

# **A Synod For the '90s: The 1990s**

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Side by side, by all appearances made of the same stuff, moving, but not in the same direction, slowly, building up tremendous pressures. Some say a cataclysmic upheaval is inevitable. Others predict a lot of shaking and quaking, a cloud of dust, and then a return to normality. I'm not speaking of the WELS, but of the San Andreas fault in California. But I could be speaking of the WELS in the 1990s. We are looking uneasily at events which may reshape our synodical landscape. We peer anxiously into the future as the familiar ground under our feet appears to be shifting.

History, even church history, is what we choose to remember. My good friend, and former colleague here at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, has given us an excellent view of the shaking and quaking that rocked Michigan a hundred years ago. I believe he has made wise choices in the things he has brought to our remembrance. Then men were sinners and saints, too. Time, opportunities and spiritual energy were wasted. Yet the spirit of Christ triumphed in the end. God's work among us continued. The golden thread that binds us to our former experiences is the gentle whisper of divine truth that shouts to us above the Sturm und Drang of the passing moment.

In that spirit I will attempt to carry out the assignment given to me to look at "A Synod for the 90s—the 1990s." It is a perilous undertaking. I recall retired Professor Edward Fredrich making an observation. It is a fearful thing, he said, to assess any period of church history when many of the players are still alive and able to jump up and say, "It ain't necessarily so." All of you here are as equipped as me to offer an opinion about the WELS in 1992. And, when it comes to the future, we are not making a judicious selection of facts to be remembered. We are projecting the experiences of the past, some pleasant and some painful, into the future. We are unavoidably expressing our hopes and voicing our fears. Our natures, whether overly cautious, overly optimistic, or somewhere in between, will have an impact on how we interpret trends and calculate change. The future by its very nature cannot be tested. It is therefore open to debate and argument. Some of you will say when this essay has been read, "it ain't necessarily so." Fine! I welcome in advance your critique and criticism. I am not an oracle. I view myself as but one servant of Christ among many, one who shares with my brethren a concern for the present and a passionate interest in the path which, God willing, we will walk down together as a synod in the 1990s.

## **A Pentecost Perspective**

This weekend we celebrated Pentecost, the festival in our church year which marks the birthday of the Christian church. What a day that must have been. A small band of the faithful had witnessed Jesus' death and resurrection and his return to the right hand of the Father. Yet they were huddled for fear of the Jews on the fiftieth day after Passover. Pentecost marked the date, according to pious Jews, that the Lord gave Moses the Torah on Mt. Sinai. On the first Christian Pentecost the wind blew, the room rocked and tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the Twelve. They arose from their places and began speaking. The message was basic and powerful. Jesus of Nazareth, a true man among men, had died. This Jesus was God. He had risen from the dead. Because of what Jesus is and because of what he did, it was God's gracious will that the sinful lives of men be forever changed.

The result was a synod, that is, a band of believers walking together in step with this message: - On Pentecost 3,000 believed. These believers continued to repeat the message and the Word grew, adding daily such as the Lord meant to be saved. These believers were active. They baptized those who repented and turned to Jesus. They gathered to share their Lord's body and blood. The wants and needs of all were addressed unselfishly as the rich gave up their possessions to distribute to the poor. Prayer was a way of life.

That first synod was a dynamic entity, ever adapting, ever changing in response to the growth of the Word which widened the circle of believers on a daily basis. The apostles gave over specialized ministry to men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom so that they might devote themselves more fully to the Word and prayer. When persecution came, bold confessors came to the fore. Some were theologically trained men, first Peter and John, then all twelve, in due time Paul. Others were consecrated laymen like Stephen and Philip. Women, too, like Dorcas and the daughters of Philip, confessed their faith in words and actions. Some like Matthew and Luke served the synod by committing to parchment the words which the Holy Spirit moved them to write. Others like Barnabas had the eyes to see and encourage the good in others. The vast majority of those who made up that first synod do not have their works recorded. We must assume, however, that they labored faithfully in keeping with the grace given them.

The young synod wrestled successfully with cross-cultural issues. It found a formula to serve all the widows of Jerusalem, whether they spoke Aramaic or Greek. Cornelius, a Gentile and a Roman soldier, was welcomed. His was a simple and genuine faith whose existence drove the accidents of his birth and the offense of his profession into the background. Simon the magician, as well as Annanias and his wife Sapphira, were not welcome. Their faith was self-serving and bogus. Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee and an agent of the persecution-bent Sanhedrin, was viewed with understandable suspicion, but only for a time. After a fourteen year cooling off period the synod welcomed him and applauded his work. Why? Because his words were God's words.

Within that early Pentecost fellowship one could find nurture and outreach. Men like James, the Lord's brother, attended to the former by and large, while men like Peter and Paul steeped themselves in the latter. Some supported missions, while others did the work. A John Mark could be a disappointing young missionary early on, and yet one indispensable to the apostle Paul later on. It was a synod whose mission districts came to the financial rescue of the mother church when a disastrous famine devastated Judea.

As the young synod expanded and contact between men and congregations became naturally harder to maintain, distance and culture stirred up suspicions which lead to conclusions and false doctrine. Even theological giants like Peter and Paul clashed, clay pots that they were. Matters were resolved when the leadership called a meeting in Jerusalem at which all sides of the issue in question were aired and God's Word brought in as the arbiter.

A person might continue to draw obvious parallels between the church of Pentecost and our synod today. No one can deny that those were different times and that the customs, languages, environment and a hundred other external things were radically different from the situation which obtains today. Yet it is equally undeniable, amazing and encouraging to see the gentle whisper of the divine Word effectively at work the same then as now. God does get his work done within the body of Christ which is his church. He does so in spite of human weakness and external circumstances.

### **An Earlier Pentecost Perspective**

Those who walked together in the early Christian Church were not the first to walk together. The very expression “walking together” has a Jewish ring to it. Judaism took a left turn when it rejected Jesus as the Messiah. It has left itself with a Savior-less pursuit of the covenant given by God on Mt. Sinai ever since. Judaism still refers to its pursuit of the Torah as a walking (*halakah*).

We know, of course, that the covenant struck by God on Mt. Sinai with Israel was part of God’s plan to reveal his grace to a damned world. God created Israel as a shadow of the good things that were coming. The reality would be Jesus, a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the Glory of God’s people Israel. Israel owed its existence to the right hand of God. That arm struck down the oppressing Egyptians in an act of judgment. At the same time it embraced the descendants of Abraham in an act of grace. The blood of the Passover Lamb, smeared on the doorposts, delivered from death, just as the Lord had said. The absence of that blood, a token of unbelief and rejection, meant death to Egypt’s firstborn, just as the Lord had said.

Fifty days later Israel stood before the Lord at Mt. Sinai. That, too, was a day of fire, earthquake, sound and fury. Ever after pious Jews marked the giving of the Torah to Moses as the birthday of their Old Testament fellowship. It was one of the three annual festivals at which every Hebrew male was expected to present himself before the Lord. As such it served as a powerful picture, along with Passover and Tabernacles.

Passover anticipated the shedding of Jesus’ blood on the cross and of his resurrection from the dead. Passover also marked the beginning of the grain harvest. On it farmers were commanded by God to cut the first fruits and wave them before the Lord. The apostle Paul saw the connection with Christ’s work. Jesus, he says, is the first fruits of all who rise from the dead. He died for our sins and was raised again for our justification.

Tabernacles marked the fruit harvest in the seventh month after the long, dry, summer heat. Believers were to remember Israel’s weary trek through the desert on the way to the Promised Land. During Tabernacles believers were to contemplate how the Lord sustains each person’s pilgrimage through life. The manna is God’s grace in Christ. The summer fruits are good works performed in thankful love. Old Testament believers were to view themselves as destined for God’s eternal harvest.

Between Passover, whose significance lies in the saving acts of Christ’s first coming, and Tabernacles, whose significance lies in the glorious and eternal impact of Christ’s second coming, is Pentecost. Coming, as it did, fifty days after the gathering of the firstfruits, the Hebrew Pentecost marked the end of the grain harvest. On it two sweet cakes were baked and presented to the Lord in thanksgiving. Pentecost is the “synodical festival,” the feast of the church of all believers who are gathered around the Word in thankful love to produce living offerings whose presentation pleases God.

As the New Testament makes unmistakably clear, the covenant made by God with Israel on Mt. Sinai was a yoke Israel could not bear. The priests of that covenant became corrupt. The kings who were raised up to stand by that covenant went astray. And even the prophets, who called the people back from empty ritual to law and gospel, finally fell silent.

What man cannot do, God did and God does. Where God’s firstborn Israel failed, God’s only-begotten succeeded. God granted the righteousness of Christ freely to the whole world, without respect to human merit. The ministry of that message became the trust of a new Israel, the Israel of faith built on the testimony of the apostles.

Whether Old Testament or New, Pentecost is essentially the same. It is the festival of faith which comes by hearing, a festival of hearing worked by the Word of God. This has, and still does, bind each member to the body of Christ. In this life Pentecost is the celebration of the church militant. With the sword of the Spirit in hand Old Testament Israel, the early church, and our synod in the 1990s fights against flesh and blood, against the prince of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places.

### **The Elijah Perspective**

I cannot prove it, but I believe Elijah stood before God on Mt Horeb fifty days after the Lord made his power known on Mt. Carmel. Again, though I cannot prove it, I believe the Lord vindicated Elijah before the priests of Baal at the spring harvest. The drought announced by Elijah lasted three and a half years. That drought would surely have begun in the fall when the rainy season in Israel begins. If this is true, then the rain which followed Elijah's defeat of Baal happened around Passover. Although I can't prove it, I like the connection that can be made between Elijah's experience on Mt Horeb and the Pentecosts of Mt. Sinai and of the Christian church in Jerusalem 1500 years later. I like it because Elijah's experience has a special message, I believe, for us as a synod in the 1990's.

Elijah lived at a pivotal point in Old Testament history. Elijah observed evidence everywhere of apostasy. The covenant God had made with his people was being broken. The altars which had been erected for the worship of the true God were being torn down. Prophets who spoke the truth of God without compromise were few. Ahab and his wicked consort Jezebel had marked them for extermination. It is fair to say that Elijah was overcome by pessimism as he stood before God on Mt Horeb. He had convinced himself that his walk with God was a lonely one, zealous for the truth, but one walked alone. He was in fact saying, for me there is no synod.

God responded, as he is wont, by taking charge with his Word. "What are you doing here?" he asked Elijah. Elijah professed his zeal, painted his bleak picture of affairs in Israel, and offered the opinion that he was the only believer left alive. The Lord then proceeded to ask the same question again, but not before he had torn the landscape with a mighty wind, scorched it with a ferocious fire, and scrambled it with a terrible earthquake. Elijah was forced to see that the Lord was not to be found in these dramatic outpourings of divine power.

I believe the Lord was reading Elijah's mind. Like Adam in the garden who blamed God indirectly for creating the woman who had led him into his predicament, Elijah was blaming God for not doing more to carry out the ministry of the Word. Elijah wanted winds, fires, and earthquakes. How could God let Jezebel chase him into the desert so soon after God had dramatically orchestrated nature to vindicate truth on Mt. Carmel? By his answer the Lord made it clear that his presence was not in things of men or that impress men, but in the gentle whisper of the divine Word. Although Elijah couldn't see it, God's Word had been working in its quiet, effective way all along. There was a synod! It had 7,000 members who had neither bowed to Baal nor kissed his image.

Having made that point, God gave Elijah instructions which were every bit as tumultuous as the wind, fire and earthquake that Elijah had wanted, but for the wrong reasons. A tornado named Hazael was to sweep out of the north to give high and mighty Israel its comeuppance. A firebrand named Jehu would overturn the earthly power of Ahab's apostate house. The Spirit of God would breathe through a new prophet, Elisha, who would in time take Elijah's place. All three of these men would be anointed by Elijah so that the work of God's synod would continue.

Although Elijah had just had the brass to tell the Lord, not once, but twice, that the mighty work over which he had been called as God's leader was futile, God knew otherwise.

### **A Gentle Whisper for Our Times**

Our world is not Elijah's, but there are similarities. King Ahab embodies every compromising thing we see in today's visible church. Ahab's predecessors in Israel had found it convenient to bend God's Word for practical and political reasons. They were Old Testament sectarians who felt God's Word, in slightly altered form, was still good enough. Ahab went further. He tolerated blatant idolatry within his family and kingdom. Jezebel imported the sex and violence of Baal and his consort. She then promoted it. The common people were drawn for fleshly reasons to tolerate and then embrace her innovations. As a result Jezebel found it relatively easy to round up men of Belial who could find it a small thing to break the moral law and the covenant law of Israel in order to steal Naboth's vineyard.

We breathe American air. That air exudes tolerance and acceptance. It is easy for many to bend God's Word for practical and political reasons. Our culture has married itself to secular humanism. It is a god of nature like Baal- It worships the creature rather than the Creator. It holds that man is an animal, the product of endless cycles of death-dominated struggle up from the slime. In this milieu the love of many has grown cold. Our culture chases after riches and pleasure. Tearing down old barns and building new ones is the measure of success. What feels good, even though it kills us, must be good. Ours is a culture, like that of Ahab's day, that tolerates child sacrifice and sees suicide as an honorable way out when things no longer work.

Can we hope to react to our times any better than Elijah did to his? We have eyes. We see how bad things are and we are worried that they may get worse. We are an American synod, breathing American air. At our worst moments we are convinced that everyone and everything around us is doing it wrong, and that we are the only ones getting it right. Then again there are those "worst moments" when we want to lie down and die, like Elijah wanted to die, before the Lord brought him to Mt. Horeb. Take us home, we cry, and spare us this seemingly useless and frustrating struggle. We worry about change. Familiar altars are being torn down. We observe things happening, even within our fellowship, that we don't recall happening in our fathers' day. Is our confessional covenant with God and each other crumbling? Who listens to the truth? Where are God's prophets who boldly speak up when truth is under attack? Hounded into silence? Killed off through compromise and blatant apostasy? Where is the fire, we ask? Where is the wind and earthquake? Who will shake things up, light a fire in God's people? Who will blow new life into our synodical corpse?

The gentle whisper remains. It says, be still and know that I am God. Without my Word you will do nothing, absolutely nothing! You will stand on a mountaintop like Elijah complaining, feeling ill-used and unappreciated, hoping for something big to jar things loose. But you will stand there and nothing will be accomplished. The gentle whisper says to us, as it did to Elijah, go back the way you came! Be faithful in carrying out the ministry I have put in your hands. The wind and the fire and the earthquake are mine. I may use them in a ministerial way to accomplish my ends. Then again I may not. If I do, it will be to further my plans, not yours. Just remember, I have reserved for myself all who are mine, all whose hearts have been crushed by my law, all whose hearts have been lifted by my grace in Christ.

Elijah accepted God's attitude adjustment. He anointed Hazael, Jehu and Elisha. Israel was humbled, but only for a time. Jehu improved royal leadership, but only for a time. Elisha continued to prophesy, but only for a time. A generation came, a generation passed, but the Word

of the Lord remained, even though Israel went into captivity, even though the house of Jehu became as wicked as that of Ahab, even though prophet after prophet was sent in God's name to prepare the way for Jesus.

My first lesson for the 1990s-and I truly mean mine-is an attitude adjustment. I cannot and must not assume that I alone of all God's people see things clearly and accurately. Moreover, as much as God's work doesn't depend on me, just as surely it doesn't depend on fire, or wind, or earthquake. God may use them, but they are not a means of grace. Finally, if God asks me, "what are you doing here?" my only correct answer is to go back to the call I have and do his bidding there, relying on his Word and trusting that he may use me as he calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps the 7,000 of my day. Only then will I stop frustrating him in his creation of a synod for the 1990s.

### **How Do I View the WELS in 1992?**

The Elijah in me wants to be zealous for the Lord. The Elijah in me still once in a while wants to chuck it all in frustration. And, I must admit, the hankering for wind, fire and earthquake is hard to shake.

I don't think I am alone in wanting to be zealous for the Lord. In the last number of years, my work as head of MLS and a member of the Board for Worker Training has taken me to over half our synod's districts. Without an exception that I can think of, the leaders of our synod, and that includes pastors, teachers, missionaries and laymen, want God's work to be done and they want it to be done God's way. There is a zealous commitment to pass on the heritage of God's Word, not only to the next generation, but also to those who have not heard the voice of Jesus.

Nor am I alone in my frustration. I have talked with angry and impatient people. Each in their own way, from their own set of experiences, has an agenda for our synod. No two are exactly alike. For the most part the agendas vary over practical approaches to things our Lord has left to our Christian common sense. But not always. There are voices who speak out in alarm because they see activity afoot that they are sure will compromise or undermine the faith we hold in common. Rarely, but certainly on occasion, I have heard a voice saying that some things are already out of hand.

And I am not alone in my fascination with wind, fire and earthquake. Almost every agenda has a magic bullet somewhere. If only this was done, it would make a difference, says one. No, that's dangerous. This way of doing things is far better, says another. No, chimes in a third, if our synod would only do this, we would be on the right track. And so it goes.

To me our synod is Elijah and each of our synod's members an Elijah. We have our golden moments when God uses us to smite Baal in our day. But we also have our downers. I need to hear and be reminded of this by all of you, regularly. The future does not depend on me or you. None of us can see with the eyes of God what the agenda of the 1990s will be when our decade is history. There is no magic bullet; unless it serve the Word by God's direction and at his good pleasure.

Sounds like a formula for doing nothing! I don't think so. The key again is a heart, soul and mind captive to the gentle whisper. If we want to insure that nothing, absolutely nothing is done, we can remain Elijah-like on our mountain of God. If we wish, however, to be part of that grand plan of our Lord's that began with a promise in fallen Eden and that hastens to its perfect fulfillment in the paradise of the blessed, then we are compelled by God's Word to go back to the place to which God has called us and honor that call. There zeal will be rewarded. There God

will show us how much wind, fire or earthquake is appropriate in a ministerial way to accomplish what only the Word can do. There and only there, will something get done.

In the New Testament God has not seen fit to prescribe in his Word just what is to be done. Not the way he did for Elijah. In our Christian freedom he has permitted us to say thank you to him in a variety of ways. He wants us to be light and salt in a pagan world. We do that as citizens with our vote. We do that in the societies and associations we join to promote Christian values and a respect for God's holiness among us. He wants us to be about our heavenly Fathers business. We are to gather together around the Word and sacrament trusting in his promise that he will be there in our midst. Within that gathering we are encouraged to seek out reliable men for teaching and preaching. In their ministries they are to be held captive by the Word of God, neither adding to it in pride, nor subtracting from it in ignorance or rebellion. They, like all men in the body of Christ, perform works of praise to God with a servant's spirit, recalling the humility of our Lord Jesus. It was he who considered equality with God something not to be grasped. He lived in anticipation of the joy God would bestow in God's time once the awful sacrifice for our sins had been accomplished. Within the visible church there will be a multiplicity of offices, some determined by gifts given by the Spirit, some framed by geographical location,, some created in response to necessity.

Brothers and sisters within the body of Christ are urged to respect their leaders as God-given watchmen who care for souls. Within the body, the eye must not pretend to be the whole body, nor the ear, nor the feet nor the hands. The eye must live with the conviction that the ear is as much connected to Christ as it is. To do less would be to impugn the power of Christ to accomplish the work of the church. When decisions affecting the whole body are needed, the whole body is involved. And when the decision is made, after careful consideration by all parts of the body on behalf of the body, the whole body must work together to carry it out.

### **Getting Somewhat Concrete**

I would probably disappoint those who know me well if I did not address anything about the 1990s in concrete terms. I won't disappoint you, but it is my intention to make clear from the outset that what I say is only that and nothing more. I trust you will put me to the Elijah-test. I trust also that you will listen and react from your own perspective within the body of Christ. It is my hope that my views will find many others. Together as a district we will sort them out, pray over them and then roll up our sleeves to work for our synod, all that his glory, not our own be done.

Yesterday we heard how controversy split the Michigan synod a hundred years ago. We heard of rash actions, hastily conceived and emotionally applied. We heard, too, how healing was carried out in a truly humble and inspiring way. The issue then was a practical one, but a big one. As Professor Brenner correctly pointed out, it was and still is impossible for a confessional synod to continue without a steady supply of confessional leaders.

This June in all twelve districts our synod will again discuss the future of its worker training system. Before the districts is the report of a duly constituted committee which acknowledges the feasibility of the system's consolidation. This consolidation was first placed before the synod in 1989 by the Prep Study Commission at the request of the Board for Worker Training. The Board for Worker Training in turn acted on a resolution passed here in Saginaw in 1985 that requested an on-going study of the need for three preparatory schools. In 1993 all expect our synod to take some action. It could repudiate the 1991 convention's long-range plan that there be one combined college in New Ulm and a single Wisconsin prep school in

Watertown. Or, the WELS could mandate the implementation of the 1991 resolution. There are further possibilities. Some favor the creation of an entirely new college in southeastern Wisconsin.

With so little being said since 1985 about Michigan Lutheran Seminary, the conclusion might be drawn that MLS, its faculty, its president and its board are simply onlookers, or that you in Michigan feel no compulsion to adopt a position on the future of worker training. Nothing could be farther from the truth. For better or for worse, what the synod decides will have a profound impact on all of us.

Let me suggest, however, that our relative “distance” from the publicly adopted or proposed blueprint for worker training offers us a special advantage. Can we not in Michigan help the discussion by looking for principles which might contribute constructively to the controversy about the future of our school system, now well under way. My fourteen years in the Michigan District has taught me that we are in many respects a microcosm of the synod as a whole, at least in respect to worker training. The Northern Conference is “old WELS.” It is heartland WELS. It has a worker training school in its midst. It contains the largest concentration of WELS Lutherans without an area Lutheran high school. The Southwestern Conference has given birth to and supports an area high school. Like many parts of the WELS today, the demands of that school for loyalty and support are large. It isn't easy. Few if any youth from the southwestern corner attend MLS. As a result worker training must be done through an area Lutheran high school there, or not at all. The Southeastern Conference splits its young people between an area high school and MLS. Operating a high school is not easy, and there is always the potential for friction between the synod's secondary program in Saginaw and the local high school program in Westland. It is a matter of joy to me that such friction has been kept to a minimum. Finally, the Ohio conference is like those sparsely populated saltwater districts of the WELS that encircle the Midwest from Alaska to Maine. Ohio is decidedly mission oriented. It cares about its youth, but asks honest questions about the allocation of precious resources when so few of its youth can be recruited to live far away from home at a boarding school during their high school years.

In another way, Michigan is like no other district. It is midwestern, yet historically a cat that walks by itself among the five heartland districts. Professor Teifel's essay at the back of Michigan Memories outlines the maverick role Michigan has played after rejoining the synodical federation in 1910. The so-called Michigan plan spurred a new approach to stewardship. Agitation, then action, led to a bold leap across state lines to open home missions in Florida. Mission-minded men from Michigan led the charge which expanded our world mission program. Organized evangelism's earliest proponents were Michigan's. Michigan remains our synod's pioneer in care for the aging and concern for the victims of disasters or other calamities. We have challenged the old saw that it was not prudent to send a Michigan man directly to Mequon without a side trip elsewhere in the synod to test his orthodoxy. In fact three of Michigan's native sons hold professorships at Mequon.

But let me get to the point. To close this essay I would like to share with you the principles which guide me at MLS and which I believe will best position it and our worker training division for the work it must do in the 1990s. As I have said, they will necessarily be mine and open to critique and alternative thinking. Like all principles, mine are part idealism, part perception, part belief, and part me. I share them without claiming infallibility. I offer them candidly with no apology but with an open mind.

## **Principles to Guide the Training of Workers in the 1990s – My Beliefs**

*I believe in an educational program for the 1990s that is immersed in the Word, as well as occupied with the Word.* I believe this because the inspired Scriptures are the world's only pure fountain of truth and wisdom. I believe this because a regular use of the Word is the only means of grace for ourselves and others.

As a synod we need to support and encourage any and all attempts to get our people involved in the study of the Bible. To keep such an explosion of Bible study evangelical and Spirit-driven, we must insure that our worker training system produces pastors whose Greek and Hebrew is limber and user-friendly. We must reserve our time in our teacher training program and any special ministries program for a thorough grounding in the Scriptures. Our WELS repudiated proof-text theology early in this century. Doctrine grounded in a contextual, historical/grammatical study of Scripture was the cornerstone of the Wauwatosa Gospel. We dare not settle for proof-text dogmatism at the end of this century. A knowledge of the Bible where the forest is as clear as the trees is something our consecrated laymen can also reach out for in partnership with their pastors. Such immersion in God's Word will be our bulwark against doctrinal drift or careless apostasy.

That is, if we use the Word as a means of grace and not as a plaything for the mind. One only has to compare the two great reformers of the sixteenth century. Luther's theology was rooted in grace and it became and remained evangelical. Calvin's theology made a deal with the intellect and this spawned a host of faith-eroding errors.

Every attempt should be made by us in our K through 12 programs to implement the fine new religion curriculum which has been planned and is now in the initial stages of implementation. That program aims at the head and the heart in an excellent way. It is designed to apply the Word to the lives of youngsters and move them to see God's power in their lives when God's grace moves them.

I believe that our worker training schools should address the somewhat unnatural "congregational" life which is created when a student leaves home to live in an institutional setting. On the prep level I am personally acquainted with the multiplicity of come-ons which bombard our students in order to lure them into well-paying and prestigious careers. Certainly I would be the last to say that being a doctor, a lawyer, or some other professional is wrong. But we need pastors, teachers and missionaries! The fields remain white. Workers must be sent. By giving young people opportunities to minister to themselves and others in ways that are appropriate to their age and maturity, young people discover that God is pleased to use clay pots to do his work and that he dishes out rewards that cannot be measured in shekels or in the fleeting coin of worldly fame. Our synod has operated a vicar program since the 1950s. All graduates of DMLC practice teach. Our schools now have early field experiences, summer vicarships, college level canvassing, schooltime taste of the ministry and summertime VBS programs for high schoolers. These and similar programs deserve our support and encouragement.

I believe in an educational program for the 1990s that is rooted in past experience, one that is shaped by present realities, and one that is calibrated to future opportunities. Put another way, we should honor hard lessons learned. We should be practical about how much we can do well with our present resources. But we should always be positioning ourselves to meet the future when it arrives, not flatfooted, but poised to employ promising new tools for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom.

We have an elementary and secondary program supported by our congregations that is the envy of most. And should be. We also have a worker training program that is a precious heritage. But it is not static. What worked for our immigrant forbearers may deserve a second look in the 1990s.

I believe the WELS is about to pass through its third “cultural revolution” of this century. The first one coincided with World War I when all things German were unpatriotic. We became bilingual as a synod when English was added to German. The second cultural revolution occurred as we emerged from the Great Depression and World War II. During that war Americans distinguished being German from being fascist. Nevertheless we put German on the shelf as a synod. The *Gemeindeblatt* ceased publication. German orations were no longer given at Northwestern. The influence of the German hymnal and catechism evaporated. Now comes the third cultural revolution.

America is fast becoming a melting pot for more than European whites. By the year 2000 a full 47% of Americans will be brown, black or yellow. The economic road ahead will be multi-national. The search for jobs will lure our people beyond America’s shores and locate them in places where English is understood, but a native language is preferred. I believe our schools should once again take up the serious pursuit of other languages, and for pedagogical reasons the earlier in the educational process the better. I do for a number of reasons. Language has been called the window to the soul. We know that the Word is the only power to unlock the heart and create saving faith. The Word must not bounce off the soul like an arrow off a window pane. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit saw fit to equip the first cadre of missionaries with the gift of intelligent tongues. Did this convert them? Certainly not. But it removed an obstacle.

I also believe that our country and world is also well into a revolution that will rival the industrial and Gutenberg revolutions. Within our lifetime we will witness the merger of all information delivery technologies into one. The resulting multimedia highway for information will be as potentially powerful to us as the printing press was in the hands of Luther. With it we can be about our Father’s business to preach and teach all over the world like never before. Satan is already hard at work to get his message out through the media. He will bring new meaning to the phrase, “prince of the power of the air, “ if he is the only one to make spiritual use of multimedia.

Technology will certainly challenge us. At the beginning of this century our pastors copied out sermons in longhand on folded sheets of paper. My father typed them on his manual Remington. When I got to MLS one of the first purchases we made was an IBM selectric. Now sermons are composed on word processors. For the more adventuresome among us, whole libraries are ours on compact disk. Whether we have one college or two, a single prep school or many feeder schools, each educational institution will have to tame the beast and teach its students how to ride.

*I believe in an educational program for the 1990s that is dedicated to the wine rather than the wineskins.* The impact of change in our modern world has been thoroughly studied by experts. They use terms like “future shock” to describe the inability of a growing number of people to come to terms with rapid change.

Outside our circles a thinker addressed this problem and gave a new meaning to the word paradigm. For those of us who didn’t take Latin, Hebrew or Greek, a paradigm used to be the standard word used in textbooks that was used to run a verb or noun through its many inflections. The new use of that word is one which describes a way of life built around assumptions that once worked. Over time, so the theory goes, the proven utility of a given system achieves a certain

aura of sacredness that accrues to all that it touches. When changes occur or innovations threaten any part of the paradigm, the system either shifts or freezes. When it shifts survival is possible. When it freezes, the system eventually collapses under the weight of its increasing lack of relevance to what really works.

The old Swiss watch is offered as a easy-to-grasp example. Swiss watches worked. They were masterpieces. They had the admiration of the world. Along came the consumer society. Price was the one aspect of the Swiss-watch-paradigm that was now vulnerable. Savvy entrepreneurs created a digital watch Poof. The Swiss watch paradigm collapsed. In our own bark yard General Motors is cited as another example. For most of this century GM was a giant who could slay all comers. It perfected the assembly line, but it also warehoused goods and paid its worker the highest wages in the world. Along came the Japanese. Workers and management kept wages low. A just-in-time philosophy of supplying parts to the assembly line also cut costs. Add high quality and we in Michigan know what has happened.

It can happen in the church too. For years we have told ourselves that our worker training system is second to none. Who can quarrel with a prep system that yields 50% of its graduates on average to our colleges, or with Northwestern that yields 70% of its incoming freshmen and almost all of its graduates for enrollment at the Seminary, or with DMLC that yields over two-thirds of its freshmen and over 90% of its seniors for assignment. I won't even mention Mequon where the senior who doesn't seek a call is rare indeed. It's a paradigm that works. But is it a paradigm that shifts or one that freezes? Our Lord warned about putting new wine in old wineskins. I think he knows about paradigms. What we do holds primacy over how we do it. But how we do it could be the chink in our armor. It could spill all that great stuff that we have before it gets to where the Lord wants it. I recall the Abyssinian Coptic chapel in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. There the priests mechanically recited a language they no longer understood. The words were a liturgy of their church from the fifth century. In the past 1400 years Ethiopia has shifted languages twice. The paradigm did not shift. It froze. How many Abyssinian Copts do you know?

*I believe in an education for the 1990s that is general enough to uphold the unity of faith, yet diverse enough to enrich the body of Christ.* In plain language, I think specialized ministries have a future. I also believe we will have to work hard to have all our ministries work together as one. In 1961 the WELS broke with Missouri. This kicked off an unprecedented growth in home mission activity. By the time my class graduated from Mequon fully 50% of the graduates were assigned to new missions.

Many were unprepared for the s challenges of building and leading a mission. Most struggled, not because their theology was lacking, but because the practical components of their training were geared to midwestern realities. Some went under as missionaries and wondered why. I found out myself that a mission pastor in Dixie Florida is not the same as the pastor of a gathered flock in some rural midwestern town where the church has been around and for several generations.

Am I in favor of abandoning theology to make room for a how-to seminar-seminary? I say no. I do, however, believe that we should do more to respond to the diversity of gifts that exist in the pool of potential pastors, teachers, missionaries and lay leaders. Not every student need take the same curricular road to a common end. I for one believe that high school students will be better prepared for a study of biblical languages in college if they learn any language well and at the same time carry with them a positive attitude toward language study. I believe our Board for Worker Training and our synod took a positive step when it established curricula for

staff ministries. Some worry about a fragmented ministry. Not necessarily. People trained in the areas of evangelism, family ministry, youth work, and the care of suffering Christians need only be used where they are wanted. And, I say, where they are wanted they will lighten that pastors burden considerably.

*I believe that worker training education in the 1990s, while holding fast to the sanctity of the call, should anticipate entries and exits that are possible throughout a lifetime.* The projected gap between needs and projected graduates is real, at least for the preaching ministry. The growth in resignations from ministries is also real. Both problems may find a partial solution in the growth of continuing education in our midst. In America high school counselors tell students they should count on changing jobs and being retrained at least three times in their productive years. If our church develops fully its present program of seminary certification that allows men in their thirties and forties to pursue ministry we may narrow the gap. The promise of distance learning, including interactive video, opens up the possibility that a school may come to the student rather than vice versa. For men whose wives are working and whose children are in school such an opportunity may allow more to test out the idea of entering the ministry before making a commitment that requires relocation and a radical change in family life. A growth in continuing education may also allow some pastors, teachers, and missionaries already working in the field to gain a new lease on life without changing calls. And, for those who see the wisdom in a change of venue, continuing education may develop a hitherto undeveloped skill, something an observant district president will note when drawing up a call list.

*Finally, I believe that education in the 1990s should be led by mentors who are apt to teach, competent to teach, and in touch with the ministry for which they are teaching.*

Being apt to teach is the ability “to effect transfer” from self to another. This rather clumsy expression assumes that there are many things which may be transferred by a teacher. Knowledge is certainly one. But attitudes, skills, and the wisdom of God are important others. When a teacher covers material, it cannot be assumed that a transfer is taking place. I have known brilliant men who could not teach and average men who were superb teachers. I am convinced aptness to teach is a gift which everyone has to some degree, but a gift given in special measure to some. It is a gift that can be augmented with prayer and hard work. I have come to believe that aptness to teach has a different measuring stick on different age levels. A man apt to teach seminarians is not necessarily apt on the high school level, and vice versa. Times, too, can redefine aptness. Our current generation of high school children, generally speaking, has a short attention span and a high expectation that teaching should be entertaining. They say, grab me, don’t bore me and grab me often! An apt teacher will find ways to sidestep boredom and at the same time instill structure, inspire discipline, display fairness, and be able to banter good-naturedly about things of little consequence. I wonder if Director Hoenecke would have said the same things a half century ago. Maybe so. Maybe not.

Being competent to teach means you have something to transfer. Here again the commodities are knowledge, attitude, skill and godly wisdom. Competence is something best measured by others. It is gained by study and hard work. It is a lifelong pursuit. To stop learning is to risk incompetence. To think that one can teach anything is hubris. For us to ask teachers to teach things about which they know only a little more than their pupils is to trivialize education.

Worker training teachers, I believe, must have a third component to stand squarely like a three-legged stool in their ministries at a worker training institution. A teacher in tune with contemporary ministry will tend to make wise choices in the selection of material to be transferred. This doesn’t mean that everything must be immediately and perceptibly utilitarian.

Systematic theology, for example, though abstract to some is indispensable for a confessional ministry that does not wish to wander aimlessly all over the map. What could be more sensibly practical than that? Being in touch is also knowing a bit about the wide variety of calls that are out there. I find it hard to believe that faculty can maintain an effective *Weltanschauung* if its members are restricted to a single campus or community for long periods of time. Faculty exchanges, sabbaticals-in-ministry, regular contact with the wider WELS and non-WELS educational community, and other ideas should be considered. Wise boards will seek diversity in building faculties. They should urge faculty members to explore the work of the synod at large as best they can. Time and money ought to be set aside for such purposes.

### **Epilogue**

There! I've said in public many things that I have shared with brethren in small, private bull sessions. Let me add one personal note. There have been nights when I haven't slept well because of the quaking and shaking that threaten my corner of the kingdom. Emotions have a way of running high and running wild. It was on one of those nights that I woke suddenly with thoughts built around the familiar second commandment admonition to pray, praise and give thanks. I wrote a letter to the editor of the Northwestern Lutheran as a result and it was printed.. For those of you who missed it, let it be my amen to this essay.

Our church body faces enormous challenges as we seek to pass on to our children what our fathers bequeathed to us. We would like to pass things on in good shape, at least as good as was given to us. Perhaps, by God's grace, we might even hope to pass things on a bit better. Let me propose an action plan: Pray, praise, and give thanks.

In reverse order-give thanks daily for what we have. It is far more than we deserve.

Praise the good works we see done by others, in our circle of Christian friends, in the work done by our congregations, and in the labors of our faithful—but human—pastors, teachers, and missionaries. And, yes, in our oft-criticized synod in all of its parts, too.

And then pray. When we have doubts about what others do, when we fear their ideas might be leading our church body astray, when we ourselves are just plain scared because of all the changes that seem to be necessary to keep up with Satan's perversion of the world we live in—pray! After all, the Lord is really the only one big enough, strong enough, or wise enough to make a difference!

Pray, praise, and give thanks!