

# **Introduction To And Summary Of Statement Of Purpose And Objectives Of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary**

[Faculty Retreat, Fox Hills Mishicot, Wisconsin, September 5, 1984]

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Whatever we may accomplish in these few days of reflection in a recreational setting is intended, with God's help and direction, to enhance the carrying out of the purpose and objectives of that unique and wonderful institution where we are privileged to work and live. The purpose and objectives of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have not varied in substance since 1863. The formal statement of purpose and objectives was most recently revised in 1978.

The revised statement, to be found on pages 94 and 95 of the 1978 Self-Study, is printed in full on page 3 of each issue of the Seminary Catalog. Its clauses will supply the framework for this presentation and will be quoted as we progress.

A very neat *summary* of the Seminary's purpose and objectives is to be found at pages 7 and 10 of the 1978 Self-Study. "The Seminary is committed exclusively to training for the public ministry," and, "The continuing goal of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary must be to help the student

- 1) to apprehend that Word clearly, and
- 2) to apply it faithfully."

So much for a summary. We are left with the task of introducing. "Do what you want to do," said the man who issued the assignment. He must have trusted that I had no desire to admonish or chastise or excoriate this group. He was correct. He must have hoped I would remind the group of what the Seminary is and does and thus, perhaps, help us all to appreciate anew the privileges and responsibilities of our special calling.

In reading and studying the statement one quickly comes to the conclusion that embodied in it is a confession. Indirectly, it expresses certain convictions as to what the public ministry is, who is to participate in the pastoral ministry, what the essence of that ministry is. It makes a confession concerning the source and nature of the Holy Scriptures and it subscribes to the Lutheran Confessions. It recognizes and endorses the Law-Gospel distinction. It acknowledges the Seminary's dependence on the Holy Spirit in all that it undertakes to do in preparing men for service in the Church of Jesus Christ. Implicitly it recognizes the impropriety of allowing itself to be used as a kind of union seminary, training men to serve in various heterodox fellowships.

Now, confessions must have a biblical base. There must be a Scripture text behind the text of this statement. In a real sense, everything that Jesus and his apostles say about the New Testament ministry does lie behind this statement. But the writing that came most frequently to mind as I was poring over the statement and reflecting on how it might be discussed this evening is 2 Corinthians. In what follows, thoughts drawn from that letter in which Paul defends his ministry and defines the Gospel ministry for all time will be used to elaborate upon or highlight the text of the statement.

*The specific purpose of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is to offer theological training.* We offer a structured program in the study of God, the knowledge of God. We know very well that only God makes a theologian, but we are confident that he uses us in the process. Just as he used human instruments to call us to faith and other human instruments to shape us as preachers and teachers, ministers of the New Testament, so he deigns to use us in the training of theologians.

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Co 4:6)." In the making of theologians as in the creation of light, there is no raw material or potential for God to begin with. There is only darkness.

Twentieth-century man cries out for light:

“ ... What am I?  
An infant crying in the night;  
An infant crying out for light,  
And with no language but a cry.”

When men apply themselves to problems of public health, the environment, the economy, their God-given reason can occasionally offer solutions that work. But in theology the only function of reason is to understand the Word of God after he shines in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Attempts to theologize must end in death and despair unless God lifts up his countenance upon us in Christ, instead of turning his face away from us in anger and disgust.

Our faith and our theology are not the fruit of great deliberation on our part, or the result of a decision we have made. They are the result of God's creative act, with his Word as the creative means.

Our purpose is to offer theological training for men who desire to enter the public ministry. When we consider the plight of many Lutheran seminaries we are grateful to God for the men he directs to our seminary. The attitude toward Scripture they come with: what a boon! The tools for the study of Scripture they come with: what a blessing! Although they may have imperfect perceptions as to what the public ministry is and mixed motives in seeking the office, they want to learn to be "servants for Jesus' sake (4:5)."

President Toppe characterized the graduates of Northwestern College in a Synod essay in 1965. What he said about the men who entered our seminary that autumn pretty well describes the men who appear before us for the first time in any September. Yes, it applies to the Bethany men as well.

He wrote: "There are attitudes among our graduates that we value for the ministry. A certain wholesome diffidence in place of an inflated sense of their own importance, a quiet reserve rather than pretension, a sense of having not yet arrived in sanctification rather than a display of piety, sober moderation rather than an intemperate enthusiasm ... They prefer to be independent, but they know what loyalty means...."

"To them the Bible is a book to be respected, not to be assessed; revelation a fact to be believed, not to be sifted; the parish ministry a goal rather than a steppingstone, an honor rather than a humiliation.

"They are not without weaknesses and follies, but we are grateful for these qualities of moderation in them. Of those who do not profess great worthiness the Holy Spirit can make worthy servants of the Word."

They are men who desire to enter the public ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod or of churches within its confessional fellowship. If not at the beginning of their training, then at the end, they understand and share our Bible-based confession. They offer themselves for assignment to a church that is committed to that confession. They are "a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (3:3)."

In our ministry to them we are not accountable to government, to accrediting agencies or to prevailing theological opinion. We are grateful for that, and cannot imagine how we would function if our curriculum and instruction were imposed upon us by those who do not share our convictions.

But it is not a light thing to be answerable to the churches of our fellowship, to the men we train for them and to the Head of the Church. Like Paul, we work in view of eternity "that (they) can boast of us just as we will boast of (them) in the day of the Lord Jesus (1:14)."

A single negative particle appears in the statement of purpose and objectives. If the sentence in which it stands were to appear without that negative the Seminary might be quite a different place. The sentence reads: *(The Seminary) is not established or maintained to serve merely or in part as a school of religion furnishing opportunity to anyone for specialized study in various fields of theology.* Among other things, this statement reminds us that theology is not an end in itself and that the Seminary is not maintained by its sponsoring Synod as a school for dilettantes. It reminds us that if faculty or students ever develop the notion that there are "better" or "more important" things to do than serve a parish, the Seminary will lose its reason for being.

*The Seminary carries out (its) purpose by training all of its students to preach and teach the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us understand the phrase "pure Gospel" here in the sense of "unqualified Good News."*

The unqualified Good News concerning Jesus Christ is that "no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ (1:20)." All the promises concerning the Descendant of Eve, Abraham, Judah, David are fulfilled in Christ. All the promises of free and faithful grace, mercy, love, eternal life are affirmed in him.

The unqualified Good News is "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. ... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (5:19, 21)." The God-Man, Jesus Christ, did what no mere man could do. He lived the perfect life of love, fulfilling all righteousness as our Representative. He died the innocent death of One in whom no sin was to be found. He overcame death by dying, conquered hell by suffering the God-forsakenness of hell and God raised him from the dead.

The result is reconciliation. A change has taken place. It is not a change in the Holy One, whose name is Love. Why should he change? It is not a change in man, either. It is a change in man's status, in the way God regards man, "not counting men's sins against them." The sins of the world on Christ, the righteousness of God credited to all. That is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We and our students want to be able to say in simple honesty, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord (4:5)." The minister is not to promote his own personality or his own interests. He is not a hustler whose talents and achievements must be recognized with promotions and salary increases. We are not to proclaim our pet theories or personal philosophies and palm them off as God's revelation.

Rather, we preach Jesus Christ as Lord. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (10:4,5)." The only implement of warfare in the struggle against idolatry, unbelief and self-righteousness is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. None of the world's weapons—reason, research, righteous sentiment—can win human hearts for God. But the Gospel is "the power used in God's interest and to his advantage" (better than "divine power") to demolish the strongholds of nay-saying and teach people to say "Amen" to God's "Yes" in Christ.

*The Seminary carries out this purpose by training all of its students ... to carry out the pastoral ministrations of the public ministry in accordance with the Holy Scriptures as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God and in conscious agreement with the historical Confessions of the Lutheran Church.*

The New Testament has a rich store of "titles" for those who preach and teach the Gospel. They are never merely titles, for they always signify the function of the person who is designated by them. "Pastor" is certainly one of the most significant and appealing. It evokes the story of a Risen Lord saying to a penitent disciple, "Feed My lambs ... Feed My sheep." It reminds us that the ministry is the feeding and leading of the Savior's flock. It calls to mind Jesus' self-designation as the Good Shepherd and helps us remember that the best-trained practical theologian is always only an undershepherd.

That reminder of subordination is also present in the title "ambassador," which Paul employs in 5:19, 20. "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

An ambassador is a representative of the one who sent him. He is not sent to say what he thinks but what his master says. He makes no offers on his own, makes no demands for his own sake, makes no promises except those that his ruler will back up. The ambassador whom we train is the agent of God's appeal. On happy occasions and sad, to young and old, to the eager and the delinquent, to the faithful and the infidel, when he is fresh and when he is weary he implores on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God."

To be faithful in this service he must carry it out in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and in conscious agreement with the Lutheran Confessions. His teaching and practice must be in accord with the

former as God's message and with the latter because it is a true exposition of God's message. "In Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God (2:17)." A translation that reflects the etymology of *eilikrineia* (sincerity) is "what is able to pass the test of bright sunlight."

The devil must consider the teaching of verbal inspiration and inerrancy important. Else why would he inspire so many caricatures of it and bold attacks against it? "Intellectualism, rationalism, Biblicism, mechanical treatment, manual of dogmatic statutes, codex of laws falling from heaven, paper pope," is an old list of calumnies. "Irrelevancy" is a new way in which he has taught many who bear the name of Luther to dismiss it.

Professor Ernst's synod essay of 1911 was summarized in the "*Gemeinde blatt*" and Professor Kowalke translated its seventh thesis in his essay before the Synod in 1961: "The Seminary should always have as its goal the development of self-reliant men, who are fully conscious of their high calling, capable of building a congregation on the right foundation, able to recognize all false trends and harmful influences and ready to oppose them and with God's help overcome them." An important part of theological training for the pastoral ministrations of the public ministry must be the development of a discerning mind which tests the spirits and does not fall for the subtle legalism of many "practical helps." The evangelical pastor needs to give attention to the sources of materials and methods that he uses. Our graduates must know how to beware the poisoned well, the evil tree that cannot be expected to bring forth good fruit, the piety which comes from the law and not the gospel.

All of the theoretical and practical courses of the Seminary, as well as its vicarship program, are arranged to serve this (specific) purpose. The Church's mission is always the same and the means for carrying it out do not change. Methods do change. So, too, the Seminary's purpose and the essential means for carrying it out do not change. But our methods, our theoretical and practical courses and the ways in which we offer them, are always subject to critical analysis and to change.

Since our 1978 self-study electives in missiology and in A-V and computer use have been introduced. Introductory courses in pastoral theology and education have become part of the Junior program. Middlers are now afforded the opportunity to gain experience in teaching in schools of the metropolitan area. A professor has been called to develop and teach a course in personal evangelism. These changes would seem to have enhanced the practical content of our curriculum without diminishing the "theoretical."

*In line with this single purpose of training men for the public ministry the Seminary also endeavors in various ways to offer opportunity for theological and professional growth to those who are already active in the public ministry of its confessional fellowship.* The summer quarter of graduate and supplementary study comes immediately to mind, with its annual offerings of opportunity for theological and professional growth.

In fact, however, the Seminary has been involved in continuing education from the days when convention after convention heard essays from the pen of Dr. Hoenecke. In the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, contributions to other church papers, conference and convention essays, as well as major theological works our predecessors and models still speak to the pastors and indirectly to the people of our churches. As we grind away at our *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* articles, periodical contributions, essays, Pastors' Institute lectures and other writings, let us not be dismayed if our efforts do not seem to measure up to those of the giants of earlier days. We, too, are writing for the future as well as for the present. In a small way, at least, some of our work will also provide information, focus, correction and strengthening to theologians who may be greater than we are but whose confessional position will, God grant, be the same as ours.

The Seminary's statement of purpose sets forth its reason for being. The statement of objectives sets forth how the Seminary attempts to realize that purpose. There are two sentences, one stating what is considered fundamental to the realization of the purpose, the other stating what the Seminary strives to do. Each sentence elicits soul-searching and prayer from one who takes it seriously. Each sentence challenges faculty and students to conscientious endeavor.

The first reads: *Reverent, thorough, and scholarly study of the Holy Scriptures and a clear apprehension and faithful application of its contents, especially of its basic messages of Law and Gospel, are considered fundamental in realizing the Seminary's practical purpose of training and equipping men for the practical tasks*

*of the public ministry.* Study, apprehension and application of Holy Scripture, especially Law and Gospel: without these there can be no truly practical theology, only methods. There can be no systematic theology, only speculation. There can be no historical theology, only cynicism. Without biblical theology there is no theology. Isn't this first sentence in the statement of objectives saying that the beating heart of this Seminary is isagogics and exegesis?

Fundamental in realizing the Seminary's practical purpose is *reverent, thorough, and scholarly study of the Holy Scriptures.*

"It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak (4:13)." We cannot in a practical way serve the Seminary's practical purpose of training men for practical ministry without the basic "competence" of a reverent attitude toward Holy Scripture. This competence comes from God by the Gospel. Faith bows to the Bible as the Word of truth given by the God of truth. In ourselves and in our students it is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word by which "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and (by which) we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (10:4,5)."

On the other hand, in terms of our call and assignment as theological professors, it is not enough to be Bible-believers if our study of the Holy Scriptures is not also thorough and scholarly. In the history of the Church, false hermeneutic and faulty exegesis have not been the domain of scoffers alone. Pious and well-meaning believers have practiced "spiritual" exegesis and read Scripture selectively, sometimes with disastrous results for the faith of many. Paul warned his readers against looking for hidden meanings and double entendres: "We do not write you anything you cannot read or understand (1:13)." "Let the prophet speak!" said Dr. Peters.

The author of the Synod Centennial volume, *Continuing in His Word*, wrote concerning the development of this Seminary's character: "The danger is always present of bowing to precedent, of emphasizing tradition, of stressing system if not in the work of a pioneer teacher, then in the attitude of his followers. Here the emphasis on a sound historical and grammatical interpretation of Scripture, on a thorough indoctrination of the student into the full and coherent content of Scripture, and on an unrelenting effort to determine what the words of Scripture mean to say, rather than what man would like to have them say—the things which were the distinctive contribution of Koehler and Pieper served to create the pattern of a balanced theology which our Seminary is trying to follow to this day." Isn't that the "Wauwatosa Gospel" approach to theology and theological training? Isn't it what we are trying to follow to this day?

This approach needs to be emphasized in practical theology, perhaps more than in systematics. The preacher must learn to ask, "What does this text mean?" before he asks, "What kind of sermon can I make of this?" In teaching, leading worship, dealing with members, evangelizing, planning a major project in the congregation the first question is not, "How can I use this?", but, "What is the Holy Spirit saying here?"

Fundamental in realizing the Seminary's practical purpose are *a clear apprehension and faithful application of its contents, especially of its basic messages of Law and Gospel.*

Perhaps you have also read the criticism that when it comes to seminary professors there is too much preaching in the classroom and too much lecturing in the pulpit. I hope the criticism did not leave you debilitated and incapacitated. It is true, of course, that the pulpit is not the place for technical jargon and elaborate expositions. But in view of and in the sense of the above clause from the statement of objectives, we should always be doing both in the classroom. We "lecture" to help students apprehend Scripture and we "preach" in order to apply it and teach them how to apply it.

We are and our students are to become "ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (3:16)." The letter, the Law, "religion" says: "Do. Love. Be good. Get right with God." It kills. The Spirit, in the Gospel, says: "God has done. God has loved. God is gracious. He has set things right." It gives life. Now, stated in that or similar ways, the distinction between Law and Gospel is a simple formula. Such formulas have their basis in Scripture and are useful. But we do not want to mistreat Scripture by simply applying these formulas in a mechanical way without regard to what Scripture is saying in a

given place. Occasionally, not in our faculty, one hears the thought expressed that what is needed in a given situation (or institution of learning) is "more Law" or "more Gospel." That might betray an unconsciously held notion that God's Word is some kind of chemical mixture and that rightly dividing the Word of truth means properly adjusting the chemical ingredients to get the right proportions and thus the desired effects.

We know that there is more art than science in applying the messages of Law and Gospel, and that it is an art taught by the Holy Spirit. God grant that, not only in our teaching but in our dealing with students, it is always evident that the work of the Law is "alien" even when it is necessary.

*In every phase of its training program the Seminary strives, with the help of the Spirit, to remain faithful to the Holy Scriptures.* Perhaps it is time to say that "The Seminary" is an abstraction in these statements. It refers to the men who are called to carry out its purpose. This statement about faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures, then, is not about some impersonal striving on the part of an ideal institution. Here we say something about *ourselves*.

On Opening Day in 1971, John Jeske said, "Brother your purpose in life is not to be comfortable, but to be committed, and commissioned." Our church body knows that we have been commissioned. They were God's agents in that commissioning. They want to know, too, that we are committed. They want to know that we are committed to the purpose and objectives of this school. They want to know that we are committed to the Holy Scriptures.

That commitment, of course, includes our formal subscription to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as given by inspiration of God and the perfect and only rule of faith. But it also includes the way we use the Bible, the way we commend it to our students as Word of Life, Power of God, Means of Grace. It includes this, that we avoid and warn them against using methods which, although they may not be immoral or an explicit denial of Scripture, are somehow unworthy of the Gospel. It means patiently pointing out, again and again, that gimmickry cannot establish and strengthen healthy congregations. "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (4:2)."

Our work is not only subjected to the scrutiny of students, awesome as that is. It must not only pass the review of our peers, our colleagues. It is done in the sight of God. Temptations in the area of faithfulness to the Scriptures do not disqualify a man, although they could sap his ability to function. Succumbing to those temptations would disqualify him, in the sight of God.

We strive, with the help of the Spirit, to remain faithful to the Holy Scriptures. We entreat his aid. How does he answer and assist? Isn't it through the very Scriptures themselves? A chapel talk, a colleague's insightful comment, devotional reading, a writing assignment, course work—in all of these the Holy Ghost uses Scripture to keep us faithful to Scripture. What a privileged life we live, how true that our years are a time of grace!

*In every phase of its training program the Seminary strives, with the help of the Spirit ..., to give evidence of thorough scholarship.* It is the Spirit's doing that we are believers and faithful to Scripture. It is only with his help that we give evidence of the thorough scholarship that is needed in a seed-bed for theologians.

Here is this course which was not a real gripper in student days. Its utility for the parish ministry proved to be marginal. It is obviously not at the heart of the curriculum. It is not near the center of many students' lives. How thorough must I be? How much more scholarly endeavor should I expend?

Here is this course in Biblical Theology. It is at the heart of the curriculum. In teaching it do I assume an air of omniscience with a pat answer for everything, acknowledging no doubts or difficulties, reducing the Word of God to a blueprint which any intelligent person ought to be able to read and follow? Are there emphases in my presentation of this course which do not meet students where they are, which answer questions they are not asking?

These are thoughts I have and questions I ask myself. Because you, my colleagues, are also human I dare to express them in the hope that you have already weathered them and can help me steer through them. There are more questions. Have I neglected continuing education or been slack in day-by-day preparation? Is

there a lack of commitment to excellence on my part that turns off the best and brightest of my students? Do I find it impossible to admit to an error in the presentation of material, in my interpretation of facts, or in dealing with a student? Can I say, "I'm sorry," "My mistake," "I was wrong"?

The answers to these and similar questions say something about our effectiveness in the Seminary. We want our pastors to speak the truth, to speak it accurately and interestingly, to speak it in love. They, as we, must learn that from the Holy Ghost, while using the natural gifts and talents the Creator has given them. The Holy Ghost uses us, their teachers, in that process of learning to a considerable extent.

We have already begun to treat the last clause of the statement of objectives. *The Seminary strives, with the help of the Spirit ..., to effect professional efficiency.* I understand this to mean that we want our graduates to be capable and workmanlike in discharging the duties to which they are called, and that we are to play an important role in effecting that. Our alumni are not to be mere professionals, but they are to be professionally competent. Only a few will be theological professors, but all must be practical theologians.

Professor Gerald Hoenecke told the Synod in 1963: "No greater joy can come to those who are called to train men for the ministry than to know that they have at least in a small way contributed to the Savior's glory by helping to prepare men to whom the Savior of sinners is all, who treasure his Word as their most precious possession, and whose greatest delight is to be associated with him in his harvest of souls." He was expressing the same joy which Paul and Timothy knew in their ministry to the Christians in Corinth, a ministry conducted "so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God (4:15)." And "we pray to God that (they) will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that (they) will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed ... We are glad whenever we are weak but (they) are strong; and our prayer is for (their) perfection (13:7,9)."

#### **Concluding Remarks**

No doubt other, even quite different, thoughts enter the minds of my colleagues when they chance to review that page 3 in the catalog, p 94f in the 1978 Self-Study. Whatever nuances we read out of them, they will always have a humbling and a challenging effect. We ask ourselves, as Paul asked concerning his call: "And who is equal to such a task (2:16)?"

Anxieties and feelings of inadequacy do not in themselves unfit us for the task, but they must not be permitted to dominate us and paralyze us. "Our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers (3:5,6)."

Both we and our students "have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (4:7)." Just as God's glory was hidden at Golgotha so it is not always visible in our work, in our Seminary. Even here, with this single purpose and these clear objectives, there are disappointments, conflicts, failures. We cannot always see what our God is doing, but we may be sure that he is doing his gracious work. We may be sure of it because his Gospel is here, his Word is here, his Spirit is here. "To be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve (13:4)."