

2. Interview with Professor Scharf

By

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Church History  
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Question: Of all the people you have met and worked with in your career who had the most influence on you?

It happens quite often that people are so strongly influenced by those with whom they associate or among whom they grow up that when they are older they can recall who it was that had most to do with the kind of life they chose to follow, possibly even the profession they followed.

Early in my life I would have to say it was my mother. She had come to Wisconsin from Germany at the age of eight, settling with her parents and older siblings on a farm in the outskirts of Lomira. Later, as a young woman, she and several of her sisters were employed as maids in the homes of wealthy German families on the eastside of downtown Milwaukee. In 1888 she married my father who had recently moved from Brooklyn to work on the farm of one of his relatives a little north of Lomira. Since he came from Brooklyn he was not at home in the German language. Hence we spoke little German in our family circle, except when my mother's relatives and friends came to visit.

My childhood Pastor was the Reverend Rudolph Pietz who like almost all our pastors in those days, was not too much at home in English. Church services were conducted in German, as well as were the instructions for confirmation. That is where my mother played an important role in my training. Almost every evening, when after supper the men of the house were busy with chores in the barn, my mother sat near the fire with her knitting basket on

her lap and the Small Catechism of Luther in German open to the lesson for the next day. Many were the times when she used the occasion to speak of the matter of studying for the ministry.

Of course, I should also mention Pastor Pietz in this connection. He had a wise rule of not letting anyone start instructions for confirmation before being fully twelve. That posed something of a problem for me. The grade school I attended was a one-room country school which enjoyed a succession of three very able teachers. The total enrollment was at most seventeen. The result of that was that a few of us traveled at our own pace. I managed to finish eighth grade a few weeks before my twelfth birthday. I was then able to start confirmation instructions. Since Pastor Pietz knew by then that I was thinking of attending Northwestern he agreed to reduce my course to one year. During that year I attended Confirmation Instructions two forenoons a week while I attended Lomira High School for the balance of the week. Since the curricula at the two schools were so very different, I started N.P.S. over in the ninth grade. A year later another Lomira farm-boy, a very good friend of mine, did the same thing. He was Professor Carl Lawrenz, later to be president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

While still speaking of people who influenced me on my way to the ministry, I should certainly mention one more person. I refer to Dr. J. H. Ott, vice-president of Northwestern, Librarian and manager of the bookstore. I don't mean to say that he often spoke to me about the ministry. He was not a theologian himself.

He had received his Ph. D. at Halle in Germany. In Spring of my Quinta year (second year in High School) he called me in one day and asked whither I might like to work for him. He explained that his assistant until then was to graduate that coming June, that I might work with them and then take over for my last six years at Northwestern as his full assistant the next September. That meant a lot to me, since I was the youngest son in a family of nine. Little did I realize how much that would mean to me. It meant traveling with him to Milwaukee and Chicago in order to help him carry the school supplies to the depots. What I liked particularly was that he usually arranged such trips when we could see some play on the legitimate stage or take in some opera or symphony concert, on occasion even a museum or art institute. Being a farm Boy that I was, I found all of that an education in itself. Then, too, he had his own canoe. As long as weather permitted he wanted me to paddle and steer his canoe up the river and take a longer swim with him. Though he was reaching 68 by that time, he remained very athletic. He had been turnmaster at the college for many years.

Question: During our meetings you mentioned several people who were very good friends of yours. Could you please comment on some of those friendships?

When you ask whom I remember as very close friends, I run a risk of omitting some because of my 87 year old memory (or lack of it) and then, too, the fact that after our twelve years of boarding school were over we found ourselves still with many of the same men in the various conferences and schools in which we still worked. But in my case I believe I might dare to mention some who meant a lot to me. When the new school year started for our Quinta year Martin Franzmann joined our class from Lake City, Minnesota. We became very close friends and remained such all the way through to the Sem. In our Senior (College) year we were presidents of the two Literary Societies and got Faculty permission to stage our school's first full evening play for the public. It was "She Stoops to Conquer". When our class reached college level we were happy to find groups of new members joining us from Saginaw and New Ulm, Among them were Sieghard Westendorf and Roland Hoenecke. Sieghard and I became close for quite a number of years. In fact, we attended a Synodical Conference together in the Twin Cities where he suffered his cerebral stroke which caused his death a few years later. He was president of the Michigan District at the time. I was pastor in Rhineland at the time. The friendship between Roland Hoenecke and myself has continued through all these years. When I was called on to be a guest-instructor at the Summer school at D.M.L.C. for fourteen summers, during the 60's and 70's, the hospitality in the Hoenecke home was particularly pleasant for me.

Our class welcomed a new member, Heinz Bluhm, into our

Sophomore year. He came with his parents from Germany during the depression under Hitler. Heinz and I became good friends during our days at Northwestern. Heinz decided not to attend the Seminary but rather pursue his education at the University of Wisconsin. This decision resulted from the fact that he had not been able to conquer a severe speech impediment. We didn't see each other for the next seven years. When I graduated from the seminary I was assigned to teach at the Winnebago Lutheran Academy. It was at that time that I decided to spend a number of summers at the University of Wisconsin. It was there that I met up with Heinz again.

After earning his Ph.D. in German he was given a position at Yale university where he soon became a full professor and head of the German department. He became internationally known as one of the great Luther scholars of his day.

When he died he bequeathed<sup>A</sup> all of his Luther library and his his own books about Luther together with \$25,000.00 to cover all costs resulting from their transportation and housing in Northwestern's library. In addition to this he bequeathed<sup>A</sup> \$125,000.00 for the erection of a Luther statue to be placed on Northwestern's campus.

Waldemar Pless and I became good friends in our last years at Northwestern. In my last year I roomed with Pless and Otto Engel. When Waldemar and I both received calls to the Academy in Fond du Lac, we spent much time together even after he got married.

Question: You mentioned that there were not many calls available in your day. What was the feeling of the student body, especially of the seniors as the end of the year drew to a close? Were the students discouraged about the call situation?

Some graduates had to wait up to two years before receiving a call. There wasn't a feeling of frustration or discouragement. For the most part, we knew that we might have to wait. On the last day of classes, Professor Pieper would give us a stern message of encouragement. He would tell us to be patient and keep up in our studies. Eventually everyone approved by the faculty would receive a call.

Question: Having already taught at WLA for two years, what went through your mind, when you received a call to return to WLA?

I had mixed feelings, of course. I was excited to return to the Academy and at the same time I wanted to serve in the Parish. I was fortunate enough to have a call and for that I was thankful.

Question: What was your work load like?

Very busy! I had seven different preparations each day. For a week once a month I was to conduct the morning devotions. After school I was involved with dramatics. There wasn't much

free time during the school year.

Question: Since you taught for five years at the Academy, during this second stint, did you have many opportunities to preach in the local congregations?

Not as many as I would have liked to have had. You have to remember that this was during the depression. Pastors as a rule did not go on vacation and they didn't retire unless absolutely necessary. Consequently, there were few invitations to do guest-preaching.

Question: When you left the Academy did you have thoughts of returning to the teaching ministry someday?

To tell you the truth, I was so excited to get into the parish that I really didn't give it much of a thought. The word must have spread that I had enjoyed the classroom because seven out of the next ten calls were for teaching.

Question: What was the most rewarding part of your Parish Ministry?

As I look back on my nineteen years in the parish ministry I find it pretty difficult to pick out one or two especially rewarding parts. To be honest with you, I pretty much enjoyed it



all. Making mission calls, working with young people, Bible classes, and preaching seem to stand out in my memory as being more favorable than things like administration and organizations. But I hope that our young men will find encouragement in my saying that it is truly possible to like all aspects of the ministry.

Question; What was it about Rhineland that made it one of the fondest memories of your ministry?

There are several things that come to mind when thinking of Rhineland. People were eager to hear the Word of God. It was evident in Bible classes. They made Bible class a priority. They would drive some great distances even in the winter time to come to Bible class. The senior Bible class often numbered over 100 people. The Men's Club and Ladies Club were not just social functions. They expected to have a lesson concerning some Bible questions or some church-related subject at the beginning of each meeting. A brief opening devotion was not considered sufficient.

Every year there were four different Confirmation classes. One class, the seventh graders, met two mornings a week for their first year of instructions. The eighth graders met on the other three mornings a week for their final year of instructions. Then there were also a High School Class of young people who had been found formerly unchurched families or among those who had not attended Christian Day School. Finally, one evening a week there would be a meeting of an Adult Confirmation Class. This adult

class some years numbered as many as 25 or 27. These four classes started meeting in September and continued until May - usually Pentecost. All four classes were Confirmed in the same service, a total on occasion of 60 and 62.

The congregation was growing during these years. When we came to Rhinelander the congregation numbered 500 communicants. When we left twelve years later it was approaching 1,000 communicants.

Two other things come to mind when trying to answer your last question. One is the fact that during our last nine years the late service was broadcast over a radius of 80 miles over the Rhinelander radio station. And during the last three years Zion found it possible to rent a large Baptist camp on Crescent Lake. Our young folks could attend for the last week in June. Members of the Ladies Aid, the faculty of our Christian Day School, together with a number of students from Northwestern College, our Seminary, and Doctor Martin Luther College made up an adequate staff.

Question: Was there ever a time in your parish ministry when you felt nervous or inadequate when handling such a heavy load?

I can answer that question quite pointedly by giving you a quote from Pastor G.E. Bergermann, long time president of our Synod. "If I ever meet a pastor who on occasion is not nervous or does not feel inadequate, I do not want to hear him."

Question: What advice would you give a young Pastor if you were given a chance?

I find that question a bit too difficult to answer, simply because of the fact that I find what I wish to advise too little practised in our day. I would strongly urge that he try his best to get into the home of every family in his congregation at least once a year. The statement we heard stressed ever so often at the Seminary would be so worthwhile trying today still. "A house-going pastor makes a church-going membership."

Question: What was a typical day like during your two years of service as a civilian chaplain during World War II in Louisiana?

We lived in Alexandria and served the manevuer-area, as well as five large camp and two air-bases - a total radius of about 80 miles. On five days of each week I would keep busy calling on servicemen in their quarters. Evenings and on Saturday I would spend as much as possible on correspondence or sermon-work. In those days there were no WELS churches below the Mason-Dixon Line. For that reason I borrowed two Missouri Synod churches, one on each end of the 80 mile wide swamp, in Alexandria on the East and De Ridder on the West, conducting a morning service in the west and evening service in the East.

Question: List some of the most rewarding experiences in Vietnam?

There were far too many such to even begin composing a list! Let me mention just one which often comes to my mind. On this occasion I wanted to visit the men in the far North near Da Nang, close to the demilitarized zone. So I sent a duplicated note to the men in that area to tell them that I planned to fly up by Vietnamese flight. By return mail I received a note from one Sgt. Steele telling me that he hoped very much that I would find him that he had not had the Lord's Supper since he left home.

I did find him after a long search. When I did he was sleeping in his bunk. He was obviously delighted to see me. He explained that he had stood guard the night before amidst heavy bombing. But he hastened to ask whether I had brought communion. Of course, I had. When we finished, he explained that he was to stand guard again that night. I began to leave, but he urged that I wait till he could dress. He added that he wanted to go with me to show me to the bus stop at which the bus would take me into Da Nang. We jumped rides with jeeps, trucks, and other vehicles until we got to the bus stop he was looking for. He told me that I had no way of knowing what danger I was in. While I was reaching my hand to say Good Bye and wish him well, I soon realized that I had to nearly fight him off to keep him from sticking a ten dollar bill into my pocket.

I was ever so happy when I heard that he was going to spend an R&R leave in Hawaii the same time I was to leave Vietnam by way

of stops at bases in the Pacific. We met in Hawaii and he attended my communion service with his wife at Fort Shafter.

Question: What was it that brought you the most joy at Northwestern?

I enjoyed the challenge of presenting the material in such a way that the student would not only grow in the knowledge of Church History but also in the doctrine of the church. I enjoyed meeting the students in and out of the class room. This allowed the student to gain an appreciation and grow in his happiness for being in the Church. It was always most gratifying to counsel someone who was thinking of dropping out.

Question: How big a role does History play in the curriculum?

I believe that there are a quite a number of reasons for ministerial students to know history. Knowing history will surely be an encouragement to the pastor when he knows and sees how God shows his hand in history as He guides and protects the affairs of the church.

A knowledge of history will also help him understand the people of the Bible days and even of the modern church through knowing the events and cultures among which these people lived their lives.

Question: It was during your tenure that the big split came between Wisconsin and Missouri. What effect did that have on the campus at Northwestern?

There was really nothing to speak of. President Kowalke did a very good job of handling the situation.

Question: What are your thoughts on the amalgamation?

Being a History professor for so many years makes one more respectful of the past. I am heart sick about the campus that meant so much to me since 1920. I am concerned even to the point of being worried about the kind of effect this will have on our church body.

Question: In your 51 years of ministry, what are you most thankful for?

I would have to say my wife. It would have not been possible without her. She was a tremendous help throughout my ministry. She played a big role in rearing the family and in helping me when I wasn't able to be there. Coming from a parsonage, she knew what the ministry was all about. Her having

taught in Christian day school for twelve years was also a big plus. And to her let me add the thought of our four children. Observing how all four of them grew up by God's grace to service in and faithfulness to their church.

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MRS. SCHARF

Question: What part of the ministry did you enjoy the most?

There wasn't a part that was better than the other. I enjoyed every part of it. I enjoyed meeting the different people from all walks of life whether it was in Louisiana, Rhineland, Slinger or at Northwestern. I enjoyed having people over to the house for social gatherings. I enjoyed rearing four children. And I enjoy watching my grandchildren grow up.

Question: What advice can you give to a young Pastor's wife?

She should remember that the friendly cooperation and Christian understanding with which the pastor and his family work in the home and in the congregation will be a big help to his ministry.