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Perspectives on Evangelicalism/fundamentalism/ neo-conservatism

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Foreward

Under the arrangements worked out between Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS), Saskatoon, and Waterloo Lutheran Seminary for the publication of *Consensus* as a biannual journal, LTS is responsible for each year's Spring issue. The present issue is the first one to be brought out by LTS under this arrangement.

The subject we have chosen for consideration in this issue, contemporary evangelicalism/fundamentalism/neo-conservatism, is one which is of more than academic interest to the writers of the present essays and the readers of this journal. During the first year of the Evangelical Lutheran Church In Canada's existence, the *Canada Lutheran* carried many letters that showed there is a polarization between segments of the church that are labelled "liberal" on the one side and "conservative" on the other side. On 25-27 February 1987 a "Conservative Evangelical Lutheran Conference" in Calgary, Alberta, brought together approximately 150 persons, both clergy and laity, most of whom, one must assume, were sympathetic to the conservative and evangelical thrust of the conference. At LTS a significant percentage of students comes to us with a perspective that has been shaped strongly by evangelical/fundamentalist/neo-conservative traditions. Given these realities, Lutherans can no longer assume the evangelical/fundamentalist/neo-conservative movement is a phenomenon affecting only other denominations in other countries (especially the United States).

The debate on this subject within Lutheran circles is probably just in its beginning stages, and the writers of the present essays recognize this. It will soon become clear to readers that the essays are not all written from the same perspective; even the subject itself that is under consideration here remains

somewhat elusive—as is evident in the title we have given to this issue and in the diversity of terms used for the topic in the essays here presented. Thus, these essays are not so much definitive statements as they are invitations to dialogue and discussion starters. It is our hope that they will prompt some response and reaction—within the pages of future issues of this journal as well as elsewhere.

Although the essays are not presented as the last word on the subject, they do offer important perspectives for us to consider. In the opening essay, “The Religious Context of Neo-Conservatism”, Roger Nostbakken places the phenomenon of religious conservatism and fundamentalism “in the larger context of religious changes worldwide and in particular in the context of religious change in North America”. Walter Freitag’s essay is a historical look at the earlier fundamentalist phase of contemporary evangelicalism and its relation to developments in Canadian Lutheranism. The essay concludes with a discussion of the continuities and discontinuities between “Reformed fundamentalism”, “Lutheran evangelicalism” and “evangelical Lutheranism”. Erwin Buck’s very substantial essay gets at the crucial questions of the authority and the interpretation of the Bible by looking at the way the New Testament is read, interpreted and applied in the neo-conservative movement. In the course of his essay Buck raises major questions about the approach to scripture that many neo-conservative scholars employ. William Hordern is true to form in his contribution when he challenges a generally accepted dictum. In this case the truism he challenges is the one that says that conservative religion and conservative politics always go together. Hordern’s essay shows that there is an important segment of the conservative, evangelical wing of the church that is pursuing radical politics while retaining its conservative theological stance. Walter Koehler is the professor at LTS who is generally perceived as most in sympathy with the evangelical and neo-conservative movement, so he was a logical choice for an essay which would look at the movement under consideration from a positive perspective. His essay, entitled “A Look at the Positive Side of Neo-Evangelicalism”, does this. Finally, our part of this issue is brought to a close by Paul Eriksson. Although he is already in his third year at LTS, Eriksson is still a parish pastor at heart, and it is from this perspective that he looks at the neo-conservative movement in his essay.

Those of you who are familiar with LTS, Saskatoon, will recognize all of the above names as belonging to persons who are connected with that institution. Although we have enjoyed working together on this issue as faculty colleagues, it is not our intention to try to produce every issue of *Consensus* in this way. Future issues of *Consensus* that are the responsibility of LTS will draw on the theological talents of a much wider group of contributors so that this journal can meet the needs of as large a readership as possible.

John W. Kleiner
Number Editor