Challenge of Ontology leads to the Challenge of Teleology, namely, what is our end?

Here the church, with the universities, have a great gift to give: we are called “to baptize” – to invite every individual into the life of the Triune God through our Lord’s instruction in Matthew 28:18-20: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.’”

And, as Paul expounds on the baptized in Romans 6:4-5, “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may have a new life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His.”

Our end is life in Christ – body and soul – and it is already ours in our baptismal union and our receipt of His very body and blood in the Holy Eucharist and Holy Absolution.

To face all these challenges, we must continually evaluate what is actually the content of that which is being taught. What appears to have Christian vocabulary can be without Christian substance. William Jason Wallace describes this situation: “New idioms, however, that replace Scriptural and apostolic witness with the metaphorical, the aesthetic, the existential, and the ineffable arguably change the content of Christianity such that it becomes unrecognizable on any pattern of authority. When this happens, the new idioms and expressions may be quite creative and even elegant, they may find adherents who are likable and moral, but, as a matter of belief, they are no longer Christian.” Sacred Syllabus – The Case for Authentic Christian Higher Education,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, September/October, 2021, p. 45.

Challenge # 5: The Challenge of Meaning and Significance

The candles of the church’s witness bring truth for they witness to Christ – The Light of the World.

Our witness to truth therefore is baptismal, eucharistic, and Scriptural. This constitutes our “in Christ” identity and with that life comes the full life that Christ promised. John 10:10.

Our meaning and significance flow from God’s absolution in Christ – we are new creations. 2 Corinthians 5:17

Our calling as witnesses to the narrative is crucial. Its center

and revelation of reality are Jesus Christ. As Anthony Esolen has concisely stated, “We have been marked with the character of Christ. Everything we do must bear that same character, even if sometimes in a light and gentle way. Our play, our work, our family life, our reading, our school, our dances, our flirtations, our care of the sick, our neighborhoods, our bearing of children, our last moments as we bid the world farewell - everything.”

“We must be clear about this. The world around us is not Christian. It is not even sanely pagan. It is quite mad and quite unhappy. We cannot minister to them by appearing to be pagan or by making ourselves half mad and half miserable. We can minister to them only by being sharply distinct. Those in the world who are weary of its broken promises will not listen to us if we speak the language of the world. They are longing for a different language entirely – the real language, which will restore them to the world’s lost beauty and goodness and point them towards what is beyond the world. They do not want us to stretch ourselves out lazily among them. They want to join us on the way.” *Out of the Ashes*, Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2017, pp. 187-188.

Yes. May we be marked by the character of Christ. May we display the baptismal truth that we have been joined to his death and to his resurrection. May the narrative of our life be defined by the narrative of his life. And may the Lord give us insight, knowledge, and wisdom – whatever the cost and time we must spend – to bring the saving narrative of Jesus Christ to our families, our neighbors, and all the world.

Note: The LCA Conference presentation contained Hebrew and Greek, most of which is not included in this edition.

¹ Concordia Universities in this article refer to the five Concordias which have formal affiliation with the LCMS: Chicago, Irvine, Seward, St. Paul, and Mequon/Ann Arbor. Texas, a sixth Concordia, is attempting to separate from the LCMS.

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Formed to Care: Confessional Theology as Framework

By **Brian T. Stark**

“A pastor is a shepherd of sheep who need to be shown the way to good pasture. A deaconess is a mercy worker who serves and ministers to those same sheep. In a parish setting, a pastor and a deaconess can model the mercy, the love, the joy, and the peace of Christ to people who desperately need it.” [Rev. David Nehrenz, sermon at the Vicarage and Deaconess Internship Assignment Service]

On April 24, the Rev. David Nehrenz, president of the LCMS Oklahoma District and pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Norman, addressed second-year students who were about to learn where they would be placed as vicars and deaconess interns. In his sermon, Nehrenz described a world filled with “scattered sheep,” people who are lost, overshadowed by darkness, starving, injured, and weak.

“The Lord will use YOU to guide them on the right path,” he told students.

He returned to the plight of the sheep. “You are being brought into the midst of parishes filled with people who are inundated with horrible, Satanic worldviews that bring only doubt, depression, desperation, and death. These four walls hem them in. They have no escape. How can they be reborn and renewed in such dire straits? Only by Jesus, the Son of God, who makes us sons of God in our Baptism.”

His sermon was a textbook display of the confessional theology at the heart of worker formation at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and at the heart of pastoral care in a parish.

The Need for Confessional Pastors

We often hear the lament that the church needs more pastors. While that sentiment is true, it is also incomplete. What the church needs now more than ever are confessional pastors, that is, pastors firmly rooted in the theology of the Lutheran Confessions as they carry out the tasks of ministry. Confessional pastors boldly embrace Lutheran identity and the beauty of confessional theology with the conviction that, in these, we have what the world is looking for and what the faithful so desperately need: authentic Christianity in an age when the church can hardly be distinguished from the gnostic culture in which she lives.

The essential role of confessional theology as the underlying framework for pastoral ministry, care and practice in our churches cannot be overstated. Pastoral ministry never takes place in a theological vacuum—if confessional theology isn’t supplying the framework, some other theological (or business!) method or model will. When we understand that the goal of pastoral ministry is to teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all, the necessity and practicality of having a confessional theology at its center becomes clear. It’s a bold statement, to be sure, but confessional theology means successful ministry.

This is true for many reasons. The most significant is that confessional theology clearly defines who pastors are and what they are called to do. A military officer cannot succeed without clearly defined mission parameters. The same is true for pastors. What is the objective of pastoral ministry? How do I go about achieving it? What does success in pastoral ministry look like? These questions are determinative—when we get the answers right, our foundation for effective ministry stands secure; when we get them wrong, we are destined for failure. Confessional theology gets the answers right.

Confessional theology is pastoral theology—theology that equips workers to be faithful shepherds of their flock. The Lutheran Confessions not only establish the mission parameters of pastoral ministry and equip pastors to perform the tasks of ministry with distinction but also serve as a safeguard against all ministry trends and fads that obscure the Gospel.

This is true, in the first place, because confessional theology is biblical theology. Confessional pastors “believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged” (*Epitome*

Student Aid Endowment Fund

Concordia Theological Foundation, Inc.

In early 2018, in honor of Mrs. Ginny Valleau’s contributions to the publication of the *Lutheran Clarion*, a Concordia Theological Seminary Student Aid Endowment Fund was established at Concordia Theological Foundation, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax deductible.

The Board of Directors of the Lutheran Concerns Association invites Lutheran Clarion readers to contribute to the Fund which can be done by sending your check marked:

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Concordia Theological Foundation, Inc.
PO Box 15810
Fort Wayne, IN 46885**

or to:

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of the Formula of Concord, Rule and Norm).

Second, with the foundation of Holy Scripture firmly in place, the Lutheran Confessions define the Gospel, that is, the doctrine of justification by faith, upon which the church stands or falls: “Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by His death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight [Rom. 3-3]” (*Augsburg Confession IV*).

Confessional pastors take Luther’s words to heart: “Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. For as St. Peter says, ‘There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ [Acts 4:12]. ‘And with his stripes we are healed’ [Isa. 53:5]. On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory” (*Smalcald Articles I*).

Finally, the Confessions provide pastors with a clear answer concerning the specific task to which they are called: “In order that we may obtain this faith, God instated the office of the ministry, that is, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel” (*Augsburg Confession V*).

Confessional Formation

All of this is to say that confessional theology provides the roadmap to faithful and effective pastoral ministry that eternally blesses both the faithful and the lost. The pastor’s doctrine and practice, what he preaches and teaches and the worship he conducts, are always determined by and based in the means through which the Spirit creates saving faith in those who believe the Gospel, namely the Word of Holy Scripture and the Sacraments. Instilling a working knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions is therefore a primary focus of our Seminary’s curriculum. By it our students enter the parish equipped to proclaim to all people that, with the church of all ages, this is what we believe, teach, and confess.

Men choose to pursue the Office of the Holy Ministry at Concordia Theological Seminary for many reasons: our world class faculty, our emphasis on the historic liturgy of the church and the central role of Kramer Chapel in pastoral formation, our close-knit seminary community, and even the serene beauty of our campus. But most of all they are drawn by the fact that, from its inception, no other institution has embraced confessional theology and Lutheran identity as boldly and consistently as Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne.

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A Life Well Lived: Remembering the Legacy of Walter Dissen *Continued from page 1*

less Word and His sacraments.

Our friendship was seeded in those years and germinated in a wonderful way, never wavering.

Walter might phone you at the least expected time; share an article or column he was reading; and seek to draw-out your views. He wore his learning lightly and he paid close attention less to what people said and more to what they actually did, or did not do. That mattered a lot to him.

He was not a cynic or a skeptic; rather he was a kind of shepherd of the soul who cared deeply about the synod and wanted to make sure its excellence and theological consistency and coherence were preserved for the rising generation of young men and women and their families.

Walter cared deeply about the synodical colleges and universities; he was interested in the direction of parish life around the nation and especially Lutheran schools; and his deep commitment to the seminaries and what was being taught there became a kind of first-commitment in his life.

One of the things Walter did, with droll, world-wise humor and long-experience as a railroad attorney, was take the temperature of the current scene. He knew things, and his robust vitality until the end of his long life was unwavering and exceptional. Redolent of his gifted memory, he would recall discussions and debates with crystalline clarity that had taken place in the 1960s, 70s, as well as more recently.

The last conversation I had with him, during a long convalescence, was a few months before he died. He told me he was “not confused about first-principles.” I was intrigued by that comment, and sought to draw him out on an otherwise interesting observation. He recounted the centrality of his baptism; his confirmation; his love for his family and his friends; his devotion to Scripture; and to continued excellent teaching and scholarship in the seminaries.

In those commitments was a life well-lived; a legacy that will live-on; the kind of indispensable man we are hungry for more of in the public square and in the church.

What a refreshing, nourishing friend and brother in Christ Walter Dissen was. We shall meet again at the Resurrection. *Requiescat in pace*, dear friend.

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Formed to Care:

Confessional Theology as Framework

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