

Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken

PART ONE: Man on a Mission

I'm thinking of a President of the Missouri Synod who set great store by BOTH assiduous faithfulness to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions AND energetic outreach with the Gospel to the nonchurched. For him, faithfulness and outreach went together like love and marriage – as a song said, you can't have one without the other. For this president, "Keep the message straight, Missouri; get the message out, Missouri" was more than a saying that he repeated often; it was the theme and the lodestar of his presidential leadership.

This president, you might have guessed, was the one for whom I worked some 25 and 30 years ago, A. L. Barry. But he was not the only leader in the Synod at that time who embodied this thrust for faithfulness together with outreach. I think, for example, of the founding president of Christ College (now Concordia University) Irvine, Dr. Chuck Manske. There were other similar contemporaries too, more numerous than I can name. Hopefully, these qualities mark every churchman in the Synod, ideally every pastor, down to this day.

In the Synod's earliest days, and even before then, one man became the archetype of these twin Missourian emphases on faithfulness and outreach. He was our second president, Friedrich Conrad Dietrich Wyneken. Well called the "father of home missions in the Missouri Synod," Wyneken went to be with the Lord about a week before his sixty-sixth birthday, on May 4, 1876. This date appears on the calendar of commemorations in *Lutheran Service Book*.

We are observing the occasion at this conference and with this presentation. Here's an outline of my four parts:

ONE: Man on a Mission

TWO: Motivator for Mission

THREE: Mentor and Pastor for Mission

FOUR: Manager for Mission

In this first part, we will examine Wyneken's early days in America and his widest missionary travels, also his growth toward Lutheran orthodoxy. That is, we will see him both getting the message out and determining more and more to keep it straight.

Wyneken the Man

Wyneken was born in 1810, in Verden in Hannover. His father, a pastor, died when he was 5 years old, leaving his wife with a brood of children.¹ All six of the sons completed university. The last of the six, our guy Friedrich (or “Fritz”) went mostly to Halle after one semester at Goettingen. He had studied theology, but upon graduation, perhaps with a view to helping with the support of his mother, he became a private tutor. Just how little he knew about Scripture at that time, he later mused, is shown in that when he started tutoring in biblical history he began his teaching with the books of Maccabees.² He became tutor in the home of a Pastor von Henfstengel, who took him under his wing. Here he was exposed to a pietistic version of early 19th-century theological awakening. Basically, Wyneken became a pietist.

After brief stints directing a Latin school and privately tutoring a young boy in Italy and the south of France, he found himself caught up by mission reports from the frontier in the U.S. Out of a sense of conscientious duty, he made himself available to join in reaching out with the Gospel in this new place. Later he wrote that he took consolation – Luther-like consolation, I might add – in being able to pray, “I have to be over there [in America.] You know, Lord, how I’d like to say here at home. But if I stayed, I wouldn’t be able to look up to you and pray to you.”³

He had many gifts to suit him to this task. His biographer J. C. W. Lindemann wrote that “God had given him a powerful body in which resided a vigorous and lively spirit. And he was not only endowed with a bright mind but also with a strong will, so that presence of mind, a ready glance, courage, and determination stood out as distinguished traits.”⁴ In addition to his native German and the theological languages he had learned in university, he was fluent in French and, as he started out his work, he had considerable ability in English too.

However gifted and talented the young man was, though, before he left for America he had to be examined as a pastoral candidate. Wyneken’s interview was conducted by a councilor of the consistory. The man was a rationalist. He seems to have wanted to embarrass this pious young examinee by opening up a line of questioning on the subject of miracles. The examiner apparently started by stating flatly that we know miracles do not take place today. Now we have to figure out whether they did in the past. Then he put it to Wyneken: “What do you say to that?” Wyneken said: “God is a God Who does miracles daily, and I am astonished that you,

¹ Biographies conflict over whether Wyneken had three or six sisters. All agree he had five brothers. *Notruf*, 63, note 1.

² Threinen, CTQ, 20.

³ Quoted in Smith, 324.

⁴ Lindemann, 2.

Reverend Councilor of the Consistory, question this.” Somewhat surprised, the examiner said: “Don’t you know, however, what Spinoza has written about this matter?” Wyneken, without raising his voice and even in a rather friendly way, replied: “Indeed, of what concern to you and me is that which this atheistic Jew speculates about! The Scriptures, the Scriptures, Reverend Councilor!” The councilor jumped up and made a number of arguments. Then Wyneken, for his part, jumped up from his seat and responded. He contradicted point after point that had been thrown at him. Yet he did it with modesty and good humor. It seems that by making the examination into a discussion, Wyneken “had won the heart of the examiner.”⁵ He ended up passing *summa cum laude*. He was ordained, and set out for America.

When Wyneken arrived in Baltimore, he knew only the other candidate who had crossed the Atlantic with him, C. W. Wolf. He had no idea where even to look for Lutherans to make contact with, but he set about the task anyway. He finally ran across some folks who claimed to be Lutheran. They were actually so-called “Otterbein” Methodists – more precisely, “United Brethren of Christ, a German denomination with Methodist influences.”⁶ They invited him to their worship service. To say the least, he found what they did to be, well, odd. They had asked him to preach a sermon and to lead them in a prayer meeting. They sang a hymn, he read a passage of Scripture, then launched into a prayer. While he was praying, he heard some in the crowd begin to moan and groan. Shouts of “Amen” came from various people. Then they sang again, but not as Wyneken had ever quite heard singing. The reveling grew, and the noise level rose. When it was all over, someone asked Wyneken how he liked it. “I don’t know whether it is from God or from the devil,” he answered. “It is certainly not Lutheran!”⁷

In Baltimore, Wyneken and Wolf eventually did find Pastor John Haesbaert and St. Paul’s congregation. This group identified themselves as Lutheran. Like many others at the time, they thought they were. In reality, though, they were a union church, Lutheran and Reformed. In any case, Haesbaert took a liking to the two young men. Soon thereafter, when Haesbaert took sick for six weeks, Wyneken covered for him in various of his duties. Yet Wyneken was itching to get on with the work for which he had come. Haesbaert told him: “You are not to travel to the West on your own. I am writing to the mission committee of the Synod of Pennsylvania. It shall send you as its missionary.”⁸

⁵Lindemann, 3-4; see Saleska, 13-14. Phelps, LHC, notes that largely through the influence of his “grandmother” – not known who exactly this is, since both of Wyneken’s real grandmothers had died before he was born – he along with his brothers and sisters had learned to “view rationalist pastors with suspicion and to piously read the Scriptures to discern the truth” (Phelps, LHC, 42).

⁶Phelps, *Methodist History*, 153.

⁷Lindemann, 4.

⁸Quoted in Lindemann, 5.

Getting the Message Out

Haesbaert had a point. A legitimate credential for Wyneken would be important. You see, fly-by-night religious imposters seemed to abound in the West. In one case, a cooper just decided that he would start preaching. In one place, he preached for six weeks before being driven from town for what we would probably call today “domestic abuse.” So why had no one checked this guy out? The answer: “He could speak quite well, we have to have a pastor, and he served for little money.”⁹ Wyneken would be light-years removed from this man – although he too would serve for little money.

Wyneken made his way west carefully. At the time, he was not in the habit of making long horseback rides. He made a stop in Lima, Ohio. There and thereabouts, he preached and baptized children of all ages for about a week. His heart went out to these dear people, who begged him to stay with tears in their eyes. He had to push on further west, though, for his assignment was supposed to be in Indiana, Illinois, even Missouri. This particular leave-taking in Ohio would not be the last one he experienced with regret, and more than a tinge of sadness because he could not do more for the people. These folks wanted so badly to hear more of Christ! Wyneken wrote later: “I cannot thank God enough that He, in His great love, led me to these hungry hearts at the very outset of my ministry.”¹⁰

In September, 1838 Wyneken arrived in Adams County, Indiana. There he met a man in the woods and inquired about where he could find Germans. When the man found out who Wyneken was and what he was doing, he said: “If you are an upright pastor, go into the house there. A man is very sick inside. But if you are like most of those who come from Germany, then go over there to the rich wagon maker.” Wyneken went to see the sick man, whose name was Loeffler. Right off, Mrs. Loeffler warned Wyneken that her husband could neither see nor hear. Undeterred, though, Wyneken went in and sat with the sick man, quoted comforting Bible passages, and prayed for him out loud. Later, Loeffler reported that he had heard every word.¹¹

The Loefflers directed the young missionary to the Buuck house, a few miles from Decatur. There he found not only a warm welcome but also his future bride, the second-oldest daughter in the family, Marie Sophie Wilhelmine (“Sophie”). He married her some three years later, on August 31, 1841, when she was not even quite 18 years old.

⁹ Quoted in Saleska, 18. This is in *Notruf*, 21.

¹⁰ Quoted in Saleska, 27.

¹¹ Lindemann, 6-7.

Some time before that, Father Buuck had provided the new preacher a small log cabin for a parsonage. It was 16 feet in length and 8 to 10 feet wide, with a rough floor made from tree trunks. The cracks between the logs in the walls had only moss to fill them. There was no window; the door had to be open to let light inside. Wyneken had a bed with a straw mattress, one table and one chair. When Pennsylvania Synod missionary Johann Joseph Nuelsen visited Wyneken in 1839, he wrote back to Haesbaert in Baltimore of this man who is “not only content with whatever he *has*, but also when he receives nothing. He has put me to shame by his faith and trust.”¹²

From Adams County, Wyneken had pushed on into Fort Wayne, to what is now called St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. This congregation, the first Lutheran church in Indiana, had just been through the death of its founding pastor, the Rev. Jesse Hoover, about four months before. It had as yet neither a church building nor a parsonage. But the 50 or so people there knew they needed a new pastor. Prominent among them was a miller named Henry Rudisill, who put Wyneken up at his own house. They all pleaded with Wyneken to stay and pick up where Hoover had left off. Before they extended a call, though, Wyneken advised them to seek permission to do so from the mission board of the Pennsylvania Synod, which had just sent him out as its traveling missionary.

While he and they awaited a reply, he set off on October 2, 1838 on a wide-ranging missionary survey expedition that took him into northern Indiana, northwest Ohio (depending on how you read the record¹³) and southern lower Michigan and also as far south and west in Indiana as Crawfordsville, on today’s Interstate 74. To sum up this extensive trip in one sentence, as I just did, hardly seems adequate. Wyneken was out for six weeks, during a cholera epidemic and facing early snows near Lake Michigan. Considering all he did, it is amazing that the time spent was not any longer. He started to make another big trip shortly thereafter in the dead of winter, on January 2, 1839, but this time he had to cut his travel short outside of Elkhart, Indiana, owing to the rigors of winter travel and his own illness at the time.

When he returned, Wyneken had his release from the service of the Pennsylvania Synod. Now he felt free to accept a congregational call. Over the previous four months, he had “organized three congregations, preached 58 times, baptized 68 children and two adults, confirmed one, administered the Lord’s Supper to about 180 persons, married one couple, buried one, and collected \$16.50.”¹⁴

¹²Quoted in Saleska, 41, italics added.

¹³Smith, 339, note 55.

¹⁴Trip report, CHIQ, 135.

Writing his friend Pastor Friedrich Schmidt in Pittsburgh toward the end of January, Wyneken said that riding that large a circuit was not the best method for mission operation. Instead, he wrote:

I believe that the only way to accomplish anything worthwhile in the vineyard of the Lord is to call missionaries for smaller sections of the country. The General Synod ought to make an appeal to all the Lutheran congregations. . . . The occasional attacks and skirmishes on the field of the devil, I fear, are practically worthless. We must get a firm hold and wrest the country step by step from the devil and place outposts on the boundaries.

Wyneken added that if there were not enough workers in the U.S., a strong appeal to German brethren would perhaps supply the need. We have to pray, he said – as Luther put it, throw the beggar’s bag at the Lord’s feet.¹⁵

Wyneken may no longer have been a survey missionary for the Pennsylvania Synod, but he was still a missionary all the same, and a missionary traveler. He went as pastor to Wilshire and Schumm, Ohio, to say nothing of close to 10 other places in northeast Indiana.¹⁶ “In the area I served,” he later wrote, “I had two organized congregations which more or less took up my time; nevertheless I could not help accepting the many invitations to preach in other settlements also on weekdays.”¹⁷ His travels, although nearer to home than before, often took him away for four weeks or even six at a time. He ended up regretting his lack of time to devote to caring for souls in places he reached only every two or three weeks.¹⁸ Still, on his way home from these trips, which were often arduous journeys in bad weather along poor paths, a church member at the time recalled that Wyneken would cheerfully whistle a tune or sing it. He could be heard at quite a distance.¹⁹

Travel indeed proved difficult through the heavily forested land. So thick was the growth that in some places even at noon only a little direct light penetrated through the trees. What’s more, Wyneken often traveled at night. Sometimes he would get lost and would have to depend on his horse to find the way. One night the horse suddenly stopped. Wyneken could not get him to move. Hoping there were people nearby, he began calling out in the darkness. Someone shined a light, and only then could Wyneken see that he was on the edge of a mill pond. The man with the light rowed out to get him and pulled him into the boat, leaving the noble horse to swim alongside. On another occasion Wyneken, this time on foot, found himself floating on a

¹⁵Quoted in Saleska, 36.

¹⁶ Smith, 329, reporting the “oral tradition” in northeast Indiana communities. St. Paul’s history, 14, says he also went up to Michigan.

¹⁷ Notruf, 27.

¹⁸ Notruf, 28.

¹⁹St. Paul history, CHIQ 14-15.

log in the middle of a flooded plain. He ended up spending the night on that log, sleeping face down with his arms and legs hanging over sideways and down into the water on either side of him.²⁰

While Wyneken was engaged in such exploits, his friend Haesbaert in Baltimore wrote of him: “He is a hero of the faith of that type for which a person, as a rule, looks in ancient times, long past. Oh, how this example shames many of us who live in peace and comfort, having abundance of all things, and who are not ready to make the least sacrifice for the Lord and His poor brethren.”²¹ Much later, upon Wyneken’s death, C. F. W. Walther wrote – as, indeed, he had written to Wyneken during Wyneken's lifetime – that Wyneken was among the few of whom it could be said (as in Acts 15:26) that he had risked his life for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.²² For his own part, Wyneken recalled the early years of his ministry and called them the best of his life.²³

For he was doing the Lord’s work, doing what he had come to America to do. When J. J. Nuelsen visited Wyneken about a year after Wyneken started in Indiana, he wrote a short account of the way Wyneken went about things. Enroute to a church in Adams County, Nuelsen wrote: “We visited a house on the way to which the neighbors consisting of two other families came soon.” With just a little imagination, you can hear the call going out through the woods: *The preacher’s here!* At that, people dropped what they were doing. Nuelsen continued: “That was a circuit of about eight souls who have been converted to the Lord more or less through his work.” Nuelsen also noted that Wyneken was all in favor of getting schoolteachers to the frontier who could teach in German, and that Wyneken himself was already thinking about going back to Germany to recruit more pastoral candidates. He thought he could use six – so long as they could be satisfied simply with food and clothes.²⁴

“On the whole,” Nuelsen wrote, “he deals with the people simply and childlike.” Well, Wyneken certainly had ways of engaging folks. As he spoke with you, he liked to grip your hand. His biographer Lindemann wrote that

he would seize [a man] by the coat button or vest button as though he wanted to prevent his escape. He would even stick his finger into the buttonhole to hold on to the one being addressed. Yet he spoke sincerely and insistently. With his friendly eyes he looked ardently into the eyes of the person he wanted to win

²⁰Lindemann, 11-12.

²¹August 26, 1839, quoted in Saleska, 26.

²²Harrison, 212.

²³Lindemann, 13.

²⁴Quoted in Lindemann, 14.

and pressed for a fast decision. He was a passionate as well as a kind and pleasant pastor everywhere.²⁵

He spoke the people's language. Quoting again from Lindemann: "He knew how to talk brilliantly, to old and young, men and women, about cows and pigs, about corn and potatoes, and yet always knew how to spice up his language. He associated with the people in the most simple and jovial manner, however always remaining the pastor."²⁶

Wyneken was always the missionary, too, even when he was not traveling around from one fairly distant point to another. Once, in a pharmacy in Fort Wayne, a man who had sometimes heard him preach walked up to him wanting to know whether he really believed what he preached. The man added, "I don't believe it." Wyneken told him: "Just go with that! And when the devil has you by the collar and drags you into hell, just scream on and on: I don't believe it. I still don't believe it." With that, the two parted company. But the man came back a few days later wondering whether anyone had seen Wyneken. "That man has made me uneasy," he said. "I have to talk to him." Eventually, this man who once forcefully professed his unbelief became a Christian.²⁷

Wyneken spoke from a depth of theological conviction. His faith, however, was not merely faith in faith. He knew what he believed, and at this point in his life and ministry he was learning not only more but also better all the time. He was concerned not only about getting the message out, but also about keeping it straight.

²⁵Quoted on Lindemann, 15.

²⁶Lindemann, 12.

²⁷Lindemann, 16.

Keeping the Message Straight

Some 25 years after Wyneken started his work in America, he looked back and said that God “by wondrous guidance . . . has brought us, specifically the older ones among us, back from various paths of great error and gathered us around His truth.”²⁸ When he said “us,” he was most definitely referring to himself too. The Pennsylvania Synod’s mission committee had sent him not to gather scattered *Lutherans* on the frontier, but scattered German *Protestants*.²⁹ The committee did not distinguish sharply between the two at the time. Neither, it seems, did Wyneken as he accepted this assignment. In one of his very few surviving full-length sermons, from early 1841, he called John Wesley “one of the truest, most pious, and zealous servants of Christ.”³⁰

Indispensable in Wyneken’s movement toward a more orthodox Lutheran theological position was a two-year trip back to Germany on which he embarked later that year (and about which we will have much more to say in the next part of this presentation). When he got back to America in 1843 he was, according to an early history of St. Paul’s in Fort Wayne, “a completely different person. He returned encouraging knowledge of the pure Lutheran doctrine and fervently rejecting all enemies of the Lutheran church.”³¹

However, already upon Wyneken’s arrival in Germany at the *beginning* of this trip he was showing signs of enhanced Lutheran identity. People noticed this at the time.³² Before he went to America Wyneken had been, an acquaintance recalled, “a fiery zealot against all narrow churchliness.”³³

His first three years in America, 1838-1841, had been moving him in the direction of orthodoxy. When he first left Europe he was already an anti-rationalist, as his theological examination showed. His succeeding run-ins with Methodists and revivalists in America caused him to think more in terms of traditional theology.³⁴

The sermon he preached in 1841 – the one I referred to a moment ago where he mentioned Wesley – was based on 1 Corinthians 1:10, which says that there are to be “no

²⁸Missouri Synod 1863 *Proceedings*, trans. Richard L. Scheiderer, *Moving Frontiers*, 28.

²⁹Threinen, CTQ, 21.

³⁰Harrison, 346.

³¹St Paul’s History, CHIQ 22

³²Threinen, CTQ, 26.

³³Quoted in Threinen CTQ, 21. The quote is from Petri – Threinen LHC, 117.

³⁴ See Phelps, *Methodist History*. E.g., page 160: “Wyneken’s first public stand for orthodox Lutheran doctrine (which he saw protected and preserved in the Lutheran Confessions) was against the Methodists.”

divisions among you . . . that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.” The sermon was precautionary, to warn the sheep in his flock not to go looking for greener grass in the pasture of some other congregation – quite possibly a Methodist one. Wyneken brought Wesley up toward the start of the sermon, even quoted him at length on the subject of church hopping, to show that even the founder of Methodism would not like the sheep stealing about which Wyneken was concerned.³⁵ A German Methodist leader (and former Lutheran) named Wilhelm Nast had developed an approach to German immigrants, complete with expressions that sounded familiar to Lutherans. It had resulted in their going to Methodist chapels by the scores.³⁶

In the sermon, Wyneken went on to say: “So what do you . . . seek in another fellowship . . . if you have Christ and He has you? A fellowship may have better laws, better organizations, and more lively fellowship among *all* its members. But it cannot have a better, stronger, more all-sufficient Christ.” If you leave this church to go to some other, Wyneken continued, wouldn’t you have to say “that the naked, mere, and sole Christ does not please you, but that you must have Him wrapped up and clothed in all sorts of external things? . . . Can – yes, *will* – it finally not happen that you base your // salvation not upon the one Rock, but upon sand, upon the loose sand of human regulations, exciting preaching, prayers, excitements, feelings and the like, which are nothing?”³⁷ Wyneken was making estimable points. All the same, he was preaching less on church *fellowship* than on church *membership*.

The two-year trip that Wyneken took to Germany, which started later in the year during which he delivered this sermon, further opened his eyes. He saw the struggles being waged by determined Lutherans of the old country against the Prussian Union and all similar thinking. He heard of the emigration made by the Saxons to Missouri and, as Lindemann put it, “about the condition of those deceived by [Martin Stephan] in the far West of America.”³⁸

Wyneken returned to Fort Wayne from Europe with a more settled Lutheran position and practice than ever. There would be no more preachers of different confessions proclaiming in the pulpit to which he was called; no longer would any of the Reformed commune at the altar there. Some laypeople left St. Paul’s. Even the previously supportive Mr. Rudisill started wondering about his pastor.³⁹

³⁵ This is also the conclusion of Phelps, *Methodist History*, 157-58.

³⁶ Phelps, *Methodist History*, 157.

³⁷ Harrison, 353-354, italics original.

³⁸ Lindemann, 20.

³⁹ Saleska, 55.

The audacious Wyneken seized an opportunity in the form of an upcoming meeting of the Synod of the West, of which he and the congregation were members, in October, 1844. He invited this Synod to hold its convention at St. Paul's in Fort Wayne. He further invited Rudisill to bring to the Synod any accusations or misgivings he had about his pastor. Even before Wyneken went back to Germany, he had been known within the Synod of the West as an "old Lutheran," as distinct from those generally called "American Lutherans." Now, in a two-hour statement on the floor of the synod meeting, in English and in German, Wyneken defended his actions on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. His objective was not only to demonstrate his adherence to the truth to his own St. Paul congregation but also to cause others in his synod to look again at the Bible and the Lutheran Symbols and reassess their own positions. That day, the synod ended up acknowledging Wyneken as a faithful Lutheran pastor. The congregation was reassured.⁴⁰ Their pastor was not "a clandestine Catholic," as some had intimated, but "a proper Lutheran."⁴¹

About this time, various American Methodists reacted against writing that Wyneken had done while he was in Germany, exposing their theology and practice on the frontier. Now they released their own pamphlet against him called "Why Have You Become an Apostate?"⁴²

Also at about this time, Wyneken got his hands on the very first issue of *Der Lutheraner*, published by Walther in St. Louis in September of 1844. Just at the time when Wyneken was seeing little future in the Synod of the West, he had only to look a bit at *Der Lutheraner* before he cried out: "God be praised! There are still more Lutherans in America!"⁴³

It wasn't long before Wyneken was writing for *Der Lutheraner*. He wrote there that the General Synod was "Reformed in doctrine, Methodist in practice, and laboring for the ruin of the church whose name she falsely bears."⁴⁴ These were not new things for Wyneken to say. He had written similarly while he was recruiting workers in Germany.

The General Synod took notice. At its 1845 convention in Philadelphia, it resolved to address correspondence to "various ecclesiastical bodies of our church in Europe" as a defense against "false impressions."⁴⁵ Wyneken was a delegate to this General Synod meeting, representing the Synod of the West. He offered the amendment that writings such as Samuel Simon Schmucker's *Popular Theology* and Benjamin Kurtz's *Infant Baptism* be submitted to

⁴⁰See Saleska, 56.

⁴¹Lindemann, 21.

⁴²See Saleska, 56-57.

⁴³Lindemann, 21. In fact, the Synod of the West dissolved in 1846. See Phelps, CHIQ.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Saleska, 59 n. 68.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Saleska, 60.

influential theologians in Germany like Rudelbach and Harless for a check on their orthodoxy. As Wyneken expected, his amendment was tabled. Thereupon he moved a substitute motion that the General Synod either renounce the “American Lutheran” views of Schmucker and Kurtz, or give up calling itself Lutheran.⁴⁶ That substitute went nowhere.

Wyneken at least knew where he stood with the General Synod. A short time later in that same year, 1845, he went to Cleveland to attend the first in a series of meetings that led to the formation of the Missouri Synod. He was not present at the Synod’s founding in 1847, but he and the congregation he served (at that time, in Baltimore) studied the new Synod’s constitution and joined it the following year. Now Wyneken had a home in a Synod that wanted both to keep the message straight and to get the message out.

Applications for Today

In many ways, Wyneken provides us an example to emulate. What can we learn from his first few years of ministry in America?

Apply yourself. A leading point that stands out is the enormous energy that Wyneken poured into the work at hand. We all know that sinners can reject the Word of God. Yet the results can be marvelous when a pastor stays on task, reaching out with the Gospel. It could be through efforts to canvass the neighborhood. Or it could be that he gives his business cards to his members and encourages them to pass the cards along to hurting people, then he meets with the hurting people who call and gives them the Good News of Christ. There is no substitute for pastors applying themselves in evangelism.

To do this, one has to be fairly heedless of self and one’s own preferences and predilections. Wyneken provides us a model here. Seeing him in action, some people wondered whether they could ever be THAT dedicated themselves. Maybe we can start, just a bit, with a determination to get out of whatever comfort zone we’re in. Over a hundred years after Wyneken’s early ministry in Indiana, Herman Gockel encouraged evangelism and wrote: “We are not advocating a recklessness, but we are calling for a venturesomeness which will depopulate the overcrowded safety zones in the Church today”⁴⁷

A major ingredient in Wyneken’s energy was his certainty of conviction. Here is a place where getting the message out was intimately connected with keeping it straight. Wyneken

⁴⁶ Gustavson, 114; see Saleska, 60-61.

⁴⁷ TODAY Feb. 1949, 16-17.

could say with St. Paul and the psalmist, “I believed, therefore I have spoken.”⁴⁸ Even as Wyneken was growing in his appreciation for the confession of the Lutheran Church in all respects, he took strength from what he had learned of God’s Word and was continuing to learn. Wyneken trusted the Lord’s promise that His Word does not return empty, that He Himself would see to the results.

The “nudge” toward orthodoxy. Speaking of Wyneken’s growth in theological knowledge and appreciation, a large key to its start already in America – before he went back to Germany from 1841 to 1843 – was that he was seeing how “the other half lived.” That is, he saw what passed for Christian theology and church life among sectarians and Methodists. Then when he went to Germany, he encountered disappointing examples there among Lutherans. There had to be something better.

In the mid-twentieth century, the ALC theologian Edmund Smits wrote:

Every teacher of theology has had some gifted students with a keen interest in religious problems, yet at the same time a pronounced distaste for anything “dogmatic” or “orthodox.” What happens when one of these students becomes a pastor responsible for his flock? It is easy to predict. Little by little he falls out of love with his own doubts and finds the sweetness of rebellion fading away. Instead of delighting himself and dazzling others with his dialectical skill, he discovers that he must search for a simple and direct means of presenting the true doctrine of the Apostles. In other words, our young friend is drifting toward a form of orthodoxy, whether or not he wishes to admit the fact to himself. In the case of a Lutheran the orthodoxy to which he inclines might very likely be the same seventeenth century orthodoxy which he rejected. . . .⁴⁹

This may be something at least akin to what Wyneken himself experienced. Smits was talking about a young man probably tempted by Rationalism, while Wyneken was moving to Orthodoxy from Pietism.

I have seen a bit of this myself, albeit on a more modest scale. I’m thinking, for example, of a young man who came out of seminary with a view of the pastoral office as a preeminent example of a helping profession. He had a vision of himself as pastor strongly resembling a social worker. As he got into his work with real people, though, it dawned on him increasingly that what they needed most was not him as their friend, but the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. This young man had passed his seminary fourth-year theological interview. But still, once

⁴⁸ 2 Cor. 4:13.

⁴⁹ Edmund Smits, “Introduction,” *The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology*, ed. Herman Preus and Edmund Smits, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962), xxii.

he became a pastor he was bringing orthodox theology to bear on his work more and more. Maybe we can talk about whether his case is typical.

Connecting the “dots.” We have seen Wyneken telling a man in Fort Wayne that it would end up as cold comfort to assert his disbelief in Christ, even at the top of his lungs, while the devil was dragging him into hell. In Wyneken’s missionary travels, he made what he called an “earnest request” to non-churchgoing Germans to “hallow the sacred day of the Lord, by means of united worship, rather than to desecrate it in taverns.”⁵⁰ In these instances, as in so many more from Wyneken’s ministry, he was “connecting the dots” for people. For example, they had a sense for sanctifying the holy day. They knew that there were spiritual hazards connected with frequenting taverns and avoiding church. They were horrified by the prospect of hell. All of these were dots, particular points, that had previously been planted on their spiritual landscape. The work of a preacher consisted largely in saying things that would connect their dots.

In our world, there are still people with dots to connect: those who were brought up in the church, or who have some knowledge of Christian teaching from their own study. But, as the late Presbyterian pastor Tim Keller pointed out, many people these days simply lack such well-defined points on their spiritual landscape. They have no dots to connect, at least not consciously. This is a respect in which our situation differs from Wyneken’s.

How to start with that latter group of people? Here are three quick ideas, which are not mutually exclusive:

- Keller suggested finding a place where the worldview of your contemporaries at least resembles Christian truth, a matter about which you can agree with people. Move from there to points where they might disagree, but would have a hard time doing so because they have already agreed with you about the first thing.
- Adopt parts of the protreptic approach of the early church, which – like us – lived and worked in a time where there was no shared understanding across cultures of dots to connect. Show that Christianity is the way to a life that is truly lived well and wisely.
- In preaching, be like the prophet Nathan talking with David: get hearers to nod along with you that something is reprehensible, then show that they themselves are guilty before God of doing the same thing, and that only in the forgiveness of Christ is there salvation.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Trip Report, CHIQ 20 (1947), 131.

⁵¹ For more on these, see my article, “Preaching in Church to Unbelievers,” *Concordia Pulpit Resources* 35 (September 21, 2025-Nov. 23, 2025):13-16.

An entire conference – or more – could be done on this. For unlike Wyneken, we often deal with people who lack dots to connect.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years after Wyneken started his ministry in America, he wrote Walther:
“. . . the longer and the more I have suffered under my heavy spiritual *Anfechtungen*, I have experienced in a practical way the necessity and importance of pure doctrine. Since every doctrine is connected with justification, and undergirds it – indeed, proceeds from it as the center and leads back to it – I have found in this doctrine my only stay in the midst of my difficulties. Thus every doctrine becomes all the more significant for me for the sake of the consolation I seek.”⁵²

Wyneken knew well that keeping the message straight is all about salvation for poor sinners by grace through faith in Christ. Therefore what could he do but get this saving message out?

⁵² Harrison, 425.