

Carl Gausewitz: Church Man and Catechist

By Edward C. Fredrich

[This essay is part of a series of essays produced by a joint effort involving Dr. Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for the 450th anniversary of Luther's Large and Small Catechisms in the spring of 1979.]

It would be safe to assume even without statistical evidence that 90 percent of the members in our church body learned the rudiments of the Christian religion from the Gausewitz Catechism in either its original or revised form. Who was Gausewitz? Even without statistical evidence it would be safe to assume that 90 percent of these learners would not even know the rudiments of a Gausewitz biography. That situation should be rectified.

Already in 1927 the obituary writers were hinting at a reluctance of Gausewitz to have writings of his or about him appear in print.¹ Add to this the built-in aversion of our church body to heroes and hero-worship and a definite difficulty has been created for any biographical endeavors. Nevertheless some biographical material is required in a *Quarterly* issue that concentrates on the anniversary of Luther's Catechism. Who was Gausewitz?

Preparation

One would want Carl Gausewitz to have strong and long synodical roots. That is exactly the way it was. His father was a pioneer pastor of the Wisconsin Synod. Way back in 1860 President Muehlhaeuser reported to the synodical convention:

In the month of November [1859] there appeared Candidates Gausewitz and Strube, trained by the Barmen Mission Institute and sent out by the Langenberger Society. Brother Gausewitz went to Pastor Koehler and Brother Strube to Pastor Reim, where they were for a limited period to receive practical guidance to make them ready for service. Under the prevailing circumstances I was compelled to authorize Pastor Koehler and Pastor Sprengling to ordain Brother Gausewitz so that he could take over the field of the deposed Rueter in Maple Grove.²

In the following year, on August 29, Carl Gausewitz, Sr. and his wife Amalie nee Lobscheid became the parents of Carl, Jr. The birthplace was what is today's Reedsville in the Manitowoc area. The father, who was in seniority the twenty-first member of the synodical body at the time of his admission, also served pastorates at West Bend and Iron Ridge while his son Carl was growing up. In 1868 the father would affix his name as one of the five Wisconsin signers to the historic Missouri-Wisconsin Agreement that paved the way to fellowship relations between the bodies.

In the fall of 1872, in his eleventh year, Carl Gausewitz entered the worker-training school at Watertown. He completed the Northwestern course in 1879. Among his teachers there were A. Ernst, A. Graebner, and F. Notz. At the Milwaukee seminary he studied under Professors A. Hoenecke and E. Notz. In 1882 he was sent out into the ministry. Two days before his twenty-first birthday he was ordained and installed at East Farmington, Polk County, Wisconsin, by Pastor Philip von Rohr and the retiring Pastor F. Seifert.³

¹ W.H. (Walther Hoenecke) "† Pastor Carl Gausewitz †" in *Ev.-Luth. Gemeinde-Blatt*, LXII (Sept. 25, 1927), 305. Hereafter referred to as *Gemeinde-Blatt* Obituary.

² *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1860, p. 7.

³ For the details see the *Gemeinde-Blatt* Obituary and the *Northwestern Lutheran* counterpart, issue of Oct. 2, 1927.

Pastor

The pastorate at East Farmington would last only three years. The Zion congregation, now a member of the Minnesota District, was then young and small. It had its beginnings in the mid 1860s, was served from Lake Elmo two decades, and erected its first church building in 1874. Carl Gausewitz was the first resident pastor.

The three-year service at East Farmington demonstrated that the fledgling pastor had outstanding ability and abundant zeal. The communicant roll grew steadily until it stood at about 225 the year that Gausewitz accepted another call.⁴

The large St. John's Church in St. Paul had a vacant pastorate in 1885 because Pastor Hoyer had been called as head of the synodical school being opened at New Ulm. St. John's reached across the state and synodical boundary line to call as its new pastor Carl Gausewitz. He arrived just in time to become involved in an ambitious relocation project.

There had been a movement of the membership away from the original location in the lower city toward the east.⁵ Property was purchased at the corner of Hope and Margaret Streets in 1886. First a school was built, utilized also for evening services. By the end of 1891 a new church building seating 1500 had been erected at the site. Obviously there were debts.

Before they could be retired, the 1893 Panic struck. The old church property brought only one-fifth of the anticipated sum.

An excerpt from the congregation's sketch in the synodical golden anniversary history provides this summary:

In these difficult years the dear Father in heaven graciously preserved the congregation from despair. The Word of God demonstrated its power in the members and preserved them steadfast and immovable, even supplying courage for new undertakings. Although a considerable debt was still burdening the congregation, more property was acquired on Margaret Street and a roomy, attractive parsonage was erected at considerable cost in 1902. In 1903 provisions were made for the future through the purchase of three lots across from the church building on which a school was to be built. Through all this time the congregation was strengthened inwardly and outwardly in peace through the grace of God.

In the summer of 1906 the Reverend Pastor C. Gausewitz accepted a call to Grace Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.⁶

In 1906 as well as a score years later Grace Church's pulpit ranked as one of the most prestigious in the Wisconsin Synod. Muehlhaeuser had filled it from the founding to 1867. Jaekel, long-time synodical secretary and treasurer, served there from 1868–1906. The membership was large and still growing. An able and dedicated pastor was needed.

Carl Gausewitz had left the Wisconsin Synod in 1885 to serve the neighboring body. He returned two decades later recognized as one endowed with administrative and leadership talents. He had been entrusted with the presidencies of the Minnesota Synod and the *Allgemeine Synode*. The years 1906 to 1927 would be good for both pastor and congregation.

They were busy years for the pastor. Apart from large responsibilities to be described in subsequent pages, Carl Gausewitz served on the editorial committee of the *Gemeinde-Blatt* from the time that committee was formed in 1908 to assume work previously in the hands of the faculty of the Theological Seminary until the

⁴ *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings*, 1885, p. 78.

⁵ This detail and those that follow are supplied in A. Kuhn, ed., *Geschichte der Minnesota Synode und ihrer einzelnen Gemeinden* (St. Louis: Louis Lange Publishing House, 1909). The story of St. John's of St. Paul is found on pp 230–238. The work is hereafter cited as *Minnesota Geschichte*.

⁶ The previous footnote supplies the general location. The specific page is 236.

time of his death. He was a member of the governing board for both Northwestern College and the Theological Seminary. For seventeen years he was chairman of the Lutheran city missions of Milwaukee.

President

Most people never get elected president. Gausewitz was president of three large church bodies: the Minnesota Synod, 1894–1906; the *Allgemeine Synode*, 1901–1907 and 1913–17; the Synodical Conference, 1912–1927.

After six years of service in the Minnesota District Gausewitz was elected vice-president. In 1894 he was chosen to succeed C.J. Albrecht as president. Bemoaning previous debts and deficits, the Minnesota historian points out that it wasn't until the bleak panic years and the new regime that improvements were made.

Only in the year 1894, when Pastor C. Gausewitz was elected president, did the Synod find the right way to rid itself of its debt. It was resolved that the congregations should according to their ability share in the synodical debt and should themselves gather their offerings. Thus paid collectors were rendered superfluous and the Synod was spared a yearly expense of about \$1000. Carrying out the resolution may have left much to be desired, but at least we could again breathe a sigh of relief and the threat of bankruptcy was averted. The debt was decreased year by year and with but a slight effort will soon be liquidated.⁷

The Gausewitz presidency in the Minnesota Synod is generally characterized by a businesslike attention to such details as budget, debt retirement, and joint work with fellow believers in other synods. There is a minimum of the spectacular that gets attention in the pages of church history. Most noteworthy activity perhaps was the development of the Belle Plaine Home. President Gausewitz, together with Pastors Moebus and Stiemke, served on the committees that saw the charitable endeavor develop from a legacy in 1897 to a dedicated building on Nov. 6, 1898.

After describing this effort, the Minnesota history continues: “Regarding the development of the Synod since the founding of the *Allgemeine Synode* [1892], there is little more of significance to report. There is a slow outward growth. There is faithful labor in the fields allotted with the powers God has given and the Lord is acknowledging the efforts.”⁸ The time described encompasses all the years of Gausewitz' Minnesota presidency.

Before that presidency was completed Gausewitz was involved with another. In 1901 the *Allgemeine Synode* or General Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other States elected him to be its president and reelected him in 1903 and 1905. As vice-president he had already functioned as president when Dr. Ernst resigned the office abruptly on Oct. 1, 1900.

Gausewitz does not seem to have been too happy serving in this post. After the first two-year term he declared in the presidential address: “According to the non-prescriptive opinion of the undersigned many a difficulty in our joint endeavors would be obviated if the presidency of the General Synod would again be entrusted to a member of the Wisconsin Synod.”⁹ At the next meeting he repeated the request and in 1907 it was the same story.¹⁰ In 1907 the convention yielded to the pleas of the man who had just begun his pastorate at Grace Church.

Having given Gausewitz a period of grace to adjust to the new post, the General Synod in 1913 once again entrusted him with the presidency and subsequently reelected him in 1915. These were busy and important years for the General Synod, the time when it was transforming itself from a loose federation of

⁷ *Minnesota Geschichte*, p. 38.

⁸ *Minnesota Geschichte*, pp. 49–50.

⁹ *General Synod Proceedings*, 1903, p. 6.

¹⁰ *General Synod Proceedings*, 1905 and 1907, p. 8 in both instances.

synods into the merged Joint Synod with districts. The administrative skills of Carl Gausewitz helped make smooth and easy a transition that could easily have been difficult, if mishandled.

When Wisconsin's President Bergemann assumed the leadership of the newly created Joint Synod, Gausewitz must have been happy to step down to a seat on the Board of Trustees. Once again he was down to one presidential responsibility, but that was the presidency of the Synodical Conference, the largest Lutheran federation in the United States.

When in 1912 ill health prevented Bading from continuing his long Synodical Conference presidency that had begun in 1882, the Conference elected Carl Gausewitz to succeed him. Reelection followed reelection and Gausewitz was still president of the Synodical Conference at the time of his death in 1927.

Those early years of the present century were halcyon days for the Conference. Past were the turbulent times of the controversy over conversion and election. Still in the future were the fellowship problems that would bring about the end of the Conference. The presidential years of Gausewitz, 1912–1927, saw the Synodical Conference demonstrating brotherly unity in word and in deed.

What Gausewitz as Conference leader could concern himself about most in the absence of great doctrinal or administrative problems, was a work of the Conference dear to his heart, the mission to the Blacks in this country. His obituary testifies that he, “as president of the Synodical Conference always showed a keen interest in this Synodical Conference mission endeavor in that he regularly attended meetings of the committee....At these meetings Pastor Gausewitz...followed the deliberations with great interest and aided matters with his well-considered, sensible advice.”¹¹ The 1928 Synodical Conference convention paid this tribute to its former president: “Especially the Negro Missions have lost in him a valuable friend and a zealous promoter of their cause.”¹²

Pedagogue

These presidential posts obviously received much attention when obituaries had to be written in 1927 for this outstanding leader in our Lutheran circles, who died suddenly in the Grace sacristy just before the Holy Communion service on Sept. 4. More important, however, then and especially later was the service Gausewitz rendered through work on the synodical Catechism.

The first special Catechism project that engaged the attention of Carl Gausewitz was working on a Synodical Conference committee charged with the responsibility of editing Luther's Small Catechism. The committee was busy at the turn of the century.¹³

It is this assignment that may well have led to the appointment Gausewitz received to serve on the committee to which President von Rohr assigned the task of carrying out a 1907 synodical resolution: “A double commission to be appointed of which the one will have the assignment to undertake a revision of our German Catechism and the other the assignment to provide a good English translation of this revised German Catechism.”¹⁴ The committee, which could have rivaled any synodical committee of that time in prestige and ability consisted of Prof. Ernst, Prof. Schaller, President Soll, and Pastor Gausewitz.¹⁵ Catechism work was serious business in those days.

The committee seems to have had difficulty in getting on with its assignment. The 1909 *Proceedings* are silent on the subject and the 1910 *Proceedings* insist that “the Synod ought to proceed as quickly as possible with the publication of the German Catechism” and that Teacher R. Albrecht should be added to the

¹¹ *Gemeinde-Blatt* Obituary, p. 306.

¹² *Synodical Conference Proceedings*, 1928, p. 60.

¹³ *Synodical Conference Proceedings, 1896–1902*. This project is mentioned in the following places: 1896, p. 65; 1898, pp. 49–50; 1900, pp. 60–61; 1902, pp. 74–75.

¹⁴ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1907*, p. 92. Reports in the *Proceedings* on the production of the new *Catechism* appear here and subsequently in the *Bericht des Buchhandlungskomitees*, usually printed in the *Proceedings* as one of the last reports. The Catechism being revised was that which resulted from the early 1880s catechetical efforts at providing a simplified, uniform publication. For details see H. Wicke, “WELS and Luther's Small Catechism,” in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, LXVI (Feb. 4, 1979), p. 37.

¹⁵ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1908*, p. 32.

committee.¹⁶ After another silence in 1911 the synodical convention in 1912 must have taken *cum grano salis* the promise that the revised Catechism would be out in fall, for it specifically resolved that the committee on publications “should speed up the production of the new German and English Catechism.”¹⁷

That there were good reasons for such concerns soon became evident. The next synodical convention accepted a floor committee report that expressed “regrets that the new edition of the Catechism in German and English had not yet appeared.” Then it resolved that “the present committee for producing the Catechism be discharged and the production of the Catechism be entrusted to one man.”¹⁸

That one man was Carl Gausewitz. President Bergemann, who selected the one man, was in later years, when dispensing administrative lore, fond of citing this as the classic instance of the superiority of one good man over a committee in getting a difficult task well done.¹⁹ Despite the heavy work load described previously, Gausewitz went to work and by 1917 the Catechism in both languages was available at the Northwestern Publishing House.

When the book appeared Prof. John Schaller, who had served with Gausewitz on the original committee, provided a substantial review in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* running to almost six pages.²⁰ He stated, “One could boldly claim that our publishing house has up to now not brought out any book that is of greater practical significance for the edification of the church than this explanation of the Catechism.”²¹ After 39 years a revision appeared that is currently being revised. Much of Gausewitz, however, remained in the revision and his pedagogical and catechetical labors are still providing benefits in the present time.

Outstanding features of the Gausewitz edition that Schaller pointed to in his 1917 review were: footnotes that defined difficult terms; carefully selected Bible history material used, not as proof of a point of doctrine, but in order to present and develop the point of doctrine; clear and pointed questions and answers.²²

Above all, the gospel tone of the work is praised. “Here the gospel appears,” writes Schaller, “not only as one of the matters that are also treated, but as the precious bond that runs through the whole Catechism, ties all of its sentences tightly together, and alone makes possible its biblically correct understanding... Whoever has actually recognized and experienced this special feature of the new Catechism will because of it love the book the more and will therefore gladly accept as part of the bargain the flaws he finds in it.”²³

Ten years after the Catechism appeared Gausewitz died, very likely never imagining how long and how much the work would be of benefit. One wonders if he even regarded it as his *chef d’oeuvre*. President Bergemann commenting on Gausewitz’ death in his next convention report doesn’t even mention the Catechism. He says:

Pastor Carl Gausewitz has been taken from our midst by a sudden death. That was sad news! The man, who in our midst was a leader, who just a few weeks previously had strengthened and established the synodical convention in its trust in the Scripture through his magnificent essay, the man who with his discerning eye, with his quiet, sober judgment just in this difficult time could render us outstanding service, has been taken from us.²⁴

¹⁶ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1910, p. 95.

¹⁷ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1912, pp. 112–113.

¹⁸ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1913, pp. 114–115.

¹⁹ Obviously this is not written down any place in the record. Bergemann wrote little, but he was at his best when providing orally guidance and correction to young men who needed it badly. The writer was one of those who benefited from such invaluable on-the-job training.

²⁰ J. Schaller, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Kleiner Katechismus*, *Theologische Quartalschrift*, XIV (April 1917) 165–170. Hereafter cited as Schaller, *Review*.

²¹ Schaller, *Review*, p. 165.

²² Schaller, *Review*, pp. 165–166.

²³ Schaller, *Review*, pp. 168–169.

²⁴ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1929, p. 7. The 1927 Gausewitz essay referred to is “Why Do I Believe That the Bible is the Word of God?” The convention ordered that it be printed separately in English and German for free distribution in the congregations. The “difficult time” is a reference to the Protes’tant matter.

President Bergemann certainly appreciated the catechetical labors of Carl Gausewitz. It was just that there were so many other good and important things to be said about the man at the time of his passing that the one item was not included. Those other things are being blurred for us by the passing of a half century and more. The one item, however, still looms large. And that is the reason why in this Catechism anniversary publication Gausewitz is being given attention “as churchman and catechist.”