

# Bading and the Formative Presidency of the Wisconsin Synod

*By Edward C. Fredrich*

The *vita* of the second president of the Wisconsin Synod, Johannes Bading, is impressive and absorbing even in the mere recitation of fact and detail. The eighty-eight years reach so far back that they allow for a baptism in 1824 by Pastor Jaenicke, founder of a famed mission school in Berlin at the turn of the previous century, and extend so long that they reach into the lifetime of the present Wisconsin Synod president.<sup>i</sup> When Bading came to Wisconsin in 1853 at the age of 28, there were only seven pastors in the Wisconsin Synod. By the time of his death in 1913 that number had grown to 298.<sup>ii</sup>

The three score years of service include pastorates at Calumet 1854–1855, Theresa 1855–1860, Watertown 1860–1868, Milwaukee 1868–1908, and limited service there until shortly before his death in 1913. For seventeen months in 1863 and 1864 he collected funds for the Watertown school in various areas of Germany and Russia.<sup>iii</sup> He was synodical secretary in the late 1850's, president 1860–1864 and 1867–1889, vice-president in 1866 and 1889–1908. He was president of the Northwestern Board from 1865 for 47 years. He labored energetically and effectively at the task of organizing the Synodical Conference that was called into being in his St. John's Church in Milwaukee in July 1872, and was president of that body for thirty years, 1882–1912.

Especially significant in the Bading life and ministry, however, are the three decades of presidential administration running from 1860 to 1889 with brief time out in the mid 1860's for European fund raising. In all Wisconsin Synod history only one other time period of generation length can match the Bading era in far-reaching importance, the period that began in 1939. While Bading was president, Wisconsin made its half circle turn on the doctrinal and confessional scale from left to right. It broke with the European mission societies and the less than soundly Lutheran policies they favored. It promptly terminated its involvement with the General Council. It established fellowship with Missouri and helped organize the Synodical Conference. During the first decade of that body's history and the strife over Scripture truth and synodical structure, Wisconsin contended firmly for doctrinal and organizational integrity.

It is the main motif of this historical treatment of the Synod's second president that Bading and his administration played a vital role in these major developments that placed Wisconsin squarely on the pathway that brought it to the position occupied today and, it is to be hoped fervently, also tomorrow. In our historical evaluations we have generally tended to admit that Bading was on the scene at a crucial time in our synod's history but then to assume that what developed was, if not exactly in spite of him, not to any appreciable extent because of him.

There are several reasons for this downgrading. For one thing, the Wisconsin Synod by its nature just isn't all that ready to acknowledge the gift of administration. Synod and district presidents are not hero figures in our midst. Especially since the Protestant Controversy, it seems quite impossible for that office in Wisconsin circles to achieve the recognition it gets in other church bodies. Then too, most of us have learned about the 1860–1889 era from Koehler, directly or indirectly.<sup>iv</sup> One needs only a nodding acquaintance with his writings to realize that he ardently follows, or rather fosters, this synodical viewpoint and consistently ranks the presidential office below the classroom of the worker-training school in importance and value for the church body.

The comparison involving the school naturally brings to mind another facet of the point at issue. During the Bading presidency the one important theological teacher was Adolph Hoenecke. With perfect right he was and is gratefully recognized for services he rendered in helping Wisconsin turn the doctrinal and confessional corner. To diminish that recognition is neither sensible nor possible. However, it is not amiss to call attention to what others contributed in their assigned fields. That is what this article proposes to do in the matter of Bading's presidential leadership.

## I. Leadership Qualities Developed and Recognized, 1824–1860

As Bading's *Gemeinde-Blatt* obituary reports, he was already out of his teens when the first specific step was taken that would lead him from his native land into the service of the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>v</sup> On Berlin's Sebastian Street he saw above a house door the Mark 16:15 motto. It triggered the resolve to become a preacher of the gospel. Bading turned to Director Bleck of the Berlin Mission Society, who advised a year of travel. After its completion Bading was enrolled as a student in 1846. Revolutionary activities in Berlin soon thereafter necessitated a transfer to the newly opened mission school of L. Harms at Hermannsburg. Bading became a member of the first Hermannsburg class.

When it was time for that class to be sent out for mission assignments, chiefly in Africa, the society's records state: "After a four-year training there were left in the Mission House eight of the twelve enrolled. Two the Lord had taken away by death, two others became unfaithful."<sup>vi</sup> Bading is included in the latter two. In official reports Director L. Harms supplies the elucidation that the two were dismissed "because the earthly work became too much for them." He then remarks:

God forgive them the deep concern they thereby caused us all and open their eyes that they realize their sin. The Lord has thus far heard our prayer in that one of them is deeply sorrowful over his sin and has asked for forgiveness, which was also heartily granted him, even though his request for readmittance to the school could not be granted.<sup>vii</sup>

After putting himself into the hands of the Langenberg Society and carrying out what was indicated in the preceding quotation, Bading in May 1853 was declared ready for service in the Synod that was the Langenberg's special concern. A comment or two on the Hermannsburg episode is in place. Under Harms and the thoroughly Lutheran Hermannsburg training Bading was exposed to a stancher brand of confessionalism than was available at Basel or Berlin or Barmen. We can be grateful to the Lord both because Bading became a Langenberg missionary to America instead of a Hermannsburg missionary to Africa and also because he was at the same time granted the benefits of the Hermannsburg preparation.

While not all details of Bading's break with Hermannsburg are available, two pertinent points emerge. The problem did not involve any heresy or scandal. It arose from disagreement over the scheduled afternoon work detail that was part of the practical instruction of the school. The clash and eventual outcome reveal a readiness on the part of Bading to stand up for his point, as he saw it, even at great cost but not to the point that reconciliation was made impossible by unbending stubbornness.

This trait is abundantly evident in Bading's very first dealings in Wisconsin after presenting himself to President Muehlhaeuser in late July 1853. Traveling around the state to become acquainted with the Wisconsin holdings while waiting for a parish assignment, Bading was called by the little congregation in the Calumet area. He insisted on prompt ordination instead of the customary status of licensed pastor. He gained his well-taken point and was ordained on October 6, 1853.<sup>viii</sup>

As Koehler recounts the ordination episode on the basis of Bading's own recollections, a serious dispute broke out between the ordinant, Muehlhaeuser, and the ordinand over the pledge to be made.<sup>ix</sup> Bading wanted a pledge to all the Lutheran Confessions, but Muehlhaeuser tried to put him off with references to *papierne Scheidewaende*. The veteran and venerable president had to yield to the fledgling pastor and in the sermon Bading preached on the importance of the Confessions. The Calumet episode foreshadows a large and important chapter in Wisconsin's history that would begin in 1860.

The first reference to Bading in the Wisconsin Synod's Proceedings is equally illustrative.<sup>x</sup> The year is 1854 and the meeting place is Granville. In an emotionally charged session, Gotthilf Weitbrecht is apologizing to the assembly for having become involved with Methodists. Twice the secretary, Goldammer, inserts into the account the parenthetical *Traenen*. Muehlhaeuser asks for floor comments and Goldammer expresses sympathy for the lost sheep returned. Bading, however, cuts through the sentimental and emotional atmosphere with the

pertinent question whether it is permissible for anyone to carry out pastoral duties in a Methodist congregation. The question must have caused some difficulties, for the minutes say at that point, *Bis weiter verschoben*.

Subsequent minutes are dotted with enough references to Bading to indicate that he was soon regarded as a reliable and energetic minister by his fellow pastors. He was given his share of assignments and seems to have fulfilled them in capable fashion.<sup>xi</sup> As previously stated, he was elected secretary in 1856. The move to Theresa in 1855 put him into the area where he would have as neighbors G. Reim at Ashford and Ph. Koehler near West Bend. With others, these men made up the old Northwestern Conference, that distinguished itself in Wisconsin's first decade by advocating more confessionalism than the body as a whole demonstrated.<sup>xii</sup>

Because of Bading's soundly Lutheran stand the Wisconsin Synod almost lost him to Missouri. In his Calumet congregation were a number of members who had a strongly rationalistic spirit and who stubbornly resisted the pastor's efforts to further Lutheran doctrine and practice in their midst. Added to previous discouraging experiences at the synodical level, these parish problems loomed large enough to cause Bading to consider joining the Missouri Synod where orthodoxy was known to prevail. Contact with President Fuerbringer of Missouri's Northern District was established. However, Fuerbringer, demonstrating what was best in early Missouri-Wisconsin relations, prevailed upon Bading to remain in Wisconsin where his confessional concerns were more needed than in Missouri.<sup>xiii</sup>

Within a few years Bading had other, less friendly relations with Missouri's Northern District in the Lebanon-Watertown parish conflicts. In both places there was unrest in Missouri congregations, originally caused by insistence on private confession but soon involving a host of other matters. In Watertown there were complications because another congregation was feuding with its pastor. Because of proximity Bading was called upon to serve secessionist groups. In this difficult situation he tried to conduct himself as correctly and conscientiously as possible and succeeded to the satisfaction of his body.<sup>xiv</sup> It was obviously another stow when Missouri made its report.

The upshot of the perplexing problem was that the Watertown congregation not in membership with Missouri, joined by many former Missouri members, called Bading as pastor. His Theresa congregation, however, on this occasion refused to release their pastor. A year later, when Bading could urge the advantage of Watertown's rail and road connections for a synodical president, a second call brought Bading to Watertown. The Watertown-Lebanon situation must have been a distressing experience for Bading but it also had its good effects. It revealed him once again, to associates and opponents, as a man who under great pressure would stand by his convictions and act on them. It also provided direct and personal experiences for one who would in the future have to provide guidance and pass judgment in many another Wisconsin-Missouri parish problem and intersynodical difficulty.

In 1860 President Muehlhaeuser declined reelection because, as he said, the burdens of office were "becoming more pressing year by year."<sup>xv</sup> It is possible that his decision may have been influenced by the realization that the body he had founded had in a decade turned perceptibly from the pathway he had originally charted and was growing more and more confessional. Muehlhaeuser himself was growing with it, as Bading was quick to point out to Langenberg officials.<sup>xvi</sup> In any event, the time had come for a change in leadership.

With "heartfelt sorrow" the Wisconsin delegates in 1860 accepted Muehlhaeuser's decision and honored him by appointment to the specially created office of "Senior."<sup>xvii</sup> Then they promptly elected Bading, at that time thirty-five years old, second president of the Wisconsin Synod. They were not acting blindly. The fourteen pastors present all knew Bading, who had always let others know how he felt and where he stood. A man with confessional convictions was wanted and needed. The second decade would be the most crucial of the first ten decades. Capable administration and sound leadership would have to be provided.

## II. Leadership in a Crucial Era, 1860–1872

Three major assignments loomed for the new president: the transition from the previous but still influential administration had to be made without undue stress, funds for the needed worker-training school would have to be gathered at home and abroad, and in the not too distant future fellowship decisions of far-

reaching consequence would have to be reached and implemented. Bading functioned so effectively that difficult tasks were made to look easy, and the performance consequently was generally underrated then and since.

The tasks were anything but easy. It is generally forgotten that the two men who tried to fill in during Bading's overseas absence and the following years did not even succeed in finishing their terms. G. Reim completed the 1862–1864 term as vice-president and was then elected in his own right. However, just before the 1865 meeting he resigned. Helenville parish problems, rather than synodical matters, were the cause in this instance.<sup>xviii</sup> Streissguth finished that term, was elected in 1866, but concluded his 1867 presidential report with the plea:

The experiences of both my years in office and my health, which has declined more and more, place upon me the duty of requesting in a most friendly but also most determined manner the honorable Synod to relieve me of my office, since I could not carry it out without the greatest disadvantage to my health, my family, my congregation and the Synod itself. The honorable Synod is asked to grant this request without delay, for I have determined under all circumstances to carry out what I deem to be my irrefutable obligation.<sup>xix</sup>

With all its stress on health, the Streissguth statement clearly underscores the difficulty of serving as Wisconsin president during its most turbulent decade. That unenviable position Bading, then first vice-president and subsequently president, assumed and filled until 1889.

Bading's first means to smooth the presidential transition and to lay the groundwork for more fundamental decisions were the presidential address and the doctrinal discussion. Muehlhaeuser's addresses were often eloquent gospel proclamations and heart-gripping admonitions, but they remained on the plane of the general. Bading's, on the contrary, deal with specifics and come to grips with issues. His first presidential addresses mark a turning point in our doctrinal history. In 1861 he offered this admonition:

In our Evangelical Lutheran Church we have His Word in truth and purity. Let us like our fathers hold fast to it in life and death; if necessary, sacrifice for it good and blood, life and limb and rather suffer all than depart one hair's breadth from the truth we have learned and from our beloved Confessions.<sup>xx</sup>

In 1862 President Bading elaborated on this theme. Noting that those in other synods often referred to Wisconsin's confessional declarations as "fine phrases that lack all substance," he reminded his fellow pastors:

At our ordination into the ministry, we were all pledged to the Confessions of our Church and indeed not *in so far as* but *because they agree with God's Word*. But isn't it one thing to have the right and truly pure doctrine on paper and isn't it something different to possess it in one's own clear understanding and one's own childlike faith?<sup>xxi</sup>

It was at the 1861 convention, the first over which Bading presided, that a discussion of doctrine by way of essay or theses was given a place on the convention agenda. We, who tend to take such procedure for granted at our conventions today, should gratefully recall that it was a Bading innovation that gave us this useful practice. In 1861 G. Reim treated the confessional stand of the Wisconsin Synod and G. Fachtmann read a paper on confession. In 1862 Bading apologized for not being able to grant time for arranged doctrinal discussion since the convention would be busy enough with constitutional revision and school planning.<sup>xxii</sup> However, at some subsequent conventions, such as 1865, doctrinal essays or theses were heard and from 1869 on became a regular part of the convention agenda.

By 1863 enough forward steps had been taken to mark the first phase of Bading's presidency a success. As indicated, the pastors were committing themselves to a position that was making the old harsh charges of

“New Lutheranism” and unionism anachronistic and extreme.<sup>xxiii</sup> The resolve to establish a school of its own for training pastors gave promise of further improvements in the future. It was this school venture that actually brought Wisconsin to the proverbial crossroads in its theological development and once again Bading would prove to be the key figure.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In 1863 the Wisconsin Synod made three important decisions in this matter that would be of major significance in its history and the Bading biography. After lengthy debate it preferred Watertown, Bading’s own area of labor from 1860 on, as the location of the school over Milwaukee, the other city in consideration.<sup>xxv</sup> Then it resolved to resort to European fund raising to supplement monies that could be gotten from the city of Watertown and from its four dozen parishes for the establishment of the school. Finally, it selected Bading to be the European collector.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Previously aid from German mission societies had chiefly been in the form of supplying workers. Money became involved in the salary of the *Reiseprediger*, who had no congregation of his own to look to for support, but this amounted to no more than several hundred dollars. Now the figure would run into thousands, some in direct donations and some in interest-bearing endowments. The timing could not have been more out of joint. These were the very years when Wisconsin was becoming more confessional and less ready to tone down Lutheran-Reformed differences. Conflict was inevitable.

Several factors are to be taken into account before anyone levels the charge of rank inconsistency and gross opportunism at Bading for gathering money from those whose unionistic practices he opposed. For one thing, Bading was following a policy that the Wisconsin Synod itself espoused and clearly spelled out when after considerable debate it resolved in 1867:

It has long since been known by our Berlin friends that we condemn all doctrinal union.... However, as long as there are still Lutherans in the respective union state churches among whom the gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered rightly and as long as they protest against a union imposed by force as an injustice committed and continued against the Lutheran Church, we can only gratefully accept the services of love of the union societies which make it possible for workers to come to us from those Lutherans in the state church who maintain and renew their protest.<sup>xxvii</sup>

One may wish that the harsher condemnation of the unionistic state church which some in the body desired had then been voiced and that such sentiments had been in force earlier.<sup>xxviii</sup> However, also in 1864 the convention endorsed and enlarged the overseas collection.<sup>xxix</sup> It is also to be noted that Bading, while in Germany, let his confessional stand be clearly known. A case in point is his article, “A Voice from Wisconsin,” published in *Neues Zeitblatt fuer die Angelegenheiten der Lutherischen Kirche*, which avowed allegiance to all the Lutheran Confessions without distinction.<sup>xxx</sup>

Our oral traditions have it that Bading, late in his life, still dreamed and schemed about obtaining some of the collected monies that had been frozen in the course of the final break with our whilom benefactors overseas. If the tradition were true, one could find it in his heart to understand the motivation of one who worked hard to gather the funds and who had learned to appreciate many of the givers as much as their gifts. In any event, we do not hold with tradition. The record states that Bading was in the chair when the body renounced all claims to the Prussian collection and instructed its president to bring this information to the authorities there.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The preceding paragraph indicates that it was in the second stage of Bading’s presidency, beginning in 1867 and continuing to 1889, that the unsatisfactory relationship with the overseas societies was terminated. Even if this was more than anything else a case of Wisconsin saying, “You can’t fire me because I quit!” it still marked a decisive step in the Synod’s history and was certainly set in motion by its growing confessionalism.<sup>xxxii</sup>

By 1867 the Wisconsin Synod was involved in a General Council membership. President Streissguth and Watertown’s Martin had attended the preliminary meeting at Reading the previous December and had

presented a favorable report. According to a resolution of its 1867 convention Wisconsin became one of the Council's eleven charter members at Fort Wayne in 1867 with Bading, Hoenecke, and Martin in attendance.

However, already at that Fort Wayne meeting a protest was lodged against the Council's indecisive response to the "Four Points," questions regarding altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, lodge membership and chiasm. The protest included the warning that an unfavorable report would have to be made to the next synodical convention.<sup>xxxiii</sup> As a result of such a report included in the presidential address to the 1868 convention, the body resolved that it must have a better statement on the "Four Points" from the next Council meeting or it would have to withdraw from membership.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The 1868 Pittsburgh meeting of the General Council did not produce the desired statement President Bading joined with Pastors Klingmann of Michigan and Adelberg of New York in submitting a minority report that did not win acceptance.<sup>xxxv</sup> When Bading outlined the unsatisfactory outcome to Wisconsin's 1869 convention, the result was a vote to put the previous year's resolution into effect. Wisconsin became the first of the General Council bodies to withdraw for confessional reasons. The Council protested this "hasty withdrawal" and "uncharitable assault," but Wisconsin under Bading's leadership was not by any means inclined to endure another prolonged debate on fellowship and confessionalism.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In these very years President Bading was not only presiding over the breaking of unsatisfactory fellowship ties but also guiding his body into new and lasting brotherly associations. The long-standing but loosely constructed fraternal dealings with Minnesota were formalized and finalized. In 1869 he and Hoenecke met with President Sieker and Pastors Emmel, Kuhn, and Reitz for doctrinal discussions. The commissioners found that doctrinal unity existed between the two bodies. In this instance Bading in his leadership advanced farther than the body was willing to follow. The 1870 convention gave unanimous approval to and ratification of all official actions of its president but was not willing to enlarge fellowship relations with Minnesota or even recognize publicly its orthodoxy.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Minnesota's continuing General Council membership was the problem. By the next year that matter was in the process of resolving itself and the enduring Minnesota-Wisconsin fellowship was formally declared. Bading, it can be presumed, called for the vote on Minnesota orthodoxy with great, if belated, joy.

Bading played an even more significant role in the Missouri-Wisconsin *rapprochement*. So far as basic and underlying causes are concerned, this would and could not have come to pass had it not been for the improved doctrinal and confessional stand that Wisconsin took in the first Bading decade. In the matter of specific dealings, it is again Bading who takes the lead. At the 1868 Racine convention he included in his presidential report the opinion that "an opportune private discussion with pastors of the Missouri Synod, who desire peace as earnestly with us as we with them, justifies the hope that also our relations to that church body will become more and more friendly and brotherly."<sup>xxxviii</sup> In the Watertown area Bading, Hoenecke, and Koehler were enjoying good relationships with their Missouri neighbors and Bading, who would leave for Milwaukee before the year was over, made the most of the opportunity.

The Wisconsin convention responded to the president's suggestion by passing two resolutions. One instructed Bading to take the "proper steps to bring about peace so that there might be mutual recognition as Lutheran synods and brotherly relations between members of both synods in the spirit of truth on the basis of pure doctrine." The basis for this enabling resolution was laid when the convention declared that in the area of Missouri-Wisconsin relations it had no knowledge of any differences in the area of doctrine and that conflicts involved practical matters.<sup>xxxix</sup> Missouri responded favorably, although it placed more emphasis on a discussion of doctrinal issues than on a resolution of parish problems. Bading, who had been specifically instructed to concentrate on the latter subject, correctly yielded the point even though he felt that Wisconsin's orthodoxy had been sufficiently demonstrated. The colloquy was held October 21 and 22, 1868, in the parish to which Bading had just moved two weeks earlier. The result was a mutual recognition of orthodoxy which both synods ratified at 1869 conventions.

The way was open for membership in the Synodical Conference. Wisconsin joined with Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, the Norwegians, and Ohio in calling this strongly confessional fellowship into being in July 1872. The constituent convention took place in Bading's St. John's Church. Forty years later, bidding the

Synodical Conference farewell in a letter, the ailing Bading recalled Walther's words in the opening sermon, "*O gesegneter, seliger Tag*" and then went on to write: "This declaration echoed joyfully at that time in the hearts of all of us who had worked together in the founding of the Synodical Conference. To these co-workers the writer of these lines belonged and he can certainly say that he belonged to them with joy."<sup>xl</sup>

During the twelve years from 1860 to 1872, while Bading was either its president or its representative overseas, Wisconsin had moved from a confessional position that was denounced by Missouri to one that brought her into fellowship with Missouri in the Synodical Conference. In the human agencies of this work of God's grace, Bading stands in the front rank with Adolph Hoenecke. Let one who did not always see eye-to-eye with Bading in these developments testify to this, even if grudgingly. In an 1870 letter Streissguth wrote to Bading: "*This* Lutheranism that you have helped establish will *never* become my own, though I be made out a worse heretic than I long since have been considered—now you have purged the Synod of all unionism and put it on a pure (?) Lutheran basis. What have you improved thereby? or gained?"<sup>xli</sup>

Bading's own summary, set down in the anniversary sermon he preached at the 1875 convention, praises the Lord and declares:

He has constrained and constricted us through bitter inner battles, until the false spirit in us was destroyed, the false ties were broken, and the true unity in the Spirit was established, namely the unity which continues in the true Word and in the true Confession, as the Lutheran Church possesses it and for which the fathers shed blood and tears. This is the unity, which the Lord desired, while He has never desired the unity which unionism produces.... That is why we have publicly renounced all unionism, have fought lodgery, have rejected every pulpit and altar fellowship with those of a different faith and why we now by lip and pen tell all who seek unity: "Rid yourselves of all that separates you from the Lutheran Confessions, accept the wholesome doctrine of the Lutheran Church, and the unity which pleases God and truly binds hearts is present."<sup>xlii</sup>

### III. Leadership in Holding Fast, 1872–1889

Any assumption that Synodical Conference membership meant an end to all doctrinal strife and intersynodical discord and would usher in an era of easy administration was soon proved false. Two major problems presented themselves in the first decade of the Synodical Conference and put Bading's leadership abilities to a severe test.

The first of these was the so-called "state synod" strife. Dr. Walther of Missouri pushed hard for a breakdown of the established synod lines and an alignment of all Synodical Conference congregations in geographical districts or "state synods" of the larger association. These districts would provide schools for the first levels of the training of future pastors. All seminary work would be done at St. Louis.

Putting the best construction on the proposal, one could understand Walther's plan as an effort to provide a type of organization that would be able to deal effectively with the inevitable conflicts that arise between neighboring parishes. If the congregations in conflict were members of the same administrative unit, and not of different synods, complicated and long-lasting intersynodical "cases" might be avoided, so ran the argument. However, smaller synods, such as Wisconsin, felt they were risking the loss of their heritage and identity to the larger bodies in such a development and were understandably wary.

The Wisconsin Synod went along with the united seminary plan. It transferred its seminary work to St. Louis from 1870 to 1878, meanwhile opening the doors of the Watertown school to Missouri students. Missouri placed a professor at Watertown. Wisconsin was supposed to send one, obviously Adolph Hoenecke, to St. Louis.

It was Bading's chore to carry out these difficult dealings that moved from the delicate to the embarrassing stage when more and more years passed and no Wisconsin professor appeared on the Concordia campus. The graciousness with which Missouri endured the Wisconsin inability to fulfill its part of the bargain

was the one factor that made a bad situation tolerable. Bading could report to the 1871 convention that on his visitation trip to St. Louis in the fall of 1870 he found all well with the Wisconsin contingent of students.<sup>xliii</sup>

In 1877 and 1878 when the “state synod” problems intensified, the Wisconsin president had to muster and demonstrate patience and firmness above and beyond the call of duty. Wisconsin’s 1877 resolution, unanimously adopted, to join the venture “as soon as the possibility is eliminated that this state synod will then join one of the existing synods and thus lose its identity and independence” was regarded by Walther and Missouri as a violation of Christian liberty.<sup>xliiv</sup> Missouri’s determination to develop the united seminary was a factor in our decision to move our seminary work from St. Louis to Milwaukee. By the summer of 1878 Bading was involved in an official correspondence regarding the difficulties with Walther and other Missourians.<sup>xlv</sup> He had the unenviable task of trying to get Walther to change his opinion about what an infringement of Christian liberty was and several other conceptions and misconceptions he had about Wisconsin. While Bading did not succeed completely in his endeavor, he made a strong case for his synod’s viewpoints and actions.

If it can be said that the Synodical Conference election controversy, that broke out at this very time, made the whole “state synod” plan a dead letter, it should also be realized that the strife and ill will over an organizational problem, where differences of opinion were possible, could easily carry over into doctrinal matters and promote a stand in conflict with God’s Word. Wisconsin leaders did not let such human sentiments prevail. Ohio, Missouri’s partner in the “state synod” endeavor, broke with her over election; Wisconsin, Missouri’s “state synod” opponent, sided with her in the doctrinal matter.

However, it should be noted that Wisconsin was not just blindly following another synod in the controversy. Already in 1879, the newly organized Pastoral Conference questioned four inaccurate election statements in Missouri writings.<sup>xlvi</sup> In 1881 Wisconsin delegates to the Synodical Conference meeting were instructed to withdraw from the sessions if the doctrine of election became an issue so that the body as a whole could render its judgment.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Such a course of action made it inevitable that the Wisconsin president would play a vital part, even though the controversy involved Missouri, Ohio, and the Norwegians more directly. This Bading did. While Hoenecke led discussions on election at the 1881 Pastoral Conference and the 1882 joint session of the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods, Bading handled practical problems that developed. He represented his body at Oshkosh when the congregation was invaded and split by Schmidt and Allwardt, Walther’s main opponents. He set the tone for the Minnesota-Wisconsin meeting at La Crosse in 1882. Later in the year at the crucial Synodical Conference convention he was elected president of that body and had to preside over the stormy sessions that ensued when discussions centered on the parliamentary question of the seating of Schmidt as a Norwegian delegate but actually were airing the bitter doctrinal conflict.

Bading revealed his stand and his grasp of the situation very clearly in his opening address at the La Crosse meeting. Among other things, he said that it was Satan who

had sundered the Synodical Conference, to which all upright Lutherans had been looking with thanks to God, with joy and hope for the future. He has led large sections on deplorable pathways of error and brought it about that its members, who earlier had given one another the hand of brotherhood and with one another had wielded the trowel for the upbuilding of God’s kingdom, now have drawn the sword against one another and are engaging in bitter conflict O let it be our concern that Satan may not succeed in causing division among us! The danger is great.<sup>xlviii</sup>

The victory of the Bible doctrine of election at La Crosse, when both Wisconsin and Minnesota, with but a very few exceptions, repudiated *intuitu fidei*, was the high point in the final decade of Bading’s presidency. There were still tasks to perform for the body as a whole and for the schools that trained pastors but the years from 1882 to 1889 were not marked by any such major problems as had arisen in the 1860’s and 1870’s. In his 1889 presidential address Bading had to call attention to the threat to Wisconsin Synod schools

posed by the Bennett Law, but the battle against the Bennett Law was one Bading would not have to lead. As he concluded that 1889 address, he told the delegates that the conclusion of the address also

in this instance represents the conclusion of my official activity as president of the Synod. For one thing, the term of office of the synodical officials has this year reached its end; for another thing, I must request the Synod in the ensuing elections to leave me out of consideration. After having served the Synod twenty-six years in the presidential office, changing from a young, strong man with the future before him to an old man whose life's thread will soon be unwound—after the members of the Synod for years have been made sufficiently aware that I serve a congregation in which there is much grinding work to be done and in which a difficult lengthy church building project is being carried out, which will likewise make no small demands on the pastor's time, surely I may express the plea that you will no longer want or require my services as president.<sup>xlix</sup>

The convention could not prevail upon the venerable president to reconsider. He stuck to his resolve not to continue in the office. The Bading presidency ended in 1889, although the prediction of an early demise would not come true.

#### **IV. Leadership in Semi-Retirement but Still Active, 1889–1913**

Bading's work on the board of Northwestern College, then also responsible for the Seminary in Milwaukee, would continue for several more decades and enable him to continue to influence the work of the Wisconsin Synod in the vital matter of the training of pastors. In those years a considerable number of respected teachers would be called to these schools.

That Bading turned over to his successor, Philipp von Rohr, a church body that was functioning smoothly is evident from the ease and speed with which the federation of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synod was accomplished in 1892. The smaller synods had no reason to fear the association with the larger body. If trouble developed in Michigan over its school in subsequent years, that is not to Bading's discredit. In fact, one may surmise that the Michigan problems might have been avoided if the sure and steady administrative hand of Bading had still been at the helm.

Not to be forgotten is Bading's continuing service as president of the Synodical Conference. After weathering the stormy 1882 meeting, he presided over every subsequent convention until 1912. Again and again the delegates showed their confidence in Bading by repeated reelections. In 1912 the Synodical Conference was addressed by Bading only by letter. He had become ill and could not travel to Saginaw. As previously stated, the letter recalled the Conference's founding in 1872, mentioned the writer's inability to serve any longer, and concluded with thanks to the Conference and a prayer to God for its continued blessing.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. F. Pieper was instructed to reply for the Conference. He spoke of Bading's long and valuable service and then stated:

We are mindful of the fact that the Synodical Conference represents a church union that is according to the will of God. It is not a union on the basis of a humanly devised platform, but a union on the basis of unity in the Christian doctrine in all its articles. God give us grace to keep what He has given us through the fathers.

Though officially retired as pastor of St. John's in 1908, Bading had been serving as much as he could at his advanced age. But the illness that prevented him from attending the Synodical Conference meeting in 1912 put his labors to an end. He lived into the next May. His death was on May 24, 1913. Synod President Bergemann, reporting to the 1913 convention, paid tribute to Bading's preaching ability and his services to the church at large. As one instance of many, Bergemann pointed to work on the Northwestern board and asked:

“Who can, for example, measure the blessing that has gone forth from our schools in whose establishment Bading rendered yeoman’s service and about whose prosperity he was concerned up to his end.”<sup>li</sup>

Let Bading sum up this biographical sketch with the statement he made when he ended his formative presidency in 1889. Then he declared:

My efforts during my long tenure at office, as is well known, were extended in one direction to ward off all so-called union endeavors against the ecclesiastical independence of our Synod; in the other direction, however, also to foster and maintain fellowship with those who are one with us in doctrine and faith. May that mind and spirit, which I deem wholesome, also in the future prevail in our midst and may the future demonstrate that the Lord is with this mind and spirit.<sup>lii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> The baptismal data is from the Bading obituary found in *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*, XXXXVIII (June 15, 1913), 184–186, over the initials “H. B.” Hereafter this citation will be shortened to *Gemeinde-Blatt* Obituary.

<sup>ii</sup> The numbers are from the pertinent *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1853, p 1 and 1913, p 10. The early *Wisconsin Proceedings* (*Verhandlungen der Versammlung der Evangel. Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin*) from 1849 to 1857 are available in a photostatic reproduction of a printing of the original manuscripts in volume XXXIX of Northwestern College’s *Black and Red* and are published in one volume with the Proceedings of 1858 to 1869. Hereafter references to Wisconsin Synod minutes will be cited simply as *Wisconsin Proceedings* with the appropriate date and location.

<sup>iii</sup> Bading has a lengthy article on the Russian trip in the first *Gemeinde-Blatt* volume under the title *Reise-Erinnerungen* beginning in I,3, p 3 and continuing through I,6. Incidentally, Bading was one of the original co-editors of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*.

<sup>iv</sup> J. P. Koehler wrote *Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und andern Staaten* (Milwaukee, 1925). This is the first volume in German of the revised and completed English *History of the Wisconsin Synod* carried in Faith-Life from February 1938 to January 1944 and published by the Protestant Conference at St. Cloud, Minn., in 1970. Subsequent citations from the volume will be abbreviated to Koehler, *History* and location.

<sup>v</sup> *Gemeinde-Blatt* Obituary, p 185.

<sup>vi</sup> *Hermannsburger Missionsblatt*, I (January 1854), 6.

<sup>vii</sup> George Haccius, *Hannoversche Missions-Geschichte*, 3 vols. (Hermannsburg, 1909–1920). The clash between Bading and the mission school authorities seems to have involved his unwillingness to participate fully in the school’s work program.

<sup>viii</sup> Koehler, *History*, p 45, places the ordination in the summer of 1854. The *Gemeinde-Blatt* Obituary, p 185 says, “Am 6. Oktober 1853 wurde er hier eingefuehrt.” A local history, for which Bading obviously supplied data, *History of Milwaukee* (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1881) gives Oct. 6, 1853, as the ordination date. It is difficult to understand why the ordination would have been postponed beyond the 1854 convention, a convention that actually delegated Bading and Conrad to represent the Synod before the Slinger congregation in a Lord’s Supper matter. Recording Bading’s golden anniversary the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, XXXVIII (Nov. 1, 1903), 163, sets the ordination date at Oct. 7, 1853, and introduces another slight discrepancy.

<sup>ix</sup> Koehler, *History*, p 45.

<sup>x</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1854, p 2.

<sup>xi</sup> Eg. see *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1854, p 3; 1855, p 2; 1856, pp 2–3.

<sup>xii</sup> Koehler, *History* has a special section headed “The Nordwestliche Konferenz,” pp 49–51.

<sup>xiii</sup> Koehler, *History*, p 45.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1858, p 9.

<sup>xv</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1860, pp 11 and 13.

<sup>xvi</sup> Koehler, *History*, p 117.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1860, pp 12–13.

<sup>xviii</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1865, p 16.

<sup>xix</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1867, p 10.

<sup>xx</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1861, p 6.

<sup>xxi</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1862, p 6.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1862, p 13.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Typical of the “New Lutheran” characterization is the *Lutheraner* item, XVI (Dec. 27, 1859), 78. In a November 1860 letter that appears in *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und ueber Nord-America* XIX (October 1861), 74, Iowa’s Deindörfer applies to Wisconsin the colorful epithet *dick uniert*.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Reference is here made to the familiar *Lehre und Wehre* article with the Hercules analogy found in the issue of March 1868, p 93.

<sup>xxv</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1863, pp 22–25 and 28–9. Kowalke discusses the site selection in *Centennial Story* (Milwaukee, 1965), pp 19–24, and Koehler in his *History* on pp 89–90. The latter indicates that behind the Watertown-Milwaukee contest loomed the old Bading-Muehlhaeuser differences. If so, the 45–19 vote would indicate how Bading was succeeding in his confessional efforts.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1863, p 19.

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- xxvii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1867*, pp 22–23.
- xxviii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1867*, p 22.
- xxix *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1864*, pp 10–11.
- xxx Koehler, *History*, pp 97–98.
- xxxi *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1869*, p 14.
- xxxii The Prussian funds were declared frozen in March 1869; our renunciation followed in the May convention of that year. See Koehler, *History*, pp 112–114.
- xxxiii *Gemeinde-Blatt III*, (Dec. 1 and Dec. 15, 1867), 1 in both issues.
- xxxiv See *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1868*, p 8 for the report and pp 19, 27, and 31 for the convention action.
- xxxv *Gemeinde-Blatt, IV* (Dec. 15, 1868), 1.
- xxxvi *General Council Proceedings, 1869*, pp 32–34.
- xxxvii *Verhandlungen der Deutschen Evangelisch-Luth. Synode von Minnesota und anderen Staaten* (Minnesota Volksblatt, 1870), pp 8–9.
- xxxviii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1868*, p 9.
- xxxix *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1868*, p 28.
- xl *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1912*, p 5
- xli Koehler, *History*, p 152.
- xlii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1875*, p 10.
- xliii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1871*, p 7.
- xliv Koehler treats this matter extensively in *History*, pp 144–150. The quoted resolution is in *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1877*, p 22.
- lv Five of the letters are reprinted in Koehler, *History*, pp 154–157.
- lxvi Carl Meyer, ed. *Moving Frontiers* (St. Louis, 1964), pp 273–274, supplies information, as does Koehler, *History*, pp 158–159.
- lxvii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1881*, p 56.
- lxviii *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1882*, p 11.
- lxix *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1889*, p 18.
- <sup>1</sup> *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1912*, pp 5–6. Pieper’s reply to Bading’s letter is also included here.
- <sup>ii</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1913*, p 16.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1889*, p 18.