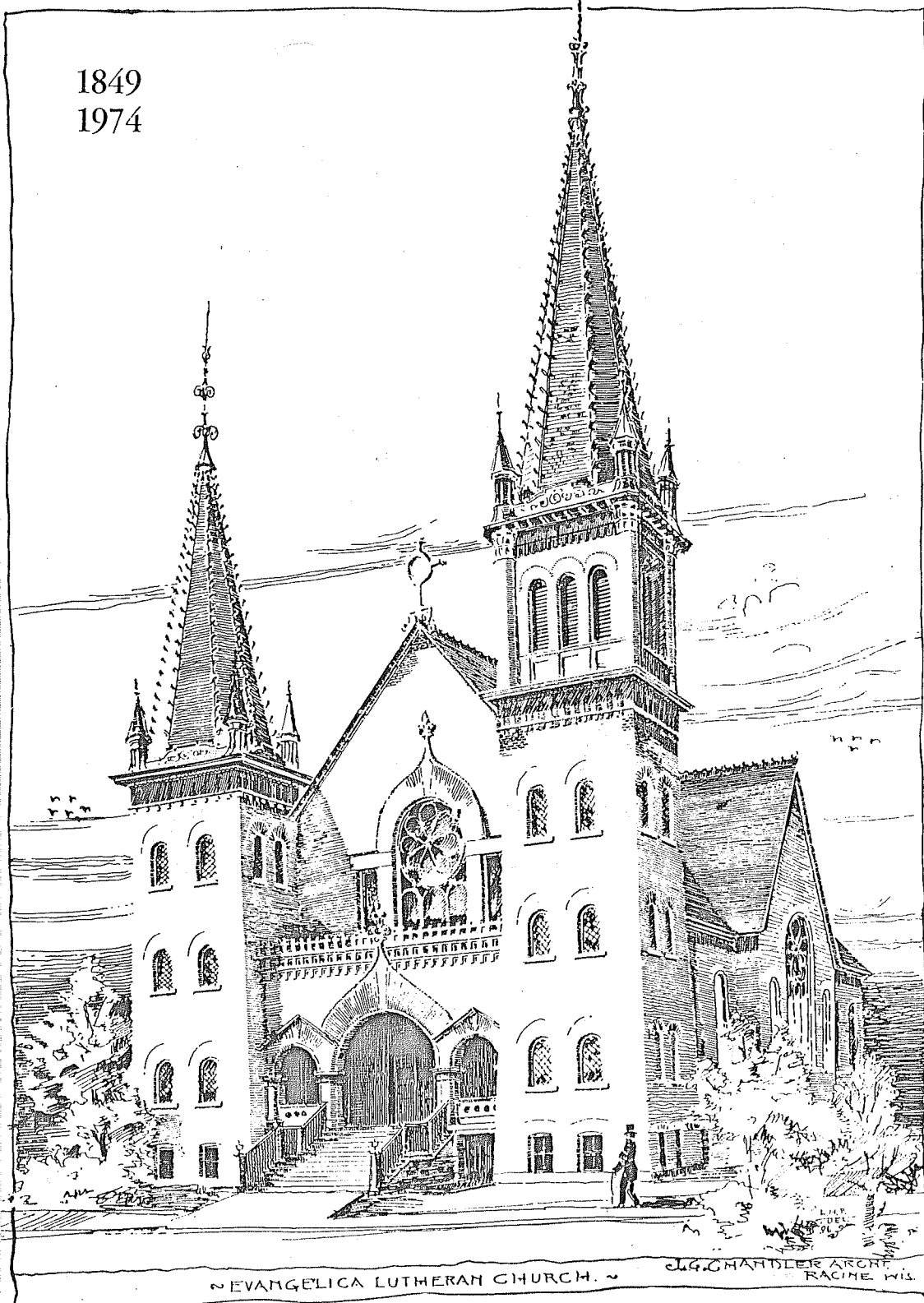


Missouri Interference

in Racine

1849
1974



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH.

J.G. CHANDLER ARCHT.
RACINE WIS.

SKETCH OF CHURCH BUILDING — CIRCA 1896

FIRST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

728 VILLA STREET

RACINE, WISCONSIN

Conrad

vs.

the
Missouri
Synod

vs.

Bading

vs.

the Faction

vs.

the Congre-
gation

vs.

Another
School

vs.

Paul
Huebner

vs.

Church
History

March 14,
1975

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive, 65W
Madison, Wisconsin

Missouri Interference in Racine

"Pastor Jacob Conrad erhielt letzten Spätherbst einen Ruf an die hiesige Gemeinde zu Racine, an der er früher schon einmal 5 Jahre gearbeitet hatte. Er wurde vor P. Wagener in meinen Auftrage am zweiten Weihnachtstage installiert." (Pastor Bading, Synodical Reports, 1967)

With this statement in the reports there arises an interesting case of a pastor being recalled by his former congregation. In fact, Pastor Conrad was consequently recalled by his former congregation in Theresa in 1870. Thus it was a double recall. But this recall to Racine within five years offers us a little light on the topic of this paper, namely, the claim of interference in Racine. However, before we move into the Racine affair itself, it would be good to take a look at Pastor Conrad and then also the Racine congregation to place us back into the setting.

Pastor Jacob Conrad

Jacob Conrad was born in Breidenheim in Hesse, Germany. His parents brought him to America when he was only eight years old. While living in Rochester, New York, he was taught by and confirmed by Pastor Muehlhaeser. Later on he came to Wisconsin selling tracts and met Pastor Muehlhaeser again. Here he was encouraged to train for the ministry. Conrad trained under Pastor John Wrede at Granville until 1851, when he was licensed by the synod and inducted at Richfield. In 1853 he was ordained pastor at Herman in Dodge County.

In 1852, on Dec. 19, Jacob Conrad and Charlotte Muehlhaeser were married. There were no records of children available although this writer learned that there is a grand-niece of his living in Milwaukee. Unfortunately, her name and address are as yet unknown, since the pastor

who said that he might have her address did not send it.

Pastor Conrad served First Ev. Luth. Church in Racine from 1855-1862 and from 1867-1870. He served St. Jacobi in Theresa from 1863-1867 and from 1870-1889. He then retired to Milwaukee but was persuaded to return to service by founding, or at least helping found and serving as pastor of Salem Lutheran Church on Cramer Street. He had also served as treasurer and secretary of the Synod at various times. He died on Aug. 18, 1890 at the age of 62. (Gemeindeblatt, 1890) (J. F. Koehler's book, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, contains an error. It has in its index an F. Conrad and a J. Conrad. They are both J. Conrad, one and the same man. Synodical Reports and the brief history of First Evan., Racine will bear this out.)

First Evan., Racine

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in 1849, one year after the founding of Racine. Pastor John Weinmann of Oakwood, Wisconsin helped bring about the beginning. He was also its first pastor from 1849-1853. Shortly after the founding of the congregation, a church, a school and a parsonage were built. The church which now stands was built in 1896, and the congregation has been served by nine different pastors.

The 1862 Affair

The circumstances are not the easiest to explain since the records of the Racine Congregation contain nothing and little is available for cross reference. However, two articles of Der Lutheraner provide us with a general history of this flare-up of synodical polemics.

A family, recently moved from Indiana to Racine, joined the congregation because there was no Missouri church there. However, their appreciation of their new pastor seems quite poor as they quickly accused him of being a ^vsecretist. That family sent a letter to their former pastor, Pastor Steinbach, and included the complaint that Conrad was circulating a syncretistic tract entitled, Amerikanischen Bot-schaft.

Upon notification of this problem, Pastor Lochner sent Steinbach down to Racine to see what the trouble was. There he was informed that Conrad was guilty of using the unionistic formula for the distribution of the Lord's Supper; of having read the Heidelberg Catechism concerning the Reformed teaching of the Lord's Supper; of having professed to his congregation that between the Reformed and the Lutherans there really was not so much difference; of having preached the Roman teaching of hell; and finally, he was accused of stating on Reformation Festival that Zwingli was a reformer. (Der Lutheraner, Vol. 19, Nov. 12, 1862). It was also noted that a great majority of this group had also requested a branch school on the north side of the city which would be closer to their homes. They had been refused.

Missouri's Action

This same article states that Pastor Steinbach, by the time of this meeting now the pastor at St. Stephen's, Milwaukee, heard the group, but then expressed a desire to speak to Conrad. Unfortunately, Conrad was gone and Steinbach could not wait. Instead he set up a conference for the third Sunday after Pentecost. At the end of this ^{first} meeting with the dissenters from "Canada", the northern part of Racine, he was enticed to hold services for them. Here lay the basis for the claim of interference.

The Racine Conference

Pastors Conrad and Julius Hoffmann of Kenosha represented the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor Steinbach and teacher Glaser represented the Missouri Synod. Again there is little known of the conversation except that Hoffmann said that concerning the body, the word "true" was an addition. It is interesting to note that since this was an article written by the Missouri Synod against the claim of their interference, no mention is made of Conrad, his defense or his opinions.

It is also interesting to note that Steinbach was by

no means demanding in his decision. He agreed that the majority of the Canada group had left on account of the school matter. These he encouraged to return, while agreeing that the two or three families that had found it impossible to continue for doctrinal reasons ought to be permitted to leave. Again, no statements were recorded as being directed against Conrad.

Synodical Advice

When the other families refused to return to the congregation, Conrad brought up the matter at the synodical meeting. In the report for 1862 we read:

Die Synode sand sich unter diesen Umständen veranlasst, dem Pastor Conrad folgenden Rath zu enthielen: Er möge den 15 Familien, welche sich getrennt haben, aber ihre Trennung könne um der nichtigen und unlautern Gründe willen, welche dieselbe bewirkt haben, von der Gemeinde auch nicht gebilligt werden, die Gemeinde müsse diese Trennung vielmehr für eine Sünde halten, und ihnen dieselbe behalten, so lange sie nicht Busse thun. Es wurde beschlossen, dass der Sekretär ein dahin lautendes Schreiben an die Gemeinde des Herrn Pastor Conrad richte.

No change of heart took place so the Canada group formed their own congregation and were served by a Missouri congregation.

What Lit the Fuse?

At the same time or even a little later Pastor Bading accepted some members into his congregation that were apparently under church discipline from a Missouri Synod church. Bading denied the charge, although overemphatically. This was answered by a full volley of accusations and unfortunate insinuations by the Missouri Synod. Coming to the aid of his synod's president, Jacob Conrad turned the same claim of interference back on the Missouri Synod in an article entitled, "Missourische Eingriffe in die Ev. Lutherische Gemeinde in Racine, Wisconsin." In it he charged the Missourians with violating Matt. 18, 15ff, probably pointing to the services held by Steinbach as well as

their serving a group of people under church discipline. Missouri replied by a pair of articles in Der Lutheraner, Nov. 12, and Dec. 10, 1862, to prove their innocence as well as to show the many sins of the Wisconsin Synod. Walther also responded by a commentary on Matt. 18 in the next synodical conference. Conrad wasn't exactly expecting the boom to fall on him as it did so he published another article defending himself. Lochner and Steinbach retaliated with a short article in Der Lutheraner, Dec. 10, 1862, demanding that Conrad prove that they had misrepresented him. Here it all seems to drop off, probably due to the fact that Conrad took the call to Theresa, Wisconsin. Now the question is, did the Missouri Synod really interfere in Racine?

Looking at it from the Wis. Side

Certainly this synod could point to the services held by Steinbach as interference. But their contention lay with ^{the} end result, namely, serving people under church discipline. Nor could they defend themselves too well either because most of the early pastors of the Wisconsin Synod had been trained by the unionistic mission societies. Conrad had trained under Pastor Wrede, one of the more confessional pastors. However, even that did not preclude any syncretism on the part of Conrad. Perhaps the only claim that Conrad could prove was that the very confessional body of the Missouri Synod had accepted these families into their church knowing that the only reason most of them had made the move was because of the school problem. That was indeed a point of contention, if there were any at all.

From the Missouri Viewpoint

When the Missouri Synod found members leaving the Wisconsin Synod, they were happy to accept them into their own. After all, the Wisconsin Synod was unionistic. It was, or would be, in the General Council which was still not Lutheran enough for Missouri. Therefore the Missourians could treat Wisconsin in much the same way as it would

a Reformed church. Although many men like Fuerbringer still had hopes for the Wisconsin Synod, there was still the feeling of contempt for these unLutheran Lutherans.

Was This Interference Then?

The answer would have to be no. There was no real invasion at all. In fact, the cooperation that seemed to be manifested between Steinbach and Conrad during this time would tend to prove just the opposite.

The claim of interference was really no new thing either. Both sides were making these claims, although few were really true. Most likely this was another case of flaring tempers, exaggerations, and overstatements. The blame rested not so much on either synod, but on the individual congregations and their problems. This is the case here.

Racine: A WisMo Congregation

This writer uses the term WisMo to indicate the two different leanings that congregation held at the same time. Some favored staying with the Wisconsin Synod, while others wanted to go Missouri.

In 1853 a problem arose which can be used as a precedent. Pastor Weinmann, then at Racine, accepted the call to Baltimore. He lined up a friend of his, Pastor Dulitz, formerly of Wisconsin, now with Missouri. When Muehlhaeser met with the congregation with the result of sending the call to John Wrede, a part of the congregation, part of the church council, particularly its secretary, Mr. Hueffner, sent a letter asking for a release to join the Missouri Synod. At the same time they asked President Wyneken for permission to join and for permission to call Dulitz. It was finally resolved when Wrede was called according to the whole congregations desire. There seems to have been no vocal dissent from the group that leaned toward Missouri, but it probably remained dormant for a while.

This latent feeling arose during the 1862 controversy.

The family from Indiana had some people who were in agreement with them and who backed them up. Add that to the frequent occurrence of dissatisfaction over some congregational decision and that spell factions. While Pastor Conrad was by no means completely orthodox, he was also by no means the cause of this whole thing. But he did not help it any with his literary attacks upon Steinbach and Lochner. Nor did Steinbach help any when he catered to this group of dissidents. That was more or less a sign of agreement which strengthened the 20 families in their stubbornness. The basis of the whole mess lay in the congregation and in its dual natures.

Does This Have Any Pertinence for Today?

While the cries of interference no longer fill the headlines, there is a feeling of superiority on the part of many Missourians, referring to us as a Calvinistic body under a papistic government. Unfortunately Missouri is now involved with its own problem, a question of confessionalism. The do or die attitude which is often prevalent in many arguments on both sides as well as by the peacemakers continues to be a big problem in their attempts to clean up their synod. Nor does the fact that many Missouri congregations are now at our doorstep help the cause any.

A problem that the Wisconsin Synod now faces is not so much the "holier than thou" attitude as it is the problem of dealing with many of the Missourians who are now entering our synod. After a long dragged-out battle to save their synod, many have finally thrown in the towel. Unfortunately, their continual defense have produced the inevitable quirks and hang-ups, which often develop into legalism and polemics. These traits, while understandable under the circumstances, unfortunately arise in their new surroundings, the result of which is often factionalism and unrest in the congregation. While this has occurred, we dare not simply divest ourselves of the problem, but rather deal with these people with patience and understanding.

Perhaps a few words about the pertinence in Racine to-

day might be in order. In 1944 it was agreed that Racine Lutheran High School would hold its classes at First Evan. Everything went smoothly until the synodical break in 1961. Since then it has been reported that whenever the doctrine of fellowship is discussed, the Missourians always pointed to Wisconsin's involvement in Bethesda and Racine Lutheran. To be sure, one cannot simply put a nix on Racine for their slow action involving this school. Yet it has taken up to last year to cut all support of that school and that didn't go over to well either. Shoreland Lutheran High School is located only about twenty minutes away, but because it has no facility of its own, there is little support. One wonders if a problem over a school will develop or not.

At the same time it is also true that St. John's, Missouri Synod, is or was a daughter congregation. And there have always been a very close relationship between the members of First Evan. and the Missouri churches. Should the Missouri Synod take a turn for the good, as we would hope and pray, one would have to think that Shoreland could very well be in trouble from a lack of support. ^{at least from Racine} If this does happen it will be interesting to note if this congregation, after having celebrated its 125th anniversary, will continue, since the Missouri Synods ^{churches} bracket the city while First Evan. is located directly in the center of town and on the edge of the inner city. Perhaps this may not have anything to do with the problem that occurred in 1862, and after being associated with this congregation for a while, this writer certainly hopes not. All that can be said is, "Wait and see."

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