

Priorities in Pastoral Education: 1929 and 2004

by Paul Kelm

[Presented at the Symposium on Pastoral Education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, September 20-21, 2004]

The past 75 years have witnessed a shift in American Christendom from clearly defined denominations to a non-denominational milieu, with detours through the ecumenical and charismatic movements. The mainline protestant churches of 1929 have lost big chunks of both theology and membership. Roman Catholicism in America has become a broad religious tradition rather than an exclusive doctrinal position. Fundamentalists morphed into Evangelicals, streamlining their theological distinctives and adopting a political agenda. That's a lot of change.

The neighborhood church of 1929 has virtually passed out of existence. The ethnic origins of church bodies have largely faded into history. Many rural churches have closed, merged, or been radically altered by the influx of ex-urban commuters. A growing number of urban churches have reinvented themselves to address a changing neighborhood and a pluralistic society. While some churches have grown from one pastor to a large ministry staff, others struggle to afford their pastor. The Baby-Boomer mega-churches get most of the publicity today; but new Gen-X and Millennial Generation ministries seem to be taking a significantly different shape. Ironically, the two-parish ministry of the past looks like a promising contemporary phenomenon. Bi-vocational ministry may well be a trend.

America has changed dramatically since the dedication of our seminary's facilities in 1929. Few remember the depression and world war that completed the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. That industrial age has given way to the so-called "information economy;" and already authors have identified an emerging "experience economy." The literate world of 1929 was significantly altered (some say "dumbed down") by television; and a logical, sequential way of thinking is being replaced by visual and mosaic thought patterns.

The modern world for which the seminary prepared pastors in 1929 is yielding to a postmodern culture. While the modern challenges of reason, secular humanism and social Darwinism remain, the new enemies of faith are postmodern denials of universal and objective truth. The Judaeo-Christian ethic that once characterized western culture has been replaced by subjective and pragmatic "values." Instead of the classroom or the pulpit, people seek direction from the media and the internet. Each new Gallup or Barna poll confirms that young Americans question and then quietly dismiss the importance of "church."

This is not your father's America, nor is it your grandfather's church. But it is still your heavenly Father's world. The church in general and the seminary particularly must confront the critical questions: What dare never change? What may change? And what must change? Navigating between Hebrews 13:8 and Matthew 24:35¹ on one hand and 1 Corinthians 9:22 and Isaiah 43:18-19² on the other will mean challenging dialog. The pastors who graduate today must be more deeply rooted in changeless theology and yet more personally flexible than those of us who bring some tread-wear to this anniversary. It is valuable, therefore, to go back not just to 1929, but to the mid-first century in order to reestablish the basics.

Qualifications of a Pastor in the Pastoral Epistles

¹ Heb. 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Matt. 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

² 1 Cor. 9:22 "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." Is. 43:18-19 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"

It is still true that “if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). And the Holy Spirit still moves young men to set their hearts on ministry, still gives them the requisite gifts. In 2004 that heart assumes greater importance than in 1929, I believe, while the gifts remain the same. Any reading of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 must conclude that the Apostle Paul was more concerned about the “heart” than the “head” qualifications of a pastor. What the Word of God does with pastoral candidates, more than what they do with that Word, dominates the list of qualifications. That is so contemporary! What young and unchurched Americans prize in a pastor today is, first, his authentic Christian heart and life, not his skills or credentials. At the same time, that pastor must serve members whose standards for both the pastor’s character and skills have been significantly raised by comparisons and by scandals.

While any attempt to cluster the qualifications St. Paul lists for pastors is arbitrary, this linear and logical-thinking observer sees three categories: the Christian character traits of a pastor, the Christian lifestyle of a pastor, and theological prerequisites for a pastor.

Christian Character Traits

The 1928-29 seminary catalog says in its section on entrance requirements: “Graduation from these institutions (Northwestern College or a Synodical Conference college) is taken as trustworthy evidence of the applicant’s Christian character.”³ Twice daily chapel and the mutual admonition of dormitory life must certainly have an impact on Christian character, but alumni who reflect on their college years might wonder how trustworthy the evidence provided by their graduation really was. A thoroughly academic system of pastoral training relied on the influence of Christian parents and teachers in a young man’s formative years to shape the Christian character traits vital to a pastor. A training system of 12 years could refine the character of a young man or, as was announced by more than one professor, “weed out” those who were unfit. But the worker training system’s goals and strategies for Christian character formation were not articulated as well as the curriculum that would shape knowledge and skills. In a culture that embraced those character traits, perhaps clear goals and strategies weren’t necessary.

In 2004, those character traits are no longer reinforced by culture. The influence of the media and peers is enormous and often counter to Christian moral values. The influence of mom and dad may not be entirely positive. A seminary student is far more likely to be the product of a broken home. And the “system” has been reduced to eight years for a growing percentage of students. It may well be that among the priorities in pastoral education for 2004 is a more intentional approach to the nurturing of Christian character traits.

Four words are repeated in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to describe the character of a pastor: *σώφρων*, *φιλόξενος*, *μη πάροινος*, and *μη πλήκτης*.

Σώφρων is translated “self-controlled” by the NIV. It means sensible, having good judgment and a moderate lifestyle. Such a man does not get carried away by his emotions; he thinks before he speaks or acts. To reinforce the importance of this character trait, Paul in Titus one adds the word *ἐγκρατής*, which can be translated “self-controlled” or “disciplined,” literally “having power in oneself.” This word represents a core ethical virtue of the Greek philosophers, particularly Socrates and Aristotle. Philo describes *ἐγκρατής* as “superiority over every desire.”⁴ Lenski suggests that the life of Joseph is a biblical illustration of this word.⁵ For good measure, the apostle makes the point in the negative for Titus with *μη αὐθάδη*, not self-willed, not stubborn or arrogant. The word literally says “not self-pleasing.” Contemporary jargon would say, “It’s not about me.” Perhaps these characteristics can be summarized with the word “maturity.” An immature pastor, self-centered, undisciplined and over-reacting, will undermine his ministry with caustic words, with hasty judgments, or with ill-considered actions. Most of us can give concrete examples of this.

³ *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Catalog*, 1928-29, page 11.

⁴ Gerhard Kittel, editor, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), Volume II, pages 340-341.

⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), page 899.

Φιλόξενος, literally “one who loves strangers,” describes a man who is caring and accepting of others, “hospitable” in the NIV. In the early church, the pastor’s home was a haven for the persecuted and for peripatetic Christian workers. Today, the parsonage that hosts gatherings of members and neighbors (“pre-Christians”) models openness and love. How the pastor and his church treat the hungry and homeless speaks volumes about the impact of our faith. The opposite of φιλόξενος is xenophobic, closed toward people who are different. In a pluralistic culture, hospitality extends beyond people of diverse ethnicity to people whose addictions, dysfunctions, and moral distortions have distanced them from the church. Evangelism to the really lost requires that the church be a hospital for sinners, not a country club of pseudo-saints. Spiritual hospitals need a hospitable pastor.

Μὴ πάροινος means that the pastor does not have a drinking problem, a weakness for alcohol. Contemporary American culture may be more sensitive to this moral qualifier than was the case a generation or two ago. That this problem exists in every era is suggested by the additional term in 1 Timothy 3, νηφάλιος – temperate, sober in the use of wine. This word, however, is broad enough to describe a calm and measured approach to life. Armin Schuetze goes so far as to apply the word this way: “He will not be intrigued by change merely for the sake of change.”⁶ The word defines an antidote to the predilection for “Jewish myths” and “godless chatter” which Paul warns against in the pastoral epistles.

Μὴ πλήκτης means “not violent” or “not a bully.” Not just physical abuse, but verbal bullying is the concern. The pastor can’t “lose his cool,” threaten or intimidate, no matter how asinine the comments and behavior in a voters meeting. In Titus Paul adds the term, μὴ ὀργίλον, which refers to a quick temper and an angry response. The word ἄμαχον in 1 Timothy, literally “not a fighter,” intensifies the point. The translation “not quarrelsome” directs a pastor to avoid taking sides where Scripture is not at stake, to swallow hard when criticism comes his way. “Peaceable” is a positive translation that recalls Jesus’ beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

In 1 Timothy the apostle uses the word ἀφιλάργυρον, “not a lover of money” or “not greedy.” In Titus the term is μὴ ἀίσχροκερδῆ, “not fond of dishonest gain.” St. Paul eschewed a salary to avoid such charges, while at the same time insisting that the pastor was due a livable wage. In a materialistic world, such as the first or twenty-first century, it’s easy to let income get in the way of serving. In a competitive, comparative world, the pastor may resent that his education and gifts aren’t reflected in his paycheck. The apostle’s encouragement to “godliness with contentment” in 1 Timothy 6 applies to the pastor first.

Several positive terms fill out the Christian character traits of a pastor. Κόσμιος is a broad term in 1 Timothy 3 that describes orderliness and respectability. (Originally, it was a military term for arranging troops in battle array.) Current slang might describe such a man as “having his act together.” How the pastor dresses is a reflection of this character trait, one that some young pastors today haven’t appreciated. Time management is another arena addressed by κόσμιος. Trench says: “The well ordering is not of dress and demeanor only, but of the inner life.”⁷ Kittel points out that over time κόσμιος came to mean “adorn,” especially as it described the well-dressed woman.⁸ It is used that way in Titus 2:10,⁹ which makes the point that a Christian life *adorns* the doctrine of our Savior God. We make truth look good when we live it out. A disorganized style of ministry probably reflects a sloppy way of life; and people draw conclusions from what they observe.

Ἐπιεικῆ in 1 Timothy 3, describes a kind and gentle nature. “Forbearance” is the old English word for patient and forgiving acceptance of people. This is the word the apostle used in Philippians 4:5, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” In a generation where the “sensitive male” is touted, the pastor should lead the way.

⁶ Armin Schuetze, *The People’s Bible – I and II Timothy and Titus*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1991), page 51.

⁷ Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), page 346.

⁸ Gerhard Kittel, *op. cit.*, Volume III, page 867.

⁹ “...to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

In Titus 1, three positive terms fill out the Christian character traits of a pastor. Φιλόγαθος, “lover of good,” describes someone who is positive, who appreciates God’s gifts and blessings, who is quick to thank and affirm rather than criticize and cavil. Philippians 4:8¹⁰ is this character trait urged upon all Christians. Negative pastors drive people away, and then blame everyone but themselves. We can be confessional without being what Spiro Agnew once called “nattering nabobs of negativism.” Δίκαιος and ὅσιος are often paired in classical Greek, according to Trench.¹¹ The former describes the honesty and faithfulness of a pastor, the “upright” nature that is a reflection of the imputed righteousness he has in Christ. The latter, translated “holy” most often, summarizes a consistent moral life that is true to the person’s convictions. Together these words add up to what we call “integrity.” In this generation authentic Christian character earns the right to be heard. Perhaps the highest compliment I’ve heard for a pastor in consulting interviews was, “He’s real.”

Christian character formation is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. However, just as God uses the visual and experiential teaching of parents’ example to train children, so also does he use modeling to shape the character of pastors. If the positive impact of parents wanes, the role of ministerial education becomes more significant. The importance of Christian character, no doubt, finds its way into seminary classrooms regularly, both biblical injunction and practical illustration. But the methodology Jesus employed (Mark 3:14 – “He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach...”) may be more appropriate than an academic model for the character formation of pastors. “Caught more than taught” is the maxim. To balance the competitive environment of college, can we create relationships of mutual encouragement and accountability that continue many years into ministry? Though the specter of pietism has been a dissuading factor, can we encourage healthy small group Bible study and prayer at Martin Luther College? In addition to their role as instructors, can professors be intentional mentors? Older pastors have observed that veterans aren’t mentoring new pastors the way they did a generation ago; and young pastors don’t seem to take to mentoring all that well. The vicar year is one answer to the need for modeling and mentoring, but in this generation future pastors would benefit from earlier efforts and a sustained emphasis.

Christian Lifestyle

Since marriage was forbidden to a seminary student in 1929,¹² qualifications such as “the husband of but one wife” and “manage his own family well” could hardly be applied. The growing percentage of married students today means that the church has at least a small window on a ministerial candidate’s family life. The seminary student’s wife today is less likely to understand or accept what life in the parsonage is than the pastor’s wife in 1929, and a growing percentage of wives have little background in the WELS. A young woman’s career and lifestyle expectations can be at odds with her husband’s calling. The parsonage remains a glass house, even if less is expected of the pastor’s wife and the house may now be owned by the pastor. Family Ministry is a growing emphasis in Lutheran congregations; and the seminary has encouraged it. Interviews with church members have confirmed for me that people expect their pastor’s family to model the principles of Christian family life. Maybe the marriage enrichment and parenting events that comprise much of a church’s Family Ministry ought to be experienced by the pastor during his seminary years, before he attempts to lead the effort in his church.

How a pastor manages money is a lifestyle issue that can make or break his ministry. In 1929 no one had much money to manage; and the frugal maxim “Use it up, wear it out; make it do, do without” was modeled and taught in the home. Now, mom and dad may not have much fiscal sense to pass on to their son at the

¹⁰ “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

¹¹ *Ibid.* Page 328.

¹² Immanuel P. Frey, “Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863-1963” – a centennial essay. On page 26, Frey adds, “Fifty years ago even engagements of students were forbidden by seminary regulations.”

seminary. The seminary student of today owns a truck-load of material things and may have accumulated substantial debt. What were understood as “wants” in 1929 are perceived as “needs” by the student of today. There is a significant gap from the most well-off to the financially struggling, a gap that can heighten material expectations. Recall Paul’s character description ἀφιλόργυρος in 1 Timothy 3. Gambling is a problem for future pastors today, just as it is for their members, in part because it has become socially acceptable. Recall St. Paul’s Christian character qualification μὴ ἀίσχροκερδής in Titus 1. The seminary has made money management seminars available to all its students. Perhaps financial counsel ought to occur earlier in their training. One good reason is that teaching the stewardship of money to young members is an important facet of adult discipleship today, and that stewardship training ought to be much more than merely encouraging giving to the church.

A generation or two ago, people tended to look the other way if the pastor drank a little too much. “Boys will be boys” excused excessive drinking in college, maybe even the seminary. There is little such tolerance today, by governments or by society. The seminary student today drinks better beer than his father did, and he has more sensitivity to the danger of driving drunk. He probably faces more pressures than his father did as well; and the use of alcohol to release stress is a dangerous first step toward abusing alcohol. Recall the character trait μὴ πρόρουνον in 1 Timothy 3.

In both 1 Timothy and Titus, St. Paul emphasizes that the pastor be a “one-woman man.”¹³ No doubt, the apostle would dismiss any argument that rising divorce rates among the clergy, sexual harassment lawsuits, homosexuality, and internet pornography make the 21st century more difficult than the first century. Corinth of Paul’s day would make Mequon blush. But there’s little doubt that external sexual temptation today is far greater than it was in 1929. Internet pornography is a problem for a quarter of the male population and, some psychologists suggest, for about the same percentage of pastors. The seminary has a legitimate concern for the private morality of students. After repeated scandals, the American press has made discussion of sexuality and ministry public. The good God brings out of evil may be that the church is forced to confront what nobody talked about a generation and more ago. “Sex education” at the seminary is a concept whose time has come. Dr. John Johnson addresses students on the subject.

The amalgamation of Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College ameliorated the potentially unhealthy separation of future pastors from women for both college and seminary years. The male ghetto of ministerial education remains a factor, nonetheless, in preparing pastors to serve a church that – in protestant circles in America – may be 60% female. Because the role of women in the church is so sensitive, how a young pastor relates to women is critical to his ministry. A condescending or dismissive attitude is hard to disguise. Insensitivity to gender differences, expressed in bad humor or awkward silence, can hurt a man’s ministry. Perhaps a “winterim” course on gender issues will be offered in the near future.

District presidents would probably affirm that more pastors lose their ministry to sexual sins and family problems, financial wrongs and addictions, than to doctrinal aberration or incompetence. If these lifestyle issues could be addressed early on, ministries could be rescued. Perhaps some circuit pastors are sensitive enough to detect the onset of moral failure in a pastor’s lifestyle, and perhaps they have built a relationship that allows honest and loving confrontation. However, because the circuit pastor is part of the system that makes judgments about a pastor’s future, he may not be the confidant of first choice to a troubled pastor. Building close Christian relationships of support and accountability during the years of ministerial training seems more likely to provide pastors with someone who will notice that his friend’s moral compass is skewed, someone trusted enough to be able to confront his erring brother.

St. Paul begins his list of qualifications for Timothy with the phrase δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπισκοποῦν ἀνεπίληπτον εἶναι. “It is necessary, therefore, that the overseer be above reproach.” Ἀνεπίληπτος “not open to blame” – is paralleled in Titus 1 with ἀνέγκλητος. Only Paul uses these words in Scripture; and they

¹³ Armin Schuetze (*op. cit.*, page 50) and others interpret μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα in this way, focusing on moral rectitude in a sexually immoral society rather than issues such as whether a widower could remarry.

seem interchangeable. The former says literally that there is nothing an adversary could take hold of, on which to base a charge. The latter, Chrysostom says, implies not merely acquittal, but the absence of so much as a charge or accusation.¹⁴ *Dei* makes clear that the highest standard, a blameless life, is essential to the pastor's ministry. The summary statement at the end of Paul's list of qualifications in 1 Timothy reads δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔξωθεν. "It is also necessary to have a good witness (reputation) among those outside." It may stretch Paul's intent, but the word μαρτυρίαν is a reminder that our witness to the unchurched is first our Christian lifestyle, then words. St. Peter would agree. (1 Peter 3:14-16) The bookend phrases summarize the Christian lifestyle qualifications of a pastor: nothing on which members could base a charge, and nothing that the community could use to discredit gospel ministry...or more positively, the example for members to follow and the evidence of the gospel's power that gains an audience for the gospel's truth. Holding students to that high calling is an essential responsibility of a seminary.

Theological Prerequisites

While the pastoral epistles place a premium on theology, there are just three clauses in the 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 position descriptions that can be described as theological qualifiers. But each is a mouthful.

To Timothy Paul says: "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil." The word νεόφυτος – neophyte – means literally "recently planted." It describes someone with little rooting. The apostle used the analogy positively in Colossians 2:6-7, "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, *rooted* and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught." People who aren't rooted in God's Word get easily up-rooted by spurious arguments, emotional appeals, and well-phrased heresy. How else, for example, could Lutheran pastors buy the premise that "without recognizing the body of the Lord" in 1 Corinthians 11:29 refers to the church? People who aren't rooted in God's Word get blown away by the attention that comes with public ministry. They begin to think that they know more than they do, that they are more important than they are. Neophytes ignore St. Peter's qualifications for the ministry, especially 1 Peter 5:3: "Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." Τυφωθεὶς the word translated "become conceited," could be literally rendered "wrapped in smoke." A contemporary idiom fits, for the novice doesn't recognize when people are "blowing smoke at him." He is misdirected by flattery, then becomes a people-pleaser or finds himself in someone's "pocket." Pride led Satan to rebel against God. Without realizing it, the novice pastor's pride puts him in competition with his God; and he risks Satan's sentence.

The rigorous training of WELS ministerial education pretty well assures that no "neophytes" are assigned to parishes. May God spare us what other church bodies have faced, rushing second career seminarians into the ministry to fill vacancies. Still, every new pastor is a neophyte in ministry. That isn't drummed home today the way it once was, when the not-so-facetious counsel was to wait until you had five years of experience before speaking at a pastoral conference. Experience is humbling to most of us. The pastoral ego resistant to lessons in humility may need someone to "woodshed" him early on, before Paul's warning becomes reality.

In Titus Paul summarizes the importance of theological training with the words: "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." The Greek construction almost defies literal translation, but there's no missing the emphatic redundancy in ἀντεχόμενον τοῦ κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν πιστοῦ λόγου. The pastor is urged to a firm grasp of the "faithful Word," just the way it has been taught. Not creeds and confessions, but Scripture alone (exegetical theology) is the basis for ministry. At the same time, creeds and confessions (systematic and historical theology) reflect the timeless teaching of truth that informs and circumscribes the pastor's preaching and teaching. Ἀντέχομαι means to have a firm grasp on something, then to cling to it. What an appropriate illustration for a pastor's theological acumen! The combination of exegetical and systematic study allows a

¹⁴ Trench, *op.cit.*, page 381.

seminarian to “wrap himself around” doctrine, not merely learn about it. When conventional wisdom or an emotional appeal pressures him to compromise, he clings to what he is certain about. When scholars question and churches confuse doctrine, the one who has a firm grasp of truth won’t let go. And that allows him to encourage the doubting and refute the erring. Every pastor is called upon to do both, encourage and refute.

Without a firm grasp on sound doctrine, a pastor’s answers include too many “it seems to me” or “professor somebody said” answers, lengthier than necessary and clear as mud. Then his members begin asking, “What does the synod say?” or resenting what several people have called “synod rules.” Simplistic pronouncements about church fellowship can create legalists and separatists. Ill-informed judgments about medical ethics may lead people to question what their pastor tells them about anything. An inability to teach within the “analogy of faith” will leave people with disconnected snippets of dogma. Let nothing erode the thorough theological curriculum of our seminary, for without that foundation no amount of knowledge or skills can honor God or serve his people.

Διδακτικός, “able to teach” includes the pastor’s grasp of theology, the content of his teaching. Without that, technical skill won’t matter. The Greek word, however, is best understood as referring to the pastor’s teaching skills. There may be “born teachers,” but most of us become effective teachers through principles learned, pedagogical and andragogical methodology acquired, and – of course – experience. While theology is the queen discipline of the seminary, διδακτικός implies some training in the practical elements of psychology, epistemology, technology, and a few other -ologies. Every professor at the seminary is modeling elements of “able to teach” in his classroom, and the variety of examples contributes to the seminarian’s toolbox. It is not enough to know theology; pastoral ministry is about communicating that theology. And in a world of rapidly changing social science and communications technology, a seminary professor is himself continually relearning his craft. Pieper and Schaller might be a bit lost at first in the seminary classroom of today; but they would catch on, because what hasn’t changed is the commitment to effective preaching and teaching of the efficacious Word of God.

A basic theological prerequisites of seminary training is the ability to handle the biblical languages. Our seminary has consistently affirmed the necessity of prior education in Hebrew and Greek, so that exegetical study at the seminary and throughout one’s ministry can be done in those languages. Some things should never change.

Ministerial Emphases in the Pastoral Epistles

St. Paul’s directives for Timothy and Titus go well beyond the familiar “qualifications” sections of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Re-read the three epistles every day for two weeks, and a handful of themes become apparent. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and couched in the very real ministry of the first century, these emphases deserve explication and application in any study of priorities in pastoral education.

Sound Doctrine

Nine times in the pastoral epistles, and nowhere else, St. Paul uses the term “sound doctrine” or its equivalent. In 1 Timothy 1:10, it’s ὑγιαίνουσα διδασκαλία. The term “sound” really means “healthy” or “whole.” For the Greeks, health of the soul was primary, “and the pillar of the healthy soul is the νοῦς.”¹⁵ Mental health, then, might be today’s parallel. “Sound” equals “balanced according to the order of the whole”¹⁶ for Greek thought, a reminder of Lutheran concern for correct law/gospel balance. Like the human organism, doctrine is systemic. Disease in any part affects the whole. Mess up conversion, and you condition grace. Bad eschatology robs the gospel of its comfort. Separate sanctification from justification, and both suffer. In verse 11, the apostle provides his own definition of healthy doctrine when he adds: “that conforms to the glorious

¹⁵ Gerhard Kittel, *op. cit.*, Volume VIII, page 312.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 309.

gospel of the blessed God.” The heart of biblical doctrine is the gospel of God’s unconditional and unmerited grace in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Any doctrine that is severed from the gospel cannot be “sound.” C. F. W. Walther puts it this way: “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.”¹⁷

2 Timothy 4:3, Titus 1:9, and Titus 2:1 repeat the term ὑγιαίνουσα διδασκαλία in one declension or another. In 1 Timothy 4:6, the expression is καλῆς διδασκαλίας, good teaching. In 1 Timothy 6:3 Paul uses the words ὑγιαίνουσιν λόγοις, “sound instruction” or “healthy words.” In Titus 1:13 the phrase ὑγιαίνουσιν ἐν τῇ πίστει reminds us that “the faith” must be a God-given objective reality before faith can become a subjective experience. Λόγον ὑγιῆ in Titus 2:8 provides a variation on this apostolic theme. Ὑγιῆς has the same root as the verb ὑγιαίνω, but is often translated “undamaged” or “unbroken.” You’ll recall Jesus’ commentary in John 10:35, “The Scripture cannot be broken.”

In 2 Timothy 1:13, the phrase ὑποτύπωσιν ὑγιαίνόντων λόγων, “the pattern of sound teaching,” suggests systematic theology, confessions, a catechism, but much more. This is a way of thinking about truth and life. This is “having the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:16) Call it a “biblical worldview.” The Lutheran approach to theology, revolving around the axis of Law/ Gospel tension and centered in Justification, is an example of “the pattern of sound doctrine.” Rather than attempting to resolve biblical tensions with human logic, the “pattern of sound doctrine” appreciates the paradox in *simul iustus et peccator* or doctrines such as election and conversion. Maintaining an appropriate tension between “watching out for false prophets” (Matthew 7:15) and “keeping the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) is an example of the theological “art” that a seminary wants to inculcate.

There is a particular backdrop against which Paul wants Timothy and Titus to understand “sound doctrine.” Several times he refers to Jewish “myths” and “genealogies” (E.g. 1 Timothy 1:4, 2 Timothy 4:4, and Titus 1:14), probably a reference to apocryphal writings and rabbinic commentary that obscured God’s Word.¹⁸ The best-selling novel, “The Da Vinci Code,” demonstrates that pseudepigraphal myths and genealogies are still the antagonists of sound doctrine. Phrases like “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7) and “what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3) could also refer to early gnostic teaching that preyed on religious curiosity. The “designer religion” of our subjective age and the New Age Movement today are a parallel. The “spiritual journey” popularized by Baby Boomers sounds very much like what the apostle addressed.

Another category of “diseased doctrine” is what St. Paul calls “godless chatter,” (1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 2:16), “controversies” (1 Timothy 1:4, 6:4, Titus 3:9), “quarrels about words” (1 Timothy 6:4, 2 Timothy 2:14), and “foolish and stupid arguments” (2 Timothy 2:23). Donald Guthrie uses the phrase “having a morbid craving for arguments” to explain 1 Timothy 6:4.¹⁹ In fact, Paul’s injunction to “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him” (Titus 3:10) is pointedly addressed at people who destroy the unity of the Body of Christ over issues that are not really biblical.

1 Timothy 1 points out that much of the controversy and godless chatter was rooted in the legalisms of Pharisaical Judaism. While the seminary must train pastors who have the courage to separate from errorists, it must also train churchmen who treasure unity and abhor gossip, slander, religious nit-picking and name-calling.

In 1929, the synod was in the midst of the Protes’tant Controversy, with the seminary’s faculty at the center of things; and much of that controversy would probably have fallen under Paul’s judgment. This generation’s ministerium has experienced some “controversies” and “quarrels about words,” in areas such as evangelism, discipleship (Can we use that word now?), and worship. Distinguishing biblical principles from sociological

¹⁷ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1928), page 403.

¹⁸ Donald Guthrie says: “Many scholars see in “genealogies” a clear reference to the second century gnostic emanations. But there seems stronger reasons to suppose that the anonymous false teachers were members of a sect attracted to the more speculative aspects of Judaism.” Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), page 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, page 111.

judgments is a form of discernment that the seminary must seek to inculcate. How brothers disagree is an important issue for classroom discussion and modeling. Warning about legalism is as important as warning against liberalism.

Faithfulness

While St. Paul doesn't use the word "faithful," much of his counsel is the development of this theme. "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Timothy 4:16) may be the thematic verse for the pastoral epistles. A close second might be "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) The verses urging "sound doctrine" describe faithfulness *to* the Word of God. Other verses will emphasize faithfulness *with* the Word of God. And still other verses exhort pastors simply to be faithful to God.

There is a militant strain running through the pastoral epistles. "Fight the good fight" (1 Timothy 1:18 and 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7) is a recurring expression. In 2 Timothy 2:3 Paul says: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." It's hard to avoid the backdrop of persecution and opposition in 2 Timothy, written during Paul's second imprisonment. Witness passages such as: "Join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8), "Endure hardship" (2 Timothy 2:3 and 4:5), "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect" (2 Timothy 2:10). Paul names names, heretics and antagonists such as Hymenaeus and Philetus, Demas and Alexander. In summary, Paul writes: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:12-13) While every generation of Christians this side of heaven is the "Church Militant," some generations face greater persecution and opposition than others. In 1929 America was perceived as a Christian nation. Sure, there were secular humanism and materialism to combat, but the focus of martial energy was the false doctrine in other Christian denominations. In 2004 any pretense of being Christian has been banished from the national psyche, and the church must fight neo-paganism, Islam, pseudo-Christian cults, and the denial of any truth at all. The pluralistic value of "tolerance" is used to intimidate Christian witness to Christ's exclusive claim and Scripture's absolute morality. Churches are no longer perceived as good neighbors, and it would be foolish to dismiss the possibility of governmental prosecution for insisting on biblical truth. "Faithfulness" may very well take on a first-century aura in the next generation. The seminary must be sure graduates recognize the direction of Satan's attack.

Faithfulness, for St. Paul, was rooted in a pastor's gift and calling. In 1 Timothy 1 Paul introduces pastoral advice with the words: "I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you" (1 Timothy 1:18) – probably a reference to what we'd call Timothy's ordination/ installation, as chapter 4, verse 14 suggests: "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." The apostle reiterates the point in 2 Timothy 1:6, "I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands." Then Paul continues, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline." The antidote to discouragement is the power and promise that accompany a pastor's call. What keeps ministry from becoming a job is the pastor's vocation, his calling. There's no room for excuses, no settling for mediocrity, no small thinking for the pastor who "fans into flame the gift that is in him." Those of us who can see most of our ministry in a rear-view mirror have a special admonition to finish well rather than coast into retirement. St. Paul encourages us to faithfulness to our calling.

Moral purity is an essential component of pastoral faithfulness. "But you, man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith love, endurance and gentleness," Paul urges in 1 Timothy 6:11. "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart," he reiterates in 2 Timothy 2:22. The "flee and pursue" theme speaks to spiritual discipline in the life of a pastor. There is, arguably, far less accountability in the life of a pastor than is the case for most of his members. When a seminary graduate is assigned to a small church, the discipline in his schedule will have to be internally developed. Who asks the pastor the pointed questions about his devotional life, his sexual purity, his financial integrity, his example as husband and father? Some congregations still take seriously the

responsibility of the elders for the pastor's spiritual and moral well-being. A small but growing number of churches formally structure an annual review. Many interviews with pastors and their wives have demonstrated for me that too few pastors have a close relationship with another pastor. The seminary, especially in this generation, can encourage graduates to find a confidant, to be morally accountable.

Faithfulness *with* the Word of God means saying what must be said, applying truth to issues and lives, without regard for personal consequences. That's never as easy in practice as it is in theory. St. Paul solemnly and formally makes the point at the end of 2 Timothy: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction." (2 Timothy 4:1-2) In 1 Timothy 4:6 the apostle wrote: "If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed." It may be more difficult for a pastor to explain why he won't officiate at a funeral today than in 1929. There are certainly more cases of divorce to address. There probably wasn't a lot of discussion in pastoral theology about how to deal with people living together or members who are bi-sexual in 1929. Many young pastors in 2004 will face opposition if they raise the issue of excommunication in a voters assembly. Faithfulness means consistent practice; and that often means "doing the hard thing."

Without commitment to the mission of the church, faithfulness is hollow. Paul uses first-person language and example in addressing evangelism (Cf. 1 Timothy 1:15-16 and 2 Timothy 1:11)²⁰. He ties theology to mission in verses such as 1 Timothy 2:5-7²¹. And he summarizes the connection of mission and ministry with: "Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:5) Faithfulness in serving members has a variety of prods. Phone calls ask for the pastor to visit the sick and dying. Elders meetings remind the pastor of the spiritually drifting and dying. His palm pilot has shut-in visits scheduled, as well as Bible classes and worship services. But who will call the pastor to account if he doesn't visit the unchurched husband of Mrs. Schmidt or the family whose children were in Vacation Bible School? In 1929 most of the unchurched in the community were some church's delinquents. In 2004 there are many who haven't a clue about the gospel. The seminary today is preparing pastors who will either build the church with evangelism or may bury it with a series of funerals. It's an issue of faithfulness.

As pastors confront a sea change in American culture and declining church membership, it's easy to become defensive. Seminars sponsored by synodical and para-church agencies are sometimes taken as criticism of what pastors have been doing, and then the defensiveness becomes reactionary. With an appeal to 1 Corinthians 4:1-2,²² the beleaguered pastor takes refuge in the word "faithfulness." That's appropriate. But ministry is not only faithfulness *to* the Word; it is also faithfulness *with* the Word. Rather than hide out in faithfulness, we can reach out in faithfulness and grow in faithfulness. One of the challenges faced by the seminary in 2004 is to train pastors who are not defensively faithful, but aggressively faithful. In this generation the pastor's office can easily become a bunker, with the computer at its command center. Continually, personally renewed joy in the gospel frees us from fears and defensiveness, empowers us to love and to witness.

²⁰ 1 Tim. 1:15-16 "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him." 2 Tim. 1:11 "Of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle."

²¹ "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle."

²² "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

Leadership

In Romans 12 the apostle lists leadership among spiritual gifts, along with teaching, encouraging and prophesying. Whether or not a pastor has a special gift for these areas of his ministry, they are a part of his position description. In 1929 pastors were leaders without anyone talking about it. Their education and the respect accorded the office of ministry made that the case, as did a culture more likely to defer to those in authority. “Herr Pastor” was often a leader in his community as well as in his church. Legends paint some even as dictators in their church. Ironically, there is less deference accorded to pastors today, but maybe more expectations of leadership. The definition of pastoral leadership is different.

In a 2002 survey of 240 WELS members,²³ respondents were asked to choose one of four answers to complete the sentence: “I think a pastor’s role should primarily be...” 70% chose “strong spiritual leader.” (16% chose “motivating equipper for Christian life.” 9% chose “wise Bible teacher.” 5% chose “compassionate Christian counselor.”) A recent, controversial article by Bruce Eberle in the publication *Charis* emphasized how important pastoral leadership is. One reason for this emphasis may be a perceived leadership vacuum in American business and politics during unsettled times. In the absence of a national moral compass, and in the wake of numerous scandals, people want leaders to offer direction and inspire hope. There has been an explosion of literature on the subject of leadership over the past decade. People transfer to the church what is a preoccupation in society. Another reason may be statistical decline in churches, along with a sense that “we’re drifting.” Parish ministry has arguably become more complex. Lay leaders work long hours. The church’s by-laws typically don’t allow lay leaders to develop expertise or continuity in any area of the church’s work. If the pastor doesn’t lead, the church is likely to flounder. If it is true that this is a “post-Christian” era, with different assumptions and demands than in a “churched” America, then strong pastoral leadership will be necessary.

St. Paul doesn’t use the word “leadership” in the pastoral epistles, but there’s no question that he is urging Timothy and Titus to be strong leaders. Establishing churches, like re-establishing churches (some have called this “leading turnaround churches”²⁴), requires such pastoral leadership. It is easy to read 21st century ideas into Paul’s words, but there do appear to be several themes of leadership in those words.

“Servant leadership,” as modeled by Jesus and expressed in passages such as Mark 10:42-45,²⁵ is a Christian theme that has found its way into the business world. In current literature, a servant leader encourages, enables, equips and empowers those who report to him, so that they can succeed in their roles. That sounds like Ephesians 4:11-13.²⁶ St. Paul’s exhortations as to how Timothy should treat older and younger men and women (1 Timothy 5:1-2) portray servant leadership. In 2 Timothy 2:24 Paul says: “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct.”

Servant leadership, however, is characterized by strength and boldness. To Titus Paul says: “Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.” (Titus 2:15) For Timothy the directive was: “Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young.” (1 Timothy 4:11-12). St. Paul uses the word *παρραγγέλλω* – command, give orders from a position of authority – more than once in articulating the leadership role Timothy was to fill. (Cf. also 1 Timothy 6:17)²⁷ Recall the words, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power...” in 2 Timothy 1:7, or the injunction “Be strong” in 2 Timothy 2:1.

²³ Paul Kelm, “A Theology of Ministerial Practice” – 2003 doctoral dissertation. Page 223.

²⁴ For example, the book *Leading Turnaround Churches* by Gene Wood (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2001).

²⁵ “...Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. . . For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”

²⁶ “...and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up...”

²⁷ “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth...”

Leadership and administration are two different gifts, in Scripture and in contemporary literature. Nonetheless, strong administrative direction is an important function of pastoral leadership. Titus was told to “straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders.” (Titus 1:5) In 1 Timothy 5:17, the apostle establishes the principle that “the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor.” An important element of administration, delegation, is encouraged in 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” While this passage is often used as a charter for seminaries, passages such as Romans 15:14 and Hebrews 5:12 support the premise that training members to be teachers is an element of pastoral leadership.

Perhaps the most important element of leadership is modeling Christian faith and life. To Timothy St. Paul said: “Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12) To Titus the words are: “In everything set them an example by doing what is good.” (Titus 2:7) The pastor lives in a glass house. He can resent that or embrace it. Leaders welcome the opportunity to model what they teach, for members as well as neighbors who may be led to listen by what they see.

A generation ago somewhat heated debate centered on whether the pastor was “shepherd or coach.” Today the debate is probably “shepherd or leader.” Pastors who were trained in the sixties and seventies tend to see their ministry as one-to-one shepherding relationships with their members. They were prepared to serve one-pastor churches of gathered Christians. That paradigm, in a time of growing program and counseling demands, may contribute to declining membership statistics. The number of souls one pastor can shepherd is probably smaller today than it was a generation and more ago. Today, evangelizing and discipling people who have no Christian background, as well as caring for and nurturing to maturity members who struggle with a host of challenges, typically requires more ministry staff and a style of ministry that empowers member ministry. Professor Daniel Leyrer offers a synthesis of ministry styles when he writes: “Thus the pastoral leader was to see himself as sort of a ‘player coach’ ... The pastoral leader is to watch over the flock by organizing and administering their own (members’) work in ministry. Therefore he will concern himself with building morale by the gospel; setting spiritual goals for the flock; demonstrating appropriate flexibility in encouraging different forms of service, even ones he’s never considered before.”²⁸ Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has begun to teach a module on leadership in its practical theology curriculum. Developing that module and adding more summer quarter classes on pastoral leadership is a response to reality and a reflection of Paul’s directives for Timothy and Titus.

Gospel Preeminence

The focus of the pastoral epistles is sanctification more than justification. For example, the core of 1 Timothy is summarized with the words “how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household.” (1 Timothy 3:15) The table of duties for older and younger men and women, citizens and slaves, in Titus 2 is another example. Paul’s directives regarding widows and elders in 1 Timothy 5 are law. And yet, the “command and teach” or “teach and urge” injunctions to Christian life and an orderly church are periodically interrupted by a glowing gospel proclamation or doxology. It is as though the apostle can’t help himself. He means what he says in 1 Timothy 1, that sound doctrine “conforms to the glorious gospel.”

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul urges prayers for the authorities and quiet lives of holiness, then interrupts himself with several verses about God’s will that all be saved through the mediating ransom of Jesus Christ. In chapter three, right after concluding his words about how people ought to conduct themselves in the church, the apostle breaks out in a doxology about the “mystery of godliness.” Chapter four’s dire warnings about “deceiving spirits” and solemn injunctions to faithful ministry are sandwiched around one of the “trustworthy sayings” that reiterates the gospel. In the midst of chapter six’s exhortations about wealth is a soaring doxology (verses 15 and 16). Similarly in 2 Timothy 1 (verses 9 and 10) and 2 (verses 8 to 13), God’s grace interrupts Paul’s warnings and exhortations.

²⁸ Daniel Leyrer, “New Testament Pastoral Leadership” – a March, 2004 essay. Page 6.

In Titus these gospel interruptions are even more gloriously apparent. Chapter one and the first half of chapter two outline the qualifications and challenges of an elder, together with very direct moral law for people of different life situations. In 2:11 the word γὰρ introduces gospel power and motivation for Christian living. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. *IT* teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” In chapter three, the law in its third use – which is characteristic of much of the pastoral epistles – gives way to the more important law as “mirror.” Then comes one of the great gospel passages of the New Testament: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7) The next verse once more demonstrates how sanctification flows out of justification, for Paul writes in verse 8: “This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.”

Real pastoral ministry in every generation is characterized by gospel interruptions and doxologies. God’s grace is so amazing, so overpowering, so incredibly big, that a pastor can’t help but come back to it as the foundation for everything he does and teaches. A pastor’s face changes and his words become more compelling as he reminds people of what Jesus has done to make them God’s forgiven and dearly loved children, as he helps people face trials in their Christian walk. Rich metaphors and fresh illustrations make the gospel stand out in his preaching. Reminders of God’s grace and goodness pepper his conversation unabashedly. It’s all about Jesus.

Without the “command and teach” injunctions of sanctification which Paul gave Timothy and Titus, especially in a culture antagonistic to Christian moral values, the church becomes disorderly and its members may be misled into lifestyles of subjectivism. Without the “gospel interruptions” that anchor Christian life in God’s grace and empower Christian living, legalism will focus on “cleaning up the church” and improving behavior. The pastoral epistles don’t just teach practical theology; they model it.

“Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), clearly distinguishing law and gospel, is the hallmark of Lutheran theology. But it doesn’t end there. Demonstrating the inseparable link between justification and sanctification and insisting on the biblical sequence of these two doctrines, is essential. Perhaps as a reaction to a distortion of law and gospel in current Evangelical writing, Lutherans have not always taught a clear and robust doctrine of sanctification. The law in its third use is sometimes offered with disclaimers rather than proclamations about gospel motivation. In a strange form of law/gospel reductionism, preaching is restricted to Law that shows our sin and Gospel that shows our Savior. The exhortation and direction of God’s law for his forgiven people and the power of the Gospel to shape Christian will and move Christians to action is missing. There seems a fear that we may lose justification by teaching too much sanctification. Dogmatists, for good reason, separate justification and sanctification. The apostle Paul demonstrates how pastoral ministry brings these two primary doctrines together appropriately. Read Koehler and Pieper, and you discover that the Wauwatosa Theology” which moved to Mequon had those same concerns in 1929.²⁹ Exegesis remains the cornerstone discipline of pastoral training.

Some Things Don’t Change

When the seminary moved to Mequon, it did so with a new president. The 2004-5 academic year begins the same way. In 1929 the seminary was seriously under-staffed. To accomplish all that the synod requires of the seminary, it is probably still under-staffed. During the early years on the Mequon campus, the seminary was preparing students for calls that weren’t there. With the 2005 class, it would appear that graduates without full-

²⁹ Cf. the essay “Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 1863 - 1963” by Immanuel Frey, where on pages 18 - 20 he describes how Koehler and Pieper emphasized exegesis over dogmatics for fear of a dead orthodoxy in Missouri’s dogmatism.

time calls will once more be a concern. Financial shortfall in the synod was a major issue in 1929; and it impacted the seminary. Ministerial education today is being shaped, in part, by the lack of financial resources to maintain a status quo. In 1929, there were expressed fears that pastors would be influenced by Calvinism and sectarianism because there were too few Lutheran books in English.³⁰ Sound familiar? Another parallel between 1929 and 2004 seems apparent in this observation by Prof. Edward Fredrich: “Anti-establishmentarianism was a key feature of the twenties. A scofflaw attitude prevailed in that decade over against the old mores and morality, the old order and authority.”³¹ There are more significant parallels.

Theoretical or Practical

Well before 1929 there was debate whether the seminary should be “theoretical” or “practical.” The synod made and subsequently affirmed the decision to establish a “theoretical” seminary. Tensions persisted, however, because there have always been more skills and insights valuable to pastoral ministry than time to teach them. The November 20, 1932 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* included an editorial arguing for an additional year (beyond a vicar year) in the seminary program to cover all the practical theology a pastor could use. Liturgics found its way into the seminary catalog in the thirties, at least in part, as a result of outside pressures.³² The seminary has wisely resisted pressures to cut back theological components of its curriculum, whether in exegetical, systematic or historical theology. At the same time, there have been increasing arguments for more practical courses based on the social sciences. And the faculty has attempted to incorporate more training in areas such as evangelism, administration, adult education, leadership and family ministry. Subjects such as conflict management, change theory, and the impact of generational differences on ministry are among many that could be added to the list of practical concerns. The number of classroom hours a student can handle has been a subject for recent discussion. There is a danger that practical theology becomes a mile wide and an inch deep, as more subjects are pressed into unexpanded time frames. Enrollment in the summer quarter has grown dramatically, as has the variety of courses offered. A masters degree program focused on practical theology has been added. A new “winterim” for seminary students offers the possibility of focusing on practical ministry issues.

The seminary can certainly do more, but what is really needed is a church-wide emphasis on continuing education for pastors. Much of pastoral theology can only be appreciated with some experience in the parish. A growing curriculum of summer quarter courses, particularly in practical theology, can be offered by adjunct faculty – pastors who’ve developed expertise via study and experience. The primary vehicle for practical training remains the vicar year. There has been an effort to place students into the best possible settings for the vicar year. Nonetheless, finances remain a dominant factor in placing vicars; and congregations still see a vicar as a cheap substitute for additional pastoral staff rather than as a student learning about parish ministry in their midst. It can be argued that the best use of dollars would be to assure that vicars learn from the forty or fifty best practitioners of parish ministry in the synod, at the congregations which can best equip them for the kind of ministry they will face. It may be penny-wise and pound-foolish to fund the vicar year largely outside the ministerial education budget.

Cultural Roots and Cultural Accommodation

In 1929 both the synod and the seminary were still knee-deep in the transition from German to English. Our German forebears questioned whether English culture could communicate good theology. J. P. Koehler wrote: “The English make-up is essentially Calvinistic, apt to confuse justification and sanctification and given

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Page 25.

³¹ Edward Fredrich, “The Protes’tant Controversy” – a May, 1984 essay for the Minnesota District. Page 4.

³² The 1937 Report of the Seminary Board of Regents included these words: “With the present stressing of liturgics in some circles of the church, our seminary tries to offer a training in that subject that is soundly Lutheran. Hand in hand with it goes a study of hymnology and the practical training in the singing of the chorale.”

to confounding the preaching of the Gospel with secular and political aims and ideals.”³³ The seminary catalog for the 1928-29 academic year demonstrates that the majority of classes were still taught in German.

Today the culture shift is from mono-cultural to multi-cultural. The synod’s Home Mission division has attempted to emphasize cross-cultural mission work; and some work among Spanish and Hmong immigrants has been developed. A few congregations, particularly in Milwaukee, have adapted to their African–American neighbors. But the majority of the synod’s congregations are still mono-cultural. While the synod’s World Mission division has established beach-heads around the globe, the church still looks at issues with the perspective of western culture. (How important is it that an Asian church adopt the Western Rite?)

Another culture shift is from modern to postmodern. The church is probably fighting a war on both fronts; but we still tend to think and react like modernists. The impact of a postmodern culture on the way people think and learn will alter the way the church teaches, inevitably. The implications of that statement will create tensions for a decade or more, as the church seeks to distinguish cultural forces that can be harnessed for gospel ministry from those that are inherently inimical to the gospel.

Popular culture impacts the church as well. In 1929 a pastor could condemn all dancing and gambling as sinful. Today dances are a part of the calendar at Lutheran schools; and pastors carefully apply the biblical principles associated with gambling rather than discipline members who bet on football games. In 1929 no one contemplated establishing a para-church agency to address such life issues as abortion and euthanasia. For that matter, few confirmation classes spent time clarifying God’s will regarding homosexuality. In the midst of the Karen Ann Quinlan case in the seventies, pastors took strong stands on “pulling the plug,” stands from which they have retreated with more reflection and better scientific understanding. Medical science and social science will confront the church with new ethical issues. Perhaps we’ve learned from experience to avoid premature pastoral pronouncements. Every generation must apply God’s Word to the issues of its day, not merely perpetuate “policies.” Culture shifts highlight how important it is for a seminary to teach men how to think theologically, not simply quote their professors.

The church may lack adequate forums to engage the necessary debates. Church culture may even drive the debate underground. The seminary can create a culture of healthy debate, in which ideas can be tested without the fear that those who raise them will be labeled something less than orthodox. An important lesson for any future pastor is *how* Christians disagree. Pastors might be surprised to discover how little of orthodox Lutheran theology many of their members understand, how much they question or disagree with.

A radical option for dealing with culture shift is that every student admitted to the seminary be required to have spent a year outside the synodical worker training system. That year could be spent in a secular university advancing a skill useful to ministry. It could be spent working in a cross-cultural setting. Yet another option is a year of service in a mission field or in an arena of social service. The intent is that those who must reach a culture vastly different from that inside our church body experience that culture prior to their seminary training. The classes at the seminary would have a different context.

What It Means to be Confessional

In 1929 seminary professors were still engaged in dialog with theologians of other church bodies. The turn of the last century witnessed serious discussions over such issues as election and conversion, chiliasm and the antichrist, church and ministry. In the middle of the twentieth century the seminary’s professors were at the forefront of dialog with other Lutherans over the doctrine of church fellowship, as well as the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

Since the dissolution of the synodical conference, our synod has had little discussion with other American Lutherans. There were free conferences for a time, but our synod and our seminary professors have largely ignored the arena of theological debate. It can certainly be argued that persistent errorists in other church bodies have given no indication that they would reconsider their theological positions. Nonetheless,

³³ J. P. Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Printing Company, 1981), page 208.

what the Wisconsin Synod once contributed to the bigger picture of Lutheran theology and Christian conviction has been, for the most part, muted.

Certainly, there are issues of church fellowship to consider. But there is also the doctrine of the *Una Sancta*. By the term “confessional” we typically mean subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. Confessional should also mean that, like the confessors who shaped our theology in the sixteenth century, we are willing to confess truth to those in error. Our theology is a gift from God to be shared. Ongoing changes in American Christendom, let alone world Christendom, may offer valuable opportunities to engage others in theological discussion, without historical assumptions or doctrinal pre-conditions. It would enrich education at the seminary if our professors were involved in truly ecumenical efforts to share our rich doctrinal heritage.

2004 and Beyond

There are probably enough provocative issues already raised, maybe even sacred cows dragged to the slaughter house. Consider yet a couple of issues that the seminary will in one way or another address in the next decade or more.³⁴

One such issue might be called “generalists or specialists.” Our seminary has very pointedly restricted itself to training for parish ministry. No doctorates are awarded. People who are interested in other forms of ministry are directed elsewhere. The last two decades have demonstrated, however, that parish ministry can take a variety of forms. When a congregation calls its second, third, or even fourth pastor, it may not be best that they all see themselves as generalists. If one excels at preaching, should all share the pulpit equally? Is someone who focuses his energy on youth ministry a “second class” pastor? Does it work well to label each pastor in a team ministry as “associate,” or ought one be the “senior” or “lead” pastor? There are probably more multi-pastor staffs experiencing inter-personal stress than healthy pastoral teams, at least based on interviews and word-on-the-street. One reason may be that our pastors are all trained to be solo practitioners and generalists. While we can all agree that “the call seeks the man, not the man the call,” it is not contrary to Scripture for pastors to recognize their gifts and limitations, or to sense that God may be leading them toward a specialized ministry. Without suggesting that the seminary graduate “youth pastors” and “evangelism ministers,” it is feasible that the seminary prepare men for the option of a specialized role in a multi-staff ministry.

Statistics from a variety of sources indicate that 80 to 85% of American churches are plateaued or declining. A review of the synod’s statistical reports would, no doubt, find similar data. Seminary graduates over the course of the next decade and beyond will be assigned to congregations in difficult straits. Demoralizing losses of members, debilitating financial problems, and dysfunctional systems and relationships may tax their abilities. It would be good if their toolbox included models and principles developed elsewhere to turn around unhealthy churches. Who does this research within our synod is one question. When in the training process this issue and these principles and models are provided is another question. But already there are graduates who will acknowledge that they weren’t prepared for how challenging the situation in their church is. Some pastors over the next decade and more will be called on to close a church, merge two churches, or serve two or more churches. Can the seminary prepare them, at least emotionally, for that possibility and equip them to lead a congregation through difficult transitions, while at the same time maintaining a sense of joy and excitement about the privilege of ministry?

A growing body of literature suggests that Gen-X and the Millennial Generation are less interested than Builders and Boomers in the institutional nature of the church. Buildings are less important, as are numbers. Relationships matter. While some young men have strong relational instincts and skills to go along with a loving heart, others struggle with people skills. Can the seminary, in some way, develop more relational

³⁴ For a thoughtful summary of future challenges, especially in missions, see David Valleskey’s essay “Challenges Facing the WELS in 2001 and Beyond As it Seeks to Advance with the Gospel.”

pastors? Some young men are more creative and entrepreneurial than others. The next generation will likely call for more non-traditional types of ministry. The bi-vocational model is but one form. How to teach creativity is not something that our ministerial education system has been known for. Reggie McNeal, in the book The Present Future, suggests that “spiritual life coaching” will be important for new Christians whose background is antithetical to the Christian walk they want to embrace. Can we figure out what that means? Will we adjust Bible classes to the reality that teaching is training? Pastors are spiritual change agents. Do they see themselves as church change agents? Should they?

Conclusion

75 years is a significant slice of history. If we learn anything through pausing to reflect on that era, it is that themes recur but settings differ significantly. The seminary has, by God’s grace, retained its theological heritage. And it has done a decent job of adapting to changes in culture. The future will call for a still more mature grasp of theology and a still greater degree of adaptability. The “Objectives” section of the seminary’s 2003 self-study suggests that our seminary is poised to meet that challenge. The ideal graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is described as: “Confessional in stance, Evangelical in approach, Mission-minded in spirit, Culturally sensitive, Appropriately flexible, and Zealous to nurture and equip the saints.”³⁵ Amen!

³⁵ 2003 Self-Study of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Executive Summary, page 1.