

Introduction

In late 1958, a brash young seminarian from the Bronx, New York, named Herman Otten stood before the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, to answer charges that he had “violated the law of love” as expressed by Jesus in the New Testament. Earlier that year, Otten had leveled accusations of heresy against several seminarians. Later, in a secret meeting with synod president John W. Behnken, Otten charged that members of the Concordia faculty were teaching heresy, denying the veracity of cherished Bible stories, and questioning Scripture’s inerrancy and infallibility. Faculty members, soon confronted by Behnken with Otten’s charges, were incensed. They demanded not only that Otten admit that he had sinned in making charges without first confronting the accused—a clear violation of the principle of Matthew 18¹—but that he retract his accusations. Otten refused. And so the faculty stood in judgment: After years of study and a graduate degree, Herman Otten would not be certified by Concordia Seminary for service as a minister in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). In effect, he was blackballed from the church.

Fourteen years later, in October 1972, many of the same men who had sat in judgment of young Otten were marched, one at a time, before a similar committee in St. Louis. This time, they were on trial. Each man was now forced to answer the charges first raised by Otten in 1958: Were Adam and Eve real historical persons? Was Jesus’ mother, Mary, a virgin? Is the Holy Bible infallible and inerrant?² Within three years, all but five would be out of a job, fired after a series of political defeats, tactical errors, and self-exile.

Their fall bookended a decade of hope, political conflict, and spiritual struggle. And it ushered in a new age in the Missouri Synod, which now took its place as a champion of American evangelical conservatism, while entering an era of chronic decline.

Missouri's story is modern church history writ large. It is yet another tale of epic struggle between the forces of modernism and conservatism in American religious life. It is also the essential story of modern history in the life of a great American religious denomination, then the country's eighth-largest church body, and its nearly three million members. Most significantly, it is the story of a small but dedicated group of men, their relationships, their behaviors, the ideologies to which they were committed, a movement they created, and a church they forever altered.

Uncharted Waters

I began my circuitous route to this story from a distance. A child of the Missouri Synod, I spent all but one of my pregraduate educational years in its schools and churches. After four years of graduate study in history, I began to look at the modern phenomenon of organized political activity among Christian conservatives—the “Religious Right.” Only then did I come across a sound I may have heard once or twice in passing as a child and teen: “Seminex,” the word that has come to embody one of the most convulsive periods in the short history of the LCMS, a civil war that split the church in the 1970s.³ My curiosity was roused when a historiographical survey turned up but a handful of accounts of the period, mostly emotional, partisan, or triumphalist works written by participants in the struggle. Mary Todd, in her 1996 dissertation (and subsequent book), tells why: Concordia Publishing House (CPH) in St. Louis, the synod's official publishing enterprise, subjects all submissions to a process of anonymous doctrinal review.⁴ The manufactured flaw, she recognizes, is that the church writes its own history, leaving only filtered works that present a glorified past. Moreover, almost all of what little has been written about the period addresses the theological debate that divided the church, as if the schism happened within a contextual vacuum. Was it mere coincidence that the synod had rapidly liberalized

during the 1950s and 1960s just as the nation moved forward on civil rights and a “Great Society”? Or that it, like the rest of America, fought with itself during the 1970s over the changes produced by those earlier decades? That J. A. O. “Jack” Preus, the conservative candidate for the LCMS presidency, narrowly won election in the same year that Richard Nixon first took office? Or that conservatives in the Missouri Synod had organized into a political movement just as the Religious Right in America was taking form?

In 2000, I contacted the Concordia Historical Institute (CHI), the synod’s Department of Archives and History, to ask about the status of records from the period. Executive Office records from the Behnken and Harms administrations (through 1969) were accessible. Better yet, the files of Jack Preus, the synod’s president from 1969 to 1981, which had been sealed for nearly two decades, would be open to me the following summer. Jim Adams’s 1977 book, *Preus of Missouri and the Great Lutheran Civil War*, raised significant questions about the man.⁵ To synod moderates, particularly the ones who had left Missouri in the late 1970s, Jack Preus was the great villain of modern church history, together with kingmaker Herman Otten. (Former Concordia professor Frederick Danker referred to the schism as “the Preus-Otten Purge of Missouri.”⁶) To conservatives, Preus was the champion who recaptured the seminary and saved the synod from the forces of liberalism. I wanted to know more about the man and the movement that brought him to power. I resolved to spend the summer of 2000 in steamy St. Louis, working through the musty Preus files and interviewing those still alive who led the warring parties.

It was then that my journey took a disturbing turn. Several people, many who had lived through the period, cautioned me to back off. These are dangerous people who might make my life miserable, I was warned, particularly if I wanted to teach at one of the synod’s colleges or universities (which I now do). I went to St. Louis just the same. As I worked my way through Preus’s files and the files of his brother, Robert, I collected names, phone numbers, and e-mail and mailing addresses of dozens of men who knew or had gone to Concordia with Otten; men involved with various movements to combat liberalism in the church; men who helped elect Preus and served in his administration. When I began calling on those

still alive to request interviews, I often found something completely unexpected: silence. Many were unwilling to talk. The reasons were diverse. For some, the emotional wounds were still fresh. Some were embarrassed by their involvement. Others had professional reasons, wanting to stay “neutral” while serving in official capacities in the church. Some were afraid of reprisals. The most unsettling, however, was the stonewalling from men who did not want the truth exposed; who did not want aired the details of a veiled organization that, it was implied, still rules the synod. Richard Koenig had dubbed the “conservative reaction” in Missouri a gathering of “fearful” men: I fully expected allusions to Nixon, but I did not expect this cloak-and-dagger, Deep Throat dynamic, surely not in a conservative Christian church.⁷ But here they were, Lutheran ministers engaging me in the most juvenile of conversational acrobatics: “What are you, conservative or lib?” “I can’t tell you that.” “Those who know will take these secrets to their grave.” “There are no Dick Morris [former political advisor to Bill Clinton turned tell-all journalist] in our organization.” “Men of integrity will never reveal” who is in the inner circle. Or better yet, “Why don’t you ask me the questions, and I’ll tell you if you are getting warmer or colder.” It was this researcher’s journey—these unforeseen interactions and the surprising nature of the documentation—that moved me to unforeseen conclusions.

I argue here what I believe everyone knows but few will confess: the schismatic history of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is about more than just theology. I readily concede that theological language dominated the conflict as the synod polarized in the postwar years around questions of truth: those who saw biblical truth in part as subjective, through historical and cultural lenses, and those who viewed it as definable and untouchable, transcending time and interpretation. But as James Davison Hunter suggests in *Culture Wars*, this worldview and this language were neither specific to the Missouri Synod nor exclusively theological.⁸ By the 1960s, the emerging progressive and orthodox poles in the LCMS were defined as much by their social and political views as their religious beliefs. Most of the major accounts of the conflict revolve around the 1969 election of Jack Preus.⁹ The war that followed was a war of ideologies, primarily but

not exclusively theological in expression. And, lest we forget, the war's great battle was fought over a seminary. So yes, it was about theology.

But it was also about the cultural and political contexts in which these men lived. "Religions," writes Martin Marty, "have always engaged in dialogue with their environment."¹⁰ Missouri was no different. Lutherans of all stripes struggled to define their churches in an age of weakening ties to denominations. To say this seems superfluous, but it is not: Missouri Synod Lutherans voted, shopped, and went to the movies just like other good Americans. Missouri liberals often called themselves good Democrats and cultivated deeper relationships with like-minded people outside the denomination, as did many good Republican conservatives. They had opinions in an age of resolute opinions: during the sixties they held views of the civil rights movement, Vietnam, the welfare state, or the communist menace. They called themselves "conservatives" and "liberals" (later "moderates"), self-denominating with words that intentionally transcended the synod's boundaries and embracing ideologies that increasingly consisted of both secular and religious elements.¹¹ The events of the 1960s and the reactions they generated opened a window in time, creating space for change. Conservatives and their champion, Jack Preus, stormed through that window.

Those disagreeing, insisting that the conflict was solely theological, must ask themselves this: Would the schism have happened in the absence of the great, convulsive events of the 1960s? Would America's conservative "silent majority" have been so frightened of "liberals" had there been no civil rights and antiwar marches, no riots, no black radicalism, or no welfare state? Jack Preus's resonant call for order in the LCMS in 1969 paralleled what most conservatives, Lutheran and secular, were saying: liberalism had gone too far.¹² And liberalism meant more than just theology.¹³

Finally, this was about the men. Individuals shape history, particularly in elitist politics. And the Missouri Synod, like many mainline church bodies, is a clerical oligarchy, an organization dominated by elites—male, typically white, clergy. As Mary Todd writes, "This is a church body in which clerical hegemony has been the rule." It is a church body with a long history of "strong pastors" and "clergy-dependent people."¹⁴ Its officers, with the exception of treasurer, must be clergy, and fully half of all delegates to

synodical conventions must be clergy. Clergy, for those purposes, equates only with ordained LCMS ministers.¹⁵ And LCMS ministers must be male. Missouri Synod conventions, held every two to three years, elect all of the church's leaders, control the bureaucracy, decide doctrinal issues, and make a variety of pronouncements. Herman Otten's great epiphany, developed sometime in the mid-sixties and perfected by the seventies, was that to control the LCMS you had to control the convention. Conservatives also recognized that organizing the clergy meant controlling the church. Jeffrey Hadden, in his 1969 study of Protestant churches (including the Missouri Synod), warned of a growing ideological gap between Protestant ministers and church laity. His survey was significant in defining lines between Missouri clergy and laity. But more significant, I believe, was a widening generational gulf he identified separating older, more conservative clergy from younger, more liberal clergy.¹⁶ The synod's St. Louis seminary was producing the next generation of clergy, and before long, its graduates would dominate the synod. It is for this reason that the major confrontation in Missouri's "Great Lutheran Civil War" was fought over Concordia.

The movement's progenitor was Herman Otten. While pockets of grumbling dissenters did protest liberalism in the church throughout the 1950s and early '60s, Otten made it a *cause célèbre* among some Missouri clergy. Herman Otten's mouthpiece, *Christian News*, was the movement's mouthpiece in the years following its launch in 1962. He defined conservatism for the Missouri Synod, created a sense of crisis, and, through *Christian News*, turned a handful of anxious pastors and laymen into a movement. Dubbed "Jacob's Ladder" after Preus's 1969 election, *Christian News* became a steady source of discomfort to LCMS leaders. Conservatives either loved Otten or hated him, but all relied on him. Otten and those who loved him were often relegated by those who hated him to the far-right fringe of Missouri sentiment. The pages of *Christian News* were filled with diatribes as often against communism, feminism, and civil rights protest as against theological liberalism. More "centrist"¹⁷ conservatives likely saw those issues as distractions from what they believed the gravest threat to the synod, namely, theological liberalism. But for all their talk of grassroots distress over theological issues, these conservatives used *Christian News* to their advantage,

far more so than any of the theology-laden publications others produced. The *Christian News* archives are filled with articles ghost-written by the same men who verbally minimized his influence and excluded him from the conservative inner sanctum. These conservatives, too, tried to compete with Otten, and almost always failed.

In their zeal to moderate, many conservatives struggled to write a history that excluded Otten. Their conservative reaction, the story goes, was a divinely inspired, grassroots, lay-led movement that spontaneously materialized and unified. Here is how *Affirm*, a publication that competed with *Christian News* after 1971, wrote its own history:

But God caused events to occur which they [the liberals] may not have imagined possible. In one way, they might have seemed odd and unthreatening events. For example, in one part of the country a few clergymen met to express their dismay over what was happening to their church, their beloved Missouri. They met again, perhaps with an enlarged group.

In another city others met—unaware that concerned people were meeting in groups elsewhere. Some groups in the main were not the church's clergy, but members of its laity. They decided to meet again. The groups multiplied. So did the meetings. The common concern grew. It didn't take long before these groups began to find out about each other's work. Soon they no longer merely talked at their meetings; they began to decide on a course of action.¹⁸

Others tried to manufacture a story that isolated Preus from his conservative partners. Concordia's Board of Control, then headed by Preus ally E. J. Otto, wrote in 1977 that liberals tried "to create the impression that the crisis in the Missouri Synod had been originated and been fostered by conservatives under the leadership of Balance Incorporated (publishers of *Affirm*) and the editorial position of *Christian News*."¹⁹

Again, it is necessary, given such revisionism, to state the obvious: Herman Otten was the single most influential conservative in the synod before 1969.²⁰ Serious questions can produce no acceptable answers in Otten's absence. How did so many Missouri Synod Lutherans come, by 1969, to view liberalism as so dominant and threatening, and Concordia Seminary as less than orthodox, if not for Otten's unrelenting assault on the synod's administration and faculty? By Preus's election, a large minority of LCMS

pastors questioned the seminary's commitment to "sound Lutheran principles."²¹ If not for Otten's *Christian News*, how can such sentiment be explained? The historian has few other means to measure popular opinion than simply to read what people were reading and draw conclusions from its contents. *Christian News* is what conservatives were reading.

Herman Otten is the Missouri Synod's great pitiable figure. Time and again, he was exploited by conservatives too cowardly to publicly associate their respectable names and clerical collars with his ethically questionable actions. Several times during his career as the synod's chief antagonist, Otten led crusades that began with scores of professing supporters in underground gatherings, only to find himself alone and abandoned when the campaign reached daylight. Otten's long march was both directed and devastated by these men—aging professors in the 1950s, "movement" leaders in the sixties, and a synodical president and his cronies in the seventies—who often encouraged, exhorted, and supported him in private, only to renounce or denounce him in public. An odd dynamic emerged during interviews with conservatives, one that exists now as then: no one admits to reading *Christian News*, but everybody does. Perhaps the great tragedy for both Otten and the synod was that his determined campaign for seminary certification failed, largely for personal reasons. It failed because he had attacked the fundamental values of men who had dedicated their lives to Christian ministry. It failed because most conservatives, declaring sympathy for his cause, deserted him when it counted. Most of all, it failed because Otten made the crusade about much more than theology.

Herman Otten is also the Missouri Synod's most infamous figure. Otten saw himself, as others still see him, as the "Martin Luther of the Missouri Synod," standing firm for truth regardless of the cost.²² But as *Christian News* developed in the 1960s, it came more to reflect Otten's truth than biblical or even religious truth. Before long it had become his child, a manifestation of his own beliefs and idiosyncrasies (he primarily uses the editorial "we" in *Christian News's* pages). *Christian News* made it crystal clear that this was about much more than just the Missouri Synod. Otten's paper covered a lot of ground, blasting liberals in other church bodies, social movements, secular politics, and foreign countries, always in the name of

conservatism. By the 1980s, he was taking on secular history and becoming active in the Holocaust-denial movement (the Anti-Defamation League called *Christian News* an “anti-Semitic tabloid”).²³ Otten was consistently conservative but ideologically inconsistent. He claimed a respect for journalistic standards but reprinted articles without securing appropriate consent. He professed honesty and openness at all costs, but published ghost-written articles, anonymous accusations, and even personal letters—so much so that by the 1970s, personal letters from friends at times opened with “NOT FOR PUBLICATION.” He complained about the conservative movement’s secretive tactics but attended clandestine meetings and frequently communicated through back channels. Herman Otten’s sprawling conservatism and problematic methods gained him unmatched influence. They gained him a strong and loyal following. And they gained him enduring infamy.

The other figure central in the Missouri Synod’s conservative movement was Jack Preus, though he was neither its founder nor its most faithful contributor. A newcomer from the “Little Norwegian” Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS),²⁴ during the 1960s Preus associated with conservatives erratically. When he did meet with them, he entered through the back door, careful not to leave a record of his presence. But he was, many soon judged, conservatism’s most attractive, articulate, and politically able member. In short, he was the most electable. The son of a Minnesota governor, Jack Preus seemed to many conservatives the ideal synthesis of theologian and politician. A back-slapping good old boy who could skillfully trade locker-room expletives, he was just as comfortable jousting over theology with brainy professors. He was good in front of the microphone, photogenic, and, most important, he reasoned like a politician.

Conservatives hoped for the theologian but got the politician. In 1969, Preus took charge of a movement that seemed unified. Humbly accepting nomination by his backers and election by delegates, he quickly distanced himself from the first by reaching out to the second. That Preus was a master of duplicity is the one point on which nearly all those I interviewed (who were willing to talk) agreed. He seized control of the church and built a decade-long career by constructing and fueling a fraudulent leadership dynamic in the church, consistently showing one face to the public and

another to his cronies. From the day of his election in 1969, Jack Preus openly and repeatedly condemned the men who elected and kept him in power, only to backtrack with them in private, encourage extralegal exploits, and coordinate organized political activity through a mysterious “pipeline.” He gave conservatives what they wanted—victory against the liberals. When it was achieved, the tenuous coalition collapsed and turned on him while conservatives turned on each other. The same men who crowned him in 1969 dethroned him in 1981.

Finally, there are the men who built and became the conservative movement. The movement was made up of two tiers. Atop sat a small but increasingly organized cabal of elites, mostly clergy but also some wealthier laymen, who shared important commonalities. Some were refugees from the war against liberalism in other Christian denominations. Among the most powerful, the group to which Preus would attach himself, were those who considered themselves more mainstream or less radical conservatives, men who believed they were focused intently and solely on the *sine qua non* of synodical survival, doctrinal purity. Another, more radical wing openly embraced secular conservatism and operated relatively independently of the first. This group, considered by the first to be less than legitimate, was comprised of men impelled by another agenda. These were the synod’s John Birchers who decried the advance of communism, civil rights, and bureaucracy. But lines between them were fluid, with several powerful personalities like Otten maintaining ties to both. Most of them were men who had the time, resources, and commitment to their diverse agenda to organize, momentarily unify, and lead a movement against their one common enemy.

The second tier was comprised of elites of a different stripe: pastors, mostly graduates of Missouri’s two seminaries, and a smaller number of laymen. They looked a lot like first-tier conservatives. They were white, often suburban, theologically and socially conservative, likely to vote Republican, and probably held antagonistic or prejudiced views toward the socially active, Jews, and blacks. For all the significance of the men at the top, these were the movement’s foot soldiers, the ones who proved a receptive audience for *Christian News*, organized local campaigns at the behest of movement

leaders (often circumventing the established structures and elected leaders within their local districts), and funneled information to the men at the top. Before 1965 they gave increasing portions of their local church budgets to the synod; after 1965 they withheld more and more.

This was, however, no lay groundswell. It took a full decade to generate enough suspicion of the “liberal” church leadership to bring about a change in 1969, and even then it happened only by a razor-thin margin, often with only a bare majority of convention delegates. Some conservative leaders again and again carped about the lack of passion and interest on the part of so many “neutralists” on the local level. But there were just enough conservatives to capture the presidency and ram through conventions the conservative agenda.

Missouri and the Religious Right

The challenge for any book is: Who cares? The schism in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was a traumatic and triumphant experience for many of nearly three million Missouri Synod Lutherans. It tore apart families and churches, leaving scars that, in many cases, have never healed. It did not have to happen that way. This book points to the personalities and ideology that turned disagreement into an all-out war that has not yet ended and whose outcome is still uncertain. The LCMS has also assumed a place in America’s emergent Religious Right, if not in so public a way as others. (In 2004, President George W. Bush gave one of three election-year commencement addresses to an enthusiastic audience at the synod’s flagship university in swing-state Wisconsin.) The LCMS’s presidents and conventions regularly issue proclamations on issues like abortion, homosexuality, sexual abstinence, and stem cell research. Its 2001 convention urged participation in the Republican Party’s “Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.”²⁵

This book helps explain the transformation from a church that rarely took such positions to one that, during the 1960s, supported many liberal political positions, to what it has become today. For much of its history, the LCMS enjoyed “fellowship” with one or more of the nation’s major Lutheran church bodies. Today it is routinely censured by the one minor

body to its right, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), while it censures the big brother to its left, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).²⁶ Finally, the synod is today as politically managed and charged as ever. Among the first orders of business at its 2001 convention were efforts to limit the orchestration of party-bloc votes through the use of wireless devices.²⁷ The opening sermon of the convention contained a surprisingly frank condemnation of “noisy minorities” on the “right and the left,” singling out “liberal” political groups critical of synod leadership.²⁸ These dramatic changes in the life and direction of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were not inevitable but contingent on the exploits of a few driven and powerful personalities and the hidden dynamic of a movement shaped by those men.

This story is now, as it was then, of great interest to other American Lutherans, as well as secular and religious communities. With considerable curiosity, the story was followed in spurts during the 1970s, in the pages of *Time*, *Newsweek*, national and local newspapers, television stations, and religious periodicals. Conservative evangelicals look proudly to Missouri’s tale of victory over liberalism,²⁹ a distinction few other mainline churches can claim, while liberal critics have disparaged “Pope” Preus and the shift in the church.³⁰ Moreover, while the schism in Missouri may have ended that body’s hopes of generating unity in American Lutherandom, it did have a determinative role in the formation of the nation’s largest Lutheran church, the ELCA.³¹

Finally, this book speaks to the history and nature of religious conservatism. Religious conservatism as an ideology was not a new phenomenon in 1969; an “Old Christian Right” of religious conservatives skillfully fused theology and politics as a countermovement to Roosevelt liberalism in the 1930s.³² The Old Right spied in modern liberalism a Marxist conspiracy, adroitly exploited forms of mass communication, organized parachurch parties, and was visibly anti-Semitic.³³ McCarthy’s Red Scare, the attenuation of denominational loyalties, postwar growth in government, and secular (primarily judicial) challenges to religion in public life in the 1950s generated what Richard Hofstadter called a “paranoid style” in American religious conservatism.³⁴ A decade of ideological polarization (1965–1974)

found religious conservatives increasingly comfortable in the public political sphere; Alabama governor George Wallace called on religious conservatives in his 1968 presidential bid, while evangelist Billy Graham endorsed Nixon for president that same year.³⁵

Herman Otten belongs on any list of the most significant leaders of the “New Christian Right.”³⁶ Otten and the movement he helped create bridged the gap between old and new movements. While Missouri’s religious conservatives were more hesitant than others to fuse politics and pulpit openly (and not at all hesitant to criticize the theological failings of their conservative brethren for doing so), they often marched lockstep with American fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Leo Ribuffo writes of the latter:

While theologically and politically liberal social gospelers campaigned for racial equality and against the Vietnam War, many evangelicals and Fundamentalists not only rejected their specific stands but also charged that social activism in general distracted attention from saving souls. Similarly, the ordination of women and gays was worse than bad policy; it was sin that might provoke God’s judgment on the United States. Conflict between theological liberals and conservatives over these issues reopened half-healed wounds from the past, and Protestant denominations once again debated biblical inerrancy and the legitimacy of Pentecostalist practices.³⁷

Before there was conservatism, there were conservatives. Missouri conservatives complained, rightfully so, that they were at a disadvantage in the public ideological war.³⁸ With tolerance established as an essential principle, they argued, liberalism easily united people of diverse backgrounds and ideas while diluting intensity of conviction. But their view of liberalism was inaccurate; liberalism and conservatism were both ideologies that shared commonalities. Ideologies, for all their historic mutability, often degenerate into prideful, intense, and zealous self-assurance.³⁹ Richard John Neuhaus, LCMS liberal who became a Catholic neoconservative, lamented the drive to ideological “positioning” that left him a stranger in a civil rights movement he helped build.⁴⁰ Conservatism dominated the LCMS because more of its people were conservative. Even so, given the diversity of background, experience, and interest even among so homogenous a group as Missouri Synod Lutherans, conservatism was a perpetually fractured movement.

It was, and had to be, a movement of common denominators. Unity was attainable only with a shared, easily identifiable, and threatening adversary. In its absence, conservatives easily relapsed into parochial interests and insistence that “my” brand of conservatism is “purer” than yours. For all the Lutheran talk of *adiaphora* (practices that are neither expressed nor forbidden by Scripture, and therefore not a basis for sectarianism), the ideology of conservatism is distinctively at home in the Missouri Synod, which so often in its history rejected visible forms of unity for insularity.⁴¹

Missouri’s modern history is about conservatism because Missouri conservatives made it so. They voluntarily appropriated the language of a movement bigger than Missouri, calling themselves “conservatives” contra “liberals.” In personal correspondence they complained about the frustrating nature of conservatism. They could hardly agree with each other, much less non-Lutheran conservatives. But they recognized and frequently articulated that with their religious and secular counterparts they shared common characteristics and a common enemy.⁴²

Clarifications

A few clarifications and definitions are in order. In this book I rely heavily on quotation. While I make no claims to impartiality and certainly make clear my thesis, my hope is to let the actors tell the story as much as possible. I also rely heavily on quotation because, particularly after 1969, conservatives were doing so with each other as evidence of duplicity or even as threats.

Categories like liberal and conservative are relative newcomers to our political lexicon. They are politically charged designations, frequently meaning one thing when used pejoratively and another in self-identification. Within the broader polity they remain historically very fluid terms.⁴³ Conservatives in Missouri have never been ashamed to refer to themselves as such; it was a badge of honor rather than a scarlet letter. Accordingly, I will freely use the term in reference to a conscious movement within the church of (predominantly) men who were at once theologically and politically conservative. Theologically, this translated into a literalistic view of the Bible and a belief in the binding nature of official church doctrine on all members.

Politically, this same group typically stood against ecumenical relations with bodies not in complete agreement with LCMS doctrine, against most forms of social activism (especially integration), and against communism, big government, and woman suffrage.

Defining liberalism is trickier. By the mid-1960s, many of those to the left of Missouri's center took to calling themselves "moderates," in part to quash criticism by conservatives that they were "liberals." I argue that many Missouri moderates can properly be called liberal. Liberals in Missouri as elsewhere were commonly proponents of social action (particularly with respect to race relations), champions of ecumenism, decidedly less than literalistic in their theological postures, and open to a greater—if circumscribed—diversity of views within the synod. Like conservatives, Missouri liberals saw themselves as part of a broad if undefined movement. Yet many of their views were outside the mainstream of grassroots synod thought. Because of this disconnect, many liberals called themselves moderates to hide the fact that they were liberal, particularly as liberalism became a political liability by the 1970s.⁴⁴ In the interest of consistency, I will use the word "moderate" primarily to depict those who self-identified as such, although the term will be used interchangeably with "liberal."

I also make two modifications to lend this book consistency and readability. Otten's publication was known as *Lutheran News* from its inception in 1962 until 1968, when it was renamed *Christian News*. Here, however, you will see it referred to only as *Christian News*. To avoid confusion I also on occasion refer to J. A. O. "Jack" Preus as "Jack," and Robert Preus as "Robert." Finally, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod will be referred to interchangeably, as it is within synodical circles, as "synod," "Missouri," "Missouri Synod," and "LCMS."