

Chapter 1

THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND TO AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

Before beginning the history of Lutherans in America, it is important to understand the origins and progress of Lutheranism in Europe. When Lutherans began to come to the New World early in the seventeenth century, the Lutheran movement was already one hundred years old, and it continued to grow and develop in important ways, especially during the next two hundred years. Lutheran immigration from Europe to America continued in large numbers up until the beginning of the First World War in 1914, and subsequent immigrants continued to bring with them the issues and developments of European Lutheranism. Even in the twentieth century, developments within European Lutheranism continued to reverberate in important ways among American Lutherans, even though they were increasingly independent of each other. Although their paths eventually diverged in many ways, Lutherans on both sides of the Atlantic nevertheless were tied together and influenced by each other, and thus it is important to understand the European Lutheran “backstory” to American Lutheranism.

Beginnings of the Protestant Reformation

Protestants need to be careful when describing the western European Christian church of the late Middle Ages (1300–1500), as it is easy to fall into polemics and stereotypes. Many sixteenth-century Protestants described the medieval church against which they struggled in very dark terms indeed, and subsequent Protestant writers have tended to describe the period in terms of a battle between the “good guys” and the “bad guys,” with the Protestants “recovering” the truth of Christianity that the medieval church had nearly lost. Roman Catholics have done the same thing, except switching the assigned roles. But a more nuanced understanding of this time period suggests that the medieval Western church was better off than might be imagined, and that there were important continuities between elements of the medieval church and the Protestant movements of the sixteenth century.

After the collapse of Roman authority in western Europe at the end of the fifth century, Christianity in western Europe struggled with two huge tasks: first, to Christianize the Celtic, Germanic, and Slavic tribes of western and northern Europe; and, second, to maintain and rebuild some semblance of Christian civilization among these tribes. Western Europe was a cultural and religious backwater, with the Byzantine Christian Empire in Eastern Europe and the Muslim empires in Asia and North Africa as the leading powers. But after the year 1200 or so, the parallel declines of the Byzantines and the Muslims led to the slow expansion of the “Latin” western Europeans. Despite disasters such as the great plagues of the fourteenth century, and almost constant infighting among the “Christian” leaders of western Europe, the center of Christian life slowly moved westward, especially when the Muslims conquered the Byzantine Empire, completed by 1453.

Western Latin Christianity flourished during the period from 1100 to 1300, the age of the great Gothic cathedrals and the Scholastic theologians, such as Anselm and Aquinas. Although the Western church was rocked by scandals in the later Middle Ages—especially by struggles between church and state, the Avignon Papacy (1309–1377), and the Great Schism (1377–1415), when there were two or even three different popes—western Europe grew in power and wealth. The Western church imagined its world in terms of “Christendom,” a unitary Christian civilization in the West in which church and state cooperated together closely—always more of a dream than a reality, but an important conceptual ideal, nonetheless.

The Latin Church, headed by the bishop of Rome (the pope) grew rich and powerful within Western society. The church came to dominate many aspects of life, economic and political as well as theological, and this power in turn drew many individuals into the church who sought power and advancement. It also led to corruption within the church itself, when power and wealth overcame the mission of

the church. The church became the means to an end for many ambitious people at the expense of the people it should have been serving. But this was also an age of deep piety, when there was growing concern for religious adherence and a seriousness about things religious. Piety and power were contesting with one another in the late medieval period, and when piety lost out to power, as it inevitably does, the concern for piety sought avenues for expression outside of the church, in popular devotion and movements that the church often viewed with deep suspicion, tried to manage or co-opt, and sometimes labeled as heresy.

During this time, many western Europeans decried the corruptions within the church, and many ideas were suggested to reform or purify it. Reformers were very active, trying to clean up the religious “system” by means of reform church councils such as the Council of Constance (1414–18), by the intervention of the state, and through internal means. One common call was for the election of a “good” reforming pope or the calling of a “good” reforming council to purify the church. If this could be done, many believed, the Western church could be rid of its corruptions and return to a state of relative purity. But the church system itself was not inclined toward reform and managed to subvert or ignore most attempts to change it; there were too many people within the system who still benefited from the status quo to see it changed.

Martin Luther and the Beginnings of the Reformation

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany on November 10, 1483, to Hans Luther, a peasant and self-made mine owner, and his wife, Margarethe. Martin grew up in the rich piety of late medieval Saxony, largely taught to him by his mother and through his schooling with the Brethren of the Common Life. After some form of religious crisis in his youth, he abandoned the University of Erfurt and a legal career to join the eremite Augustinian monastic order, which was especially pious and restrictive. Luther later recalled that he was a zealous monk who sought to relieve his religious crises through strict observance and disciplinary practices, contrary to later Roman Catholic charges that he was a failed monk. Both talented and restless, his order sent him to the new University at Wittenberg, where he studied Bible and theology, and where he became a professor after earning his doctor’s degree. As a teacher he began to give annual serial lectures on books of the Bible, especially Psalms, Romans, and Galatians. Scholars disagree on the timing and the pace, but sometime during the 1510s Luther had a theological and religious transformation based on a new insight into God’s grace and justification of the sinful person, which he determined was apart from any human works. This radical new theology was

diametrically opposed to the cooperation between works and grace, a cornerstone of medieval theology.

As a priest, he was seriously interested in the reform of the church; he was especially disturbed by practices surrounding indulgences, which claimed to wipe out sins through good works and even through monetary payments. On October 31, 1517, he posted a series of ninety-five propositions in Latin critical of indulgences, which he wished to defend in academic theological debate. However Luther initially intended them, the Ninety-Five Theses were rapidly translated into other languages and achieved a widespread notoriety around Europe. Luther obviously touched a nerve among both reformers and defenders of the status quo, and he quickly became a lightning rod who attracted both intense praise and intense condemnation.

Luther wanted to debate abuses within the church; the church wanted him to shut up and retract his criticisms, and applied immense pressure to get him to do both. Over the next four years (1517–1521), Luther was attacked constantly by theologians and church leaders, and in defending himself he was pushed further in a more radical direction. By the year 1520, Luther had issued three seminal works that demonstrated how far he had come in the previous three years: “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” “The Letter to the Christian Nobility of Germany,” and “The Freedom of a Christian.” His Ninety-Five Theses sought limited reform within the institutional boundaries of the church, but by 1520 Luther came to believe that the problem was the very system itself, which no amount of reform could fix. Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X in 1520, and hauled before the Holy Roman Emperor at the Diet of Worms in 1521, where he was condemned by the civil authorities as well.

Luther’s stinging attacks on the papacy itself, the symbol and linchpin of the medieval religious system, suggested that something far beyond simple reforms or a new system was necessary. His new “evangelical discovery” was nothing less than a complete paradigm shift, a new way of conceptualizing Christian theology. This transformation was characterized in the phrase “justification by grace through faith, apart from works of the law,” an understanding that the salvific grace of God comes to the human person as a divine gift, which the recipient can do nothing to earn or merit. Certainly, the medieval church did believe in justification as a part of the Christian life, but combined it with other elements. Luther made his understanding of justification the core of his new evangelical theology; all other theological or religious elements were viewed through the “lens” of justification. In his 1537 Smalcald Articles, Luther stated, “On this article [justification] stands all that we teach and practice against the Pope, the devil, and the world,” and insisted that nothing in this article could be “conceded or given up.”

Luther could very well have ended up like the fifteenth-century reformer Jan Hus, who was burned at the stake in 1415. Luther, however, was both very popular and protected by a powerful German ruler, Frederick, Elector of Saxony. After the Diet of Worms, Luther was whisked away into a form of protective custody for eleven months, during which time he translated the New Testament into German. But in Wittenberg, radical elements hijacked the new reform movement and, in order to regain control and moderate the pace of change, Luther returned to the city in early 1522. Radical religious and political elements led to the rise of Anabaptist and Spiritualist movements, as well as a revolt of the peasants in 1525, all of which Luther strongly opposed.

After 1522, Luther began to direct personally the reform of the territorial churches in northern and central Germany, either through his own efforts or through the legions of students who studied with him in Wittenberg. As a reformer, Luther was a conservative radical—radical in the sense of cutting through the layers of theology and church structure to focus on the centrality of the Christian gospel as he understood it. But grasping the central gospel affirmation of the justification of the sinner by God's grace alone, through faith, Luther was a quite willing and eager conservative, seeking to maintain much of the medieval religious heritage as long as it did not contradict the gospel. Luther reformed and maintained the medieval mass and much of the worship and music of the church, now translated into German, and put in the hands of the lay worshipers. Luther was also concerned with order; he did not want the people simply taking power into their own hands, but sought to legitimize the reform of the church by putting it in the hands of the lay political leaders in Germany, and in this way to retain the traditional complementary relation of church and state.

Luther continued his reformation of the churches in the German states through the 1520s and 1530s, issuing a flood of theological treatises, catechisms, worship materials and hymns, devotional materials, and sermons. He directed a network of reformers centered in Germany, but also stretching into Scandinavia and eastern Europe. This reformation drew the ire of church and political officials, especially the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who began to move militarily against the rebellious Protestants, as they came to be known; Luther preferred the term *Evangelicals*. From the late 1520s through his death in 1546, Luther and his newly reformed churches were threatened by the military power of the emperor and the Catholic rulers in central Europe. The Protestants united to defend themselves and the balance of power swung back and forth, but the reform was never completely extinguished. Luther remained the center of this new movement until his death,

interceding between quarreling theologians and among feuding rulers on whom the nascent Evangelical churches depended.

Theologically, Luther continued to write voluminously, engaging not only his Roman Catholic opponents, but also other Protestant reformers, such as Ulrich Zwingli from Zürich, whose symbolic interpretation of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper Luther strongly opposed. Luther also opposed the Anabaptists and Spiritualists, along with condemnations of the Jews, who angered Luther by refusing to accept the new Evangelical teachings. Sometimes, to the despair of his friends and colleagues, Luther could remain stubborn and intransigent on points of theology when he felt important elements of the gospel were at stake. An example was Luther's disagreement with Zwingli over the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. This dispute came at a difficult point in the late 1520s, when Protestant unity against the Roman Catholic armies was sorely needed, but Luther was unable to reach agreement with Zwingli, and the Protestants remained divided. Luther's theological output was huge, and is usually described as "occasional," in that he never wrote a complete, systematic theology but, rather, theological works to address specific theological issues or controversies. This being said, however, it must be clear that Luther himself worked and wrote within the framework of a coherent and consistent theology. His Small Catechism and Large Catechism (both from 1529) are masterpieces of this integrated theology, and have been of enduring importance to the formation and continuation of Lutheran theology across the centuries.

The Initial Formation of Lutheranism

In the sixteenth-century Lutheran territories of central and northern Europe, a new Lutheran church pattern evolved. In the core areas of Germany and Scandinavia, where they were supported by the local states and rulers, the Lutheran churches were organized territorially, with all the congregations in any particular state gathered into one church organization, closely allied to the secular power. Just because they themselves had separated from the Church at Rome did not imply that these territorial churches believed in pluralism or religious toleration; rather, they held to an establishment model of Christendom, only now on a regional level rather than on a more universal scale. Most Lutheran territories did not allow for the presence of other religious groups, Catholic or Protestant, believing that it was vital for both church and society that religious uniformity be maintained. While this situation was fairly stable in Scandinavia, the situation in Germany was much more complex. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg brought religious warfare to a temporary halt within

the Holy Roman Empire and legalized the new Lutheran churches for the first time. It also enshrined the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* (“whoever rules determines the religion”), which meant that every dynastic change in the German territories was a potential opportunity for confessional mischief. Indeed, a number of territories shifted from Protestant to Catholic, or the reverse, and the later presence of Reformed Protestantism complicated the issue even further. War and the conquest of territory simply added to the mix. Soon there were pockets of religious minorities within the German states due to dynastic changes.

In eastern and southern Europe, there were also groups of Lutherans living in otherwise Catholic territories, and later, in Eastern Orthodox or Reformed territories. There were Lutherans in the areas of Bohemia, Slovakia, and Hungary, as well as in pockets around Salzburg, Austria, and Slovenia and Croatia. Later, with Lutheran migrations to the east, there were Lutheran settlements in Transylvania, Ukraine, and Russia. For these communities of Lutherans any idea of a territorial church was impossible, so they had to develop a communal or congregational manner of organization, in which the local gathering of Lutheran leaders decided issues, often referring back to the theological faculties of German Lutheran universities or to established Lutheran church authorities. This model would become important for Lutherans settling in colonial America.

Lacking the magisterial function of medieval bishops and the institution of the papacy, Lutherans instead looked to the theological faculties of their universities to provide guidance and judgment. These were the places where pastors were trained and evaluated for ministry, and they became places of leadership (and strife!) within the new Lutheran communion. Regular visitations of the local parishes and pastors provided guidance and evaluation of Lutheran theology and practice on the local level. In the German territories, local rulers appointed superintendents to oversee the Lutheran churches, along with groupings of senior clergy often known as consistories. In the Scandinavian state churches, which had turned over directly from medieval Catholicism, the new state-church structure maintained many of the medieval institutions, even the office of bishop and the local diocesan structures. Scandinavian Lutherans were clear, however, that they maintained reformed or “evangelical” bishops. The apostolic lineage of the bishops was broken in Denmark and Norway, and though it was incidentally maintained in Sweden, Swedish Lutherans did not hold or emphasize the medieval idea of the apostolic succession of bishops, or the “historic episcopate.”

On the local parish level, especially in the rural areas, change came very slowly. Certainly, the pastors were now married and the forms of worship were changed to conform to the new Evangelical understandings, but many of the old medieval

traditions persisted, in some places (such as rural Norway) for centuries. Luther and his companions used sermons and new educational tools such as the Small Catechism and catechetical hymns to teach their understanding of the Christian gospel, but this took time. Pastors, too, had to be schooled in the new Evangelical teaching and provided with pastoral manuals to assist them in their ministry. In Protestant areas of Europe literacy rose, as it was considered important for laypeople to read Bibles and catechisms.

The Development of the Lutheran Confessional Documents

Another important element of European Lutheranism in the sixteenth century and beyond was the development of a set of theological writings that came to have confessional authority for the various churches, specifically the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the various works in the *Book of Concord* (1580). Besides defining Lutheran theology and attempting to settle intra-Lutheran theological debates, these confessional documents became the standard by which Lutheranism was judged. A group was Lutheran insofar as it acknowledged the authority of these documents; in some minority situations, such as in southern and eastern Europe, Lutheran churches were referred to as the Church of the Augsburg Confession rather than by the term *Lutheran*. Even though Lutherans have long debated the theological content and meaning of these documents, and have also disputed the exact nature of confessional subscription, these documents have provided them with a common ground over which they can argue. Unlike Reformed Protestants, Lutherans have also decided that these sixteenth-century documents are sufficient, and occasional attempts to modify or supplant them have been rejected.

The Augsburg Confession of 1530 (Latin, *Confessio Augustana*) is the most widely accepted Lutheran confessional document. It was written by Luther's younger colleague Philipp Melanchthon in 1530 to present a definition of the Lutheran theological position to the emperor and Imperial Diet at Augsburg. Unlike his older and more polemical colleague, Melanchthon was a conciliatory figure, and his carefully crafted document attempted to firmly establish the Lutheran evangelical position, while insisting upon its continuity with the faith once confessed by the Roman Church. The document itself quickly became the standard for defining Lutheranism. Ten years later, in 1540, during a difficult period for German Lutheranism, Melanchthon attempted to revise the Augsburg Confession in order to meet Catholic objections and appeal to reformers in Switzerland and southwest Germany. Not only was this attempt unsuccessful, it also drew widespread condemnation from other Lutherans. Even today, many Lutheran groups signal their allegiance

to the “Unaltered” Augsburg Confession, suggesting that attempts to modify it are unwelcomed.

During the decades after Luther’s death in 1546, German Lutheranism went through trying times internally and externally. From the outside, Lutheran territories were attacked by Catholic forces and faced major inroads made by Reformed Protestantism, especially in western Germany. Internally, Lutherans fought over a series of theological issues revolving around the nature of faith, grace, and the human person; without the authority of Luther himself to adjudicate these disputes, these conflicts threatened to tear the Lutheran movement apart. Followers of Melancthon (Philippists) fought with the so-called Old Lutherans (Gnesio-Lutherans) over the theological direction of the movement. Even though the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 gave the Lutherans some much-needed political breathing room, these disputes were still dangerous to the new movement. In the 1560s and 1570s, a group of mediating Lutheran theologians, including Martin Chemnitz and Jakob Andreae, began to negotiate these disputes and to draw together a common confession that most of the disputants could accept, a document called the Formula of Concord (1577; in Latin, *Concordia*). Besides gathering the disputing Lutherans together, this document also strongly attacked the Roman Catholics and other Protestants, especially the Reformed; its tone is much more combative than the Augsburg Confession, in part reflecting the brutal religious situation of the later sixteenth century. The Formula of Concord was gathered together with other writings, including the Large and Small Catechisms, Luther’s Smalcald Articles (1537), the treatise on “The Power and Primacy of the Pope” (1537), and the Augsburg Confession, into the *Book of Concord*, all of which were publicly attested to by the leading Lutheran powers in Germany. Although some other Lutherans, especially in Denmark and Norway, have not given the Formula of Concord as much weight as the Augsburg Confession, in general the *Book of Concord* is the defining set of Lutheran confessional documents and has not been supplanted by any later writings or statements.

Perennial Issues within Lutheranism

Luther and the first generation of Lutheran leaders left their descendants a rich theological legacy; sometimes it seems almost too rich, because the range of options and positions within Lutheranism has at times led to internal conflicts and disputes. This is surely the case with the situation in the mid-sixteenth century that led up to the Formula of Concord in 1577, and even the adoption of the *Book of Concord* in 1580 did not bring these dynamics to a conclusion. Luther developed a dynamic theology that relied heavily on dialectical elements held in tension with each other, such

as the nature of the human person as fully saint and sinner at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*), the relation between law and gospel, the hidden and revealed God, and the finite's capability to bear the infinite. These dialectical elements have been hard for Lutherans to continue to hold in tension and to explain to subsequent generations, and reductionism was a constant danger. As well, there are implications of the Lutheran theological positions that have needed to be fleshed out, especially as Lutherans have encountered new historical situations and new intellectual movements to which these insights needed to be applied. Finally, since the early Lutherans did not consider any particular church structure or liturgical orders to be absolutely normative, allowing and evidencing a great deal of latitude on these elements, Lutherans have also argued often about the nature of the church and worship.

From Luther onward, the chief Lutheran theological cornerstone has been the centrality of justification: that the human person is justified, or made right with God, by God's grace alone, through divinely granted faith. This is the chief article of faith, by which all other elements of the faith stand or fall. Luther intended this to oppose any element of human works as being involved in the process; one can do nothing to cooperate with God's grace or to merit salvation in any way. To Luther's opponents, both Catholics and other Protestants, this appeared deeply problematic, as it seems to absolve the believer from any sort of moral or ethical imperatives, and may even lead to antinomianism (opposition to the law). Lutherans have continually struggled to express the nature of grace and faith in such a way that avoids turning faith into a human work, on the one hand, or that leads to an utter determinism, on the other hand. Especially difficult for Lutherans has been the doctrine of sanctification, or the holiness of the believer. Luther made a number of remarks on the need for believers to live out personal holiness and regeneration, but later Lutherans have struggled to find a means to express the need for holiness within the confines of the doctrine of justification. Lutherans have always been clear, however, that sanctification is gift of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. Other Protestants, especially the Calvinist or Reformed Protestants, have made sanctification a much more prominent part of their theological patterns. When Lutherans immigrated to the United States, where the religious culture was dominated by Reformed Protestantism, this became a point of contention between the Lutherans and other Christians.

Lutherans have also been remarkably flexible on questions of church structure and worship practices, within some boundaries, of course. Historically, Lutherans have evidenced a wide degree of different church structures, enabled by a rather pragmatic stance on the matter. Luther famously and enigmatically remarked that even an seven-year-old child knew what the church was, but since theological faculties are not usually constituted by seven-year-olds, they have not always been able

to agree. Lutheran church organizational patterns run the gamut from centralized episcopal systems, such as in the state churches in Scandinavia, through synodical forms prevalent among American Lutherans, to Lutheran congregationalism, but this has not kept some Lutherans from arguing that particular forms of church polity or organization are normative. The situation is similar with regard to worship and liturgical practices, although there are some traditional theological positions that are generally considered normative, such as a Lutheran understanding of Christ's real presence in the sacrament of Holy Communion, something that has produced confusion among non-Lutherans and Lutherans alike. The Augsburg Confession clearly stated that "it is not necessary [*satis est*] for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by human beings, should be observed uniformly in all places" (Augsburg Confession, article VII). But this has not restrained some Lutherans from criticizing other Lutherans on the sole basis of their liturgical rites and their perceived "un-Lutheranness."

Finally, Lutherans have struggled continually to define their relations to the larger social and political worlds around them, and what the appropriate boundaries of these relations should be. In its first centuries, Lutheranism was protected by state and military power in Germany and Scandinavia, and many of the Lutheran territorial churches developed a close relationship with the political powers that protected and funded them. This situation led to a number of instances where the Lutheran churches became, in effect, the religious wing of secular power, which made it difficult to truly differentiate the two, even in subsequent situations where it became clear that the state did not always have the best interests of the church in mind. Elsewhere, other Lutheran churches were established as minorities within states that were either essentially pluralistic, such as the Netherlands, or in Roman Catholic areas, where Lutheranism was harassed and at times persecuted, such as southern Germany and eastern Europe. These "minority" forms of Lutheranism developed independently of the state, and became important models for American Lutherans establishing themselves within the voluntary religious situation in the United States. But the level of religious and theological engagement with, and critique of, society and government has always been an issue for Lutherans, and remains so to the present.

Patterns and Relations with Other Christians

As we have seen, the dominant Lutheran pattern, especially in Germany and Scandinavia, was the territorial church, closely related to the local government. Many of these territorial churches developed their own distinct form of Lutheran organization, practice, and piety, so that the "feel" of Lutheranism differed from one

territory to the next, a situation that increased as time went along. This situation was most dramatic in Germany, where the medieval jumble of hundreds of different territories continued to exist until the late eighteenth century, when the French emperor Napoleon forcibly reorganized the German territories. Indeed, though there was a limited linguistic and cultural sense of “German-ness” within central Europe, most Lutherans in these areas thought of themselves first as Saxons or Friesians or Hanoverians or Prussians, and only second as Germans. Hence, when these “Germans” immigrated to the United States, though others considered them German Lutherans, they often grouped in local congregations that reflected their European localities. Scandinavians also demonstrated many of the same regional variations as did the Germans, with immigrants clumping in regionally specific congregations dependent on the local area of origin. These elements faded over time, but still remained important elements of American Lutheranism until the end of mass immigration after World War I.

But there were even more complications, especially within Germany. With the religious and political upheavals and changes from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the religious patterns were also often disrupted. A Lutheran territory might find itself coming under the rule of Reformed or Roman Catholic rulers, or combined with another territory of differing religious background. Then what would become of the territorial church? In some places, especially in western Germany where the German Reformed church was strong, the local territorial church might consist of separate groupings of Lutheran and Reformed congregations, both under the rule of the local state. In some areas of Germany, Lutherans and Reformed Protestants developed long traditions of living and working together, habits that were continued in the United States, especially in the colonial-era “union” churches. Some American Lutherans felt very close to these other German Protestants, Reformed and Moravians alike. In other places, governmental pressure to combine Lutheran and Reformed led to greater confessional resistance, such as when the new Reformed rulers of Brandenburg-Prussia attempted to unite the largely Lutheran population with existing Reformed churches, the so-called Prussian Union of 1817. This forced attempt at union resulted in a confessional Lutheran backlash against the Reformed, one that especially colored the development of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod in the nineteenth-century United States. These different patterns and experiences meant that Lutheran and Reformed relations in Europe were varied and complicated, and these variations and complications would be transferred to the United States. Lutheran relations with Roman Catholicism remained rather uniformly negative throughout this period in Europe, and historically this antipathy remained a fairly constant pattern in the United States as well.

The Age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 1580–1675

European Lutheranism entered a new phase after the codification and adoption of the *Book of Concord* in 1580, a period often referred to as the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy. This period, especially in Germany, was dominated by attempts further to define and defend Lutheran theology by means of academic, university-based theology, by intellectual conflict with other Christians, and by open military conflict between Lutheran and Roman Catholic territories. The old charge that this was an age of “sterile” orthodoxy has largely been disproven; this period was important for the survival and development of German Lutheranism, and for the development of a rich Lutheran devotional and worship tradition. But the endemic warfare of this time also led to a steep decline in the societies of central Germany, one that took decades to remedy.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, European Lutheranism was on the defensive in many ways. The “growing edge” of Protestantism in Europe during this time had passed from Lutheranism to the Reformed Protestantism, and a number of the ruling families of German territories had switched to the Reformed camp. More ominously, the reforms of the papal church achieved under the Council of Trent (1545–1563) established a militant and resurgent Roman Catholicism that sought to regain “lost” territories and populations from the Protestants. This Roman Catholic “Counter-Reformation” saw aggressive attempts to win back Protestants, either by persuasive or coercive means. New Roman Catholic orders, such as the Jesuits, sought to carry the Counter-Reformation to all corners of Europe, and through missionaries to the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The Counter-Reformation was most successful in such eastern European countries as Poland and Lithuania, but also made significant inroads in Germany as well.

Although the military situation in Europe remained relatively quiet after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, a type of confessional “cold war” generally smoldered beneath the surface. This conflict “went hot” after 1618, with the Thirty Years’ War in Germany (1618–1648). This brutal and deeply destructive conflict began with Roman Catholic armies pressing northward into Lutheran territories, and almost completely overrunning them. At a critical point, with Protestant fortunes in Germany held in the balance, Swedish Lutheran king Gustavus Adolphus entered the field with his armies, and pushed the Catholic forces back into southern Germany. But with Gustavus Adolphus’s death on the battlefield in Lützen in 1632, the conflict degenerated into a bloody and destructive stalemate, in which both sides lost control of rampaging armies and German territories were devastated. Finally, the conflict was ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, with a general return to the prewar religious situation, but some areas of Germany lost between one-third

and two-thirds of their populations. The states gained even more control over the churches, which became departments of the states.

Theologically, the development of Lutheranism continued after the adoption of the *Book of Concord*, going in directions that were equally polemic and academic. Facing challenges from both the Reformed and the resurgent Roman Catholics, Lutherans had to defend themselves intellectually and to define themselves as over and against their opponents. Theological disputation was a “contact sport” in this time period, and Lutherans had to develop their skills and their positions in order to keep up. During his life, Martin Luther often spoke dismissively of the medieval Scholastic traditions, especially the Aristotelian philosophy that undergirded much of it. But the intellectual *lingua franca* (“common language”) of seventeenth-century Europe was Aristotelianism, and Lutheran theologians after Luther quickly adopted Aristotelian philosophy as their means to express Lutheran theology, even if Luther himself had hated Aristotle. There was a trend to conceptualize and intellectualize theology; true faith was expressed in terms of “correct doctrine.” Getting doctrine straight was almost equal to having faith, so the proclamation of the gospel in sermons was often a primarily intellectual exercise.

This tendency can be overstated, however. Later critics often lambasted this period of “Protestant Scholasticism” as a period of “dead” orthodoxy, and suggested that the subjective element of faith and piety was nowhere to be found. Certainly, some of these stereotypes did have some basis in reality, but this is to overlook the deep Lutheran piety of this troubled period, as expressed in the hymns of Phillip Nicolai, Paul Gerhardt, and Johann Crüger, and the Lutheran spiritual classic, Johann Arndt’s *True Christianity*, written in 1606. But because of the Thirty Years’ War and its devastations, the moral life of Lutheran Germany declined precipitously, and church life slipped badly as well. However, the focus on the development of “correct doctrine” also has had its supporters among later Lutherans, especially in the United States, who have looked to seventeenth-century scholastic Lutheranism as a golden age of Lutheran clarity, and who have sought to repristinate the theology of this period. It is often the case that later Lutherans have either loved or hated the Lutheranism of the seventeenth century.

Some of the problems within seventeenth-century Lutheranism can also be traced to church leaders and the clergy within the European state churches. The close relationship and support between church and state led some church leaders to see themselves essentially as state officials, whose primary allegiance it sometimes seemed was to the state. Some Lutheran pastors were educated in the rarified atmosphere of the German universities and Protestant Scholasticism, and embodied these characteristics in their clerical careers. Other pastors were poorly educated and

had difficulty in articulating both the gospel and Lutheran distinctives. Again, this criticism can be overstated, but there were many church leaders who seemed to be incapable of providing spiritual and theological leadership to their congregations. Granted, this was a very difficult period of time, but many of these troubling trends continued even after the relative calm and slow rebuilding that were occasioned after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. One hundred and fifty years after its inauguration in 1517, it seemed to some that the power of the Lutheran Reformation had run out of steam.

Pietism and Awakenings

Or perhaps it had not run out steam. In the late seventeenth century, there was a wave of renewal and awakening movements in Europe, a cluster of movements that have been described overall as “Religions of the Heart” for their emphasis on the subjective and personal elements of the Christian faith. This cluster would include such Christian groups as the Jansenists within Roman Catholicism, some of the Puritans and later the Methodists in England, the Moravians in Germany, and, among the continental Protestants, the movement known as Pietism.

Pietism has been dismissed and caricatured by some later Lutherans as a deviation from “true” Lutheranism because of its stress on personal conversion and sanctification, but in many ways Lutheran Pietism is simply a restatement of theological and religious themes that can be traced from Luther through many of the later Lutheran theologians. Lutheran Pietism forced Lutheran churches and church leaders to return to an emphasis on the development of personal faith within the believer, something that had diminished within Lutheranism during the turbulent years of the seventeenth century. It would be wrong to overstress the changes brought by Pietism, however, as much of what they urged was in harmony with Luther and with the earlier traditions of Lutheran religious practices and faith.

The “father” of German Lutheran Pietism was a Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt, Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705). When a new edition of Arndt’s *True Christianity* was published in 1675, Spener added to the work an introduction strongly critical of the state-church Lutheranism of his day. This introduction was eventually republished independently under the title *Pia Desideria* (“Pious Wishes”) and became a sensation. In this work, Spener decries the “spiritual desolation” of his age, conditions that he attributes to the spiritual decay of the church and especially of the pastors. Spener graphically describes the moral laxity of the churches of his day, and the inability or disinclination of the pastors to do anything about it. As a pastor himself, Spener knew the difficulty of trying to attack these problems, so he suggested the development of

“conventicles,” small groups of lay Christians who would meet together for Bible study and mutual encouragement in true and living faith. These believers would be guided through the *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”), a directed path by which the believer would move, step by step, to a deeper and genuine Christian faith.

Spener’s criticisms of the church and his proposals for renewal were highly controversial. Many Lutherans, lay and clergy, welcomed his renewing vision and sought to implement them in their local congregations. But many others, especially church leaders, were highly critical of Spener and the Pietist movement. They thought that his emphasis on active faith and sanctification was essentially a form of “works righteousness,” which many attributed to the influence of Reformed Protestantism. Pietism played down the importance of “correct doctrine” as a key to the church, and instead urged a “living faith,” leading the Lutheran Orthodox theologians to attack the Pietists as being doctrinally suspect and indeterminate. Church leaders found the concept of the conventicle to be a “dangerous innovation” in which laypeople without proper theological training and guidance from their pastors would be led into heresy and error. Others worried that the creation of conventicles within local congregations would lead to the creation of groups of “super Christians” who would consider themselves better than the rest of the congregation, and even better than the pastor, if he were not one of the spiritually developed. To be sure, there were instances where all of these criticisms of Pietism proved accurate, but in many other cases the Pietist pastors and conventicles proved to be forces for deep renewal within the Lutheran churches. In some cases, criticism of the Pietists came merely out of jealousy, embarrassment, and fear among pastors and church leaders of lay religious activity. Women, too, were active in Pietist circles, and this participation also resulted in additional criticism.

The reception of Pietism within European Lutheranism varied from one state church to another. In some of the territorial churches, and among the church superintendents in Germany and bishops in Scandinavia, the Pietist initiatives were welcomed and Pietist pastors were encouraged. In other places, church leaders maintained a harsh opposition to Pietism in whatever form, and Pietist activities had to go underground or keep a very low profile in order to survive. Pietism itself took on institutional forms, especially through the formation of the University of Halle by August Hermann Francke (1663–1727). Besides the university itself, Halle also included a cluster of related educational and social ministry institutions at which the Pietist pastors and missionaries were trained, and from where a worldwide network of Pietist ministries and activities was directed.

In many ways similar to Lutheran Pietism were the Moravians. This group has its roots in the pre-Reformation followers of Jan Hus in Bohemia and Moravia,

some of whom in 1722 found refuge from Roman Catholic persecution at Herrnhut, the estate of Ludwig von Zinzendorf, in Saxony. Zinzendorf, who had been influenced by Spener and Francke, developed an awakened community of believers who spread out from Herrnhut all over Europe and beyond, preaching Christian renewal and ministering to both Christians and non-Christians. They were some of the first Protestant missionaries, and by their example and challenge pushed the Lutheran Pietists themselves into global missionary activity. Both Moravians and Lutheran Pietists alike had a strong ecumenical bent, believing that the rigid doctrinal and denominational boundaries that church officials had erected were artificial and damaging. They themselves were open to relations with any “true Christian,” and often worked in conjunction with one another. In the colonial United States, Pietist Lutheran leaders such as Henry Melchior Muhlenberg sometimes worked together with the Moravians, but often came into sharp conflict with them as well.

Most of the Lutheran Pietist leaders could well be considered “churchly” Pietists, in that they wished to work within the established Lutheran churches of their time, and did not consider separation from them. Many of the Lutheran leaders in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were exactly this, moderate churchly Pietists, and their commitments were deeply stamped on American Lutheranism. But there were separatist elements within European Pietism during this time as well, groups that considered it necessary to leave the state-church congregations to form their own independent congregations. These separatist or radical Pietists believed that those who were spiritually converted Christians could no longer stay within the spiritually mixed state-church congregations, especially those with “unconverted” pastors, and that “spiritual” Christians had to form pure and separate congregations of their own. Such radical Pietist groups arose in Germany in the eighteenth century, such as the Dunkers and the Brethren, and many of these groups immigrated to Pennsylvania, complicating matters for the colonial American Lutherans. A similar dynamic would arise in Scandinavia and among Scandinavian American Lutherans in the nineteenth century.

The Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century and Rationalism

The eighteenth century saw a radical transformation of the intellectual climate of Europe, a grouping of ideas and assumptions that came to be known as the Enlightenment, from the German term *Aufklärung*. The intellectuals who developed the set of Enlightenment principles essentially presided over a radical transformation of epistemology, or the theories of knowledge and authority. These intellectuals

dismissed the traditional forms of knowledge and authority, which had been static conceptions of divine revelation, and the traditions of Western culture that surrounded them. These new thinkers, rather, privileged human reason as central to knowledge, especially the knowledge that came into the human senses through their examination of the natural world. Humans, through the development of their faculty of reason, could come to know the essence of the created world that the God of creation had placed in nature. Such an intellectual movement also necessitated a complete transformation of the ideas of the human person (anthropology): human persons had to be essentially good, or at least perfectible, and able to train their minds through reason to make moral progress for themselves and for human society. Humans were the center of creation and the human mind the highest order of creation. The Enlightenment had an air of optimism to it, that human civilization was progressing and would continue to progress if led by “reasonable” and enlightened leaders.

In defining religion, the Enlightenment thinkers took a range of positions, from “reasoned” and enlightened forms of Christianity to outright Deism. Many moderate Enlightenment thinkers believed that traditional religions, such as Christianity itself, could be molded through the elements of Enlightenment rationality, to “purify” them of their irrational, medieval accretions. One example of this approach can be seen in the works of the English philosopher John Locke, who wrote a book entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, giving an essentially rationalistic explanation of traditional Christianity. Other, more radical figures, such as Voltaire in France and Thomas Paine in America, sought to completely replace traditional, “revealed,” and irrational religions with a rational, universal Deism. Deists believed in a rational Creator God who created the world, embedded in it the rational laws of nature, and then set the world to run on its own, without divine interventions or interferences. Human beings, through their rational faculties, could discover the laws and will of the Creator God in nature, and act rationally and ethically on the basis of this knowledge. There was usually some element of some sort of final judgment, in which the divine would sort out human beings on the basis of their moral actions, or lack thereof.

Obviously, the Enlightenment was a huge challenge to traditional religions such as Christianity, which had been based on the ideas of special revelation and God’s continual and often miraculous intervention in the created order. Enlightenment ideas sought to undercut most of the assumptions and ideas on which Christianity itself had been based for centuries, and often ridiculed its practices and theologies. The Enlightenment’s direct impact on Christianity was rather minimal in the eighteenth century, however, as these thinkers were a rather rarified group of

intellectuals who often conversed primarily with each other. Indeed, many Enlightenment thinkers, such as the American “Founding Fathers” (Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, and others) believed that the maintenance of traditional Christianity was vital to public morality and virtue, as the morality derived from universal reason was only available to the “enlightened” and reasonable elite. But they saw particular forms of religion as at root only important for their moral characteristics, which they saw as derived only from universal morality available through the natural creation and not from special revelation. To them, Jesus was above all the teacher of this universal morality, and they downplayed any idea that he was especially divine or had miraculous powers.

The direct impact of the Enlightenment on the churches came through the universities where the pastors were educated and trained. The philosophical and religious assumptions of the Enlightenment began to affect the educational processes, and in turn had an impact on how some pastors preached and conducted their churches, a development within Western Christianity that is sometimes referred to as religious rationalism. There were important rationalist theologians within the German church, such as Baron Christian von Wolff, Johann Semler, and Johann Mosheim, who sought to develop Lutheranism on a “reasonable” basis. Rationalistic clergy saw their primary responsibility as inculcating universal morality within their parishioners and raising the moral and educational level of their communities. Among some of these rationalistic clergy, traditional Lutheran law-and-gospel sermons were replaced with addresses about such things as the merits of vaccinations, or discourses on the proper methods of farming or similar subjects. Rationalistic clergy continued to teach the Bible and the catechisms, but now as essentially moralistic texts shorn of miraculous, superstitious, or unreasonable elements. Of course, many other pastors maintained an emphasis on traditional religion, and the congregations, being essentially conservative institutions, were slow to change. There were, however, definite signs of Enlightenment influence within the churches, especially in the cities, by the end of the eighteenth century.

Christian theological writing began to change as well, especially on the university and academic levels. One of the clearest examples of his shift can be seen in the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), in whom the transition from Pietist spirituality to Romanticism can be clearly seen. Schleiermacher was deeply concerned that the essential insights of Christianity were being lost among the educated classes of his day, and in 1799 wrote a work entitled *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, in which he attempted to convince them of the value of Christianity. But to do so, Schleiermacher had to argue on essentially rationalistic grounds; since he could not claim special, revealed, and divine

authority for Christianity, his argument was reduced to suggesting that Christianity as he styled it was the highest and most refined form of the universal religion and morality, which was available to all rational beings. This strategy, which is the basis of most modern forms of liberal Christianity, was hardly successful in winning over the “cultured despisers” of traditional or orthodox Christianity, but began to create an increasingly wide gap between Christian traditionalists and the new Christian liberals, such as in the new Unitarian movement. The intellectual world of western Europe began to move away from traditional Christianity, and Christians themselves became increasingly divided among themselves as to how to address this growing challenge.

Other developments in the eighteenth century affected traditional European Lutheranism. Memories of the devastations of confessional warfare of the previous century, combined with the “awakening” movements’ drift away from theological disputation and the Enlightenment stress on universal rather than particular forms of religion, all led to the development of Christian ecumenism, in which particular differences between Christian groups were downplayed and commonalities were stressed. The idea of confessional strife between Christian groups, whether theological disputation or outright persecution or warfare, was dismissed as “primitive.” The growing and centralizing power of the new European states, such as Prussia in Germany, combined a degree of Enlightenment religious toleration with a rigid state control of all elements of life, including religion. In some places, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire in central Europe, this made life somewhat easier for the minority Lutheran populations, which had suffered under persecution by the Roman Catholic authorities.

The Enlightenment was not, however, enamored of democracy, which it viewed with horror as the rule of the unenlightened and uneducated masses. Even in the new United States, the direct power of the people was limited by franchise and by forms of government that blunted the direct effects of popular sovereignty. But with the French Revolution of 1789, and the increasingly radical nature of that reform, movements toward popular democracy in Europe accelerated. The military conquests of the French emperor Napoleon, though eventually reversed, permanently altered the political and social landscapes of Europe, especially in France and Germany. Because Lutheranism was a state church, changes on the political level could not help but affect the churches. Although the ruling elites attempted to regain their autocratic control over church and state after the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the “cat was out of the bag” and popular forces of democracy continued to push for greater freedoms.

European Lutheranism in the Nineteenth Century

Tied to the European states and threatened by rationalism and the Enlightenment, most European Lutheran churches were at a fairly low state of vitality by the end of the eighteenth century. In the next century, they would be both challenged and reinvigorated by movements from below, such as lay awakening movements in Scandinavia and Germany, and by the resurgence of confessional Lutheranism, which often came through individual pastors and theologians. The rise of the mission movements during this century saw the expansion of Lutheranism into the Americas and Australia through European Lutheran emigrants, and through missionaries to native populations in Africa and Asia. Although some church leaders were hostile or skeptical to these directions, others found room to cooperate with these popular movements, which led to a stronger Lutheranism during the century. This was important, because the century also saw the rise of strong secularist movements hostile to religion, such as the new science of Darwin and others, the socialist and communist movements, and other intellectual challenges, such as Freudian psychology.

The awakening movements in Scandinavia and Germany during the nineteenth century drew on the heritage of Lutheran Pietism, but also were influenced by elements of popular democracy and other mass movements of the time. The revivals of the nineteenth century saw a strong emphasis on lay preaching and lay Bible study, along with a critique of the state churches that contained a strong suggestion of class resentment. There was also an element of incipient nationalism in some of these movements, especially in Norway and Finland. The Moravian movement in the late eighteenth century formed a bridge between the older Pietism and the new awakenings of the nineteenth century, but as that period moved along, its influence was supplanted by Lutheran connections with the strong and vigorous Anglo-American religious revivals that were making themselves felt around the world.

The Scandinavian awakenings began with sporadic revivals early in the century, and crescendoed through the middle of the century, especially from the 1840s to the 1870s. The revival movement later divided between those who wanted to remain within state-church Lutheranism and those who developed independent movements—Covenant, Methodist, Baptist, and eventually Pentecostal. These awakenings had a profound effect on Scandinavian American Lutheranism as well; most of the leaders of these American Lutheran denominations were deeply affected by them. The pioneer of this awakening was the Norwegian lay preacher and revivalist Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824), who combined a deeply spiritual revivalism with a populist and nationalistic movement. Hauge ran afoul of the church and

secular authorities, and was imprisoned for long stretches of time, but his activities (especially his preaching) had a deep impact on a significant portion of Norwegian Lutheranism. His message urged repentance of sin, conversion, and living a holy and sanctified life. Hauge urged his followers to remain within the state church, but they also gathered in local *Bedehus* (“prayer houses”) for revivalistic preaching.

The next generation of revivals blanketed Scandinavia at mid-century. In Norway, Hauge’s mantle fell on a theological professor, Gisle Johnson (1822–1894), who directed a major revival movement in the 1850s and 1860s. The revivalist movement in Sweden was led by another layperson, Carl Olof Rosenius (1816–1868), who was initially “converted” by George Scott, an English Methodist preacher working in Stockholm. Although a popular and effective preacher, Rosenius’s main impact came through his devotional writings and by publishing a popular magazine called *Pietisten*, which was influential throughout Scandinavia. He also founded the National Evangelical Foundation in Sweden to direct the work of revivals, and which also encouraged popular and deeply effective hymnwriters and composers, such as Carolina Sandell Berg (1832–1903) and Oscar Ahnfeldt (1813–1882). In Denmark, the populist vision and hymns of N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) had a deep and abiding influence on Danish Lutheranism, though distinctive elements of his theology, such as the theological primacy of the Apostles Creed, did not have a permanent influence. The Pietist leader Vilhelm Beck (1829–1901) led the revival movement in Denmark, but was equally influential through the establishment of the “Inner Mission” movement, which spread across Europe, combining revival preaching with social reform. In Finland, important revivalists like Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), Paavo Ruotsalainen (1777–1852), and Frederick Hedberg (1811–1893) led popular movements inside and outside the state church.

The nineteenth-century Pietist awakenings in Scandinavia were deeply concerned with both personal and societal transformation. Their strict personal morality has often been ridiculed by outside critics who allege that the Pietists “robbed the joy out of life,” a charge that is actually quite baseless. Scandinavia was deeply affected during this time by the rampant abuse of alcohol, and the temperance movement, pioneered by Pietist leaders, had a huge positive influence on Scandinavian life and society. Through the Inner Mission movement, the revival leaders developed widespread social-service programs long before the state took notice of these needs. This emphasis also transferred to Lutheran immigrants to the United States, for whom these social-service and educational institutions became the hallmark of their denominations.

Later in the nineteenth century, the awakening movement in Scandinavia also developed a separatist wing, with the formation of the Mission Covenant in Sweden

under P. P. Waldenström, and in the Methodist and Baptist movements in Scandinavia and Germany. Toward the end of the century, leaders such as Frederick Fran-son and Lewi Pethrus, influenced by Anglo-American Protestantism, brought the Free Church and Pentecostal movements into the world of European Lutheranism. These later developments were deeply trans-Atlantic movements, with strong and repeated influences between Europe and America.

Confessional Movements in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Another important element of nineteenth-century European Lutheranism was the revival of confessional Lutheranism. This movement, essentially conservative in the best senses of the word, sought to regain the distinctive and particular elements of Lutheran confessional identity that had been downplayed by the Pietists and scorned by the rational Enlightenment. The leaders of this movement, some influenced by the Romantic movement, sought to rebuild traditional Lutheran theology and practice, which in some areas were threatened by movements toward a general pan-Protestantism, especially in Germany. One of the first leaders in this was the German theologian Claus Harms (1778–1855), who for the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1817 issued his own contemporary set of ninety-five theses, attacking rationalism and the loss of Lutheran theological distinctives. His call for a return to the Lutheran confessions reverberated throughout Lutheran territories, and made him an influential teacher and writer.

The nineteenth-century movement toward German unification was led by the rulers of Prussia, whose continual expansion of their state systematically absorbed the territories of northern and central Germany, sometimes by force. For a number of reasons, the Reformed Prussian ruling family sought a union of Reformed and Lutheran churches in their newly acquired territories. In 1821, the Prussian Union, under King Frederick William III attempted to impose a single liturgy on the Protestant churches within his territory, provoking vigorous opposition from a number of the Lutheran territorial churches and their leaders. Confessional Lutheran pastors such as Martin Stephan in Saxony and Friedrich Brunn in Nassau protested the enforced “unionism,” and some even formed independent “free” Lutheran bodies in Germany. Other church leaders, such as E. W. Hengstenberg in Berlin wrote and organized against what they saw as the loss of Lutheran identity. Inspired by this movement, some Lutherans left Germany for America, including C. F. W. Walther of the Missouri Synod and Johannes Grabau of the Buffalo Synod. They carried this confessional revival with them, while other American Lutheran leaders were simultaneously moving in a more definite confessional direction in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The confessional revival also influenced some of the German university faculties, especially at the University of Erlangen in Bavaria. The “Erlangen school” was an important element in the revival of confessional Lutheran identity, both in Germany and among Lutherans in Scandinavia and the United States. Theologians such as J.K.C. von Hoffmann, Gottlieb Harless, and others sought to strengthen a Lutheran confessional identity over and against the Reformed, the Roman Catholics, and rationalist and secularist forces. Influenced by the confessional revival and the Erlangen school, German pastor and theologian Wilhelm Löhe organized a famous mission school at Neuendettelsau, which sent confessional Lutheran pastors out into the world especially to work with German immigrants. These pastors were very important in the origins and shaping of the Iowa and Missouri synods in the United States. Löhe was also important in the Inner Mission movement, especially in his attempt to establish the deaconess movement both in Europe and America.

The Mission Movement

Although the European Roman Catholics led the first wave of European missions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European Protestants began to participate in this worldwide movement during the eighteenth century, with the Moravians leading the way. Copying the Moravians, and under the influence of Pietism, European Lutherans began to send their own missionaries abroad. The first mission fields were among areas of the North, such as to the Sami in Scandinavia and the Inuit people in Greenland. Missionaries followed European Lutheran immigrants to North America, the Caribbean, and other areas, and America would remain the object of European missions throughout the nineteenth century. European mission activity often went hand in hand with colonial activity but, despite initial attempts by the Danish and Swedish monarchies to develop colonies, these efforts did not last. Since Germany was so weak and divided internally, the Germans did not enter the colonial “race” until after German unification in 1870. In 1706, the Danish king sent the Lutheran missionary Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) to India, where he developed a successful mission at Tranquebar.

European Lutheran mission activities were greatly enhanced in the nineteenth century, not initially through the efforts of Lutheran territorial or state churches, but through independent mission societies and mission schools. These institutions were developed under the influence of Pietism and the awakening movements, and by contact with the example of voluntary mission societies in the Anglo-American world. The initial Lutheran mission society was organized in Basel in 1780, followed by Berlin (1824), the Rhenish Mission (1828), Leipzig (1834), and a flood of

other societies to follow. Mission societies were initially formed in Norway beginning in 1842, in Denmark in 1821, in Sweden in 1835, and in Finland in 1859. Some of these mission organizations were cooperative ventures with other Protestants, while some were exclusively Lutheran. Many of these mission groups were independent of their local Lutheran churches, but others worked in close cooperation with them. A number of Lutheran state churches, such as the Church of Sweden, eventually developed their own official missions. Along with the mission societies came the mission training schools, such as Neuendettelsau, Brekum, Hermannsburg, and St. Chrischona in Germany, and Fjellstad, Ahlsborg, and Stavanger in Scandinavia, which were created to train pastors and other workers for the mission fields; quite a number of Lutheran pastors and leaders in America can be traced to these schools.

Although Lutherans were somewhat slow to join the greater nineteenth-century mission movement, they participated in it with great success, forming Lutheran missions in many areas of Asia and Africa, but especially in India and China, and in southern and eastern Africa. Although their mission churches in America had their own struggles with building an indigenous Lutheranism in the United States, these also caught the mission “fever” and began to cooperate with the European Lutheran mission societies, eventually forming their own independent missions.

Liberalism and Secularism

Although European Lutheranism showed great movements of renewal, awakening, and mission through the nineteenth century, it was against the background of growing liberalism and secularism, which was deeply affecting the entire continent. The European Lutheran state churches remained strong during this period of time, but worrying trends, especially first among the educated classes, and then among the middle classes, of a movement away from Christian practice and belief could not be masked. Certainly, in the Enlightenment the elites (Schleiermacher’s “cultured despisers of Christianity”) were disaffected, but in the great democratic movements of the nineteenth century others joined the parade. The rise of the “new” science embodied by Darwin seemed to suggest that religion was no longer necessary, and that science and technology could not only explain the universe, they also had the potential to “save” it, in ways that seemed better than the answers provided by religion. Later elements, such as the psychology of Sigmund Freud, not only denigrated religious belief as an unhealthy neurosis, but suggested “salvific” forms of therapy. Other antireligious movements arose, especially socialism and communism, appealing both to the educated and working classes. While some elements of socialism were open to working with organized religion and created forms of Christian socialism

toward the end of the century, more militant forms of socialism and the communist movement of Marx and Engel strongly opposed religion, seeing it as a bourgeois plot to keep the working classes enslaved. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth, many western European countries saw a rise in movements for labor reform and democracy, and these movements often came to see the state churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, as the enemies of progress in their country; when these new elements took political power, they often strongly curbed the power and influence of the churches.

European Christians were divided as to how to respond. Many in the churches attempted to ignore the new movements and to continue on with their work. The Inner Mission and other groups attempted to work with the disaffected workers in the new industrial cities, with limited results. Some traditionalists “came out swinging” with critiques of the new movements and updated restatements of traditional Christian theology. But there was also the rise of a new movement of liberal Christian theology that sought to take the critiques of secularism seriously and to reshape Christian theology and practice to meet the new situation. German Lutheran theologians Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) were two such liberal Protestant thinkers, and their work creatively responded to this new situation, even if, in the end, they were no more successful in countering it than Schleiermacher had been before them. But the rise of liberal Protestant theology did seriously divide the churches, just when they needed to meet the new world with a strong united front.

Conclusion

This overview of European Lutheranism from its beginnings with Martin Luther to the end of the nineteenth century has been primarily to show the European movements and developments that influenced the growth of American Lutheranism. Certainly, this development was, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, essentially a one-way street, with things flowing from Europe to America. In the nineteenth century, however, there was more of a creative interchange between the two worlds, although the European side still definitely predominated. With the end of mass European immigration to America around the First World War, and the maturation of uniquely American forms of Lutheranism, there was less of an interchange between the two, and when there was interchange, it was more on an equal footing. Indeed, because of the effects of war and secularism in Europe, American Lutheranism has at times during the twentieth century taken the lead. So it is to the history of the development of those uniquely American forms of Lutheranism that we now turn.

RASMUS JENSEN AND DANISH EXPLORATION

He thought he was going to India. He wasn't even supposed to be in North America, but he ended up dying there, and never did make it to Asia. But one thing makes us remember the name of Rasmus Jensen, that he was the very first Lutheran pastor in North America.

In the seventeenth century, all the European nations were establishing trading posts in Asia, and King Christian IV of Denmark wanted to do so as well. So, in 1619, the king sent out two expeditions to India. One traveled the usual route around the southern tip of Africa and established a Danish colony in India. The other, under the command of an adventurer and explorer, Jens Munk, went the other way, trying to force its way through the legendary Northwest Passage. It was believed back then that you could sail between Greenland and Canada, across the Arctic and into the Pacific, in a shortcut to the riches of India, China, and Japan.

Among his crew, Munk was assigned a young Lutheran pastor named Rasmus Jensen. Jensen had studied at the University of Copenhagen and was appointed by the king to be a "Ship Pastor to the East Indies," in charge of the spiritual life and condition of the expedition itself, and to the Danish colony in India once he had arrived. He was promised a salary of one hundred dollars a year.

The Munk expedition through the Northwest Passage was neither the first nor the last of such attempts, but it did share one thing in common with many others: it ended in tragedy. Munk's ships sailed into the Canadian Arctic regions in the summer of 1619, entering Hudson Bay in August. But despite their constant attempts to do so, they could not find a suitable water route to the riches of Asia. In late September, with the Arctic winter quickly upon them, Munk made the fateful decision to spend the winter in Hudson Bay, hoping to find the fabled route west in the next spring. They moored their ships near the present town of Churchill, Manitoba.

Initially, the winter was not too bad. The holidays of the Christian year were regularly celebrated, including St. Martin's Day on November 10, in honor of the fourth-century saint and his namesake, Martin Luther. At Christmas, Pastor Jensen celebrated the customary religious services in the traditional liturgy of the Church of Denmark. Captain Munk recorded the following entry: "The Holy Christmas Day was celebrated in customary Christian fashion. We had a sermon and Communion; and our offerings to the minister after the sermon were according to our means."¹ Since they did not have money, they gave Pastor Jensen white fox skins.

Those fox skins came just in time, as the winter suddenly turned frigid with the New Year. The expedition was short on food and supplies, and their health began to decline rapidly. Before Christmas, Pastor Jensen had already presided over the funerals of two crew members, a boatswain and the ship's surgeon. For the funeral of the surgeon, they had to wait two days for the cold to let up, and even then Pastor Jensen had to abbreviate the service, as the cold was so bitter.

After Christmas, Pastor Jensen became so weak from poor food and illness that he, like the rest of the crew, could barely survive. By January 23, Pastor Jensen was confined to his bed, and the log records, “. . . the minister sat up in his berth and preached to the crew, which was his last sermon in this world.” Munk later recorded on February 20, 1620, “. . . toward evening the Rev. Rasmus Jensen died after having been sick for some time.”² Thus ended the career of the first Lutheran pastor in North America. Munk and only two other men survived that brutal winter, and made their way back to Denmark.

Believing that he been called to India, Pastor Jensen found himself instead stranded in the harsh winter of the Canadian Arctic. He ministered faithfully to the crew for as long as he was able, leading worship and celebrating the sacraments, and even preaching from his sickbed, until he could no longer do so. He was buried in an unmarked grave on a foreign shore far from home, the first of many brave Lutheran pastors to serve in this New World.

Notes

1. Captain Jens Munk, “*Navigato Septentrionalis*” (1624), quoted in Carl R. Cronmiller, *A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada*, vol. 1 (N.p.: Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada, 1961), 16.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.