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Letter from the Chairman: Over One Hundred Years of Student Publications at Concordia Seminary

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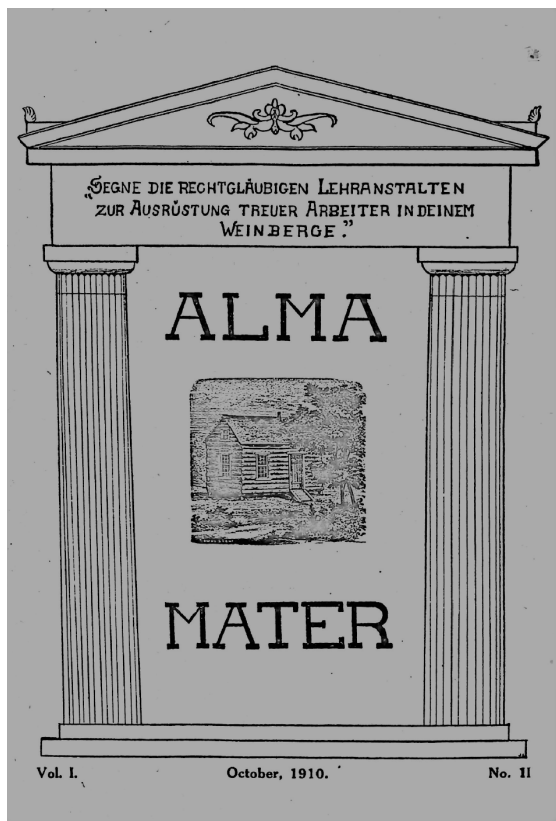
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Letter from the Chairman: Over One Hundred Years of Student Publications at Concordia Seminary

For this year's issue of *Grapho* we are focusing on the theme, "The Light from Generation to Generation." Obviously, this echoes the motto of our seminary, "Ἀνωθεν τὸ φῶς" or "The light from above." But the student publications committee also felt that this theme captures well what we do here at this seminary: prepare men and women to teach present and future generations about *the* light, the Lord Jesus. In exegetical classes we learn how the writers of the Scriptures pointed their original hearers to this light. In historical classes we learn how Christians in the past taught and thought about the light. In systematic courses we learn how to speak this message about the light of the world for the world of today. In practical course we get into the nitty gritty of preaching and teaching and leading others to point them to this same light. As students at this institution, we are acutely aware that we owe a great debt to the pastors and other faithful Christians who have taught us the faith and we hope to pass on this very same faith to others in our future service to the church. We would like this issue to explore this central task more.

After this letter, you will see how some of our writers have contributed to this discussion, but first I would like to offer a brief picture of the long history of student publications at Concordia Seminary. My hope is that this glimpse into student publications from over one hundred years ago will help us gain some perspective on how the conversations in this journal might contribute to the task of passing on the light of Jesus Christ from generation to generation.

A quick look over at the official archives of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Concordia Historical Institute (CHI), reveals that there is a long and varied history of student publications at Concordia Seminary. These publications have taken a variety of forms and names over the

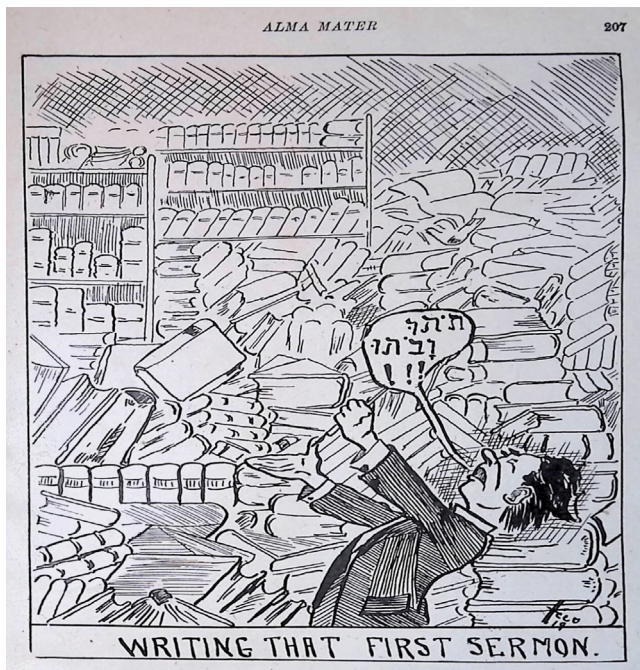


The cover of the inaugural issue of *Alma Mater*. The German text reads: "Bless orthodox institutions of learning for the equipping of faithful workers in your vineyard."

years. The earliest publication I am aware of calls itself *Alma Mater* and began in 1910. This publication ran continuously under various names until 1974. CHI has records of numerous other student publications, such as *The Vicar* (1943–1953), *The Quad* (1952–1968), *Spectrum* (1968–2000), *Concordia Seminary Student Journal* (1983–2007), and *Around the Tower* (2000–2007). There are records of numerous other publications as well. Some of these publications are in the style of an academic journal, like *Grapho*, others take an even more eclectic approach and feature sections on poetry, humor, sports, updates from other synodical colleges and the like. Some publications were published quite frequently, even weekly. Some are quite brief and functioned more like a newsletter. So even though the present publication was only started in 2018, *Grapho* is continuing a long tradition of the various student bodies of this institution, a tradition that goes back well over a hundred years.

I would like to offer a few brief observations from the earliest issues of *Alma Mater* since they offer us a window into student life from such a long time ago. When *Alma Mater* began in 1910, the current campus had not been built yet. The seminary made its home in a single building over on Jefferson Avenue. This student publication was started by students upon the approval of the faculty and was published monthly. Issues were distributed throughout synodical colleges as well as to subscribing alumni for fifty cents annually. While most articles and the like are in English, a significant number are also in German. Occasionally a piece written in Latin also appears. The inaugural issue has the following to say about the languages that would be accepted for submission, which gives a sense of the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the expected readership and contributors: “Any language spoken within the bounds of the Missouri Synod is acceptable. However, correspondents in Tamil, Portuguese, Slavonian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Estonian will be requested to furnish their own interpretation.”¹

One also finds a news section in each month’s issue reporting news from synodical schools and colleges across the country. Many of these other institutions will be familiar to present readers such as Seward, St. Paul, and Ft. Wayne. However, present readers may also be surprised to find news bulletins from synodical colleges in Greensboro and Conover, North Carolina; Oakland, California;



A cartoon from the humor section of *Alma Mater*. The student quotes Genesis 1 in Hebrew, “formless and void.”

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Winfield, Kansas; and two different colleges in New Orleans.

One issue notes, in reference to Franz Pieper, the seminary president at the time, “At present he is preparing to issue a larger work on Dogmatical Theology.”² The reference, of course, is to Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*, a work that readers are certainly familiar with.

The humor section features jokes, cartoons, and other humorous stories. While many of the jokes do not quite land for contemporary readers as well as they may have for readers from a century ago, some are still very relevant: “What is the difference between some students and a mirror? A mirror reflects without talking; some students talk without reflecting.”³

In discussing how the seminary’s athletic programs got their start, it is reported that the first sport to gain official approval from the faculty was baseball. Prior to this the faculty were strongly opposed to athletics at the seminary. Other sports were not approved until later. Concordia Seminary successfully fielded a baseball team in the spring of 1910 and apparently was able to win games against Washington University and St. Louis University.⁴ One imagines that the intervening century has unfortunately diminished this institution’s chances of success against such universities again.

Although not everything in this publication is as light-hearted. One can also observe how current events affected the seminary. Later volumes reflect on the outbreak of World War I. One author forcefully asserts that this new European war is ultimately a result of God’s judgment on the nations of Europe: “God has stricken them for their disobedience and unbelief. The just retribution which is overtaking them is so bloody in its nature, so appalling in its consequences as to baffle description—words cannot be found to give an adequate portrayal thereof.” Yet he continues by pointing out that this situation also serves as a warning to those in the Missouri Synod to be faithful in continuing to proclaim the pure teaching of the Scriptures that has been entrusted to them by God: “Should we grow proud of our own wisdom and abilities to the detriment of God’s Word, then God would afflict us with a divine visitation as surely as He is even now laying low the proud and arrogant nations of Europe.”⁵ Of course, it was not long before the United States also became involved in the Great War and it ceased to be such a distinctly European problem. Nevertheless, these reflections show how some students reflected on the theological significance of world events around them.

Several years later another author reflects on the end of the war in 1918 and the experience of celebrating the same Christmas when things were all of a sudden so different after years of war:

Yet there is a change. We are changed. The events of five of the most momentous years in the history of mankind and of the last few days, which were the equivalent of another such five years, have not passed us by untouched. The peace which has descended from above with a God-given balm on the disrupted world is enriching our hearts, too, and the Christmas which we shall thus celebrate in color and sentiment, in force and depth of feeling, will differ from any which we have celebrated heretofore.⁷

While it may be difficult for us today to understand how it may have felt to live through a world war, the *Alma Mater's* reflections on the pandemic caused by the Spanish flu remind us that even “unprecedented” times are not quite so unique as we might imagine. They report multiple waves of the flu striking St. Louis, church services cancelled for weeks on end, classes cancelled and students sent home, professors and students getting sick even resulting in the death of one student. Classes were cancelled from December 1st to January 7th and students went home, though it is reported that about forty students stayed behind. Apparently, they kept themselves busy working in the city even delivering mail for the post office. It is even reported that this remnant of seminarians got into the habit of gathering for their morning devotions as early as four or five in the morning, though no reason is given for such early rising.⁷

We thank God that he has been faithful to allow this institution to continue to form students for ministry. We hope that the essays, poems, and other pieces contained in this present issue will help you to think about both the debt we owe to the generations of faithful Christians who have come before us as well as the task we ourselves have been given to faithfully preach and teach this one true light for future generations to come.

Kendall Davis
Student Publications Chairman
Holy Week 2022

Endnotes

1 William Dau, *Alma Mater* 1, no. 1 (1910): 11.

2 *Alma Mater* 1, no. 5 (1911).

3 *Alma Mater* 1, no. 6 (1911): 193.

4 C. Hoffmann, “Seminary Organism,” *Alma Mater* 1, no. 5 (1911): 142.

5 E. M., “The War a Reminder of Our Duties,” *Alma Mater* 5, no. 1 (1914): 13.

6 *Alma Mater* 9, no. 3 (1918): 93.

7 *Alma Mater* 9, nos. 4–5 (1919): 147.