

LUTHERAN HISTORICAL CONFERENCE

NEWSLETTER

2012 CALL FOR PAPERS

Lutheran Historical Conference Biennial Meeting
October 11-13, 2012
Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia
Philadelphia, Pa.

“Choosing the Lutheran Narrative: Commemorating, Remembering, Forgetting?”

Lutherans grapple with their history in a number of ways. At times, their past is lifted up and celebrated. Still other parts are simply remembered. Perhaps more disturbing, Lutherans also forget their history, sometimes through neglect and other times quite deliberately. This conference will explore these themes while also celebrating the life of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg.

Papers dealing with any aspect of this theme are welcome, as are topics outside of the theme!

Presenters will be given 20-25 minutes for their presentation, followed by a question and answer session. Paper proposals should include a title, 250 word abstract, and brief biography.

Proposals and inquiries are due April 16, 2012 and should be sent electronically to the Program Chair:

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Concordia University Chicago
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Presenters must be members of the Lutheran Historical Conference by October 2012. Presenters are responsible for covering conference fees and travel costs.

Students are encouraged to submit paper proposals and to apply to the LHC Board for limited scholarship assistance for travel-related expenses.

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THE LEGACY of
HENRY MELCHIOR
MUHLENBERG

BOOK REVIEW: Pastor and President by David W. Preus

Preus, David W. *Pastor and President; Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman*. Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011.

Reviewed by Leslie F. Weber, Jr.

Twenty-four years after leaving office as president of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), David Preus has written a concise, clear, and informative account of his ministry, covering the period 1950 to 1987, with many insights into the life of the ALC during this time.

Though from a long line of Lutheran clergy of Norwegian descent, David Preus had interests other than entering the Holy Ministry. After serving three years in the U.S. Army during World War II, he began law school at the University of Minnesota. Soon, however, a thirst for a "personal working theology" (7) led him to enroll at Luther Seminary to test out his interest; once there, he sensed God's call to pastoral ministry.

With this brief pre-ministerial background, the author prefaces the two main portions of the book, dealing with his parish ministry (1950-1973) and his years as president (1973-1987). Four "priorities" overlay both portions: evangelism, congregations, unity, and justice. At a few points, he seems to understand "evangelism" primarily as verbal witness, but then clarifies that verbal witness and explains that works of love "are parts of evangelical outreach" (12), which demonstrates that he has lived through the period in which Lutherans' understanding of the blend of these has changed. Throughout the book, Preus emphasizes that denominational and ecumenical organizations depend upon and are accountable to congregations (16). He says the priority of "unity," like that of "justice," matured as he matured in ministry, influenced by societal factors.

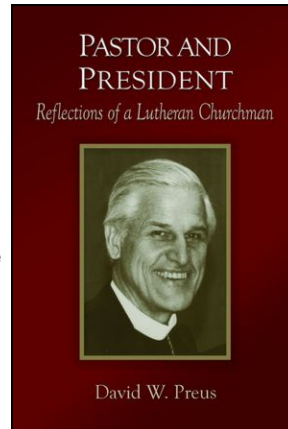
Roughly twenty pages cover Preus' parish ministry years. His account focuses on types of service beyond normal pastoral activities while he was at University Lutheran Church of Hope in southeast Minneapolis. Much of this information was new to this reviewer. For the denomination he chaired the Board of Youth Activity and represented the ALC at a White House Consultation on Equal Educational Opportunity. Preus joined with other clergy, lay leaders, and community residents to form the Southeast Minneapolis

Planning and Coordinating Committee (SEMPACC) to address threats to a once decent residential community from governmental, commercial, and educational institutions. As a result of knowledge acquired through SEMPACC work, in 1965 Preus found himself appointed to fill a vacancy on the Minneapolis school board and was subsequently elected twice to the board, for a total of nine years, two of which he chaired the board.

This was the period of school desegregation. Preus recalls: "There were meetings that threatened to become riots. Obscenities and personal threats were hurled at us. Even our children had to face threats. Phone calls and letters piled up both at church and at home. Most were bitterly anti-desegregation" (30). This civic involvement led to Preus being asked to represent Minneapolis in the Maintenance Workers' March in Memphis, Tennessee, which followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (He had met King on three occasions.) Preus was also invited to serve on the Minneapolis Urban Coalition to stem violence in the streets and address civil rights abuses during the 1960s.

The second and considerably longer part of the book covers David Preus's years as president of the American Lutheran Church. His nomination for ALC vice president, he believes, grew out of the relevance of the form his pastoral ministry had taken. He was surprised to be elected vice president. It then dawned on him that he might succeed Frederick Schiotz. Preus does not reveal his thoughts and feelings when Kent Knutson was stricken with Kreuzfeldt's disease except to say, "It was a difficult time" (40). The author indicates that he slipped from the parish pastor role to that of denominational president with nary a bump. The author proceeds to cover the ALC's work to and on behalf of congregations, ecumenical involvements, and public church work during his watch. A few particularly interesting items related to these three topics will have to suffice for this review.

As he reviews congregational services, Preus notes ALC theological challenges,



including the fact that a small number of congregations became disenchanted with ALC "liberalism" over verbal inspiration and the attention given to social ministry versus evangelism, and they eventually left. He also discusses the ALC's voting of altar and pulpit fellowship with Reformed churches at its last convention before ELCA merger and says that it was his "hope and expectation that mutual recognition would quickly spread to include the broadest possible range of Christian churches" (59), but such was not the case with the Episcopal Church because each church could not accept the other "as we are."

Tied for the book's longest chapter is the one on "ALC and LCMS Relations," part of Preus' accounting of the ALC's ecumenical involvements. From the beginning of his presidency, Preus "believed the ALC, LCA, and LCMS needed each other to fulfill the U.S. Lutheran mission" (67). He believed they were one in Christ and in their Confessional commitment and any differences were "peripheral." Already in 1963, as a delegate to the Southeastern Minnesota District Convention, he was instrumental in presenting a motion that the ALC invite the LCA and LCMS to form a union committee. In 1969, the LCMS adopted altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC, and the LCMS elected as its president J.A. O. Preus, Jr., David's "theologically very conservative" first cousin. About his relationship to Jack Preus, David says they had been "close friends from early childhood and had attended college together. We liked each other, liked our extended family, and shared extensive history." (72) David Preus saw LCMS-ALC fellowship as a "crucially important" first step to bring the ALC, LCA, and LCMS to "a positive and effective unity in reconciled diversity." He was "hopeful and fearful" about this possibility.

The author shares the contents of a series of personal notes based on private conversations with Jacob Preus. The LCMS president assured the ALC president on several occasions that he wanted to maintain fellowship in spite of the fact that four of the five seats on the Joint Committee on Fellowship were held by "ultra-conservatives." Jacob Preus told David Preus on April 26, 1973, that John Tietjen would be fired at that summer's convention. In one of the book's rare glimpses of David Preus as a political person, he describes a meeting he had

BOOK REVIEW Cont'd

with LCMS district presidents during the 1973 LCMS convention. He writes: "The presidents were clutching at straws in hoping that I might have some insight on how Jack could be encouraged to moderate. I told the group that I knew no way to respond to a political takeover other than to mount a stronger political effort. That suggestion was not welcomed" (75). In a remark that shows David Preus as a political realist, he told Jack Preus on March 6, 1974, that "there was no way for him to win if he allowed the fight to remain a win-lose situation. There are too many moderates who will never forget the tyranny that made them 'losers.'" Then David Preus reflects, "Jack refuses to take my words seriously" (79). In keeping with his treatment of colleagues throughout the book, David's comments about his cousin are generous: at worst he describes Jack as "naïve."

No review of this book would be adequate without describing what Preus has to say about the uniting of the ALC, Lutheran Church in America, and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, another phase of the ALC's ecumenical involvements. Preus reiterates the reasons for his well-known initial resistance to merging the three bodies: the experience of forming the ALC in 1960, pragmatic concerns around costs and time commitment, "very substantial polity differences between the ALC and LCA," deflection from mission as merger was occurring, and a biblical and theological understanding of unity as transcending physical organizational merger. He is upfront about failing to make this case to the ALC districts and says that in the end he "had no reason to consider my thinking infallible" (93). From the time of the districts' informal poll, he became committed to merger.

As Preus describes the work of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church

(CNLC), he says he had concerns for the way the CNLC worked and especially about the polity of the new church. As to the former, he critiques the fact that the commission banned caucuses by members of previous church bodies as a way of resisting a replication of the past: this "created a vacuum that was quickly filled by informal caucuses that became agenda setters and influential beyond their numbers" (95). In terms of the latter, because of his worry about losing the foundational role of congregations, he tells how he worked with Robert Marshall to propose a closer-to-the-people model for the new church. It would consist of nine regions, each with a bishop, each carrying out most organizational work, and each made up of small synods performing pastoral functions. Only a shadow of this concept was taken into the ELCA. Preus does not comment upon his relationship with the presiding bishops of the AELC or LCA.

The other "longest chapter" of the book is part of the author's coverage of the ALC's public church work. It deals with Preus's activities during the Cold War with church leaders behind the Iron Curtain in behalf of nuclear disarmament and peace. Just as his earlier parish community involvement propelled him into bigger leadership roles in Minneapolis, so his presidency propelled him into Lutheran World Federation and World Council of Churches roles that included significant functions with politicians and global church leaders. For example, he was a LWF delegate to a 1982 peace conference hosted by the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow. For that, he was chosen as vice chair of the planning committee and chair of one of the major plenary sessions. Initial sessions consisted of "highly political" content usually praising the Soviet Union and condemning the West for fomenting the arms race. When it became Preus's time to chair, he set a theological tone, pointed out the partisan nature of the

conversation to that point, and pleaded with the 600 attendees to speak out of religious conviction and be even-handed.

In sum, the tone of this book is that of a memoir set within a report-type accounting of the ALC's mission and ministry. The focus is on the author's ministry, not on his life: the reader is not privy to family history or early life that would help ground, elucidate, and evaluate David Preus's ministry. Similarly, the reader is let in on the author's thinking but seldom on his feelings. There are a few inaccuracies such as "Professor Carl Piepkorn" rather than "Professor Arthur Carl Piepkorn" and "Fuehrbringer" rather than "Fuerbringer" (84), or reference in the present tense to Lutheran Social Service System rather than to Lutheran Services in America (56), and implying that Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* was already written at the time of a 1977 meeting with President Carter when it was not published until 1985 (136). These are minor, however. If the legacy that David Preus wishes to confirm by writing this book is that of "churchman," the book accomplishes its task. Though there are various facets to his churchmanship, the model he set for the church's participation in society may only be matched by that of Franklin Clark Fry from ALC-LCA days, and has only been superseded by another son of the ALC, Mark Hanson. Leigh Jordahl, in his essay on the Norwegian Synod ("The Gentry Tradition—Men and Women of a Leadership Class," *Church Roots*, 1985) says that not enough attention has been given to that heritage's "gentry tradition of noble service" (106). David Preus's book is testimony to the fact that the author, whose great grandfather was one of the founders of the Norwegian Synod, used his privileges of upbringing, education, and leadership skills in "noble service." As he turns 90 years old this May, it is fitting to remember this service with appreciation.

WENTZ PRIZE ANNOUNCED

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic announces the Wentz Prize for the best essay detailing the history of Lutherans in America:

- \$2,000 for an essay by a First-degree Student at a Seminary or Divinity School;
- \$2,000 for an essay by a Graduate Student.

Submissions to be received by May 31, 2012

Articles should be at least 20 double-spaced pages, follow the format stipulated in the most recent guide by Kate Turabian and be accompanied by a short letter of reference from a faculty advisor. Guidelines for the writing of these papers are available by submitting a request to one of the addresses below.

Paper should be submitted to:

Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg
61 Seminary Ridge
Gettysburg, PA 17325

Or as an attachment to: dhou-sley@verizon.net

Joel Thoreson, Editor
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BOOK REVIEWS

Those interested in contributing book reviews or wishing to suggest a book, please contact David Settje at David.Settje@CUChicago.edu.

Each review should be between 500 and 750 words long, be sent as a MS Word document or in a compatible format, and specifically evaluate the book and its Lutheran content/context.

NEEDED: YOUR NEWS!

This newsletter is intended as a clearing-house of information for archivists, historians and librarians. It needs **you** to provide material for it.

Please send material for publication to the editor. Items of interest include notice of research in progress, new appointments, publications, meetings and celebrations planned or held, bibliographical materials, and anything of general interest to LHC members.

The LHC Newsletter is issued four times a year: February, May, August and November.

Please send items to
Joel.Thoreson@elca.org.

Have You Renewed Your Membership?

If the mailing label on your newsletter shows an expiration date (Exp:) of "11" or less, please renew now for 2012. Send a check for \$35.00, payable to the "Lutheran Historical Conference" to

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