



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!

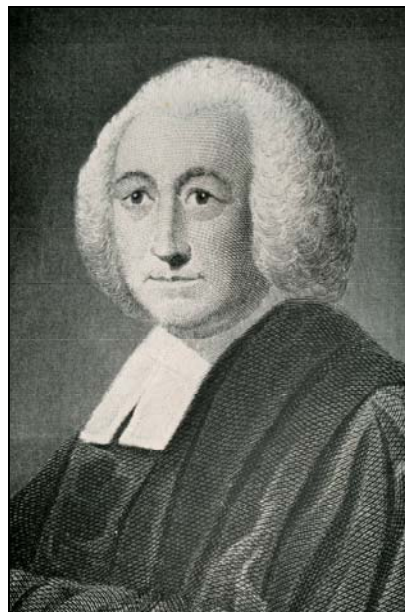
Presenters will be given 20-25 minutes for their presentation, followed by a question and answer session. Paper proposals should include a title, 250 word abstract, and brief biography.

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

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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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BOOK REVIEW: Power, Politics and the Missouri Synod

Burke, James C. *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod: A Conflict That Changed American Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

Reviewed by David E. Settje, Concordia University Chicago

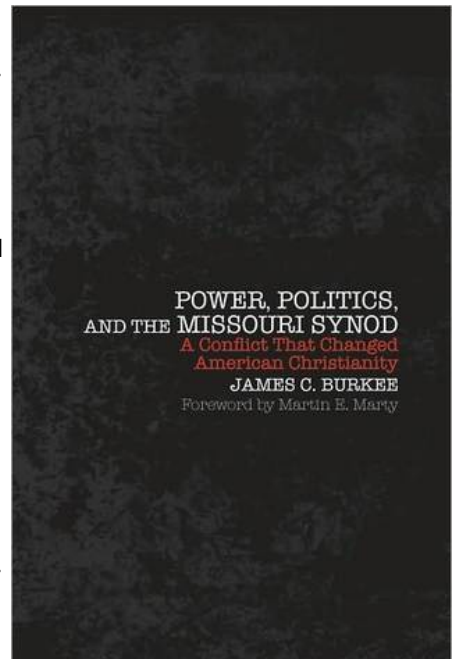
James Burke has ventured into obviously controversial territory with his account of the LCMS during the 1960s and 1970s. *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod* provides an important, balanced, well researched, and detailed account of what amounts to a conservative takeover of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. As a member of the LCMS, Burke delivers a reliable history of a pivotal time in LCMS history and believable criticism of its major figures. Rather than an outsider looking to lambaste a conservative church body, Burke gives an insider's search for the origins of the vitriolic partisanship that too often has characterized recent LCMS history. Burke did a sound job with his explanation, but not one without a few troublesome shortcomings.

Burke points to the influence of J. A. O. Preus and Herman Otten as most significant in propelling the LCMS to the right. Preus served as LCMS president from 1969 to 1981, and Otten was a former seminarian denied ordination who thereafter became a disgruntled critic of the LCMS. Both well known figures appear vindictive, selfish, and power hungry in Burke's telling of the story. Burke is especially critical of Preus, and rightfully so. He exposes time and again how Preus told people of all political and theological leanings what they wanted to hear, then privately worked against them and orchestrated elections that defeated them or their ideas. Preus backstabbed, manipulated, and then re-treated at every turn in order to protect his own position and reputation. He espoused conservative doctrine

publicly to pacify his supporters while simultaneously collaborating with moderates to create a policy or statement that watered down what he had just stated. The best of example for all of the above comes from Preus's relationship with Herman Otten. No one better knew of his double crossing than Otten, whom Preus criticized openly, worked against behind the scenes, but then would personally call with an apology or at other times plant information in Otten's Christian News. Otten continually pushed Preus to enact more conservative stances. Preus promised as much but in actuality ignored most of Otten's recommendations. The LCMS's refusal to ordain Otten also came between the two men. Preus continually promised Otten that he would work to instate him as a pastor, then made sure as LCMS president that this never happened.

Yet Burke demonstrates that Otten was just as Machiavellian as Preus. In what is probably the most complete account of Otten's role in the Synod based in part on interviews with him, Burke documents how Otten published letters and articles without people's consent, attempted to blackmail Preus and others to get what he wanted, and used his newspaper unscrupulously to promote himself and his agenda. Otten repeatedly condemned moderates and liberals for unionism, while aligning himself with evangelicals and other conservatives outside of the LCMS. Burke portrays Otten as not merely outspoken but as someone who sought to destroy his opponents and their credibility.

Throughout, Burke traces the influence of this sort of politicking on the Synod, often pointing out how it poisoned elections and the actions of LCMS leaders, all the while precluding sober theological reflection on the spiritual dimensions upon which the church was founded. No major figure in the volume comes away un-



scathed. Burke supports his allegations with ample evidence and well articulated arguments. The liberal to moderate wing, often led by John Tietjen (president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis), lost out to conservatives because of a mixture of naiveté and intellectual hubris. Too comfortable in their positions, they failed to grasp the politics swirling around them or that the lay people had become alienated from what they saw as an academic elite. Conservatives therefore manipulated LCMS polity and ran roughshod over the liberals and moderates, even when resorting to infighting among themselves and eschewing a spirit of Christian civility in order to maintain power. Indeed, Burke focuses much of his analysis on demonstrating that the bad politics of that era still haunts the LCMS today.

Nonetheless, there are a few troubling aspects about this book. Burke tells the tale of a conservative push within the denomination and therefore relies primarily on sources about and from the conservatives. Not that he ignores entirely other key voices such as Oliver Harms (LCMS presi-

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Compiled by

**Dr. James W. Albers,
Mr. John N. Dickmeyer, and
Rev. Robert E. Smith**

This is the latest installment of the bibliography of items related to the history of Lutheranism in America. It covers items published in the calendar year 2010 and items from prior years which were missed in previous indexes. The 2010 and previous bibliographies are also available on the LHC Web Page: <http://luthhist.org>.

As in previous years, we once again appeal to LHC members for help in compiling next year's index. Although the tools of modern library research are excellent, such as searching WorldCat, such searches are not, nor are they likely to become, exhaustive. Please send us citations of your own work as well as those of your colleagues. We are especially interested in local, private and unindexed theses of note. Send relevant citations to:

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EUGENE FEVOLD, 1918-2011

Dr. Eugene L. Fevold, age 93, of St. Paul, retired Luther Seminary professor and pastor, died October 29, 2011. He was born October 5, 1918 in Minnewaukan, N.D.

Eugene was a graduate of St. Olaf College, Luther Seminary, University of Chicago Divinity School and also completed post graduate studies at Harvard and Princeton. In 1954-55 he was a Fulbright Scholar in Norway. Ordained in 1948, he served Faith Lutheran in West Fargo, N.D., while also teaching at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn. He joined the faculty of Luther Theological Seminary in 1956. Eugene was a recognized authority and author on religion in the U.S., particularly on Norwegian-American Lutheranism.

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Eugene was the author of a number of works, including *The Lutheran Free Church in America* and *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*, in collaboration with E. Clifford Nelson. He also presented papers at three LHC conferences between 1972 and 1984.

In 1949 he married his wife Dorothea, who preceded him in death. He is survived by his children, Constance (William Durland), Karen (Harry) Maher, Carol (John) Koepke and David (Patricia Mapes); grandchildren, Andrew (Ivannia) and Allison Durland; Reid, Nate (Sarah Garb) and Dana Olson, Hannah and Jonas Maher; Carson Koepke; Marissa Mal-lory; great-grandchildren, Sharon and

Axel; sister, Doris Mikel-son; brothers, Richard (Judith) and Joseph (Ardeh); many nieces, nephews and friends.

Memorials preferred to St. Olaf Col-lege, Luther Seminary, St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church or Lyngblomsten Care Center.



Eugene L. Fevold, ca. 1960.

BOOK REVIEW Cont'd

dent, 1962-1969) and John Tietjen, but that they always seem to lurk in the background, being talked about rather than speaking for themselves. When they are at the forefront of Burkee's analysis, he mostly employed their public statements. This is especially disappointing in light of the meticulous "back room" sources that Burkee uncovered about the conservatives, and that so enrich his text.

Also, Burkee displays an alarming lack of interest in recent Lutheran historiography. While he includes Mary Todd's influential *Authority Vested: A Story of Identity and Change in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, he could have done more to compare his argument to her already established scholarship. She traced the issue of authority in the LCMS from its founding through the 1980s. Burkee's story complements her history but without his making key

links to it. A number of times he made references to the Civil Rights Movement and racial unrest during the 1960s and 1970s, but no-where does he cite Kathryn Galchutt's *The Career of Andrew Schulze, 1924-1968: Lutherans and Race in the Civil Rights Era*. He includes analysis about the Walther League and particularly the League's invitation to Pete Seeger to appear at a convention, yet fails to incorporate Jon Pahl's *Hopes and Dreams of All: The International Walther League and Lutheran Youth in American Culture, 1893-1993*, which contains a reliable analysis of the Seeger controversy. Similarly Burkee often references the Cold and Vietnam Wars without a citation of other scholarship on that front. The use of these and other works would have enhanced and sharpened Burkee's own. They would also have provided depth to matters that he only skimmed.

That being said, Burkee has written a compelling book. He adds a unique understanding of internal LCMS politics that so changed the denomination during the late 1960s and 1970s. Readers can rely upon his even-handed approach as an LCMS member unafraid to criticize the denomination. His cool academic approach means that he did not write an apology for the LCMS or avoid the controversies that brought Jack Preus and the conservatives to office. It also means that he avoided condemnations of the LCMS simply because of its conservatism. Burkee capably traverses the minefield of recent LCMS history to generate an honest, frank, and accurate portrayal about how political maneuvering came to dominate that denomination.

RUTH FLESNER, 1918-2011

Ruth Louise Flesner was born on August 22, 1918, in Oak Park, Ill., the daughter of Dr. Elmer and Erna Flack. She entered the Church Triumphant on October 29, 2011, at the age of 93.

Prior to moving to Gettysburg in 2007, Ruth was a resident of Roseville, Minn., and for almost fifty years an active member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis. She was married to Dorris A. Flesner on July 17, 1940. They were the parents of three children: Paul, David, and Lois. Dorris and Ruth were very happily married for almost fifty-five years before he predeceased her in 1995.

Dorris was a founding Lutheran Historical Conference member and served as its first president from 1962-1964. He eventually served three terms on the LHC Board.

Ruth's entire life revolved around family, church, and seminary. The Rev. Dr. Dorris A. Flesner was a pastor in Iowa and Indiana and a Professor of Church History at Northwestern and Luther theological seminaries in Minnesota. Ruth was active in seminary life and a long-time member and president of the board of the Minnesota School of Missions. She was also a founding and 29-year member of the Luther/

Northwestern Seminary Faculty Wives Reading Group.

Ruth often commented, "I have been so blessed." She in turn was a blessing to others with her positive attitude about life, always reaching out to others in their time of need.

Ruth is survived by her son, Rev. Paul Flesner of Wheeling, Ill.; by her son and daughter-in-law, Dr. David and Susan Flesner of Gettysburg, Pa.; by her daughter and son-in-law, Lois and Rev. Arthur Goetz of Hot Springs, Ark.; by her four grandchildren, five great grandchildren; and by many, many friends.

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This collection is a part of a larger database of articles, videos and other texts related to the Lutheran church. To view this collection, go to: media.ctsfw.edu. In the bottom, left corner of the screen, select "See other Materials." A window will open on the right side of the screen. Select "Lutheran History Images" from the list in that window.

Joel Thoreson, Editor
Newsletter
Lutheran Historical Conference
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
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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.

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

Please send items to
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