

**A CONFSSIONAL LUTHERAN REACTION TO
METHODISM IN AMERICA:
THE CASE OF FRIEDRICH WYNEKEN**

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On June 28, 1838, aspiring missionary Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken arrived in Baltimore on the *Apollo*.¹ Wyneken would rapidly emerge as one of the foremost leaders of German home missions for Lutherans in North America. His leadership abilities were recognized among confessional Lutheran Germans in America and in 1850 they elected him as the second president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Yet in the summer of 1838, Wyneken had no strategy, official instruction, or plan to start his mission work. Wyneken's first objective was to find some Lutherans in town and ask them for direction and guidance.² Coming from a country where almost everyone he knew was Lutheran (at least in name), this proved to be harder than expected.³

Historian Norman Threinen describes Wyneken's beliefs in 1838 as "awakened Christian but not yet a confessional Lutheran."⁴ Still, Wyneken was conscious of his Lutheran identity. After Wyneken wandered into an "Otterbein" (United Brethren of Christ, a German denomination with Methodist influences) worship service, Wyneken reportedly exclaimed "I don't know whether it is from God or from the devil! It is certainly not Lutheran!"⁵ In the course of the next few years, Wyneken frequently encountered Methodism on the American frontier. This forced him to develop his Lutheran distinctiveness. While other "awakened" Lutherans were drawn to Methodism, Wyneken underwent a theological, and deeply personal, transformation from awakened to confessional.

After a continued search, Wyneken was taken in by Pastor Johann

¹ *Baltimore Sun*, "Port of Baltimore—June 28" (June 29, 1838).

² Johann Christoph Wilhelm Lindemann, "Friedrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken: An Evangelist Among the Lutherans of North America," in *Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche*, by Eugen Adolf Wilhelm Krauß, trans. Sieghard Rein, 734–794 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1912), 4.

³ Michel Ange Bernard de Mangourit, *Travels in Hanover During the Years 1803 and 1804 Containing an Account of the Form of Government, Religion, Agriculture, Commerce, and Natural History of the Country* (London: Barnard & Sultzer, 1806), 56. De Mangourit, a diplomat and former ambassador to the United States writes: "Calvinism is very little prevalent in this electorate. There are still a few Roman Catholics in Hanover, properly so called; but they are much less numerous than during the last century."

⁴ Norman Threinen, "Wyneken and Nineteenth-Century German Lutheranism: An Attempt to Mobilize Confessional Lutherans in Germany in Behalf of Lutherans in North America," in *Lutheran Historical Conference* (1994), 116.

⁵ Lindemann, 4.

Haesbaert, who served at the Second German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Baltimore. Initially Haesbaert was suspicious of Wyneken for his interaction with the Otterbeins and other Methodists. However, after six weeks of service in Haesbaert's congregation, Haesbaert arranged for Wyneken to finally receive official instructions and a call from the Lutheran Pennsylvania Ministerium to serve German immigrants in and around the Fort Wayne area. In Pittsburg, while underway to his destination, Wyneken befriended Friedrich Schmidt, the editor of the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, which had just been founded earlier that year.⁶

This was one of the most important contacts Wyneken made in his early years in America. Historian Frederick Bente remarks that Schmidt's paper was, "the first German paper within the [Lutheran] General Synod which occasionally raised its voice against the apostasy of the *Observer* . . . the [*Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*] soon proved a thorn in the flesh of the liberals."⁷ Through Schmidt, Wyneken possessed a platform to share his experiences and make public appeals for aid for his mission work, while forming a relationship with a conservative branch of Lutheranism.

In Fort Wayne, Wyneken inherited a significant connection from his deceased predecessor, Jesse Hoover, in the form of the frontier church body—the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West. This thinly stretched synod, although small, had lofty aspirations. Its mission society actively gathered information on areas where a new congregation could be formed, or where vacancies occurred in existing congregations outside the synod. The mission-minded synod recognized both the need for more workers and bilingual ministry. Here Wyneken found fellow pastors who were working in similar situations and faced the same challenges.

However, Lutheranism on the American frontier was very different from the established church in Europe. Historian John B. Gardner describes the Synod of the West as "more Methodist than Lutheran."⁸ Indeed, if Wyneken had attended the synod's annual session in 1839, he may have been shocked at what these "Lutherans" were doing. On the evening of October 3, the attendees gathered to hear pastor Abraham Reck preach and commence a revival. This religious practice, at which Wyneken had recoiled from in Baltimore, was recorded in the session's minutes in detail:

This discourse produced a very deep feeling in the congregation and was immediately followed up by brother [President] Wm. Jenkins, with a very warm and powerful exhortation, delivered in the happy style of that favored brother's best efforts; and the effect was truly glorious. Silence reigned through the house, save the voice of the speaker only, and here and there a half-suppressed sigh, or groan, which burst involuntarily forth from the heaving breasts of deeply convicted sinners. The whole congregation became more or less moved. The place became truly awful and glorious... Accordingly, those who especially felt desirous of an interest in the prayers of God's people, were directed to kneel at their seats—when, probably, between fifty

⁶ Lindemann, 5–6. Lindemann reports that Wyneken had first stayed at the home of a Methodist minister before he found Haesbaert.

⁷ Frederick Bente, *American Lutheranism: The United Lutheran Church: General Synod, General Council, United Synod in the South*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1919), 151.

⁸ John Gardner, "The Synod of the West," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* (1920): 84.

and one hundred persons were seen at once prostrating themselves on their knees before God; and thus, before heaven and earth testifying to the lost condition in which they felt themselves. After this, the scene became still more interesting . . . the mourners were invited to convenient seats, for the purpose of affording the brethren an opportunity of conversing freely with them upon their condition, and imparting instruction. Thus, the meeting continued, in singing, exhortation and prayer, until a very late hour, when it was thought best to close.⁹

Whatever happened that night, it certainly was not “Lutheran.” However, this episode illustrates how many American Lutherans had adopted the “New Measures.”

Wyneken’s voluntary association with a variety of religious organizations indicates that he was not *primarily* concerned about fellowship, doctrine, or practice; whatever his personal views may have been. While his position on these matters would certainly intensify and solidify in the next several years, Wyneken was not yet a “strenuous” confessional Lutheran. Still, his own words show a nascent, hard-working, missionary who was ready to take an active leadership role in the Lutheran church.

On February 2, 1841, Wyneken composed a letter to his mother.¹⁰ Wyneken shared how much exertion went into missions on his circuit, “My days in the bush are times of much work and more joy, because I have a day for school and pedagogy with the confirmands and then in the evening I have Bible Study with the old ones.” He continued to describe a typical day of worship and how the work load weighed him down:

Particularly on Sundays I have work and joy enough. From 10am to 12:30 pm I have church, where (on account of lack of hymnals for the function) I must lead in song. From 1 to 3 pm there is Sunday School. At 6 the neighbors come, and then there is church again, and after that until it gets late, there is song and conversation Whenever it creates more fruit, I wanted to work more. But with all the preaching, reading, singing, and praying [my desire] remains dead. God help! With the children I have more joy. May the LORD make me thankful.

Yet his thankfulness was not always apparent. Wyneken also described his own spiritual struggles and self-doubt:

Oh, that indeed I still experience the dear Savior in joy, that we implore [him] from the whole heart, and not merely with lips, for his grace and our regeneration, so that he may finally, truly, and alone live in our hearts *Sometimes I can't possibly understand why he has made me, a poor worm, the preacher here and why long ago he hasn't sent another to my place* How hard it is for one to die to the world! And yet how easily could one do it if he would always consider the dear Savior.¹¹

As an awakened Christian, Wyneken learned to focus on his own spiritual failings. As a result, he suffered from a troubled conscience and anxiety over his own adequacy for mission work.

⁹ The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West, *Journal of the Fifth Annual Session of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West* (Louisville: Penn & Eliot, 1839), 12–13.

¹⁰ Letter from Friedrich Wyneken to Luise Wyneken February 2, 1841, Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken, “Aus einem Briefe unsers ersten Missionars,” *Der Lutheraner* (1898), 10–11, my trans.

¹¹ Letter from Friedrich Wyneken to Luise Wyneken (February 2, 1841), my ital.

Wyneken was not the only immigrant missionary who had struggled with self-doubt. Wilhelm Nast, three years Wyneken's senior, had much in common with the Lutheran circuit rider. Nast was born in Stuttgart in the Kingdom of Württemberg in 1807. Nast, like Wyneken, came from a family which included many civil servants and Lutheran ministers. According to Nast's friend and correspondent, Adam Miller, Nast received "a pure evangelical education." However, from his youth, Nast suffered from a severely burdened conscience, "he felt the load of his sins pressing upon him; and, as soon as the ceremony of [his] confirmation was over, he hastened through the rain in to [a] field, kneeled down and prayed the Lord to give him a new heart, that he might be able to keep his vows." According to Miller, Nast frequently went to pietist gatherings to ease his burden. Interactions with pietist and awakened Lutherans instilled a zeal of missions in Nast, who wanted to attend the Basel Mission Institute.¹²

However, at his family's request, Nast attended the seminary at Blaubeuren. Nast (as did Wyneken at Göttingen) became discouraged by the vulgar behavior of classmates and the rationalist instruction from professors. Nast would later write, "Instead of being nourished with the sincere milk of the Word, that I might grow up thereby to a man of Christ, I was nourished with the nectar and ambrosia of classical paganism."¹³

Although Nast was expected to become a Lutheran pastor, his conscience, awakened by pietism, would not allow him to do so. Nast wrote to Miller,

My remaining in the Church would have secured me wealth, honor, and ease; but my conscience did not permit to profess and teach a doctrine which I did not believe from the heart, or which, at least, I interpreted in a different sense from the Church. I was not willing . . . to make a solemn promise preaching, according to the Articles of Religion in the Lutheran Church, which rationalism had taught me to reject.¹⁴

Unlike his "Lutheran" instructors, Nast could not bring himself to teach and preach what he did not believe.

In 1828, Nast immigrated to the United States with the intent of becoming a teacher of the classics. However, his letter of introduction to a Lutheran minister in New York was met with "cool treatment." This interaction only served to make Nast "bitter against the [established] Church."¹⁵ After some time Nast became a tutor in a Methodist family in the Baltimore area. Their kind behavior stood in stark contrast to his experiences with Lutheran clergy. Nast continued to have more positive interactions with Methodists when he moved to New York to become an instructor at West Point. After a lifetime of thoughts that, "weighed heavily upon his mind," Nast reflected upon seeing, "Methodists as the happiest people he had ever mingled with."¹⁶ In

¹² Adam Miller, *Experience of German Methodist Preachers* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1859), 77–78.

¹³ Paul F. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1939), 8.

¹⁴ Miller, 80.

¹⁵ Miller, 81.

¹⁶ Miller, 83.

1835, Nast attended a revival in Danville, Ohio. There his “spiritual eyes were opened to see the fullness of the merit of Christ.” His response was an emotional one, “He was filled with joy unutterable and full of glory.” Nast wanted to make the most from his conversion experience. There were many other German immigrants who needed “awakening and conversion.” At the Methodist conference in the fall of 1835, Nast was licensed to preach and to establish a German mission.¹⁷

Within a few years, Nast’s utilized a strategy which resulted in scores of protestant German immigrants joining the Methodist church. According to historian W. Harrison Daniel, Nast possessed, “strong self-awareness concerning Methodism’s similarities and differences with Lutheranism.”¹⁸ Daniel adds:

In particular, Nast was at great pains to encourage all the German-speaking preachers to focus entirely upon the mercy and saving grace of God in Christ. Like the Lutherans, Nast affirmed justification by faith and a covenant of grace through which God stands read at all times to enact with humanity . . . Nast clearly framed his soteriology with expressions drawn directly from his Lutheran background.¹⁹

Nast’s strategy worked; Wyneken saw some of his own members leave the church of their birth for a “new sect.” In response, on February 14, 1841, Wyneken preached a sermon concerning unity, which was later published in *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.²⁰

This sermon focused on the threat of Methodism while attempting to hold a mixed protestant congregation together. Wyneken’s purpose was, “to demonstrate that it is wrong for those who have come to believe in the Savior to leave their previous fellowship or congregation to join another. I will demonstrate the danger that a person who would do so brings upon his own soul and upon the souls of others.”²¹ For translator and current LCMS president, Matthew Harrison, Wyneken’s complimentary treatment of a non-Lutheran in his sermon is a sign of doctrinal immaturity stating, “Wyneken was not at this point the confessional Lutheran he would become.”²² Wyneken certainly wrote highly of John Wesley, calling him, “one of the truest, most pious, and zealous servants of Christ.”²³

However, Wyneken’s words were not meant to encourage cooperation with the Methodists. This unity sermon was a response to the “sheep stealing” practiced by the Methodists among German Lutheran immigrants. Wyneken’s “praise” of Wesley was calculated to lower the guard of those sympathetic to Methodism. Wyneken shrewdly used Wesley’s own conduct

¹⁷ Miller, 87.

¹⁸ W. Harrison Daniel, “Wilhelm Nast (1807-1899): Founder of German-Speaking Methodism in America and Architect of the Methodist Episcopal Church Mission in Europe,” *Methodist History* (April, 2001): 159.

¹⁹ Daniel, 159–160.

²⁰ Sermon by Friedrich Wyneken, “Let There Be No Divisions Among You,” in Matthew Harrison, *At Home in the House of My Fathers* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 345. The original sermon was published in two parts in April, 1841.

²¹ Wyneken, in Harrison, 346.

²² Wyneken, in Harrison, 345.

²³ Wyneken, in Harrison, 346.

to encourage German Lutherans to remain in their mother church. “All the attacks and accusations of his enemies could not prevent [Wesley] from dying as an old man as a member and minister of the *Anglican* Church.”²⁴ Wesley himself demonstrated that a Christian should remain faithful to his denomination unless forced to do something unbiblical.²⁵

Wyneken wanted his congregations (and the readers of the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*) to see why a Christian should stay in his or her own church, “If, in his fellowship, a man is not forced to do or leave undone something that is contrary to the Holy Scriptures, it is his unavoidable duty to remain in that fellowship.”²⁶ His focus on fellowship was not about encouraging Christians to leave heterodox congregations, but on keeping Lutherans in Lutheran congregations. The Methodist church did not offer anything better than the Lutheran church

Wyneken argued that Lutherans have the duty of thankfulness. The Lutheran reformers and the hearers’ own ancestors suffered much for the sake of the gospel. “Their property laid waste, their homes destroyed, their families torn apart, and their hearts crushed. They offered up themselves and their lives battle and died martyrs’ deaths. Over a period of nearly one hundred years, with a few breaks, midst pleas and tears, they bore the persecution of their miserable lives in angst and distress with all the horrors of war.”²⁷ They did this for their descendants’ sake!

Walking a fine line between guiltling his members into the desired response, and using gospel motivation, Wyneken continued to encourage a loyalty rooted in thankfulness. He believed that Lutherans should view their church as their mother, not to be carelessly abandoned:

Will not the blood of your fathers cry out to God for vengeance because you so flippantly regarded what they with blood purchased and built for you? Will not your Church complain before God that you, having been brought up by her, now deny her your help and work? You trample her underfoot and bring upon her the abuse of her opponents. You not only leave her but also cause division and offense among her children The duty of thankfulness must hold you by your Church.²⁸

Wyneken did not claim that any Lutheran congregation was without problems—problems that were ultimately the responsibility of the members. He wrote, “If you desire to be a Christian, you have the duty to make good the damage you have done in the time of your unbelief.” Wyneken argued that the presence of difficulties within a church is not a reason to leave it. Rather, loyalty to the church which has given so much, requires members to stay and support their church in times of trouble.

In sharp contrast to Nast, Wyneken had repeatedly found strength and direction in his family’s religious training. Assuming most of his immigrant

²⁴ Wyneken, in Harrison, 346.

²⁵ Demonstrating his research, Wyneken proceeded to quote Wesley for several more pages. Wyneken was never known to leave anything out of a sermon.

²⁶ Wyneken, in Harrison, 349.

²⁷ Wyneken, in Harrison, 349.

²⁸ Wyneken, in Harrison, 350.

hearers had a similar education, Wyneken hoped that the memory of their childhood would reinforce their denomination loyalty,

Just think back to your youth. Hearken back to the oft-repeated voices in your memory, which have struck your heart through books, people, or ceremonies within your Church. You would have to be mired in the most insane pride . . . if you would [say] that you would have come to faith easily on your own.²⁹

While Methodism required adults to have a conversion experience, Wyneken, as a Lutheran, believed that conversion happened through baptism.

Although he viewed justification as the central Christian doctrine, Wyneken still gave great attention to sanctification. Wyneken used rhetorical questions to prompt his hearers to fruits of faith. He asked his members, who, having been made alive in Christ, if they would drive away the spiritually dying and sick: “You must remain. Duty demands it, since you have experienced love. The danger of harm to your own souls compels you to remain.” Wyneken firmly believed that leaving one fellowship for another was sin, because it broke the law of love. In this discussion, Wyneken commented on a key point of contention between Lutherans and Methodists, “Can such a person advance in sanctification, which God works, when he goes off on his own way and pursues a sanctification he thinks up himself?”

With these words, Wyneken was attacking the Methodist doctrine that even Nast admitted, was very different from Lutheranism. Daniel comments that with Nast, “the Lutheran heritage clearly predominated, but it was combined with Methodist structures that promoted piety and community.” For Nast, the Lutherans simply did not go far enough. Daniel states that Nast believed, “the Methodists had reclaimed something lost in the German speaking Lutheranism, namely, Wesley’s teaching emphasis on holiness and sanctification.” Nast needed assurance of his salvation through visible signs in his own life. He thought a person needed to have a conversion experience and that complete sanctification is possible during a Christian’s time on earth.³⁰

In contrast, Wyneken addressed the hearts of those doubting the sincerity of their faith and surety of their salvation. “Dear souls, if you have faith by the grace of God; if through faith in Christ, He alone fills your soul; if you regard as trifles any thought of salvation through your works, or anything else outside and alongside Him, do you not through your defection demonstrate that Christ is not enough for you?”³¹

For Wyneken, there was no valid reason to leave the Lutheran Church for another. “When you leave and seek another fellowship, you do it evidently for its arrangements and institutions, and not for the sake of having Christ, whom you already have,” he wrote, “and thus, you seek your goal not in Christ alone and His grace, but in external things.”³²

²⁹ Wyneken, in Harrison, 350.

³⁰ Daniel, 160.

³¹ Wyneken, in Harrison, 353.

³² Wyneken, in Harrison, 354.

As a frontier missionary, Wyneken was not initially interested in drawing attention denominational differences. Rather, he wanted to gather unchurched Germans into congregations. Later, he would confront the unconfessional doctrine in Synod of the West and the General Synod, but Wyneken did not initially attack his supporters who held different views. Wyneken's first public stand for orthodox Lutheran doctrine (which he saw protected and preserved in the Lutheran Confessions) was against the Methodists. What started out as a defensive theological war turned Wyneken into the chief Lutheran theologian who confronted the threat of new measures and the advance of Methodism.

Among Nast's several strengths was his ability to distribute Methodist media. Nast provided the first collected translations of Methodist German hymns. In January, 1839, he published the first edition of a weekly periodical, *Der Christliche Apologete*.³³ Nast's attempts to convince Lutherans that Methodism was the true heir of Luther's reformation quickly came to Wyneken's attention.

On April 25, 1841, Schmidt published a letter from Wyneken in *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.³⁴ This letter was not his typical report of the hardships faced on the frontier but was a polemical letter written in response to statements made by Nast in the *Christliche Apologete*.³⁵ In it, Wyneken first commented on two men who had turned to Methodism and had criticized the Lutherans:

What a pity that Satan succeeded to exhale his destructive miasma over the new life in the awakened Church, in order to destroy it. God be praised that we have a Savior, who has overcome death and Satan and now lives eternally and rules over His Church . . . I am saddened to the utmost that dear Brothers Ungemach and Gülich are turning their articles against her and their own church.³⁶

Misrepresentation, often a consequence of polemics, ignited his ire. Wyneken wrote to Schmidt, "I was astonished how the true state of the matter has been completely distorted."

Wyneken proceeded to list the Methodist's theses and offered his own responses as follows.

Thesis 1: "How dare we slander brothers in Christ just because they are Methodist and have adiaphoristic ceremonies?"

Wyneken claimed that they slandered Schmidt; he never said he hated Methodists. The issue was not about different worship styles. Reformed, Episcopalians, etc., and even Lutherans used different ceremonies within

³³ Daniel, 157.

³⁴ Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken, "Lieber Bruder," *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, trans. S. Rein (April, 1841): 132–133.

³⁵ Unfortunately, I have been unable to obtain a copy of this document. All quotations are taken from the Concordia Historical Institute's copy of Rein's translation of Wyneken's article in the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.

³⁶ Wyneken, "Lieber Bruder," 132–133.

their denomination!

Wyneken shared the view of Lutherans in America. The Reformed and Anglican/Episcopalian churches were established churches of the Protestant Reformation. They were not *Schwärmer*—enthusiasts who relied on direct revelation. The Methodists had separated from and the established church and they imposed their beliefs on others. “It is not the brothers whom we hate; but the perverse nature of the brothers, which consists in causing a new division in the body of Christ, and in seeking to lead the souls from other faiths not only to Christ, but to their community”: Why did Wyneken consider the Methodists outside the church but not Reformed or Episcopalian? As seen in his sermon, Wyneken was primarily concerned with “sheep stealing” which was a method unabashedly used by the Methodists and was one of the purposes of their revivals.

Thesis 2: “Is there nothing that can be corrected in Lutherans?”

Wyneken replied with a biting rhetorical question, “Does the name Methodist . . . have such magical power that with the change of the name, reform of the heart occurs? Is there nothing that can be corrected in Methodists?” Wyneken avoided the point of the Methodists’ question. It is more significant to note what Wyneken did not say, than what he did. This question gave Wyneken the opportunity to point to the doctrinal purity of the Lutheran Church professed by the Book of Concord, yet Wyneken was silent on the finer details of doctrine. He appears to have had single-minded focus on the Methodists practices, particularly their sheep stealing, over and above any fundamental doctrinal issue.

Thesis 3: “Shouldn’t all Christian preachers unite rather than divide?”

Wyneken replied that the Lutherans had not separated from the Methodists. The leaders of German-American Methodists were the ones who have separated and were creating division. As seen in his sermon, Wyneken’s primary goal was to keep Lutherans from being pulled away from others.

Thesis 4: “Don’t all sects have to end to be one flock and shepherd?”

Wyneken mocked the Methodists with another sarcastic retort: “Marvelous miracle of the nineteenth century! Do the sects come to an end if new ones spring up every day?” It was probably unfair to call Methodism “new” in the 1840s, yet German Methodism was a novel phenomenon and threat to the established Lutheran church.

Thesis 5, “Are all others to be modeled after the Lutherans?”

Wyneken responded that Lutheran preachers did not demand that. Lutheran preachers did not steal parishioners. Wyneken finally addressed the fundamental origin of differences between the Lutherans and the Methodists “The Lutheran Church has no model of doctrine except Scripture according to the plain meaning of the words, understood without a hair-splitting inter-

pretation, and even in that there is no coercion of conscience . . . We don't want to model anyone after us, but we oppose [others forcing themselves upon our members.]”³⁷

The lack of reference to Lutheran Confessions is noteworthy but can be explained. While Wyneken had already demonstrated his concern and loyalty to Lutheran doctrine, he was still undergoing a lengthy process of becoming more familiar with Lutheran writings and their implications for interdenominational relations. In his polemics against Methodists, Wyneken realized that they would have no respect for Lutheran symbols, but they would have responded to claims that their practices are unbiblical. Wyneken claimed that Methodists were forcing the consciences of individuals, which is particularly unbiblical, “With the spirit of Paul . . . we resist every coercive human model, so that Christ is all . . . [T]his spiritual despotism is invading the Christian Church here in America in such a way that it is the duty of every sincere Christian to oppose it.”³⁸

Thesis 6: “But what actually is Lutheran, Reformed, or Methodists? Aren't they all Christians?”

Wyneken answered that the Lutherans were not blinded by a sectarian spirit like Paul mentions in 1st Corinthians:

Is the Lutheran Church the originator of factions and parties? Whoever knows the history of the Reformation can assert, and who sees Luther's effort and earnestness with which he strives for union with the Reformed and the *Lutheran Observer*³⁹ puts it before the eyes of readers anew. Or hadn't the union of the hearts in Germany been brought about at the last revival, and it would have remained, if the King of Prussia wouldn't have wanted to forcibly compel what the Spirit of God could not bestow voluntarily to the Christian Church. And is the Lutheran Church here the cause of new factions, or does she not contend against them?⁴⁰

In this response, one sees that Wyneken valued the unity of the Christian Church, but not as something that could be brought about by force. Wyneken, as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West, was also a member of the General Synod, which was very open to the practice of unionism and cooperation with the Reformed.⁴¹ The Methodists ‘question gave the opportunity to point out false teaching in the non-Lutheran bodies, *but Wyneken did not seize that opportunity!*

Thesis 7: “Let us obliterate the factional names.”

Wyneken responded, “Yes and Amen . . . but how can this happen by rendering homage to *new* factions and seeking to procure proselytes from other faiths!” Wyneken then complained about the brazen divisiveness, hypocrisy, and slander in *Chrisliche Apologeten*. “How could the brothers [Wesley]

³⁷ Wyneken, “Lieber Bruder,” 132–133.

³⁸ Wyneken, “Lieber Bruder,” 132–133.

³⁹ A publication of the General Synod.

⁴⁰ Wyneken, “Lieber Bruder,” 132–133.

⁴¹ Wyneken's position was at odds with confessional Lutherans like the Saxons in Missouri and the Prussians in Wisconsin and New York, although he was probably unaware of them in early 1841.

dare start a new sect, if they followed the Spirit of God? . . . You are calling . . . Lutheran and Reformed, carnal and nominal Christians, although you know very well that we live in peace with each other.”⁴²

Wyneken concluded with the hope that the “sneering remarks” made by Nast have been exposed. For the first time, Wyneken publicly referenced Luther and even compared himself to Luther responding to the *Schwärmer* in his eight sermons. It is apparent that Nast’s attempts to adapt and vocalize Luther’s teachings to gain Lutheran converts compelled Wyneken to develop a deeper understanding of his own Lutheran identity and theology.

At the very end of his editorial, Wyneken responded to Nast’s claims that there was no difference in doctrine between Lutherans and Methodists. Wyneken made three points: First, Nast attacked the Lutheran doctrine of Holy Communion. Second, Nast’s defection from Lutheranism seems to have been a rash decision. Third, Nast used references to Luther as “bacon in a trap to catch Lutherans like mice.”

In the fall of 1841, Wyneken returned to Germany to organize and gather support for Lutheran missions among the Germans in North America. While staying with his mother in Verden, Wyneken was sought out by Otto Friedrich Wehrhan, a former Lutheran pastor, who was intrigued by the situation of the church in America and paid special attention to Wyneken’s reports on Methodists and other sects. In his travelogue, *Norddeutsche Reise*, Wehrhan recalled: “Wyneken told me about the Methodist preachers and their machinations and of the Albrecht Brothers.⁴³ These fanatics of Münster are the regret of the world, who place Christendom in crudeness and under a coarse frock with their revivals.” Wehrhan believed that this information would be sufficient to lead Germans to investigate these sects before immigrating to the United States. In this private conversation, a troubled Wyneken admitted to Wehrhan that the Methodist preachers, “have entrancing oratorical eloquence.”⁴⁴ The tone of Wehrhan’s response is indicative of the reaction of many Germans, who had a great aversion to “sects” and religious “fanatics.”

Being aware of this, Wyneken made special mention of the Methodists in his *Notruf*, a public appeal for aid, with the hopes that this would demonstrate to German Lutherans how truly awful the conditions were on the American frontier, where their relatives were at the mercy of the “sects” if no Lutheran pastors were there to guide them.

The sects which are working most zealously at tearing down the old neglected cathedral of the church of America, in order to build up their own chapels from the fragments, and with which I have had the most dealings, are the United Brethren in Christ, the Albright people, and the Methodist-Episcopal sects. The latter is the most active of them all. Within the past several years, it has also established a mission among the Germans, which it heavily supports, and which unless the Lord, sends

⁴² Wyneken, “Lieber Bruder,” 132–133.

⁴³ Followers of Jacob Albrecht. Very similar to Methodists in doctrine, in 1816 the denomination assumed the title of “Evangelical Association of North America.”

⁴⁴ Otto Friedrich Wehrhan, *Norddeutsche Reise* (Dresden: Justus Naumann, 1842), 306, 307, my trans.

help very soon, will certainly even wipe out the name of the Lutheran Church in the West

How artful, however, the nature and activities of these sects is best ascertained from the "new measures" now so prevalent among them. One of the results of these is the frequent occurrence of the "protracted meetings," as they are called. These are relatively large gatherings, often lasting one to two weeks, whose aim is what is called a revival, and at which there are always several preachers present. Preaching continues all day long; in between there are prayer hours. The sermons are intentionally aimed at having an increased impact on the emotions. A stronger and more forceful preacher always follows the other. Prayers, songs based on worldly attractive melodies, moaning and groaning, and exclamations do their part in stirring up the senses and the nerves. Toward evening, when the excitement has reached its highest point, an appeal is made to the sinners who want to be converted. While one group sings the most lively melodies and another prays, a bench is set up in the front of the pulpit and the appeal is renewed by a preacher. The others rush in among the listeners and try to appeal, with a shouting voice, to drop the false shame, to come now and escape the anger of God. Finally, the bench is filled with penitent sinners and now the confusion reaches its highest point. The kneeling sinners sob, moan, and often scream as though they were actually facing the Judgement Seat of Christ, while several preachers admonish them. Part of the congregation prays loudly for and with them, while the other preachers are still running around between the pews shouting invitations with loud voices. Other groups sing a mixture of all sorts of songs and melodies, while still others, on their own and individually, with groans, exclamations, sighs, prayers, and the clapping of hands drive the tension of the nerves and the tempting of the sense to their highest pitch. No wonder that with such excitement, created beforehand by the sermon, and with such strong addition help, the repentant ones are literally stupefied and go into ecstasies, which are accompanied by all sorts of feelings and visions never before anticipated. Since now their whole attention has been focused on received grace, what else are these ecstasies and visions to be, or in what different circle can they actually move, than in that in which at the moment all feelings, indeed the whole soul, are mobbing. How should they be interpreted in any other way by those who are having them, than that Christ has heard them, and have been accepted into His grace? The "spirit" has completed its job, to be sure, usually not before the appearance of all sorts of the most repugnant manifestations. Often the repentant ones fall to the ground as though they were dead; Then they suddenly awaken and jump several feet high with jubilation, which however, happens in an unconscious condition, and as though they were driven by an invisible force. The "spirit" frequently breaks into the most awful gyrations and raptures, or in a laughter which is infectious and takes hold of the whole gathering. There are instances to show that even the worst mockers, who wanted to steal away in horror from the confusion of such a meeting, have fallen down at the door as though they were dead. The faithful gather around such a person, pray and sing, standing over him; and when he comes to, he sees himself in the grip of the Almighty Lord, who has seized him right on his way and cast him to the ground. Those standing around him miss no chance to encourage him and to paint hell, into which he would now have to fall, in lurid colors, if he does not now convert; and this moment is the beginning of the conversion for this frightened sinner. The sects regard these striking occurrences although they continue to be repeated again and again, as an act of the Holy Spirit; I have however, never been able to overcome a horror for the demonic power at such happenings.

But there is hardly a Lutheran or Reformed congregation which does not have to suffer from these swarming pests. Many congregations have been completely scattered by them, others are constantly exposed to their attacks and banter, and complaints about these agitators come from all areas. For the faithful preacher they

are a constant evil going at the very marrow of his soul.⁴⁵

Wyneken's purpose in describing rivals was to provoke a response of horror among his readers. To them, this practice was foreign and terrifying. Wyneken believed it to be demonic.

Wyneken's warning of the reach of Methodism resonated with his European peers. Friedrich Lochner was so moved by Wyneken's presentation at a public gathering in Nuremberg, that he decided to answer the distress call for workers. Wyneken's depiction of a Methodist revival made a lasting impression. Lochner later recalled that

He especially dwelled on the activities of the Methodists. The highlight of his portrayal constituted the description of a camp meeting. Arriving at the well-known moment, where individuals are asked to approach the anxious bench, Wyneken suddenly came up to those sitting or standing closet or close to him, seized some them by the hand and asked them "Don't you want to be converted too?" I can see how some looked at the speaker startled, some even shrank back shyly, as though they feared that a Methodist conversion was to take place in earnest!⁴⁶

Leaving out appeals for "conversion" and physical signs of renewal, Wyneken ironically utilized Methodist-style mass meetings and played on the emotions and fears of his audience to build his argument for the need for action.

In Germany, there was uniform agreement among confessional Lutherans that Methodism was indeed a threat that needed to be guarded against. However, in America, as Wyneken's words were published and spread, the reactions were mixed. In April, 1844, *Der Christliche Botschafter*, an organ of the Evangelical Association of North America, published an article from *Christliche Apologete* concerning Wyneken's *Notruf*. The writer (probably Nast) outlined Wyneken's work and agreed with Wyneken's identification of the main problem, "In the first part he shows in a truthful and highly touching manner, how a great part of the Germans in America no longer care about the Word of God, how the number of orthodox preachers is far too limited for the number of souls of the German immigrants how often godless deceivers are hired by Lutheran churches to the preaching office." However, *Christliche Apologete* was not pleased with Wyneken's treatment of Methodism. In response, its writer sought to discredit Wyneken:

Mr. Wyneken, as much as we have learned from safe sources, never came into contact with a person from the German mission of the Methodist Church. He has yet to become acquainted with one of our German preachers and must therefore have woven together the horrific caricature of Methodism out of his imagination and mere hearsay.⁴⁷

Yet Wyneken's detailed description of a Methodist revival indicates that he

⁴⁵ Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken, *The Distress of the German Lutherans in North America*, ed. Rudolph Rehmer, trans. S. Edgar Schmidt (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1982), 30–32.

⁴⁶ Lindemann, 18.

⁴⁷ "Wie Ein Schrieber in Deuschalnd die amerikanische Kirche schildert," *Der Christliche Botschafter* (1844): 52, my trans.

either witnessed a revival in person, was referring to his interaction with Otterbeins in Baltimore, or relied on reliable sources. Wyneken's testimony stands under scrutiny.

Analysis of Wyneken's treatment of the Methodists is given by historians Roger Finke and Robert Stark, who concur that it was competition for immigrants from Methodists that first turned Wyneken's ire against them. They wrote

Wyneken's fear of Methodists and other sects was well founded. Although his warnings on the annihilation of Lutherans in western America were inflated to garner assistance from the fatherland, his detailed descriptions of the sects' revival meetings, the emotional pleas of their clergy, and the open competition they fostered are in complete agreement with other historical accounts.

Finke and Stark identify the Methodists' aggressiveness and audacity as the threat which worried Wyneken and other German Lutherans. Finke and Stark also believe that the Methodists did the most to drive Wyneken to make his *Notruf*:

The sectarian groups' outreach to the immigrants eventually proved less effective than the appeals of the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic congregations . . . but it forced the former establishments to compete for adherents because the sects were perceived as a viable threat . . . Without the threat of Methodists and other sects, Wyneken might have never issued his distress call.

This speculation, however, goes too far. Wyneken's main problem was a lack of manpower, organization, and material support for the ever-increasing German population in Indiana and elsewhere. Yet Finke and Stark offer one final noteworthy insight:

The sects served as models for mobilizing commitment. Wyneken loathed the emotional revivalist appeals of the sects that included "moaning and groaning" and "stirring up the senses and the nerves." Yet his own emotional appeal would have made a sectarian revivalist proud. He complained that Methodism has "infected almost all of Christendom" and that "they destroy church life with the help of erected chapels, hired preachers, evangelists, colporteurs, and treatises; they seek to win for themselves the faithful who do not recognize the church or despise it." But by the end of the century Lutherans had followed suit in each of these areas.⁴⁸

As seen from his polemical editorial above, in addition to their aggressive proselytizing, Wyneken's main complaint of the Methodists *was* directed at their practices. On the surface it seems as if his vitriol was an aversion to something new and different. Yet there were many religious innovations on the frontier and Wyneken had adapted and adopted many of them in his ministry. Wyneken's condemnation of the Methodists was rooted in resentment of their stealing of parishioners. He further despised them as *Schwärmer*—fanatics who, while seeking the Holy Spirit outside of the Means of Grace, tapped into, as Wyneken called it, "demonical power."

Wyneken's public condemnation of Methodist practices led to fierce re-

⁴⁸ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2005), 151, 152, 153–154.

action to the *Notruf*. Wyneken was attacked by a writer identified only as “Mr. Gottlob” in *Christliche Apologete* and *Christliche Botschafter*. Gottlob stated that Wyneken, “may be a good and a pious man in his own way alone,” but “he’s from the old school” and thinks “his members should not dare to contradict the pastor, but only to work and live for him and to regard his sayings as oracles.” Gottlob, like many immigrants from Europe, wished to leave many of the old ways behind. Once they arrived in America, Gottlob and others wanted to take advantage of new liberties:

But now we have another homeland, a free country, where in the religious realm as in the political, another mindset is blowing, the spirit of freedom. We do not recognize any other man as God and the law of the land; we see with what giant steps civilization proceeds; we cannot ignore that we live in a country that is in its most powerful period of life—at the age of adolescence, it seizes everything with more vigor. What the American and the German in America recognizes as good and right he pursues at once, and nothing is able to dissuade him. He does not allow himself to be deterred by the various appeals of others, but proceeds courageously along the path once begun, unconcerned about the judgment of others.

Wyneken’s appeal to a confessional and established church in Europe, made him only appear as reactionary and elitist.

We also do not believe, as does Mr. Wyneken, that only an examined theologian is called to the ministry. No, but we keep with the Word of God, which stands simple, clear, and without any oratorical ornament. Therefore, we also believe that the apostles of our Lord Jesus were not learned men, but modest, unpretentious men, who in the simplicity of their heart, proclaimed the Word of God with power and truth. Who preached with more success, the scribes and Pharisees, or the apostles? We do not mean to say that our preachers should not be educated; on the contrary, where both erudition and fear of God are united with each other, they will bring more beautiful fruits. We have the example of the apostle Paul. Who has written more, and preached with more success?⁴⁹

Writing the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, *Wyneken* exclaimed in response, “What in the world is this entire sentence?” *Wyneken* claimed that Gottlob was guilty of misrepresenting him and of making arguments in reference to positions never taken by *Wyneken*. *Wyneken* turned to his favored sarcastic rhetorical questions: “Aren’t Methodist preachers ‘theologians’? Then what are they? In what contrast are the ‘examined theologians’ to the ‘plain clear Word of God?’”⁵⁰

Wyneken responded to Gottlob’s criticism of the “old church” and claimed he again is guilty of misrepresentation. Irritated, *Wyneken* replied to Gottlob’s article by questioning whether or not Gottlob was showing proper Christian love: “Can you deny that by sectarianism and the sectarian spirit those who boast of Christ only too often are led into the hardest temptation to fall from love and to think and judge harshly and unjustly of one’s neighbor,

⁴⁹ Gottlob, “Erwiderung auf die von Hrn. Wyneken gemachten Angriffe auf den Methodismus,” *Der Christliche Botschafter* (1844): 58 my trans.

⁵⁰ “Lieber Brüder Schmidt!” *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* (1844), trans. by Sieghart Rein in possession of the Concordia Historical Institute.

who nevertheless is someone else's servant?"⁵¹

Such was the reaction among German Methodists to Wyneken's treatment of them in his *Notruf*, that Wilhelm Nast travelled to Germany in 1845 to counteract the damage Wyneken had done. Wyneken, in turn, wrote to his friend Andreas Rudelbach, editor of the confessional Lutheran periodical, *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*, and asked him to send over any pamphlet Nast might write. Wyneken was even willing to sail back to Europe so that, "I may serve him and set him up as a liar and warn the people before him. What I have written [concerning Methodism] I can answer for as the truth on the Last Day."⁵²

Nast's trip took him to many individuals and societies which Wyneken had visited two years earlier. Nast reported, "Since these friends had no other picture of America than that designed by Wyneken, I had to answer many questions and objections before I was understood." Nast found that the mission societies had gravitated into two camps as a result of Wyneken's visit: one was ecumenical and did not have "party spirit," the other was confessional Lutheran and refused to work with other denominations for the sake of preserving doctrinal purity. Yet Nast even approached Lutheran groups. He reported, "Some of them were more strenuous Lutherans than others, and were Wyneken's intimate friends, yet they loved Jesus even more than Luther and Wyneken."⁵³

Although Nast was politely listened to, his trip to Germany did not gain much support. While lack of religious freedom may have been a significant factor, Wyneken's work against Methodism had certainly affected the outcome. For the Methodists, Wyneken's confessional development only served to retard their meteoric growth among German immigrants. However, Wyneken's interactions and controversy with Nast and other Methodists were a turning point in his life. As an awakened Christian, Wyneken could have sympathized with some of the Methodist's goals and concerns. Many awakened Lutherans, like Nast and Gottlob, even joined the movement full-heartedly. Yet Wyneken was compelled to go in the other direction. Early in his ministry, he had harmonized his awakened views with the core Lutheran doctrine of justification, which had been shrouded by rationalism and pietism. When Wyneken saw Lutherans joining the Methodists, he was irritated. When challenged by their polemics, Wyneken, through studying both Wesley and Luther, became a strenuous, confessional, Old Lutheran.

⁵¹ "Lieber Brüder Schmidt!"

⁵² Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken, "Mittheilungen aus Briefen des Pastor F. Wyneken in Fort Wayne N. Amerika," *Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Lutherische Theologie und Kirche: Sechster Jahrgang. Erstes Quartalheft*, (1845): 77.

⁵³ Wilhelm Nast, "Nachrichten vom Herausgeber," *Der Christliche Botschafter* (1845): 137–139, 145–146, 137.