

The Debate in Lebanon and Watertown:

PRIVATE CONFESSION or PRIVATE EDIFICATION?

Senior Church History

Professor Fredrich

May 5, 1978

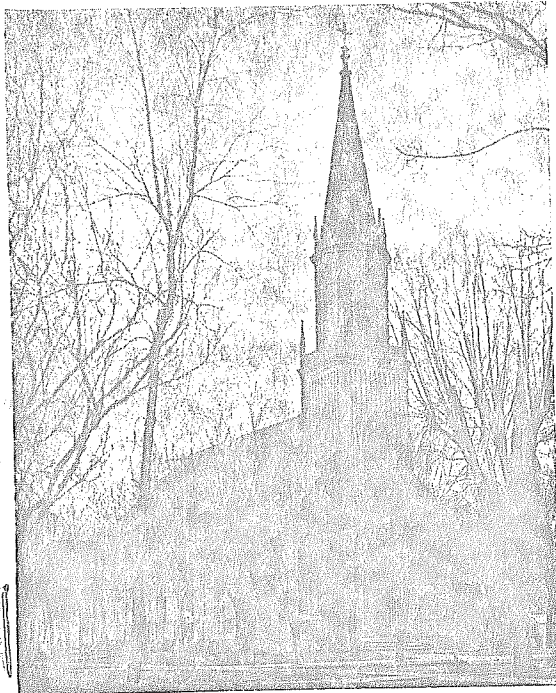
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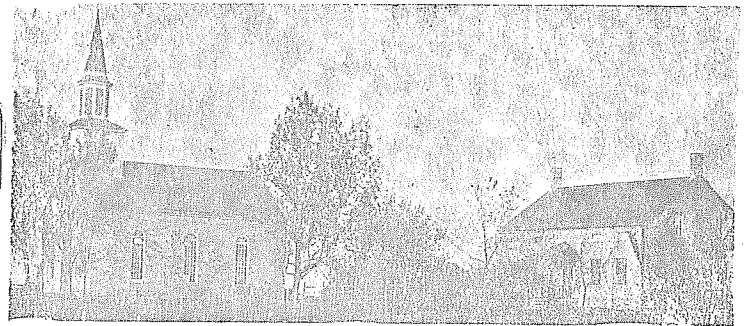
- I. Underlying Causes
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 - A. Founding
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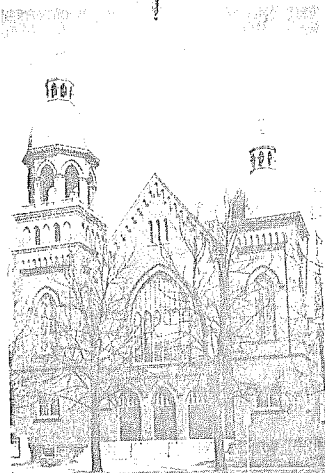
St. John's Lutheran Church
1865-1907



The REV. ANTON WAGNER
1855-1858



IMMANUEL, LEBANON 1861-1925 ↑
1925- ↓



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
(1908-1967)
Dedication - April 15, 1908

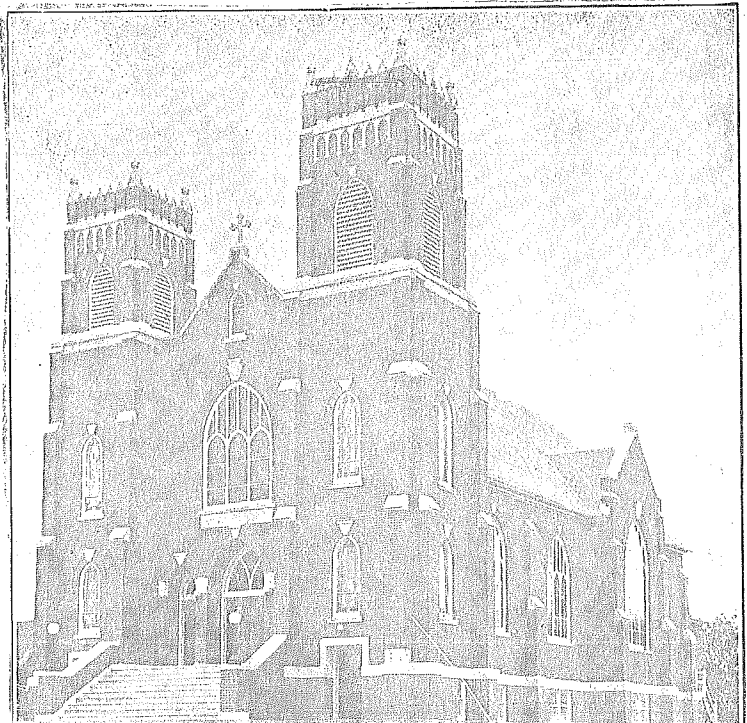
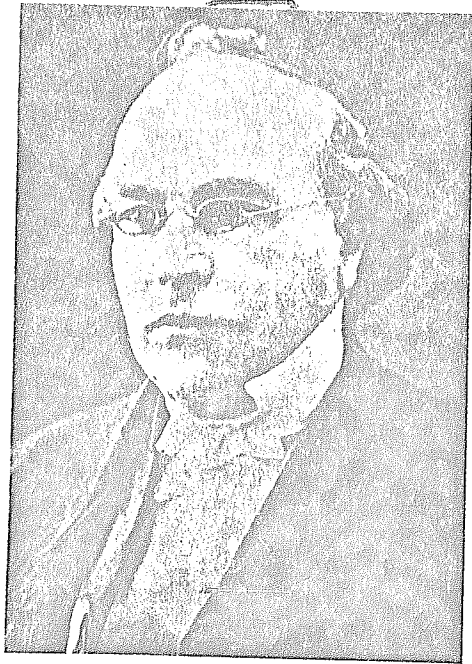
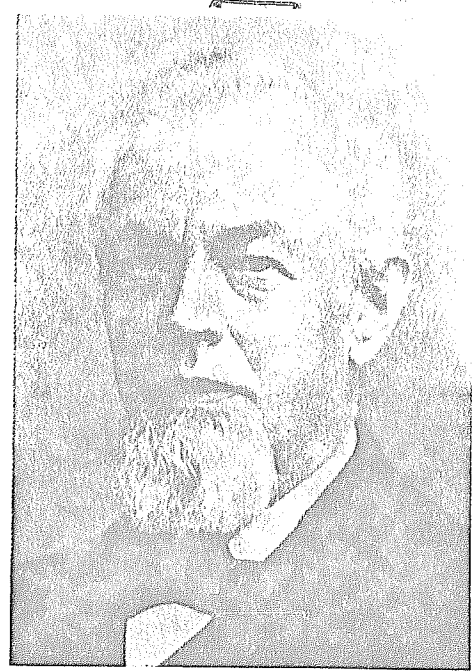


Photo by Meyers Studio



Pastor Christian Sans
1854 - 1860

ST. MARKS



Pastor Johannes Bading
1860 - 1868



OLD CHURCH 1855 - 1886

The Watertown - Lebanon controversy over private confession is a nearly forgotten chapter in the history of the Wisconsin Synod. It merits only a one-line mention in the 125th anniversary book of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Lebanon, the apparent home of the controversy. The 125th anniversary book of its sister congregation (1977), St. John's, Watertown, (where the same dispute arose at the same time) lends the private confession vs. general confession controversy one paragraph. Synodical minutes of both the Missouri synod and the Wisconsin Synod deal with it in only a few pages. Yet, upon careful examination, we find that this controversy not only resulted in establishing two new Wisconsin Synod congregations, but also had dramatic influence upon Wisconsin - Missouri synodical relations; and may have had a profound influence upon the entire subsequent doctrinal stand of the Wisconsin Synod.

The Watertown - Lebanon controversy (1856-1860) does not at all prove to be what it seems to be at first glance. The issue of private confession (Privatbeichte) versus general confession (allgemeine Beichte) seems to be only the surface issue in a much deeper division over true Lutheran practice; and the important consequences of the controversy only slightly include the issue of private confession and general confession. In order to do justice to this brief but important part of our synod's history, let us first put the confession controversy into an historical context.

Although the Watertown - Lebanon controversy over private confession lasted only 4 years, controversy over private confession really began

back in Germany in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Pietism had held sway in German Lutheranism, but during this time anti-pietism reaction set in. Congregational liturgical custom and practice differed from area to area as a result of this. Some churches practiced private confession, while others preferred general confession. The Prussian Union of 1817 also contributed to a diversity of liturgical practice. In 1817 on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, King Friedrich Wilhelm III urged his subjects to abandon their Lutheran or Reformed liturgies and celebrate the anniversary with a new "Evangelical" form. Certainly this would effect an "Evangelical" congregation's attitude toward private confession - or for that matter, any confession at all before receiving the sacrament - since Calvinists (reformed) believe the Lord's Supper is merely a memorial meal and is not effective in offering forgiveness of sins.

It was on account of this so-called Prussian Union of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Germany that many Lutherans withdrew from the state church and sought religious purity in America. The group of Lutherans who founded the Immanuel congregation at Lebanon was made up of such people. On June 20, 1843, a group of about 150 Lutherans from Pommerania and Brandenburg left Hamburg and sailed 7 weeks to New York. From there they went to Buffalo, N.Y., and again boarded ship for Milwaukee, arriving there on Sept. 6, 1843. Six weeks later these Pommeranians and Brandenburgers arrived at Lebanon, and were soon joined by another group from Oderbruch, in northern Germany.

Already during this journey, differences in background and therefore doctrine disrupted the little group of 150. In America the immigrants had met Rev. Grabau, the father of the Buffalo Synod, at

Buffalo, New York. Grabau emphasized the need for ordination, stressing the "regularly called" aspects of the ministry, and de-emphasizing the universal priesthood. He maintained that, except for cases of extreme emergency, the administration of the sacraments "is not to be done through one who has not been called, or who has been improperly called."¹ Part of the group of 150 agreed, and joined the Buffalo Synod. The majority, however, refused to submit, and were thus left at Lebanon without pastoral care.

For a whole year laymen held services in the home of one of the members, John Korth. But then they heard of Lutheran ministers at St. Louis, Mo., who also disagreed with Pastor Grabau in this doctrine of the Church. They petitioned the Missourians to send them a minister, if possible. The petition was granted, and Candidate of Theology, L. Geyer became the first pastor of Immanuel congregation on Nov. 24th, 1844. Shortly thereafter they erected a church and parsonage. With the rush of German immigrants around 1850 (called "48ers"), the Immanuel congregation grew steadily with people from many backgrounds.

But trouble loomed ahead for the young congregation. Most of this trouble can be traced to disputes which could not be settled in a Christian manner because German stubbornness had severed the lines of communication among Immanuel's members. In 1846, about 16 families were not satisfied with a case of church discipline which involved the teacher, a Mr. Pankow, who had played a violin in the church one afternoon. He and the 16 families who would not admit that this was sinful finally left and established another congregation

three miles north, with himself as pastor. In 1847 pastor Geyer and the congregation admitted their error, but the separatists simply would not return. At the same time, 12 families left and joined the Baptist Church a mile to the east. Another group separated and founded St. Paul's, Ixonia, in 1848, which joined the Wisconsin Synod. This time the congregation had split over an argument about a line-fence. The German reputation for being stubborn seems to have been confirmed at Immanuel; dispute always seemed to be in the air.

One additional element contributed to set the stage for the coming controversy over confession. By 1856 there was already some controversy over private confession and general confession in the Missouri Synod. The Second Report of the Northern District of the Deutschen Evang.-Luther. Synode of Missouri, Ohio, and other states contains a 6 page essay on private confession. The contents are as follows:

(p. 11) "This old institution of the church exists in most of the congregations of the Northern District, of which only a few also use a common confession along side. Since now the custom of the practice of private confession is recognized more and more for its wholesomeness...it is desirable ...that this same should be recognized and practiced in still wider circles." Following this, private confession was recommended as 1) an old Lutheran church form; and 2) having the advantage of providing for the individual announcements of forgiveness for individual sins.

This initial plug for private confession seems to have been made because more and more churches were introducing the common confession along side of private confession. The following several paragraphs made a point of distinguishing the Lutheran private confession from the Roman auricular confession. Three pages of essay then described the difference between the two; emphasizing the Roman confession as an opus operatum, while extolling the Lutheran private confession as centering on faith in Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Concluding this section (p.15), the essayist ponders the reason for the increasing use of the general confession - perhaps because of a confusion among the laity with the Catholic auricular confession:

"Although the Lutheran doctrine of Word and faith

especially concerning private absolution is now richly preached among us and is understood by more and more of the hearers, still it is indeed strange that private confession is not found to be part of common Lutheran practice and life... where one certainly enough realizes the heaven-wide distance between Lutheran private confession and Roman auricular confession."

The synod then requested reasons for this lamentable appearance (of common confession), and found the following:

- 1) "People are so sure of salvation that there is little terror and need of comfort in conscience."
- 2) "There exists the false view that private confession only is to be sought if there is a spiritual crisis."
- 3) "There is fear and timidity of the pastor; ...and sometimes the pastor shows a lack of concern."

(p.16) Following this, the writer of the essay records a hearty endorsement of the use of private confession: "So much worth does the synod still lay on private confession and so much does it desire its re-institution...for something more, than to hold it as an adiaphoron, and thereupon even use it as a "shibboleth" for Lutherans." However, the essayist stressed that this idea was not to be introduced by force: "Therefore it is the conviction of the synod, that a place for private confession again be found in the church order not as a demand, but as following in the congregation through the witness of the Word awakening a new spirit."

(p.17) With this in mind, the synod adopted these statements: (N.B. not all are direct quotes)

- 1) A Christian congregation cannot be imagined without some provision for private absolution. Private confession goes hand in hand with this.
- 2) "The re-institution of the old form of private confession in most congregations cannot happen immediately, but must be permitted as God sees fit...to select time and place...and remove evil in the way." Diligent instructions through preaching and teaching were encouraged.
- 3) Private confession aids in preventing unworthy reception of the Lord's Supper more effectively.
- 4) Private confession includes a wholesome state of humility before a fellow sinner.

Obviously, the 1856 convention sensed that general confession was edging into the domain of private confession, and the delegates were troubled by it. In reaction, they strongly recommended using private confession for everyone, implying that it would be wise to discontinue (or certainly not to start) general confession. The

thought of making private confession into "more than an adiaphora" and into a "shibboleth for Lutherans" hints of a confessional usage of the adiaphoron. In any event, one can be quite safe in assuming that many pastors returned to their parishes determined to give private confession a new "shot in the arm" in their congregations. This may have been the case in Lebanon, since the controversy began in late 1856.

In addition to the Missouri Synod, a more heated controversy must have been going on in the Buffalo Synod at this time, too. Remember that part of this Immanuel congregation had split off to join the Buffalo Synod before they even established themselves at Lebanon, and Buffalo was well represented in Wisconsin. When Missouri was discussing a petition from the Freistadt church for common confession in the 1860 Northern District convention, the minutes referred to the "well known problem in the Buffalo Synod" with private confession and the office of the ministry. No doubt the members of Immanuel also heard what was going on in Buffalo.

We now have five elements in the air at Immanuel, Lebanon, which may have combined to spark and/or fuel the controversy which flared up in late 1856:

- 1) The diverse backgrounds and traditions of the original and subsequent members of Immanuel.
- 2) The seeming stubbornness of these Germans and their unwillingness to compromise, resulting in a breakdown in Christian communications.
- 3) The readiness of these people to dispute
- 4) The controversy over private confession in both the Missouri and Buffalo synods was already in the air.
- 5) The strong encouragement of private confession at the 1856 Northern District convention.

It follows that if anyone wanted to start trouble for any reason, he could split the congregation most easily by making use of the private confession controversy already on people's minds - whether or not private confession was the real issue.

From this background, the controversy over private confession arose at Immanuel late in 1856. The key figures here and at Watertown were:

Missouri Synod:

- Pastor Geyer - Pastor of Immanuel congregation.
- Pastor Wagner - Pastor of St. John's, the sister congregation at Watertown.
- Pastor Lochner - Pastor of a Missouri church in Milwaukee which also had to deal with the same problem.
- Pastor Fuerbringer - District President of the Northern District of the Missouri Synod.
- Pastor Wyneken - President of the Missouri Synod.
- * Teacher Wetzel - Teacher and leader of the separatists at Lebanon.
- * Teacher F. Hass - Teacher and leader of the separatists at Watertown.

Wisconsin Synod:

- Pastor Sans - Non-confessional pastor at St. Mark's before 1860.
- * Pastor Bading - Pastor at Theresa, called by the separatists at Lebanon, later became Synod president and pastor at St. Mark's in Watertown after Sans.
- Pastor Rueber - Wisconsin Pastor at Columbus.
- * Pastor Muehlhauser - President of Wisconsin until 1860.

(* = sided with Wisconsin and separatists)

This controversy came to the attention of the Northern District convention of the Missouri Synod in 1858, and the following information was given the delegates:

Controversy about the Confessional in Pastor Geyer's Congregation and the Attitude of the Wisconsin Synod.

Late in the year 1856 several members of Pastor Geyer's congregation started an opposition against the ordinance of private confession which exclusively had been in effect since 1844, the same that simultaneously started in the neighbor congregation of Pastor Wagner. Neither the pastor's instructions, nor those of the district president at his early visitation succeeded to quiet the opponents; rather, the agitating of the school teacher and the false conception and application of Luther's statements about confession combined to increase the unrest in the congregation to such an extent that for the sake of avoiding a split Pastor Geyer with his adherents, alas, thought it necessary to yield to the *Beichtstuermer* [stormers against confession] and allowed the introduction of so-called general confession alongside of the current private confession - a change that for the same reason and at the same time was accomplished in Pastor Wagner's congregation.

Still, peace as desired and hoped for was not afforded to Pastor Geyer's congregation. Because Pastor Geyer, with his party, demanded of the *Beichtstuermer* that they retract their continual charges as though the ordinance of private confession, because it had been practiced exclusively, were a must, a law, and a yoke of bondage, the opponents of private confession under leadership of the teacher separated themselves and conducted their own worship. A written overture of the Geyer congregation mutually to call the district praeses for an investigation of the trouble remained unanswered by the opponents; instead, the teacher with one of the dissidents came to your reporter and, directed by him, to the district praeses and asked for the transfer of Pastor Geyer - a request that he could not at once grant for the simple reason that he certainly had to hear the other side too. Without knowing at the time, however, that separatist services had already been held, and likewise, that this errand of the two petitioners had been

undertaken surreptitiously, the district praeses offered to grant them an investigation; and because he had just returned from an official trip, he asked your reporter in a short note to go with Pastor Wagner to the scene, hear both parties right on the ground, and make a detailed record. However, not only was he [the writer] unable to carry out this commission offhand, but soon after the departure of the petitioners the request of Pastor Geyer and his party for an investigation and arbitration of the trouble by the district praeses came to the latter's hands, which request he [Geyer] finally filed on his own account because the separated party left unanswered at the appointed time the overture of the congregation referred to above, and, as already mentioned, instead and without the Geyer party's knowledge sent those two to effect the pastor's transfer. This and the fact that the annual pastoral conference was only a few weeks distant, determined the district praeses to bide his time until then, in order to see Pastor Geyer personally and ask him about several points. Even though this interview now made it still more evident that these people were not looking for peace but really for the removal of Pastor Geyer, still the whole conference advised that Pastor Fuerbringer investigate the matter on the ground before the October synodical meeting still, assuming that Pastor Geyer with his congregation so desired. This resolution then, indeed, was carried out immediately before synod, as will be detailed later, notwithstanding the fact that in the meantime all relations had been severed by the separatists with their ministerial office and the Synod, inasmuch, when after the return of their two emissaries the conduct of the investigation and the anticipated transfer of Pastor Geyer were delayed, the *Rottierer* [a gang, in ecclesiastical usage] had at once called a pastor of the Wisconsin Synod, by whom they were also served at once, and under date of September 5th had filed an abusive declaration of withdrawal from the Synod with the praesidium.

As here the reader, so the synod was acquainted with the historical events. But since the seditious party seeks to justify its secession from us and its fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod as though both the district praeses and the president-general had studiously avoided an investigation, the synod after hearing the historical report gave further attention to a study of this procedure.

In the first place, the District Praeses acquainted the synod with the minutes of the investigation conducted on the ground, which the pastoral conference, as already mentioned, has asked him to undertake and which, after receipt of a number of letters describing the deplorable situation there, he had immediately conducted October 3, 1857, on the eve of synod, it is seen, assisted by Pastors Wagner and Lochner. Now, even though the district praeses had appeared with the two assistants for investigation, yes, even though the seceders were invited by letter and by word of mouth not less than four times, in the course of one and the same day, to come and present all their grievances, and were expressly assured that everything that had happened since the trouble about the confessional would be looked into, not one of them appeared, but they answered that they could and would appear only with their pastor called from the Wisconsin Synod, to get whom, however, they required 3-4 days. Since the pastors named could not wait that long, because they had to leave Oct. 12th for the synod at Fort Wayne; since they, moreover, had nothing to deal about with this preacher of the Wisconsin Synod, and it was quite evident what the seditious element really wanted: they investigated, as nothing else remained for them to do, the separation case by hearing the Geyer congregation, constituting the party affiliated with us and seeking the investigation, with the result that one-sided, stiff-necked, and stubborn insistence on legalistic restrictions

Christian liberty in this controversy about the confessional can not be laid at the door of Pastor Geyer or his party, on the contrary, he is to be blamed for yielding too much to the demands of the Beichtstuermer by deciding for the sake of peace on the introduction of general confession alongside of private confession and also putting it into effect, which decision, as now has become evident, did not manage to restrain the party in which *non est* the lust of separation had been conceived.

As, accordingly, on the part of the district's praesidium everything had been done that was possible under the circumstances, so too, on the other hand, on the part of the general praesidium, which is clearly and unmistakably made evident by the following facts. To wit, when Pastor Wyncken received a bill of grievances from Pastor Geyer's opponents, he also on his part promised an investigation at the scene, provided they accepted the Christian terms that he would needs have to insist upon. Now it has been proved that this answer in due season reached the Watertown post-office and was listed in the printed bulletin; but it is just as undeniable a fact that this letter was suddenly produced not before eight weeks after the postal notice, after that preacher of the Wisconsin Synod, it is seen, had already been called in, by the seditious teacher's son, with the pretext that the letter had been mislaid at the post-office, notwithstanding that various persons, so Pastor Wagner, too, during these eight weeks had repeatedly inquired about this letter at the post-office and the official in charge insisted and still insists that it had been called for by some one soon after the postal notification.

After our synod had thus satisfied and convinced itself as to the lying and malicious procedure of these people, as though our two praesides had not wanted an investigation to take place: it thereupon also made inquiry whether said preacher of the Wisconsin Synod, who had served these people hitherto, or the praeses of this synod, Pastor Muehlhaeuser here, who in spring in company of one of his synodical members visited the seceders and dealt with them, or the Wisconsin Synod itself, which on May 31 and June 1 also was in session in this city, [but did not condemn the dealings?] with the *Rotte* thru its delegates and its preacher, rather justified them—whether then those named in any way consulted Pastor Geyer or the district praesidium about the causes of the separation and the relation of the *Rottierer* to their former ministerial office and their synodical affiliation? But it appeared in this connection 1., that said preacher indeed did inquire of Pastor Geyer on a scrap of paper whether he might visit him, in order to discuss this matter, but that this was done after he already had begun to conduct services for the separatists; and 2., that neither the district praeses nor the president-general have been consulted by said synod or its officers or one of its members in any way or been notified of the intention to take charge of these people by as much as one word.

On account of these and all other facts our synod then finally was forced to adopt the following resolution:

"The Synod of Missouri, Ohio & St., Northern District, would emphatically declare itself against the gang work (*das rottische Treiben*) and interference of the Wisconsin Synod in the congregation of Pastor Geyer and feels called to address to said *Rotte* and its priest the Word of the Lord Ps. 50, 16:17: Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou takest my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hastest instruction, and castest my words behind thee?"

"Would that many a one of the poor souls entangled in this gang work might sober up again. But let not this *Rottenprediger* and his whole synod try to weaken or to destroy the wholesome effect of our solemn testimony, prompted by the fear of God and by love, thus, as though this testimony were to be

classed with the charges of the Buffaloes against the Missourians; forasmuch as we have without avail, not only once but all of ten times, asked the Buffalo Synod to grant a discussion with us, and those who sought refuge with us were threatened from the start with excommunication if they didn't submit to the hierarchical yoke: it is clear to every one that right is on our side over against the Buffalo Synod as well as in the case of the Wisconsin Synod! ---

W 10 "Finally it may also be mentioned in this connection that upon request of a delegate Pastors Fuerbringer, Wagner, and Lochner voiced their opinion in regard to the confessional stand of the Wisconsin Synod to the effect that even though there has been a step forward since the declaration of said synod a year ago of its adherence to all the symbols and since the proffered motion, to work toward the elimination of the unionistic and rationalizing Pennsylvania Agenda in use in its midst, in practice there were still much unionistic indifferentism and a lack of the right observance of the confessional restrictions.")

UNQUOTE

Missouri simply had excommunicated the opponents of Geyer who formed the new St. Matthew's congregation because, in their view, they had already separated themselves and would not repent. (confer Letter 4, Ad. 3). The proceedings had listed several reasons for this conclusion:

- 1) The separatists had no valid complaint (Para. 1)
- 2) They did not agree to join with Geyer's congregation in a Christian fashion to ask District President Fuerbringer for an investigation (P. 2)
- 3) They took matters into their own hands (P. 2).
- 4) They called a pastor (Bading) from the Wisconsin Synod. (P. 2).
- 5) They refused to co-operate with the investigation team of Fuerbringer, Lochner and Wagner (P. 4).

But one side of the story does not tell the whole story. J. P. Koehler, in his book, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, gives a synopsis of these same events from the Wisconsin point of view:

In September 1857 Bading visited with a friend or his wife's at Watertown, Senator C. Meyer, the father-in-law of Wetzel, and there Geyer's opponents submitted the case to him. He reported to Muehlhaeuser, asking whether he should first see Geyer, and in case that were futile consult with Fuerbringer, before he acceded to the people's request of supplying them with the Word and Sacraments. Muehlhaeuser evidently consented to Bading's going to Lebanon and serving the group, for Bading did just that that same month and in a later letter stated that he acted under Muehlhaeuser's authority and as a representative of Synod.

Now the Lebanon recalcitrants were excommunicated by Missouri. That entailed a correspondence between Bading and Muehlhaeuser on the one hand and Wagner, the Missouri pastor at Watertown, Geyer of Lebanon, and Rueter, the Wisconsin man at Columbus, on the other hand. The latter was close to Pastor Sans at Watertown, whose congregation after this became the Wisconsin Synod's St. Markus, and he also sought association with Wagner. Rueter warned Bading against interfering at Lebanon; he had heard from Wagner how Geyer would answer the charges of his opponents; that Wyneken's rejection of their appeal were due to a misunderstanding, because they had confessed the sinfulness of their separation to him and he had informed them that if they told their pastor that there would be no need of an investigation; Fuerbringer's missing answer had not been delivered by the Lebanon postmaster.

In answer to that Bading wrote to Muehlhaeuser that Geyer's opponents had not referred to their separation from Geyer as sinful but to their separation from the synod, and in regard to Fuerbringer's missing letter, the Lebanon postmaster held with Geyer and no doubt had withheld the letter; besides, Wagner himself had told him that Fuerbringer had no time to come, and Geyer had written him, which Wagner also confirmed, that Fuerbringer didn't want to come. Muehlhaeuser now wanted to order a committee investigation, in consultation with Fuerbringer, but Bading refused that and continued to serve the Lebanon people by coming over from Theresa from time to time.

Pastor Bading wrote to President Muehlhaeuser that he did not want to bear full responsibility by himself for serving those Geyer had excommunicated. By examining Bading's letter of Feb. 27, 1858, we can see that in the Wisconsin point of view the excommunicated St. Matthew's group seemed to have been treated unfairly, and should not have been excommunicated at all. The following is that letter.

Theresa, Dodge Co.,
February 27, 1858

Dear Brother Muehlhaeuser!

P1 Here he is referring to the Leb. ST. Mat. congre. Today, Saturday, I received your letter and hasten to answer it. Eight days ago I made a trip to Watertown to preach there the next day and to celebrate Holy Communion. There were 145 communicants, members of St. Matthew congregation, who partook of the Lord's Supper. I did this under the impression that I was acting in the name of Synod. I was led to this assumption by the content of your letter, our conversations, and by all the circumstances of this case. Never have I been willing to alone assume the responsibility for whatever has been done by me. Everything that I have done so far has been done by your advice and order. Neither am I willing now to take on the sole responsibility. Had I been willing to do so, I should have handled the whole matter differently from the beginning. I would have gone there to preach without your advice to do so. There would have been no need for an investigation by a committee. The people would have been saved the expense of \$11.00 in these hard times -- \$6.00 for the deputation to Milwaukee and \$5.00 for the committee. You see from this that I did not mean to act independently and therefore not willing to take the responsibility alone.

P2 However, is an apology or a vindication necessary? I believe not. Only be not frightened by Pastor Rueber's letter. When reading his letters (I received one from him today) one would think he were filled from head to foot with righteousness to such an extent that he would explode unless his letters provided him with a safety valve. But facts to which I shall refer later, prove the opposite of his being righteous and just. The reason for the style of his letters may on the one hand be diffidence and anxiety over this matter, and on the other hand and mainly it may be an egling with pastors Geyer and Wagner. Wagner knows this very well and tries to influence him. This was the reason for getting Rueber to his (Wagner's) house from Meyer's as soon as you had left Watertown, and keeping him there 'til evening so that Rueber was barely able to catch the evening train. He is supposed to have said to Wagner that he would write to me to have nothing to do with "such people" and he is also supposed to have said he was greatly surprised that he had been appointed to the investigating committee since he had not yet belonged to the Wisconsin Synod and had had scruples about accepting the appointment. From this it is apparent that he sides more with the Missourians than with us. His decisions in this matter therefore are not valid as far as I am concerned. It also shows how far his sense of justice reaches, namely so far that there is nothing to decide against pastors Geyer and Wagner, even though they be in the wrong, at least they must not know that Pastor Rueber, their friend, voted against them. So the proverb comes true: "A crow does not peck out the eye of a fellow crow."

P3

Concerning the excommunication of the Pastors Geyer and Wagner, they cannot worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, it is identically the same as the excommunication of St. John's congregation in Milwaukee and of all those who leave the Missourians because they are not willing to endure the tyranny (Pfaffenjock) of the ministers, nor stand for their unevangelical Lutheranism. Such Missourian juggleries have frightened Pastor Rueber's tender conscience to such an extent that he loses his sense of justice and in his heart and nearly in plain words pronounces a damning verdict on the separated ones and will have nothing more to do with them. It is good that the Wis. Synod is not entirely comprised of Ruebers -- else, where would one find right and justice? I am sure that old Koepsel, Gaulk, Graunke, etc., have as good a conscience and as great a sense of justice in their bosoms as Pastors Geyer and Wagner. And while Geyer and Wagner are continually harping on the excommunicated, Pastor Geyer and his party may find that they are the really excommunicated ones, having caused the separation, and the same is true of Wagner, who pronounces Geyer and his party in the right.

P4

Concerning the letter in which Wyneken proposes to come for an investigation, I myself have read this letter and find that its contents differ entirely from what Wagner writes and Rueber cites. The separation from Synod (Bei dem Distriktspraeses Fuerbringer) which the excommunicated confess to have been over-hasty and wrong against Wyneken, because they had neglected to appeal to him as the last resort for help; this separation from Synod, Wyneken, in his letter, construes to be the separation from Pastor Geyer and from his congregation. Thus he, I might say willfully, misconstrues the sense of the letter in which the excommunicated ones had clearly and plainly written what they meant. And then he hammers away at them: "Do you acknowledge that you have done wrong by separating from Pastor Geyer and from his congregation? Then repent, confess your sins to your pastor, ask for forgiveness and be reconciled with him. If then there be anything left to investigate, I shall come to do so, etc." From this it is apparent that Wagner omitted the main part and stressed the unimportant part of the letter in order to paint the separatists the blacker in Rueber's eyes.

P5

Regarding the suppression or delay of the letter: Graunke had repeatedly inquired at the post office whether there was a letter for him, as advertised (in the paper). However, the postmaster would say the letter had already been gotten -- or he would not find it, etc. At last, a few days before I got there, the letter was found and Graunke received it in a condition showing that it had been handled very much. The opinion (supposition) was that others, probably the Missourians, had intercepted it. Be that as it may, the letter would not have changed conditions even if it had been received in time. I cannot blame the separatists for wanting nothing more to do with the Missourians nor for refusing to have an investigation by them.

They have done their part, sacrificing time and money in order to remain united with the Missourians. No matter how much Wagner babbles that Fuerbringer had had no time to come right away, we know that this is a lie -- Fuerbringer did not want to come. Geyer has written me to that effect and Wagner has told me so some time ago. Therefore we should not urge these people to consent to another investigation by two Missourians. They have suffered enough from these vultures.

P6

Now to conclude this matter, I wish to state that I am not willing to take the sole responsibility for giving the Lord's Supper to the excommunicants, although I am convinced that they are in the right. I had promised them that I would preach to them on *Cantate* or *Exaudi*, celebrate the Lord's Supper, and also confirm seven children. But if I cannot do this in the name and with the sanction of synod, then write to me so that I can inform the people that under such conditions I cannot serve them. However, my opinion is that we should all stand together and, as resolved, serve this congregation at intervals so that they may not lose faith in us as they have in Missouri and a greater calamity befall them to the detriment of their souls.

P7

When meeting these people and hearing the opinion of all the faithful in Pankow's and in Wagner's congregations, who are acquainted with the condition (of the latter congregation there were six members present with me until 12 midnight at Meyer's house in Watertown last Monday), then one hears and knows "on which side the dove caws - on which side the raven caws."

And now something about Pastor Rueber and his procedure at Lowell....

Your brother in Christ,

Bading

By examining Bading's letter, we can see that from Bading's point of view (and Wisconsin's) differed from the cut and dried story of Missouri. Note the important discrepancies in the accounts:

- 1) Apparently Bading either did not know the fact or recognize it as important that Geyer had bent over backwards to accommodate the opponents to private confession by introducing general confession "side by side" with private confession (N. Dist. Fro., '58, P1). Bading still accused such an apparently flexible ministry of Geyer as being "tyrannical" and "unevangelical" (L1, P3).

- 2) Fuerbringer really did not want to come nor did he (L1, P5). (Compare N.D. Proc., '58, P2).
- 3) Wyneken would not have come even if there had been no mix-up with the mail service (L1, P4). (Compare N.D. Proc., '58, P5.)
- 4) The separatists had a valid complaint (L1, P5).

N. B.: The reader may here also wish to refer to Bading's letter of Sept. 10, 1857, which includes a letter from Wetzel.

Wisconsin concluded that the St. Matthew's group had been invalidly excommunicated and should be served by a Wisconsin Synod man. This decision is reflected in the 1858 Wisconsin Synod Report:

The 1858 Wisconsin Synod report has the following to say in the matter:

QUOTE

When the committee submitted its findings in regard to the relationship of the Evangelical-Lutheran St. Mattheus-Gemeinde in Town Lebanon near Wauertown, Pastor Bading was asked by synodical resolution to give a brief impartial account of the situation in this matter, with consideration of all documentary evidence. This was done, with comment on individual points by the Praeses as well as the delegates of the congregation present. Then ensued a more thorough discussion of the affair, furthermore a second reading of the committee report, whereupon the following formulation of the latter was adopted by Synod:

"Resolved that Synod after due weighing of the matter renders the following verdict:

"1. Since the Evangelical-Lutheran St. Mattheus-Gemeinde in Town Lebanon contrary to the Word of God, to clear and unmistakable statements of the Augustana, and contrary to its own conscience was to have private confession forced upon it, there could be no denial of its right to protest against the imposition of such a yoke.

"2. Since this protest was not heeded by the preacher of the congregation, a part of the congregation, too, according to the documents before us, treated by him in an unchristian manner, it would have behooved the ministerium of the Lutheran Synod of Missouri to give ear to their repeated requests, and do so in a Christian way, which was not done.

"3. Since the request of this congregation for an investigation, made to the ministerium has not been heeded, neither by the district president nor by the president-general, the congregation named has thus not been rendered justice over against Pastor Geyer, we do not consider said congregation as any longer under obligation to remain within its synodical association, and it is free to turn to such who share the same basis of faith with it.

"4. Where in the method of procedure, however, this congregation, too, has erred, we do not lend our support, rather offer the admonition that it repent and seek God's forgiveness."

QUOTE

It so happened that immediately after the Wisconsin synod's sessions (May 30-June 3) at St. Johannis, Milwaukee, the Northern District of the Missouri Synod met at neighboring Dreieinigkeits (June 2-8). So there was an early discussion of Wisconsin's action there and the following ventilation of the matter in the district's fourth annual report (1858):

NOTE

And so St. Matthew's congregation of Lebanon split off from Immanuel and the Missouri Synod officially on Sept. 5, 1857. By Feb. 27th, Bading had been serving the congregation. At the 1858 convention the Lebanon situation was examined. Finally, after discussing correspondence between Bading, Geyer and Wagner, and after the entire synod had been admonished to repent by a letter from Fuerbringer, Feb. 1, 1859 (L 16), St. Matthew's was received into the Wisconsin Synod on Mar 19, 1859. But now what about a pastor? When St. Matthew's first began holding services, they had asked Bading to serve them. The reason for this was quite uncomplicated: the two "underhanded" men who had gone to Fuerbringer to ask for Geyer's removal (Wetzel and Koepsel) had also given some thought to a replacement pastor. Koepsel had children living near Theresa, and they simply recommended Bading to them. This Bading did as they built a church one mile to the south of the present site of Immanuel, near the junctions of Cty. SC and Wis. 109. This is also the reason St. Matthew's did not send a delegate to the 1859 convention (L2).

Then Koehler records this bit of Immanuel's history from 1860 - 1863:

For a short while a university theologian, name of Gradmann, who had just arrived from Germany (and whom Fachmann tried to secure a place at La Crosse or Fond du Lac), supplied the St. Matthaeus-Gemeinde of Lebanon and the Michaels-Gemeinde of Watertown, before Bading moved to Watertown. Gradmann had to give up his position again because his moral conduct was questioned. Teacher Wetzel of Lebanon raised charges of false doctrine which could not be substantiated. Wetzel, on his part, overreached himself by unauthorized administering of baptism and similar acts. The Watertown congregation stood with Gradmann, even Senator Meyer, Wetzel's father-in-law. But then the *Weltbote* published evil reports against him, e. g. that he had embezzled money in Germany and that he was addicted to drink. Gradmann frankly discussed these matters in a letter to Muchhaeuser which leaves one with the impression that he was not guilty of unfaithfulness so much as of thoughtlessness. He resigned of his own accord, to save Synod from injury, and seems to have returned to Europe in order to serve the diaspora in Russia. Thus it happens that there is no mention at all of him in the synodical reports.

Shortly after these unfortunate events, Pastor A. Lange was called to St. Matthew's. He is received into the synod at the 1863 convention. However, A Lange was a troublemaker. Rev. Link, who succeeded Geyer at Immanuel in 1860, admonished A. Lange for bad practice, and Lange responded to defended himself in (L4 and L5). Finally in 1870 Lange led St. Matthew's out of the Wisconsin Synod, for reasons which the reader may judge for himself (L6).^(English)

Doctrine seemed to be small matter with Pastor Lange. He and St. Matthew's then joined the Buffalo Synod. This may have been in part due to the stricter doctrinal stance of the Wisconsin Synod. In 1872 Wisconsin joined Missouri in the Synodical Conference. Perhaps Lange saw this coming and thought it impossible to once again be in fellowship with the congregation which had excommunicated his congregation 14 years earlier.

No records from St. Matthew's remain (to this writer's knowledge) in the Lebanon area or in the archives of the Wisconsin Synod - except for the record of births, baptisms and deaths. Apparently the members of St. Matthew's kept close fellowship with their Wisconsin Synod neighbors three miles to the south, St. Paul's of Ixonia (who had also split from Immanuel in the 1850s over the line-fence controversy). According to the son of the last president of St. Matthew's, Gilbert Lettow, the membership of St. Matthew's eventually dwindled so that they worshipped regularly at St. Paul's, Ixonia. Only four times a year did they hold a service, a communion service, in their own church building. Finally, only four

families still remained in St. Matthew's congregation, and they merged with St. Paul's in 1926 under Pastor Bernthal.

In the opinion of this writer, private confession, though involved, was only the trigger issue here. This paper will develop this in more depth as we incorporate this point and other long-reaching events with the analysis of St. John's, Watertown.

* * * * *

According to the Missouri Synod's Northern District Proceedings of 1858, the Missouri Synod congregation in Watertown, St. John's, went through the same controversy at the same time (P1). ^{Paragraph} It, too, was made up of immigrants from various parts of Germany with differing backgrounds and traditions of worship. They arrived in Watertown very likely in the fall of 1851 - some of the '48ers. Within a year, late in 1852, the congregation called its first pastor, the Rev. A. Kleinegees, a member of the Ohio Lutheran Synod. He remained with the congregation a very short time, until March of 1853, since it was soon discovered that he believed and taught the liberal and rationalistic doctrines of the State church in Germany.

At this point we can see how St. John's became closely connected with events at Immanuel, Lebanon. Being without a pastor, the congregation prevailed upon Rev. Geyer of Immanuel to serve them. He began to serve the congregation on Nov. 1, 1853, and remained its pastor until Feb. 1, 1855, providing services once a month. Most likely, he practiced private confession here, too. In 1854, St. John's joined the Missouri synod.

At this time, St. John's also addressed a call to Candidate of Theology Anton Wagner, who had just graduated from the Theological Seminary of the Missouri Synod at Ft. Wayne. St. John's 100th anniversary book continues the narrative:

He accepted the call, and came to Watertown around the first of the year 1855. At that time the railhead was extended to Oconomowoc, from where the young Pastor traveled the remaining miles to Watertown by stagecoach. He arrived in the middle of the night, and found lodging in a hotel. The next morning, in spite of having contracted a severe cold on his journey, Candidate Wagner walked the six miles through snow a foot deep to the home of Rev. Geyer in Town Lebanon. Here he discovered that St. John's Congregation had no Agenda, that is, the book of forms and prayers for church services, baptisms, the celebration of Holy Communion, the performing of weddings, and similar ministerial acts. Our Synod had published no such book at that time. There remained nothing for him to do but to spend several days as the guest of Pastor Geyer, and to copy the most important sections from Pastor Geyer's book, which itself was also a hand-written copy.

It might be well also to note at this time that in those early years before the publication of a hymnal by the Missouri Synod, the conducting of a church service involved considerable difficulty. The German immigrants had

faithfully brought with them their copies of their hymnals, but since they came from different sections of Germany, the selections of hymns varied considerably, and the same hymn, although it often appeared in all the hymnals, nevertheless had different verses and was published in different dialects, all of which made congregational singing a problem.

At this point we can be fairly sure that Wagner also chose to practice private confession. It was common practice in Missouri - and it was written in Geyer's Agenda, which Wagner copied. By 1857, St. John's had grown to a congregation of 90 voting members and 381 souls.

Unfortunately, with the same stresses here as at Immanuel, and with St. John's close connection with this sister only 6 miles away, 1857 marked the year that the private confession controversy flared up here, also. St. John's German 60th anniversary book records these facts:

"Yet the congregation should now struggle through a difficult period of strife. In 1856, indeed, several members, just as in the congregation at Lebanon, also in our congregation - raised opposition to the existing order of private confession. Neither the explanation of the pastors nor the visiting District President could silence the opponents. Even when the congregation introduced the general confession next to the private confession the fire of discord still glowed under the ashes. The main agitator was the first called teacher of the congregation, Fredrich Hass, in 1857. He also began to lecture in private homes all over and to gatherings called for that purpose to which these and those dear friends were invited. But all this was diligently kept from the pastor. Only one evening at such a meeting a trustee got up and said, "Brethern, we can't get by with this thing, let's give it up." Now the pastor found out - he had been weakened by a long fever - and he dreaded the coming struggle; but he asked God for wisdom and strength, and behold, after much instruction, the holding of such private meetings was given up.

The controversy lasted, and finally after many fruitless meetings, a break occurred, and more than 20 families left the congregation."

Though the controversy is said to have centered upon private vs. general confession, as at Lebanon, the reader can judge for himself as he reads the letter of the separatist group written to Pres. Meuhlhauser on Nov. 3, 1858. This letter raises their complaints and announces that they intend to leave Wagner's congregation.

Sept. 9, 58

7 L7

To the honorable Rev. Muehlhaeser
of the honorable Wisconsin Synod.

Dear President:

Please pardon us for troubling you with this letter.

More than a year ago there arose a controversy in our congregation about the custom of private confession. Because of the stubbornness of Rev. Wagner and of his foolish utterance that he would rather go on the guillotine before he would consent to the rite of general confession, several members lost confidence in the pastor and intend to leave the congregation. The teacher and a deacon spoke to these people about this matter. On this occasion the deacon asked the teacher to lead in a devotional exercise. We had such devotional meetings even before a teacher had been called. The teacher complied with the request, but thought that the reading of a sermon would prolong the meeting too much. He proposed reading a Bible passage and saying a few words on it. The people present at this meeting agreed to this proposal. Such meetings were conducted for sometime. When, however, the pastor heard about them, he forbade the teacher to continue this practice because it was an encroachment upon the pastor's office. The teacher was to acknowledge that he had sinned, ask for forgiveness and promise not to do it again.

The teacher refused this unchristian request, saying, he did not consider his action a sin, neither would he give the required promise. Thereupon the pastor refused Holy Communion to the teacher and through a deacon he notified him that unless he confessed his sin and sought forgiveness, either he (teacher) or the pastor would have to leave the congregation. One or the other had to leave. When this ultimatum did not have the desired effect, the pastor brought the case before the congregation. Again he accuse the teacher of having encroached upon the pastor's office. Although we quoted to him from the Bible, from Luther and from other church fathers that every Christian by reason of his "royal priesthood" has the right to privately preach the Word of God and no one can prove otherwise from the Bible, the pastor would not be convinced by our proofs, but repeated his former assertion, and a part of the congregation sided with him. He furthermore stated that unless the teacher complied with his request, he could not remain as teacher; he would take his child out of school. The pastor and his party did take their children out of school, and he also took away the janitor job from the teacher and gave it to deacon Kroening. As in this instance he had acted arbitrarily, we confronted him and told him that he had done wrong and that Kroening was encroaching upon another's office. But neither of them would admit having done wrong and were upheld by a part of the congregation in several congregational meetings which were held concerning this question. No peaceable solution or agreement was reached. Instead the pastor became more stubborn, began to mock us, giving us the nickname "Super Holy Ones". When the meetings brought no solution to the

controversy, the pastor again arbitrarily sent the deacons Kroening and Schröcter to the school-house to expel the teacher. When our children came home weeping, we went to the school-house and insisted that the teacher continue to instruct our children. This was done through that week. However, on the following Sunday, the pastor announced a congregation that the teacher was to be dismissed from his office. This resolution was invalid according to our congregation's constitution, but the pastor pronounced it valid and his party sustained him. Our protest was not considered, and the teacher was publicly ejected from office and was also to be excommunicated from the congregation, the pastor declaring him a "heather and a publican" from the pulpit, admonishing the congregation that unless they excommunicate the teacher, they would tread God's Word under foot. When again we protested, he rebuked us with the words: "You have nothing more to say."

Now we cannot submit to such a godless procedure, and also our conscience is sorely stressed when Pastor Wagner defames our brethren of St. Matthew's, or the congregation by calling them a "mob" and their Pastor Bading a "mob-preacher".

For these reasons we find it impossible to remain in this congregation and its synod that permits such procedure. The defaming words about our teacher and our brethren in St. Matthew's are directed also against us, we being one with them in doctrine.

We have therefore resolved to form a congregation of our own and to join the honorable Wisconsin Synod. Being without a pastor, we earnestly beseech you, the Hon. President, to help us with your advice so that we may be provided with Word and sacrament by Pastor Bading. Could it be so arranged that Rev. Bading could also preach to us when he comes next time to preach to St. Matthew's? Please write to us this week yet, if possible, so that we may be able to clear up difficulties or objections to this request.

Should you deem it advisable to come here to investigate personally, we shall be glad to receive you, and as soon as possible. Only notify us a few days in advance. If you come, stop at Mr. George Meyer's house and also send any communications to us in care of Mr. Meyer.

With due respect we sign as the temporary council of the congregation and in its name:

August Gamm

Wilhelm Graunke

George Meyer

Watertown, Sept. 9, 1858

P.S. Address: Senator Meyer because Mary Meyers lives here.

In a later letter to Muehlhäuser, (Nov. 3, 1858, L8) the separatists claim to have separated from St. John's and the Missouri Synod, and to have formed the new St. Michael's congregation. (confer L17 for the first written request to join the Synod.) In the Nov. letter, 5 reasons are clearly given for such action:

Nov. 3, 1858

L8

Right Honorable President:

As we have separated from Pastor Wagner's congregation and organized our own Ev. Luth. congregation, we consider it our Christian duty to join a Lutheran Synod. Therefore we have on this date (Nov. 3, 1858) unanimously resolved to seek admission into the Ev. Luth. Synod of Wisconsin and we beseech you, Honorable President, to graciously accept our petition. We are honestly convinced in our conscience of having done right by separating from Pastor Wagner and from his congregation.

To justify our action before you we herewith present the reasons for the separation and for seeking admission into your synod:

- 1) Pastor Wagner denies the right of Christians to meet privately for edificational devotions if a certain time therefore and invitations thereto are stipulated.
- 2) Pastor Wagner asserts that if one person at these meetings discourses on the Word of God, be it only as long as five minutes, he commits a sin and he will not tolerate it.
- 3) Pastor Wagner has excommunicated two members, the Messrs. Busch and Graunke as heathen and publicans because they have declared their disagreement with his principles. As he would not retract them, they have under these circumstances separated from him. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it". I Cor. 12, 26.
- 4) Pastor Wagner has, by his prevarications and by his denials of what transpired between him and several members, lost the confidence of members to such an extent that none of us dares to go to him without taking along a witness. This can be proved by many

occurrences.

5) Pastor Wagner reviles and abuses our brethren in faith, the St. Matthew congregation in Lebanon, calling them a "mob" and we cannot believe that the Word of God compels us to remain with him and thereby sanction and endorse his vituperations.

These, among many others, are the principal reasons for our separation from Pastor Wagner and from his congregation. Hoping that they justify our action in your sight.

We sign with respect

The deacons of St Michael's Congregation"

Watertown, Nov. 3, 1858.

George Meyer
August Gamm
Gottlieb schult
Wilhelm Grunke
Gottlob B----- (busch?)
Ludwig Fricke

(confer also L9.)

Pastor Gradmann then served St. Michael's for a very short time from St. Matthew's in Lebanon (L10). But St. Michael's called Pastor Bading from Theresa to be their pastor on May 30, 1859 (L11). Shortly thereafter the congregation applied for admission to the Wisconsin Synod in the 1859 convention (L19). It must have been a very optimistic congregation, for without a pastor, a church, and having just applied for membership in the Synod 9 days earlier, St. Michael's offered to host the synod convention three years hence (L13)! This was the first Wisconsin synod congregation in Watertown. Koshler reports on page 59 of his history:

bership. In the 1859 synodical report we read (p. 15): "15. The St. Matthaeus-Gemeinde in Town Lebanon. The praeses is instructed to write the congregation a letter in keeping with the local conditions." . . . "In regard to the Watertown congregation the correspondence in the case was submitted and after its thorough examination and explicit indorsement of the principles therein voiced by our secretary and of the president's action based thereon, Resolved: 16. that the Ev. Luth. Michaels-Gemeinde at Watertown be received (upon the terms mentioned repeatedly above) into the membership of Synod." The parenthesis referred to the sending in and approval of its constitution.

But ambitious as St. Michael's was, a turn in events was soon to end its existence. The liberal and unionistic evangelical Lutheran church in Watertown, St. Mark's, dismissed their pastor Sans from duty in 1860. This put the members of St. Michael's in an interesting and apparently influential position. "When Pastor Sans was removed from office, our congregation in its meeting of July 15, 1860, not only called Pastor Bading, but also invited St. Michael's congregation to join it, all of which soon came to pass." (A Century with Christ. St. Mark's 100th anniversary book, p, 18.) Such is the history of the private confession controversy at St. Michael's.

* * * * *

Although history records this as "the private confession controversy" in these two congregations, nevertheless, it seems to this writer that the issue of private confession vs. general confession was not the real issue in these congregations. Rather, the underlying issue seems to be the rights and privileges of the universal priesthood and their relationship to the pastoral office. There seems to be several reasons why these congregations would be particularly sensitive to this issue.

Let us return to Germany in the early 1800's. These Lutherans had left Germany because their church leaders - the pastors - were forcing them to compromise the truths of God's Word in many congregations. Whether it was the Prussian Union or rationalism, to these people, their pastors had failed them, and had compelled

them to give up doctrinal purity. So they left.

Now follow the group to Lebanon. Already at Buffalo, N.Y., the sensitivity of these confessional Lutherans to any threat upon their privileges as the universal priesthood. They would not follow Rev. Grabau, whose doctrine imposed on their right to administer the sacraments, among other things.

Then the controversy over private confession began in late 1856. But private confession had been practiced at Immanuel since 1844! Why the sudden discontent? If this was the primary issue, the members showed a surprising lack of patience. Even if Geyer had not permitted the common confession along side private confession, as the '58 Missouri Report records^{(+ Bading never mentions) he did}, certainly someone must have known what was said about private confession two years earlier at the 1856 convention. There it was made perfectly clear that private confession was not the only way, and that the issue should be handled with great care and patience in all congregations. Knowing that the Synod was on their side, it seems that Wetzel and the others would have been ready to show more patience, and try more earnestly to use the proper channels - if private confession was the primary issue here.

Instead, private confession at Immanuel and at St. John's seem merely to have been the contemporary item of debate by which the issue of the pastoral office in relationship to the universal priesthood found expression. The 1856 district convention had strongly urged that private confession, since it has so many advantages, be practiced in all congregations. Some of the

immigrants who had had compromise forced upon them in Europe perhaps felt pressure from the top again, pressure to compromise on the doctrine of the Church. Did Wagner say that he would rather go to the guillotine rather than permit private confession? The members knew that the Missouri Synod did not tolerate such an attitude - it could have been worked out. But they did protest to the tyrannical procedure of the pastor even more. The school-house issue, the janitor job issue, and this decree in the use of an adiaphoron all seemed like an abuse of the pastoral office - and an infringement on their universal priesthood. Even Bading does not mention private confession once in his letter (L1); but complains against the "tyrannical and unevangelical" rule of Geyer.

St. John's case is even more convincing that the relationship of the pastoral office to the universal priesthood was the real issue. Remember, too, that these two disputes were over the same issue at the same time. Now look at L7 and L8 again. The matter in question is encroachment upon the pastor's office (L7, P2)! The "royal priesthood" issue is mentioned by name, but there is no mention of "confession". It involves alleged "tyrannical conduct" on Wagner's part, and his maligning of the separatists.

Now review the five points of separation (L8). Again, they deal with the power exercised by the pastor in relation to his members, not with private confession.

Finally, even more convincing is Pastor Wagner's defense of himself, addressed to Muehlhauser and Streisguth: (L4)

Dec. 15, 1858 (L4)

To the honorable Pastors Muehlhaeuser and
Streisguth in Milwaukee.

Honorable Pastors:

P1 I received your letter of the 7th in the evening of the
8th. Had I not been sick I should have answered sooner. Even
though still not well, I shall not let you wait longer for an
answer.

P2 First of all, I thank you for sending me the "Five Reasons
for the Separation," and requesting my answer, stating "whether
these reasons are valid or invalid". This I am heartily
willing to do without your urgent request. But before examining
the enclosed "Five Reasons," permit me first to answer some
of the assertions contained in your letter:

P3 You claim that the minutes of the meeting of our Synod-
ical District are garbled -- (Sinn und sachtentstellende
Protokoll). If that is your honest opinion, then no one can
hinder you from bearing witness against said "mis-statements"
or such "garbling". Furthermore, "you hope that notwithstanding
this difference of opinion" I will believe in your well-meaning
endeavors to further the peace and welfare of the Kingdom of
the Lord in Watertown. I answer: As long as I am convinced
that you honestly and truly mean this, I assure you that I,
too, shall endeavor to further the peace of the church in
Watertown. Likewise I claim, as you do, that it is not obstinate
pervenacity that impels my actions, but the sense of right and
justice as well as the desire to promote the welfare and peace
of God's Kingdom. This I have proved by repeatedly imploring
the congregation in its meetings during this sad controversy
thus: "You see, dear people, that we cannot come to a peace-
able solution. Therefore I implore you to ask our president
and several pastors to come and investigate our controversy
and judge and decide who is right and who is wrong. I will
not stubbornly claim to be right and will gladly confess my
fault if these investigators decide that I have done wrong."
But the opponents would in no wise consent to this proposal.
Their answers were similar to those given to Pastor Geyer by
his opponents. For example: "The Lord Jesus also would not
be judged by the Pharisees."

P4 I cannot agree with your opinion on the letter which my
congregation and I had written to the opponents of which you
claim that it contains "the great principal mistake." I
fail to see the "mistake" Had you been better informed, your

verdict would have been different. For it is not true that in our letter it was assumed "a priori" that the opponents were in the wrong. On the contrary, it is spoken thereof "a posteriori." The "investigation of the reasons for complaint," (not the reasons for separation) have certainly been sufficiently explored in the many meetings held since second Pentecost day. From the Bible, from the symbolical books, many citations from Luther and teachers of our church, it was proven to all but the obdurate ones that what the opponents defended as a sacred right, was in fact, a great wrong. Repeatedly have I asked them to cite one passage from orthodox teachers to prove their stand-point, but it was not possible for them to do so. Whatever they cited from Luther proved to be a refutation of their argument. At one meeting they thought they had the proof for their contention from a pamphlet entitled: "Testimony of Old and New Teachers of the Lutheran church concerning the Spiritual Priesthood". However, when I proposed to go through it publicly with them, they would not consent -- and for good reasons-- even though they would then have had the opportunity to defend and to prove their view; and neither would they heed my petition to show a willingness to hear proof of their error.

P5 What you write--with some "strong" language-- concerning the transfer of some members of St. John's congregation to Trinity congregation of Milwaukee, I shall ignore as not pertinent to the matter hand. You may confer with Pastor Lochner about that. But one thing I want to remark here: When you declare that in the Lebanon case you have dealt according to the teaching of the Gospel, I must declare that up to the present hour I am convinced of the contrary and cannot believe you. This much concerning your letter.

P6 Now I shall turn to the conscientious illucidation of the "Five Reasons for the separation". or what I write, I hold myself responsible before God and man and promise that if unintentional and unwittingly I should fall into an error, and this is proven to me, I shall willingly and gladly retract and plead for forgiveness.

P7 However, before treating on the separate points, I would like to make several general observation. On the 15th of Oct. , Pastor Bading and four or five of the separatists quite unexpectedly came to me to confer about the separation. Two deacons of my congregation were present. Because I was at the time suffering from neuralgia and also because I could not have the minutes of the congregation meeting, I requested Pastor Bading to postpone the conference until next Monday, as Pastor Bading always remained here several days after preaching on Sunday. But they would not accede to my wish, and we began the conference which lasted 'til past midnight. The separatists had five reasons written on paper, and in the presence of pastor Bading they maintained that these were the true and certain ground for their separation. Now I am much surprised to find these (present) five reasons much changed from the words read on

that evening by Mr. P. C. For on that evening, none of the reasons given were valid and sufficient for a separation as Mr. C.P. had to admit. Pastor Bading, therefore, admonished them: "People, return--do not separate yourselves--preserve unity".

P8

I tried repeatedly to obtain a copy of those five reasons, but was denied a copy, therefore, I cannot give the exact wording of those five points, but some of them were about as follows:

- a) I was supposed to have said that I would sooner go on the guillotine before changing anything in the custom of confession. --This was proven untrue by witnesses.
 - b) I had gone to Lord's Supper with an unreconciled heart when at Synodical Meeting. --This I explained and answered to the satisfaction of Rev. Bading.
 - c) That the congregation had resolved to excommunicate the teacher as a heathen and a publican. --This was retracted upon Pastor Bading's recommendation.
 - d) That I had removed the teacher from his office.
- For this I gave good reasons. -- etc.

Some of these accusations are now repeated in the enclosed document, and I will again answer them, "they being the most important ones" that supposedly have caused the separation. --What right Mr. George Meyer has to base his separation on these "five reasons" I cannot understand; for although I begged him urgently to do so, he never once appeared at our meetings during this controversy. Whether his reason is the one intimated to me by Rev. Bading in a letter--God will judge. But to proceed.

Ad. 1. According to this first point, the separatists say that I do not dispute the right of Christians to meet for private devotion in general, except in case a certain time for, and invitations to these meetings are stipulated. I am glad to have this declaration in writing, because people here have spoken and still speak differently. They claim that I have forbidden all devotional meetings. They are not ashamed to say that I have forbidden reading the Bible and praying, notwithstanding that I have urgently admonished my congregation to diligently read their Bibles and to pray. Still, I had it thrown up to me in public that I am a pope and also for the reason of having prohibited the Bible.

Concerning meetings at a stipulated time and place, I maintain that because of such stipulation of time and place these meetings are of a public character, and therefore it is the pastor's duty to conduct such meetings, he having been ordained by God, through the congregation, to do so. But it was not possible for me to conduct these meetings because I was not informed of the time and place. Only afterwards, from other members, did I accidentally hear about them. I first was under the impression that at such meetings there was praying.

reading of Scripture and a general discussion of Holy Writ. Fearing to induce strife and contention, I did not at first confront the participants of these meetings. But after I made known to them my view, they asked: "Can no one then say to his neighbor, come to my house today or tomorrow and we shall read God's Word and pray, read a sermon and be edified?" My answer was: That is very good and pleases me if it is done in the proper way. And I stressed then the duty of the Head of the household as priest of the family. And this is the pivot on which the first point of the controversy hinges. My contention is that at such meetings not one certain person shall always deliver sermons (or as the separatists will term it "speeches" -- which essentially is the same as preaching). Note therefore, that this "first reason" is a prevarication, or, to express it mildly, it is a distortion of facts.

Ad. 2. When it says here: "The discourse by one person on God's Word for a duration of five minutes I declared a sin and permitted it not" - isn't this connection an infamous lie. Yes, I have spoken of ten--maybe also of five--minutes. And who would not, in the heat of battle, sometimes use a hyperbole? Any fair-minded person will know that this is done only for the sake of contrast. To call a discourse a sermon does not depend on the length of time of its delivery. There are long and there are short sermons, but the latter are still called sermons. Likewise, I have spoken of "sin", but have applied this to the preaching of the teacher Hass because (a) he has no vocation or call to preach (though he claims to have a direct call from God) and therefore he had no more a right to preach than any other lay member, and (b) he has caused offense and disunion as is plentifully apparent. With my own ears have I heard it said: The participants of those meetings are the truly converted, the real Christians and children of God. The others, says the teacher, are a rabble who knows nothing about conversion and therefore the offense (at the separatist meetings). But to sit in the grocery store playing cards he (Hass) does not seem to consider to be an offense -- and Pastor Bading had to hear similar remarks from deacon Schultz at one of our meetings.

And these are the reasons for my saying: "Such acts and words I shall not, cannot and must not permit".

The principal contention here is the question whether the teacher has actually preached. This has been undoubtably proven. For example: right after the teacher's first sermon, three deacons, among whom were Cottlich Schultz and Wilhelm Graunke, privately conversing have said: "What was this the teacher did! We cannot get by with this. He must stop it." However, sad to say, they kept quiet about it.

Ad. 3. In order to confute this "third reason" I need only to explain the true facts of the case.

All the reasons or causes why their self-excommunication had to be announced publicly I cannot now produce nor deem that necessary. The main reason, known also to Pastor Bading and discussed in his presence, is as follows: When Mr. Busch for the second time announced his separation and was asked for a reason, he went to his house to get a Bible from which he then read Hos. 4:6. Applying this passage to me he said: "That is the way you are. You have rejected God's Word, therefore you can no longer be my pastor and therefore I sever my connection with you." I shall not mention the vulgarities and defamations about my sermons poured forth by him and others. Concerning the separation of Graunke, the minutes of our congregation meeting states that he accuses me of willful neglect of my official duties. This, too, was disproved in the presence of Rev. Bading. Here, too, I shall not mention Graunke's heretical ideas concerning the "power of the Word" nor his contemptuous, I might even say, sacrilegious remarks about my person and about my sermons. Both Schultz and Graunke have always behaved in an unchristian manner and would never accept any admonition.

And now this pertinent question: How can this "third reason" be a ground for a separation since the opponents already weeks ago had petulantly stormed out from our meeting, had begun separatistical church services and severed their connection with us? They had in fact and to all intent separated themselves before Schultz and Graunke were excommunicated as heathen and publicans.

Ad. 4. This "fourth reason" I would rather not discuss at all, for it causes me great anguish of soul. The Lord God will in His own good time bring everything to light.

I confess that I am a poor sinner and have become guilty before God during this controversy as is so likely to happen to human beings in like circumstances, and I daily ask God to forgive my trespasses.

But it takes a brazen profligacy to make an accusation like this "reason four".

Even the separatists will have to admit that I have often pleaded, since so much was implicated about sin, they should show me where and how I had committed an offensive deed and I would publicly, from my pulpit, apologize before the entire congregation. However, no such proof was produced.

I would really like to know who the person is that dares not come to me, the pastor, unless he brings some witness along as they claim can be proven by many instances. As to my

denying in public what had been said between me and certain individuals, I know of only one case in point: I mentioned in a meeting that Mr. Graunke had told me in my house that teacher Hass had delivered a fine sermon on the gospel: "Christ, the Good shepherd". Graunke denied having used the term "sermon," but claimed to have said "speech". To put an end to the quarrel about these synonymous terms I proposed: "Mr. Graunke, neither you nor I can produce any witnesses, so let us drop the matter". This can be testified to by the entire congregation. Although I am still convinced that I was right --yet, claiming no infallibility, I agree that it could be as Graunke claims. In private conversations similar cases may have occurred, as they do occur in any pastor's official life.

It is inexplicable to me how Mr. L. Lieske could put his signature to this "reason". He is such a dear quiet man, who had assured me in the presence of his wife, that he loved me, had nothing against me. But the others had said that I was opposed to those "edifying gatherings".

Ad. 5 This fifth and last sentence, as I understand it, seems to imply that all my utterance, both on the pulpit and otherwise, follow the "Buffalo pattern," in that they consist only of abuses and vilifications. However, only once, in a congregational meeting, when answering a remark or a question, did I call the Matthew congregation of Lebanon a "mob," expressing my honest opinion and conviction, and I hope on one will want to forbid me to express my honest opinion. At that time I also added the remark that I would repeat this allegation as often as necessary until convinced of the contrary, in which case the term "mob" would never again be used by me in this connection. That this fifth point also, according to their own constitution was no sufficient reason for separation, was silently acquiesced in by Pastor Bading. It is amazing that the people who claim my "abuses and vilifications" as one of the principal reasons for their separation have no qualms of conscience about the innumerable abuses -- (the number known only to the omniscient God) -- heaped upon my poor person as well as upon one whole synod.

This is then my answer on the "five reasons". I hope you will be able to orient yourselves. In our meeting, I should probably have been more explicit on doctrine in points 1 and 2.

If Pastor Bading says anything about our correspondence, which I for certain reasons no longer wish to continue, you may tell him in my name that I am able to prove all concerned facts with such infallible arguments, that they who now have the temerity to call them (the arguments) lies, will be dumb-founded and silenced.

The merciful God give you much wisdom and grace and grant that we all, also the separatists, may inherit eternal salvation

by grace for Jesus' sake.

This wishes and prays for,

the much maligned Lutheran preacher

A. Wagner

Watertown, Dec. 15, 1858.

P. S. The document containing the signatures of all the separatists is well known to you.

On the 2nd inst. there took place a meeting in Mr. Meyer's house. There we discussed the subject "Private edification". Now a certain busybody, for the sake of gaining a personal advantage, is eagerly spreading a perversion of the outcome of that meeting. This I have heard from very reliable sources.

This is only by the way.

In this entire letter, if Wagner defends himself concerning anything, it has to do with teaching, sermonizing, and gathering together outside of church for Bible study. Note the quote which the separatists brought, and which they felt addressed the real issue: "Testimony of Old and New Teachers of the Lutheran Church concerning the Spiritual Priesthood." The only mention of confession appears in P8: "I was supposed to have said that I would sooner go to the guillotine before changing anything in the custom of confession. -- This was proven untrue by witnesses." The real issue was not private confession, but as Wagner himself neatly puts it at the end, "Private Edification". Where does the universal priesthood leave off-- and infringement on the pastoral office begin?

This is not to deny that other congregations were undoubtedly involved in a knocked-down and dragged-out controversy over private confession; but here it was simply the dispute in the air at the time - used as a tool to bring deeper troubles to the surface.

* * * * *

Finally, this Waterown-Lebanon debate had unexpected and far reaching effects for both synods. Though private confession wasn't behind it all in these home congregations, it was the issue that captures the most attention on the synodical level. The internal discussions within the Missouri Synod and Buffalo Synod even before this time contributed to this.

The synod-level debate over private confession did have influence upon inter-synodical relations, and far-reaching effects on synodical practice. Both Synods carefully defined their doctrine and practice in regard to private and general confession. In the 1858 Proceedings of the Northern District, the following questions were raised as a direct result of the matter in Geyer's church:

p.28. Question 1: Can it be interpreted as burdening (terrorizing) consciences or curtailing Christian liberty, if in a congregation private confession is used exclusively, though a smaller or greater portion of the congregation is opposed to the exclusive use of private confession, and the other portion refuses to introduce beside the private confession also the general confession?

p.32. Question 2: What methods or procedures are to be used in dealing with members of a congregation which refuses to introduce the general confession beside the private confession, which members feel that their Christian liberty has been curtailed, and who therefore have separated from the congregation or who have refrained from receiving the Holy Sacrament?

p.33. Question 3: This question deals with a practical matter of two congregations in Milwaukee (St. Stephens and Trinity) which while both belonged to the synod, yet followed different practices with regard to private and general confession.

During the Wisconsin Synod meeting in 1861, Wisconsin also defined its doctrine and practice in regard to confession. Reim delivered an opening essay on it, then Fachtmann presented an essay on private and general confession in the following theses. These theses were adopted by the synod.

- 1) Neither private nor general confession as a church order is commanded by Scriptures.
- 2) Confession, therefore, cannot be a sacrament. It can be an aid to spiritual life. By the need in our lives, it came to be instituted as an order in the Christian Church.
- 3) Originally, confession was not connected with the celebration of Holy Communion; rather, it has its origin in the special confession of sins of such who were once excommunicated, when they were re-instated in the congregation.
- 4) Rightly, the Lutheran Church rejected the order of the auricular confession, which since the Lateran Council 1215 (by Innocent III) had been elevated to a church law.
- 5) Luther accepted both private and general confession.
- 6) However, in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, private confession is usually given first place, and it was in the most general use at the time of the Reformation.
- 7) Private confession does not demand a complete innumeration of sins, which burdens the conscience; neither is only the priest entitled to hear it, but it extends to the sphere of the universal priesthood.
- 8) Because of great benefit, a revival of the forgotten churchly order is desirable.
- 9) Introduction of private confession can be done only when there is complete harmony between the pastor and the congregation in the matter.
- 10) Introduction of private confession is desirable, but must follow thorough instruction concerning repentance and confession of sins before God and man.
- 11) The application and use of this aid for spiritual life: "Confess your sins one to another in all phases of your Christian life."

The above theses were individually discussed and adopted by resolution.

Note how closely these Wisconsin theses come to the Missouri discussion of private confession in the 1856 Northern District Proceedings. Undoubtedly, all through the controversy, Wisconsin (especially Bading) and Missouri had been in correspondence. By 1858 Missouri had already taken note of an improvement in Wisconsin's confessional stand (cf. 1858 Proceedings, P10). Even after 1858, the two synods began to appreciate each other's confessionalism more and more, until synodical inter-relations came to the point of fellowship in 1868.

This controversy had yet another consequence, quite important to the Wisconsin synod, which still effects synodical affairs even today. Perhaps this is the most important result.

St. Michael's was the first Wisconsin synod in Watertown - and was extremely important during its short life. Now St. Matthew's in Lebanon had been served by Bading since '58. Later, of course, he also served St. Michael's. Through these two congregations, news of Bading's preaching, his firm orthodox stand, and simply familiarity with his name, spread. This good public sentiment and the natural urging of St. Michael's congregation (of which prestigious Sen. Meyer was also a member) undoubtedly had decisive influence upon the combined members of St. Mark's as they decided to call Bading as their pastor from Theresa.

Bading accepted. And with him came the presidency of the Wisconsin Synod which he had received at the 1860 convention. Bading was a powerful voice of orthodoxy in St. Mark's, and in 1861 St. Mark's decided to join the Wisconsin Synod. This had great

impact
upon the synod in itself.

But Bading was a powerful voice in the synod, too. The synod meeting was held at Watertown that summer (1861). At its sessions, both Pastor Bading and St. Mark's delegate, Mr. Daniel Kusel, spoke out for establishing a college and a seminary and suggested Watertown as its location. In 1863, the step was finally taken, and Watertown won out over Milwaukee, 45-19. Very likely it was primarily because the synod's president was in Watertown - making Watertown the center of synod activity - that Watertown was chosen as the site for the Synod's first college and Seminary. And it was only because of St. Matthew's that Bading came to work in the area in the first place; and primarily because of St. Michael's that St. Mark's extended him the call. Therefore, Northwestern was established in Watertown as an indirect result of the "private confession" controversy.

Now the college and seminary were right under Bading's watchful eye. Who knows how a different location may have affected the success of Northwestern - or if being further away from the strong orthodox influence of Bading would have changed the doctrine taught there? Northwestern spent its tender infant years growing up at Bading's doorstep. From his actions and correspondence, we know that Bading was deeply involved with Northwestern. He saw to it that orthodoxy remained with the school, and that good new men were called to teach there (Hoenicke). It was an ideal situation.

When seen in this light, the private confession controversy at the Watertown and Lebanon churches becomes much more than just another controversy. Here we can see our God, through His gracious guidance, bring a strong, true-teaching man to the Synod's head - and place the infant school to train its pastors at his feet. It was all in God's hands - and in His plan. What confidence this should give us in God's guiding hand - even today when once again a large portion of the Lutheran Church is struggling with controversy. God preserved His pure doctrine then; He is just as interested in preserving it now. May He preserve it among us also.

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Wisconsin Synod - 1857, 1858 as designated in text-p. 8,9
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PEOPLE: Pastor Kauffeldt - St. John's
Pastor Faustian - St. Mark's
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Pastor Schink - Wis. Synod archives

Wally Nass
Gilbert Lettow - Lebanon
Dan Cestreich

S.J. Bergemann - Watertown

The following letters are those kept by Bading which had something to do with this controversy. The writer did not translated (have translated) th em all. A short description may be found on some, taken form Koehler's index of these letters.

The red numbers are to the references (L1) in the text.

The red letters in the upper left arrange these letters in chronological order. (if mentioned)

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