

The Life and Ministry of Arnold J. Koelpin

*Professor Emeritus
Distinguished Author
Retired Mayor
Faithful Servant*



Then and Now

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One of the most influential, and most enjoyable, teachers that I have ever had is the reverend professor, Arnold J. Koelpin. In his teaching of religion and history courses, he encouraged students to ponder the wonderful ways of our Lord. In expounding on so many passages of God's inspired word, he enabled students to answer the "What does this mean?" questions of faith and life. After nearly four decades of teaching teachers, this pillar of our worker training schools retired in 2001. I happened to be back in New Ulm, this time in the pastor track of Seminary Certification studies that year, and I was surprised that he was retiring. My sister had finished her course of Lutheran Confessions with Professor Koelpin, and to hear her beam about his classes told me that he still had the gifts to teach exceptionally well. This same spark is evident in the recorded interview that I was privileged to conduct with the Arnold and his wife, Ruth. I enjoyed walking through his memory banks on two occasions, the week before our taping and the day after he presented for the 2005 WLS Symposium. The insights I gained were treasures that should be available for others to cherish. I hope the DVD chapter titles provide a glimpse of what you may enjoy should one watch the interview. The four chapters on disc one are: an Audio Overview, Biography, Childhood, and Study & Travel. The four chapters on disc two are: 1961-1962 A Parish Pastor after the Split, Four Decades of Teaching Teachers, Family Life in the Koelpin Home, and Reflections on being Mayor & Retirement.

As you listen to his heart through the kaleidoscope of memories, you will hear his thankful praise for God's unmerited grace and every blessing. He understands the cross the Christian carries yet rejoices in this as well as the many kindnesses show to him and his entire family. He is a fourth generation Lutheran pastor, and besides his sons who are now fifth generation pastors, this is most rare in WELS circles. Both his grandparents were WELS pastors. His father started Fairview Lutheran in Milwaukee, where Arnold lived until age 8 and attended for grades 1 and 2. He then moved to a parsonage with a farm near Fond du Lac where his dad served as pastor and he attended Trinity, another WELS grade school in Caledonia, WI. He then went off to Concordia College-High

School to dorm in Milwaukee for six years, beginning as a lowly sextaner, and continuing through the prep school system until it was time to go on to Northwestern College.

From here you might assume the usual NWC to WLS to pastoral call life curriculum, but his path was far from predictable and his experiences were the richer for it. After graduating from NWC in 1953, during the Korean War, he and several classmates, (George Tiefel, Dave Schmiel & Norb Meyer) took a year of study abroad in Oberusel, Germany. This required a special dispensation from the U.S. Military draft board. It was a delightful year, learning to speak German fluently and catch some sightseeing while motorcycling around Europe.

In 1954, he returned to the U.S. to begin studies at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The following year however, he tutored at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. His time teaching in our synodical training schools was far from over though. After returning for his final WLS training and teaching for a semester at Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, he graduated WLS in 1958. Forty years separate his class portrait from his father's class portrait adorning the Seminary walls.

Lest you think he was finished with our worker training schools, think again. In fact, Professor Koelpin is the only man I know of who taught at NWC, DMLC, and MLC. The Northwestern College years were 1958-1960. He was assigned once again as a tutor, but this time he not only gained more classroom teaching experience, but also the hand of his beloved bride, Ruth.

Ruth E. Jaeger hailed from Oconomowoc, and was a Northwestern Prep girl, but while nearly ten years separated them she consented to date and eventually marry the strapping tutor. It was a joy to hear her recount the day she was asked out, and how all her senior classmates were giddy. Ruth graduated and was pursuing a teaching degree in the two year, two summer WELS program of the late 50s, but they wed after Arnold was finished tutoring in 1960. Arnold was ordained by his father early that fall in anticipation of ministry opportunities he would soon have overseas. Their "honeymoon in Europe" was not as short as you might think.

The reason the newly weds were able to spend a year in Germany was due to the academic scholarship Arnold was awarded to study at the university of Erlangen/Nuremberg. This Fulbright Scholarship was a rare honor and wonderful blessing for extended graduate work. The income was meager but the experiences were rich. It did me a great deal of good to hear of their early marriage trials and know that at age thirty he too had yet to receive his call into full time parish ministry. Sometimes the path that I and my family have taken seems long. The years of school can take their toll. Compared to professor Koelpin though, my ten years of post high school training don't seem that long at all. In the mid sixties, he also studied history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. He also did summer research at Goshen Mennonite College, in Goshen, Indiana and the Center for Reformation Research, in St. Louis, Missouri. He later returned to the University of Erlangen Nuremberg, for doctoral work in 1966-1967. He studied under distinguished men such as Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Maurer and Prof. Dr. Hermann Sasse. His dissertation for his Theology Doctorate was interrupted by severe illness. Professor Koelpin is truly a dedicated scholar and if not for his illness and family situation, he would not have come back to the United States before its completion. He did return to the University of Erlangen/Nuremberg, for more dissertation work in the summer of 1968.

His studies in Germany had a profound impact on his writing, love of Luther, and theology--not to mention his teaching. The classes when he described the Luther lands were spellbinding because these were places he had personally visited. He was never merely "a book professor" but let his subjects come alive for students because they were so important to his own life. His professional memberships include the Church History Society, the American Society for Reformation Research, Luthergesellschaft, the WELS Historical Institute, the Brown County Historical Society, the Minnesota Historical Society, Pommersche Verein in Freistadt, Wisconsin, and he was elected as a Fellow of the Luther Academy. His hobbies include: Genealogy work & family history, traveling,

slide lectures, computer creations, writing, gardening, photography, and wood-working. These all show his passion for history, theology, and life.

He had a relatively short parish ministry when he returned from the Fulbright Scholarship Year in Germany. It was also a challenging one since this was right at the time of the WELS and LC-MS split. He recalled seeing the two Franzmann brothers on conflicting sides at the convention we severed fellowship ties. Now he would be the pastor of a congregation which had undergone its own split having its members breaking away to form a CLC congregation. What an emotional time it was. As you'll see on the recording, a very moving family event happened upon the Koelpin's return from their year long "honeymoon." A severe heart attack brought his mother's earthly life to a close on August 2, 1961. Arnold and Ruth were on a plane home the day the Lord brought his mother, Lenchen, to eternity with him. One month and one day later, Arnold was installed as the pastor of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, in Cambridge, WI (northwest of Ft. Atkinson).

Though he had only one year in the parish, it was chocked full of what one might experience in several years. His first funeral as a young pastor was one for the PT books. A young mother in the congregation had conceived out of wedlock and the child was stillborn. Because the child was brought to full term the mother and grandmother requested a funeral. They did bury the stillborn child in a little cigar-like box on a hill-cemetery, overlooking Lake Ripley, and he as pastor, committed the child to the ground in the hope of the resurrection from death promised by the Lord and affirmed by his resurrection. Pastor Koelpin introduced the offering envelope system to a congregation that had never used them. He serves as vacancy pastor at London and Newville, WI. He also exchanged pulpit duties during Lent with his uncle (Rev. Gieschen), who was pastor of a nearby WELS congregation.

It was then in 1962, that he would receive the call to the position he served for the rest of his long and fruitful ministry, to be a college professor at New Ulm. He still remembers the phone conversation with President Schweppe, who said something like, "Hey Koelpin, I know that a

congregation hates to lose a good man, but we need you over here.” He had two other WELS calls one to head the religion department at WLC and a late in life call to a parish in Bella Vista, Arkansas (not to mention the early LC-MS call to shore up their language department at his former school Concordia of Milwaukee). Yet the call to serve in New Ulm teaching the timeless truths of God’s Word, Lutheran theology, and European history to future WELS teachers was a perfect match for his interests and abilities.

His regular courses taught at DMLC and MLC included: “Lutheran Confessional Writings”, “New Testament Epistles”, “Europe in Modern Times”, “The Reformation Era”, and “Lutheranism in America”. Prior to 1980 he taught: “Modern Church History”, “History of Israel – Old Testament”, “United States History to 1865”, “United States History 1865 – present” and “Civil War – Union in Crisis”. He shares his joys, challenges and surprises in the interview and his insights go on and on. For summer sessions from 1972 to 1996, he lead European Civilization and Culture study tours to places such as Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France, Holland, Belgium, England, Switzerland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Israel. During our two sessions of reminiscing, I especially appreciate his wisdom when commenting on the amalgamation of the two synodical colleges, the teaching of Scripture, and those most practical Lutheran Confessions. He has left a legacy of writings for the future generations to learn from as well. I have included a list of these as an addenda to this paper.

As far as family life goes, it is clear that Arnold highly values his marriage. Ruth is the glue that holds the family together, humanly speaking. The four children they have are the delight of their lives and now their spouses and families fill out the “quiver” as the Psalmist says. Paul, Mark, John and Beth all graduated from our synod worker training schools and have followed in the teaching and preaching ministries. Sixteen grandchildren as of this interview have helped to grow our synod population as well as bring the Koelpins happiness. I appreciate the remarks I received from the oldest and youngest of Arn and Ruth’s children, which I believe enhance the recording.

Near the end of his ministry (in 2000 and serving into 2003), Professor Koelpin transferred duties to the magisterial regime of God's left hand, caring and sharing as mayor of New Ulm. This was by City Council request and appointment. One highlight was guiding Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura up through the trap door of the Hermann Monument to the foot of Hermann, to do a twenty minute interview about the city on his radio talk show. He also was mayor during the 9/11 terrorist crisis which allowed him to meet Mayor Rudolph Julianne at a conference in Washington, D.C.. Mayor Koelpin even had to formally welcome a new Roman Catholic bishop into New Ulm's Diocese. All these activities and more gave him a deeper appreciation for the civic realm of service. His tenure in the office of mayor began on July 1, 2000 and concluded on January 1, 2003.

Now he keeps busy, involved with ministerial duties such as writing for NPH, teaching in his congregation's evangelism program, lecturing on Luther, and lately serves as head of New Ulm's Thrivent chapter. As a speaker, writer and editor he is still at the top of his abilities even at seventy-five. He still gives many public presentations. His lectures, seminars, workshops and other speaking engagements are always packed full of practical wisdom. He and Ruth celebrated their forty-fifth wedding anniversary and are both involved with team-teaching in the OWLS gatherings. I hope and pray that the Lord continues to let them serve in fulfilling ways as they await the joy of heaven, the unmerited blessed of God's faithful. We thank the Lord for giving us, his church, many faithful years of pleasing service though and from Professor Arnold Koelpin.

Addenda: NOTABLE PUBLICATIONS & WRITINGS

- 1967 Article *Reformation Studies in the Grades?*
Published in the "Lutheran Educator"
- 1970 Article *Sensitivity Training.*
Published in a series in "The Northwestern Lutheran"
- 1973 Article *The Charismatic Movement and Evangelism Today.*
Published in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly
Also published in Our Great Heritage, Vol. 3.
- 1974 Essay *What is Scriptural and What is Traditional in Lutheran Church Work?*
WELS Inner City Mission Seminar; WELS Pacific Northwest District
- 1975 Essay *The Christian Elementary School Teachers' Understanding and Application of Prayer.*
For WELS Minnesota District Teachers' Conference
Published, in part, in "Lutheran Educator", Oct. 1987.
- 1976 Series *Meditations* (Two weeks in summer of 1976)
Devotions on Romans 8. 18-23, Trinity 4 & 1 Peter 3, 8-15 Trinity 5
Published by Northwestern Publishing House.
- 1976 Essay *The Relationship of Government to the Institutional Church.*
For WELS West Wisconsin District convention
- 1976 Article *Paul Gerhardt, "I Will Sing My Maker's Praises."*
Published in Northwestern Lutheran, November & December
Cited by Concordia Historical Society for excellence in publication hymns.
- 1977 Essay *Luther, As Father and Teacher.*
WELS Michigan District Teachers' Conference.
Published first in WELS' Women's Society in St. Louis; also published in three installments in WELS "Parish Leadership" magazine, 1995.
- 1977 Essay *Preparing a New Bible Translation in Luther's Day.*
WELS Synod Convention Essay.
Published in "WELS Proceedings, 1977"
Published in Logia, Volume X, Number 1, Epiphany 2001
- 1977 Essay *Textual Criticism in the Light of the Lutheran Confessions and its Application to the 'New International Version' Bible Translation.*
WELS Minnesota Pastors' Conference
- 1978 Article *The Challenge of Anabaptist Baptism and the Lutheran Confession.*
Published in NPH Festschrift, No Other Gospel, 1980

- 1979 Essay *The Large and Small Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther.*
WELS Minnesota Pastors' Conference
- 1980 Book *No Other Gospel: essays in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the Formula of Concord.*
Published Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI,
Editor and contributor.
- 1980 Essay *Dealing With Humanism in Today's World.*
WELS Wisconsin State Teachers' Conference
- 1983 Articles *"Luther Lands, Then and Now"* and *"Luther's Wittenberg."*
Published in: "Lutheran Educator", 1983
- 1983 Essay *Luther Battles the Fanatics.*
Quincentenary of Luther's Birth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
Lecture series. On Video NPH. Published in LOGIA, A Journal of
Lutheran Theology, Vol. V, #3, 1996.
- 1983 Book *The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther: a picture catechism*
WELS Synod Committee, chair; 2nd printing in 1990s
Published by Master Graphics of New Ulm, MN
- 1984+ Series *A WELS Historical Profile.* 1800-1850 / 1850-1860 / 1860-1865
1865-1870/ 1870- 1880/ 1880-1890/ 1890-1900/ 1900-1910
1910-1920 / 1920-1930 / 1930-1940 / 1940-1950 / 1950-1960
Published in Vols. 1-8: "WELS Historical Institute Journal"
- 1984 Book (unfinished) *Exploring Our Heritage: the Story of the Christian Church.* Textbook
(Chapter "The Early Christian Church" Field tested 1994).
- 1986 Article *The Sacramental Presence in the Theology of the Synodical Conference.*
Presented in January at the 9th Annual Symposium on the Lutheran
Confessions at Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, Indiana.
Published in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Fall 1986; and
in book Our Great Heritage, NPH Vol. 3, p.270ff.
- 1987 Essay *Handling Criticism: an Education Essay.*
Wisconsin State Teachers' Conference, October 29, 1987
- 1987 Essay *Walther and the Synodical Conference.*
Reformation Lectures. Bethany Lutheran College & Seminary,
Mankato, MN, Oct. 28. Published: in Lutheran Synod Quarterly.
- 1988 Essay *The Lutheran Confession As a Norm for Faith & Fellowship.*
Lutheran Free Conference held at Lincoln, Nebraska

- 1988 Booklet *Hermann: From Legend to Symbol*
Commissioned: New Ulm Hermann Monument Centennial Committee.
Published by Master Graphics of New Ulm, MN, revised 2nd printing 2001
Cited in: Simon Schama: Landscape and Memory, Random House,
ISBN 0-679-73512-7 Chapter 2, p.112, footnote 81 [endnote, p. 586, 81]
- 1989 Essay *Justification by Faith.*
Presentation to the New Ulm Pastor's Conference
- 1992 Essay *The Importance of Public Worship in the Life of the Church*
St. Croix Conference, MN District, Delegate Conference.
Published by request in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1994.
- 1992 Essay *Ministry in the Minds & Lives of the Confessors*
WELS Ministry Symposium, Northwestern College, Dec 29.
Also presented at MN, South Pastoral Conference.
Printed in collection "WELS Ministry Compendium" Vol II;
and published in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1993.
- 1993 Essay *The Scriptures in the Context of History*
DMLC Symposium: The Uniqueness of Christianity.
Also presented in Oct. 1994 in Texas District.
Published as an hermeneutical study in Logia, A Journal of Lutheran
Theology, Vol IV. 1995. Cited by diagram in LOGIA XIV, I, 37
- 1993 Series *Meditations* (For Easter week)
Published devotions for April 11-17 on Psalm 118, 14-24
Northwestern Publishing House
- 1994 Series *Meditations* (For Easter week)
Published devotions for the year 1996 on Jonah 2, 2-9
Northwestern Publishing House
- 1995 Essay *Law and Gospel in Counseling*
Luther Academy meeting 4/21 North Shore Hilton, Skokie/Chicago, IL
Printed in Luther Academy Conference Papers, Vol. 2, 1995
- 1996 Essay *Teaching History from a Christian Perspective*
Education Essay for Metro-Milwaukee Teachers' Conference 4/08.
- 1996 Essay *The Doctrine of the Will of Man in Lutheran Confessional Theology*
Minnesota District Pastoral Conference, 04/16/96
- 1996 Essay *Justification, the doctrine by which the church either stands or falls*
Confessional Ev. Lutheran Conference (International) in Puerto Rico.
4/23-25/96. Published in its publication. Translated/published in Spanish.

- 1998 Essays *Luther's Legacy: The Luther-Erasmus Debate Revisited*
Bethany lectures: Reformation Festival October
Lecture 1: The enslaved will & God's absolute freedom
Lecture 2: The cross, God's mask in human history
Lecture 3: Scripture, the revelation of history's Lord
Published in the ELS theological journal 1999
- 2002 Lecture *Sanctification and Individual Prayer in Lutheran Theology.*
Pieper Lecture Series. Concordia Academy & Concordia Historical Institute.
At Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO. October 3-4.
Published in paperback by the Luther Academy in 2003.
- 2003 Essay *An American Application of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Realms:
The Relationship of Government to the Institutional Church*
Published in LOGIA, in Spring, 2003
Put on LCMS Life Ministries website [Human Care Ministries], by permission.
- 2003 Essay *The Real Presence: Moment or Mystery?*
Presented to the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference,
April 29, at Brainerd, MN.
- 2005 Afterword *The Varus Battle and its Impact on America.*
An Afterword, printed on p 341 ff], written by request, in the American
Edition of Tony Clunn, The Quest for the Lost Roman Legions,
ISBN #1-86227-316-2. Features the Battle of Kalkriese, archeological
verification of the Hermann [Arminius] victory and its relationship to the
Hermann Monument in New Ulm.
- 2005 Essay *The Lutheran Confessions: Sources and Story.*
Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions,
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Sept. 26-27, 2005
- 2006 Book *At the Lamb's High Feast: the Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church.*
(a work begun in 1995) In the Series: People's Bible Teachings.
To be published by Northwestern Publishing House in 2006