

GEORG ALBERT SCHIEFERDECKER

A Case of Synodical Discipline & Repentance

BORN: MARCH 2, 1815 *Leipzig, Germany*

DIED: NOVEMBER 23, 1891 *Hamel, Madison County, Ill.*

GEORG ALBERT SCHIEFERDECKER BELONGED TO THE SAXON MIGRATION OF 1838–39, a group of Lutherans determined to establish a true Lutheran Church in America, something they thought was no longer possible in their homeland. Along with Schieferdecker, several others arrived who would help to establish The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1847. Among them was C.F.W. Walther, first president of the Synod. He and Schieferdecker became friends in the old country and shared the same commitment to biblical Christianity as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions.

Trained in theology at the University of Leipzig, Schieferdecker accepted a call to pastor a congregation in Monroe County, Ill., in 1841. Walther ordained him. When the Missouri Synod began, Schieferdecker could not be present at the first convention, but he soon joined the new church body and, in 1849, became a pastor in Altenburg, Mo., one of the congregations that the Saxon Lutherans organized shortly after their arrival.

The new Synod grew rapidly. In 1854, the Synod divided into four districts, and Schieferdecker became the president of the new Western District. But a few years later, disaster struck. Schieferdecker embraced the heresy (false teaching) of chiliasm. Today we call it millennialism. There are many varieties, but all of them are based on a misreading of Revelation 20. Schieferdecker adopted the view that the “millennium” would be a long period of prosperity for the Church all over the world, including the conversion of all Jewish people to the Christian faith. After that, Christ would return. But the Book of Revelation is filled with visions of unearthly creatures and fantastic events that must be interpreted by clear teachings from the rest of the Bible. Jesus Himself

taught that Judgment Day would come after a period of intense tribulation and falling away from the faith, not prosperity.

Because of his beliefs in millennialism that he advocated publicly, Schieferdecker had to be admonished by the Synod, and he was. The Synod convention of 1857 devoted several sessions to the Schieferdecker case. In spite of intense but brotherly discussions, Schieferdecker persisted in his beliefs and was removed from the LCMS. With a minority of the members of his congregation, he formed another church in Altenburg and joined a synod that would tolerate his views.

In spite of it all, however, this story has a happy ending. In 1875, Schieferdecker renounced his heretical views and became a pastor once again in the Missouri Synod. By that time he was no longer living in Altenburg. Though it took a little longer, Schieferdecker’s Altenburg congregation also joined the Synod — in 1988!

For more information about the 175th anniversary of the LCMS, visit lcms.org/175.

DISCOVER MORE

August R. Suelflow, “Georg Albert Schieferdecker and His Relation to Chiliasm in the Iowa Synod” (B.D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946), scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/153.

Johann Friedrich Koestering, *The Emigration of the Saxon Lutherans in the Year 1838* (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 2022).



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ONLY JESUS
NO OTHER NAME

— 175 YEARS —

