

WISCONSIN'S PIONEER MISSION DEVELOPER:
MOLDEHNKE AS REISEPREDIGER

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When it comes to the subject of pioneer pastors in the Wisconsin Synod, the name of Edward Frederick Moldehnke is one that stands out in the crowd. Moldehnke is well-known in Synod circles as the founder of the Wisconsin Synod's first seminary and as the first editor of the Gemeinde-Blatt, the fore-runner to The Northwestern Lutheran. If you narrow the subject down to pioneer mission pastors in the Wisconsin Synod, the name of Edward Frederick Moldehnke stands all by itself. He is in a class by himself as the early Wisconsin Synod's premier missionary. Only a man like Gottlieb Fachtmann can possibly come close to matching him in the area of mission work.

This paper will treat the subject of Moldehnke's work as a missionary for the Wisconsin Synod. Its scope will include: (1) a brief sketch of Moldehnke's life, (2) a survey of his work as the Wisconsin Synod's first official Reiseprediger, (3) a look at the qualities which made him an effective mission developer, and (4) an analysis of the Wisconsin Synod's decision to remove him from his full-time work as the Reiseprediger and to make him the founder of the Seminary.

I. A Biographical Sketch Of Moldehnke

Edward Frederick Moldehnke was born at Insterberg, East Prussia on August 10, 1836, a descendant on his mother's side of the expelled Salzburger Lutherans. He received a classical education at Lyck. After his mother died when he was nine years old, he received harsh treatment from his stepmother. In spite of that, mild-mannered Edward graduated with great honor from college in Lyck at the age of seventeen.

In 1853 he enrolled in the University of Königsberg to study

theology. Two years later he followed his good friend, Professor Jacobi, to the University of Halle. From 1855-57 at Halle, he served as the secretary to Professor August Tholuck, from whom he learned to contend for the Christian faith. While at Halle, he came under the instruction of a very good theologian named Professor Julius Mueller. In the fall of 1857 he passed his "pro licentia concionandi" exam. He passed his "pro ministerio" examination a year later. In the spring of 1859 he received an excellent score on his "pro rectoratu" exam.

After passing that exam he assumed the rectorship (principalship) of a German gymnasium (combination high school and college). He remained at the gymnasium only several months because in July of 1859 he decided to fill a vacancy as a religious instructor for the upper classes at the College of Lyck. For the next two years, he taught all the branches of Christian knowledge including some Hebrew.

In 1861 Moldehnke responded to a request by several German mission societies to serve as a missionary to Germans in America. Konistorialrat Weiss in Königsberg supported his candidacy for the position. The societies selected him, and after convincing his wife to leave Germany for Wisconsin, he was ordained as a missionary at Königsberg in July, 1861. He arrived with his wife and child in Wisconsin the next month, full of enthusiasm for his work in America.

From September of 1861 to September of 1863 he served as the Reiseprediger (traveling missionary) of the Wisconsin Synod. At the 1863 Synod convention, Moldehnke was chosen to be the founding professor of a new seminary in Watertown, WI. From 1863 - 1866 he served as the president-professor of the Seminary and also as a part-time Reiseprediger, a one-year vacancy pastor at President Bading's church in Watertown, and the first editor of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinde-Blatt. In 1865 he received a P. h. D. from Rostock University in Germany.

In the summer of 1866 he resigned his positions at the seminary and as the editor of the Gemeinde-Blatt against the objection of the Synod and returned to Germany in August of that year.

In Germany he hoped to start a proseminary for the Wisconsin Synod which would recruit and prepare German boys for Northwestern in Watertown and future ministry in the Wisconsin Synod. His efforts to establish such a seminary through Lohmann of Glowitz failed, mostly because of Lohmann's financial difficulties.

From August 1866 to early 1869 Moldehnke served in a large East Prussian parish along the Polish border in Johannsburg. The parish included 60 villages, 8000 Poles, 2000 Germans, 23 or 24 schools and 1300 children. That made for quite a bit of work. From October, 1868 through February, 1870 he wrote a series of articles on his work in the Wisconsin Synod entitled "Fünf Jahre in Amerika" for Hengstenberg's Evangelische Kirchenzeitung. Because of growing dissatisfaction with the Prussian Union of Reformed and Lutheran churches in one church body, he left Germany for America.

In April, 1869 Moldehnke started a Lutheran mission congregation, Zion, in New York. He was a pastor in the General Council, a body he had previously warned others against joining. His congregation later merged with St. Peter's and Moldehnke served the larger congregation. He remained active on the mission scene by editing a paper entitled Siloah, which was the first and only German monthly for Home Missions, from 1882 - 1889. He also urged the committee on Foreign Missions of the General Council to publish a paper entitled Missionbote, starting in January of 1878. In 1887 he received a D.D. degree from Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

From June, 1877 to June, 1879 he served as editor of Lutherische Herald and was the first editor of the Luth. Kirchenblatt, started in January, 1884. He was also a member of the select committee which helped prepare the German "Kirchenbuch".

In January of 1888 Moldehnke was afflicted with heart disease, which prevented him from active participation in the work of the General Council. He remained in New York for the rest of his life and died on January 25, 1904 in Plainfield, N.Y. at the age of 67. (1

II. Moldehnke's Work As Wisconsin's Reiseprediger

Edward Moldehnke was an extraordinary man who performed well

in a number of capacities in the church during his lifetime. One of the areas where he excelled was in the role of traveling missionary for the Wisconsin Synod, a role he filled for a large part of the five years he was with the Synod.

Moldehnke was the first official Reiseprediger the Synod had, though not the first. The concept of a traveling missionary to serve scattered groups of German people and to organize them into new congregations was introduced by Pastor Gottlieb Fachtmann at the 1857 Synod convention. At the 1858 Synod convention, President Muelhauser appointed Fachtman as Reiseprediger for the Synod. Fachtmann performed admirably by starting a number of congregations in the Fox River Valley area and in other parts of the state. By 1860, however, Fachtmann had moved to Minnesota to work with the fledgling Minnesota Synod and was no longer available to serve as Wisconsin's Reiseprediger.

Fachtmann had demonstrated the value of the Reisepredigt, so in Session 7 of the 1860 Convention, the Synod resolved to ask the Berlin and Langenberg Mission Societies to supply a man for the Reisepredigt. (2) The two societies agreed to support the work with \$200 each per year and recruited Moldehnke for the job.

Moldehnke was eager to take up the challenge of mission work in America. His wife had a hard time breaking the home ties, but he finally convinced her to come to America. He arrived with his family, already ordained and eager to begin work, in August of 1861. He settled with his family in Germany (Town of Oakland) near Fort Atkinson.

Koehler notes that the arrival of the mission society-sponsored Moldehnke marked a change in the way the Reisepredigt was carried out. Fachtmann had pretty much run his own show. Muelhauser had appointed him and had given him free reign to do what he wanted. Fachtmann moved when he wished. Koehler assessed Fachtmann as a man inclined toward unionism, who was impressed with the Old Lutherans and had good relations with most of the pastors and people he met. (3)

When Moldehnke reported to the Synod President, the situation was somewhat confused. The President didn't know how to give him

a description of his work. Moldehnke had to devise his own job outline as he went along. Since he was being supported by Berlin and Langenberg, Moldehnke was under the impression (at least initially) that he must govern himself strictly by the wishes of the German societies. Although he was probably closer theologically to the Old Lutherans than Fachtmann was, he had more friction with them on his travels. Much of that was probably due to the increased tension between Wisconsin and Missouri over the Lebanon-Watertown incidents where the Wisconsin Synod started congregations with ex-Missouri people. Moldehnke was more careful than Fachtmann to respect the parish rights of others, even of the sectarian Albrechtsbrüder. (4)

Moldehnke began his work with his first Reise from September to early November of 1861. His December 2, 1861 Reisebericht gives a detailed account of that journey into central Wisconsin. Moldehnke traveled to such places as Waupun, Town Berlin (Merrill), Almond, Plover, Stevens Point, Wausau, Town Stettin, Portage City, and Kilbourn City (Wisconsin Dells) in rapid succession. Traveling about much like a latter-day St. Paul, he visited most of the places several times.

His first trip exposed him to some interesting challenges and gratifying experiences. In Waupun he found a group of 25 families who hoped to build a simple church and have the services of a full-time pastor. They had been served by pastors of other denominations, but preferred Moldehnke and Wisconsin. Moldehnke also preached to 25 prisoners at the state prison. In Berlin he preached in a schoolhouse to people who usually followed a Methodist blacksmith preacher named Schäfer, but deserted him whenever a Lutheran preacher came. He also had the "pleasure" of preaching to a group of contentious Old Lutherans who critically quizzed him on his theology. In Almond Moldehnke gathered 16 families and instructed them to hold reading services and Sunday School.

In Stevens Point, he had 25 - 30 people at his service. He discovered three solid male congregational leaders and initiated reading services and Sunday School. In Wausau he met with people who

had been served, but turned off by the Missourian Hoffmann. The 26-family nucleus welcomed Moldehnke. They planned on building a church and wanted a pastor immediately. Potential was good with over 300 German families in the area. In Town Stettin he discovered about 50 Pommeranian families, some of whom had a deep love for the Word of God and wanted to call a pastor from the Synod.

At Portage City he gathered 25 families for services. The people welcomed him warmly. Many of them had been involved with a legalistic Iowa Synod pastor named Rohrlack, who had made confirmands swear never to dance and had whimsically excommunicated a number of people. Since the people no longer belonged to the Iowa Synod and wanted a pastor, Moldehnke instructed them to apply to the Wisconsin Synod for help. This incident later created some friction for Moldehnke with the Iowans. In Kilbourn City all the evangelicals, including a large number of men involved in religiously-mixed marriages came to hear him.

Under the direction of the mission societies, Moldehnke ended his Reise for the year before winter set in. Already, at the end of his first trip, he was aware of the magnitude of his job and realized that he needed the help of others to work the territory. He invited fellow pastors to tip him off on the best areas to work so that he could use his time more effectively. ⁽⁵⁾

In 1862 Moldehnke made two extensive reports on work he did between December, 1861 and August, 1862. In his June, 1862 report he comments on his winter and spring work in southern and central Wisconsin.

Although the mission societies had not allowed him to make any extensive Reise in the winter months, Moldehnke did not take a vacation from his Gospel ministry. During that time, he served a group of 40 families in his Town Oakland home and organized a congregation of 26 members in nearby Fort Atkinson. He also spent several weeks ministering to Lutherans in Lake Mills, but lost most of them when Waterloo got a Synod of the West pastor to serve on a regular basis.

When the weather got warmer, Moldehnke visited places such as Kilbourn City, Portage City, Lewistown, Jefferson, Whitewater,

Helenville, Golden Lac, Oconomowoc, Watertown, Waterloo, Waupun, Juneau, Ripon, Berlin, Almond, Stevens Point, Amherst, Wausau, and Stettin. He again visited some places a number of times. On the second Reise, Moldehnke expanded the territory he served and added more interesting experiences.

In Kilbourn City he found that an inexperienced Iowa Synod pastor, Bredow, had split the Lutherans by mishandling the topic of alcohol and insisting that the Lutheran Church is the only saving church. Moldehnke counseled with him, but had little success. In Portage City the congregation had added 8 more families because of the lay-led reading services. The Sunday School was strong. He held two communion services there. In Lewistown 16 families assembled for services and started their own reading services.

In Jefferson, Moldehnke found that the Germans had attached themselves to the Albrechtsbrüder so he passed them by. In White-water he preached to 20 families who had been served by Duborg (a Missouri man from Chicago) on occasion and wanted to form a congregation. In Helenville, he preached for Reim. In Golden Lac and Oconomowoc, he worked with Candidate Farb and tried to help him with his poor preaching.

In Waupun he introduced reading services, Sunday school, and a building program in a seven-family congregation. On this trip, the warden at the prison denied him permission to preach at the prison. In Ripon he got a cold reception but promised to try again later. In Berlin he discovered that only 6 families remained in the nucleus. The rest had gone over to the Albrechts people.

Traveling to Almond by stage, Moldehnke found that the people were in the process of building a parsonage and wanted a pastor. Moldehnke extended some hope to them that they would get a man for the area. In Stevens Point only 6 families remained. The rest had gone over to the Methodists and Episcopalians. Many did come to his night service, however. In Amherst he served 13 families.

In Wausau he preached to a full house. In Berlin the lay leader Wagner said that people would leave the Methodists if they had a regular preacher. In the Wausau, Berlin, and Stettin area, a pastor could serve 114 families and probably 200 - 300 within

a year. In Stevens Point Moldehnke encountered the people being served by a Methodist pastor. He debated with the Methodist about the Lord's Supper and told the people he couldn't serve them if they went Methodist. They promised to leave the Methodist soon.

Moldehnke was always looking ahead toward the future needs of the places he had been and in his summary he laid out plans for three regional parishes where men could serve. (6)

After the Synod convention in 1862, Moldehnke set out on a summertime Reise which took him into northeastern Wisconsin. He covered some of the old stations such as Waupun, Portage, Lewistown, Almond, Stevens Point, and Wausau. He also investigated new locations such as Caledonia, Green Bay, Sandy Bay, Kewaunee, Peters, Foresthill, Two Creeks, Manitowoc, Newton, Chilton, Lomira and Theresa. He was able to lay the foundations for congregations in Caledonia, Kewaunee, Peters, and Two Creeks.

This third Reise saw him travel 638 miles and stop at 37 places in the space of 1½ months. Not bad for the days of horse and buggy and sometimes foot. He closed his report with a proposal for five regional parishes and a plea to train more Synod Reiseprediger to meet the needs of the field. (7)

1863 was another busy year for Reiseprediger Moldehnke. In his Reisebericht to the Synod convention, he reported that he had been serving in Germany, Fort Atkinson, Whitewater, Waupun (city & prison), Almond, Stevens Point, Wausau, Stettin, Berlin, Green Bay, Kewaunee, Carlton, Forestville, Sandy Bay, Algoma, Portage City, Lewistown, Caledonia and vacancies in Theresa, Lomira, Fond du Lac, Forrest, and Eldorado. In addition he had taken a Reise westward and had begun 4 Minnesota and 14 western Wisconsin preaching stations. He was sure to start reading services and Sunday schools wherever possible. (8)

During the 1863 Convention, Moldehnke was selected to be the first professor of the new seminary in Watertown. Not only was he responsible for starting the seminary, but he also served as the vacancy pastor in Watertown while President Bading went on a support-raising trip to Europe. These two things would be work enough for most men, especially since there were great obstacles to overcome in establishing the seminary and since a thorny lodge

problem existed at Bading's congregation. Still, Moldehnke continued to do occasional Reispredigt work. At the Synod convention he reports that he took two short winter trips and served 23 stations in Wisconsin. He also extended his mission travels to Minnesota and even to Iowa in the summer. (9)

His work in Minnesota helped strengthen the ties between the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods. He served as a delegate to the 1864 Minnesota convention and helped Minnesota steer clear of the General Council. The Minnesotans were so impressed with Moldehnke that Fachtmann (now with Minnesota) was appointed by the Synod to ask Wisconsin for pastors to help out and to ask especially for Moldehnke. (10)

Some of the places which Moldehnke reached in his Minnesota travels were Mendota, St. Paul, West Albany, Zumbrota, Cooks Valley, Watopa, St. Peter, Henderson, and New Ulm. In western Wisconsin he preached at Prescott, Ridgeville, Menomonee, and Black River Falls. (11)

In 1865 the demands of the seminary prevented Moldehnke from making any Reise. He and the seminary students did fill in at area congregations on occasion. Moldehnke did make several collection trips for the seminary that year among Synod congregations. (12)

The 1865 -66 school year was a discouraging one for Moldehnke. He had strongly considered returning to Germany during that year. In the spring of 1866, he went on a nine-week preaching tour of Wisconsin and Minnesota. This trip was unauthorized and took him away from school while classes were in session, but the Synod approved of his actions after it was over and warmly thanked him by Synod resolution. (13)

After the 1866 Convention, at which Adolph Hoenecke was chosen to be a second seminary professor, Moldehnke made one more Reise for the Synod in Wisconsin and Minnesota. He then resigned his positions as seminary professor and editor of the Gemeinde-Blatt and returned to Germany in August of 1866.

III. Moldehnke's Mission Developing Qualities

During his five years of service, Moldehnke was an outstanding

mission developer for the Synod. He was an unusually gifted man, and his special qualities made him ideal for this difficult work.

Probably the most outstanding of his qualities was his burning zeal for mission work. His reports breathe concern for meeting the great challenge of bringing the Gospel to the people of America's Midwest. In an article written two years after he had returned to Germany, he still pleaded with the Germans "not to forget their children who are scattered all over America." He felt deeply for the thousands of spiritually needy people who were left unattended and often had to go without the services of a pastor for 16 - 20 years.⁽¹⁴⁾ One of the most touching incidents in which his mission concern came through was an instance that occurred on his third Reise in Forestville in eastern Wisconsin. While taking time to instruct the children of the innkeeper he stayed with, Moldehnke had to stop the instruction because he broke down and cried over their great lack of knowledge of the Christian faith.⁽¹⁵⁾ His mission zeal extended not only to the upstanding German people of the Midwest, but also to the down-and-out prisoners at Waupun and to the poorly treated (by whites) Indians. Almost all of his reports end with fervent prayers to God and equally fervent pleas to the Synod for more workers for the harvest. Moldehnke was a glowing example of a mission-minded Christian.

Another quality which made Moldehnke an effective mission developer was his energetic, self-sacrificing lifestyle. He bubbled over with ambition. The agendas for every one of his trips were full of activity. He worked long, hard, intense hours on every trip he made. One could get exhausted just reading his reports. Although he was human and did wear down physically from time to time, he recuperated quickly and was soon on his way again. The conditions in which he worked were far from ideal. They required great sacrifice on his part. Travel was often slow and tiring; the weather was frequently harsh; the receptions he got from people were unpredictable; long separations from his family were unavoidable. Yet he willingly endured these hardships for the sake of the Gospel.

Moldehnke was also a fairly sound theologian. Kowalke calls

him a "well-educated, staunch Lutheran."⁽¹⁶⁾ He evidenced that in his doctrinal writings for the Synod and in the way he carried out his ministry. As a product of the Prussian Union of Reformed and Lutheran under one roof and as an employee of mission societies founded on the principle of doctrinal compromise, one would expect him to be rather lax in his attitudes toward unionism, yet he demonstrates a faithfulness to Lutheranism that is refreshing. In his personal ministry, he limited himself to serving people only with Lutheran doctrine, in spite of the wishes of the mission societies who employed him to have their men serve both Lutheran and Reformed with their own teachings. Koehler once accused Moldehnke of not being confessional enough in an instance where Moldehnke wrote a letter to the Prussian Supreme Council and stated that he was willing to let two of their men in Wisconsin, Huber and Sauer, serve both Reformed and Lutheran, (the societies didn't like it that their men sometimes chose to serve only Lutheran people), but only with Lutheran doctrine.⁽¹⁷⁾ One must remember that Moldehnke was living at a time when Wisconsin was working through its relationship with the mission societies in light of the movement toward a more confessional Lutheranism in America. Before this time, Wisconsin had never been very critical of the practices of the German societies responsible for Wisconsin's existence. The principles of fellowship in regard to the societies were not all that easy to determine at that point in time.

Moldehnke skillfully handled several problems of legalism in working with groups who had been burned by Lutherans of other Synods. He stood firmly against the superficial, distorted teachings of the Methodists and Albrechtsbrüder. It grieved him no end that the people who came to hear him when he was in town went to hear the Methodists on Sunday.⁽¹⁸⁾

One thing that especially stands out about Moldehnke is his evangelical dealings with pastors of other denominations. Instead of remaining aloof from them, he would discuss theology with them to understand their position and to help them gain a better understanding of the correct Biblical teaching. He wasn't always successful, but he did take advantage of the opportunities before him

to explain the Biblical position. This is an example that more of the pastors in our present-day Wisconsin Synod would do well to follow. Those who have the proper understanding of the truth of Scripture have an obligation to share that knowledge with others in an effort to help them see things God's way more clearly.

Another outstanding quality of Reiseprediger Moldehnke was his great flexibility. He was forced to adapt himself to many different situations, and he responded well. He was content to hold services in a schoolhouse, a court house, a rented Methodist church, a private home, or under the open sky. If he could not travel somewhere by horse and wagon, it bothered him little to take a train or ferry, or, at times, to go on foot. He was on the move in the bitter cold of winter and the grueling heat of summer, rain or shine or snow. He could handle all kinds of people and was able to make quick decisions on where to go, how long to stay, and many other complex issues he encountered on his travels.

Moldehnke was also an excellent administrator. He made very effective use of his time and always worked at achieving goals for each of the places he served. His methodology at organizing a group of people was well-suited to the situations he worked in. When entering into an area, he would gather a nucleus of families, hold services, identify the leaders and attempt to establish regular lay-led reading services, Sunday schools and building programs. He included them as part of his Reise and planned how they could one day have the services of their own pastor. The way he utilized the universal priests he found and the way he used orderly procedures to develop the mission were commendable. They read as if he had lifted them from the pages of the Home Mission Handbook. Moldehnke was a fantastic combination of district missionary - mission counselor for his day.

A final quality, worthy of mention, is Moldehnke's courage. He had to endure a number of occupational hazards. He had to contend with rough people in the frontier areas of Wisconsin and Minnesota. At times he had to blaze his own trails in the wilderness while seeking out people to serve. Sometimes his efforts to serve met strong opposition. It took him four tries before the people in Ripon would let him begin a station there. At times

the Indians could get a bit restless, yet he dared to venture out into western Wisconsin while nearby Minnesota was going through an Indian War. He relied firmly on his God to take care of him in all situations, and by doing so, was able to achieve what few people could.

IV. The Path Not Taken

All these qualities made Moldehnke a great Reisprediger. Unfortunately, Moldehnke only served in that position for several years before leaving the Wisconsin Synod altogether. The exact reasons why Moldehnke left to return to Germany are rather vague, but we do know some of the factors that influenced him and at this point it might be interesting to explore one of those factors in detail, the Synod's decision to remove Moldehnke from the Reispredigt and put him at the seminary. This decision may have had a great impact on Moldehnke's career in the Synod and, linked with that, a big impact on the development of the Wisconsin Synod.

From the standpoint of history it seems as if the 1863 Synod convention decision to make Moldehnke the founding president-professor of the seminary was a mistake. A number of Wisconsin men and the German mission societies were opposed to the idea initially, but it wasn't until a year or two later (after much of the damage was done) that the Synod shared their opinion. It's understandable why Moldehnke was chosen. For a number of reasons he seemed the most likely candidate. He was energetic and founding a seminary would require much work. He was university trained and had taught and not many of the other Wisconsin men had those credentials. He didn't have a specific parish and could easily move to Watertown without leaving a congregation vacant.

Moldehnke was a most capable man. There's no denying that, but the problem was that he was probably not the man best suited to handle the extremely difficult and frustrating assignment of establishing a seminary. There may not have been any in the Synod who were capable of doing it at that time (Hoenecke hadn't arrived yet), but I strongly believe that the Synod hurt itself by choosing Moldehnke for the job.

Koehler assessed Moldehnke as "a man devoted to multa and hence

did not accomplish the multum, despite his unflagging zeal and devotion to duty."⁽²⁰⁾ Establishing a seminary was "multum" work. It required infinite patience, a very conscious and deliberate narrowing of objectives, and a great degree of maturity which would hang in there when visible gains and progress were minimal. Moldehnke did not quite fit that mold. At the tender age of 27, he had not yet developed those qualities. (That's one reason why most sem profs are in their early 40's before they are called to serve there). Mission work was "multa" and more Moldehnke's speed. In the Reisepredigt Moldehnke could expend his energies in a number of areas. Moldehnke seems to have been the impatient kind of person who needs to see tangible, quick results from his efforts. He could get that satisfaction from the mission field where the opportunities for growth were great, but not at the sem. The difficulties of recruiting, funding, disciplining, and teaching poorly-equipped students were terribly frustrating for Moldehnke.

Kowalke makes this observation of Moldehnke's behavior while at the seminary: "There is every indication that Dr. Moldehnke's heart was in missionary work and not in the classroom."⁽²¹⁾ That probably accounts for the Reise he took while at sem.

Moldehnke's involvement in the Worker Training division of the Synod led to frustration for him. The Synod did try to correct the situation by appointing Hoenecke as Inspektor and second professor. When this happened, Moldehnke promptly submitted his resignation either because he took Hoenecke's appointment as a personal insult to his efforts or because he felt that the seminary needed only one professor and he would rather do mission work. Probably both reasons are valid.

The Synod refused his resignation, insisted that they wanted him as a professor of theology, and arranged to give him seven months off for mission work, but one week later Moldehnke resigned again in cross humor and after a short mission trip returned to Germany.⁽²²⁾ Although Moldehnke did return to work in America three years later, he never did come back to work for the Wisconsin Synod.

As I look at the situation, I can't help but think that Moldehnke's departure from the Synod could have been avoided and that a great Kingdom worker for our Synod could have been saved

if only things had been handled differently.

Moldehnke's strongest gifts were in the area of mission development. It would have been better to leave him in the area of missions and let someone else handle the worker training. The thing that makes the choice to remove Moldehnke from the Reisepredigt so tragic is that it decimated the Synod's entire mission program. Moldehnke did almost all the new mission work in Synod by himself. No one was trained or appointed to take his place. After he left, the Wisconsin Synod did not reinstitute the office of Reiseprediger for almost 15 years. That's a long time to operate without a decent mission program. The Synod should not have sacrificed the Reisepredigt at the expense of starting a seminary. The 1860's were hard times for the Synod. Manpower and financial resources were very slim. But there is no way that the Synod should have discontinued its mission outreach through the Reiseprediger.

Moldehnke could have established many more congregations. With some effort I believe that the Synod could have found some men to step into the new areas Moldehnke was opening up. If Moldehnke had continued in his mission work, there's no question in my mind but that the Wisconsin Synod would have experienced rapid growth and a stronger mission-mindedness in its earlier years. Today WELS might more deeply penetrate Wisconsin and Minnesota than it presently does. Moldehnke could have been the key to developing a strong mission program in our Synod and he probably still would have ^{had} time to serve as a part-time prof in our seminary during the winter, if only he hadn't met the super frustrations of founding the seminary.

Of course, history cannot be relived or rewritten. The path not taken must remain that way. But history can teach something for the present and future. May God grant the present generation of Wisconsin Synod people the ability to recognize the fantastic opportunities they have to extend the Kingdom of God and the insight and conviction necessary to wisely and boldly use all the resources God grants them to carry out their holy mission.

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