The Revival College: Westward Expansion, Spiritual Awakening, and Wittenberg College

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Introduction

Wittenberg College was founded at a time when tradition and heritage were fighting with popular American spirituality for survival. Revivalism at Wittenberg served as a unifying force between the old the new. The institution was firmly rooted in tradition, yet expressed its spirituality through a product of contemporary America. The endurance of tradition, however, outlasted the religious trends which were essential to the foundation of Wittenberg, and revivalism no longer had a place in the college.

Despite the free use of the idea of American spirituality in the nineteenth century to refer to popular religious life, no clear definition of the phrase presented itself. America built its religious identity on the values and religious beliefs of a vast array of immigrants, which resulted in an ever-changing and easily adapted religious culture. The unique individuality of the founding fathers and their successors resulted in a country largely shaped by religious pluralism, where the noblest duty of all was to uphold freedom, and as a result religious distinctiveness. The outcome of maintaining so many distinct religious cultures was the ever-changing fluidity of the term American spirituality.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the words revivalism or pietism might have sufficed to define the general religious nature of America. Still enduring the lasting effects of the Second Great Awakening, popular religion was strongly rooted in conversion and confession, and revivals allowed for both in an intimate way. Not only did they appeal to ideas of personal piety, but they also "revived" a large number of souls into a new religious life. In a society where the individual largely defined what constituted religious orthodoxy, revivals were theologically accepted by a large number of denominations as an effective and legitimate means of securing a person's salvation.

Despite the general acceptance of revivals as an expression of spirituality in America, many denominations struggled with the place these contemporary manifestations of religion held in their traditions. The Lutheran church was one of these denominations. Composed primarily of two distinct factions, those who had lived in America for some time and those who had more recently immigrated, the Lutheran church struggled to unite people from two very different situations and ethnic backgrounds. People who had lived in America for some time felt connected to a broader sense of American spirituality, and wished to incorporate larger religious trends into their denominational life. Those who had more recently immigrated,

however, were more attached to the tradition from which both factions derived and saw any deviation from that tradition as unacceptable.

From these disagreements came two distinct theological positions among Lutherans in America. The Americanist Lutheran position allowed for those aspects of American spirituality which agreed with historic Lutheran theology and doctrine to be incorporated into the daily life of the church. It also attempted to limit the importance of some historic confessions, on the claim that they were a deviation from the original intent of the reformation and that of Luther.[1] The Americanists also saw the need for preaching in English and believed immigrants should learn and incorporate the language into their new lives in America. The Confessional position, as typically defended by more recent German immigrants, held that all the confessions of the contemporary Lutheran church were true and necessary to the continuation of the church. They also lifted up the German heritage of the church, and believed all preaching should be done in German.[2]

These differences in theology had a profound affect on the Lutheran church in Ohio because of the importance it held for educating pastors for the west. The Lutheran seminary at Gettysburg had served as the primary location for educating pastors; however, the opening of a new seminary in Columbus by the German-speaking Confessionalist branch of the Lutheran church in Ohio, recognized the fact that the church was gradually expanding westward. This in turn led to the consideration, and ultimately the chartering, of a literary and theological institution for the English-speaking Lutheran church in Ohio. The institution was deliberately structured so as to compliment the American Lutheran stronghold at Gettysburg, and aid in the expansion of the church. Wittenberg College was founded as a seminary and preparatory school for the Lutheran church in the west. It was an institution founded to uphold the theology of American Lutheranism, and to educate English speaking pastors for the ever expanding church.

It was entirely natural that the new institution became a champion of American Lutheranism in the West. With a faculty heavily influenced, and in most cases educated, by Gettysburg seminary, it was no surprise that broader religious trends were incorporated into the curriculum and religious life of the institution. Within ten years of its existence Wittenberg College became known to the local community as the "Revival College."[3] The religious life of the school upheld American spirituality and revivalism, sure indications of a prosperous Americanist Lutheran institution.

The Early 19th Century Frontier

Willard Dow Albeck, a professor at Wittenberg from 1939 to 1967, commented in his book on the history of the theology of the school, "it has sometimes been said that frontier life was productive of a liberal spirit. Anti-theological movements, new sects, and church practices that broke with the past flourished there."[4] While this was generally the case in the early nineteenth century, there were a few exceptions. The Lutheran church offers one example of a deviation from the norm. The church in the west, like that of the east, experienced a split between traditionalists and those willing to modify that tradition. Even those who were more liberal struggled with the tension between tradition and innovation.

Pietism came to America on the boat. Ideas of individual spirituality, prayer, fellowship, missionizing, and social outreach played integral roles in Protestant theology throughout Europe. These notions were expounded upon, and became more popular, as a result of Philipp Jacob Spener's publication of *The Piety We Desire* in 1675. When Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, one of the early leaders of colonial Lutheranism, crossed over the ocean to America he brought these concepts of pietism with him as part of his understanding of traditional Lutheran theology.[5]

Half a century after Muhlenberg arrived in America, the religious life of the country had changed dramatically. As a result of the religious pluralism so pervasive in America, ideas from various strands of immigrants began to mix and form more American versions of their European counterparts. For example, immigrants from a Presbyterian background often incorporated that tradition's legacy of extended meetings surrounding the Lord's Supper, or "communion seasons," into their identity in America. This practice, however, evolved into an important fixture of popular religion in America beyond Presbyterian tradition. The "mainstay of American revivalism" during the early part of the nineteenth century was "in many cases a direct descendant of these early communion seasons."[6] Religious ideas were combining and changing along with the people that brought them to America. The various religious traditions were adapting themselves to coexist in a pluralistic environment, and as a result ideas which were formerly held only by a specific tradition were being freely used by any who could justifiably apply them.

Revivalism in America illustrates a widespread trend that evolved from the pietistic traditions of Germans, the "communion seasons" of the Presbyterians, and many other sources to become a common way of evangelizing in the new continent. It addressed the pietistic notion that prayer, fellowship, and missionizing were important. It also incorporated the traditions of protracted meetings, and public repentance and forgiveness which were important aspects of many denominational theologies found in American during this time. Revivals were seen as successful tools for evangelizing because the end result often included numerous conversions. They were also supported by the contemporary American theology that "God had bestowed on all people the ability to come to Christ."[7] The theology created and defended during the period known as the Second Great Awakening "arose from a widespread desire for a theology of action that could encourage and justify the expanding of revivals of Christianity."[8] Revivalism offered a way to actively evangelize and stir up excitement for religion.

Revivals were often seen as a sign of spiritual health across the denominational frontier of America, despite the problem that the role and scope of such events often came in question. In the Lutheran church, to offer a specific example, revivals were seen as vital in some congregations, appalling in others, and more often than not some sort of mix between the two. The struggle over revivalism in the Lutheran church brought up specific questions of how often and to what extent revivals should occur. The cultural popularity of revivalism was enough to make many leery of their routine incorporation into the tradition. Others were primarily concerned as to how far a congregation might go in order to revive souls, and that the church's Lutheran heritage might be sacrificed as a result. The underlying theology found in revivals of people seeking God presented a direct contradiction to the Lutheran notion that God seeks

people; however, Lutherans who supported both tradition and revivalism argued that the practice could be separated from the theology typically associated with it. One writer for the *Lutheran Observer*, a widely circulated newspaper for members of the Lutheran church, illustrates just how prevalent various degrees of revivalism were, and offers some insight into what might have been an acceptable Lutheran response to these issues:

> MEANS AND METHOD OF REVIVAL. Said a member of the church to his pastor – "What can be done to promote a revival of religion among us?" To this question, doubtless, different answers would have been given by different persons, and by few probably would have been given the answer of the pastor in question. Some would have said – we must have a protracted meeting, and send for Mr.-, and Dr.-, to come and preach in their rousing style. Others would have said – we must make more effort, and multiply means and meetings until we wake up slumbering Christians and stupid sinners. Others would have said – we must have something new to excite curiosity and bring people out, and to fix their attention when they are out; we must have anxious seats, and call sinners to come forward to be prayed for, we must induce them to make a promise that they will attend to the subject, or something of that sort. The old means and measures are worn out and become stale, and sinners will sleep on the road to ruin unless they are aroused by some new measure. But none of these was the answer given by the pastor referred to; he said – we must have an increase of personal piety – we must each one begin at home in his own heart, and cultivate more eminently the spirit of humility of penitence, of faith, of self-denial, of devotedness, of prayer; and then these little streams all running together will make a revival, and sinners around taking knowledge of the followers of Christ, that they have been with him, will, like the jailor of Philippi, when he heard Paul and Silas sing praises to God at midnight be awakened and constrained to ask of revived Christians – "Sirs, what must we do to be saved?"[9]

This cautious approach to revivalism taken by many Lutherans in America rooted itself in the traditional pietistic notions of the church, and made the justification of revivals all the more important.

When examined through the lens of Lutheran theology, revivals appeared to have numerous flaws. Spiritual pride, a false sense of devotion, and less than sincere conversions were just a few of the problems that revivals were seen to foster. Those who supported these events had the job of making sure these difficult problems were dealt with effectively and that they lifted up the respected pietistic traditions that could be manifested through revivals. Revivalism served as a legitimate practice of the church when enlightened by pietism, because the extreme aspects of revivalism were restrained by traditionally accepted theology. By "leading each one to consider religion as primarily a transaction between his soul and the heart searching God," Lutherans could successfully carry out a revival without infringing into the dangerous areas mentioned above.[10] Despite the popularity of revivals in religious institutions, students were also concerned with many of the issues raised by the larger church. A student writing in the *Lutheran Observer* stated that "the spirit of revivals at the present time renders it important to discriminate the true from the false, the chaff from the wheat."[11] This illustrates that the concerns of the larger church body also resonated

with those who more popularly supported such action, but that revivals were still seen among many as a means to bring about "the early and latter rains of divine grace."

The debate surrounding revivalism among members of the Lutheran church did not quickly reach a resolution. The *Lutheran Observer* had an entire section denoted as "The Revival Department," which ran articles ranging from descriptions of revivals to the broader historical context for such events.[12] The latter was seen as especially important to supporters of revivals as a way refute the notion that revivals harmed tradition. Instead, they argued that "revivals of religion to a greater or lesser extent have at times prevailed ever since that church has existed."[13] Those who defended this argument cited evidence from both the Old and New Testaments and stated that "there were various seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord in the first centuries of the Christian church."[14] The presence of revivals in educational institutions added to the importance of their place in the church. Those who saw revivals as a positive and necessary occurrence encouraged their practice in schools, while those who did not hold revivals in such high esteem feared that their presence in these institutions would corrupt the future leaders of the church. "The awakening of many young men to a realizing sense of their sins" would have been an encouraged phenomenon in any situation; however, the use of revivals as a means to this end caused much debate.[15]

The expanding church needed to provide pastors for its parishioners moving farther and farther west, but the debate over the role of revivals in the church complicated matters. The church was sharply divided over the revival issue, and the matter of including or prohibiting their presence in the institutions of the west could not be easily resolved. Lutherans only composed a small portion of those in the west, and in many places their identity was far from clear. One piece from the *Lutheran Observer* illustrates how vague their presence appeared in some parts of the new frontier:

> A gentleman just from McKean County informs us, that this 'new sect' is a company of Germans who have stock at a stipulated sum per share on which they are making an experiment as to this life. With regard to their religion he knows nothing. They can scarcely be regarded as a religious sect, much less a 'new' one – Their association is for secular, not spiritual gain. They are understood to be in the county, Lutherans.[16]

In an attempt to clarify their identity, the Lutheran church framed its tradition and heritage in terms of its contemporary situation. One example of this can be seen in the way in which Dr. Merle D'Augibne's history of the reformation describes Luther. Aspects of his story which seem to promote and support revivalism are clearly put to the forefront, uplifting his "repentance and conversion" and describing the influence of scripture as "refreshing to my wounded spirit."[17] The confessionalists saw the application of revivalistic prose to historical events such as these as beginning the process of questioning the historical theology of the church in light of contemporary practice.

The Americanist Lutheran school consisted of strong leaders from the prominent theological institution of the time: Gettysburg Seminary. They argued that only the basic confessions of the church were necessary, and that the numerous other confessions historically part of the Lutheran tradition harmed unity in a contemporary

setting. The length of the historic Lutheran confessions led them to also argue that they greatly limited scholarly interpretation. Freedom and individualism, rather than enforced consensus, were the values uplifted by this school. They asserted that the reformers were constantly tweaking, which translated into an obligation to address contemporary thought as it arose.

Debates concerning revivals persisted as a consistent feature of Lutheran discourse through much of the early nineteenth century.[18] Even so, the tradition and historic theology of Lutheranism held a place of unquestioned importance to the majority of Lutherans in America. Pietism was influential to the acceptance of revivals by Americanist Lutherans, yet it was equally influential in the decision to remain strict adherents to tradition as the Confessionalists chose to do. Lutherans in America struggled with their place in and among these trends, and as one person stated in regards to the other side, "consequently as regards their influence, you can neither lose nor gain much."

A Literary and Theological Institution

Westward expansion was still in its infancy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many saw Ohio as a western state on the frontier, and Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky were also part of the "west." The Lutheran church struggled to keep pace with these ever-expanding boundaries. Even in Ohio, where the state was relatively settled, there were not enough pastors to go around. The ever changing population that composed the church desperately needed an institution which could sustain and encourage its growth. The Lutherans in Ohio, united in a body known as the Ohio Synod, attempted to address this need by establishing their own seminary in Columbus in 1830.[19]

There was a great division in ideals among the Lutherans in Ohio, however, similar to that of the rest of the country. Those with an Americanist Lutheran ideology became increasingly concerned with the absence of English in the formal curriculum of the new institution. On the other hand, confessionalist members of the Ohio Synod wished to maintain German language as the primary language for preaching and education. The Americanists saw the conversion from German language to English as essential for all immigrants as a way to adapt to their new surroundings, and the continuation of German preaching as never leading to the type of evangelism that the gospel called the church to do. Eventually this division in principle led to the split of the Ohio Synod into two separate governing bodies: the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and the Joint Synod of Ohio, which was predominately German.

The tension between the two synods grew, and their animosity towards each other with it. At one point the English Synod passed the following resolution which illustrates just how edgy their relationship with the Germans had become:

> Resolved, That inasmuch as the German Joint Synods of Ohio, treated our worthy delegate, Rev. Dr. Hamilton, with contempt, we, the members of the English Ev. Luth. Synod of Ohio, cannot condescend to have any further intercourse with that Synod, until a suitable apology be made to this Synod. Unless this is done, we cannot send or receive any delegate, or any Minutes, to or from that Synod.[20]

The incorporation of revivalism into the tradition also heightened these already present tensions between the two Lutheran synods. In that same resolution, the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod "resolved that this Synod recommend to all its members the importance of conforming, as much as possible, where practicable, to the customs, manners, forms and usages, of our fathers, without injuring the cause of vital Godliness," affirming that American spirituality should be included to the greatest extent possible.[21] The thought of conforming to popular American ideas appalled the German Joint Synods, which wished above all else to stay true to tradition, heritage, and language. The English synod voted to "recommend uniformity in worship – and that in conducting revivals of religion, [they should] be careful to obey the injunction of the apostle: - 'Let all things be done decently, and in order.'"[22] The German synod no doubt saw the maintenance of order as a concern during revivals of religion; however, since they were opposed to the very concept of adapting these American ideas to their tradition, no amount of caution by the English synod could result in a compromise. The language used by the English synod in its resolution also seems carefully chosen to antagonize its German counterpart. The statement that "we highly approve of extraordinary efforts to awaken sinners, and bring them to the knowledge of truth, as it is in Christ," left no room for compromise with the Joint Synod, and pushed many of the issues over which the two groups disagreed.[23]

As a result of these irreconcilable differences, the English synod felt that the importance of educating English speaking pastors for the west fell to them. The inability to reach a compromise with the seminary in Columbus already had an effect on members of the church throughout Ohio and the west. In one case a member in Van Wert County, Ohio wrote that "there is a great call for a faithful Lutheran minister here, able to preach in both English and German languages."[24] Without a formal agreement to teach both English and German at the Columbus seminary, English was neglected entirely after 1839, when the bilingual professor Wilhelm Schmidt, died.[25] This situation proved unacceptable to many of the Lutherans in Ohio and, as a result, the English synod soon resolved that in "humble reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and alone for his glory and honor, we, now in Synod assembled, do ordain and establish a Literary and Theological institution."[26] They had heard the call of many to provide pastors to lead the ever-expanding church, and to lift up the American Lutheran ideas which they championed.

With the establishment of a literary and theological institution decided, the English Synod needed to shape its vague statement of intent into a clear vision. The newly elected board of directors met in Wooster in June of 1843 to discuss concrete plans for the new institution. They decided to locate the school in Wooster and to seek help from those in the East for finding an appropriate professor for the school.[27] They commented that "the destitution of our church is alarmingly great, and as the time has arrived when the calls for an able and efficient ministry are great, we hope nothing will be left undone to get into immediate operation, this school of the Prophets."[28] Prophets challenge people to live in God's image using contemporary methods, such as revivals, to convey their message, and revivals were just the type of religious experience the board had in mind when it began to plan for the institution. Revivals were contemporary and yet ultimately connected people with tradition. The board did not, however, focus solely on promoting revivals and new measures

of religion. It also voted to establish a book depository for "the Hymn books and Catechisms of our Church" illustrating the early commitment of the board to the traditional writings of the Lutheran church.[29]

The man whom the board chose to tie together tradition and Americanism was Ezra Keller. Called as the first professor of theology for the institution, Keller exerted a large influence on the shape of the school, and was largely responsible for the prominent role revivals played in the new institution. A product of a revivalistic conversion himself, he was well aware of the ways in which revivals could be used to evangelize. The story of his conversion, as quoted by Michael Diehl, is as follows:

> After the opening exercises were concluded, an elderly man arose, who preached with much simplicity and pathos. The subject discussed was, 'The Christian life and its blessed reward.' An arrow was thrust into my heart and fastened there... I saw myself as a condemned sinner; I felt that to continue in that state would be intolerable. I left the house, and retired to my father's barn. There, upon bended knees, I solemnly consecrated myself to the service of God. From that moment my feelings were changed.[30]

Having been so influenced by conversion and contemporary American Protestantism, it is understandable that he wished to teach these things to his students. On the other hand, he was also a scholar of the Lutheran tradition and had great respect for the heritage and confessions that it encompassed. It is also interesting to note that during Keller's college years the church was "visited with remarkable outpourings of the Holy Ghost, whereby hundreds of sinners were in all human judgment converted, while at the same time believers were revived and strengthened, and stimulated to press forward toward the heavenly prize with renewed vigor and delight."[31] As a student at Gettysburg, Keller was deeply involved in this "glorious epoch in the annals of American Lutheranism" which resulted in "the augmented number of candidates for the ministry," Keller himself among them.[32] As a minister in the Lutheran church Keller quickly rose to join the American Lutheran cause and become a prominent young leader.[33]

Keller also had experience working in the west. Shortly after graduation from seminary he was sent by the Missionary Society of the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg to travel westward, assessing the state of the western church as he went. He became especially interested during his travels to take note of a church in Ohio which had "lately had the Augsburg Confession translated into English, and also an English Liturgy prepared."[34] He did not focus solely on the English speaking congregations in Ohio, but also noticed the seminary of the then still unified Ohio Synod, which he evaluated as having "already been the means of sending out some efficient laborers into this part of the Lord's vineyard."[35] He mentioned that the seminary had been "much embarrassed in its operations by a want of funds," which could explain why he quickly worked on the endowment of Wittenberg College after being called to that institution. His Americanist leanings can be seen in much of his correspondence from his trip through the west. In one letter he commented, "it is to be regretted that those men, who have charge of the German Congregations, cannot preach in the English language; if they could, they might whilst they are tending to and supported by the German, also gradually raise English congregations."[36] He maintained the hope seen here that German and English speaking bodies could be unified even

after his call to the English oriented institution in Ohio. He attempted several times to establish a stronger relationship between the confessionalists and the Americanists, but after repeated failure he devoted his full attention to the English speaking Americanist Lutheran school.

There is no doubt that the Lutherans he met on his travels through the west influenced his later decision to aid the new theological institution. He spoke of some as being "very anxious to have a minister," and noted that they were "able and willing to contribute to his support."[37] The necessity then, was to train the pastors to send to these people. Writing back to the Missionary Society he said:

> The greatest hardship I must endure, and the only one of which I am disposed to complain, arises from the spiritual destitution of our members in the West. To see settlements of from 15 to 30 families entirely destitute of preaching, adult persons become reckless about the precepts of the gospel and the salvation of their souls, and the children growing under the destructive influence of bad example without any religious instruction, - to hear pious mothers complain with tears that they have no one to take care of the souls of their children – to hear the petitions of hungry souls who have no one to break unto them the bread of life statedly – to preach to such people awhile, ascertain their wants and then leave them, as sheep without a shepherd, is a trail which my spirit can scarcely endure.[38]

In the west he saw the piety needed for successful ministry, and when the opportunity arose for him to take an influential lead in forming leaders for the west, he most likely remembered the people he met on his first journey to that area.

In addition to his participation in revivals growing up, Keller also strongly supported revivals as a minister. The effectiveness of Keller's presence at revivals became well known in the Maryland Synod in which he served his first pastoral call. One pastor wrote in the *Lutheran Observer,* "Rev. brethren F.W. Conrad and E. Keller assisted me part of the time, and labored with much zeal and success," in reference to a revival held at his congregation. F.W. Conrad was another graduate of Gettysburg Seminary, who later succeeded Keller in his congregations in Maryland and Springfield, served as editor of the *Lutheran Observer,* and taught at Wittenberg for a short period.[39] Keller and Conrad also aided a revival at their alma matter during his time in Maryland. While they felt revivals were a good way to convert souls, they were also very clear to state that "at these meetings, there was the most perfect order and the deepest solemnity."[40] Keller emphasized that "revivals of religion are not necessarily attended with noise, disorder, and confusion," as were seen in some denomination's practices.[41] The confessionalists commonly complained of these things, and said they were a danger to those who wished to uphold the traditions of the Lutheran church. Keller illustrates one of the ultimate struggles of the Americanist Lutheran theology, that of balance with tradition. He also stated that the "spiritual interest of the youth who resort to these institutions, are by no means neglected by their instructors," and felt that this needed to be emphasized more by the Americanists.[42] Revivals were a popular Americanized way to spiritually connect with a younger generation, and Keller believed that they also needed to follow up these conversions and experiences with the traditional catechismal methods of the Lutheran church. In the words of Keller, revivals "will furnish the church with many talented, learned and pious members

and ministers," and he was thankful for the revivals his own congregation enjoyed as well.[43]

Regardless of his own theological and ideological leanings, Keller never gave up hope of a collaborative effort for the emerging literary and theological institution. He first turned to the German Joint Synod as another group which saw the need for theological education for the west. Despite his best attempts, the issue of language was never solved, and the thought of a joint effort with that group failed.[44] Next Keller turned towards the Synod of the West. This body contained congregations in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, and truly sat on the edge of westward expansion. In addition to being the very receptacle in which pastors for the west were to be placed, the Synod of the West agreed with the English synod in Ohio on basic theological terms. Both supported American Lutheranism and revivalism, and both wished to uphold tradition through the use of contemporary means. In 1842, before Keller's direct involvement with the establishment effort, the Synod of the West sent a letter to the English synod in Ohio stating that they were willing and able to aid in the sustaining of an institution for the west.[45] A debate existed, however, as to whether the institution should be located in Ohio or farther west. When Keller arrived on the scene several years after this initial discussion the debate over the location of one institution still prevailed. He defended the notion that the church in the west needed a theological institution besides the Columbus seminary, but he struggled in uniting the Ohioans and the already fracturing church farther west.[46] He attempted to determine "whether the church in the west could be concentrated in the establishment of one institution, in order to grow as rapidly, as she should, in extent, respectability, intelligence, and efficiency," or whether, because of ideological differences as to location, an agreement with the Synod of the West would never be reached.[47]

Part of the problem was the lack of a cohesive identity for the Synod of the West. The Synod was physically large, the membership fairly small, although growing rapidly, and problems similar to those the Ohio Synod had faced years before were beginning to appear. Keller complained on one occasion that "a small minority opposed [a joint institution] because 'they feared' that the doctrines of [S.S. Schmucker's] Popular Theology, and the General Synod would be taught in it."[48] This fear boiled down once again to the debate over American Lutheranism and German confessionalism. Some in the Synod of the West saw the revival supporting Keller as too liberal, and his leadership provided one of the stumbling blocks to a collaborative effort. This was, as Keller stated, a small minority; however, their influence prevented a resolution from being reached, and ultimately resulted in the division of the Synod of the West.

The literary and theological institution was established regardless, and the English Lutheran Synod of Ohio ultimately bore all the responsibility. The shaping of the school fell directly on Keller, who had been handpicked by the English synod for the job. As a result, he only answered to those who already had confidence in his abilities, which gave him much freer reign over the school. Soon after this became apparent Keller began to exercise the leadership for which the board chose him. He challenged the Board of Director's original decision, and recommended the reestablishment of the institution at Springfield, a location farther west which offered geographic and financial benefits.[49] The board accepted his idea, and reestablished

Wittenberg College there in 1845 to stand as an American Lutheran outpost in the west.

The Revival College

As a leader and educator Keller brought a passion to the newly established literary and theological institution which manifested itself in the school's identity and spirituality. He worked diligently not only as a college professor, but also as a community leader and spiritual guide. Already in his first year "he visited six pastoral districts, some weeks preached seven times, and obtained about four thousand dollars for the endowment of a professorship."[50] Additionally, he was highly regarded in the Springfield community and founder of a new Lutheran church there.[51] Keller also appealed to the New England Society for the Promotion of Collegiate Education in the West and obtained an annual appropriation for the school.[52] This is significant because the society looked at all aspects of the school in determining its eligibility, including spiritual life. Revivalism and other forms of American spirituality would have been seen as favorable qualities in deciding whether to appropriate money to Wittenberg, and Keller probably painted a picture of the school for the society that highlighted its American spirituality. He continued to aid congregations in their various attempts at revivals, recruiting for Wittenberg in the process. He also continued his involvement with revivals, and in one letter to the editor Keller wrote that he "spent Easter in a delightful communion season" and concluded that "truly we need ministers, good, pious, industrious, wise, self-denying men… Who will come?"[53]

Keller also based the curriculum and religious life of the newly founded institution on Americanist Lutheran theology. He taught the subject of revivals and used *The Church's Best State* by Rev. S.W. Harkey as the text, a work known for its support of Americanist ideas.[54] The academic strength of the institution established itself early on, and the students were generally seen as studious and well-educated. One account mentions "the general correctness and expansiveness of views exhibited by the students, and their thorough acquaintance with the subject."[55] Academics, however, provided only one part of the atmosphere at Wittenberg; the other part was the religious life of the school. Keller wrote:

> I consider it due to those who are interested in our institution to give an account of the means of grace which are enjoyed by our students. No doubt every pious parent who thinks of sending his son away to an institution of learning, is deeply concerned about the influences which will be exerted on him during the course of his education… Every pious member of the church also, if properly informed, is concerned about the kind and amount of mean used at the institution where our rising ministry is trained to imbue the students deeply with a spirit of vital, ardent piety.[56]

That "vital, ardent piety" expressed itself at Wittenberg through a variety of coordinated religious exercises. Prayer meetings were held at the College every Sunday, with a mandatory attendance policy for all the theological students. The students at the college also attended the Lutheran church and participated in the Sunday School program there. The faculty required attendance at two sermons every

Sunday, and the students were held accountable for their attendance the next day. Scripture and prayer opened and closed every day of the classes, and every Wednesday night religious instruction occurred in the church for the congregation and students at the college. "On Saturday evening the week is closed with a conference meeting, in which a subject connected with experimental and practical piety, selected the previous evening, is discussed by the students and instructors."[57] This allowed for students to become familiar with different expressions of piety, uplifted the idea of constant questioning and reform of tradition, and allowed revivalism an opportunity to manifest itself.[58] Keller longed for a revival of religion in the early days of the school as a sign of spiritual health, and commented that "no where do revivals of religion [do] so much good as in institutions of learning."[59]

Soon Keller received his wish, and the school experienced its first revival. A letter from Keller describes it best:

> This letter leaves us in *the very midst* of a season of revival. During the recess between Christmas and New Year we held a protracted meeting, and had preaching every morning and evening. . . . The church was very much revived and edified, but apparently only two, out of the church, became anxious about their salvation. But last week, unexpectedly to us, the operations of the Spirit manifested themselves among the students in the College.[60]

In fact, the work of the revival prevailed to such an extent that the faculty "were obliged to suspend the regular exercises of the institution, and attend to the spiritual interest of [their] pupils."[61] By the end of the week seven students had been converted, and preaching and other spiritual exercises continued on for quite some time. Keller wrote:

> Never did I see a work more purely that of the divine Spirit than this. We stood amazed as we approached the College several times, to hear the cry of distressed souls, and the exultations of the converted, and to see students, who a few days ago were indifferent and hardhearted, now leaning upon their fellow students speaking with joy of the love of Christ, and begging the impenitent to submit to God! Never since I have been engaged in this difficult enterprise, have I received a more striking token of God's favor than this, and for which I would be more unfeignedly thankful.[62]

The effects produced by this revival continued to prevail at the college long after the revival had concluded and, in addition to the spiritual life of the college, the academic and social aspects of the school were impacted.

With the first revival at Wittenberg, however, came many of the issues associated with revivalism in the Lutheran church. Keller stated, in the same letter as the revival announcement, his own stance on the means and method of an acceptable revival and also the position of the school. During a time in which revivalism meant many different things, it became important for Wittenberg to make a clear statement as to what was acceptable and what was not. Largely influenced by Keller and his own notions of revivalism, Wittenberg followed his liberal lead and supported a fairly broad definition of revivalism. A revival in the Wittenberg community offered a means to awaken sinners to the Good News, and that required an active engagement of people through whatever means necessary. The use of the "anxious bench" by Keller during

the first revival is a good example of this philosophy. The "anxious bench" was a tool used to single out members of the community who were feeling stirred by the spirit to come to Christ, and to move them to a seat in the front of the room. They were then closer to the message and the altar, and therefore more likely to come to the altar and accept Christ into their hearts when the time came. Those who opposed the use of the "anxious bench" argued that it forced conversion, and pressured people into accepting Christ without actually meaning it. This highlighted a grey area in which even those who strongly supported revivalism in the church were unsure as to how far one could push conversion. Keller and Wittenberg, however, argued that revivals were meant to revive the church and awaken sinners to the Good News of Christ no matter what it took. Keller believed that "if all ministers would make themselves more busy in *direct efforts* to convert souls, the controversy about measures would soon be settled."[63]

The controversy did not conclude so easily, and Keller soon faced harsh criticism from the Columbus seminary regarding the revival at Wittenberg. In an editorial in the *Lutheran Standard*, a paper published by the confessionalists in Columbus, someone wrote "we venture to say, that his present course is the result of a deviation from the fundamental principles of our Church … that so soon as we depart from those, strange practices and a stranger spirit make their appearance."[64] They went so far as to claim "if such be the spirit of modern Wittenberg it has no affinity to the Wittenberg of the Reformation, unless by way of association with the famous Dr. Carlstadt." Keller's supporters rose to his defense in the face of such disapproval, likening him not to a radical like Carlstadt, but rather to a reformer like Luther. Solomon Ritz, an early president of the Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, wrote a response:

> The *Standard* supposes that Prof. Keller is not what he promised to be – 'conservative.' Well if he is not *con*servative, his is preservative, and that is what we got him out here for. We want him to *preserve* true Lutheranism and the holy religion of the Bible in our *Wittenberg Conservatory*. No doubt when Prof. Keller came to the West, he intended to take a middle course; but finding us 'boys' right in the middle of truth, Lutheranism, and Bible religion, he went with us, and of course he is right."[65]

While this does not support the notion that Keller held a generally liberal view of revivalism, one must also keep in mind that Ritz was a strong revivalist himself. The Columbus seminary and those in the German Joint Synod were not impressed or encouraged by Wittenberg's first revival as those in the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod were, and the controversy over the role of revivalism between these two groups continued to exist in a very confrontational way.

The first revival at Wittenberg served its purpose, and the religious life at the college indeed revived after this experience. The academic life of the school also began to flourish. A Wittenberg student published an impressive thirteen part series in the *Lutheran Observer* on missions, a topic of much discussion after the revival, and the scholarship of the school began to surface on a regular basis.[66] Shortly after the series on the importance of missions and missionaries another collection of articles followed about the college itself.[67] Keller explained these writings as the lasting effects of the revival. In addition to the published works by Wittenberg students in the

Lutheran Observer, the tangible works of the students increased also. One student at the seminary began to travel thirty two miles every three weeks to visit a congregation without a pastor in Bellefontaine.[68] Others formed a group to pray for missionaries, and increased the amount of discussion on the subject of missions.[69] Keller's experience as a missionary to the west shortly after college no doubt influenced his encouragement of missionary work for the students at Wittenberg. All these things added to the religious life of the school in very tangible ways, but the revival also left the school aware of the work of the spirit in its midst. One student at Wittenberg wrote, "what praying father would not feel encouraged in having his unconverted son at an institution where the influence of the divine Spirit is almost constantly enjoyed in some measure, and occasionally fills the place so that the ungodly tremble and are led heartily to seek the Lord!"[70]

Keller saw the presence of a revival as a sign of spiritual health, and he was not alone in his assessment. The Society for Aiding Western Colleges noticed the school shortly after the revival, and offered an annual appropriation based on the "evangelical character" of the institution.[71] The number of students at Wittenberg also increased to an all time high of one hundred and thirty eight.[72] A letter from Solomon Ritz, acting as president of the Board of Directors, asked that "God may give another precious revival of pure religion to Wittenberg, during the coming session."[73]

Another revival of religion came, but something unexpected accompanied it. The new session of classes brought many new students to Wittenberg who "arrived evidently indifferent to religion."[74] Keller had instilled a sense of revivalism in the school, however, which had already manifested itself once and many who were present for the first revival saw the need for another to address these new souls. The students themselves held meetings and promoted a sense of spiritual fervor on campus in which they lifted up "holy boldness and Christian courage" as the means through which they could address this need on their own.[75] They had to meet this need on their own, because Keller had fallen ill a few weeks earlier and had yet to recover. Indeed, he never recovered from his illness, and on December 29, 1848 Keller passed away. Michael Diehl, a contemporary biographer of Keller, wrote shortly after his death that a doctor believed his illness to be typhoid fever.[76] It is ironic that the revivalist died in the midst of a revival at his school, and that while he lay on his death bed, his students were in the middle of a protracted meeting. Keller had barely begun Wittenberg before his death, and yet he deeply shaped the school during his brief tenure there. His unexpected death left the Springfield community without a pastor, Wittenberg without a scholar and president, and a family without a father.

With Keller no longer leading, Wittenberg lost its central pillar. Keller served as the primary educator and administrator for the institution, and his death meant the ship had no captain and a greatly diminished crew. Those who had begun to aid him with the teaching load, however, were able to maintain the institution to a certain degree until the next President, Samuel Sprecher, was called.[77] Sprecher also graduated from Gettysburg seminary, and believed in Americanist Lutheran theology. Much like Keller, he also experienced conversion through a revival and that experience led him to enter the ministry.[78] The similarities no doubt aided in the decision to call Sprecher as Keller's successor, and his support of revivalism made him an especially worthy candidate for the position.[79]

Shortly after coming to Wittenberg, Sprecher became deeply involved in the overall state of the institution. The religious life of the school was something of immediate concern. Keller departed during a season of revival, but the religious fervor of the school had once again calmed down. "There is not that fervent devotion and punctual attendance which we could wish. The exercises are varied; frequently they consist in relating each other's religious experience and encouraging one another in the path of duty."[80] Keller had promoted more than mere duty though, and Sprecher also saw the importance of the renewal and revival of spiritual life on a regular basis. Even so, contrary to the claims of the opponents of revivalism, a revival could not be forced upon the students, and Sprecher diverted his attention to other matters. He did so by following Keller's lead in the construction of a college building. Unlike Keller, Sprecher did not present himself very often as a public face for the college, and the construction of the first building provided no exception. Sprecher wrote very little to the *Observer* on behalf of Wittenberg, and in comparison to Keller he did little to inform the East of the state of the school. With the construction of the first building then, he turned toward the local community, rather than solicit more broadly as Keller had done, for the endowment of the school. The women of Springfield were asked to furnish rooms in the new building, and the building project proceeded at a rapid pace.[81]

Despite the physical progress of the college grounds, the state of religion remained low. Sprecher and Hezekiah Geiger, a professor at the institution, reported to the Board of Directors in August of 1850 that "there has been a lamentably low state of religion among us: and though there have been instances of religious inquiry and one very decided conversion, there has been no general revival in the Institution."[82] In addition to the already low state of religion a student died, which furthered the low state of the college.[83] The regular religious exercises of the campus carried on, and the college catalogue continued to highlight the various religious exercises Wittenberg had to offer:

> **RELIGIOUS EXERCISES**
>
> Prayers are attended in the College Chapel every morning and evening, and the reading of Scriptures; at which all the students rooming in the College are required to be present.
>
> Parents and guardians who send pupils to the Institution are requested to inform the Faculty where they shall attend worship. In the absence of such direction they will be required to worship at the College Church.
>
> Strict attention is paid to the *health, manners, and morals* of students. No profane, obscene, or reproachful language is allowed to be used. Students are required to ventilate their rooms thoroughly, to keep them in a clean and orderly condition, and to observe regular hours for meals, sleep, study and exercise.[84]

The same statement appeared in the college catalogue until 1876, and provided comfort to all the parents sending their children off to school. However, the real religious influence Wittenberg could offer to its students would be through a revival. Not only were revivals generally accepted as a sign of spiritual health, they also were very practical for a several reasons. For one, they instilled confidence in the supporters of the school that it had not become stagnant in its religious life. They also converted

many people to Christianity, some of whom went on to study and become clergy. This provided students for the seminary and kept the institution profitable. Perhaps an added benefit from a revival, from the Wittenberg perspective, would have been the commotion the thought caused among the students and faculty at the Columbus seminary.

In any case the need for a revival at Wittenberg still remained, and F.W. Conrad fulfilled that need. Conrad came to Springfield in 1851 in an effort to relieve Sprecher from the many duties he had undertaken since his arrival. He had concurrently taken on the roles of college president, professor of theology, and pastor for the Lutheran congregation in Springfield. Conrad took over Sprecher's pastorate upon his arrival, in an attempt to give Sprecher more time to devote to the ever-expanding school. After his arrival religious meetings were held each night, and religious interest increased considerably at both the church and college. Conrad's sermons were described as "usually eloquent and powerful" and eventually he held a protracted meeting "which continued for more than three weeks, and was attended by a general outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church and the College."[85] The number of candidates for the ministry, as well as the membership of the church grew considerably from this revival. By the end of the revival over fifty people had been converted, with thirty requesting membership in the Lutheran church. In fact the revival of religion at the college became so intense that the regular exercises of the institution had to be suspended for an entire week. Ten students committed to study at the seminary after graduation, and only thirteen students at the college remained unconverted.[86] The dramatic influence this single event had in the church and college is apparent both in the numbers of people affected and the growth in the congregation and seminary. The importance of revivals stretched beyond just serving as a sign of spiritual health to actually aiding in the maintenance of the institutions in which they occurred. The positive affects of this particular revival at Wittenberg continued to last far after the event concluded.

The American Lutheran theology that allowed for the occurrence of this revival, and many after it, became more deeply imbedded in the students as a result of their experiences. A few months after the revival occurred several of the students and faculty at Wittenberg aided another congregation with its own revival.[87] This acted as an experiential way in which Lutheran revivalism could be taught to the students of the seminary, as well as a way to strengthen the English Evangelical Synod against its confessionalist counterpart. The Lutherans in Springfield also tried further the influence of the Americanists by resolving to publish their own church paper, separate from the widely circulated *Lutheran Observer* and the *Lutheran Standard* published by the faculty at the Columbus seminary.[88] The *Evangelical Lutheran* resulted from this resolution, and began to circulate around Ohio and points further west in response to the lack of information about the west appearing in the *Observer*.

The publication of the *Evangelical Lutheran* marked a turning point for the college. It had firmly established itself as the stronghold of American Lutheranism in the west, and proved not to be shy about asserting a sense of independence from the church in the East. The winter of 1852 saw four students graduate from the seminary and go into the full time practice of ministry, and a steady stream of theological graduates began to flow from the school. One graduate mentioned the importance of revivalism

and conversion in reference to his new duties as a pastor when he proclaimed, "we hear of conversions from all parts ... we had the pleasure of receiving three, near the close of last year, into our little flock."[89] The revivalism taught at Wittenberg spread through its graduates into the overall ministry of the Lutheran church in the west, and the influence of the school began to be felt in the wider church. A supporter of the mission of the college wrote in the *Evangelical Lutheran*, "they are not theorists, but practical men, applying the truth to the conscience, heart and life. The students imbibe the spirit of the faculty."[90] Sprecher's baccalaureate address in 1853 underlined this claim through his message about the "proper regulation and use of ideals" in which he discussed ideals as "'those completed and vivid conceptions or images of things, which we carry in and which are the patterns after which we, consciously or unconsciously, mould our characters, and shape our conduct.'"[91] The enrollment at the school also suggested that the ideals it upheld helped to broaden its influence:

> The fall session of Wittenberg College opened last week under the most favorable auspices. Over thirty new students have already reported themselves, and others are still arriving. The number now in attendance is greater than that of any previous session in the history of the institution, and gives the most encouraging evidence of the fact, that the ability and efficiency of its Faculty of Instructors are becoming more widely known, and more generally appreciated by a discerning public.[92]

Despite the increased independence the school had gained, it still remained closely linked to Gettysburg in the east. Sprecher advised S.S. Schmucker, then president at Gettysburg, in the writing of the *Definite Synodical Platform,* a major Americanist work aimed at the churches of the General Synod.[93] This document rescinded portions of the Augsburg Confession, the primary doctrinal symbol of the church, which many liberal members of the Americanist movement believed harmed unity with other Protestants.[94] The *Definite Synodical Platform* was not well received by the entire General Synod, but the synods surrounding and directly supporting Wittenberg all adapted the platform.[95]

While the College had established itself as a strong institution of American Lutheranism, it was not alone in its stance toward revivalism in education. During Keller's tenure at Wittenberg a revival occurred at nearby Antioch College which he lifted up as a glorious event.[96] Revivals at other colleges were also common during Sprecher's time at Wittenberg, and in 1853 the *Evangelical Lutheran* published a report from the Western College Society which stated: "There had also been some cases of conversion in Knox, Beloit and Wittenberg Colleges; and Wabash College, though not blessed with a revival during the year had yet enjoyed no less than *nine* such seasons in the lapse of fourteen years."[97] Revivals commonly occurred at colleges, and were supported because of the positive affects they had on those institutions. An article supporting revivalism used a college revival as a typical example "because of the prominent position which students occupy, the salutatory influence which a work of grace exerts among them, and its powerful bearing on the interests of the Church and the world."[98] Revivals occurred at many different schools, regardless of denominational affiliation, and their presence said more about a school's acceptance of popular American spirituality than about its theology. This explains why Wittenberg

could support them and the Columbus seminary could vehemently reject them, yet both lay claim to basic Lutheran theology and dogma.

In the midst of the controversy in the Lutheran church over the role of revivals, and their support in the American college community as important expressions of spirituality, Wittenberg had yet another major revival. The death of a student at the school raised the religious interest of the student body, which eventually resulted in "several most interesting conversions."[99] Wittenberg became known in the local community as the "Revival College" because of the many prolonged revivals experienced at the college since its foundation.[100] A report submitted to the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod stated that Wittenberg had "enjoyed a refreshing season every year of its existence," and claimed that the school was second to none in its support of revivals. However, board reports indicated there were years in which a "lamentably low state of religion" existed.[101] These years were not visited by formal revivals, which makes the claim of "a refreshing season every year" seem like an exaggeration to encourage further support by the church. Nevertheless, Wittenberg maintained a strong tradition of revivalism and people had good reason to refer to it as the "Revival College."

A New Wittenberg

Despite Wittenberg's status as the "Revival College," it still paid attention to the incorporation of less extravagant expressions of religion in the daily life of the college. Through these religious practices Wittenberg connected itself with its Lutheran heritage and tradition in a way that revivalism could not. Revivalism served as a popular American way to promote evangelism and bolster numbers, but it failed to directly connect a congregation, or college, with the Lutheran tradition. To make that connection, Wittenberg incorporated Lutheran theology and doctrine into the curriculum and daily religious life of the school. Even so, the tension between Lutheran tradition and American revivalism is apparent through the many debates between the confessionalists and the Americanists. At Wittenberg the same tension existed within the school. While Wittenberg under Keller's and Sprecher's presidencies maintained strong support for revivalism, the school still had to find a balance between its Lutheran heritage and contemporary American spirituality. In the search for this balance the spiritual life of the school fluctuated a great deal.

Regular prayer meetings were held for the purpose of lifting up "our institutions of learning, as the only hope of the country and the world, and as the only means of supplying the great want of laborers in the Church and the ministry."[102] These events did not take place for the express purpose of promoting religious awakening or revival, but rather to raise up in prayer the concerns of colleges at that time. Prayer meetings also connected the college with the Lutheran church in a way that was different from a revival. A revival brought people into the church, but the more intimate interaction of prayer and worship instilled them with a sense of Lutheran theology, common mission, and shared belief. Even so, the ultimate hope for these meetings would be for God to "grant that the work may be spread, and that we may soon hear of refreshing seasons in every college in the land!"[103]

At Wittenberg revivals were seen as such an effective and popular tool for evangelism that it would have been a death blow to the early college to abandon

them completely. If a revival was not occurring one was longed for and if one was not longed for the school must have already been in the midst of a refreshing season. The yearly reports from the faculty to the Board of Directors always included a section on the spiritual state of the school, and in these reports the faculty discussed the institution's spiritual state with a kind of candor that is not seen elsewhere. The following excerpt was submitted by Sprecher in 1855:

> Our Spiritual state has been very similar to that of the preceding year. While there have been some cases of inquiry among the unconverted and some seasons of Special interest among professors, there has been no extensive revival of Religion. The attendance at the weekly prayer meeting, there has been much encouragement, the students having attended more generally and regularly than usual.[104]

While the daily religious life of the school provided a source of encouragement, the lack of a revival brought the spiritual health of the school into question. The success revivals had in bringing souls to Christ proved itself in colleges throughout America, and their appearance at Wittenberg would allow them to successfully contend with the competition. Sprecher himself stated, "there is no congregation of young men more susceptible to the claims of the Gospel when faithfully preached, than that composed of college students."[105] Wittenberg also existed to provide pastors for the ever expanding and needy church, but the majority of the students at the school were not involved with the theological program. Revivals provided a way in which students could be encouraged to pursue a religious vocation. This approach had been successful when Keller and Sprecher were at Gettysburg, and those men proceeded to implement these means at Wittenberg. They believed that "a young man comes to College to qualify himself for some high post of honor and usefulness in the world; and now the Savior meets him, in the midst of that career, and wins him for his cause."[106]

The Lutheran heritage of the school did not disappear when a season of divine grace gripped the institution. While notions of "conversion" and prolonged religious exercises might not seem very Lutheran to those in that tradition today, they were not all that unusual in the nineteenth century. Revivalism had been such a popular aspect of contemporary American spirituality, that many of the means in which revivals were carried out had become fairly orthodox for the more liberal members of the Lutheran church. The teachings of the Lutheran church were also held up during revivals at Wittenberg in a way that informed those who were being converted of the tradition in which they were already involved. When the Board of Directors founded Wittenberg they made it a depository for the "Catechisms of our Church" and the teaching of the catechism to newly converted souls served as an important follow up to conversion at a revival.[107]

A revival at Wittenberg in 1856 ended the long period of spiritual destitution that Sprecher had frequently lamented.[108] "All except three or four professed a change of heart" and the faculty noted that they had not dealt with a single discipline problem as a result of the renewed religious commitments of the students.[109] Yet again the claim that "Wittenberg has enjoyed a season of religious influence every year of its existence" surfaced in the board report to the synod, and the spiritual health of the school could no longer be questioned.[110] In 1858 another revival occurred which solidified the fact that "Wittenberg [was] still a revival College."[111] The board claimed the same the

following year, when yet another large revival gripped the college.[112] In the report to the East Ohio Synod the board said, "We feel like exclaiming with the multitude, who escorted the Savior into Jerusalem: 'Hosanna to the Son of David' for his great goodness toward us, manifested by the establishment and perpetuation of a revival College in this beautiful valley of the Mississippi!"[113]

Despite the honored place of revivalism at Wittenberg, such intense spiritual renewal could not be maintained forever. War changed the demeanor of the institution. In 1861 Sprecher reported to the board:

> The Spirit of Patriotic devotion which prevails in the Institution led some of the students to feel, that in obedience to their countries [sic] call, they ought to enlist in the war. Some of our most pious and promising young men are consequently in the Army.[114]

He followed this by discussing the lack of a special religious interest at the school. War had not only claimed many students, but it had brought a sense of somber reflection to the institution which briefly quieted the desire for religious revival. The winter of 1862, however, brought a "blessed visitation of divine grace among the students" and the theological program was again bolstered in numbers.[115] Revivals continued to occur during the war but not as extensively or successfully as the numerous manifestations of the spirit beforehand.[116] Even so, it was not until after the war ended that the revivalistic trends that were so essential to the foundation and success of Wittenberg College began to come to an end.

In 1866 the pastor of the Lutheran church in Springfield recognized the need for a renewal of spiritual commitment in his congregation and the college. The following account marks the first recorded time in which a revival of religion did not occur once the seed had been planted:

> The pastor of the church connected with the College has made special efforts for the revival of religion, and efforts of a similar kind were made in the Institution itself: followed by a special prayer meeting every morning at 8 o'clock for more than four months: but attended by no marked results either in the reviving of professors or the conversion of the impenitent. These meetings, with all the effort that was made, were attended only by a comparatively small number of the students.
>
> From some cause or causes the state of morals has also deteriorated. Doubtless the influence of war upon morals, in general, and especially upon the character of returned unconverted soldiers to the institution and the immense proportion of the students not belonging to our church, have contributed much to the lamentable state of things. But whatever may be the causes, we feel more than ever the necessity of using the most decided measures to bring about a better state of things.[117]

These "most decided measures," for the first time ever, did not necessarily include a revival. The inability to revive the college after such a long period of preparation had never occurred in the past, and this first failure had a significant impact on the continuation of revivalism at Wittenberg. Keller did not believe in revivalism as the only way to reach out and convert sinners who had yet to repent. He believed it served as a tool for evangelism that had proven successful during his time as a

pastor and educator. Sprecher also believed this and, despite being deeply moved himself by a revival, he recognized that many tools must eventually make way for newer improved models. Revivalism also served many functions during the first years of Wittenberg's existence, such as providing a way to keep discipline issues to a minimum and increasing the number of students enrolled at the seminary. With the first failure of a revival it became apparent that they could not necessarily be counted on to do these same things in the future.

Revivalism appeared as a product of contemporary American religion, and proved to be a useful method of evangelism and conversion. Revivals flourished in a college setting because their methods and results aided in the achievement of many of the goals of the faculty, in addition to serving as an attractive form of spirituality for the students. Wittenberg proved to be no exception, but the Lutheran heritage of the institution provided a unique foundation on which to base the school's religious life. Any use of American spirituality needed to compliment and be justified by the Lutheran tradition. Wittenberg's place among the ongoing debates in the Lutheran church regarding American spirituality and the maintenance of tradition aided in its defiant use of revivalism, but did not force the school to maintain the practice regardless of circumstances. The failure of revivalism left room for new measures to take its place, and the school naturally fell back to its underlying tradition and heritage. However, this transition did not occur instantaneously. This resulted in part because revivals did not cease altogether after the first failure. In fact, in 1867 a "very general revival of religion" occurred which influenced the religious life of the campus for the next two years in significant ways.[118]

Even so, this proved to be the last occurrence of revivalism at Wittenberg. "During the winter session [of 1870] protracted efforts were made for the revival of religion" but ultimately "the results were not so great as we had anticipated."[119] Revivals were neither documented nor mentioned after this entry in the journal of the Board of Directors. This disappearance would be mysterious if revivalism had served as the primary basis for the existence of the school up to this point. However, if revivalism is seen as Keller and Sprecher saw it, as a popular and successful tool for evangelism, its sudden absence in the religious life of the college makes sense. New measures were needed which could connect and impact students and no reason existed to maintain a practice that had failed to serve its function. Weekly prayer meetings replaced the reflective and self-searching aspects of revivalism. In line with current trends in colleges, a "Young Men's Christian Association" formed in 1871 helped to fill some of the needs for social accountability and institutional order that had been previously filled by revivals.[120] Sprecher recognized the need for new means of connecting with the students, and he fully supported these new religious expressions.[121] Of the YMCA in particular he commented, "this organization promises to be instrumental in much good among the students."[122]

The Americanists in Ohio founded Wittenberg on the traditions and heritage of the Lutheran church. These initial beliefs were never abandoned for culturally popular spirituality, as many critics of revivalism argued. Instead the founders of the college saw revivalism as something that could be drawn upon and modified to add to the work of the church in the world. By incorporating a contemporary American religious trend as a method of spreading the heritage of the Lutheran church, Wittenberg

united tradition and popular culture in a way that enabled both to use each other for a common purpose. Tradition used the popularity of revivalism to spread a historic message in a fresh new way, and popular culture used tradition as a way to justify an old message in a new day. Despite the unarguable success of this marriage for many years, popular culture changes quickly while tradition and heritage evolve at a much slower pace. When the success and popularity of revivalism faded at Wittenberg, the underlying foundation of the institution's Lutheran heritage provided a centering point for new forms of spiritual expressions. Without revivalism early Wittenberg might not have survived as a college, or might have had a radically different start. Revivalism influenced Wittenberg's early leaders, bolstered the numbers of students in the seminary, and provided the necessary interest to aid in the survival of the school during its formative years. Even so, Lutheran tradition proved to be the true underlying foundation of the college and when popular trends shifted, Wittenberg returned to that foundation to shape the next way in which it would express its religious identity.

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Endnotes

[1] Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1995), 21-22.

[2] David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans In Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 27-30.

[3] English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, *Minutes of the Twentieth Regular Session of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio* (Millersburg, Ohio: G.F. Newton, 1855), 8.

[4] Willard Dow Albeck, *Theology at Wittenberg* (Springfield, OH: The Wittenberg Press, 1945), 43.

[5] Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 70-71.

[6] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 68-69.

[7] Ibid., 170.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Author Unknown, "Means and Method of Revival," *Lutheran Observer,* 4 March 1837, p.2.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Author Unkown, "Marks of a True Revival of Religion," *Lutheran Observer,* 8 May 1840, p.2.

[12] While the "Revival Department" did not appear in every edition of the Observer, it appeared often enough to be considered a regular feature.

[13] Author Unknown, "Revivals of Religion," *Lutheran Observer,* 8 May 1840, p.2.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Author Unknown, "A College Revival," *Lutheran Observer,* 16 December 1853, p.2.

[16] Author Unknown, "New Sect At the West," *Lutheran Observer,* 13 January 1843, p.2.

[17] D'Aubigne, Merle, "Luther's Conversion," *Lutheran Observer,* 17 July 1840, p.1.

[18] See *Lutheran Observer*, 14 April 1843, 18 August 1843, 9 August 1844, 11 August 1843 and *Lutheran Standard*, 7 December 1842 for some typical examples of the debate over revivals.

[19] For a detailed account of the founding of the Seminary in Columbus see Donald L. Huber, *Educating Lutheran Pastors in Ohio* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989), 17-21.

[20] English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, *Minutes of the Seventh Session of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Adjacent States* (Massillon, OH: Luce and Worstell, PR., 1842), 12.

[21] Ibid., 14.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] W.M. Bower, "Destitution in the West," *Lutheran Observer*, 27 October 1843, p.3.

[25] Huber, *Educating Lutheran Pastors in Ohio*, 41-58.

[26] Ibid., 9.

[27] English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, *Minutes of the Eight Session of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Adjacent Parts* (Baltimore: Publication Rooms of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1843), 11, 16.

[28] Ibid., 32.

[29] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, "First Journal of the Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio," Unpublished Manuscript, 1843, Wittenberg University Archives, p.25.

[30] Michael Diehl, *Biography of Rev. Ezra Keller: Founder and First President of Wittenberg College* (Springfield, OH: Kuralist Publishing Co., 1859), 33-34.

[31] Benjamin Kurtz, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 19 January 1838, p.2.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Several incidents can be cited to illustrate Keller's prominent leadership role early in his career. Keller was president of the Maryland Synod: "The Lutheran Synod," *Lutheran Observer*, 11 November 1843, p.3. He also appears alongside Benjamin Kurtz and J.G. Morris as a delegate to the General Synod: S.S. Schmucker, "The General Synod," *Lutheran Observer*, 16 June 1843, p.3. His early attempts at unification between the American Lutheran and German confessionalist positions can be seen in his election as a delegate to the German Reformed Synod meetings: C.A. Smith, "General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: Minutes of the General Synod," *Lutheran Observer*, 30 June 1843, p.2.

[34] Ezra Keller, "To the Missionary Society of the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa. No. 1," *Lutheran Observer*, 6 January 1837, p.1.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ezra Keller, "To the Missionary Society of the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa. No. 3," *Lutheran Observer*, 17 March 1837, p.1.

[38] Ezra Keller, "To the Missionary Society of the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pa. No. 4," *Lutheran Observer*, 24 March 1837, p.1.

[39] Huber, *Educating Lutheran Pastors in Ohio*, 77.

[40] Ezra Keller and F.W. Conrad, "Protracted Meeting at Gettysburg," *Lutheran Observer*, 7 April 1843, p.1-2.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ezra Keller, "The Church in the West No.1," *Lutheran Observer*, 3 January 1844, p.1.

[45] English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, *Minutes of the Seventh Session of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Adjacent States*, 9.

[46] Ezra Keller, "The Church in the West No.3," *Lutheran Observer*, 31 January 1844, p.1.

[47] Ezra Keller, "The Church in the West No.1," *Lutheran Observer*, 3 January 1844, p.1. A.A. Trimper, "Synopsis of the Proceedings of the Synod of the West," 8 November 1844, p.2.

[48] Ezra Keller, "The Church in the West No.5," *Lutheran Observer*, 14 February 1845, p.1. S.S. Schmucker founded Gettysburg Seminary and taught both Keller and Sprecher there. He went on to write a "Popular Theology" in which he expounded upon Americanist Lutheran dogmatics.

[49] Author Unknown, "Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 7 March 1845, p.2.

[50] J. Hamilton, "Report of the Board of Directors of Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 25 October 1844, p.2.

[51] Solomon Ritz, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 15 August 1845, p.1-2.

[52] Ezra Keller, "Wittenberg College and the West," *Lutheran Observer*, 2 January 1846, p.2.

[53] Ezra Keller, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 15 April 1846, p.2.

[54] Ezra Keller, "Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 24 July 1846, p.2. Gustafson, *Lutherans In Crisis*, 98-100.

[55] P.C. Parker, "A Visit to Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 21 August 1846, p.3.

[56] Ezra Keller, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 18 December 1846, p1.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ezra Keller, "Wittenberg College – Acknowledgments – Revival," *Lutheran Observer*, 11 February 1848, p.2.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Anonymous, "Revival News," *Lutheran Standard*, 1 March 1848, p.2.

[65] Solomon Ritz, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 4 April 1848, p.1.

[66] Andrew, "Our Brother's Cry Nos. 1-13," *Lutheran Observer*, 28 April 1848, 5 May 1848, 12 May 1848, 19 May 1848, 26 May 1848, 2 June 1848, 9 June 1848, 16 June 1848, 23 June, 1848, 30 June, 1848, 7 July, 1848, 21 July 1848, 28 July 1848.

[67] Perge, "Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 4 August 1848, 11 August 1848, 25 August 1848, 1 September 1848.

[68] Ezra Keller, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 5 May 1848, p.2.

[69] Ezra Keller, "Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 17 July 1848, p.2.

[70] Horace, "A Few Thoughts on the Advantages of Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 18 August 1848, p.2.

[71] Board of Directors of the Society for Aiding Western Colleges, "Report of the Committee Appointed to Visit Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 24 March 1848, p.3.

[72] Anonymous, "Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 1 September 1848, p.3.

[73] Solomon Ritz, "Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 13 October 1848, p.2.

[74] Andrew, "The School of the Prophets," *Lutheran Observer*, 5 January 1848, p.1.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Michael Diehl, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 12 January 1849, p.2.

[77] Horace, "Wittenberg College: The Rev. S. Sprecher's acceptance – Its influence – The importance of new and vigorous exertions, &c.," *The Lutheran Observer*, 13 April 1849, p.1.

[78] P.G. Bell, *A Portraiture of the Life of Samuel Sprecher, D.D., LL.D.: Pastor, President of Wittenberg College and Seminary, and Author* (Philadelphia, PA: For the Author by the Lutheran Publication Society, 1907), 9-10.

[79] Harold H. Lentz, *A History of Wittenberg College (1845-1945)* (Springfield, OH: The Wittenberg Press, 1946), 56.

[80] Andrew, "Wittenberg College No. 3: Religious privileges and their influence.," *Lutheran Observer*, 20 July 1849, p.1.

[81] Perge, "Our Sisters and Wittenberg," *Lutheran Observer*, 3 August 1849.

[82] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, "First Journal of the Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio," p.98.

[83] A.S. Kissell, Untitled Editorial, *Lutheran Observer*, 1 November 1850, p.1.

[84] *Catalogue of the Officers and Students in Wittenberg College for the Third Academic Year, 1847-8* (Springfield, OH: Halsey and Emerson, Printers, 1848), 14-15 J.B. Helwig, *Historical Sketch of Wittenberg College* (Springfield, OH: privately printed, 1876), 11. The first catalogue of the college begins with a similar statement on religious exercises, which omits the section on "health, manners, and morals." The catalogue for 1848, following Keller's premature death, lists the version printed above, and this version appears in the catalogue until 1876. At that point "the reading of Scriptures" is changed to "with singing and the reading of Scriptures." This version remains unchanged until 1881 when the description of religious exercises begins to vary from year to year.

[85] H.R.G. "Revival at Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 28 February 1851, p.2.

[86] D.H., "Revival at Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer*, 4 April 1851, p.2.

[87] D. Harbaugh, "Revival," *Lutheran Observer,* 4 April 1851, p.2.

[88] Anonymous, "The Second Annual Commencement of Wittenberg College," *Lutheran Observer,* 6 August 1852, p.2.

[89] W.I. Cutter, "Letter from the Rev. W.I. Cutter, to the Theo. Students of Wittenberg College," *Evangelical Lutheran,* 14 July 1853, p.1.

[90] H.B., "Wittenberg College," *Evangelical Lutheran*, 14 July, 1853, p.3.

[91] Anonymous, "Commencement Week of Wittenberg College," *Evangelical Lutheran,* 21 July 1853, p.2.

[92] Anonymous, "Wittenberg College," *Evangelical Lutheran,* 23 September 1853, p.2.

[93] David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans In Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 126-137. Gustafson argues that Schmucker wrote the actual text of the document, but consulted with Sprecher regarding content throughout the document's creation.

[94] Specifically the document addressed the following aspects of the Augsburg confession that were seen as erroneous by the Americanists: 1. The approval of the ceremonies of the Mass. 2. Private Confession and Absolution. 3. Denial of the Divine obligation of the Christian Sabbath. 4. Baptismal Regeneration. 5. The Real Presence of the Body and Blood of the Savior in the Eucharist. *Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed with the Principles of the General Synod* (Philadelphia: Miller and Burlock, 1855), 5.

[95] Huber, *Educating Lutheran Pastors in Ohio,* 92. By this point the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod had split due to an abundance of growth. The East Ohio, Wittenberg, and Olive Branch synods, all influenced by Sprecher and Wittenberg College, adopted the platform as their doctrinal base.

[96] Ezra Keller, "Wittenberg College – Acknowledgements – Revival," p.2.

[97] Anonymous, "Western College Society," *Evangelical Lutheran*, 18 November 1853, p.2.

[98] Anonymous, "College Revivals," *Evangelical Lutheran*, 20 January 1854, p.2.

[99] Anonymous, "Wittenberg College," *Evangelical Lutheran,* 17 February 1854, p.2.

[100] English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, *Minutes of the Twentieth Regular Session of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio* (Millersburg, OH: G.F. Newton, 1855), 8.

[101] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *First Journal of the Board of Directors*, 98.

[102] Anonymous, "Prayer for Colleges," *Evangelical Lutheran*, 3 March 1854, p.2.

[103] Anonymous, "Wittenberg College," *Evangelical Lutheran*, 2 March 1855, p.2.

[104] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *First Journal of the Board of Directors*, 202.

[105] Samuel Sprecher, "Endowment of Wittenberg College No.2," *Evangelical Lutheran*, 30 November 1855, p.2.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *First Journal of the Board of Directors*, 25.

[108] Ibid., 227.

[109] Ibid.

[110] English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio, *Minutes of the Twenty First Regular Session of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio* (Mansfield, OH: John Y. Glessner, 1856), 15.

[111] East Ohio Synod, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Convention of the East Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Wooster, OH: Republican Steam Book and Job Printing Office, 1858), 15.

[112] East Ohio Synod, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Convention of the East Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Wooster, OH: Republican Steam Book and Job Printing Office, 1859), 15. Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *First Journal of the Board of Directors*, 297.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *First Journal of the Board of Directors*, 378.

[115] East Ohio Synod, *Proceeding of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention of the East Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Wooster, OH: Republican Steam Book and Job Office, 1862), 9.

[116] East Ohio Synod, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Convention of the East Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Wooster, OH: Republican Steam Book and Job Printing Office, 1863), 11. Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, "Second Journal of the Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio," Unpublished Manuscript, 1862, Wittenberg University Archives, p.20.

[117] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *Second Journal of the Board of Directors*, 90.

[118] East Ohio Synod, *Proceedings of the Thirty-Second Annual Convention of the East Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (New Philadelphia, OH: M'Ilvaine & Pittenger, Book and Job Printers, 1868), 11. Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *Second Journal of the Board of Directors*, 111, 183.

[119] Ibid., 198.

[120] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 742-743.

[121] Board of Directors of Wittenberg College, *Second Journal of the Board of Directors*, 214.

[122] Ibid.