



Christian Identity in Crisis:

*The Legacy of
Wilhelm Loehe
as Inspiration for
the Church Today*

Introduction to This Issue

The first two issues of *Currents in Theology and Mission* for 2024 are devoted to the papers presented at the 5th Conference of the International Loehe Society held at Wartburg Theological Seminary, July 24-27, 2022, under the theme “Christian Identity in Crisis: The Legacy of Wilhelm Loehe as Inspiration for the Church Today.” Over forty participants from Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and the United States gathered on campus and a handful of others joined the presentation sessions by Zoom.

The days of the conference were full with presentations, opening and closing worship services, and good fellowship over breaks and mealtimes. There was also opportunity for a trolley tour of historic Dubuque and a day-long excursion that took the group to Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa, and to two churches founded by Loehe *Sendlinge* (“sent ones”): St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Waverly, and St. Sebald Lutheran Church, in the rolling countryside near Strawberry Point. At St. Sebald, the group visited the farm site where Wartburg Theological Seminary was located from 1857-1874. Over the course of days together at the conference, a genuine sense of camaraderie and spiritual community

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developed among the participants. Let us call it *Gemutlichkeit* and *Gemeinschaft*! Planning for the next conference in Neuendettelsau, July 27-30, 2025, is currently underway.

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to explore the work of the Franconian Lutheran pastor Wilhelm Loehe as a living legacy for the church today. With the engagement of representatives from other institutions in Germany and North America that trace their roots to Loehe—the Gesellschaft für Innere und Äußere Mission, Diakonie Neuendettelsau (now Diakonie), Missionswerk Bayern (now Mission EineWelt), Concordia Theological Seminary-Fort Wayne, and Wartburg College—the organizing conference was held at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, July 2005. Subsequent conferences were held at Neuendettelsau (2008), Concordia Seminary-Fort Wayne (2011), and Neuendettelsau (2014). After an extended hiatus that included a virtual conference in 2021, the Society is again back on track to meet every three years.

The theme for the 2022 conference, “Christian Identity in Crisis,” offered space to reflect on Loehe’s theological and pastoral work in relation to crises from within and from without the church of his own time. Through his many endeavors—in church and mission, liturgy and diakonia, Lutheran confession and piety—Loehe grappled with matters of Christian identity, both personal and ecclesial. Within the church, Loehe promoted the currents of a spiritual awakening, a renewed confessionalism, and a rich liturgical life in the wake of enlightened religion and rationality. With his imagination for a mission to German immigrant communities and Native People in North America, and for the ministry of a deaconess community attentive to the physical and spiritual needs of the sick, the poor, and the rejected, Loehe was engaged in a churchly response to the social upheaval caused by industrialization, migration, revolution, and war. The question at the horizon of interest in Loehe’s work is how to understand Loehe’s legacy to us in the face of crises to Christian identity today.

The articles published here include historical and theological explorations, critical assessments, and reflections for the church in its life and mission today. In the first place—as befits a conference focused on Loehe, who was first and foremost a pastor—is a sermon from **Martin J. Lohrmann** preached at the worship service opening the conference. That day, July 25, was the commemoration of James, Apostle. Lohrmann uses the witness of the apostle James as well as the pastor Loehe to proclaim the freedom of those who follow Jesus Christ to see possibilities beyond the difficulties of the moment, to see the world as God sees it, and to serve others in love. In that spirit, you are invited to engage the articles offered here—and in the next issue as well.

Craig L. Nesson (Wartburg Theological Seminary) identifies several dimensions of Loehe’s endeavors that inspire imagination for the renewal of the church. In Loehe’s contributions to mission, worship, equipping others, diakonia, open questions, and reclaiming the missionary, Nesson finds resources “to reconstitute Christian existence today.” Loehe offers a model for “cultivating new and imaginative repetitions of historic Christian practices” and practicing solidarity in human suffering.

Rudolf Keller (Institute for Evangelical Theology, University of Regensburg) wants to let Loehe speak for himself about his central concerns: the Brethren Church, the sacrament of the altar,

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the Lutheran confession, the office of ministry, and true church fellowship. Keller explores these theological and churchly matters in statements from Loehe’s letters and other less familiar sources. He encourages us to hear Loehe out and understand him in his own context, even as we seek to address the challenges in our own.

James A. Lee II (Concordia University-Chicago) interprets Loehe’s thought in the context of the wide-ranging discussion in nineteenth-century academic theology concerning the history and development of doctrine. Although Loehe was neither an academic nor a liberal theologian, but a pastor and a confessional theologian shaped in the piety of the Awakening Movement, Lee finds evidence for an understanding of doctrinal development operating in his thought, one that distinguishes him from his academic contemporaries.

Thomas H. Schattauer (Wartburg Theological Seminary) explores what he calls Loehe’s liturgical imagination. As a dimension of faith, imagination and the images that fund it are foundational for Christian liturgy and liturgical-theological work. To describe Loehe’s imagination both *from* the liturgy and *for* the liturgy, Schattauer focuses on three quotations from Loehe’s writings. The picture that emerges is that of a eucharistic community participating in the life of the triune God and practicing a living liturgy.

John R. Stephenson (Concordia Seminary-St. Catharines) reflects on the task of writing a biography of Loehe for the English-speaking world, especially readers in North America, where Loehe’s influence remains significant. Stephenson suggests that the three-volume biography prepared by Loehe’s co-worker Johannes Deinzer would provide the foundation of such a work. A

new biography could incorporate currently available source material and speak to the concerns of contemporary North American Lutherans.

Additional conference papers from Mathias Hartmann, Jenny Wiley Legath, Stephen Pietsch, Jan Schnell, Klaus Detlev Schulz, Man-Hei Yip, and a sermon from Christian Weber will appear in the next issue of *Currents*.

The papers presented at this year's gathering add to a growing body of work on Loehe and the legacy of individuals and institutions influenced by him. Readers of *Currents in Theology and Mission* are invited to explore the papers published from previous conferences of the Society:

Dubuque (2005)

Wilhelm Loehe and His Legacy, ed. Ralph Klein.
Currents in Theology and Mission 33.2 (2006).

Neuendettelsau (2008)

Wilhelm Löhe: Erbe und Vision, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß.
Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009.

Fort Wayne (2011)

Wilhelm Loehe: Theological Impact and Historical Influence,
ed. Craig L. Nessian and Thomas H. Schattauer.
Currents in Theology and Mission 39.1 (2012).
*Wilhelm Löhe: Theology and History / Theologie und
Geschichte*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß. Nürnberg: Verein
für bayerische Kirchengeschichte; Neuendettelsau:
Freimund-Verlag, 2013.

Neuendettelsau (2014)

*Wilhelm Löhe und Bildung / Wilhelm Loehe and Christian
Formation*, ed. Dietrich Blaufuß and Jacob Corzine.
Nürnberg: Verein für bayerische Kirchengeschichte;
Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2016.

The 2022 conference resulted from many months of collaboration among the officers of the Society: Christian Weber (Basel), Thomas Schattauer (Minneapolis), Thomas Kothmann (Regensburg), and Jacob Corzine (Fort Wayne). The Society is most grateful for the generous support provided for the conference as well as the publication of these papers by the German American National Congress (DANK), Diakoneo, Gesellschaft für Innere und Äußere Mission, Wartburg College, and Wartburg Theological Seminary. Sadly, Thomas Kothmann (April 22, 1965—August 4, 2022) was not able to attend the conference due to serious illness and died shortly after its conclusion. We remember him and his loved ones in prayer and give thanks for his contributions to the Society. This issue is dedicated to his memory.

Membership and conference information for the International Loehe Society can be found at <https://www.iloes.net>.

The *Currents Focus* feature articles for January begin with an article on Loehe's preaching by **Joshua Pfeiffer**. This contribution explores the preaching of Wilhelm Loehe via a theological and rhetorical analysis of the opening sermon of his series on the Lord's Prayer. Loehe's preaching is located within the history of preaching, specifically the Lutheran catechetical heritage. He faithfully embodies this tradition not merely by conveying information and moralizing but by proclaiming law and Gospel within his catechesis. Loehe here manifests some of his distinctive ecclesial emphases, such as the creative holding together of confessional orthodoxy and pietistic devotion. Loehe's preaching provides a rich resource for the ongoing homiletical task today.

Pete Singer offers comprehensive guidance for becoming a more trauma-informed church. The most fundamental element of trauma-informed practice is a basic understanding of trauma. Trauma involves an event that overwhelms the normal human capacity to adapt or cope. This event leaves a lasting imprint on the mind, brain, body, and soul. Research is clear that one of the biggest factors contributing to resilience after trauma is competent, supportive relationships. Collaboration may occur between the church and survivor, the various people at the church helping the survivor, or between the church and providers from other organizations who may be able to help the person. The church is best able to fulfill this calling when it follows core principles and practices, grounded in Scripture, and lives them out every day as a manifestation of who we are in Christ.

"Preaching Helps" in this issue takes us from the Feast of Epiphany to the Great Feast Day of Easter. It's a bit unusual for the first quarter of *Currents* to include Easter and it happens only when Easter Sunday comes as early as the end of March. The introduction to "Preaching Helps" focuses on the book of Jonah, a reading we will hear during the early days of Epiphany. Though Jonah never prayed for Nineveh, we are urged to pray more expansively than he did. Perhaps we can add another verse to "God, Bless America."

Thomas H. Schattauer, Guest Editor

Craig L. Nessian, Issue Editor

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